

The Flip Side of Sovereignty

Many, teaching and preaching the sovereignty of God, do not go a step further – into the practical, “What does this mean to me? How does this impact my daily living?” The Christian religion is not just about what God can and will do, but what His disciples (those exercising His disciplines) can and are expected to do:

I can do everything through him who gives me strength. ^{Phil 4:13}

Isn't it the least hypocritical to point out to others their need while all the while doing everything we can to deny our need? – telling other people they need to be “saved” while living, day-by-day, in self-dependence, self-reliance, self-assurance, self-confidence and self-righteousness?

We can:
care about,
teach about,
blab about,
think about,
dream about . . .
anything,
and not do a thing!

Or we can fail to understand an underlying truth and likewise accomplish nothing – thus it is with grace! The devil currently has the greatest impact on people's understanding of grace (even in most churches!) – far more than does the Bible! His message – “Do all you can do, then seek grace.” Because he knows, when we buy into this philosophy, we essentially “dumb down” our lives to the level of:

- ✚ Doing the possible, rather than the impossible,
- ✚ doing what is comfortable, rather than that which is beyond our comfort zone,
- ✚ doing that for which we have the time, rather than incredibly finding the time to do the works God prepared in advance for us to do,
- ✚ living within our means, rather than miraculously finding money to do beyond what others or we are able, ourselves, to do,
- ✚ believing “all we can do is all we can do,” rather than having the faith that we can be significantly changed so we are (and out of this being can do) more than we could ever think or imagine.
- ✚ seeing everything through the prism of tradeoffs – juggling the responsibilities of our assigned roles so that we are mediocre, at best, in all that we do.

I know a young man who is driven, disciplined and does hard things, and is still faced with more hard things to do! The devil wants us to focus on and try hard things because whether we do them or are unsuccessful we inevitably fall into his trap – doing them leads to pride while in failing we are discouraged and give up. The devil wins as long as we don't try the incredible, unbelievable, inconceivable, unimaginable, unachievable, indeed the impossible, AND ACCOMPLISH THEM “through him” (Jesus Christ).

It is easier to see the challenges, to know they are impossible, seek grace and do them than to do what is hard on our own! This is the substance of faith – rather than simply “having a form of godliness but denying its power.” ^{2Ti 3:5}

The devil does not care if people dream the impossible dream as long as they don't find the reality of grace to do the impossible tasks God has assigned them. If they have the least desire to do more than the average and ordinary run of the mill, people face not what is hard, but the impossible. Who can possibly, on their own, do all they should do – be the best parent, the greatest spouse, utmost worker or boss, adequately tend to their spiritual needs, look after themselves physically . . . ?

Hasn't the church, as we know it, fallen into the *Galatians* trap Paul warned about?

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! ^{Gal 1:6-8}

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? . . . Are you so foolish? **After beginning with the Spirit**, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? ^{Gal 3:1-3}

But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—**having a form of godliness but denying its power.** ^{2Ti 3:1-5}

This power of the impossible is the grace of God!

"I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you. ^{Mt 17:20}

Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God." ^{Mk 10:27}

For nothing is impossible with God." ^{Lk 1:37}

The only condition?

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." ^{Jn 15:5}

The big BUT is that we should not expect to know how to seek and find grace (or to know what it "looks like") in crisis conditions if we have not practiced it (become a disciple – exercised the disciplines) in peacetime! It is a growing into the realization of our daily need and dependence, to an hourly awareness . . . then minute-by-minute. Instead of squirreling away our "acorns" of security, running around like chickens with our heads cut off, seeking comfort zones, comparing ourselves to others – we must learn, and re-learn, each day – grace is not:

- ✚ a reserve,
- ✚ a safety net,
- ✚ just in case,
- ✚ it is not even a hope.

But by seeing our need more and more, seeking grace for today's seemingly small specific needs, like any other learned exercise, trying and figuring out how it works, we tap into grace and grow in it.

“Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much.” Lk 16:10

The old adage: “Time heals” is usually true, but it is equally true that time itself seldom properly heals. Most of the time we can “get by” without grace, but this does not mean we are growing!

“But,” many will say, “this won’t appeal to many people! I can’t ‘witness’ to this.” You are right! Grace, as taught and illustrated in the Bible, is:

- ✚ Counter-intuitive – it doesn’t make sense without faith from God.
- ✚ Counter-cultural – it doesn’t appeal to all we hear, are taught, worked so hard for, etc. – in this era of glorified pride. We are taught to worship wealth as the ultimate freedom. We idolize those who can personally accomplish the most – Olympians, those earning the most money, winning the most prizes – in short, doing the most hard things.
- ✚ Counter-productive – as long as we try to do it on our own – to do what is hard rather than the easier impossible, grace does not work.

And that is why we have an analogous Christian “gospel” of self-help, relying on our choosing God rather than seeking to be chosen by God – doing God a favor by “accepting” Him, rather than seeking the grace to be accepted by Him. Who wants to admit they are in the position that a need of grace places them in? Oh, I can humble myself a little (or at least pretend to) once in my life to admit I need God to save me – but every day? and minute? – are you kidding!

But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. ^{1 Corinthians 1:27-30}

Growing in grace is learning to seek and find grace when we really CAN get by on our own – not just waiting to try grace in times of crisis – it is seeking God’s salvation for:

- ✚ marriage – before it is in crisis,
- ✚ children – before they are teenagers,
- ✚ physical needs – before we find ourselves without,
- ✚ health – before we are sick,
- ✚ work – before we find ourselves unemployed . . .

Growing in grace – learning to stay with grace – finish with grace – receive the prize of doing the impossible because God has changed us!

The warning of Galatians confronts us every day – the temptation to begin one way (by grace) and then trying OUR best and ending in failure! How dumb can we get? Only as dumb as we dumb down the gospel of grace!