

The Grace-Fellowship Doctrine

Galatians 1:6-8

Introduction: The Apostle Paul marveled that Christians would turn away from the grace of Christ to a different gospel (Gal. 1:6-8). Ironically, it really wasn't a different gospel but a perversion of the gospel. One such doctrine that turns away from Christ is the false teachings of a grace based philosophy known as the Grace-Fellowship doctrine.

I. Historically

A. This doctrine stems from the age old question; does God require perfect obedience to obtain the remission of sins?

1. Grace based advocates argue that God does not require perfect doctrinal obedience for the Christian and that the grace of God will cover their imperfect and sinful practices. It's an unconditional remission of sins type theory. The false doctrines of "once saved, always saved," continual cleansing, faith only, and grace only stem from this philosophy.

2. John Calvin wrestled with this same issue. He stated that salvation was not conditioned upon our obedience but upon the election of God (He called it grace, but we call it predestination). He drew this conclusion because he believed that man could not help but sin (total depravity). When people begin to assume that God will unconditionally forgive any sin, they are on the path toward Calvinism.

3. F. D. Srygley, a gospel preacher, made the following observation in 1890 about this issue:

"This talk about the spirit and letter of commandments usually comes from men who want to feel goodish, but do as they please, in religion . . . To put the whole thing in its simplest form, the theory is that any man who is right in spirit or motive will be accepted of God no matter what the outward form of his conduct may be. It puts man's salvation wholly upon the ground of his own honesty, and taboos the idea that anyone will be damned who has the spirit of obedience, no matter how many may be his mistakes as to the letter of God's commandments. Much has been said against rationalists (modernists-IWMC) but in my judgment they have done no more than follow this spirit-and-letter buncombe to its legitimate, logical consequences. The point is, does God require man to conform his life to an external standard, or does he leave him to determine his own course by an internal light? Is man guided in religion by revelation from without, or by a spiritual fight and nature within himself? . . . This is the only issue, and there are but two sides

of the question. Those who talk flippantly about keeping the spirit of a command while sneering at the letter of the law, or the exact thing commanded, are but the logical premises of which rationalists are the necessary conclusion, whether they so understand and intend or not . . ." (F. D. Srygley, "From the Papers," Gospel Advocate, Vol. XXXII, No. 33 (August 13, 1890), p. 513.

B. This grace-fellowship doctrine got its name a half century ago because many churches of Christ that were participating in unscriptural practices (ex. instrumental music in worship, supporting institutions, church sponsorship, fellowship halls, etc.) while using this grace based philosophy to justify their sin. They argue that if they were wrong in their practices that God's **grace** would cover these and all other ignorant sins so we should all just **fellowship** one another regardless. It was born out of the unity at all cost movement of that era.

C. Key to this false doctrine is the concept of the continual cleansing of sins and the overemphasis of grace to the neglect of an obedient faith.

II. Unconditional forgiveness of sin.

A. This doctrine acknowledges that we all sin (Rom. 3:23). But they take it a step further and state or imply that we can't help but sin. It's inevitable, no matter how hard we try, we will have sin in our lives, even upon death, whether we are aware of them or not. Perfect obedience is not a possibility. Therefore, they subscribe to an idea that the grace of God will cover our sins if we fail to make correction (Eph. 2:8-9; 1 Jn. 2:3-5).

B. Paul's writings in Romans 7:14-25 are misconstrued to make him appear unable to control his sins. In reality, Paul is explaining how sin works against him. They ignore what Paul wrote in the previous chapter (Rom. 6:1-2, 11-15, 23).

C. Romans 14 is used to teach that whatever is **not** specifically condemned is permissible because it is a doubtful thing.

1. What doubtful things would they include into Romans 14? A generation ago it was instrumental music, supporting institutions, kitchens, etc. Today, its alcohol, dancing, missing assembling's, and anything else for which they cannot find a passage that says "thou shalt not..."

2. In reality, these issues are not doubtful at all. So what they are advocating is "ignorance is bliss" (Acts 17:30-31).

D. Obedience is set aside in light of Romans 6:14. They take the reference about law to mean all law; even Christ's law (1 Cor. 9:21). Paul was talking about the Old Law here, not all law. Never mind the fact that Christ tells us we must do His will to be saved (Matt. 7:21, 23; 12:50).

E. Obedient Christians are described as legalists, Pharisees or commandment keepers. Striving to live perfectly before God is ridiculed. Yet, the Lord says perfection is possible (Matt. 5:48; 19:21; Jn. 17:23; Eph. 4:13; Col. 1:28; Col. 4:12; 1 Thess. 3:10; Heb. 11:40; 12:23; Jas. 1:4; 2:22; 3:2; 1 Pet. 5:10; Rev. 3:2).

III. Faith verses works

A. They ask, “Why can’t we teach faith without works?” To them, works is a dirty word.

1. They stress passages that teach we are not saved by works (Rom. 11:6, Eph. 2:8-9, 2 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 3:5). But they ignore passages that teach we will be judged by our works (Job 34:11; Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:5-10; 1 Cor. 7:19; 9:21; 2 Cor. 5:10; Eph. 2:10; Titus 3:8, 14; Jas. 2:14, 26; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 20:12-13; 22:12).

2. They stress our works will be a natural result of our love for the Lord’s grace. It is not because our works have anything to do with our salvation. Yet, they fail to understand the works we perform in obedience to Christ are not our works but God’s required works (Matt. 21:25; Jn. 6:28-29).

“Anytime we do what God commands because He ordered it we are working the work of God. This is equally true of believing on His Son, repenting of sins, confessing faith in Christ with the mouth, being baptized, partaking of the Lord's Supper, or doing anything else of which God is the Author.” (James Cope, “Salvation by Grace”)

B. Obedience is a commanded work necessary for salvation (Acts 5:32; Rom. 2:8; 2 Thess. 3:14; Heb. 3:18; 5:9; 1 Pet. 4:17).

IV. Living in fear

A. They use sophistry concerning fear as a way to undermine one’s confidence of salvation.

1. It’s argued that a single moment of ignorance or weakness could jeopardize one’s salvation (Jas. 2:10). You either have to live a life of sinless perfection or you are left in constant fear that God’s wrath will end your chance of salvation at any moment.

2. Repentance and confession of sins post baptism are purposely neglected as necessary for salvation. After all, what happens if you fail to repent of a sin before you die? Is God really going to condemn you to Hell for one unforgiven sin?

B. It is sad that those who boast of their confidence in salvation don't have enough confidence in God to grant us an opportunity to repent of our sins (Phil. 3:12-16).

Conclusion: We have only begun to skim the surface of the false doctrine known as grace-fellowship. It's hard to believe that some of our brethren not only believe these perversions but they teach them as well. One such preacher that we know well has embraced these false teachings and despite rebukes has joined a community-based church organization called Cornerstone. If one of our own can be sucked into this false doctrine, anyone could be unless we have a solid understanding of God's word on these subjects!