



Salvation is all of Grace yet I must...

There are two great dangers in the Christian life — legalism and antinomianism. People were led astray by them in New Testament times and they are still a problem today. Sadly, in current Christian circles, if you mention man's duty to keep God's commandments, for example to keep the Sabbath day holy, what you say is dismissed as legalism. We are told to rejoice in God's free grace. Amazing grace saves us and there is nothing we can do to add to our salvation. Lots of people, it is said, are unhappy because they fail to realise their own justification. Your sins are all forgiven — past, present and future, so just relax and enjoy the Christian life. Now there is truth in this but also the great danger of antinomianism lurks nearby. John 'Rabbi' Duncan called antinomianism the mother of all heresies. He said there is only one heresy and that is antinomianism.

Antinomianism

Antinomianism literally means against the law. There are many forms of it. Essentially it is the teaching that the Christian does not have to keep the moral law. We need not struggle to be holy. We are not duty-bound to keep the commandments. We can live the way we like and yet we will get to heaven.

Legalism

Legalism is the opposite danger. It is the idea that you can earn your salvation by good works. The Pharisees were great legalists and taught that by keeping the commandments a man was righteous in the sight of God. They had no gospel for sinners, only hell. This teaching fits in well with human thought, the natural religion of man. Generally speaking, people think if you are good you will be rewarded. Good people get to heaven. But the Bible tells us that it is only sinners who get to heaven. Christ taught,

'They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance'

Luke 5:31-32

He came to save sinners. The righteous here are those who think themselves righteous but Scripture says, *'There is none righteous, no, not one'* (Rom. 3:10). Man thinks he is good but the Lord taught, *'there is none good but one, that is, God'* (Mt. 19:17). Paul asserts, *'by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin'* (Rom. 3:20). Keeping the law will not save us because we are incapable of keeping it perfectly. Actually what the law does, is that it condemns us. It shows us our sin and therefore our guilt before God. In this way the law is our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (Gal. 3:24).

There is however another form of legalism which can affect true Christians and that is the idea that somehow or other you can add to your salvation by keeping the commandments. It is the thought that you can earn points for yourself. Legalism is trusting in your law-keeping to earn God's favour. We cannot add to our righteousness before God. We are saved solely on the basis of the finished work of Christ.

Justification and Sanctification

When a sinner believes in Jesus he is justified. All his sins are pardoned. This is solely on the basis of Christ's finished work. There is nothing we can do to add to our justification or subtract from it. It is not of works lest any man should boast (Eph. 2:9). God declares the sinner to be righteous. It does not change us, that is, our nature, but it changes our status. Sanctification, in contrast, changes us. It makes us holy.

There are two kinds of sanctification, definitive and progressive. Definitive sanctification happens when we become Christians. The sinner is transformed into a saint. There is a radical break with sin. The Apostle Paul can say,

'Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord ... But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life'

Romans 6:11, 22

John states: *'Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God'* (1 Jn. 3:9). A huge change takes place with the new birth. Sin no longer has dominion over us and we will not sin the sin unto death.

Progressive Sanctification

Progressive sanctification is different. It is beautifully expressed in the Westminster Shorter Catechism: *'Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness'*. It is ongoing. We are involved in it. We must work and struggle and be labourers together with God. Yet the glory must go to God for His grace. It is a work of free grace. We have to die to sin and strive more and more to mortify sin and to put it to death. We must live unto righteousness and exert ourselves to be holy and Christ-like. We must keep the commandments. It is not that we earn salvation but we show we are saved by the way we keep God's law. We express our love to God by obedience. Faith without works is dead (Jas. 2:20). A good tree brings forth good fruit. It's not by bringing forth the good fruit that we become good trees. Rather, the good tree shows what its nature is by the fruit it bears.

People say, Rejoice, God loves you and you are saved. Feelings of guilt for sin are dismissed as a failure to appreciate one's justification. Any mention of law-keeping is dismissed by them as legalism. But how does Paul treat the question? *'What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?'* (Rom. 6:1). Yes, it is true, the greater the sinner the greater the grace of God. Should we then continue in sin to glorify God and cause the display of His amazing grace? How could we possibly even think such a thing! 'God forbid'. If the professing Christian happily continues in sin, that simply demonstrates that he was never converted. If we have truly been regenerated we died with Christ to that old life.

Warnings

In the Scriptures there are clear warnings. One of the major temptations particularly for young men in our day is internet pornography. What do we say to someone who has become entangled in this addiction? 'Your sins are forgiven as a Christian. Don't worry; all will be fine. Rejoice, God loves you. There is no need to feel guilt. All your sins have been washed away with the blood of Christ'.

No, we must speak clearly as Christ did: *'But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell'* (Mt. 5:28-29). These words are harsh but they are true. Better to pluck out your eye and go to heaven, than having both eyes and end up in hell. Drastic action is required. The wages of sin is death. To the church in Ephesus Christ writes: *'I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore*

from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent (Rev. 2:4-5). To the church in Laodicea, which had become lukewarm, he writes: *So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth* (Rev. 3:16). What is He saying? Without repentance you will be cast into hell. These are no pretend threats but real.

Many more verses of Scripture could be quoted. The Christian is warned of perishing. Breaking God's commandments brings God's wrath. Scandalous sin could be an indicator that the individual was never converted and so will perish. However if the sinning individual is a true child of God he will be chastised and that is terribly painful: *Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby* (Heb. 12:11). Do you want God to chastise you? If not repent.

Encouragements

Thankfully along with the stick is the carrot. There are many incentives given to holiness. We are promised help. Strive to *work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure* (Phil. 2:12-13). We are to strive but God will help. The Holy Spirit who came to live in our hearts at conversion will enable us and empower us to please God. We will not be left to ourselves. He will work in us. We are promised *the peace of God, which passeth all understanding* (Phil. 4:7) and *joy unspeakable and full of glory* (1 Pet. 1:8). We are promised *the kingdom of heaven* and even that we *shall inherit the earth* (Mt. 5:3, 5). The obedient sincere Christian is told that your *Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly* (Mt. 6:4, 6, 18). Faithfulness will receive a great reward: ‘

Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, that he shall make him ruler over all his goods’

Matthew 24:46-47

Malachi wrote, *And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him* (Mal. 3:17). We must fight against the world, the flesh and the devil. We must put on the whole armour of God. We must die to sin. We must keep the commandments. We must persevere unto the end. And Paul assures us *we are more than conquerors through him that loved us* (Rom. 8:37). We shall be *kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time* (1 Pet. 1:5).

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