

God's Grace ~ Part 13

"Perhaps there is no word in the Bible more precious than Grace."

~ Rick Countryman, Senior Pastor, Big Valley Grace Community Church
Modesto, Ca.

"Compelled to Live in God's Grace by Love ~ Part B"

In my last post, we began to consider how we are compelled to live in God's Grace by love. We will continue to explore this topic.

Compelled by Love

In 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, Sha'ul states: ***"For the Messiah's love has hold of us, because we are convinced that one man died on behalf of all mankind (which implies that all mankind was already dead), and that he died on behalf of all in order that those who live should not live any longer for themselves but for the one who on their behalf died and was raised."*** While there is a lot of spiritual truth in this passage, the essential teaching is that Yeshua's love compels us to live no longer for ourselves but for Him who died for us and was raised again.

We are called to be committed to the Lordship of Yeshua in every area of our lives. We are to live no longer for ourselves, but for Him. We are to make His will the rule of our lives and His glory the goal for which we live.

While the Complete Jewish Bible uses the phrase *"has hold of us"* in verse 14, many other translations render it *'controls us,' 'constraineth' or 'compels us.'* For ease of discussion, I will use compel. Sha'ul said the love of Yeshua compels us to make this kind of commitment and to carry it out day by day. *Compel* is a strong word and often has a negative association with force or coercion. But here its meaning is positive. It is not a fear of consequences or expectation of reward that motivates Sha'ul. Rather, the love of Yeshua manifested in dying for us is the driving force of our lives.

I believe that, in most instances where people apparently abuse the reality of grace, they have not heard a message on grace but on freedom from the law. Freedom from the law is a result of grace and is an important application of the truth of grace, but it is not the same as grace. To teach freedom from the law without first teaching grace is like trying to build a house without laying the foundation. That approach can indeed lead to abuse. But when a person truly understands the grace of God in Yeshua, he or she will not abuse that grace.

Jude speaks of ***"ungodly people who pervert God's Grace into a license for debauchery and disown our only Master and Lord, Yeshua the Messiah."*** (Jude 4) Obviously, Jude was referring to unbelievers.

People, who truly understand the grace of God, not just intellectually but in the very core of their being, will not abuse grace by living irresponsibly. Sha'ul writes: ***"Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered over; blessed is the man whose sin Adonai will not reckon against his account."*** (Romans 4:7-8, quoting from Psalm 31:1-2)

What a fantastic encouragement that God will *never* judge us for our confessed sins. We know that we all have a sinful nature. Apart from the sanctifying influence of the Ruach in our lives, we are fully capable of the so-called "gross" sins¹ of immorality, drunkenness, stealing, and the like. But those are not the sins that trouble us most of the time. Rather, we struggle with what I call "refined" sins: selfishness, pride, impatience, a critical attitude, and a judgmental spirit.

So when we read that God will never count against us our confessed sins of selfishness, pride, impatience, and so on, we should leap for joy with a heartfelt thanksgiving to God for His gracious forgiveness. Now, with that truth, don't ask yourself: *"Since God is not going to count them against me anyway, I might as well not bother with all the spiritual pain of putting to death those ungodly traits?"*

¹ I am assuming that you already know that sin is sin in God's eyes. He doesn't distinguish greater or lesser sins as we humans do.

Of course we shouldn't think like that. Instead, we should ask God to purge those sinful traits from our character. We ask Him to enable us to become more and more aware of specific instances when we do commit those sins so that we can, by the power of His Ruach, put them to death as Sha'ul tells us to do in Romans. ***"For if you live according to your old nature, you will certainly die; but if, by the Spirit, you keep putting to death the practices of the body, you will live."*** (Romans 8:13) It's all about our love for Yeshua that we obey His commands.

Reverence for God

Along with a sense of profound gratitude to God for His grace, I also find myself motivated to obedience by a deep sense of reverence for Him. When Joseph was tempted to immorality by Potiphar's wife, his response was, ***"How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?"*** (Genesis 39:9). He did not calculate the possible wrath of Potiphar or the forfeiture of God's blessing. He was motivated by reverence for God. He was concerned about disobedience to a sovereign, holy God, even though that God had allowed him to be sold into slavery by his own brothers.

Sha'ul combined these two elements of God-honoring motivation - gratitude and reverence - when he wrote to the Corinthian believers: ***"Therefore, my dear friends, since we have these promises, let us purify ourselves from everything that can defile either body or spirit, and strive to be completely holy, out of reverence for God."*** (2 Corinthians 7:1)

Reverence is a sense of profound awe, respect, and devotion. It is recognition of God's intrinsic worthiness, the infinite majesty of His being, and the infinite perfection of His character. Because of who He is and what He is, God is infinitely worthy of our most diligent and loving obedience, even if we never receive a single blessing. ***"You are worthy, Adonai Eloheinu, to have glory, honor and power, because you created all things - yes, because of your will they were created and came into being!"*** (Revelation 4:11) **God is worthy of our loving obedience because of who He is, not because of what He does.**

In Romans 12:1, Sha'ul urges us, in view of God's mercy, to offer our bodies as living sacrifices to Him. Is He worthy of such sacrifice? Of course He is! He is infinitely worthy. But our motivation to obey and serve God cannot rise to such heights until we learn to live daily by grace and to experience freedom each day from the bondage of the performance treadmill.

Growing in Grace

The term *growing in grace* is most often used to indicate growth in Messianic character. While I think that usage has merit, a more accurate meaning is to continually grow in our understanding of God's Grace, especially as it applies to us personally, to become progressively more aware of our own continued spiritual bankruptcy and the unmerited, unearned, and undeserved favor of God.

As we grow in grace this way, we will grow in our motivation to obey God out of a sense of gratitude and reverence to Him. Our obedience will always be imperfect in performance in this life. We will never perfectly obey Him until we are made perfect by Him. In the same way, our motives will never be consistently pure; there will frequently be some "merit points" mentality mixed in with our genuine love and reverence for God.

So don't be discouraged if you realize your motives have been largely merit-oriented. Just begin now to move toward grace motives. Begin to think daily about the implications of the grace of God in your life. Memorize and meditate frequently on such Scripture passages as Romans 12:1 and 2 Corinthians 5:14-15. Pray about the aspects of truth in those passages and ask God to motivate you by His mercy and love. When you recognize merit-oriented motives at work in you, renounce them and cast yourself completely on the grace of God and the merit of Yeshua. As you grow in grace in this way, you will indeed discover that His love compels you to live, not for yourself, but for Him who died for you and was raised again.

In my next post, we will look into the proof of our love for God and a further discussion on the issue of law versus grace.