



The Reflector

Published and edited monthly in the interest of calling people back to the Bible
by Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

August 2011

How Much Emphasis Should Be Given to Obeying God?

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that **obey** him; (Hebrews 5:8-9)

For your **obedience** is come abroad unto all men. I am glad therefore on your behalf:... (Romans 16:19)

O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not **obey** the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? (Galatians 3:1)

Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not **obey** the truth? (Galatians 5:7)

There is an element among us, who profess to be striving to follow the New Testament pattern in faith and practice, that has apparently decided that the root of most, if not all, of the bad found among the churches is our alleged over emphasis on obedience to God's commands and keeping His law. It has been said that this is the cause of the lack of love, judging others, comparing ourselves among ourselves, fear, and anxiety found among our members.

What is their remedy for this perceived sickness that has stunned our growth, both spiritually and numerically, for lo these many years? It is that we need to buy into their brand of grace and love. In their mind-set we cannot really reach our potential in the race set before us until we lay aside the weight of an obedience oriented gospel. Most of

these will testify of their own spiritual soaring above most of the rest of us now that they have discovered the cause of their past unhappiness as Christians.

Given the great amount of emphasis in the New Testament on obeying the gospel/truth we wonder where these fellows get the idea that our over-emphasis on obeying causes so much havoc in the church. Their frequent references to and quotations from denominational grace oriented writers gives us a pretty good idea. One would do well to remember that even in doctrinal matters that "evil company corrupts goods habits." (1 Corinthians 15:33 NKJV). One needs to spend more time with the Apostles and prophets and less time with some of the popular religious writers of today.

The net results of their new-found over-emphasis on grace and love has caused them to subscribe to the old Protestant doctrine of salvation by grace *only* without their even realizing it. The grace only doctrine is that our salvations is solely by grace with works being the fruit of our salvation/justification and *not any part of the cause of it.*

Here is a sample from the internet blog of a brother who has been pretty vocal in expressing his view that we have over-emphasized obedience and law.

"We don't carry out our marriage responsibilities to be married – we do them because we're already married and through

them we're expressing our love for our spouse. We don't do works to be saved – we do them because we're already saved and through them we're expressing our love for Christ.”

(Allen's Bible Resources,

<http://allenbibleresources.com/?p=4539&ref=nf>)

He certainly would not say that we are not saved by baptism. But this is the same language used by the grace/faith only teachers for years to deny that baptism (a work) is essential to salvation – i.e. baptism is a work that we do *because* we are saved and not *to be* saved. If this kind of thinking does not lead eventually to his denying baptism's saving us, it will more than likely influence others to adopt the grace only doctrine.

Now it will not do to say that by “works” they do not mean the *acts* we do in response to faith in order to become Christians, like repentance and baptism, but works we do after becoming Christians. Repentance and baptism are still *works* that we do to be saved not because we are saved. Even belief itself is a work that we must do. (John 6:28-29).

As to the works of obedience we do after becoming Christians, Paul clearly shows that they contribute to our salvation in the end:

“Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, *work out your own salvation* with fear and trembling.” (Philippians 2:12 – *Italics mine eob*).

He is speaking of our obedience as Christians and calls it “work(ing) out (our) own salvation.” So while we should do these works of obedience out of love *because* we have been saved from past sins, we also do them in *order to work out* eternal salvation. This is also done “with fear and trembling” – things that should not be in the life of a Christian according these brethren. This does not contradict Paul's statement about salvation being “not of works” in Ephesians 2:8-9. It is still not of works in the sense of perfect obedience or law keeping. God has ordained that those saved by

grace through faith should walk in good works (verse 10). These are good works in which we walk, having something to do with our eternal salvation. This is what Paul is writing about in the Philippians passage.

These brethren do not understand the biblical teaching on either grace or works.

Let's examine the New Testament teaching on grace. Grace is God's answer to sin, but not God's license to sin. The latter verses of Romans chapter 5 shows that grace is sufficient remedy for sin and the first verses of chapter 6 shows that it not a license to continue in sin:

“Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord. What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” (Romans 5:20 - 6:2)

Grace is no excuse for relaxing our diligence to keep the law of God. Nor is it an excuse for not having a healthy fear of breaking God's law. Without grace there would be no relief from sin – law breaking. Grace relieves our fears and anxieties about sin because we know if we sin (and we all do) we have an Advocate with the Father in Jesus Christ (1 John 1:7-2:1). But, it does not relieve us of any of our responsibility to give all diligence to avoid sin. We are told to “avoid every form of evil.” We are warned if we go on sinning wilfully that we insult the spirit of grace. (Hebrews 10:26-29 NASB). What if one wilfully relaxes his efforts to avoid sin? That would get precariously close to sinning wilfully.

I have been trying to preach “the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24) since 1954. I have heard it preached by many others over those years. I have not seen the neglect in emphasizing grace that many of these brethren see. I have preached and heard brethren preach the need to deny ungodliness and worldly lust and to live soberly,

righteously and godly in this present world which the Bible says the grace of God teaches us (Titus 2:11-12). We have taught that Christians show their love to Jesus by observing all things he has commanded us (cf. 1 John 5:4; Matt. 28:19, 20). We have urged Christians to be careful to avoid all sin, just as Paul did. All in the context of love for God and the need to obey him. We have tried to preach as Paul wrote to the Ephesians:

“Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour. But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them.” (Ephesians 5:1-7)

Now such warnings against disobedience and the wrath of God would not fit into the prescribed preaching pattern of these new grace oriented brethren. Seems to me that Paul was pretty balanced. He preached following God as dear children and to walk in love as Jesus loved us. He also emphasized Christ's great act of mercy and grace by offering himself a sacrifice to God for our sins. But he also warns of the consequences of disobeying God by committing sin, naming many of them, and sternly warning that by doing such things they would bring God's wrath upon them as children of disobedience.

From my observation this has been the pattern of our teaching and preaching for all these many years. In all of this we have been very careful not to encourage people to relax their attitude toward strict obedience to God and trying to please him. We have urged people to give all diligence to make

their calling and election sure by avoiding sin at all cost and when they do succumb to temptation and sin, then the grace of God is available to pardon their sin.

We have urged brethren to serve God out of both love and fear. Not love only nor fear only, but both. Jesus taught both as legitimate motives to serve and obey. He said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments.” (John 14:15). He also said, “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” (Matthew 10:28) We see no reason to put either motive on the back burner, because there is room for them both on the front burner.

Now to the matters of “works.” The confusion over works is due to not understanding the different kinds of works of which the Bible speaks. For example, the Bible declares in one place that Abraham was not justified by works and in another place that he was justified by works. (Romans 4:2; James 2:21). Either this is a contradiction or there are different kinds of works. In Romans, he was not justified by works of the law or works that would earn him justification, making God obligated to him as a matter of debt. But in James, he was justified by works of faith. The Hebrew writers says by faith, Abraham obeyed (Hebrews 11:8).

No one that I know among gospel preachers has ever taught or implied one can be saved by works in the sense of perfect law keeping. No one has ever kept the works of law perfectly. When the law is broken (sin), keeping all the rest of the law cannot erase the sin. The only way that salvation could be of works in this sense is through perfect law keeping. This does not happen, hence it is not of works, but of grace that takes away the results of broken law, sin. But we must respond to that grace with an obedient faith. A faith that works by meeting the conditions of pardon. A faith that leads to repentance, confession and baptism. (Roman 10:8-17; Acts 2:38). After being pardoned,

faith leads one to walk in the light by “avoid(ing) every form of evil,” “serv(ing) God acceptably with reverence and godly fear,” and “do(ing) good to all men.” When one falls short in that effort his faith leads him to avail himself of God’s grace by turning to God in repentance and confession of sins with the assurance that God is faithful to forgive him. In this manner one continues to be saved by the grace of God. But if he continues in sin, he will be lost.

I hope brethren, especially young minds, will not be sucked into this bogus grace oriented concept in their desire to reach new heights of spirituality and joy in serving the Lord and relax their vigilance in being ready unto every good work and to avoid sin at all cost. True spirituality and joy can only be found in doing all you can to please God by not sinning against Him with the knowledge that, when you do sin, you have an Advocate with the Father in the person of Jesus Christ whereby you can be forgiven. (1 John 2:1). And remember after you have done all he has commanded you still have no right to boast: “*So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.*” (Luke 17:10)■

Fun, Fun, Fun

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

One of the symptoms of our hedonistic society is that people seek to avoid anything that is not “fun.” Persecution is no fun, so people avoid standing for any principles of truth that might result in it. Hardship is no fun, so people avoid pursuing any cause that might cause them to suffer hardship for the greater good – in fact, to the hedonist, fun is the greater good.

There is no fun in struggle and toil, so any pursuit, no matter how beneficial its object, that requires either is to be avoided. To the hedonist, doing something solely out a sense of duty or just

because it is the right thing to do is foolishness. It must be either intrinsically fun or can somehow be made to be fun.

As a result, even with some professed Christians, fun becomes what life are all about. Commitment means nothing. Fun means everything. If one perceives that his/her marriage is no longer fun then by all means get out of it. If a job is not fun, no matter how well it makes it possible for one to care for his own (1 Tim. 5:8), then quit it even if it means he has to look to charity to provide what it is his duty to provide.

Instant gratification is part of the hedonistic package. Accepting temporary toil and hardship, in anticipation of the future joy of having accomplished one’s goal, is out of step with hedonism. We must experience the joy now. He finds little or no pleasure in anticipation of future reward.

Education must be made fun. Serious study and hard work must be eliminated.

Worship must be made fun, rather than a time for sober reflection about spiritual things,. But, such serious reflection is no fun. So, if a large portion of the worship service, the singing and the sermon, is not fun, then some serious adjustments must be made or some members will start agitating for someone who will make it so. Or, they will start looking around for some place to attend where it is fun. Or, they may just use it as an excuse to stay home or go to for Sunday joy ride.■

But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. (Matthew 12:36)

And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. (Revelation 20:12-13)
