

Did Peter Deny the Grace of God?

Introduction. The good news of the gospel is that God has the power to transform lives. We've undoubtedly known alcoholics, drug addicts, adulterers, liars, thieves, and others won over to Christ. The Bible records that the maniac at Gadara, the despised tax collector Matthew, blind Bartimaeus, the adulterous Samaritan woman, Zacchaeus, the Roman centurion, Saul, Cornelius, the Ethiopian eunuch, the Philippian jailer, Lydia, and many others became believers in Christ.

Of course, we mostly think that grace relates to spiritual salvation. But Acts 12 records a gracious incident of physical deliverance. Herod Antipas was harassing the church. He killed James with the sword, and then imprisoned Peter. It's likely that Herod had the same fate in mind for Peter.

Let's look at the incident in Acts 12:5-11 and consider the circumstance of Peter denying the grace of God. We'll see that he didn't, and that this episode teaches us (like many in the Bible) the perfect balance between grace and faith.

I. Divine Acts and Human Acts

- A. Luke records several divine acts that Peter experienced.
 - 1. An angel appeared to him. He was God's messenger. And he came to rescue Peter from prison.
 - 2. Then the chains fell off. Peter was bound with two chains between two soldiers. Peter didn't have a key. And the angel didn't unlock them. They just miraculously fell off.
 - 3. Peter then passed through two guard posts without being seen. Four squads of soldiers were watching Peter. Each squad consisted of four men. So he went unnoticed by 16 men. How? It had to be a divine act.
 - 4. The iron gate opened by itself. The Bible says, "they came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which opened to them of its own accord" (v. 10). Another miracle.
 - 5. Now suppose you saw Peter on the street and asked, "Peter, how you get out of prison? He would respond, "The Lord delivered me" (v. 17). "How do you know?" Peter would recount the miraculous occurrences that could only be the working of the Lord.
- B. However, there were some human acts involved too.
 - 1. The angel told Peter to "Get up." The angel could've picked him up. The Lord could've miraculously transported him out of prison. But Peter had to get up on his own.
 - 2. "Put on your clothes," the angel commanded. The angel didn't dress him. Peter dressed himself.
 - 3. "Put on your shoes," he was further instructed. Peter could have said, "This is a waste of time. I'm not going anywhere." But he didn't. He got ready.
 - 4. "Follow me," the angel announced. Peter could have objected, "There are too many guards to get past. We'll never get out of here." Or he could have said, "You carry me." He instead simply obeyed.
 - 5. Now, if you ask, "Peter, how did the Lord deliver you?" He would have told you what he did.

II. Did Peter Deny the Grace of God?

- A. There's an idea among many religiously-minded people that one's saved only by grace and nothing else. You can't do anything to affect your salvation. But Peter's actions didn't nullify God's grace.
- B. Today, there's a divine role in our salvation.
 - 1. God's love, grace, and mercy have made salvation possible (Ephesians 2:4-7). Without Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, none of us could be saved (John 3:16; Romans 5:8).
 - 2. The gospel is God's saving power (Romans 1:16). God did for us what we couldn't do for ourselves.
- C. However, just like in Peter's release from prison, there's a human element involved.
 - 1. The Word must be preached (1 Corinthians 1:21; Romans 10:17). If you refuse to hear and act, you'll be lost.
 - 2. Furthermore, you must believe (Hebrews 11:6).
 - a) But you're not only believing. Submissive faith is the only acceptable response to such unmerited love.
 - b) Yet, even when we conform to God's pattern, either in initial obedience or in subsequent service, the glorious state of spiritual transformation that we experience isn't the result of our works (Ephesians 2:8-10).
 - 3. Faith works (John 6:29) and touches your heart affecting godly sorrow causing you to turn from your sins in repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10).
 - a) This means a true reformation of life. No stone of immorality can remain unturned if you're going to be saved.
 - b) This is also called conversion (Acts 3:19). You must leave behind your previous sinful life (Colossians 3:5-11; cp. 2 Corinthians 12:20-21).
 - 4. Like the Ethiopian treasurer, when you learn who Jesus is and what He did for you, you'll stand for Him and confess Him as the Son of God (Acts 8:37).
 - 5. All of this leads you to be "baptized for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). Baptism puts you into a relationship with Christ (Galatians 3:26-27), inducts you into the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13), washes away your sins (Acts 22:16; Revelation 1:5), and saves you (1 Peter 3:21).
- D. Branding the need for obedience as pharisaical perfectionism is unfair and frankly kind of hysterical. It's not an all-or-nothing proposition. There's a biblical linkage between faith and works that you must recognize and accept.

Conclusion. Our primary obedience and our future adherence to the Lord's commands doesn't negate God's grace. It only highlights how wonderful and amazing God's grace is. It marks a separation point between worldliness and righteousness, between holiness and wickedness, and between the heavenly and the earthly.

If you want to escape sin's shackles and Satan's imprisonment, listen to the Lord. Get up! Obey His Word — and follow Him.

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