

What Grace Doesn't Do

Introduction. During a British conference on comparative religions, experts from around the world debated what, if any, belief was unique to the Christian faith. They began eliminating possibilities. Incarnation? Other religions had different versions of gods appearing in human form. Resurrection? Again, other religions had accounts of return from death.

The debate went on for some time until C.S. Lewis wandered into the room. "What's the debate about?" he asked, and heard in reply that his colleagues were discussing Christianity's unique contribution among world religions. Lewis responded, "Oh, that's easy. It's grace." After some discussion, the attendees had to agree.

The notion of God's love coming to us free of charge, no strings attached, seems to go against every instinct of humanity. The Buddhist eightfold path, the Hindu doctrine of Karma, the Jewish covenant, and the Muslim code of law — each offers a way to earn approval. Only Christianity dares to make God's love unconditional.

Nothing is more clearly revealed in the Bible than our dependence on God's grace for redemption. Paul told the saints at Ephesus, "by grace you have been saved" (Ephesians 2:5). Everyone permitted to enter heaven will be there by grace.

I want you to be confident and comfortable in the grace of God.

But there's too many warped conceptions of grace today, leading people to endless speculation about what grace may do. For you to properly understand and enjoy God's grace, I want to show you five actions that God's grace doesn't do.

I. Grace Doesn't Permit Access Without Faith

- A. "Access" is admittance, entrance, or introduction. One has to show faith in Jesus Christ in order to gain access into saving grace (Romans 5:1-2).
- B. Since faith comes by hearing God's Word (Romans 10:17), you have to hear the gospel to enter God's favor. God provides salvation through grace and man accepts that provision of grace by means of faith (Ephesians 2:8).
- C. People, through their lack of assembling with the saints, aren't having their faith developed. This makes standing in the grace of God infinitely more difficult. This is why being with saints is critical to spiritual health. If grace is important to you, so should faith be also.

II. Grace Doesn't Negate Baptism

- A. The faith which gives access into grace is active trust or confidence expressed in cheerful obedience. God requires that we show faith by being baptized, and that demonstration of faith produces the remission of sins (Colossians 2:12).
- B. Peter preached repentance and baptism "for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). But he acknowledged that it's "through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ" that we'll be saved (Acts 15:11). Salvation by grace requires faith, and faith requires baptism to bring us the forgiveness of sins.
- C. Furthermore, "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17), and baptism puts me into Christ (Galatians 3:27). Therefore, I'm taking hold of the grace of Christ when I join Him in baptism.

III. Grace Doesn't Give License to Sin

- A. The Law of Moses was given to show the sinfulness of sin. Under the Law sin abounded (Romans 5:20). Does this mean that the more men sin, the more grace will be shown? Or, as Paul worded the question, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" He answered, "Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?" (Romans 6:1-2).
- B. The triumph of God's grace over sin isn't to be interpreted as a license for the Christian to indulge in unrighteousness (Romans 6:7, 12; Titus 2:11-12).
 - 1. No Christian should be going into a situation thinking, "It's okay. If I sin I'll just repent." That's disrespecting the grace of God.
 - 2. I've met people who believe in "continuous cleansing," where you can constantly be forgiven — even while sinning.
 - 3. To be forgiven you have to repent. This means putting sin to death and presenting your body as an instrument of righteousness (Romans 6:13).
 - 4. Grace doesn't merely rescue us from sin's penalty; it can free us from sin's power. Christ died and rose again to make you holy, not to give you the freedom to continue sinning because you have the grace of God.

IV. Grace Doesn't Save on the Basis of Human Merit

- A. The Bible sometimes uses the word "work" to convey the thought of activity that earns, or effort that deserves reward (Romans 4:4). Our salvation is based on faith, not something earned or deserved, "that it might be according to grace" (Romans 4:16). This is why boasting is excluded (Ephesians 2:9).
- B. Actions in exercise of faith are sometimes called "works" (James 2:24), but they aren't in the category of efforts that earn or merit. No one deserves salvation. God's grace saves and shows our inability to reach heaven by our own power, ingenuity, or deserving. God owes us nothing; we owe Him everything. But grace and being obedient by doing what God wants aren't enemies.

V. Grace Doesn't Offer Unconditional Security

- A. Just as our entrance into saving grace is conditioned on our willingness to show faith in Jesus Christ, our remaining in that grace is conditioned on our willingness to continue in faith (Romans 5:2; Colossians 1:23).
- B. The Hebrew writer warns us that one may "fail" or "come short" of the grace of God (Hebrews 12:15). The Galatians were called "into the grace of Christ" but afterward accepted false teaching that "removed" them (Galatians 1:6-7). Paul wrote to them, "you have fallen from grace" (Galatians 5:4). This explodes the theory of once in grace, always in grace.

Conclusion. I pray this approach has shown some of the limitations which God places on grace. Let's leave behind the misconceptions that have made grace different than the Bible presents it. God's free gift is the most magnificent addition you'll ever make to your life. Therefore, hear it, learn it, and obey it!

I am deeply indebted to Irvin Himmell for the use of his material.