

Twisted Scriptures

Grace and Truth

TWISTED SCRIPTURES – JOHN 1:17

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If church history teaches us anything, we should learn that the devil holds no tenet of the faith as sacred and he will distort any and every doctrine of the gospel if it will gain him any advantage over even one single believer. Grace *is* a central, core teaching of Christ's gospel and a sound understanding of it will aid one along toward spiritual maturity. A twisted misunderstanding of grace can cause one to leave off some of one's own personal responsibilities before God, thus derailing that one's life from attaining to true spiritual maturity and opening one's life to further deceptive influences of the demonic. This article attempts to lay out a smooth, sound treatment of grace as well as to expose the inadequacies of the current hyper-grace error.

That grace (as a central part of the true practice of following Christ) should come under the attack of the devil and the demonic should not come as any surprise. Paul wrote much in defense of the truth of grace, thundering out at one point, "Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means!" (Rom. 6:1-2) The devil's strategy has always been to lure men into sin so that grace does not do its work in the life of the believer.

Sin and Grace

John wrote, "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness." (1 Jn. 3:4) Any man who sins in any way (even the proponents of the hyper-grace teachings we are not considering) has broken the law. Only the man who never sins need never worry about what the law tells us about our interactions with God and man. Those of us who still deal with sin – and all of us do (1 Jn. 1:8) – often times need a reminder of just what life in the Spirit is supposed to look like. As John wrote elsewhere, "...no murderer has eternal life in him." (1 Jn. 3:15) And James wrote, "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at one point is guilty of breaking all of it." (Jas. 2:10) If in our life in Christ, we fulfill the law of Christ through love (Mt. 5:17, Gal. 6:2, etc.) in every point corresponding to Moses' law except, say, in the area of covetousness (the strong desire to have the possessions of another), we have violated God's law and we need to return again to the Lord for a fresh work of His grace – fresh in the sense that we enter into a deeper experience of the cross of Christ than we have experienced before. Any "new" work or "new" experience that does not draw us further into His cross is a false enticement away from the faith delivered once for all. Since all of us sin, there is no one who can safely depart from these "basics" of the faith.

There are three words we need to understand from John's "definition" of sin (1 Jn. 3:4):

- **Sin.** In the Greek, this is *hamartia* [266] and it refers to "missing the mark and failing to share in the prize." In a quote that rises to great heights for the believer whose aim is to be conformed to the likeness of Christ (Eph. 4:13), Gilbert Arland said, "When an archer misses the mark, he turns and looks for the fault within himself. Failure to hit the bull's-eye is never the fault of the target." The Roman Christians apparently believed more sin would produce more grace.

This “backwards” thinking, as we shall see the hyper-grace error also does, teaches a leniency toward, toleration of and even encouragements to practice more *sin*!

- **Law.** In the New Testament, we find many laws. The law of Moses and God (Jn. 1:17, Rom. 7:22, etc.) is only one of the many laws to be found therein. We find also in the New Testament the law of faith (Rom. 3:27), the law of sin and death (Rom. 7:23), the law of the Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2), the law of righteousness (Rom. 9:31), Christ’s law (1 Cor. 9:21, Gal. 6:2), the law of commandments and regulations (Eph. 2:15), the perfect law that gives freedom (Jas. 1:25, 2:12) and the royal law found in Scripture. (Jas. 2:8) As Jesus pointed out several times, one could obey the law outwardly and have a vile and wicked heart. (Mt. 5:21-22, 27-28, 31-32, 33-34, 38-39, 43-44) God is seeking those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth (Jn. 4:23), not in flesh and error. Law, any list of regulations, can be obeyed by the flesh and error is, of necessity, present because men have, at the least, interpreted and taught what they believe (or want!) the law to mean. God’s new covenant removes *all* go between except Christ Jesus. (1 Tim. 2:5, Heb. 8:10-11) who alone is the Head of every man. (1 Cor. 11:3)

- **Lawlessness.** In the Greek this is *anomia* [458], literally “without law.” Though the meaning of this word is obscured in old English by the term “iniquity” (a word much more related to “inequity” than to *anomia*!), it represents that person who has no exterior standard for his life and conduct. He does only that which is “right in his own eyes.” (Jdgs. 21:25) This is why lawlessness (what is right in a man’s own eyes) and righteousness (what is right in God’s eyes) have no fellowship or commonality. (2 Cor. 6:14)

We need to merge John’s “definition” of sin with Paul’s remonstrance about grace:

- “Shall we go on missing the mark and failing to share in the prize just so we can experience more grace? No! Grace is all about helping you hit the target dead-center so that you can attain the prize!” (Also see Phlp. 3:14)

- “Shall we go on violating God’s commandments and laws just so we can experience more of His gracious forgiveness of our violations of His ways? That’s utter nonsense!”

- “Shall we go on doing whatever is right in our own eyes so that we can deceive ourself into thinking we’re doing what’s right in His eyes because we believe His finished work grants us license to eat of the tree He commanded Adam not to eat of? These things are utterly and completely incompatible with one another.

Grace is the means by which sin is *removed* from our lives. Any “grace” that allows any sin to remain or causes us to practice any sin is merely deception.

The Purpose of the Law

We find the purpose of the law stated clearly in the New Testament. Paul wrote:

- “We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. We also know that law is not made for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious...” (1 Tim. 1:8-9)
- “Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. ...the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.” (Gal. 3:21, 24-25)
- “Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.” (Rom. 10:3-4)
- “...I myself am not under the law...though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law...” (1 Cor. 9:20-21)

The proponents of hyper-grace virtually remove all traces of the law from a believer’s life. They act as if Paul had said law is to merely introduce us to the idea of Christ and then quietly, gracefully and completely bow out and disappear forever from our lives. This is merely an incomplete understanding of what it means for law to lead us to Christ and it jettisons many other Scriptures as well, not the least of which is Paul’s clear statement, “Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.” (Rom. 3:31) What is this Christ that we follow? In Him, “*all* the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form...” (Col. 2:9) He is “the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being...” (Heb. 1:3) By what vanity do we imagine that we can truly come to Christ and be transformed fully into His likeness (Eph. 4:13) in one meeting, a mere introduction. We will spend the rest of our lifetime “coming to Christ” because He is everything we are not! The law will always remain as a tutor to teach us some new aspect of Christ (Mt. 13:52) even though now it is not our master but our servant.

Thus the Psalmist still says for the follower of Christ: “The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart: The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is Your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.” (Psa. 19:7-11)

Right and Wrong Uses of the Law

It is precisely at this point that the proponents of hyper-grace will remind us that Paul called the law “the ministry that brought death” and “the ministry that condemns men.” (2 Cor. 3:7, 9) But these overlook that Paul still recognized that “the ministry that brought death...*came with glory...*” and “the ministry that condemns men *is* glorious...” (2 Cor. 3:7, 9 – emphasis

added) The law condemned and brought death to those who *broke* the law – but it brought life and peace and even physical prosperity to those who kept the law.

What Christ has shown us – an insight not fully available to the Psalmist and the “Old Testament” keeper of laws – was that we *cannot* keep God’s laws. That one who stumbles at one point of the law “is guilty of breaking all of it” (Jas. 2:10) is a *New Testament* revelation. When we fail to submit to God’s righteousness (what is right in His eyes), we can only attempt to establish our own “righteousness” (Rom. 10:3), in truth this is merely lawlessness, that which is right in our own eyes, a self-righteousness that is no better than filthy, used and fouled menstrual cloths. (Isa. 64:6) When we fail to submit to His Spirit, that essence and expression of Himself, whereby He imparts His grace to us so that we might truly demonstrate (to the observing world around us and to the angelic realms –1 Pet. 4:4, Eph. 3:10, etc.) what God says to be the right standard for life and conduct, then we have sinned, missed the mark of Christ’s high calling, as well as violated some law, statute, precept, command, ordinance or even just the reverence due the Lord – either by turning to our self as the power source by which to do a good or right thing or by relying on our self’s definitions and preferences so as to determine what we call and believe to be right or good.

Let’s get this out of theoretical “theological” technical jargon and bring it into real life. The believer who walks in the Spirit of Christ learns from the law of God that it is wrong to desire the possessions of another. (Ex. 20:17) If the man turns to his flesh to obey this law, he will very likely (over time and by developing demonic strongholds as a result of the deception he is under) become extremely covetous, a veritable Scrooge or self-focused, tight-fisted “captain of industry,” too intent on his own wants and desires to even notice the impoverished condition of the orphans, widows and poor who live right under his nose. But the man who recognizes the truth of this righteous (right in God’s eyes) *requirement*, who then seeks the Spirit of God at His throne of grace will obtain mercy and grace (favor *and* power) to help him in his time of need. (Heb. 4:16) At that throne of grace sits the Man who also was enabled to overcome His weaknesses and resist every temptation that is common to men – all without sinning. (Heb. 4:15, also see 1 Cor. 10:13) Grace *is* the instrument, tool and weapon we are to use to stop sinning!

Those Who Merit Grace

The Amplified Bible, relying primarily on a Greek scholar named Charles Williams, has done a large disservice to the body of Christ by over-emphasizing grace as merely “the unmerited favor” of God. When we truly and spiritual (and not merely carnally or intellectually) see and grasp the grace of God, we see not only His forgiveness, mercy, favor and loving kindness (which no human could ever possibly deserve) but we also see His power by which He transforms our lives into the likeness of Christ, that “element” of His grace which removes our sin and sinful tendencies. “By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder,” Paul wrote (1 Cor. 3:10) as but one example of how “unmerited favor” alone cannot stand as the whole meaning of grace. Strength and power attend His favor and we finally see the mightiest King of all seated on His throne and we bow before Him, contentedly murmuring the *title*, “Your Grace...” Favor, power *and* graciousness – this is the full nature of God’s grace in the New Testament.

Thus we find that both James and Peter, quoting the Old Testament, write, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” (Jas. 4:6, 1 Pet. 5:5, Prov. 3:34) God has reserved His grace – His power – for those who *merit* it. That is, they humble themselves and submit to His righteousness. This is no false humility nor some work of the flesh by which we can walk up to

God and demand His grace. Rather it is the deep-seated realization that human flesh *can do nothing* to earn God's love. Spiritual maturity merely begins when we learn that we don't *need* to do anything to earn God's love. Humility is simply the attitude that always turns the Scriptures at self *first*, asking God "How does this apply to me?" before turning the Scriptures toward any other person. The proponents of hyper-grace, however, cannot see past the human tradition of "unmerited favor" which, to them, just "makes sense."

Moses and Jesus

All this groundwork has been necessary to lay out just to discuss what John wrote: "The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." (Jn. 1:17) Speaking to a proponent of hyper-grace is much like speaking to a well-conditioned, highly-trained Jehovah's Witness. They will bounce from Scripture verse to Scripture verse in the hopes of getting you to agree with them regarding any of their peculiar interpretations and spins. And the very depth of the subject matter lends itself to this, as well as providing for a thick layer of ready "exits" from the path to the truth as "this verse means that" (which it doesn't) and neither the JW nor the hyper-gracist can see the plain meaning because they have already attached their own specialized meaning to that verse. And neither the JW nor the hyper-gracist is aware that all this is a demonic scheme to draw the listener into agreement with demonic beings through false teachings – any agreement is at least some power over the other. These teachings will use a lot of accurate and factual information, even spiritual information, yet will be devoid of the truth.

How can this be? Jesus is the truth. (Jn. 14:6) There is no truth in the devil. (Jn. 8:44) These two are diametrically opposed to one another. Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil (1 Jn. 3:8) among which are the gates of death and darkness which, however futilely, endeavor to imprison and restrain the followers of Christ Jesus. (Mt. 16:18)

The writer of Hebrews tells us, "[Christ] has become a priest, not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of an indestructible life... The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God." (Heb. 7:16, 18-19)

Of this hope, John writes, "Everyone who has this hope [of attaining to nearness and likeness with Christ] *purifies himself* just as He is pure." (1 Jn. 3:3 - emphasis added) And Paul writes, "Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us *purify ourselves* from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God." (2 Cor. 7:1- emphasis added)

Reverence for (or "fear of" in many English versions), that "Old Testament" idea that the Psalmist said was "pure, enduring *forever*" (Psa. 19:9 - emphasis added), is to be our motive for "perfecting holiness." And we do this of ourselves – it is not just a work of God's grace – though certainly it is God's grace that works in and through us with which we must co-labor. (1 Cor. 15:10, etc.) The hyper-grace error includes a prohibition against all "self effort," as if that were somehow a return to law. The reality is, however, failing to obediently put forth the effort to reverently purify oneself in the sight of God is to miss the mark of His high calling, to subscribe to someone else's law ("no self effort" is merely someone's new pseudo-"Christian" law) and to decide what actions and behaviors are right and true apart from learning from God what He declares to be right and true.

The law (the setting forth of standards by which men could know something of what God considers right and true and good) was given through Moses; but grace (the favor and power of

God whereby sin can be removed and righteousness embraced and exhibited) and truth (the ultimate expression of what God considers right and true and good) came through Jesus Christ.

R.C. Trench summed it up well:

“When the Baptist announces, ‘The law was given by Moses, but grace and *truth* came by Jesus Christ’ (Jn. 1:17), the antithesis cannot lie between the false and the true, but only between the imperfect and the perfect, the shadowy and the substantial.” (*Synonyms of the New Testament*, Eerdmans, 1880, p. 28-29)

If the antithesis between what was given through Moses and what came through Jesus Christ was a difference of truth and falseness, Paul could not write, “So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.” (Rom. 7:12)

The law is merely an incomplete revelation of what God is like and about. Christ is the fullness of that revelation, or as Paul said it, “Christ is the end of the law...” (Rom. 10:4) And as Paul also said, “The law is good if one uses it properly.” (1 Tim. 1:8) Any proper use of the law must have its end firmly planted in Christ Jesus, this is true, but we must also note that it is *proper* and *right* and *good* in God’s eyes to so use the law!

The Ultimate Truth

James contrasted two laws in his short letter. He spoke of “the royal law” wherein one could find the written commandments. (Jas. 2:8) But he also spoke of a different law when he wrote, “Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom...” (Jas. 2:12) Jesus said, “...the truth will set you free.” (Jn. 8:32) Do we have a contradiction here? Is it some law or is it truth that sets us free? The answer to this last question is “Yes” to both. The truth *is* the law that gives freedom because they are both Christ who *is* the truth.

There is no set of facts and information that we can compile and accurately label as “the ultimate truth.” The truth, in this ultimate sense, is a Person. Thus the difference between whether an act is lawless or righteous, whether an idea is truth or error, is not a question man can answer by himself. It is a question of *source*, not quality. Ideas, as was said earlier, can have great percentages of facts and accuracy, even about spiritual matters, and still not be truth because it originated from the devil. An act, which might seem good to us for any number of reasons, may be simple lawlessness. Most of modern churchianity is built on things that are “good” in many people’s eyes but God, throughout Scripture and by His Spirit, declares them to be abomination nonetheless.

Peter wrote, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.” (1 Pet. 2:9-11) This *is* the high calling of Christ on our lives – to come out of all darkness and even all false light and live and work only for and with His light!

Why do we stop sinning? Because God is holy! *How* do we stop sinning? By His grace (mercy and power and provision) to overcome. How do we recognize sin, especially the deceitfulness of sin? (Heb. 3:13) The Spirit of truth leads us into ever-greater apprehension of spiritual realities – and the law is the main avenue God has given to show what actions and

behaviors will attend one whose heart is right with God while the “New Testament” remains the main avenue whereby we come to know to which king – Christ, self or Satan – our heart truly belongs. Whenever we look into either of these “mirrors” – law or truth – and we find our lives do not match up, it is time to return to the King and submit to His fresh work of grace in our lives.

The truth that the hyper-gracists have denied is the Person of truth, the Lord Jesus Christ. Rather than sit humbly at *His* feet and learn from Him, these proponents of hyper-grace have learned this error from ear-scratching “pastors” and teachers and then arrogantly decided this was the whole counsel of God on the matter. Grace is thus cheapened, becoming just another point of division, another aspect of God to be brought under man’s dominion, another empty form of godliness that enables and entitles the believer to do whatever is right in his own eyes in the name of Christ and God. Gone are the eternal standards set forth in the laws of God – according to this error, Christ came to remove those requirements so that we could become subtly evil, superficial, selfish and arrogant carriers of “the righteousness of God,” just like we always wanted to be.

No, the hyper-grace error, as is evidenced by the depths to which one must go to set forth the straight-forward truths that are obscured by this error – is simply and only a demonic perversion of the gospel of Christ. To see it as anything else is to be deceived, yet another work of the demonic.

Let he who has ears hear.

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