

Grace, Works and Reward

Failure on the part of Theologians to Comprehend the Full Auspices of Grace Can Confound the average Worshipper as to What Response is Appropriate on the part of Those who Truly Have Been Brought Under Grace.

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One would expect that if there is anything the Christian world would understand well, it would be the matter of God's Grace. So much is said about it, so much depends upon it. God's magnanimous Pardon is a major component of New Testament Theology. Where there's often a breakdown is in the area of whether or not we are called upon to reflect having come under Grace with any kind of responsiveness. The Evangelical world especially has problems comprehending the aspect of our receiving a "reward" after having lived a successful Christian life. Reward suggests Merit! Something earned! This article addresses the question of Works, and what bearing they have on the Christian life and how, IF at all, they factor into a Christian's ultimate Reward.

It is the question of what part do we individually play in the attainment of ultimate Salvation. Some would raise objections already to the wording of this sentence, in that it suggests we have a certain amount of involvement in what they regard as strictly and solely a matter of applied Grace.

What Do You Mean...?

Key words in this discussion first need to be set forward. We can't understand this matter correctly so long as we confuse or intermingle these terms. A certain amount of intermingling aggravates the problem with certain modern mainstream religions. Let's consider some of the primary subject areas that have bearing on our question: **Is there any merited Reward offered to the Christian, and do our actions have any bearing on the quality of that Reward?**

Remission: Having the accumulated guilt of past sins removed. This is not something that can be earned, though it does involve a personal

commitment. Sin's penalty is not removed (brought into remission) without the conscious plea and the acceptance on the part of the recipient of Christ's shed blood. Also, not without a prior attainment of certain essential milestones in life: Belief and True Repentance which reflects a commitment to cease sinning (breaking God's Law) (1st John 3:4, Hebrews 9:22, 10:18-20, Matt. 26:28, Acts 2:38, Jas. 2:24.)

Justification: The state of being we are brought into once our sins are forgiven. Again, this is not a state that can be attained by any works that we do. No amount of good deeds in the present can atone for a bad deed of the past. Nor is any form of 'penance' effective in attaining real Justification. Nor is this reconciled state one we can remain in without a commitment to cease from sin. (Rom. 5:9-11, Rom. 2:13, 3:30-31, Gal. 3:8-9.)

Salvation: The act of God rescuing individuals from a spiritual death sentence, which is our just due on account of our natural sinful state. (Romans 8:7) No effort on our part is sufficient to merit it. Salvation entails the removal of the death penalty, making possible eternal life. (Eph. 2:8-9, Rom. 6:23, 2nd Tim. 1:9.)

Grace: The undeserved acts of kindness of God toward us: The initial application of it being the forgiveness of sins. But Grace follows with us thru the entire process of the perfecting of our spiritual lives. We don't just receive Grace, **we come under it!** It involves more than just the forgiveness of sins and the maintenance of a sinless condition. Grace also conveys the obligation to labor on behalf of our Savior and Master. (1st Cor.15:10, 2nd Cor.9:8) This broader aspect of Grace is not commonly understood or presented in most churches. We will consider

also its broader application. (Rom. 12:6-18, Eph. 4:7-16, 1st Pet. 4:10-11.)

Faith: That confidence which expresses belief and dedication toward the precepts and promises of God, seen or unseen. (Heb. 11:1) There are two kinds of Faith: That which is of ourselves, and that which is not! Both have their part to play in the conversion process. See the article: “*Two Kinds of Faith*” (#19). (Eph. 2:8) There are two expressions of Faith: That which is responsive and that which is not! (Jas. 2:14&20.)

Lawkeeping: That state of mind which is oriented to and attempts to keep the precepts of the Laws of God. This is an activity which can operate under two different motivations: self-effort **or** love of God. Lawkeeping is generally perceived as defining the things we are not to do. It's unfortunate that people often seek remission of sins by their own self-effort, a condition referred to as ‘*legalism*’. The matter is further confused when others mis-identify someone's motivation as being an attempt to ‘earn’ salvation, when in fact they're exhibiting the effects of having received it! (Heb. 8:8-10, Ps. 19:7, 1st John 3:4, Rev. 14:12 & 22:14.)

Works: Those things we do as a result of our desire to serve God and keep His Ways. It involves activities beyond just keeping the Law. Again, there are two basic motivations: Desire to earn something **or** an appropriate expression of gratitude for what we have been given. It is religion's typical reaction to the idea of ‘earning’ anything that unfortunately carries over onto the other more commendable expression of gratitude and service. Their confusing the issue in this area can under-mine a Christian's potential for Reward! (Eph. 2:10, Matt. 16:27, John 6:27, 14:12, 1st Tim. 6:18-19, 2nd Tim. 3:17, Titus 1:16, 2:14, 3:8, Heb. 10:24, Jas. 2:14-17, Rev. 2:26, 14:13.)

Reward: Those additional benefits which are assigned to us, appropriate to what we've done with what we have been given. Not forgetting that those Talents given to us are also provided under God's ongoing Grace. (Matt. 25:14-29, Luke 19:12-26, Jas. 2:26, Rev. 22:12.)

Mis-Defined Grace

The unfortunate condition within mainstream Christianity has been the development of an attitude which is actually contrary to the condition of being ‘under Grace’. While salvation is not earnable in any manner, yet there is an **appropriate response** on the part of the recipient of it to repent of sin, not just those of the past, but any which he may presently be committing. Under Grace, we're forbidden to sin! (Romans 6:1) The Word defines for us exactly what sin is: “*The transgression of the Law*”! (1st John 3:4)

As if a mis-conception of what Grace involves isn't enough, we also have to deal with the mis-identification of the Christian's motive. Some see ALL interest in keeping the Laws of God as just an effort to **earn** salvation. Especially if it involves Old Testament precepts! This is in gross disregard of the **fundamental intent of the New Covenant to implant God's Laws into ones' heart and mind**. (Hebrews 8:8-10 quoting Jeremiah 31:31-33) It seems the critics just can't understand the concept of lawkeeping expressing the love of God. (What's hard to understand about John 14:15 and 1st John 2:3-7?) Expressing Love toward God thru keeping His Laws is entirely appropriate. Well-intentioned critics set about to discourage anything resembling that! What do they not understand? Is it the many-faceted application of Grace?

More Than Just Forgiveness!

The sub-title above refers to the ‘Full Auspices of Grace’. What's meant by that is that Grace involves **more** than just the forgiveness of sins. An earlier paragraph refers to a ‘broader application’. We see in places such as Romans 12:6-18 a lengthy list of attributes we may expect resulting from the Grace of God toward us. “*Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given, let us use them: ...*” He then goes on to list no less than twenty-seven attributes which we, according to the gifts given us, can **USE** in our Christian conduct, in service to our fellow man and use in expressing our gratefulness for what we are given.

Zealous Workers

Titus 2:11-14 *“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might **redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.**”* We see in this verse a reference to remission (redemption), the maintenance of a pure state (justification) and ‘works’ with zeal as our responsive expression of being made ‘special’ to God thru His Grace toward us.

The **ultimate manifestation of grace** is to be revealed at Christ’s appearing: see 1st Peter 1:13. Also 1st Corinthians 15:49 and Philippians 3:20-21. The investiture upon us of our Immortal Spirit Bodies is also by Grace. A Grace that we won’t ultimately receive unless we remain faithful unto the end. *“And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations:...”* (Revelation 2:26 & Luke 19:12-26)

None of these things are earnable; Not the forgiveness of sins, not the means to perfect Christian Character, not the means to serve others using the fruits of God’s Spirit and the Gifts (Talents) He provides thru His ongoing Grace, and by all means not the investiture upon us of our Spirit Bodies in His very likeness at His Coming! So, where does that leave us with regard to the question of ‘works’ and any resultant ‘reward’?

Christ Explains this Matter

A clear parable is given to us that should clarify and explain the matter of how and where works come into play, and what rewards are. There IS a reward potential set before each one of God’s called out ones, and that reward is **in addition to** Salvation of and by itself. This isn’t well understood. Consider the **parable of the Talents** found in Matthew 25:

*“14: For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who **called his own servants**, and delivered unto them his goods.*

*15: And unto one he **gave** five talents, to another*

two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey.

16: Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents.

17: And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two.

18: But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.

19: After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.

20: And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more.

*21: His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee **ruler over many things**: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.*

22: He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them.

*23: His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee **ruler over many things**: enter thou into the joy of thy lord .*

24: Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed:

*25: And I was **afraid**, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine.*

*26: His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and **slothful servant**, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed:*

27: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.

28: Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents.

29: For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.

30: And cast ye the unprofitable servant into

outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

There are a number of important things we need to consider in this narrative: First, the servants are not the world in general. Talents were given to just his own ‘called’ servants. They were made his servants by some prior determination. Secondly, these Talents were not in any way earned, other than perhaps by their having exhibited ability and faithfulness in other ways beforehand. Third, they were expected to **add** their own skills and initiative into employing what they’d been given in order to produce a worthy increase. The first two considerations are acts of grace, but the third involves input on the part of the recipient to add their own efforts toward producing a return pleasing to his master. This is given as **an illustration of the Kingdom of God**, as the lead-in verse explains.

Upon returning, the master calls his servants into account and receives the increase of his servants’ personal efforts (and notice, there is a difference between individuals. They didn’t all achieve the same return or receive the same reward). This increase was **not** their reward. The Talents were the means to the increase, but the increase itself was not the reward. It was their use of what they graciously were given that **made possible** their ‘reward’, and that reward was out of all proportion to the nominal value of the original Talents given them. Their Reward was being placed in high positions of rulership over cities (as the text here and in Luke 19:12-27 also suggests.) Their Reward also was in proportion to what they’d achieved, their rewards weren’t all the same! If the reward was Salvation alone, there wouldn’t be a difference. And in the example of that third servant we’re also cautioned against failure to employ our aptitudes, using our God given Talents effectively.

But, what about any other servants? Did he have only these three? The context suggests there may have been others. These three likely were called-out from among others. Consider the others, those who weren’t given Talents when these were. Did that mean they were not his servants, or may we assume they **were** servants, but only that. Theirs’ was the gift of true

servanthood, but without the same gifts and potential for reward. Though these others may possess the gift of grace, being included among his true servants, they are only that. This corresponds to the condition of just being forgiven of sin, (receiving grace) but not moving up into that echelon of those chosen for the potential of greater reward.

The underlying message in the parable of the talents is that there is a **potential** Reward set before each of us, but that it very much depends on what we do with what we’re given. Using these God given ‘gifts’ can and does increase our Reward when we’re brought into the Millennial Kingdom. In this, Works plays a very significant part. This is not that area where, as some suggest, ‘Christ has done it all for you’.

As we’re also admonished here in Matthew 25, we need to consider the approach taken by the slothful servant. Though in receipt of the grace of being called, (the same as the others in that respect) and beside that, selected for service, he was too faithless to step out and use the Talent given him. The result was that he lost even what he originally did have. Being cast into outer darkness is a vivid illustration of losing ones’ salvation! May we conclude that a failure to minimally pursue a potential reward is salvation threatening?

How Much Does it Matter?

When we are given the Grace of being called, of having our sins forgiven, and being made a servant of the living God, in other words, being ‘saved’, are we safe in our salvation? Does our taking it upon ourselves to perform ‘works’ in any way put that salvation in jeopardy? The theological positions of many is that our doing so would in fact be an offence against Christ’s full and complete salvation!

Laborers Together with God

There’s an interesting, even revealing passage by Paul on this question found in 1st Corinthians 3. He reflects on the situation we find ourselves in once we are in receipt of God’s Grace, it doesn’t stop there. Being forgiven, being cleansed of our guilty past, is a first step. We are then made co-

laborers with God. We are made His Servants, expected to use the ‘talents’ we’re given, the gifts inherent with the indwelling of God’s Spirit. Starting in verse 9: *“For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building.*

10: *According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.*

11: *For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*

12: *Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;*

13: *Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.*

14: *If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.*

15: *If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.*

16: *Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?*

What a profound passage! We, who are the temple of God’s Holy Spirit, His very life power dwelling within us, are made fellow-laborers with Him. When we shun doing any works, we in effect make Him powerless to work His work in our lives!

But what is most revealing in this passage is the clear picture that a person who has performed appropriate ‘works’, if those works are usable, if they are of value to the returning Master, they will result in the doer being rewarded! When those works are found to be **not valuable**, proven in part by their endurance thru trials, the laborer may find himself deficient in reward, yet still in possession of the gift of salvation! This clearly makes distinction between the gift of salvation and the building thereupon of our reward in addition to it. Notice verse 15.

Crown Thieves?!

“Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.” (Revelation 3:11) We are admonished to take heed

that no man take our crown. They can’t do that by identity theft, they can’t pose as a servant of God if they’re not actually one. They’d never slip that one by God! HOW then can someone steal our crown? They can do so by causing us to shrink back from or to reject making the effort toward obtaining our Crowning achievement by dissuading us from performing appropriate ‘God ordained **works**’, not employing the Talents God gives us. Napkin people we could call them! (see Luke 19:20)

Whom Do We Disrespect?

“Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” (Philippians 2:12-13)

When we realize that it is God who **works** in us, ¹ that it is He that both **wills** (creates the desire) and **does** His Work in and thru us, that it’s not we alone who effectively does it, then we can also see why a rejection of DOING Works is especially disrespectful of **His gracious partnership in our lives.**

Notice also, our Reward is to be **brought** to us with the return of Christ. If we **have** Salvation already, then Salvation itself isn’t that Reward referred to, that will be brought **then!** *“...and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.”* (Rev. 22:12-13, see also Rev. 11:18) Reward is predicated upon Works! Salvation is the unmerited gift. It is the wise servant who recognizes the distinction.

There is the free unmerited gift of Grace unto Salvation, and there is an appropriate Reward awaiting those who employ their God Given Talents, in addition to Salvation, in proportion to what they accomplish using those Talents. 

■ Recommended additional topics:

“We are not UNDER the Law” #9

¹ Ephesians 2:10 We are instruments in His hands.

“Growing in the Grace of our Lord” #3
“What’s WORKS Got to Do With It?” #151
“What Must I DO?” #50
“The Reward of the Saved” #64
“Oh, For the Love of God!” #94
“Two Kinds of Faith” #19