

Five Teachings Of Grace

by John W. Ritenbaugh

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A doctrine that sets the church of God apart from other "Christian" churches is its strong belief in works as a vital part of the salvation process. Though the church firmly believes that salvation is by grace through faith, it just as firmly believes that this faith is *living*, manifesting itself in works of love toward God and man (James 2:22, 24, 26; Galatians 5:6).

Only God knows how many sincere people live in ignorance of this active link between grace and works. The Deceiver has persuaded this world that works are an Old Covenant anachronism and that they have little or no place under the grace of the New Covenant. If these people understood the festivals of God and their symbolism, the number of people living in ignorance of works done in faith would probably decline.

My wife Evelyn often conversed with a Methodist minister who lived across the street from us in Columbia, South Carolina. Though elderly and retired from the active ministry, this man still gave an occasional sermon at a large Methodist church nearby. He was impressed that the church of God could publish a high-quality magazine and afford to give it without charge to millions of people worldwide. Evelyn told him that we believe in tithing, and the tithes provided the means to do this. He replied, "So do we, but our members don't do it!"

Is it any wonder that the Methodist church—and other "Christian" churches—are gradually dying? Sin, the breaking of God's commands, separates men from God so that He will not hear them (Isaiah 59:1-8). Without contact with God and the resulting spiritual power that flows from Him to His people by His Spirit, how can they expect to be spiritually strong, growing and producing fruit unto righteousness?

Undoubtedly, the Methodists would profess they believe in Christ for salvation. But is this belief shown in works of love toward Him and His people that conform to His wishes? Christ says, "If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matthew 19:17), and, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). Tithing is a command of God (Matthew 23:23; Malachi 3:8; Exodus 20:15). As a whole, the Methodist church is leavened by the sin of stealing from God (Malachi 3:8).

Leaven: A Symbol of Sin

In Matthew 16:6, Jesus warns His disciples to "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees." Seeing their puzzlement, He explains further. "Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the *doctrine* of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (verse 12). Both testaments use leaven as a symbol of sin because of what it does to a lump of bread dough. Once yeast enters the dough, it immediately begins to spread by breaking down in reaction to the dough's sugars and producing a gas that puffs the bread up.

Like leaven, when sin enters a person's life, it begins to corrupt and fill him with vanity. A person enslaved by habitual sin will have a difficult time growing in the grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ because of sin's corrupting influence. Sin defiles and can permanently destroy relationships with God and man.

Throughout the year we hear frequent exhortations to produce fruit and grow in the grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ. During Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread, we give special emphasis to "getting the leaven out." These three actions are all parts of the same process. Though not technically the same, they are related closely enough to say they are simply different ways of describing the same process. "Getting the leaven out" is the most negative, "growing" is the most general and "producing fruit" is the most specific. All three emphasize that a Christian should not stand still after entering the New Covenant. God expects him to take steps to ensure that these actions will occur in his life.

Paul instructs us in I Corinthians 5:6 that "a little leaven [sin] leavens the whole lump [church]." This particular leaven was the Corinthians' proud boasting about their tolerance of sin. In verse 7 he exhorts us to "purge out the old leaven" and become new.

In Ephesians 4:13, 15-16, the apostle adds growth to his instruction and also sets us some of the goals of growth:

[T]ill we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; . . . but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

Paul distinctly names growing in unity, maturity, stability and love, all of which result from applying ourselves in God's way.

Though the ministry, a specific gift from Christ, is an important cog in this growth process (verses 11-12), the rest of the body is also responsible for doing its share in edifying the body in love (verse 16). No one escapes God's scrutiny in these issues of getting the leaven out, growing and producing fruit. Paul tells us clearly in II Corinthians 5:10 that we will be judged according to "the things done in the body." As we do these things individually, we contribute to the edifying and growth of the church of God.

Christian growth is not something that automatically takes place because we receive God's Spirit. It occurs because we take measures to make sure it happens. Notice Ephesians 4:16 again: ". . . by what every joint supplies, according to the effective **working** by which **every part** does its share, **causes** growth. . . ." Christian growth, corporately or individually, is caused.

Notice how many active words Paul uses in Colossians 3:1-17 to describe what a Christian must be doing:

- » "Seek those things which are above" (verse 1).
- » "Set your mind on things above" (verse 2).
- » "Put to death your members" (verse 5).
- » "Put off all these" (verse 8).
- » "Do not lie to one another" (verse 9).
- » "Put on tender mercies" (verse 12).
- » "Bearing with one another, and forgiving" (verse 13).
- » "Put on love" (verse 14).

- » "Let the peace of God rule . . . and be thankful" (verse 15).
- » "Let the word of Christ dwell in you" (verse 16).
- » "Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (verse 17).

Paul makes sure we understand that we must actively participate in order to grow. When God talks about growth, He means increasing in His attributes, the qualities that will conform us to His image.

The Christian Obligation

The primary problems of this world involve relationships. Of course, the most critical relationship problem is the one between us and God. When we sin, we become separated or alienated from Him. Only when we put forth effort will we conquer these relationship problems and begin growing in the grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Receiving the forgiveness and redemption from sin by the blood of Jesus Christ obligates us to this task.

Titus 2:11-14 describes this obligation thrust upon us as a result of receiving God's grace:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

These verses are jam-packed with instruction about our Christian responsibilities. Having grown up in this Protestant-dominated society, we have heard much about God's "free grace." Though God's grace is freely given, by no stretch of Scripture can we properly label it as free! No gift has ever been so costly! It cost Christ His life! And because grace obligates us to give our life as a living sacrifice completely set apart to God (Romans 12:1), it has also cost us ours.

Consider also Luke 14:25-27, 33:

And great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple."

He could not have made our obligation any clearer, yet after receiving forgiveness, so many are forgetful and blasé about this responsibility! Family ties are the strongest of bonds, but our loyalty to Christ must supersede them. Beyond that, we must have the humble devotion to bear any burden He deems necessary for our good, the corporate good or as a witness as part of this way. From our perspective, we can hardly deem God's gift to be free!

God's part was done freely. No constraint or obligation forced Him to do it. He owes us nothing for what we have done. His grace is a love that has no motive but itself and has come completely and totally from within Him. Considering the history of mankind and our own wretched record of vanity, deceit and weakness, what about us is lovable?

Grace Has "Appeared"

Yet Paul writes that grace—self-motivated, condescending, reconciling, tender and forgiving mercy—has "appeared." How has grace appeared to bring salvation? In the context of Titus 2, in its broadest sense, it has appeared in the gospel of the Kingdom of God. The gospel includes the message of our great hope, the promise of Christ's return, Jesus' perfect life and His death for the forgiveness of our sins.

The Greeks used "appeared" in their literature to describe the sun's light bursting out from the heavens onto the darkened earth. Its feminine form is used in other places to describe Christ's first and second comings. When used in the passive voice, it means "to show openly" or "shine light upon" with the sense of suddenness and unexpectedness. This is part of the sense here since we do not normally expect grace to reveal or teach us anything.

Grace, however, has a clear message that has much to do with our responsibility and growth. "Teaching" in Titus 2:12 is the Greek word *paideuo*, also translated as "chastens" in Hebrews 12:6. It is used in the sense of schooling, training or disciplining. In the context of educating a child, it describes activity directed toward moral and spiritual development and influencing conscious will and action. In religious matters, *paideuo* means chastising to educate one to conform to divine truth. It includes instruction, as in a classroom; drilling, as in "practice, practice, practice"; and chastisement, as in spanking or rebuking to bring about correction.

God's grace teaches us by putting us under obligation negatively—to quit sinning—and positively—to grow and produce fruit. The Moffatt translation clarifies this obligation by defining the terms in more modern language. "For the grace of God has appeared to save all men, and it schools us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions and to live a life of self-mastery, of integrity, and of piety in this present world." These are the areas toward which we must turn our attention to fulfill our duty to Christ. Moffatt retains the positive and negative aspects in his version: first, the negative renouncing of "irreligion and worldly passions," then the positive living of a life of "self-mastery, integrity and piety."

What Grace Teaches Us

Through the order Paul gives in Titus 2:11-14, he seems to be saying that we cannot become godly until we first quit being ungodly. This follows the order he gives in I Corinthians 5:7: "Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump." It appears as if we must get rid of the old, bad tenant before we can bring in a new, good one. On a practical basis, however, both processes are occurring simultaneously. Let's take a closer look at these five teachings:

—Renouncing Irreligion or Ungodliness

Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers. Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. (II Timothy 2:14-16)

Renouncing ungodliness appears here in an interesting context. People in the congregation were getting into heated discussions about genealogies, meanings of words and technicalities of law. Paul called this ungodliness (or irreligion) and instructed Timothy to shun such things. These brethren had missed the point of God's way of life

which Paul says is righteousness, joy and peace in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17). Being technically correct about a minor point is not as important as building right relationships through kindness, forgiveness, service and sensitive concern for others.

The word also appears in Romans 1:18-32 within a broad denunciation of obvious ungodliness, shown as the fruit of an unholy marriage of idolatry and immorality. When grace truly comes into a person's life, he must consciously repudiate and utterly reject ungodliness. That is, he must rid himself of the leaven of those sins. It will not happen all at once, but one must make consistent effort in that direction.

—*Renouncing Worldly Passion*

Worldly passion is desire common to those "in the world." Desire is so normal that we might feel a measure of guilt for *any* desire we might have. We need not do this because God created us with the ability to have desires, and He pronounced it very good (Genesis 1:31). Through desire we accomplish our goals. Paul exhorts the brethren to "earnestly desire the best gifts" of God (I Corinthians 12:31). David writes that God Himself desires "truth in the inward parts" of men (Psalm 51:6).

Desire means "a strong yearning." However, some desires are destructive, and these the Bible usually calls lusts. These desires are often shown as cravings for satisfaction of the physical appetites (for example, food, alcohol, sex, money, pleasure). Paul tells Timothy, "Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (II Timothy 2:22). Though Scripture speaks of desire in both a good and an evil sense, the man of God recognizes that he can have evil desires, turns from them when they arise and pursues after what is good.

Desire is also seen in context with power. Some have a passion to be number one, to compete, to dominate, to assert their will and to have control. Such an attitude frequently produces envy and contention. Others passionately pursue possessions and the glory associated with owning them.

Do not be deceived into assuming that these worldly desires are all somewhat animalistic and base. They also include the more refined passions of pride (such as for academic acclaim), social status and inordinate ambition. As Colossians 3:5 instructs, a desire taken beyond what is lawful is simply idolatry through which we gratify our carnality.

The next three words of Titus 2:12 cover our responsibility to ourselves, our relationships with each other and our relationship with God. One commentator remarks that these three cover the inward, outward and the upward aspects of Christian life.

—*Self-Mastery*

Self-mastery ("soberly" in NKJV) is self-government or self-control, the foundation of a strong godly life, growth and producing fruit. If a person cannot govern himself, if he cannot master his passions, he will certainly not have a good relationship with his fellowman or God. His life will likely be marked by major excesses.

The biblical writers use this word in various ways: to behave in an orderly manner, to be sober, serious, sane, sound-minded, discreet, self-disciplined, prudent and moderate. In context of a person controlling himself, Paul writes, "For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think *soberly*, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith" (Romans 12:3; see Titus 2:6; I Peter 4:7).

A person who has self-mastery is even-handed, and his passions are under control. He makes proper use of his drives and desires, and his manner of life is not one of extremes. A person reflecting this quality will be making steady progress in growing into the perfectly balanced character of Jesus Christ.

—*Integrity*

We could easily think of integrity ("righteously" in NKJV) strictly in terms of law and pursue it no further. But when we see how this word is translated elsewhere, we add a dimension that helps us better understand how we should act toward our fellowman.

In Luke 23:41 and I Thessalonians 2:10, the same word is rendered "justly," meaning right, proper or fair. This is the adverbial form of the Greek *dikaios*, meaning "to be conformed to that which is right," which Plato said is inseparably bound to the word translated "sober" above. A person who is *dikaios* neither selfishly nor forgetfully transgresses the bounds of what is right. He gives everyone his due.

To Christianity, this translates into "my duty is my right." This concept branches out into areas of life like civility, consideration, concern and respect and has little or nothing to do with what we normally consider as "law." I Corinthians 13:4-7 is a clear example of such instruction:

Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all thing, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

The grace of God obligates us to these duties in our relationships with others. To conform to them fulfills what Paul means by living with integrity in Titus 2:12. It encompasses keeping the commandments, of course, but it also involves such virtues as probity, honesty, goodness, irreproachability, fairness, nobility, being just and sensitive to another's needs, including giving correction in kindness and mercy (Galatians 6:1-2).

—*Piety*

Piety ("godly" in NKJV) also appears as "devout" in Acts 10:2, 7:

. . . a *devout* man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always. . . . Cornelius called two of his household servants and a *devout* soldier from among those who waited on him continually.

This word means "to give to God reverence and worship that emanates from a holy life." Thus, it includes the sense of being dedicated, consecrated, earnest, faithful and loyal with an implication of intensity and intrinsic sanctity. In other words, a pious, devout, godly person is deeply committed, earnest and serious about his religious duties. One who is godly will not lackadaisically drift through life and into the Kingdom of God. Jesus says that those who attain it expend a great deal of effort (Matthew 11:12).

Our Glorious Hope

The grace of God trains us so that we may live consecrated lives, but the motivating force is "the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). "Appearing" is derived from the same root as "appeared" in verse 11, but Paul uses this particular word only to signify the return of Christ.

The thrust of Paul's exhortation is to encourage us to quit looking back with longing to the world and our former lives and to live in the present with our minds focused with eager and active expectation on our Savior's return. If we are doing these things, we are preparing for that future great event. Eagerly anticipating the imminent fulfillment of our earnest desire for Christ's return motivates us to modify our conduct in the present evil world.

If we do not have this glorious hope in us, we will very likely just drift around, squandering our time in useless, trivial, but perhaps exciting carnal pursuits. We will fail to use the grace of God toward growing in His image and producing fruit.

The Abundant Life

Titus 2:14 brings us back again to redemption through Christ and to His purpose to purify us as a special people who are eagerly desirous for good works. All the members of God's Family should live lives of self-mastery, fairness and devotion because the grace of God has burst into our moral darkness to redeem us and lead us from ungodliness onto the path of holiness. We should walk this path with eager anticipation of His appearing, being purified, a people with a zest for noble deeds. In so doing, we become a special treasure to Him.

A minister's responsibility in this process is to supply God's people with clear explanations and good reasons why they should *diligently* apply themselves to good works. We ***must*** give ourselves over to this. Before our conversion, we were sold a bill of goods that salvation is merely something we receive. But Paul's writings clearly show that **God expects much effort**.

Though it is true that we cannot save ourselves by our works, Mr. Armstrong once said, "We are not going to be saved by our works, but only those who work are going to be saved because those works are showing God their attitude toward the great gifts He has given and are preparing for even greater ones." Jesus says much the same thing in John 15:8, "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples."

Both Jesus and Paul looked upon the doing of good works as an exciting pursuit. The confused and bored people of this world have missed Jesus and Paul's secret of adding zest to life. People look for excitement in novelties, stimulants, possessions, power and freedom from obligation. A life on such terms always palls, and because these things cannot fulfill our spiritual needs, eventually boredom and monotony set in. But a life lived for the Kingdom of God—with its awesome opportunities for

service, fulfilling the needs and concerns of others, being led by the Holy Spirit—is always fresh, new, exciting, challenging and satisfying. **It is the abundant life!**

Philippians 3:12-15 emphasizes Paul's attitude regarding what God had graciously given Him:

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, *forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.

Spiritual growth and producing fruit result from following the same basic principles that produce growth and skill in the physical realm. Those with clearly defined goals, confidence in reaching them, motivation and drive to sacrifice themselves to their cause, and discipline to persevere through all difficulties will achieve.

The word picture in Philippians 3:12-15 is of men straining to win a foot race. The Christian life is especially like the longer races where the runner must sustain a winning frame of mind over a longer period of time. We cannot run our race like the hare of the "Tortoise and the Hare" fable, in which the hare took a nap during the race.

Paul illustrates that after having received God's grace, our responsibility is to return full effort to God in striving to perfection in moral, ethical and spiritual areas. He did not see the struggle against sin, fear and doubt as being accomplished by God alone. The apostle is here urging his erring brothers to follow his example in persistently concentrating on our common goal.

Life for us now consists of discarding wrong attitudes and habits accumulated in the past. In modern, psychological terms, we must lose our baggage. For us, the past is dead, buried in the waters of baptism. With that behind us, we must diligently make unwavering progress in putting out the leaven of sin, growing in God's love, producing the fruit of God's Spirit, moving toward the Kingdom of God and putting on Christ's perfection, His image in us.