

Is it true that...

Grace Plus Nothing Equals Salvation? (Grace + 0 = Salvation)

By Wesley White
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Not long ago, the Knight-Ridder newspapers published a study done on Biblical illiteracy. The article clearly showed that, when it comes to understanding the Bible, Americans seem to know less and less about Scripture as every year goes by.

For example, researchers polled Americans and asked the question: Did you read your Bible during this last week?

- In 1992, 50% said yes.
- In 2004, only 34% said Yes.

It is an unfortunate fact that people just don't read the Bible as much as they used to. And this leads to misunderstandings. Here are some examples.

There's a common phrase in churches. This phrase says, "God helps those who help themselves." This is a good phrase, but this phrase is not in Scripture. And when researchers polled Americans about this phrase, 80% said, "Yes, this phrase is in the Bible."

The researchers asked people to quote John 3:16. 65% could not recite the words of John 3:16.

The researchers asked people who Joan of Arc was. 10% of the respondents said that Joan of Arc was Noah's wife!

Wheaton College, in the state of Illinois, is a well-known school for Protestant study. Many of the graduates of Wheaton College go on to become ministers in various Protestant denominations.

But according to Gary Burge, a professor of New Testament theology at Wheaton College, every year the freshman class gets dumber when it comes to the Bible. For example, every year they give a Bible test to all the in-coming freshmen. And one of the questions is this: Put the following things in order:

== Abraham

- == the Old Testament Prophets
- == the death of Christ
- == the day of Pentecost

Only 33% of the incoming students can put these four events in proper order. 67% cannot do it.

And only 33 percent of Wheaton's freshman can find the Sermon on the Mount in the New Testament.

Today, only 1 student in 50 at Wheaton College (that's 2%) can recite all ten of the Commandments in Exodus 20.

We could go on and on in listing examples of how people in the world today do not know their Bibles. But that's the Protestants and the Catholics. What about the Sabbath-keeping Churches of God? What's our condition? Do our people look at the Scriptures with a reverence and with a desire to study it and understand it?

At times, it appears that the Church of God today suffers the same affliction as the world when it comes to Bible ignorance. Unfortunately, some people in the Church of God have some erroneous beliefs and many times these beliefs are caused by lack of Bible study.

It seems like even long-time ministers of the Church of God will make statements such as, "the Old Covenant, with The Written Law, no longer exists for Christians, only The New Covenant." They also say, "Once you have The Law fulfilled in you as a Christian by Christ, you are no longer subject to its legal works – Jesus already completed The Law for you."

We can demonstrate this with a formula that has been making the rounds for several years in many Churches of God today. This formula has generated much confusion. This formula, unfortunately, has been accepted by many of our people. And this formula is both false and unbiblical. The formula goes like this:

$$\text{Grace} + \text{Nothing} = \text{Salvation}$$

The bottom line of this thinking is that GRACE is something that exists totally by itself. The premise is that, once grace is out there, that's all you need to be saved. And the people who promote this formula say that, if you add anything to this formula, you are advocating salvation by works.

Well, when we look at this formula, we need to ask the question, "Is there anything that should be added to this equation?"

Repentance

For example, what about repentance? Is repentance REQUIRED if we are to receive salvation? Or is repentance simply preferred? Some say that repentance is quite optional.

Oh? What if we come across a person who is not a Christian? Let's say he has never accepted Jesus as his savior. By his own admission, he is not converted. What if that person says, "I'd love to accept this wonderful gift called grace. I'd love to have eternal life. But I won't repent! I'm not going to change. I'm going to stay exactly the

way I am. I am going to continue living a life of sin. There is no way am I going to even try to overcome."

What if he takes this attitude toward repentance? Will he receive this wonderful thing we call grace? No! Because repentance is REQUIRED. Notice what John-the Baptist preached. *"Now after that, John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying: The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel (Mark 1:14-15)."*

And we mustn't forget what was taught on the very day that the Church of God was born. It took place on that great day of Pentecost 31 AD when Peter gave a moving sermon after which thousands accepted Jesus. *"Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins... (Acts 2:38)"*

Again, repentance was never presented in the New Testament as an option or a suggestion. In their preaching, Jesus and the apostles instructed their hearers to commit to this great change called repentance.

Belief

Let's ask the same question about belief. What if a person says, "I want eternal life, but I don't want to have to actually BELIEVE the teachings of Jesus. Yeah, I'll go through the motions of SAYING any words that are necessary, but this Bible stuff will never be internalized within me. If I take that stance, will I receive salvation?"

We just read the words of Jesus Mark 1:15 where He **commands** us to believe.

Faith

How about faith? Luke records in his Gospel a very moving situation where a woman performs a very tender physical act of service on Jesus. She shows love to Christ by washing His feet. Jesus then tells her that her sins have now been forgiven. *"And He said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee. Go in peace. (Luke 7:50)."*

What if the woman didn't have faith? Would she have been forgiven of her sins? No way.

Baptism

What about baptism? What do we say to the person who wants the gift of eternal life, but refuses to go through the humbling experience of being immersed into water? In Acts 2:38 Peter clearly says that we must be baptized if we want to receive the holy spirit and then have eternal life. Any time a person takes the attitude that he is going to accept grace on HIS terms as opposed to what we are instructed to do in Scripture, then there is no way he can expect to receive the great gift of grace.

Forgiveness of Others

In our Christian walk, can it be said that if we want to be forgiven of our sins, then we are required to forgive others? What if a person says, "I expect God to forgive me, but there is no way I am going to forgive other people for what they have done to me?" Can a Christian take this attitude? Notice what Jesus taught on this subject: *"And if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you forgive NOT men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matthew 6:1)."*

This is serious stuff. This is a subject we cannot take lightly.

Accepting the Name of Jesus

Let's ask another some more questions. What if a person says, "I want God's grace. But I think Jesus was just some smart prophet like Muhammad or Buddha. There was nothing special about Jesus. His teachings were good, but there were a lot of people in history who had good teaching." How far will this line of reasoning get him? It certainly will not get his name placed in the Book of Life!

Obedience

And what about obedience? This is a real hot button in many religious circles. Some folks HATE when we talk about obedience. They say, "Don't say that word! Don't tell me I have to obey. I just want my grace without being expected to obey anyone or anything."

They think salvation is like ordering a Whataburger and demanding the fry cook leave off the mustard. They want it they way they want it. They hate the word "obedience."

And they are dead wrong. Notice what Paul wrote on this subject.

"Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh

And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead

By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name. (Romans 1:3-5)."

Paul says more about this in his same epistle.

"But God be thanked, that you WERE the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.

Being then made free from sin, ye became servants of righteousness. (Romans 6:17-18)."

Further, the writer of the book of Hebrews tells us that salvation does NOT exist alone. He writes, *"But beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and the things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak. (Hebrews 6:9)."*

The Key

Obedience is the key! All of these things (repentance, belief, faith, baptism, forgiveness, accepting only Jesus) all fall under the category of obedience. If you obey God, you will repent, believe, have faith, forgive, be baptized, and accept only Jesus.

Conversely, if you repent, believe, have faith, receive baptism, forgive and accept Christ, you are exercising obedience.

In other words, the correct formula is this:

Grace = Obedience = Salvation

But what about the statement in Romans 6 which say, "We're under grace but not under the law"? People love to quote the following, "*For sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace.*"

However, notice that these same people also love to STOP quoting at this point. They don't like to read verse 15 which says, "*What then, shall we sin (transgress the law) because we are not under the law but under grace? God forbid.*"

Yes, unfortunately, there are those who will tell you that accepting God's grace means you don't have to obey the Law. This is taught every day in the churches of this world.

The first century apostles knew this type of deception was going to take place to the Church of God. They prophesied it. The first century began with people who knew the truth regarding God's law, but then apostate teachers infiltrated the Church with their teaching that the law was done away with.

The apostles knew this would happen. In fact, it started happening in their lifetimes. It happened before they were martyred. Notice what Jude said would happen.

"Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that you should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. (Jude 3)"

This is such a profound statement! Jude is telling us that the primitive Church even back then needed to go back and earnestly believe and teach its original doctrines instead of getting off into nonsense being taught by false religious leaders.

Verse 4 goes on to explain, "*For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness (lawlessness or doing away with the law) and denying the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

In other words, Jude is saying, "Some false religious leaders will tell you about a false Jesus. Their Jesus will be:

- a Jesus who did away with his Father's Law;
- a Jesus who was crucified on a Friday night and who was resurrected on Sunday morning;
- a Jesus who was born on December 25;
- a Jesus who we celebrate His resurrection every Easter Sunday morning;
- a Jesus who did away with the laws of clean and unclean;

-- a Jesus who would tell you that the Sabbath is not a doctrine of the very Body of Christ, but is simply a distinctive that makes us a teeny weeny bit different from those who deny the Law and teach against the Law.

The truth of the matter is that there is no salvation to be found in following a false Christ. Salvation can only be found in following (and obeying) the true Jesus of Nazareth who kept the Sabbath and who set the example for us to follow today.

When someone says, "Grace plus nothing equals salvation," he is going against the very teaching of John who said, *"He that saith I know him and keepeth NOT his commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him."*

It is so unfortunate that so many people are so ignorant of their Bibles. These are difficult times. The world is in a mess. Crime and lawlessness run rampant in our country. Today, it seems that anything goes.

Disobedience to God's Law is taught in our schools and on TV. It's everywhere in our culture.

And it's during times like these that God's people MUST understand their Bibles. And it is VITAL that we not only understand God's Word, but that we also obey God's Word.

For more information, contact us at:
Dynamic Christian Ministries
PO Box 1062
Big Sandy TX 75755

Or check us out at: www.dynamicchristianministries.org