

**HAVE YOU THOUGHT ENOUGH ABOUT SINNING?**

I listened to her sob over the phone, “This isn’t supposed to be happening to me—I’m a Christian wife and mother!” The very sound of her voice made my heart feel like lead. For months she had been involved in an affair with a man she had met at work. A friendly chat had evolved into dinner, then intimacy. Now her adultery had been exposed. She was pregnant with her lover’s baby and could no longer hide her burgeoning figure. Everybody knew—her non-Christian friends at work, her family, her church family, her husband, and her God. She lamented her behavior and wanted ever-so-desperately to turn back the clock—to undo her illicit deeds. Then too, she worried about how her future would unveil. “Where will I live?” she asked. “Who will take care of me and the baby?” “What about my other children?”

I wanted to say some magic words. I wanted to alleviate her grief and mend her broken heart. Most of all, I wanted to see her restored to the Lord and her marriage repaired. My last wish wasn’t possible. Having severed her sacred trust with her husband, he had filed for divorce. In a few days the legal work would be completed and their eleven year bond would be dissolved in a court of law.

I didn’t say it to her on the phone, but I couldn’t help but ponder later, “She should have thought more about sin.” That’s right! She should have thought MORE, not less, about sin. Often times we get ourselves into trouble because we don’t think enough about sin and its consequences. Jesus said, “...It is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell” (Matthew 5:29b). Hell. Wages (cf. Romans 6:23; Numbers 32:23; Galatians 6:7-8). Consequences. Satan doesn’t want us to think about consequences—only the momentary gratification and pleasure. If he can divert our attention away from the results, we will falter and sell our soul for a “mess of pottage” (cf. Genesis 27).

I have a new found appreciation for the words of the Hebrew writer: “By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin” (Hebrews 11:24-25 NKJV). Moses thought about sin. He considered the eternal dimensions of staying in Egypt and sharing in the sensual pursuits of his peers.

“What faced Moses was a crisis decision: whether to remain in the eyes of men ‘the son of Pharaoh’s daughter,’ or to throw in his lot with the despised people of God. He could not be both an Egyptian and an Israelite. On one hand was all the splendor of Egypt, with its rare treasures and its magnificent heritage; to be in Pharaoh’s palaces and to possess perhaps even the throne, to be in a position of power and in a place of privilege and refinement—all the things (the author describes them as the fleeting pleasures of sin) an ancient empire could offer. On the other hand were poverty, contempt, and affliction; for Israel at this time was a nation of slaves, groaning under its heavy load, with broken spirits and vanished hopes, hemmed in inexorably to daily abuse. Yet Moses, by faith, recognized these to be the people of God. He deliberately chose to travel with them the dangerous way rather than to continue in ease. He saw, by faith, that to continue in ease would be sin and further, that the pleasures of sin give no lasting satisfaction...” {Neil Lightfott, “The Faith of Moses,” Jesus Christ Today, 215-216}.

Like Moses, we need to think more about sin and what happens if or when we yield to our desires:

- “A brief, lustful look could lead to an affair.”
- “A simple wink could wreck my marriage.”
- “Moral compromise would invalidate my example.”

# THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE

“...then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel...” (Amos 7:8)

## 10 MARKS OF A GROWING CHURCH

1. **Growing churches have elders** who are spiritual men of wisdom, knowledge, and vision, and who are deeply interested in the souls they are shepherding (I Thessalonians 5:12-13; I Timothy 3:1-7).
2. **Growing churches have deacons** who believe in servant-hood, and as deacons they rejoice for the privilege that is theirs to work in special ways to God's glory (I Timothy 3:8-13).
3. **Growing churches have preaching** that exalts Jesus Christ and His word, that proclaims the "whole counsel of God," and that encourages and challenges, in a bold but loving way, everyone to draw nearer to God (II Timothy 4:2-4; Acts 20:27; Ephesians 4:15).
4. **Growing churches have an educational program** that stimulates all to know more of God's word and to better apply its truths (II Peter 3:18; Ephesians 4:12).
5. **Growing churches regard worship as a privilege** rather than a chore. The singing is enthusiastic, the Lord's Supper is thoughtfully observed, prayers are humbly and lovingly offered, and brethren give generously as they have been prospered. People bring their Bibles, in order to follow along during the sermon because they desire to better know God and His will for their lives (John 4:24; Psalm 116:12; Ephesians 5:19; James 5:16; I Corinthians 16:1-2).
6. **Growing churches make guests feel at home.** Others can see the unity, warmth, and love that exists within the congregation (Romans 12:10; John 13:34-35).
7. **Growing churches make a diligent effort to teach the lost and to restore the fallen.** Visitation, Bible studies, and outreach are constant (Acts 5:42; Galatians 6:1-2).
8. **Growing churches keep up with their missionaries** by writing them letters, sending them good literature, and encouraging them in their work (Philippians 4:14-20; I Corinthians 3:9).
9. **Growing churches respond to goals and challenges** because every member is focused on glorifying Christ (I Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 3:17).
10. **Growing churches exhibit the mind of Christ**—they are humble, serving, loving, and obedient to the Father (Philippians 2:5-11).

Does this sound like the congregation of which you are a part? Let's all work together to help this congregation grow even more!

-Mike Vestal

- "A single click of the mouse could lead to a wrong relationship."
- "A short-term thrill would devastate my family."
- "An affair will jeopardize my salvation."
- "The fleeting excitement of passion will rob me of inner peace."

Dear Christian, have you thought enough about sinning? "...But fornicators and adulterers God will judge" Hebrews 13:4b; cf. Revelation 21:8).

-Mike Benson

## THE DEVIL'S BEATTITUDES

1. Blessed are those who are too tired, too busy, too distracted to spend an hour once a week with their fellow Christians...they are my best workers.
2. Blessed are those Christians who wait to be asked and expected to be thanked...I can use them.
3. Blessed are the touchy who stop going to church...they are my missionaries.
4. Blessed are the troublemakers...they shall be called my children.
5. Blessed are the complainers...I'm all ears to them.
6. Blessed are those who are bored with the ministers mannerisms and mistakes...for they get nothing out of his sermons.
7. Blessed is the church member who expects to be invited to his own church...for he is a part of the problem instead of the solution.
8. Blessed are those who gossip...for they shall cause strife and divisions that please me.
9. Blessed are those who are easily offended...for they will soon get angry and quit.
10. Blessed are those who do not give their offering to carry on God's work...for they are my helpers.
11. Blessed is he who professes to love God but hates his brother and sister...for he shall be with me forever.
12. Blessed are you who, when you read this think it is about other people and not yourself...I've got you too.

-Ramon Matheny

## EPITAPH ADJUSTMENT

A new widow requested the epitaph "Rest in Peace" for her husband's tombstone. When she later found he had left his fortune to his mistress, she attempted to get the engraver to change the carving. This was impossible; the words were chiseled and could not be changed. "In that case," she said, "please add, 'Till we Meet Again.'"

**GOD'S GLORIOUS GRACE**

The topic of the grace of God is a highly favored subject in the religious world today, and rightfully so. God's grace is a glorious subject, worthy of study, discussion, meditation, and commitment. Sadly, though, it is this subject that is often discussed without satisfying God's criteria for grace. This fact has caused far too many to abandon and neglect the Biblical theme of God's grace in order to stress only God's law, commands, and conditions, likewise Biblical themes. But in a world of extremes, Christians can rejoice that the discussion of grace and law does not have to be an "either/or" because the two are partners in God's scheme of redemption that cannot be separated by the strictest of extremist, whether to the right or to the left.

The word *grace* as it relates to that which God bestows upon man in order to save Him, is often said to refer to "unmerited favor." This is as accurate and efficient a definition as can ever be applied to this term. To illustrate just how this "favor" works, no better example can be applied than salvation as it is the result of grace. Paul said to Titus, "*For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men...*" (Titus 2:11). The fact that salvation is given by grace means that it is a gift that no man could ever do enough to earn, or merit. It is far too valuable and outside of man's physical reach for him to find a means to obtain it on his own. Therefore the only way salvation can be obtained is by grace, meaning God grants it upon man. Obviously then, it is seen that grace likewise is a valuable gift to receive, begging the question then, "How can I receive God's grace?"

This is where the religious world as a whole is divided. Few argue the fact of grace, the definition of grace, and the result of grace; but there is much disagreement as to how this grace is received. Much of man would advocate the idealistic view that God has already bestowed His grace upon all man without any action on his part, therefore granting a universal salvation regardless of faith, obedience or lifestyle. Their claim is that God is so loving that He would not punish man to condemnation so He has bestowed grace upon all man unto salvation. However, would this theory not contradict such blatant Bible verses as Ephesians 2:8, where Paul stated that in addition to salvation being by grace, that it comes through faith: "*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God*"? If salvation is by grace through faith, then the receiving of grace is contingent upon an individual's acceptance of the system of faith, or the gospel which is God's power unto salvation (Romans 1:16). And because much of the world lives outside the faith, then grace would not be granted upon them, not because of a deficiency on God's part, but on man's. So the theory of a universal grace regardless of one's faith or life cannot be the means through which grace can be obtained.

Then another idealistic theory that much of the world, likewise, would cleave unto is the thought that grace is contingent only upon an individual's faith, referring back to Ephesians 2:8-9. "*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.*" But likewise, to use these verses to say that grace is received through inward faith with no outer action on man's part would again contradict such obvious verses as Matthew 7:21, where Christ said, "*Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.*" Christ himself says that to receive the gift of grace, being salvation, that more must be done than simply calling on Him as Lord, not to earn salvation, but to have it given. Therefore, similar to the universal grace theory, the idea that grace is received solely based on inner faith to the neglect of outer works is also false.

How then, if not received universally or by mere inner faith, is the glorious gift of grace received by man. Dan Jenkins listed the three concepts that exist in the area of faith and works and then expounded upon the truth by saying, "Some advocate faith without works and the result is dead faith (James 2:17). The Jews had works without faith and the result was dead works (Hebrews 6:1). Heaven's view is that faith which works through love is the only thing that avails (Galatians 5:6). It is this combination of faith and works that exalts Christ. All others rob him of the glory he deserves. What the world must understand is that to minimize works is to minimize the glory we bring to Jesus."

What then is the conclusion as to how God's glorious grace can be received? God offers it freely as a gift because His Son paid the price on the cross, and then it is accepted by the faith through which man becomes "...*his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them*" (Ephesians 2:10). Can works be excluded from man's reception of God's glorious grace? No, because by grace through the faith we become God's workmanship, a working people. Therefore it is the divine combination that God has provided of His grace, the faith He has provided, and man's working of God's will that salvation is given and a home in Heaven will be enjoyed.