

GRACE EMPOWERS RIGHTEOUSNESS.



I would NEVER want to discourage a struggling believer. Lord knows, I have had more struggles with sin than I care to admit.

Often, I am thrown back on the remembrance that God knew what he was getting when he chose to come into my life in the first place! And we will ALWAYS, in this life, need to find recourse to 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

However, having acknowledged our weakness, is "just forgiven" the best we can do? If I were to ask any number of Christians, "Are you living the way God wants you to live?" I suspect many heads would drop and whisper, "No."

Well, if we are not living God's way, why not?

Joseph was told by the angel to name Mary's son Jesus, because "He will SAVE his people from their sins." Jesus "saving us from our sins" means more than our just being FORGIVEN. It also means OVERCOMING our sins.

Granted, in Romans chapter 7 the Apostle Paul describes his frustration of NOT doing the good he wants to do, but instead DOING the things he does not want to do. All of us can easily identify with his frustration.

That is not the end of his story though. In chapter 8 of Romans, the Apostle Paul pens his great sigh of relief to his question, "Who will rescue me from this body of death?" by his rejoicing that GOD will rescue him through Jesus Christ from the endless cycle of living by law and failing.

What Paul calls the "law of sin and death," is an inexorable principle. But Paul discovered a superior principle. There is now NO CONDEMNATION for those in Christ, not just because we are forgiven, but because now through the SPIRIT, the righteous requirements of the law can be fully met in us.

Please know that God is VERY interested in our living a righteous life. To camp out in "just forgiven" and continue to live in sin is NOT in the Bible.

It was Bill Johnson, pastor of the Bethel Church, who first mentioned in my hearing the phrase, "grace empowers righteousness." What a great truth! Grace is not given us so we can continue to live in sin. Grace empowers us to live a new life!

God intends a life for us, his children, in which the demands of the Law are MORE than fulfilled – namely, a life lived out of the divine love (agape) of God. This kind of righteousness though does NOT come about by trying hard to obey the Law.

We attempt that and we will absolutely fail, over and over and over again, to the point where we either quit in frustration OR we water - down the Law and become religious pretenders and hypocrites.

The way to "more than fulfill" the Law is not by trying to obey the Law. It is by living in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul was CRYSTAL clear on this point:

"We have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code" (Romans 7:6).

Jesus Christ clearly intended for his teachings in the Sermon on the Mount to actually be lived out in this life. He commanded his Apostles to "Go and make disciples of all nations ... teaching them to OBEY everything I have commanded you."

How in the world can we live by the teaching of Jesus (no anger or contempt, no lust or broken promises, no retaliation but instead love for enemies, and so on) when we cannot even keep the more basic commandments like "do not steal, do not slander"?

In other words, how does victory over sin and a righteous life come about?

It does not happen by trying harder to obey the Law, "Now, this time I really, really mean it!" It happens as we become A DIFFERENT KIND OF PERSON ON THE INSIDE. It happens as the life of the kingdom gets an increasing grip on us.

We LEARN to do all the things Jesus taught, by becoming the KIND of person who can "naturally" and easily do those things Jesus taught.

It was not hard for Jesus to pray from the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," because Jesus was THAT KIND OF PERSON. Which is why for us, in our present condition, such behavior would be IMPOSSIBLE. We are NOT yet that kind of person.

But we can BECOME increasingly like Jesus.

Set aside any thought of perfection in this life. Think instead of PROGRESS. As my mentor Dallas Willard used to say, "We are not talking about perfection. We are talking about just doing a whole lot better."

How then do we proceed? Progress is made as we practice spiritual disciplines, as we learn from our failures, but preeminently, as we learn to "walk by the Spirit."

The two links below, "How to Walk in the Spirit" and "The Problem Lies Within" should hopefully provide some further guidance for those who are interested.

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