

“Yes But, or But Now?”

The “Grace message” is a popular theme in churches today. I discovered 1.4 million websites on just one search engine with the phrase “Grace Church” in them. If you were to take a poll of churches/preachers in America, and in that poll ask the question: Do you preach the “grace message?” the vast majority would say, “yes, of course.” But if you were to follow that question with: “What is the grace message?” You, most likely, would get as many answers as you had respondents to the question. In other words, there is great confusion over what this message is.

From what I have heard over the last 20 years of listening to preaching on radio and television., what most preachers think is the grace message, is actually what I call the *yes, but* grace message. It goes like this: “Yes, we’re saved by grace, but.....“ and then comes the conditions, and attachments. I believe the overriding reason for this is that the grace message is about freeing people from the bondage of religion, and most preachers are in the business of proliferating it (religion). Let me explain. Religion is all about doing this and that (or abstaining from it) in order to obtain God’s acceptance. Grace is about *ceasing* from doing this and that in order to obtain God’s acceptance. You simply can’t get these two things together. Yet this is the very thing religions, and those who promote them, attempt to do, i.e., to convince their hearers that the two—works and grace—are compatible.

Most preachers know and can recite Ephesians 2:8: “**For by grace are ye saved, through faith, that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.**” If asked what the gift is, these same preachers would likely say, “Jesus Christ, of course,” and site the oft quoted John 3:16 : “**For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son.....**” These two verses of Scripture come from two different writers in Scripture: the apostle Paul (the former verse), and the apostle John (the latter verse). This raises the question: are the two preaching the same message? The usual answer is: “Yes, because they are both New Testament writers.” Here we have the dominant reason why true grace isn’t preached in churches today: the belief that everything from

Matthew to Revelation is all proclaiming the same message. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Christians have no trouble accepting the two major divisions in all published Bibles: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The legitimacy of these two divisions is unquestioned in Christendom. Any other attempt to divide Scripture, however, is almost always branded a heresy. This notwithstanding, there is indeed another division *that Scripture itself* calls for, and it is smack in the middle of what we know as the New Testament. It is vital that we see this division, because if we don't we will never see the true grace of God.

“Rightly Dividing The Word Of Truth”

In the apostle Paul's second letter to his understudy, Timothy, he charges him to: **“Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”** (2Timothy 2:15) This isn't about being accepted into the family of God or being saved, this is about one who *is* a member of God's family making sure that what he is doing and saying on behalf of God has *His* approval. The method by which this is to be accomplished is studying the word of truth by rightly dividing it. This raises the question: how do you rightly divide the word of truth? We need go no further than verses seven and eight of that same chapter in 2 Timothy for the answer: **“Consider what *I* say, and the Lord give thee understanding in all things. Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to *my* gospel.”** If the New Testament message (gospel) is the same from Matthew to Revelation, why would Paul use an exclusionary phrases like “my gospel”^{*} and “consider what I say,” if there is no difference in what he said, and what other writers in the NT said? I believe, from these two statements alone, we can conclude that when he says to divide the word of truth, he means separate out what he says (preaches) from what the other writers say (preach). What else could it mean?

If we fail to see this distinction between Paul and the rest of the NT, but blend the two messages as the rest of the religious world does, then our message will look something like this: “Yes, we’re saved by grace (Eph. 2:8), *but* we need to confess our sins, repent of our sins and be baptized, and keep the commandments, etc., etc., etc. (Acts 2:38; 1 John 1:9; 5:2). Paul’s gospel says: **“If by grace, then it is no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace...”(Romans 11:6)** Works and grace are mutually exclusive, folks. The activity demanded *in order to be saved* in the four “gospels,” the first part of Acts, and the Hebrew epistles (Hebrews – Rev.) can be characterized as nothing other than works!*_ The gospel Paul preached among the Gentiles (Gal. 2:2), didn’t include works for salvation, either to get it or to keep it. In Romans 5:2 Paul establishes the grace he proclaimed to be something of a special quality when he refers to it as **“*this* grace wherein we stand.”** “This grace” he refers to here was a type of grace unheard of by the other apostles, and not really something they completely understood (see 2 Peter 3:16). This stands to reason because Paul referred to it as a “mystery,” not revealed until he wrote about it in his 13 letters to the Gentiles. The grace Paul preached is what I like to refer to as the “but now,” grace of God. Here it is in Romans chapter 3:

“*Now* we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. *But now* the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe....” (Rom 3:19-22) (KJV)

And again in chapter 16:

Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began,

But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith: (Romans 16:25,26) (KJV)

And finally in Ephesians chapter 2:

“Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:

But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.” (Eph. 2:11-13)

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

Not of works, lest any man should boast.” (Eph. 2:8,9) (KJV)

There is no way the message Peter, James and John were given to preach to Israel is the same as “this grace” Paul preached, laid out in the above verses. James, in his letter to “**the twelve tribes...**” (James 1:1) said that, “**.....faith without works is dead...**” (James 2:20-26); and Peter, in his first letter to the same folks, told them to “**...gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.**” (1 Peter 1:13). In other words, what they are saying to the recipients (Israel) of there respective letters is basically what the Lord told them to do during his earthly ministry: “**...endure unto the end to be saved.**” (Matt. 10:24). When we attempt to blend this with what Paul preached--as religions and preachers tirelessly attempt to do--we end up

with “yes, but” grace, instead of the “but now” grace God desires us to hear and lay hold of. *They* (the followers of Peter, James and John) will get God’s grace at the end of a faithfully lived life, which includes confessing, repenting, getting baptized and holding on (keeping the commandments -- 1 John 3:18-24) unto the end (death). The recipients of Paul’s letters, “you Gentiles,” get God’s grace at the outset, “without the law...”, *if* they would simply believe. Paul said in Romans 4:4,5: **“Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt; but to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.”** How could any two messages be more different?

What, may I ask, dear friend are you laboring under? Are you under the “yes, but” message of the religious system, hoping God will count your works for righteousness and someday admit you into heaven? Or have you ceased from your works, and simply received the “but now” grace God is offering you, by believing Jesus Christ did all the work necessary for you to be saved when he died and rose again? **“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us...”** (Titus 3:5). No one can be saved and be the recipient of God’s grace, now, by practicing religion, being good, or “working righteousness.” The ticket is to cease from (stop trusting in) all that, and simply: **“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.** (Acts 16:31)

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- * This is repeated two more times in Paul's epistles (Romans 2:16; 16:25)
- * * "works," in the context, would be making reference to religious observation/performance, e.g., physical baptisms, physical circumcision, holding particular days and seasons sacred, mandatory church attendance/participation in rituals, tithing; in general, not transgressing the law (1 John 2:4).