

'SAVED BY GRACE ... TRAPPED BY EFFORT?' # 3**Read Galatians 3:1-14 and Colossians 2:6-15****Saved by Grace.**

We begin from where we left off last week, our tendency to lose sight of the immense value, value beyond measure, of God's Grace. Our sins (and those of everyone else who submits to Jesus as Lord) have been completely paid for by the perfect sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. The Galatians were slipping back into thinking that by focusing and straining every effort to follow the Old Testament laws they could 'improve' their salvation. This was obviously frustrating Paul, who had spent much time and effort explaining this was not only a complete misunderstanding of the purpose of OT law, but it was now fully superseded by Christ's death and resurrection. This is God's Grace; that He in Jesus, suffered and died to pay for our sins, and now we, (the totally undeserving but having faith in Jesus), are seen by God as washed clean of our sin, clean as fresh snow. (helpful reading Ephesians 2: 1-10)

Some, perhaps many of us, are troubled by thoughts of being unworthy to receive God's grace, knowing our shortcomings as we do. Can you identify with this?

Is it possible to fall from God's grace? Discuss.

"The peace of God, which transcends all understanding." (Philippians 4:7). Is there a connection here with God's grace?

Having poured His grace upon us, what do you think are God's hopes, even expectations, of us?

'Religion is all about what you can do for God; Christianity is all about what Christ has done for you.' Oswald Chambers

Trapped by efforts. I suspect that many, including me, find it difficult to draw the right balance between doing 'things for God' on one hand and doing 'things for ourselves' on the other. Certainly, society in general promotes a work ethic which endorses 'you have to work hard to get what you want, it won't just be given to you.' This can subconsciously play out in the mind of a Christian, that the more 'good stuff I do', the more credit for me, the more God will be pleased. The result can be a feeling of guilt, should we refuse any and every opportunity to do 'good stuff', and produce over-working, inefficient and ineffective work, simply because you are tired and stressed. This surely cannot be God's plan for us. How often do we accept a task or role because we feel obligated to help a friend, colleague or organisation, or perhaps, believe if we don't do it, it won't get done? But our Christian faith drives us to worship God through every word and action, to be God's hands and feet in practical ways by using the gifts He has given. To find the right balance, then, the litmus test must be to examine the reason we are doing our deeds; do we feel obligated in some way, is this for personal credit or to further the glory of God?

In what ways do you decide whether or not God is calling you to do something?

What do you see as the dangers of quickly responding to an invitation to take an action?

If you find yourself over-worked, tired or stressed, what do you do to remedy the situation?

When you see fellow Christians or friend over-working, what do you/should you do?

Do you think God has ordained that we should organise our lives to ensure we have regular times of relaxation. What did Jesus do?

How would you now respond if challenged to explain this apparent tension between two Bible verses? Paul writes (Ephesians 2:8) "It is by Grace that you have been saved, through faith ... not by works"; and James writes, "You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone." (James 2:24)

"The entire law is fulfilled in a single decree: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' Grace empowers believers to love selflessly and serve others, reflecting the love of Christ. This service is not out of obligation but as a joyful response to the grace received." Bible Hub

Prayer: *Help me, Lord, with wisdom to understand that I am not responsible for the nature of the gifts you have given me, but for how I use them. Amen*