

Building a Life Part IV

A word association quiz:
Passive – Active Gift – Wages



In trying to match these terms properly, we would logically match Gift/Passive versus Wages/Active; you anticipate doing nothing to receive a gift while you would expect to be active to earn something – this is only sensible. At first brush, *gifts* and *wages* appear to be clear concepts and mutually exclusive. What wife, for example, would appreciate having to earn a gift from her husband?

Grace is, in its essence, a gift from God.

Yet, we find there are conditions to grace – very active conditions! What gives? Is God's grace REALLY a gift or do we have to (partially or fully) earn it? There are two predominate prevailing views of God's grace – the liberal and conservative – the passive versus the active. We can find them best summarized and articulated in Malachi 2:17:

“All who do evil are good in the eyes of the LORD, and he is pleased with them”

or

“Where is the God of justice?”

These are, and have been, the two dominate current and historical views of God and His grace (some things never change!) – the liberal (“God made me like this . . .”) compared to the conservative (“Well, He didn't make me this this and you won't be 'saved' unless you change and become like me . . .”) view of obtaining God's favor (His grace).

It is simple to dismiss the liberal view, because it is so superficial, it has no serious historical support and can so easily be shattered (as virtually all liberal dribble can be); but that still leaves us with the conundrum of how there can be preconditions of activity for grace (for God's gifts) – it just doesn't sit right!

Judging by the way most professing Christians ACT and TALK God's grace is not FULLY a gift – or, at least, of another type than our commonly defined gifts – they are only too happy to tell you how much better they are than others, how they “carry their crosses,” how they do, give, etc. . . . It sounds like they think they are getting what they deserve! Even the liberal will end up telling you how good they are – why, in effect, they deserve the blessings of God.

So, if professing Christians cannot clearly articulate the truth, maybe a picture can clarify the potential confusion: Good parents will ONLY give their 16-year-old boy a car IF he is responsible



- Yes

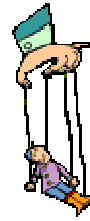


- No!

His responsibility is a precondition of the gift of the car, but it does not earn the gift (his parent's grace to him). He does not give his parents anything by being responsible – responsibility is a benefit to him that allows him to receive other gifts.

There is a catalyst to God's grace: just as a mountain person understands they must take some water to

A present is truly a gift
ONLY when
any attached strings
are to the receiver's benefit,
not the giver's.



prime the pump , in order to get further water, there are preconditions of grace to greater grace. Jesus, Himself, set the conditions for His providing our material needs:

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things [what you will eat or drink . . . what you will wear] will be given to you as well.” Matthew 6:33

We don't earn these gifts by an activity that benefits (and therefore please) God, but our “seeking first” allows us to set aside **our** activity, **our** effort, **our** work . . . to receive the gift. Most 21st Century Americans (including those who profess to be Christians) can, and do, earn wages to buy their material goods aside from God's special grace – they, certainly, are beneficiaries of His “common” grace (that which the Bible proclaims as available to everyone) –, but they will only be “GIVEN (graced) these things under the condition of “seeking first his kingdom and righteousness.”

So, what does all this have to do with “building” a life? (Excuse me! I am getting there as fast as I can!) What the building arts are so good at showing us is the requirement that the “process” is vital to the outcome – a good foundation is necessary before we proceed with the walls, windows, roof, etc. – that, long term, all that is “above” is no greater than the foundation. The same is true in building a life: Just as we no longer use the old saying, we learned as children, (“First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes the father with the baby carriage . . .”) having distorted and destroyed the foundation of family, we have cheapened grace (Who can recognize it any more?) by taking sides as Dumb and Dumber! God obviously foresaw today 2,500 years ago by proclaiming, in the current Conservative versus Liberal feud:

You have wearied the LORD with your words.

“How have we wearied him?” you ask.

By saying, “All who do evil are good in the eyes of the LORD, and he is pleased with them” or “Where is the God of justice?” Malachi 2:17

How much greater comfort will we find when God declares us *Dumb* rather than *Dumber*? I had rather be right than either of these!

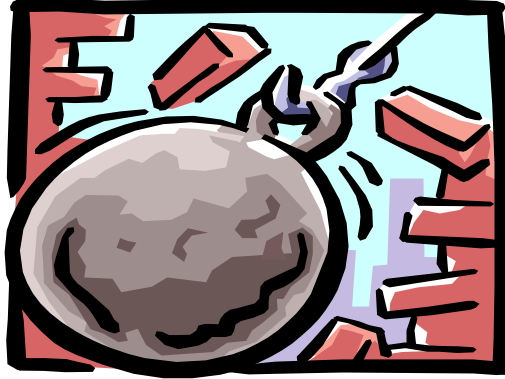
Grace is a gift from God.

There are conditions to grace – very active conditions! The “top” benefits are not received independent or apart from their foundations.



Repentance is both the *Old* and *New Testament* call  to action – it is the catalyst from which we get, the foundation on which, Humility, then Grace and finally God’s Benefits rest. To try to

find Grace (and its benefits) independent of  repentance is a fool’s game.



We will never build a meaningful life until and unless we tear down (repent) of that which is meaningless, or worse, damaging – repentance is the 1st step to humility . . . humility to grace and grace to the blessings.

Jesus relates the importance of repentance in two key verses:

“No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.” Mt 9:16 – 17

“I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.” Lk 15:7

Find the discipline and celebrate the joy of Godly repentance!