

IS GRACE A LICENSE?

Do you believe in living by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God? You will remember that when Jesus was tempted by Satan that Satan said, “If you are the Son of God, then turn these stones into bread.” Jesus replied, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’” Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy 8:3. Do you believe in living by every word that proceeds from God’s mouth?

Hello I’m Larry Murdock.

If I believe in living by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, then does that make me a creator of “checklists”? God’s Word, the Bible, contains every word that God considers to be relevant to human existence? Christians who take God at His word have been accused of making checklists. They have been accused of being legalists. Who would say this about Bible-believing Christians? In my experience those who say such things about Bible-believing people are those who do not **like everything** God has said and they make excuses for not living by **everything** God has said!

Jude, in his little New Testament book, talks about “ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.” (Jude 1:4, ESV.) That which is “sensual” (or in the KJV “lascivious”) is that which pertains to the senses, that is, the flesh and its appetites. The New International Version translates this phrase in Jude as follows: “They are godless men who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality.” How can grace become a license? Well, it cannot be a license and it is not a license; **but** godless men **say** that God’s grace grants them the freedom to indulge their immoral pleasures and still be forgiven! Yes, that’s what they say! They say that God’s grace covers their sins.

Friends, does God’s grace cover sin? Oh Yes! God forgives sin; forgiveness is always by grace. Even restitution does not merit forgiveness! That’s right! If I steal from you, but then repent and give it back. Will I not still need your forgiveness? You see, you could still distrust me; you can still feel the dishonor I have shown you by stealing from you. Yes, true forgiveness is always by grace!

Although God gave Jesus for the salvation of the world of humans, not all humans will be saved! Because God makes distinctions between sinners! We can see this distinction when God revealed Himself to Moses. You can read it in Exodus 34, beginning at verse 5. “The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with [Moses] there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. ⁶ The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “Yahweh, Yahweh, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty...” (Ex 34:5-7, ESV.) God says of himself that he will forgive iniquity and transgression and sin, but he will not “clear the guilty.” God’s gracious forgiveness will not “clear the guilty.” Who are those people? Who are the guilty God will not clear? Aren’t we all guilty? God draws a line between sinners. God makes a distinction.

You can see this distinction between sinners again in Romans 11:22, “²² Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off.” (Romans 11:22, ESV.) Notice the distinctions God makes. He shows kindness to one group; he shows severity to another group. And then, among those who has been given his kindness (or grace) there is yet another line drawn. This line stands between those who will continue in God’s kindness, and those who will not continue in that kindness. These latter folks will be “cut off.”

God’s grace, although extended to everyone, is not always accepted on God’s terms! So, our human response is brought into consideration. What we do with God’s grace is decisive! As Paul says,

⁶ He will render to each one according to his works: ⁷ to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; ⁸ but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. ⁹ There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, ¹⁰ but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. ¹¹ For God shows no partiality. Romans 2:6-11 (ESV)

Now friends, I ask you, if we who have received God's grace attempt to turn God's grace into a license to sin, will God forgive us?

There are those people who teach that once God's grace has covered your sin, you cannot sin again, so as to be lost. People call this the "once saved, always saved" doctrine. Many people are being taught to believe this doctrine. Friends, if our salvation was completely left up to God then none of us would be lost. God loves every one of us! The cross of Christ has not assured forgiveness for every person. The cross of Christ has justified God's forgiveness for every person. Did you hear that? "The cross of Christ has not assured forgiveness for every person. The cross of Christ has justified God's forgiveness for every person." God has justified Himself for forgiving everyone; but He will not forgive everyone! This is why Peter could cry out on the day of Pentecost, "save yourselves from this crooked generation." (Acts 2:40.) But isn't it God who saves? Then why does Peter say such a thing as "save yourselves"? Because it is left up to us whether we will accept God's forgiveness, or whether we will continue in sin. God does not force His forgiveness upon us.

That's why there is an invitation issued to sinners. The invitation is called a "call." Jesus told the story of a king who prepared a wedding feast for his son.

² "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, ³ and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. ⁴ Again he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.' ⁵ But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶ while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. ⁷ The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. ⁸ Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹ Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.' ¹⁰ And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests. ¹¹ "But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. ¹² And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. ¹³ Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer

darkness, in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' ¹⁴ For many are called, but few are chosen." (Matt 22:2-14, ESV.)

God's gracious forgiveness is extended to the whole world. But if you think you can enter the feast without changing your life and slipping into a wedding garment, you are sadly mistaken. A wedding garment stands for what God expects! How can you know what God expects? Read the book, his book, the Bible. I say this to those of you who are Christians, who have already come into the kingdom: do not attempt to turn God's grace into a license so you can keep on sinning after coming into the feast. Unless you will wear the garment that God expects, then God will condemn you. He will cast you out!

In the world today we have Christians who wish to bring into worship every kind of activity that entertains. They wish to attract more people with the latest kind of entertainment. Have you heard of the preacher who promised to swallow a goldfish if the church doubled its attendance for a special occasion? Well, the church did, and the preacher did!

If people's innovations to worship are questioned or challenged, you know what they say? They say the grace of God allows them to bring these activities into the worship of the church. They use God's grace as a license to do as they please, instead finding out what would please the Lord.

Some people do not want to give up a wife or a husband they have wrongfully married. John the Baptist challenged Herod's marriage to his brother Philip's wife. John said, "It is not lawful for you to have her." Herod beheaded John because of that statement. Although many today would not behead the preacher, nevertheless they think God's grace will allow them to keep the sinful arrangement. Instead of learning and obeying God's teaching on the subject, they invoke God's grace. They use God's grace as a license.

Some people do not want to stop living a sinful lifestyle. They think God's grace will save them without having to change into a wedding garment. And so they petition the government to change the definition of marriage, so that it is "legal" for them to live in sin. This will bring many economic benefits to the happy couples, and when they need God's grace of forgiveness, God's grace will cover them even while they remain in their sinful condition. In their thinking there is no

need for repentance; God's grace will cover it. This is what Jude meant when he said that ungodly people were turning the grace of God into lasciviousness. They use God's grace as a license.

Friends, Jesus said, "Unless you repent, you will perish!" (Luke 13:3.) Every human being needs the grace of God. God's grace has been extended to the world. What will you do with it? Will you treat it as a license to sin?