

The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK

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IS GRACE ENOUGH?

Many Christians - perhaps most - believe there's nothing more to salvation than to 'just believe'. But this might prompt the question, *Why does God ask obedience from His people?*

You can't read far in the Scriptures without stumbling on such texts as, addressing Isaac: *"through your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because Abraham minded my voice and kept my charge, my orders, my rules and my laws"* (Genesis 26:5). Or, New Testament: *"And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring - who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ"* (Revelation 12:17).

Throughout history the sovereign God has required obedience and imposed severe penalties for disobedience. Until Jesus?

Well then, why did Jesus say, *"Do not suppose I am come to annul the Law and the Prophets. I did not come to abolish but to complete,. For I assure you while heaven and earth endure not one iota or one sign shall drop from the Law until all is finished"* (Matthew 5:17-18). And there's no point to law if it isn't to be obeyed!

But didn't it all end at the cross? Well, Paul writing some years after Jesus 'nailed the law to the cross' (as some suggest) wrote: *"...the Law is holy, and so is the command holy and just and good"* (Romans 7:12). At the end of the first century John adds *'transgression of the Law is sin'* (I John 3:4) and *"...for true love of God*

means this, that we observe his commands" (ch 5:3).

Anyway, what's wrong for example with avoiding sexual sin - one of the 'terrible Ten'? You will escape a range of sexually transmitted diseases - including AIDS, perhaps the trauma of divorce, the death of true love. Or, what about honouring your elders, avoiding violence and theft and perjury? All divine commands! And all very worthy.

The people of God - in both the Old and the New Testament times - have acknowledged the relevance of the divine Law. It is the bed-rock of our relationship with Him. Paul again: *"For those under control of the flesh are worldly-minded.... Because worldly-mindedness is hostile to God; it is not submissive to God's Law; in fact it cannot be"* (Romans 8:5-7).

So - are you hostile to God? Or are you obeying Him? That's the choice.

Is Grace Enough?

As a Christian you will have repented, been baptized and received the Spirit of God. The Spirit? *"...which God bestows on those who obey him"*. That's New Testament - Acts 5:32. And it is vital: *"For if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ he does not belong to him"* (Romans 8:9). [Request the free articles **What Do You Mean - 'Repent'?** and **Coming To Baptism**]

But does your willing submission to the divine Law earn you brownie points with God? *Before* his conversion, Paul was as righteous - as Law-abiding - as anyone (Philippians 3:4-6). Nor did his conversion change that. But did his law-keeping bring him salvation?

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DARK DAYS

Very few of us escape life without experiencing dark days. They're inevitable, given human sin and frailty - our own and that of the rest of the race. For each of us, how those dark days dawn is a unique experience. The billows that knocks me aside may be a mere ripple for you, and *vice versa*.

Sadly, for many the darkness closes in, stifling life even to the death - pain and disease, family tragedy, wars, the blackness of depression. And Christians don't escape. Yet we have a resource that enables us to conquer our fears, to rise above adversity, to be gloriously triumphant over life's brickbats.

Every challenge, every setback, a Christian faces is in effect a jewel set in the crown of eternal life. Ahead - beyond the flesh - is an eternity of perfection. We will be resurrected in a form that won't hurt, won't tire. In a body that enables us to tirelessly serve our God and Saviour. In the meantime there's this life!

What is your 'thorn in the flesh'? Ill-health, poverty, disablement, bereavement, a soul-destroying addiction, disappointed hopes? In measure they afflict us all. In our walk with God, too, we experience highs and lows. Just like the apostle Paul. Read his biography. He reached spiritual heights attained by few. But... 'there was given me a thorn in the flesh'. *It was a gift!* A gift from God. A gift whose nature is only hinted at - because we all have our 'thorn'. A precious gift *from God*.

We treasure gifts. But this one? Whatever the pain it was allowed by our loving Father. It was filtered through the prism of His love for us. He monitored the approaching trial, assessed our need for it and judged our readiness for it. Looked at humanly it is a 'fiery trial'. Through the eye of faith He cut the diamond of suffering to perfection, readying it for mounting in our crown of life.

That's a hope to which every child of God can cling with certainty. God is our Shepherd, our Rock, our Hiding Place, our Place of Safety.

Trust Him!



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Grace?....

You probably observe Christmas and Easter and Sunday church because you think God requires it. But does your salvation depend on it? No - salvation is an effect of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus our Saviour. Only through him can our sins be forgiven. Only by his Spirit will we inherit the Kingdom of God. *Not* by our 'works of righteousness'. Some of God's Law may be obscure to us. But does disobedience through ignorance of the Law bar you from the Kingdom? No - it's the righteousness of Jesus Christ that covers us. *Yet God asks us to obey Him.*

So the answer to the question: *Is grace enough?* is quite clear.

You see, through Jesus we become children of the Father. And we are to become 'as obedient children' (I Peter 1:14). We demonstrate who our Father is by reflecting His behaviour - by our obedience to Him (*cp* John 8:41-42). If we love Him we will keep His commandments! From the heart. As we discover them in His Word. To the best of our ability. It's unlikely, however, that any Christian would quarrel with the Ten Commandments - except maybe the fourth! (But why *that* one?) And our failures are covered by Christ.

Much of the divine Law is civil stuff. It's for our rulers to implement them (Proverbs 29:18) and individual Christians really don't have much say beyond applying the underlying principle. Are they good laws? Said Moses: "Observe and practice [these laws] for they will show how wise and intelligent a nation you are.... And what great nation is there that possesses such righteous statutes and ordinances as this whole Law which I am now setting before you?" (Deuteronomy 4:1-8). And: "The Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God for our good always" (*ch* 6:24).

As Paul wrote, God's Laws *are* 'good'. Willing obedience shows who is our spiritual Father. And they are a protective encircling wall set by a loving God, accessible only through His grace. 

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