

# The Insult of Grace and the Debtor's Mentality

By George Davis and Michael Clark

Why does man find it so difficult to receive the unmerited forgiveness of God? Why does he prefer religious law-keeping over grace? It seems grace is the supreme insult to everything that we inherited from Adam, what is biblically called "the flesh."

From beginning to end, grace upon grace, Christianity is the greatest insult of all because it leaves man and the best he has to offer standing outside, hat-in-hand. True Christian faith denies place to man's carnal desire to prove his own worth and earn his own way. It offends his pride and independence that insist on being indebted to no one and controlling everyone. The insult of grace is twofold: it is free and can only be given to the unworthy (insulting man's ambition to earn his redemption), and it must remain free, only received on an ongoing basis by the weak and needy (insulting man's ambition to perfect himself).

Grace cannot be earned. It is free and available only to the undeserving, and disappears the moment it is treated like a commodity. Paul wrote, "[Now if it is in grace, it is no longer out of works, else the grace is coming to be no longer grace. Now, if it is out of works, it is no longer grace, else the work is no longer work](#)" (Romans 11:6, The Concordant Literal Version).

In order to receive God's grace you must first admit that there is nothing in you that can merit it. You have to know this. You must come to that place where you can honestly admit, "[I know that in me \(that is, in my flesh\) dwells no good thing](#)" (Romans 7:18). You must cease from your dead works, and cast yourself fully on the mercy of God and the merit of Christ. Jesus came to those who knew they were sinners, whose attitude was depicted in the publican's prayer, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." He was sent to show God's mercy to the outcasts of society. Sinners, outcasts and even the despised Samaritans received Him with joy. Grace is God giving us not what we have truly earned (the penalty of our sins), but what we could never earn (forgiveness and a new heart). You must receive it on the basis of Christ's sacrificial work alone. It is found by "[him that works not, but believes on him that justifies the ungodly](#)" whose "[faith is counted for righteousness](#)" (Romans 4:5). To the smugly righteous Pharisees, He said, "[Truly I tell you, tax collectors and prostitutes will get into God's kingdom](#)

ahead of you" (Matthew 21:31). Yes, even hookers will enter the kingdom of heaven before the self-righteous. They must both enter on the same basis as undeserving sinners, humble before God.

Jesus didn't come to justify the godly, but the ungodly. He didn't come to the hale and hearty but to the sick. "It is our sickness, not our health, that fits us for the physician, and casts us upon his skill," wrote Horatius Bonar. "In all false religion, the worshiper rests his hope of divine favor upon something in his own character, or life, or religious duties. The Pharisee did this when he came into the temple, 'thanking God that he was not as other men.'" (Horatius Bonar, *God's Way Of Peace*).

I (George) am as undeserving of God's grace today as I was back when I first bowed before Him, a wretched, hedonistic, narcissistic drug addict and asked for His mercy and grace. In the words of Newton's timeless hymn, "'Tis grace that brought me safe thus far, And grace will lead me home." Such is His amazing grace toward us. I was completely undeserving of what he gave me back then and I am completely undeserving of what He gives me now. The temptation today is not sex and drugs, but pride in personal achievement and maturity. This Leaven of the Pharisees is a far greater hindrance to the Christian walk than out-and-out hedonism ever was. It is a fundamental refusal to accept God's verdict on the flesh and is not met with grace, but with resistance. God eagerly forgives sinners, but pride is His enemy and is treated as such. ". . . wear the servile apron of humility with one another, for God is resisting the proud, yet is giving grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5 CLV).

How many of us undeserving sinners have come to Christ and received His free and unmerited gift of righteousness, only to deny grace its place in our daily lives? If Satan cannot persuade us to reject Christ altogether, he tries a more covert kind of warfare, designed to render us powerless and ineffective. Most, if not all, of the letters of Paul were written to counter this dangerous attack. To our brothers and sisters in Galatia he wrote, "Have you lost your senses? After starting your Christian lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to become perfect by your own human effort?" (Galatians 3:3).

The heart of this deception is the belief that after being redeemed by the sole merit of Christ's finished work, we must then sanctify ourselves. Though seemingly responsible, this denies the grace of Christ. Not only was our redemption purchased by Christ, but also our sanctification. When God places us in Christ, He makes Christ to be all things

to us. Christ is made to be our "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." This is done in order that no flesh should glory in God's presence" (1 Corinthians 1:29-31). All glory belongs to the Lord. He has done it all and He has been made all things to us. Our part is to receive it all by faith. He is our Wisdom. Our human wisdom is foolishness to Him. He is our righteousness. All our own righteousness is as filthy rags. We cannot complete ourselves any more than we can save ourselves because He is both our Sanctification and our Redemption. He is all and in all. There is nothing left for us to do or earn.

Grace was earned and freely given by Christ Jesus. It is forever given upon that basis, grace upon grace. From beginning to end, it is all of grace. Through his grace we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins . . . so that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. God's call to us is to receive, not work. This is the foundational principle of faith. Faith receives. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Ephesians 2:8-10 NASB). Man wants to boast, so he insists on working. He insists on earning his way. But when he tries to earn grace, he discredits Christ's work and devalues His gift.

Throughout the New Testament God's grace is associated with abundance, liberality and generosity. There is no exactness in it. It is not thrifty but extravagant. It gives far too much. The only correct response to it is gratitude. Grace demands only one thing of its recipients, that they walk in generosity toward others. Freely you have received, freely give. Grace demands that its riches be forwarded in every area of life, in receiving and giving and in forgiving and being forgiven.

### **Forwarding Law or Forwarding Grace**

A lack of gratitude in the life of believers is a sure sign that they have begun to work for righteousness and now consider any blessing that comes as payment for their labor. Why would anyone be grateful for receiving what they have earned by their own hard work? If this work-ethic is not repented of, it soon permeates every relationship until grace is supplanted by pride, condemnation and judgment. Those who return to the law

for their righteousness have a fierce tendency to bite and devour one another (Galatians 5: 14-15).

The author of Hebrews reminded his fellow Jewish Christians, who were tempted to go back to the law and Judaism, of the mercilessness of that system. "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses." The author goes on to explain that if they returned to the law after they had received the knowledge of the new and living way that Jesus had consecrated for them through the veil of his flesh, they would tread the Son of God under foot, count His blood an unholy thing and insult the Spirit of grace. (Hebrews 10: 20-29).

A lack of mercy indicates that we have returned to the law for our righteousness and are forwarding the demands of law to others. You cannot keep the law and walk in grace at the same time. Law-keeping nullifies the grace of God and the grace of God nullifies law-keeping. "I do not nullify the grace of God, for if justification were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose" (Galatians 2:21). "You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace" (Galatians 5:4).

Law and grace are exact opposites and cancel one another out. They are of different Covenants and of different natures. The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. Law demands, grace gives. The law demanded righteous behavior from man as a condition for life, acceptance and blessing. Grace gives all these things to undeserving sinners.

In order to understand why man is so drawn to law-keeping, we must take note of the correlation between the law and the flesh. It is an interesting study to see how many times law and flesh are mentioned in the very same verse or context in the New Testament. It is far too many times to be coincidental. You cannot read and understand these passages without concluding that there is a special affinity between law and flesh. By divine design, the law targets the weakness of the flesh in very specific ways. The law demanded, but gave no help. The law was given to trick and expose the flesh by making impossible demands on it. Through the law, God required what He knew fleshly men were incapable of and what He knew they were most eager to attempt. Just as Adam and Eve were eager to cover themselves with fig leaves after they sinned, so man tries to be righteous by law keeping.

What good was the law then? The purpose of the law was to teach man that nothing good resides in his flesh ([Romans 7:18](#)). The law was not given to edify or build man up, but to cage him and reveal his true nature. The law demanded godly behavior from ungodly man. The law demanded selfless behavior from a humanity that had lost that innocence way back in Eden. It demanded that a fallen and delusional humanity take an honest look at itself and give up all hope of self-redemption, turn to Christ as the Last Adam, and be reborn as a new creature having a new nature.

Controlling the flesh with law is like trying to domesticate a tiger. If you are somewhat successful in putting the necessary outer restraints on him, his nature remains the same. If you remove his claws, teach him to jump through hoops and sit at the snap of a whip you still can't turn your back on him.

So it is when the flesh is leashed with law. The law tells man to be righteous by keeping its commandments, but the harder he tries the more apparent sin becomes and the more the law grinds him down. Since it is not his habit to give up too soon, he doubles his efforts. From there it is just a matter of time before his energy is spent, his resolve is dashed and he collapses under the weight of it all. From God's view the law has done its precious work. It has destroyed the illusion of man's righteousness. It has tricked him, assayed him and found him wanting. His early hopes of obeying the law and being counted holy through law-keeping are dashed. All that is left is the seeing and knowing his own inadequacies.

It is difficult for man to fully appreciate how redemptive this is. The law was never given as a remedy for sin and the flesh. It was given to increase the offense so that as sin abounds, grace would much more abound ([Romans 5:20](#)). Paul went so far as to say that "[the power of sin is the law](#)" ([1 Corinthians 15:55-57](#)). Sin was empowered (increased and intensified) by the Law. In what way does the increase of sin serve God's redemptive purpose?

Salvation begins with an honest and accurate assessment of your own condition. All efforts to cover sin by masking it in human philanthropy must be acknowledged as futile. You must see yourself as an undeserving sinner before you can receive the free gift of righteousness. The law was given to frustrate the self-righteous. So wrote Spurgeon: "The law is for the self-righteous, to humble their pride: the gospel is for the lost, to remove their despair" (Spurgeon - All of Grace).

You cannot receive the grace of God as long as you think there is any goodness in you or that you can do any good thing in the eyes of God. You cannot be counted righteous until you stop trying to be blameless through works and trust Him who justifies the ungodly. "But to him that works not, but believes on him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Romans 4 5). The law leads man to the turning-point of giving up on works.

The flesh prefers its own sacrifice for sins and devalues the cleansing blood of Christ. God bestows grace. Man wants to earn it. God gives repentance. Man prefers penance and restitution. Under grace we are not asked to undo or repair every evil thing we have ever done. We are asked to accept free and full payment for our sins provided by Another. We are asked to stop trying to be righteous on our own. We are asked to cease from these dead works and accept His free and unmerited gift.

If we do receive forgiveness and the free gift of righteousness, another temptation arises. Pride tempts us to balance the ledger by paying God back, and soon every act of obedience becomes a payment. We are not calling for complete inactivity; God's grace is the most active force in the universe, but grace does not permit purely human activity. God's grace is the most powerful and sufficient when it meets with good old honest, non-delusional human weakness.

According to Peter, grace and peace are multiplied unto us through "the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord" and that "His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness. . ." to the end that we "may become partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:2-3). Peter went on to exhort us to add to our faith moral excellence and to moral excellence, knowledge, and to knowledge self-control, and to self-control, perseverance, and to perseverance, godliness, and to godliness, brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness, love. Many of these things are listed in Galatians 5 as fruits of the Spirit. Otherwise they are merely self-improvement. Norman Grubb aptly said, "self-improvement is both a sin and an impossibility." Self-control is not self-control. It is a fruit of the Spirit. Love does not originate in us any more than goodness does. It also is a fruit of the Spirit. Kindness is a fruit of the Spirit. All that we are and ever will be and all that we do and ever will do, are owing to God's grace. "But by the grace of God I am what I am," wrote Paul, "and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Corinthians 15:10).

Paul was who he was by the grace of God. He labored abundantly but least we think that this was something done in his own strength, we should note three little words, *yet not I*. "Yet not I, but the grace of God." Yet not I? Very similar words are found in Galatians 2:20. "I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me. . . ." Grace is the empowering, life changing force of Christ in us who is our new life Source.

How can we live and not live? How can we labor without laboring? Grace is defined in the answer to these questions. I live, yet not I . . . I labored, yet not I . . . He lives! He labors! This is grace in action, God working in us both the willingness and the ability to do His good pleasure. There is no room for pride because it is all by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

To the Philippians Paul wrote, "[continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.](#)" This seems to put the complete responsibility for working out salvation on the shoulders of the believer, but Paul went on to specify, "[For it is God who is producing in you both the desire and the ability to do what pleases him](#)" (Philippians 2:12 -13). Grace is God working in us and through us, and if He has His way with us, we will be anything but idle.

The fact remains that anything done apart from God working in and through us is nothing. Jesus said, "without me you can do nothing," so everything done without Him is exactly that, nothing. The best we can do in and of ourselves is nothing. When we forget that and return to the treadmill of the law, our grace is no longer grace and love's graciousness disappears as well. In their place is a stern and exacting taskmaster.

Many of us have experienced what happens to a fellowship of believers that embrace the work ethic of the law. It is not a pretty sight. I (George) have seen it many times and participated in it many times, feeling perfectly righteous all the while before I knew what it was. I have seen it destroy the love of believers and end in such ugliness and anger that the unsaved felt justified. God only knows how many times this debtor's mentality has hindered grace.

## **The Debtor's Mentality and the Debtor's Prison**

Jesus uses a parable about a debtor's prison to teach about this. He described the operations of grace and law in Christian relationships and the blessings and consequences of both.

Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he had begun to settle them, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.' And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.' So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.' But he was unwilling and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?' And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart." (Matthew 18:21-35).

In this parable we learn that God forgives on request without restitution being required. We also learn something important about unforgiveness. The man's refusal to forward grace resulted in a series of divine consequences. Unforgiveness is a return to legalism. It is as exacting and demanding as the law. It keeps a precise ledger and balance to determine just how completely the debt is paid, right down to the last penny. It mercilessly holds others accountable for full payment. They will not be released until everything is made right and they will be tortured until they do.

Unforgiveness is the debtors-mentality, a merciless mindset that refuses to release others until they pay all that is due. It is the exact opposite of grace, which gives what

is not due and eliminates all debt. When God forgives, He frees the forgiven from all obligation to repay. This is how we who have accepted Christ have been forgiven. Yet how often do we turn right around in our relationships with others and insist that they make everything right before we release them? As in the parable, we take them about the throat and say, "Pay me what you owe!" Nothing could be more contradictory to the example of Jesus. God didn't send Jesus into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved (John 3:17). He didn't come to browbeat sinners, but to set the captives free.

We have drifted so far away from Christ's example that one believer rightly observed, "We Christians seem to have a vested interest in the damnation of others." What did we lose that leaves us behaving in a manner so unlike our Lord? It all comes down to what we are forwarding. We have been forgiven a great debt! This should be reflected in our behavior. We should forward mercy and grace rather than law, condemnation and judgment. We should release others just as we have been released. What we forward to others we will get back, good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over.

Jesus exhorted His followers, "Be you therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful." Then He went on to show how that is done.

"Judge not, and you shall not be judged: condemn not, and you shall not be condemned: forgive, and you shall be forgiven: Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your lap. For with the same measure that you measure it shall be measured to you again." (Luke 6:35-38)

In His mercy God does not give us what we deserve, and if we are to be merciful as he is merciful, we too will not judge and condemn. Through His grace God gives us what we don't deserve and if we are to be as our Father, we too will forgive and give. This is the testimony of grace Christians are called to demonstrate. "Be you therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful."

The same is true of giving. The giving that Jesus spoke of is clearly not the giving demanded by the law. Jesus was not talking about dutifully giving a tithe to maintain a temple or clergy system. He wants gracious giving that gives as freely as He does to those in need. In fact, this giving is called liberality ( Greek *khar'-ece* -- grace) in 1

Corinthians 16:3 and is called grace throughout the rest of the scriptures. "And when I come, whomsoever you shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality (grace) unto Jerusalem." God desires to give us this liberality, a free gift that is heaped up, running over, and so well shaken together that we can't contain it and so it overflows from us to others.

In giving to the poor at Jerusalem, the Corinthian believers weren't earning anything. They were forwarding the grace and liberality of God. It was not a demanded gift. It was, as the Amplified Bible says, "not as an extortion [wrung out of you] but as a generous and willing gift." It was considered sowing because it was given with God's gracious giving in mind. "[Remember] this: he who sows sparingly and grudgingly will also reap sparingly and grudgingly, and he who sows generously [that blessings may come to someone] will also reap generously and with blessings (2 Corinthians 9:6 Amplified Bible).

Such giving can never be by compulsion. It cannot be demanded through legalistic browbeating. Any gift given out of coercion or duress is not liberality. Legalistic giving is a stingy and graceless giving that never willingly gives more than the law demands. The giving of the tenth becomes an excuse for not giving all. The giving of grace can only occur when each one has freedom to give (or not give) from the heart.

Let each one [give] as he has made up his own mind and purposed in his heart, not reluctantly or sorrowfully or under compulsion, for God loves (He takes pleasure in, prizes above other things, and is unwilling to abandon or to do without) a cheerful (joyous, "prompt to do it") giver [whose heart is in his giving]. (2 Corinthians 9:7 Amplified Bible)

We are free to give without fear of lack because "God is able to meet all our needs from His riches in glory." We give and He gives to us. We stop the flow and so does He. The river of life flows freely in His kingdom and we are called to drink of it freely. He is able to make all grace come to us in abundance. He will never allow those who give to the poor to go without because that giving is the testimony of His continued grace. He wants us to be conduits of His grace to those in need. James calls this "visiting the widows and orphans in their affliction." We are to be His hands, meeting them at their point of need. This is "pure religion that is undefiled before God..." (James 1:27).

Once, I (Michael) heard Father say, "Michael, you have been generous to the church where you stand to get something back, but now I want to show you a higher kind of giving, giving to those who cannot return to you in kind." At the church I gave to, I was able to use the copy machine and the conference room for ministry purposes, could get free counseling, the pastor was a good Bible teacher, and we freely took food from the church food bank at no cost. My wife was receiving a salary for being the church secretary as well, so the perks for our tithing were many. It was then that He sent me to Guatemala to work at an orphanage with poor children. Those kids loved Him and had nothing of this world to give back to me as I ministered to them, but they had abundant love for me and that was payment enough. It is one thing to give our worldly wealth to those who can give the same in return, but another to give to those who have nothing to give back to us. Jesus taught according to this same principle.

"When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your kinsmen or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just." (Luke 14:12-14 RSV)

Let's prayerfully read Paul's reminder to those who were freely forwarding this grace to the poor saints at Jerusalem.

"As it is written, He [the benevolent person] scatters abroad; He gives to the poor; His deeds of justice and goodness and kindness and benevolence will go on and endure forever! And [God] Who provides seed for the sower and bread for eating will also provide and multiply your [resources for] sowing and increase the fruits of your righteousness [which manifests itself in active goodness, kindness, and charity]. Thus you will be enriched in all things and in every way, so that you can be generous, and [your generosity as it is] administered by us will bring forth thanksgiving to God. For the service that the ministering of this fund renders does not only fully supply what is lacking to the saints (God's people), but it also overflows in many [cries of] thanksgiving to God. Because at [your] standing of the test of this ministry, they will glorify God for your loyalty and obedience to the Gospel of Christ which you confess, as well as for your generous-hearted liberality to them and to all [the other needy ones]. And they yearn for you while they pray for you, because of the surpassing measure of God's grace (His favor and mercy and spiritual blessing which is shown

forth) in you. Now thanks be to God for His Gift, [precious] beyond telling [His indescribable, inexpressible, free Gift]!"

By this we see how important giving is. It is a demonstration of Christ's grace. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might be rich." (2 Corinthians 8:9). This giving is a demonstration of the gospel of grace and goes far beyond giving to friends.

## Loving Our Enemies

You have heard that it has been said, You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them who despitefully use you, and persecute you; *That you may be the children of your Father who is in heaven: for he makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.* (Matthew 5:43-45 KJ200, *emphasis added*)

Do you have a hard time perceiving and enjoying God as your loving Father? When we start living out His love and kindness with His New Covenant heart within us, we will not only know Him as our Father in a real way, but others will know Him through His love flowing forth from us to friend and foe alike.

If we do not forward the mercy we have received from Him to others we will receive no mercy. Here again we see the debtor's mentality (unforgiveness) and the debtors prison. If we judge we will be judged. If we condemn we will be condemned. Someone said, "To live in unforgiveness and bitterness against another is like drinking poison, hoping the other person will die." Unforgiveness eats us up from the inside out and defiles all those around us as it draws others into it morass as we tell everyone who will listen what a bad person so-in-so is and what they have done.

It is in the empowering commands "forgive and give" that the grace of God is most evident and the "yet not I" is most needful. In them God shows a living demonstration of the gospel of grace.

Forgiving and giving are the only proper responses to the extravagant giving of God. When God forgives it seems excessive from a human point of view. He absorbs the

entire debt. Forgiveness is bearing the penalty for someone else's sin. It means He absorbs the debt, bears the consequences for the loss, and lets the debtor go free.

As wonderful as this is, God's grace does far more. What did He do after He mercifully forgave us? He graced us with His riches! It is one thing to forgive someone a large debt but quite another to take out your wallet and give all your money. Jesus said,

And if any man will sue you at the law, and take away your coat, let him have your cloak also. And whosoever shall compel you to go a mile, go with him two. Give to him that asks you, and from him that would borrow of you turn not away. (Matthew 5:40-42 KJ2000)

Christ laid down His life for us while we were yet enemies of God. Jesus also requires us to present this good news while demonstrating His grace to those who hate us and seek to harm us.

We have all heard stories of heroic men and women who gave their lives for friends and loved ones, but I can think of only one Man who freely laid down His life for His enemies (Romans 5:7 - 10). Paul condensed this down to a single area of conflict. "Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good" (Romans 12:21). When we return the aggression of our enemies, we are conquered, because we have entered their place of expertise and strength. We are meeting them on their battleground. Man has never conquered on that ground. With all his armies that marched the world over and fleets of ships that dominated the seas, he has never once come close to conquering on that field. Wars were "won," but the peace was never won because the real enemy was not vanquished.

The words "overcome evil with good" describe an altogether different kind of victory. They concisely illustrate the strategy and victory of our Lord Jesus Christ who died for a captive world that hated Him and vanquished the one who tries to hold us captive. This is the only victory that can win the peace. "[God] disarmed the principalities and powers that were ranged against us and made a bold display and public example of them in triumphing over them in Him and in it [the cross]" (Colossians 2:15, Amplified Bible). Jesus overcame evil with good. This example of the cross is intertwined with the gospel and cannot be separated. If the gospel is going to be heard, believed, and have its powerful effect, a living demonstration of the cross and a profound sharing in the sufferings of Christ must accompany it.

While travelling on foot the Indian Christian missionary Sadhu Sundar Singh came on reapers harvesting in a field. He began to preach the gospel to them. Upset that he preached about Christ the owner of the field hurled a stone and hit Sundar Singh just above the eye inflicting a bleeding wound. Sundar quietly went to a nearby stream, washed his wound and returned to the field. The reapers took note that he "did not cast a spell or even utter a word of cursing at the man who had caused him injury," which they fully expected him to do. Suddenly the field owner got a headache so severe that he couldn't continue working. Sundar Singh calmly took up his scythe and completed his work for him. At the end of the day Sundar Singh preach Christ to the entire village and from that day forward was given a warm welcome whenever he passed by. What did Sundar do here? He loved his enemy.

The mercy of God and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ are on display when God's children forgive and give ([Romans 12:19 - 21](#)). The gospel will be hindered until this becomes a reality in us.

## **The Standard of Conduct; the Gospel of Grace and the Word of The Cross**

Watchman Nee wrote almost eighty years ago,

"Nothing has done greater damage to our Christian testimony than our trying to be right and demanding right of others. We become preoccupied with what is and what is not right. We ask ourselves, Have we been justly or unjustly treated? And we think thus to validate our actions. But this is not our standard. The whole question for us is one of cross-bearing. You ask me, 'Is it right for someone to strike my cheek?' I reply, 'Of course not! But the question is, do you only want to be right?' As Christians our standard of living can never be 'right or wrong,' but the cross. The principle of the cross is our principle of conduct. Praise God that he makes his sun to shine on the evil and the good. With him it is a question of his grace and not of right and wrong. But that is to be our standard also: "Forgive each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32). Right or wrong is the principle of the Gentiles and tax gathers. My life is to be governed by the principle of the cross and of the perfection of the Father: "Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect . . . We have nothing to stand for, nothing to ask or demand. We have only to give." (Watchman Nee - *Sit, Walk, Stand*).

How could Mr. Nee make such a statement? How could he say that trying to be right and demanding right of others has done greater damage to the Christian testimony than anything else?

The early believers had no New Testament but they had the gospel of grace in a measure and purity that we don't today. The preaching of the cross is the power of God to those who believe (1 Corinthians 1:18), and every appeal for right conduct was based on it. This is especially so in Paul's letters. To the Philippians he wrote, "Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ. . ." (Philippians 1:27 - 29). Let your conduct be in keeping with the gospel of Christ. Paul wrote about forgiveness, "...bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do" (Colossians 3:13).

When Paul saw certain Jewish Christians treating their Gentile brothers and sisters like second class citizens, he reminded them that "they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel" (Galatians 2:14). He reminded the believers at Rome that "Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, 'The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on Me.'" Why did he redirect their attention to this foundational gospel truth? He did it to remind them of their need to be like-minded toward one another and walk according to Christ Jesus. "Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus. . . Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God" (Romans 15:3 - 7). Here again the gospel of grace is the touchstone of Christian conduct.

To husbands he wrote, "Husbands, love your wives. . ." By what standard are they to do this? ". . . just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her (Ephesians 5:24-25). This is conduct worthy of the gospel of grace. This is the gospel that touches every area of life. This is the gospel Paul called "the power of God." This is the gospel that makes marriage counselors obsolete. The gospel of grace affects and empowers correctness in every area of life, because it is confirmed by God himself with power.

What would it be like if all God's Children lived according to the gospel of Christ and released every person who has hurt them? What would it be like if the good of these words, "be releasing, and you shall be released," came to their complete fruition among us? What would it be like if we stopped counting the failings of others and forgave them

as Christ has forgiven us? What would it be like if we stopped stereotyping them, freeze-framing them so they cannot get beyond previous offenses? What would it be like if we fired the accountant in our heads and gave as "irresponsibly" and "scandalously" as God does? These are questions we ask ourselves. We judge no one here, because in this we are the chief of sinners.

We are seeing through a glass darkly and we have been given enough grace to pray, "Father, please empower us to live according to Christ Jesus. Deliver us completely from the debtor's mentality that binds our brothers and sisters to debt and ourselves to exactness and greediness! Forgive our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Empower us to release others and give to them as freely and extravagantly as you have forgiven us! We know we can't do this on our own, for yours is the power, kingdom and the glory. So we ask in Your name and for Your glory that You would give us the grace to liberate every one who has ever wronged us. Help us to set them free just as you have set us free! Empower us to do for our enemies what you have done for us. Empower us to love them! Help us set aside all prejudice and so-called patriotism that would make us curse and not love the Muslim people. Help us to completely turn from the eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth "crusade" mentality that tries to conquer evil with evil and has succeeded only in filling the world with hate. Deliver all your children from this untoward generation so we can once again turn the world up-side-down (right-side-up) with your love and grace. Amen!"