

Grace versus the Law

What do I have to do to be a “Good Christian” or a “Real Christian”? I ask this question because part of me some times feels like I need to “do something” to keep in God's good graces. I feel like I need to not do certain things to be seen as righteous or good. So, when in doubt, I read and I study the Bible to see what Christ says to do. A man asked Christ what he needed to do to have eternal life:

Matthew 19:16-22

Behold, one came to him and said, “Good teacher, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?” He said to him, “**Why do you call me good? No one is good but one, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.**” He said to him, “Which ones?” Jesus said, “**‘You shall not murder.’ ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ ‘You shall not steal.’ ‘You shall not offer false testimony.’ ‘Honor your father and mother.’ And, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’**” The young man said to him, “All these things I have observed from my youth. What do I still lack?” Jesus said to him, “**If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.**” But when the young man heard the saying, he went away sad, for he was one who had great possessions.

Now, it would be easy to say “Cool! I'm not wealthy. I'll just stay poor and then I get to go to heaven.” But I think we would be missing something. You see, we all have things in our lives we aren't willing to give over to Christ. This man's thing was money. But for some of us it might be an addiction we hold onto, or bad choices we make over and over again. Christ said no one is good but God. So if we all fall short and none of us are completely devoted to Christ 24/7 and perfect in every way, how can we call ourselves Christians?

That's the trick, isn't it? Some how we've gotten it into our heads that being a Christian means that you're perfect or as close as possible. But following Christ isn't about being perfect. It's about finally being willing to admit to God and those around you that you aren't perfect and asking for Christ to help you in the areas you haven't been able to give over to Him. It simply isn't possible to get to Heaven through being a good person. We need to remember that following Christ is all about Grace. Not about “works” and not about keeping the law.

Ephesians 2:1-10

You were made alive when you were dead in transgressions and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the powers of the air, the spirit who now works in the children of disobedience; among whom we also all once lived in the lust of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, for his great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus; for by grace you have been saved

through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before that we would walk in them.

This is a concept that is always hard for me to grasp because it's so contrary to common sense and a worldly prospective. God loves all mankind so much that he gave his only son, Jesus Christ, as an atoning sacrifice for all of our sins. He did this even knowing the past, present, and future sins of all mankind. That includes all my past sins and those to come as well as yours. This is a gift freely given that can not be earned. You can't earn something that has already been given. And yet so many of us try to earn "brownie points" with God. He already loves each one of us more than we can ever comprehend and he loves us exactly where we are. I suspect that it helps that he knows our potential and our future better than we do.

I once had someone explain the difference between Fairness, Mercy, and Grace once in a way that really made sense to me. Under Fairness, if you do something wrong against another person you are immediately punished for your crime. Under Mercy, you are forgiven of your crime and no punishment is given out. Under Grace, not only are you forgiven for your crime but you are given a gift in return for your crime. It doesn't really make sense, does it? And yet, that is the Grace of God. He has given us the gift of Jesus Christ despite the sins we have committed against Him. So what's the catch? There is one, and I think Acts 13:61 says it best. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." That's it. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Believe He is who He says He is and believe that He died for your sins.

So what about doing good? If we look back at the end of the Ephesians passage above we can see that it was written "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before that we would walk in them." Doing good works is what we were made to do. But we aren't to be compelled to do it. We were made to do it and if we are to call ourselves servants of our Lord Jesus Christ then of course we are going to obey our Lord and Saviour and do what He calls us to do. What's great is that He calls us all a little differently. What God calls me to do isn't what He calls you to do because He loves each and every one of us and has created each one of us to be unique. So if we walk into a building called a church and we all look and sound and talk alike that does not necessarily mean that we are being good servants. In fact, I would worry that we are missing the uniqueness that God created us with and that we need to listen to Him more and to the world around us less.

So what does living under Grace instead of the Law look like? How will I know if I'm doing it "right"?
Luke 6:43-45

For there is no good tree that brings forth rotten fruit; nor again a rotten tree that brings forth good fruit. For each tree is known by its own fruit. For people don't gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush. The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings out that which is good, and the evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings out that which is evil, for out of the abundance of the heart, his mouth speaks.

Look at the fruit you produce in your life. God has given us freedom in Jesus Christ to do what we are called to do. The fruit of our lives may look a little different but we can all recognize good fruit from bad fruit. Each one of us has been created to do good works and the creator of the universe wants us to accept His love and guidance. He has given us Grace and Forgiveness through Jesus Christ. He has given us the Holy Spirit inside of each of us to guide us. And just as importantly he has given us the Church, the body of Christ on Earth, with which to fellowship and be strengthened and encouraged. We must never forget that Christ lived on this Earth too and he understands temptation and the struggle of this life and he Loves us. He has already forgiven the sin you are going to commit today before you've committed it. Accept the Grace of God and serve Him with all your Heart and Strength, and Mind.