

A Wild Goose Chase?

Political conservatives understand what liberals refuse to acknowledge – it is easy to create a society in which potential blessings become actual curses – when incentives are established encouraging an entitlement mentality and resulting laziness. It is not that the liberal has poor motives, they don't! They think (without thinking it through) that what they advocate is right, just and loving.

In the same way, preachers can be in error and think they are doing good when, in fact, they preach a false gospel. A case in point, in which most liberal and conservative religionists interestingly (yet still wrongly) believe, preach and teach is the “unconditional” love and grace of God.

I do not, unless I am fooled, go to liberal churches. Yesterday I visited a church that would say they are a “Bible-believing” church. They are currently preaching a sermon series on grace from the book of *Galatians*. The pastor, in his sermon, made a strong point (actually two separate points) that God's love is unconditional, as is His grace. And these points carried even more emphasis since they were summary, near the conclusion of his sermon, statements.

Well, of course, if we search the *Bible* we will not find the term “unconditional” and we certainly will not find the theme because all of God's promises are in the form of covenants – promises and associated conditions – starting with the most important promise of all:

God opposes the proud
but gives grace [promise] to the humble. [condition]” Pr 3:34, Jas 4:6 and 1Pe 5:5

The same promise/condition relationship is true for love as well:

If you obey my commands [condition], you will remain in my love. [promise] Jn 15:10

We, therefore, do people a real disservice if we proclaim God's blessings as unconditional when we should be encouraging them to seek and find both His great promises and the related associated conditions.

“But, but, but . . . so you are saying we must earn the blessings of God by meeting and fulfilling the associated conditions?” No, maybe there is a third, true, answer and alternative. Let's look at a key, foundational and BIG grace as an example:

Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, [condition]
and all these things [everything we need!] will be given to you as well. [a very great promise] Mt 6:33

I could rightly say I earned “all these things” by meeting either of the two following conditions:

1. I, through my own abilities, strength and effort was able to “seek first” properly and correctly, or
2. I sacrificed something to seek first.

But, we find the seeking first that reaches the heights necessary to have all these things given to us:

1. Can only be accomplished by/through grace – God's gift, and

2. The seeking first is itself a great blessing! Seeking first is no sacrifice, it is the initial blessing leading to another great blessing!

So that we find here yet another case of:

From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another [grace upon grace in some translations]. Jn 1:16

Jesus Christ gives us the blessing of seeking first (as opposed to working like and for the devil) and we receive a second great blessing of having everything we need given to us!

A decent analogy that may make this clearer? Love between any rational married couple is conditional. If a husband wants to have a good marriage he must love his wife, not commit adultery, abandon, abuse, neglect . . . her. But, by doing so, does he “earn” a good marriage? If, coldly and legalistically, he tries to do what he must do to have a good marriage he will certainly fail – he must do what he does based on love for his wife! Well, then, assuming he does, has he *then* earned a good marriage? It is not likely you will find the husband bragging about all the work he had to do to achieve a good marriage. Or, lamenting about having to sacrifice adultery, abuse . . . for his marriage.

Assuming his wife is rational and loving (herself doing what she should to have a good marriage), both are blessed in the doing and the results – a better marriage. The good marriage is not earned, but a second great blessing! God’s love, material provision, protection (indeed all his) promises are the same – we are blessed in both “doing” the conditions and the results – and we must certainly have his grace for fulfilling the conditions of his promises!

“Circular logic” (it takes grace to get grace)? No more than that of any gift. If someone gives me money on the condition I do right with it, I am blessed by both the money and blessed by what it purchases. Just as the husband will be blessed on the conditions of loving his wife and the better marriage it produces, we should not think (and certainly not falsely tell others – sending them on a potentially deadly wild goose chase) that God’s love and grace are unconditional. Instead we should seek, find and tell others of the great blessings of Jesus Christ and the associated (often even greater) blessings in finding, seeking, protecting the conditions (all only by and through grace!) with all our hearts, minds, souls and strength!

If I remember correctly, the story is from a *Focus on the Family* broadcast:

A wife went to a therapist, after trying time after time to save her marriage, and asked the therapist how she could best leave her husband so he would really be miserable after she left him – she was fed up and really wanted to make him pay!

The therapist told her to go home, be as nice and do as much for him as she could do for three months and then up and leave him. Six or eight months later the therapist saw the wife and he asked how she was coping with the single life. She looked at him and said: “Single? I have never been happier – my marriage is great! I did just what you said to do and before the three months ended my husband made a ‘180 degree’ turn – our marriage is better than ever!”

“God’s grace and love are unconditional” (if believed) will result in a very wild goose chase. If on the other hand, we look for and proclaim the blessings of God not simply in his promises, but in the associated “conditions” as well, we will then find the full grace and truth Jesus brought and offered.

Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, [condition]
and all these things [everything we need!] will be given to you as well. [a very great promise] Mt 6:33

Having all things given to us is surely a great blessing. But, isn't the condition on which this promise is based an even greater blessing and the real purpose of the promise? Isn't the seeking first greater than even the time, money and all else we need? For “all things,” as valuable as they are, are only of benefit for our short earthly life while seeking first promises eternal rewards!

Great Promises

Forgiveness - Your heavenly Father will forgive you.

Faith - Everything is possible – he is not condemned – he will believe in God.

Perseverance - There is a small gate and narrow road that leads to life.

Protection - Jesus says, “I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.”

God’s Love and Presence - You will remain in my love.

Truth, Light and Freedom - Comes into the light . . . know the truth . . . sets you free . . . that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.

Peace and Rest - I [Jesus] will give you rest.

Meaningfulness - Jesus will make us fishers of men.

Eternal Life, Blessing and Security – “I [Jesus] am going to my Father’s house to prepare a place for my children. And if I go and prepare a place for them, I will come back and take them to be with me that they also may be where I am.”

Certain Required Behaviors

You forgive men when they sin against you.

Believe in Jesus.

Enter through the narrow gate, stay on the narrow road.

The Father must give them to Jesus.

Obey my commands.

Live by the truth . . . hold to Jesus’ teaching.

Come to me [Jesus].

Follow Jesus.

Be a child of Jesus.

Looking at these promises and conditions who would say the promises are greater blessings than the conditions? Looking at just the last one for example, which is greater?

- The place Jesus is going to prepare for us? or
- Being a child of His?

How can we rightly separate one from the other?

No, we do no one a favor by “offering” them an unconditional gospel – offering the “things” of the Gospel without the Person of Jesus Christ – there are indeed very great blessings in the conditions of God’s love and grace!