

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

Volume 30, Number 19

May 12, 2013



True Grace

By Silvanus, a faithful brother unto you, as I suppose, I have written briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand. (1 Peter 5:12, KJV 1900)

How often we skim over passages in the Bible and fail to slow down enough to absorb the message intended by the Holy Spirit. You will notice an informative word in the psalms that reminds us to slow down at important passages and pay special notice to their content. Written to be sung, the psalms include several words that appear to refer specifically to instructions regarding their singing. "Selah" is generally defined as "Pause." In contemporary music, we would use the word "Rest." Don't sing for the measured time indicated by the "Rest" symbol. Sometimes a strategic silence of one of the four parts adds far more to the melody than singing through the rest. If we translate the strategic "Selah" pauses into our reading of the psalms, we might learn far more than skipping over them because Selah is a strange word with which we are not familiar. The next time you encounter this word in your reading of the psalms, stop, read back over the verse and think about the thought that it teaches before continuing your reading. God reveals a thought deserving of that pause and greater meditation. The word serves as His instruction; pause and think about what He directed the psalmist to write here.

Our study verse, much like our overlooking "Selah," could easily be skipped over with barely a notice. Yes, it mentions grace, one of our favorite Bible words, but it doesn't tickle our fancy as Ephesians 2:8 or Titus 2:11, for example. We think we understand "True grace," but we fail to consider that, by the very use of the word, Peter suggests that we might fall under the influence of "False grace." Do we have any sense of this danger?

Apparently, Peter intends to remind us that his letter contains a description of God's "True grace," so we should study it carefully to understand this topic and to avoid any appearance of "False grace" in our lives. If we go back over Peter's first letter and reflect on its content, we discover major segments of information about God, His work in our eternal deliverance from sin and into His glorious presence. We discover that God has "Graced" us, not only with His eternally saving grace, but He has also taught us that we should use that grace to "...shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." (1 Peter 2:9b) Not so appealing, Peter also encourages suffering Christians to lean on their God for sustaining grace through their trials. God's

grace doesn't always prevent our encounters with trials; at times He adds more grace to enable us to endure the trial so as to honor Him for the sufficient grace that He gave us. (2 Corinthians 12:9) He warns the faltering to remain steadfast in faith, lest they suffer as a murderer, thief, evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. (1 Peter 4:15) We glorify God and His grace when we suffer with "True grace" as a Christian, but we dishonor God and display "False grace," which is no real grace at all, when we compromise our faith and practice these sins.

Peter has enlightened our minds with the varied images of "True grace" in this letter. He has also warned us of the dangers of its opposite, false grace. By the content of Peter's first letter, we expose our spiritual senses to God's "True grace." By observing the failures against which Peter warns us, we are left inexcusable against the ravages of false grace to our spiritual senses.

A study of various beliefs that historically surface among professing Christians sadly serves as lively examples of both true and false grace. Two opposite extreme ideas will serve to illustrate the point.

1. On one extreme side of the point, you will read of very sincere Christians who use the word "Grace" freely, but they define grace as something far different than we see in Scripture. Grace in their minds is God's "Crutch" to help crippled sinners work their way into the family of God. A few years ago I was driving around one day and listening to Christian radio. The speaker of the moment introduced Titus 2:11, so he caught my interest. I was dreadfully saddened when he grossly misquoted—and misrepresented—the wording of the verse. Our King James Bible reads, "For the grace of God that **bringeth** salvation hath appeared unto all men." This man misquoted the verse in a way that depicts one of many doctrines of false grace, "For the grace of God that **offers** salvation to all men has appeared." In this low view of God and of His grace, God's grace merely offers salvation to the wicked, but the wicked must use that grace or spend eternity in lonely separation from God.

Thus we see one example of false grace that is sadly popular in our world today.

2. Nearly a mirror opposite view; but—thank the Lord—not nearly as popular is the idea that God in grace actually causes every event that occurs. When challenged on this assertion, defenders of the idea will allege that God causes, either directly or indirectly, acts of sin, even heinous sin, so that He may intervene and, by “Grace,” bring a greater good out of it in the end. The day after the Tucson, Arizona shooting, January 8, 2011, a preacher who holds to this low view of God and of grace preached his Sunday morning sermon on the event. In his sermon, this man specifically stated his low “False grace” belief that everything that occurred the day before in Tucson, including the murder of the eight year old girl, was precisely “...according to the will of God.” Any intelligent and moral being expresses his moral character by his will. His will affirms his view of right and wrong. God expresses His moral character in Scripture by His will (1 Thessalonians 4:37; nothing in this passage even remotely implies that murder and mayhem are “...according to the will of God.” In fact, the passage teaches the opposite.) If the shooting that day, including the murder of the young girl, was according to the will of God, advocates of this abominable idea cannot avoid the obvious and inevitable conclusion that God has no fixed moral character at all. He is a duplicitous, diabolical, schizophrenic being, if this were the case. However, Scripture repudiates this belief as “False grace,” not “True grace.” Apparently, some people in Jeremiah’s day tried to pass similar ideas by the godly weeping prophet, but he refused to accept their abomination. (Jeremiah 7:31¹, 19:5, 32:35) Likewise, Paul repudiated this belief as a slander against “True grace” in Romans 3:1-8. Anyone who tries to defend this low view of God will wax philosophical in his effort to rationalize how God can cause sin and still

¹ The ancient Septuagint Greek translation of the Old Testament, typically quoted in the New Testament by inspired writers, gives an enlightening and informative reading of the closing words of this verse, “...which I did not command them to do, neither did I design it in my heart.” (Jer 7:31 LXE) Not only did God not command this cruel sin, but neither did He “...design it...” in His heart. Scripture never affirms fatalism; it always repudiates the idea. God didn’t “...design” in His heart the Tucson shooting and the murder of the young girl on January 8, 2011. It was not in any way “...according to His will.”

be righteous, but they cannot wax Biblical, for Scripture rejects this low view of God. It is yet another “False grace” that Scripture will not allow.

If we desire to immerse our minds in God’s “True grace,” we should spend more time with Peter, Paul, John, and others whom the Holy Spirit chose to write our New Testament. They will refine our thinking and guide us to the right—the Biblical—view of God and of godly morality that is always “...according to the will of God,” “...true grace.”

...*wherein ye stand*. Go back to the first chapter and read Peter’s description of the people to whom he wrote this letter. Not only did these godly saints understand God’s grace, they were standing in it, even to suffering persecution because of their faithful steadfastness.

By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (Romans 5:2 KJVP)

Read Paul’s description of these people whom he describes as being justified by faith. They were godly, faithful saints. For them, standing in grace didn’t mean that they thought themselves immune from God’s moral character and commandments. Grace for them represented a high moral principle by which God “Graces” His children when they can do nothing to deserve it. That same grace in which we stand convicts and teaches us through the indwelling Holy Spirit and His law written in our hearts and minds to live faithfully, to stand in—not occasionally meander through—His grace.

If we study sufficiently and are “Graced” with divine mercy to learn the meaning of “True grace,” we shall understand that God’s “True grace” is other-worldly in its unspeakable benevolence. The moral impact of that grace on our conscience is no less other-worldly. Regardless what wicked people or misguided saints say or do that hurts us, the conviction, the moral ethics of God’s “True grace,” urges us to turn the other cheek, to respond with grace on our lips and in our hearts to those who malign us or treat us evilly. When we quietly examine the issues of our lives in areas that no one else will ever know or see, God’s “True grace” convicts us to be just as faithful and steadfast as if we stood on a public stage.

For many believers, the idea of “Faith” refers to our sense of connection, understanding, or belief in God and His work, things that are true and factual, though we cannot see them with the eye. While this idea forms part of Biblical faith, the emphasis on faith in the Old Testament stresses faithfulness in action more than a mere mental outlook or trust. The more I study New Testament faith the more I am convinced that it retains far more of this Old Testament idea of faithfulness than many teachers acknowledge. Godly, New Testament faith urges us to faithfulness, even in trials and persecution.

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor