

**Grace for Sale:
False Teachers, False Definitions, True Bondage**

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The Apostle Paul writes:

“You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by the hearing of faith?” Gal. 3:1-2

False teachers and legalists were prevalent in the early church even while the apostles were living. There was a constant battle between a theocentric theology and an anthropocentric theology even then. From the time of the Reformation until about 1825 the prevailing theology was theocentric and more specifically Christocentric. From about 1825 on theology has decidedly shifted to anthropocentrism.

More recently, over the last 40 years or so, there has also been a shift away from teaching the essentials of the faith toward either embracing fads or denouncing fads. On both sides leadership has assumed that because their flocks give mental assent to the essentials in their membership documents or Statement of Faith they therefore understand and can defend the essentials of the faith.

This is so prevalent that Pastor Rick Warren announced that we don't need a reformation of creeds but a reformation of deeds. He declares:

“We know what we believe.”

Contrary to Warren's claims, pollster George Barna demonstrates that 91% of Born Again Evangelicals and 49% of Evangelical pastors are deficient in one or more areas of essential doctrine. One of the areas this shows up most clearly is the doctrine of Grace.

We could spend our time on the aberrations and bondage associated with cults like the Jehovah's Witnesses who write in their publication *Our Kingdom Ministry*:

“We want to give deserving ones the opportunity to learn of Jehovah's undeserved kindness and the Kingdom hope.”

It seems to escape their notice that if they are “deserving ones” then the grace they talk about it deserved. On the other hand, if grace is undeserved than there are no “deserving ones.”

We could spend our time on the aberrations and bondage associated with the shepherding movements and new cults such as the International Churches of Christ or Gwen Shamblin and Remnant Fellowship (Weigh Down Workshop). However, I think our time would be better spent looking at one of the more accepted teachers within the church who is one of the better promoters of a false definition of Grace and who has profoundly impacted many churches.

Bill Gothard and the Institute in Basic Life Principles.

There are many issues of concern but the big three would be:

- View of Authority
- Circumcision is morally required
- Definition of Grace

Since we are focusing on Grace, it would do well to let Gothard give his definitions. In his video-taped *Basic Seminar* he defines grace as:

“The power and ability to do God’s will joyfully.”

In Gothard’s view, grace is some sort of substance which enables believers to keep the law and as a result earn more grace. In the *Basic Seminar Textbook*, p. 6 he writes:

“The success of our lives is entirely related to how much grace God gives us. Grace is the desire and power to do God's will. (Philippians 2: 13) Paul's prayer was that grace would be multiplied to every Christian. How then do we receive this grace? There is only one way--by being humbled.”

How can human beings measure whether they are being humble enough to receive this stuff called “grace”? How humble is humble enough? If you got to the point of realizing that you are now humble enough, would you now no longer be humble because you can be proud of your humility—and as a result suffer a loss of grace?

Bill Gothard defines faith as: “Visualizing what God intends to do in my life” (Basic Seminar Textbook, p. 150)

In Gothard's year 2000 document <http://www.billgotharddiscussion.com/grace.htm> > "The Definition of Grace" he tells us that the definition of grace as "unmerited favor" is a "faulty definition and writes:

"In the Old Testament, those who found grace possessed qualities that merited God's favor."

He also writes:

"Two witnesses in the New Testament also affirm that additional grace is merited by a person's humility."

He further declares:

"The grace that comes by Jesus Christ is an active, dynamic energy from God to carry out His will."

Gothard gives an analogy:

"A child who does not want to be protected from evil will look at parental instruction as unwanted control. However, a wise parent will not only give detailed instruction on how to avoid problems, but will give further encouragement and assistance to carry them out. This illustrates the true nature of grace, which is "the divine influence upon the heart, and its reflection in life."

For Gothard, the primary purpose of grace is to assist Christians in keeping the Law. And a primary purpose for keeping the Law is to "earn" more grace!

This should all sound very familiar, for the view derives from Roman Catholicism and was one of the main issues for which the reformers stood, and for which the Council of Trent anathematized them.

In fact, if we look back in history to see the concept of grace limited to some kind of "energy" or "power" or "substance" that God transmits to people to make them more righteous, we also find specific errors following closely behind. These errors have driven countless souls to despair:

- 1) An emphasis on "infused righteousness" to the exclusion of the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ to the believer.

2) The teaching that grace is merited – or earned, or deserved rather than unmerited.

3) A re-definition of “justification” itself in terms of both personal merit and “infused righteousness” – or as God “*making* sinners righteous” rather than declaring, counting or reckoning sinners righteous.

Bill Gothard writes:

“It is certain, based on biblical truth, that we can do nothing to merit the grace of God for salvation. Grace for salvation is a free gift and not the reward for any works that we do to merit it. The distinction was the great battlefield of the Reformation because of the false doctrine that a person could earn salvation by good works.”

Even here he couldn't resist criticizing Martin Luther for going to:

“...opposite extremes which also breed error.”

For example, Luther's letter of August 21, 1521 to Melanchthon ends with:

“If you are a preacher of grace, then preach a true and not a fictitious grace; if grace is true, you must bear a true and not a fictitious sin. God does not save people who are only fictitious sinners. Be a sinner and sin boldly, but believe and rejoice in Christ even more boldly, for he is victorious over sin, death, and the world. As long as we are here [in this world] we have to sin. This life is not the dwelling place of righteousness, but, as Peter says, we look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. It is enough that by the riches of God's glory we have come to know the Lamb that takes away the sin of the world. No sin will separate us from the Lamb, even though we commit fornication and murder a thousand times a day. Do you think that the purchase price that was paid for the redemption of our sins by so great a Lamb is too small? Pray boldly—you too are a mighty sinner.”

It is difficult to go through Gothard's material without seeing the shadow of St. Peter's Basilica looming large over Bill Gothard's headquarters in Oak Brook, IL. One of the documents from the Reformation period which most closely aligns with Gothard's view

comes from "The Cannons of the Council of Trent" (1546):

"For, whereas Jesus Christ himself continually infuses his virtue into the said justified, - as the head into the members and the vine into the branches, - and this virtue always precedes and accompanies and follows their good works, which without it could not in any wise be pleasing and meritorious before God, - we must believe that nothing further is wanting to the justified, to prevent their being accounted to have, by those very works which have been done in God, fully satisfied the divine law according to the state of this life, and to have truly merited eternal life..."

Gothard's opposing definitions of "unmerited" for salvation and "merited" subsequent to salvation are purely arbitrary and leave one lost in a sea of confusion.

A "Chance" Meeting (2005)

While running errands on a Saturday morning I came across a car which had broken down on the side of the road. I pulled over to see if I could lend some assistance only to discover that the driver was Bill Gothard. After getting the vehicle pushed in to a convenience store parking lot (along with the help of a couple of other young men), I offered to drive Bill to the Institute headquarters in Oak Brook, IL. On the way he mentioned that this may be a meeting orchestrated by God, and that he feels badly that we have not been able to resolve the issues. He then asked what the major points of contention were, and I began enumerating them. Gothard requested that we meet once a week and try to resolve the issues one at a time. I agreed, and the first issue he chose was grace. In addition to meeting, there was a fair amount of correspondence back and forth which included Ron Henzel, the Senior Researcher of Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc. In an attachment to Bill Gothard's email of April 14, 2005 Gothard asks:

"Am I correct in concluding that you believe that there is no desire or power in grace, because it is only an attitude or disposition of God's favor upon man?"

A kindly attitude toward the undeserving or "unmerited favor"?

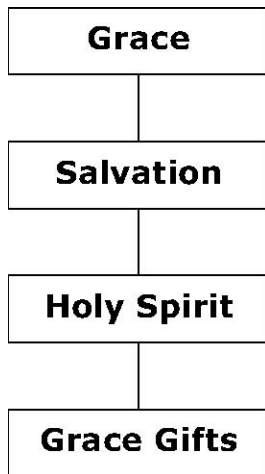
The Greek word for "grace" (*charis*) was used long before the New Testament authors used it for God's grace. It even existed long before the Septuagint translators of the 3rd and 2nd centuries B.C. used it to translate the Hebrew word *chen*. So a basic question here is, "What did the word *charis* mean to pagan, polytheistic Greeks before biblical writers attributed it to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob?"

Well, one thing we can be pretty sure about is that when pagan, polytheistic Greeks mentioned *charis*, they were *not* referring to "a desire and power to joyfully do God's will." Such a thought, then, was obviously not *inherent* in the word itself. In fact, Greek scholars tell us that while Aeschylus used it of "the favor of the gods," *charis* was "not a central religious or philosophical term." (Kittel and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, abridged by Bromiley, [Eerdmans, 1985], p. 1301).

Perhaps, the question might come up: "Could such a thought have *become* inherent in *charis* once it was used of 'God's grace' by biblical writers?" The short answer is, "No," because we have no evidence that biblical writers went around changing the meanings of common Greek words like *charis*. Such a practice would have defeated the purpose of attempting to communicate the gospel with the average Greek-speaking person.

An attitude of kindness toward the undeserving and the giving of "desire," "power" and other gifts.

It is a grave biblical error to treat grace as some kind of energy source when man's most basic need is not an energy source, but a favorable attitude on the part of God whose wrath against man's sin will condemn him to Hell. And you can't treat humility as the instrument through which sinful man receives grace when (a) sinful man can never achieve true humility, and (b) the Bible actually teaches that faith is that instrument. And you can't treat faith as some kind of proactive visualization exercise when the word actually means to believe and trust. It's imperative that all we do to receive the benefits of God's grace is to **trust** that they're for us, or else we are eternally condemned. A little progress chart may help here:



“Unmerited Favor” is God’s attitude of favor toward the undeserving

God’s free gift to the undeserving who have faith in Him.

The indwelling Holy Spirit is the empowering agent

The grace gifts (favors) are the tools

Because of God’s attitude of favor toward the undeserving He provided for salvation (John 3:16). Those who receive salvation receive the indwelling and empowering Holy Spirit who in turn give grace (undeserved) gifts which are the tools of service to the Body of Christ (Ro. 12, 1 Cor. 12 and Eph. 4)

Like Bill Gothard, Roman Catholicism Condemns Defining Grace as “The Favor of God”

Canon XI.—*Si quis dixerit, homines* Canon XI.—If any one saith, that men are *justificari, vel sola imputatione* justified, either by the sole imputation of *justitiæ Christi, vel sola peccatorum* the justice of Christ, or by the sole *remissione, exclusa gratia et caritate*, remission of sins, to the exclusion of the *quæ in cordibus eorum*

per Spiritum grace and *the charity which is poured Sanctum diffundatur atque illis forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost inhæreat; aut etiam gratiam, qua* (Romans 5:5) and is inherent in them; or *justificamur, esse tantum favorem* even that the grace, whereby we are *Dei: anathema sit.* justified, is only the favor of God: let him

be anathema.¹

¹—“The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent,” Canon 11 (On Justification, 1547), in Philip Schaff and David S. Schaff, eds., *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 2, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, reprinted 1985), 112-113 In Isaiah 55:1-3 we read:

Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.

Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.