

## #49 “Grace Vs. Legalism”

by Brent Barnett

[www.relevantbibleteaching.com](http://www.relevantbibleteaching.com)

In God’s economy, no one has ever been saved by being righteous of their own good deeds. In fact, it is impossible for such a case to ever exist because man is born fallen and prone to sin (1 Corinthians 15:22). His heart misleads him, and he does wickedly (Jeremiah 17:9). The only Person ever to walk this earth and not sin was Christ, Who was not born of man but conceived in Mary by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:20). Thus, He did not have inherent sin, and He did not sin. But the rest of us sin, and we all fall short of God’s glory (Romans 3:23). The result is that it is absolutely ridiculous and foolish for any remnant or notion to remain in our minds which suggests that man has any innate ability to please God.

We can’t earn our way to God in terms of our salvation as if our good works are good enough to atone for all of our bad ones. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.” If we could save ourselves, we should glory in ourselves, for we would be our own messiahs. But we can’t, and we dare not usurp the place and unique role of Christ Who alone was holy. It is only in and through His holiness that we can be made holy as we seek His forgiveness, dying with Him to our sin and old self and being raised to new life in Christ (Romans 6:4). The new self can do good works, and in fact, as Ephesians 2:10 indicates, it is “created in Christ Jesus for good works.” These are good works which are indicative of the grace of God working in our hearts as God moves in us, enabling us to do right and bear true spiritual fruit. We need God’s grace to save us from our sins, and we need God’s grace to enable us to become more like Christ after salvation. We can do nothing of ourselves (John 15:5), for we are not adequate of ourselves to do anything (2 Corinthians 3:5). Our sufficiency is only through Christ Who is Himself sufficient (2 Peter 1:3) and by God’s Word which is sufficient and able to make us adequate (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

It is imperative in the Christian life that we remember from whence we came and how we got to where we are lest we start living by a works mentality once again. We must remember that we are both saved by grace and sanctified by grace. We could not save ourselves, and we cannot even live in a way honoring to God after being saved except for the truth that God’s grace continues to enable our wills to do good. When we stand before Christ, we will not boast in ourselves and the glory of our discipline and willpower. We will marvel that God changed us so greatly such that we were able to be used by Him to do good works, even enjoying doing many of them with no focus on self. To do selfless acts being mindful only of the delight of those acted upon and the God for whose sake we act is always a clear evidence of the grace of God at work in our hearts. To go from being self-centered and self-interested to interested more in the wellbeing of others than in our own is a sign of grace.

If we ever start to think that we are good in and of ourselves, that is, in our own flesh, then we are getting off track. If we are ever prone to boast in something in us other than Christ in us, we need to get back to living under grace. As Paul says in Philippians 3:3, “For we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.” There is nothing in and of ourselves, which are nothing but dust (Genesis 2:7), which has the power to please God. We only please God by faith as we let God have His way in our hearts and lives (Hebrews 11:6). We are dependent beings, like branches to a vine. We need Jesus, and we are helpless and hopeless without Him to be able to bear fruit (John 15:5).

So it is clear that grace changed us to be born again, and it is clear that grace enables us to bear fruit which endures. Why then would any who have experienced grace be prone to return to living under law? It makes no sense to do so, but if and when we do choose to live under law, we will begin to gloat in our own abilities and performance, ranking others in comparison to ourselves and looking to get ahead in terms of getting an inside track with God. We will begin to think we can make God love us more based upon our level of faithfulness and obedience. In fact, we will want Him to love us more than somebody else, a very evil, partial attitude. We will be consumed with ourselves, glorying and even worshipping our own “goodness.” The branch will begin to think the branch is so great that it could even exist on its own apart from the vine. Living under the law creates a mentality of performance and worth, value, and righteousness derived from the amount of church activity. Good heart motives are exchanged for external time and energy invested in religious things. Humility is eliminated in exchange for pride and self-sufficiency. Life becomes all about what we can do for God, rather than glorying in God as we yield to God working His plan and purposes in and through His weak vessels of clay, that is, us.

Living under the law, that is, legalism, defines righteousness based upon the judgment and evaluation of man, rather than that of God. Living under grace concerns itself not at all with the approval of man but only that of God. It isn't impressed with man's applause or admiration, but it concerns itself only with being sure God is pleased. Grace living has no illusions about the fallibility of the flesh, but it purposes by faith to rely upon the infilling of the Spirit for strength and right living by the grace of God.

Living by the law kills a person spiritually, but sadly few realize it. The Law was given to show man his inability, not to provide him the path to prove his ability (Galatians 3:24). Legalists deny the reality of their weakness, choosing to exalt in their supposed strength rather than in their weakness and God's strength which is perfected in their weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). Those who live under grace embrace weakness, not exalting error and sin but God's grace which enables them supernaturally to walk by faith and in holiness.

Grace is not an excuse to sin but an enabling not to sin. Legalism is sin because it exalts self and rejects grace. Let us be those who exalt Christ, who receive His grace by faith,

and who walk in victory and holiness not by the power of our feeble, fallible flesh but by the power of the resurrected Christ living out His life, will, and ways within us.