

# I'm Betting on \_\_\_\_\_?

Every day (in fact, several times a day) we are betting, placing our faith, on and in something or someone to provide, protect, give hope . . . to the present and future; and, for each person, this bet has a theme. Children, rightly, look to their parents to fill the role of provider and protector – until they become teenagers and realize what boobs their parents really are! So the teenager (even if 80 years old and just a teenager at heart) falls in love and then places all their hope in (as Oprah has popularized) their “soul mate;” “Now everything is well with the world – I have found my soul mate!” It may take a while, but eventually the soul mate is no longer a god, but a mere person struggling to save themselves – little help to me!

For many, as they age, it is themselves they are betting on – their education, personality, looks, money – “If you don’t look out for #1, who will?” is the line of thought. Others (and this increasingly), rely on the government to provide for and protect them – they are betting on the government. And finally, as a last resort (and this for a relatively few) it is God and His Grace as expressed in Jesus Christ. “Or maybe I will try a smorgasbord – a little of my significant other, my children, my job, the government, and God – the best of all worlds! What is wrong with this?” And the answer is nothing, if it worked!

One may ask: “But I thought most American were Christians and are therefore depending on God’s grace?” The only reasonable answer to this is that in neither words nor deeds does the “average” Christian know any more about grace than a skunk does! The common notion about grace (among “Christians” – non-Christians don’t really consider the subject) is that it rescues us when we are in trouble – or at least it should! We get into trouble, pray to God and he is supposed to send grace to get us out of the mess we are in. Or if we are really religious, we might pray to God, something like the following, before we do something big or get into trouble:

“Lord please bless me and what I am getting ready to do . . .”

Grace MAY rescue us when we are in trouble – it MAY bless us when we are doing something big; and, on the other hand, it may not. There are BIG and CONSISTENT conditions for grace – yes, grace is a free gift, but there are still conditions for this gift.

“God opposes the proud  
but gives grace to the humble.” Pr 3:34, James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. Jas 4:7 - 10

“This, then, is how you should pray:

“ ‘Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done . . .’ ” Mt 6:9 - 10

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Eph 2:4 - 10

Conditions, conditions, conditions! Grace has reasons well beyond making us happy!

For those not meeting these conditions, the *Bible* is replete with how:

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. Ro 1:18

Not only is the devil not threatened by the “faith” of most “Christians,” he is pleased and uses them and their “faith” for his eternal purposes. The big lie about faith, as told and re-told week in and week out in many churches, is that faith is believing in God and Jesus Christ – then everything, at least eternally, will be OK.

The *Bible’s* warning about this foolishness?

You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. Jas 2:19

Jesus, on the other hand, detailed clear conditions to grace and salvation:

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.” Mt 7:24 - 27

“But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.” John 3:21

“Well, isn’t it safer,” many ask (even if not verbally – by their thoughts and actions), “not to know what Jesus says, in the *Bible* – remain ignorant of what He/it says?” And the answer is “Possibly yes” – unless we reach the point of Simon Peter who (better late than never) believed and said: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” Jn 6:68 Who, indeed? I’m betting on God.

And as the *Bible* makes abundantly clear, faith for eternal life is much harder than faith for everyday living – for “mere” food, clothes, shelter, friendship . . . our short temporal life is simply a “dress rehearsal” for eternal life.

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Three of the very great prayers of the *Bible* are helpful at this point – at the point of realizing that NO level of faith is up to Jesus’ standards and conditions – what are we to do? Pray:

“God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” Lk 18:13

“I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” Mk 9:24

“your kingdom come,  
your will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.” Mt 6:10

Why? Because these meet the first condition and promise of grace – “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Pr 3:34, James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5

The best, only sure, place to start is at the beginning – this is the beginning!

Growing in grace means increasingly understanding our helplessness in ourselves to do anything “big” and meaningful, grasping God can and seeking His will – grace always and only follows God’s will! Grace is near to God – the closer we get to God the greater the grace.

The fight of faith and grace never, on earth, ends! Thus, in love, we are warned:

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. Phil 2:12 - 13

Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen. 2Pe 3:17 - 18



I’m Betting on Grace, and its conditions for my help and hope now and forever!

Any better idea(s)? I am all

