

Growing in Grace: Understanding the True Gospel vs. False Teaching

The early church faced a unique challenge that we might not fully appreciate today. Unlike us, they didn't have a completed Bible to reference. Instead, their faith was built on a person - Jesus Christ - and the teachings of the apostles who laid the foundation of the church. This reality helps us understand why the letters written by Paul and other apostles were so precious to these early believers.

Is Our Faith in a Book or a Person?

While we are a Bible-based church, we must remember that we are fundamentally a Jesus-based church. The Bible is precious and essential - it keeps us "between the lines" - but our faith must rely totally on Jesus Christ and the personal relationship we have with Him. Without Jesus Christ, the Bible would have no meaning because it would miss the point entirely.

From Genesis to Revelation, the entire Bible points to one person: Jesus. The main concept is understanding the revelation that Jesus Christ is Lord of heaven and earth.

Paul's Transformation: From Persecutor to Apostle

Paul's story illustrates the danger of having knowledge without understanding. As Saul, he persecuted the church based on his interpretation of Scripture, thinking he was doing God's work. He was highly educated, having studied under Gamaliel, one of the most acclaimed Hebrew scholars of his day. Yet he completely missed the main point - that the Scriptures pointed to the very one he was persecuting.

Everything changed on the road to Damascus when Paul encountered not a book, but a person - Jesus Christ. This encounter transformed his life and ministry.

The Role of the Holy Spirit in Understanding Scripture

As Second Corinthians 3:6 tells us: "who made us also adequate as servants of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."

Without the Holy Spirit, we cannot understand what the Word really says. It becomes just a collection of rules and regulations that we could never keep. The law was given to show us how short we fall in fulfilling everything God requires of us.

If you're a born-again Christian who has asked Jesus to be your personal Lord and Savior, the Spirit of truth lives inside you. He will lead, guide, and help you in your journey with Christ.

What Is Grace Really About?

Grace is God working inside us, helping us overcome the things of this world. When we face struggles and difficulties - things that don't go our way - we might be tempted to rely on our own determination and stubbornness to tough it out. But God wants us to understand what it means to have His grace working through our lives.

There is no "I" in grace. It's not about what we have accomplished. Grace represents a different walk, a different journey that brings true fulfillment and accomplishment to our lives.

The Danger of Adding Law to Grace

The book of Galatians addresses Christians who started well but lost their way by returning to legalism. Understanding God's grace can be scary because it doesn't compute with our natural thinking - it seems too good to be true.

The Judaizers who infiltrated the Galatian churches pressured people to embrace Mosaic law alongside grace, creating a "grace plus" method. They taught that yes, Jesus went to the cross, but you still have to follow certain rules and regulations.

This creates confusion about our motives. Are we obeying God because we have to or because we want to? We need to reach the place where we obey because we want to, out of love for Him.

Paul's Divine Calling and Authority

Paul began his letter to the Galatians by defending his apostleship because false teachers had undermined his authority. In Galatians 1:1-2, he writes: "Paul, an apostle (not sent from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead), and all the brethren who are with me, To the churches of Galatia."

Paul had a divine call - God simply chose him for this purpose. We all have callings and giftings that God has placed inside us, and we can only receive from a person in ministry if we respect and acknowledge the office they stand in.

Grace and Peace: Two Pillars of Faith

In Galatians 1:3-5, Paul mentions grace and peace as foundational elements: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forevermore. Amen."

When we flow in God's grace, we walk in peace. When we get out of grace, we lose peace. Paul used the word "grace" more than 100 times in his writings, while all other New Testament writers combined used it only 55 times. He truly was the apostle of grace.

The Danger of a Different Gospel

Paul expressed amazement that the Galatians were "so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another" (Galatians 1:6-7). This different gospel wasn't really good news at all - it drew people away from the simplicity of the gospel back into bondage.

False teachers market alternative gospels that use elements of truth but distort them by adding or removing key components. This creates disturbance and agitation rather than the peace that comes from the true gospel.

Warnings Against Distorting the Gospel

Paul's warning in Galatians 1:8-9 is severe: "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed. As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed."

This warning applies to any teaching that negates the sacrifice of Christ or adds human works as requirements for salvation. Whether it's religious systems that deny Christ's divinity or modern attempts to rewrite Scripture to fit political ideologies, any distortion of the gospel brings spiritual consequences.

Pleasing God Rather Than People

Paul concludes this section by asking: "For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10).

The word "bond-servant" refers to a slave who chooses to remain in permanent servitude because of love for their master. We are freed to become slaves to Christ, choosing to make His will our will.

Life Application

This week, examine your relationship with God honestly. Are you trying to earn His favor through your own efforts, or are you resting in His grace? Challenge yourself to identify areas where you might be adding "works" to grace - whether it's feeling like you have to attend church a certain number of times, give a specific amount, or follow particular rules to be "good enough" for God.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Am I obeying God because I have to or because I want to?
- Is my faith based on my relationship with Jesus or on following a set of rules?
- Am I seeking to please people or God in my daily decisions?

- Do I truly understand that grace means God's strength working through me, not my own efforts?

Remember that growing in grace means learning to rely on God's strength rather than your own determination. When you face difficulties this week, instead of trying to "tough it out" alone, invite God's grace to work through your situation. This is the journey that leads to true fulfillment and spiritual accomplishment.