

## CHAPTER 113

### Grace: The Tender Trap

Here is a verse that used to puzzle me greatly:

*But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared (Psalm 130:4, KJV).*

This verse was puzzling to me because it says that God is to be feared because of his forgiveness. Why should anyone fear God's forgiveness?

Allow me to illustrate the answer to this question from my own life experience. Back in 1963, when I quit on Christianity, I had magnificent reasons, not just excuses, for doing so. There were still some areas of my thought life that were easily as bad as before I got saved. For example, I was constantly pressured by lust and jealousy and anger. I didn't want to be some sort of lukewarm Christian. Therefore, I couldn't accept such gross imperfections. I wanted to be an on-fire Christian or no Christian at all. No halfway, no games. I wanted to be holy as he is holy—or I wanted to quit.

At that very time, I was teaching and preaching and the Lord was using my testimony mightily. Believe me when I say that I was no slouch. I was trying as hard as I could. But, because I was so far from perfect, I quit. I went back to my old life and for five years I lived life with almost total abandon. I concluded that Christianity was only for good people, not sinners like me!

But after five years, when Jesus brought me back, he taught me his grace. Now I know his grace. I know that his grace is greater than all my sin. I can purify myself, even as he is pure. I can get up and start over again anytime I fall. I can serve him without hypocrisy, because he is my righteousness, not I. I used to be able to say, "I'm too weak to be a good servant of God," but now I have to agree with God that my weakness is no excuse to quit. The Lord says:

*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9, my paraphrase).*

Of course, the Lord spoke these words to the apostle Paul, but they apply to us all. What an amazing and crucial revelation: God can manifest his power best through our weaknesses! Therefore, Paul went on to express the great paradox of Christ-centered ministry:

*Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. . . for when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).*

My personal weaknesses can no longer provide me with excuses to quit. I now understand that the most fearful thing in God is his forgiveness. Why? Because if I can always be forgiven and accepted in spite of my weaknesses, then I'm trapped!

As you finish this book, you need to realize that the most dangerous thing about God is not his judgment or his wrath but his mercy! His mercy wipes out all excuses. Every sinner qualifies for mercy, so the entire world is left without excuses. The refusal to respond to grace leads to eternal hell because *there is no excuse not to respond*. Thus you are trapped by grace!

Legalism can never hold you the way grace can. You see, if the legalist falls, he's dead. But the person who is justified by faith has power not only over sin but also over defeat. The Bible says:

*For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again (Proverbs 24:16, KJV).*

So you see how the grace of God is the most dangerous thing in the world. Even if Satan manages to whip you, under grace you can still get up immediately and start over. You have no satisfactory excuse to remain fallen because God forgives you. You have one option: Get up! Over and over and over and over again, until you learn to stand firm. Quitting will never again be a viable option for you. That's why the Bible says that the just man (justified in Christ, remember) gets up as often as he falls. In the formation of godly character, this is foundational.

Look at what the psalmist said:

*Surely goodness and mercy shall pursue me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever (Psalm 23:6, KJV).*

How did the psalmist learn this? The hard way. This is your verse. Take it. What it means is that there is no way of escape from God's love. You are trapped by infinite mercy. Mercy will follow you all the days of your life. Legalism can never save you, but grace will never let you go. The tender trap has been sprung—on you!