

The Danger of Abusing the Grace of God

Identity theft has risen to epidemic proportions in recent years. The Federal Trade Commission estimates as many as 9 million Americans have their identities stolen every year. Resolving **identity theft** may take months, and even years in some cases, to restore your credibility and good name.

While I have not personally experienced the trauma of having someone impersonate me, we are nevertheless all vulnerable daily to this despicable cyber thievery. Identity theft is usually confined to individuals or corporations. I recently watched a news program of an American couple in China who visited a large Apple store replete with iPhones, iPads, Mac computers and the famous Apple logo. Returning to the States, they discovered that Apple did not have a store in that particular city in China. The whole thing was nothing less than identity fraud on a major scale.

Allow me to make my point. I'm deeply troubled by what I'll term as spiritual identity theft. I've become increasingly aware over the past year that there is a growing trend to steal God's identity. I'm referring particularly to the god of grace that is masquerading as the real God of grace. Somehow this false and **perverted spirit** has managed to captivate the hearts of thousands, instructing them that regardless of their actions, grace forever turns a blind eye to their sinful, willful ways and even smiles upon them.

Abusing the Grace of God

Now just for the record, I'm a firm believer in the grace of God. I believe as A.W. Tozer wrote, "You can never put a plus sign beside the cross." No amount of activity on our part can ever merit a single "brownie point" with God. We are saved by grace and by grace alone. Having said that, we need to

understand and be aware of God's intention regarding grace.

God never intended grace to be a license for sin but rather the means whereby we overcome sin. "For by grace you have been saved" (Eph. 2:8) Saved from what? "You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). Unless we understand God's intention, we will end up **abusing the grace of God**, and fall prey to the deceptive and damnable god of grace.

Last year 45 million Americans participated in the government food stamp program, a 70 percent increase since 2007. The government's intention behind this program is to assist needy individuals to feed themselves and their children. The great tragedy is that multiplied millions of dollars worth of food stamps are used for cigarettes, alcohol and even drugs. This abuse of the program causes all of us to express some degree of anger toward those individuals who knowingly stoop to such a crime.

Imagine then the deep sorrow on the part of God, Who so lavishly poured out His grace upon us only to have His people turn it into the very opposite of its intended use. Rather than being a means of liberty from sin, it becomes instead a license to sin.

I'm becoming increasingly conscious of the fact that the god of grace has an almost identical sibling called unconditional love. God's love is universal, impartial and incorruptible, but is it unconditional? This god of unconditional love never corrects, rebukes or challenges you regarding your actions, but simply loves you regardless of how you act or live.

Is God's Love Really Unconditional?

Now the last time I picked up my Bible I saw it was divided into the Old Testament and the New Testament or the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. We could easily modify this to the Old Contracts and the New Contracts. Many of you reading

this have signed some type of contract or agreement; perhaps to lease a house, apartment or car, etc. Every contract has a list of terms or conditions to be upheld by both parties.

So how do you reconcile the word *unconditional* with the word *contract*? But you say, "Wait a minute, I know that in the Old Covenant God required that His people met certain conditions and that if broken, they would suffer the consequences. However when we look at the New Covenant God doesn't require anything from us because everything is one great big grace package." Correct? Yes, and no. Yes, we are saved purely by the grace of God; but if we stop there we end up in universalism or ultimate reconciliation—meaning everyone is or will eventually be saved.

Oh, so there are conditions then? Listen to Peter's response on the Day of Pentecost to the people after listening to his message and crying out, "What shall we do [to be saved]?" (Acts 2:37, brackets added). Peter did not shout back, "Nothing at all," but rather, "Repent, and ... be baptized" (v. 38).

Jesus said, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent" (John 6:29). Once we are saved there are also conditions: "'The Lord knows those who are His,' and, 'Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity'" (2 Tim. 2:19). Perhaps I could sum it all up in one word: *Obedience*.

God's love cannot be separated from His justice and righteousness. Paul reminds us of the goodness and severity of God. This "new god" has no severity or consequences for our actions. The new father, unlike the true Father, never corrects or disciplines us but rather winks in approval of our rebellious and defiant ways.

This topic is almost inexhaustible, but hopefully, I've said enough to provoke you to think more along these lines. Just as

it takes two wings for a bird to fly we need to have a healthy balanced view of these two great and glorious aspects of God's nature. For those pastors, teachers and spiritual leaders reading this, I urge you to restore God's identity back as the true God of love and grace.

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