

INTRODUCTION

For years I published a monthly devotional letter called Grace plus Nothing, and it seemed to me that the title might appear to be imbalanced. Therefore, I always included the following introductory statement in Grace plus Nothing:

Every Christian should be aware that Jesus Christ is full of grace and truth, not just grace (John 1:14). Therefore, what I mean by grace plus nothing is not some sort of cheap grace without truth. My intent in naming this letter Grace plus Nothing is to emphasize the biblical truth that, in the formation of Christian character, God's truth works only through his grace, not apart from it.

I emphasize grace plus nothing because there has always been a tendency in the body of Christ to preach salvation by grace through faith and then to attempt sanctification and holiness through every imaginable form of legalism. Certainly the Lord calls every Christian to press into sanctification and holiness, but neither happens apart from grace: Legalism—the attempt to justify ourselves before God through good works — can never satisfy God. Therefore, sanctification is by grace: “For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace. . . those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ” (Romans 6:14; 5:17).

This introduction from my newsletter (including the Scripture) expresses the exact thrust of this book. Christians need to be taught to completely forsake any performance basis for relating to God and to forever embrace the grace basis, carefully avoiding the error of cheap grace in the process.

The grace of God is neither legalistic nor cheap. One of my most important objectives is to help you define and avoid both distortions. In a nutshell, legalism means any attempt to earn right standing before God based on our performance or good works, while cheap grace refers to the all too common misconception that we can accept Jesus as our Savior and yet somehow simultaneously avoid his lordship.

In our generation many Christians fear cheap grace so much that they have completely rejected preaching about grace. Thus, in many circles, even sincere believers are not secure in their salvation. Legalism is usually substituted for grace. Clearly, the baby has been thrown out with the dirty bath water. The cure is worse than the disease.

Grace plus Nothing asserts that without grace all preaching is just wasted hot air. Sin cannot be removed apart from grace. Hearts and minds cannot be transformed apart from grace. Grace is God's program. Grace is God's design. We have celebrated virtually everything else in our churches; now, let us celebrate grace! My central objective in this book is to glorify God through a definition of his grace and its applications, and, in the process, to demonstrate how only grace leads to true obedience.

Legalism, performance-based-acceptance (PBA), never produces pure obedience. Grace alone will produce what God wants: the fruit of the Spirit and godly character. This approach is called ABP, acceptance-based-performance.

I do not address this book primarily to people who want to play games with God and therefore attempt to abuse grace. God will have to deal with you some other way. But I dedicate this book

to all of you grace-starved Christians who have a genuine hunger for God. God's grace is for you! You will be liberated as you read.

I have included a lot of my own personal testimony because I have found it to be helpful for illustrating grace at work. I hope none of it offends you in any way. I think you will discover that it ministers to you and encourages you. Besides, I have treated the written Word of God itself as an authority far superior to any personal testimony.

May the Lord bless you as you read, and may this book provide a springboard for you to study these things for yourself.