



Grace and works

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*“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves:
it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8,9).*

DO THE ABOVE words of the Apostle Paul teach us that, being saved by the grace of God, we do not have to do anything (a view the writer recently heard expressed)? Before going into the significance of these words, let us consider the following passage from Ephesians 4, which illustrates the action required on the part of the believer following baptism:

“. . . that ye put off concerning the former conversation [way of life] the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye *put on the new man*, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. Wherefore *putting away lying*, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another. Be ye angry, and *sin not*: let not the sun go down upon your wrath . . . Let him that stole *steal no more* . . . *Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth*, but that which is good . . . *Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you*, with all malice: and *be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another*, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (vv. 22-32).

These words clearly show that there must be action on our part to overcome the ‘old man’, which is corrupt; it will not just happen automatically. Moreover, this must continue from the time we embrace the Truth in baptism until we fall asleep in death or the Master returns.

The works of the law and the works of faith

What is meant by, “not of works, lest any man should boast”? The Apostle Paul is here referring to the works of the law. He means, ‘not of the works of the law’. We need to understand the distinction between the works of the law and the works of faith. Abraham was justified by the works of faith, therefore the works of faith are

essential. The example of Abraham explains the meaning of the words in Ephesians 2:10: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them”.

We see this in the trial of Abraham’s faith, when God told him to offer his only beloved son in sacrifice. Here we might say that Abraham was God’s workmanship, and that God had before ordained that he should perform this work of faith. So James, using the same example of Abraham, explains that faith requires works: “Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness . . . Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (2:21-24).

In the same way our heavenly Father leads us into situations where our faith is tried, so that we might manifest the works of faith in our lives. Hence the words of Peter: “. . . that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:7). Therefore, although we are saved by the grace of God, faith and action is required on our part. We must agonise to enter the Kingdom.

The law and grace

Let us now try to understand a little more about grace. We read in Scripture: “For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (Jno. 1:17). Whereas it is true that “the law worketh wrath” (Rom. 4:15), it is not true to say that in Old Testament times men and women were under wrath and in the New

Testament they are under grace, for this would mean that the Almighty God was and is changeable, which cannot be the case.

We need to understand the place of the law in the purpose of God. It was there temporarily until the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul describes it as “our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ” (Gal. 3:24). As the servant in Roman times led the children to school, so the law was a servant to bring Israel to Christ. In the Old Testament the faithful would have looked beyond the law to Christ, as was said of Abraham: “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad” (Jno. 8:56); and of David: “For David speaketh concerning him [Jesus], I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved” (Acts 2:25).

Greater responsibility under the grace of God

Although, after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, believers were under the grace of God and released from the ritual of the law, there was still a responsibility to walk faithfully, as we have seen. It is very serious for such to forsake the Truth which they have learned; even more serious, it would seem, than despising the Law of Moses, as appears from the following verses from the letter to the Hebrews:

“He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?” (10:28,29); “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears” (12:14-17);

“but ye are come unto . . . the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church [ecclesia] of the firstborn, which are written

in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel” (vv. 22-24).

The law did indeed work wrath, but greater wrath, it appears, is upon those who do “despite unto the Spirit of grace”. The tenor of these verses seems to be that the responsibility of those who are in Christ is far greater than the responsibility of those under the law. Therefore we do well to heed the exhortation that the writer to the Hebrews gives his readers and us: “See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him That speaketh from heaven” (v. 25).

Prevenient grace

This phrase refers to the false doctrine that we have to have the Holy Spirit before we can believe and repent.¹ This doctrine is based on a wrong understanding of the words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:3, “no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy [Spirit]”, and is derived from a failure to understand the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit was given to the apostles to demonstrate that Jesus was the Christ, or the promised Messiah, or Lord. And so it was that in his speech on the Day of Pentecost Peter said: “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). For our part, the four Gospels, the Epistles and Revelation collectively demonstrate that Jesus is the Christ, and because of this we do not need the Holy Spirit in our day to enable us to say that Jesus is Lord. It was clearly set forth in the first century by those called by God, as the words of Paul to Timothy witness: “. . . Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world [ages] began, but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel: whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles” (2 Tim. 1:9-11).

1. See E. Whittaker and R. Carr, *Spirit in the New Testament*, p. 117, Note 3, published by The Testimony.

God's Word is Spirit

From the foregoing we can see how essential the Word of God is to us. It is the Spirit Word, as taught by Jesus (Jno. 6:63), and the only way we can have this spirit in us is by reading, imbibing, and then manifesting the Word of God in the way we live our lives. How important it was, and is, that the writer to the Hebrews should exhort the believers of his day and ours, "See that ye refuse not Him That speaketh" (Heb. 12:25)! Jesus has spoken, and his words, which are the words God commanded him to speak (Jno. 12:49), have been written down in the New Testament.

Moreover, Jesus is at the very centre of the purpose of the Almighty God, from Genesis to Revelation; therefore when we open the Word of God we learn of Jesus, who is the Word made flesh. May we therefore hearken to the voice of the great Shepherd of the sheep: "Now the God of peace, That brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen" (Heb. 13:20,21).



Reviews

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Christadelphians and litigation*

John Nicholls

THIS NEW pamphlet on the subject of the disciple of Christ and litigation deals in a very comprehensive way with the principles that should govern our attitude to, and our possible use of, the law of the land in which we live. It also examines some of the modern issues involved in the application of these principles, offering well-reasoned and Scripturally based advice. Although the current issues dealt with are those which touch the Brotherhood in the United Kingdom, ecclesias in other parts of the world come under the same principles, and will find much help by adapting the advice to their particular circumstances.

The booklet is divided into five chapters, each easy to follow and well supported by Scripture. The Scriptures are allowed to speak for themselves, and Brother Butler has done us a great service in so skilfully bringing together the relevant passages and basing his own comments clearly on the Word of God.

Chapter 1 deals with the Christian attitude to the law, and is followed by a much longer chapter on the life and teaching of the Lord Jesus, in which the author takes us effortlessly through the Gospels, reminding us of the teaching of our Master on topics such as possessions, redress of

wrongs and forgiveness. Here are some extracts from this chapter:

"We shall find that he gives us no advice whatsoever on ways of preserving our material possessions or standard of living";

"Unlike so many of us, Jesus totally subjugated in himself self-seeking pride, resentment and vengefulness. He was ever ready to forgive men for the evil that they said about him and did to him";

"The Lord laid no claim to any material possessions, and so had nothing to defend. He had no need to have recourse to law to obtain or retain what was rightly his. If we expect advice from the Lord on how to obtain justice in this life we shall be disappointed . . . throughout his teaching, the standards that he faultlessly observed himself he proclaimed

* *Dare Any of You . . . Go to Law?*, Cecil Butler. Produced by The Christadelphian on behalf of the Christadelphian Military Service Committee. 36 pages. Price £1.00 plus postage. Available from the Christadelphian Office, 404 Shaftmoor Lane, Birmingham B28 8SZ. Tel. 0121 777 6328; email orders@thechristadelphian.com.