



*But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. -*

**Matthew 15:9**

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## **Am I Good Enough for Heaven?**

My posts since starting this weekly discussion have been a little negative. It's easy to get caught up looking at humans, including ourselves. What we see in that focus is never pretty. But our vision needs to be centered on Jesus. He is altogether lovely; in character. When we focus on him then our own characters become more like his; more lovely.

I have been reading a book released about the turn of the millennium by Philip Yancey. It was his first book after "The Jesus I Never Knew." It's titled, "What's So Amazing About Grace?" He does spend some time in the book, quite a bit, actually, amazing at the many forms of "ungrace" demonstrated by Christians. But he does also point out the grace of God demonstrated in the life and teaching of Jesus.

He comes to a point, however, where he struggles with the concept of grace, particularly as it pertains to forgiveness. Many Christians believe the theology that salvation is forgiveness and vice-versa. People who believe that theology are prone to decide that it's OK to sin because God will forgive if they ask. It is true that God is willing to forgive even when we plan on his forgiveness. But forgiveness is not salvation.

Sin is a defect in the human character that is incompatible with life. We often don't understand that because God, in his grace and his desire to save the species we call homo sapiens, has granted us life beyond what is natural. We live our lives apart from God, one of the more useful definitions of sin, and we don't die because God miraculously sustains our lives beyond the point where sin would normally cause death.

Choosing to commit a sinful act warps our already diseased characters. Forgiveness doesn't change that. As Yancey accurately points out, many people who choose a sinful course of action end up not coming back to God for forgiveness. When we understand the effect of sinful choices on our characters we can more easily understand why that might be. Our further diseased characters stand between us and the God that forgives.

But suppose someone overcomes that effect and does return to God after choosing a sinful course of action. We have asserted that God does forgive them. Does that set everything right? The Bible has some narratives that demonstrate that everything is not right even when God forgives. David let his sexual prowess lead him to murder. When the prophet confronted him so that he became aware of how unloving he had been he repented and sought forgiveness. God granted it.

But David suffered much as a result of that one sin, despite his forgiven condition. He lost at least three sons, faced the rape of a daughter, and almost lost his kingship and even his life. Yes, God will forgive because it is his nature, his character, to forgive. But he rarely stands between us and the results of our choices.

Paul addresses this thinking in his letter to the believers in Rome. He had made the point that the law was added so that iniquity would increase. But where iniquity increased, God's grace also increased. When he said this Paul realized some people would take what he said the wrong way. If God's grace increases when there is more sin, then maybe we should sin a lot so there will be a lot of God's grace.

But Paul points out that the effect of grace is righteousness. Grace is not limited to forgiveness. It is God's grace that repairs the damage to our characters and makes us more like the sinless Jesus. Through God's grace we die to sin. Then, as Jesus was raised from the dead, we are raised to live a new life (not the same old life). If we have died to sin, Paul argues, how can we continue to live in it? If God's grace increases, righteousness also increases and leads to eternal life.

The beauty of God's plan to save humanity is that it is based in reality, not in imagination. He doesn't "cook the books" so that we look good even though we aren't, he changes us so that we ARE good. Once we are good we HAVE eternal life, for the disease of sin which would normally cause our death is in remission. This body may still die, but our characters, (our names) are written in

heaven and that perfect character HAS eternal life. The resurrection of the dead at the second coming makes it real for our consciousness, but it is real before then.

Jesus said God was not the God of the dead. He wasn't saying that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were alive then, he was saying they had eternal life.

Grace has been defined as "unmerited favor." Grace, when received, leads us to respond with grace to those around us. We don't wait for people to earn our favor. We grant it even when it has NOT been merited. That is the beauty of God's character, a beauty that can be ours.

May God bless you this weekend.

Elkanah

Addendum:

Elkanah wrote the above after I went to bed last night. During the night I got up and found the article and was reading it before posting it to the website. There was something in there that caused some concerns and I went looking for him to see if he was awake. He was asleep so I wrote him a note telling him what I saw and why I thought it might be a problem for some people. He got up later but I didn't know it. I heard him making noise and went to talk to him when he was headed back to bed. I handed him my note and we briefly discussed the issue I saw. He slept on it then later asked me to write a little something to explain what my concern was.

Let me restate the phrase that bothered me:

"Once we are good we HAVE eternal life..."

His statement is correct but you MUST read the context behind it. This statement in itself might cause someone to think he was promoting self-sanctification. We cannot cleanse our own characters and it isn't our job to do that. That's the job of the Holy Spirit. It's our job to keep open the relationship between us and Jesus so the Holy Spirit will be able to do His work of changing us.

To simplify this I'll share with you a portion of the note I wrote to Elkanah during

the night. There aren't any text references. If you are unfamiliar with these passages I've mentioned then go to an online Bible site or a Bible software and use their search engine to try to find these passages for yourself. It will be a good exercise for you. I also quoted Dr. Brad Cole who is a neurologist at Loma Linda Medical School. Originally I found his video on YouTube but was unable to find it again. If you want to hear it do a search on YouTube for Dr. Brad Cole. Perhaps you'll be able to find it. And if you have to listen to several of his presentations before finding his comment, don't worry about that too much. He has an interesting message.

Here's a portion of the note I wrote to Elkanah:

In that paragraph you make the statement that we cannot have eternal life until we are good. Yes, you do qualify that by saying it's God that makes us good, but what exactly denotes "good?"

I could be wrong but I think there are a lot of people out there who are unclear on what "good" is. What must they do to be saved? That's a selfish question but that's our sinful nature that causes us to think in that way.

There is a text that states "believe in the Lord, Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." But I don't believe that's an accurate statement. "Even the demons believe and tremble" yet they won't be saved.

There are people who believe in and love Jesus, but they fear the Father.

Remember what I told you about that message I heard Brad Cole preach? God came to the mountain and met with Moses. The Israelites were told to stay away from the mountain lest "they die" or "they must be stoned" or something. I haven't looked that up. Moses (and Joshua?) went up the mountain. When he returned he was glowing or shining. The Israelites were afraid of him and told him to speak to God for them and they would do what he told them. Moses told them that there wasn't any reason to be afraid of God, but they feared him anyway. So, Moses acted as the mediator between the Israelites and God.

Today we are also in a position where we (most of us) fear God. Because of that Jesus is acting as our mediator. But perfect Love casts out all fear. Fear of what? Fear of life-threatening danger or fear

of God? It would be foolish to not fear a she-bear who has cubs, if you should stumble upon them while out walking alone in the woods. That kind of fear probably shouldn't be cast out. Not while we are on this planet. But fear of God should be discarded. And as our characters are being healed, that fear of the Father is cast out. When we no longer fear God, then we can be taken to heaven.

God would probably like to take us to heaven even though we fear him. However, that would be unwise. Our fear would spread to those who have not fallen and God wants to end this misery we are forced to endure.

So, do we go to heaven when God makes us "good" or do we go to heaven when we no longer fear God, and by losing that fear of Him we begin to emulate Him and develop a love for others and put ourselves in the background because we see others as more important than ourselves.

And with that said, I bid you a good day. May your life be filled to overflowing with the presence of Jesus.

Hannah

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