



The Reflector

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Should Christians Perpetually Lament Their “Unworthiness”?

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The rash of going out of the way, by some super-spiritual elitists, to emphasize how worthless and undone they still feel after they have been made new creatures in Christ, is possibly rooted in Calvinistic concepts – especially the doctrine of the imputed righteousness of Christ. This doctrine allows one to still be a worthless sinner while God graciously imputes the righteous life of Christ to his account. While the man himself is still a vile sinner, God does not judge him so because He only sees the righteousness of Christ which He has spread over the filthy sinner – leaving him a sinner under the cover of Christ’s righteousness. Thus it is supposed to be a sign of great humility to magnify how sinful, unworthily and undone one feels even as he enjoys fellowship with God.

Isaiah 64:6 is often cited as proof that *all* of a Christian’s righteous acts of obedience are but “filthy rags” and are so considered by God. But, this passage is teaching no such thing. The passage is not speaking of how God *generally* views the righteous acts of obedience of his people. It is in the midst of a prayer on behalf of Israel that Isaiah started in chapter 53:15 and continues through chapter 64. In the verse before us, he is contritely confessing the wickedness that had taken them away from God. They were so polluted with sin that even their “righteousnesses” (plural) or righteous deeds were as filthy rags. When one turns away from hearing the Lord and becomes ungodly in his way of life, as Israel had, then even his sacrifices and prayers (righteous deeds) are an abomination to the Lord (Prov. 15:8; 28:9) – even as filthy rags. That was the state of Israel that needed rectifying. If they turned back to hearing the Lord, then their righteousnesses (righteous deeds), like offering sacrifices and prayers would no longer be as “filthy rags,” but as a sweet aroma.

(Cf. Lev. 1:9).

In fact, continual self-bashing is a slam on God’s workmanship in making us over by the power of the gospel. Before Christ came into our lives we *were* nobodies (“not a people”), but he has made us into somebodies (people of God). (See 1 Peter 2:10) We are not self-made but God-made. We *were* the servants of sin but he has made us into the servant of righteousness. It is neither arrogant nor self-righteous, but an expression of gratitude, to point out what we are after God’s make-over. We are now new creatures. There is no need to retain a sack cloth and ashes breast beating mentality but lift up our eyes in thankful recognition of what we have become by the power of God. Accept His gracious forgiveness and praise Him for our becoming who we are by His power working in us. We should even urge others to become such as we are (cf. Acts 26:29). When it comes to Christians, the operative is “**were**” when it comes to being worthless sinners (cf. Rom. 5:8, 19; 1 Cor. 6:11). But, **now** we are **vessels unto honor**.

In just a few verses we see what we are now by the power of God. Please note the words and phrases that I have placed in bold letters:

“If a man therefore purge himself from these, **he shall be a vessel unto honour**, sanctified, and **meet for the master’s use**, and prepared unto every good work.” (2 Timothy 2:21 KJV)

“You also, as **living stones**, are being built up a **spiritual house**, a **holy priesthood**, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 2:5 NKJV)

“But you are a **chosen generation**, a **royal priesthood**, a **holy nation**, His own **special people**, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;” (1 Peter 2:9 NKJV)

“And has made us **kings** and **priests** to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” (Revelation 1:6 NKJV)

“You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for **they are worthy.**” (Revelation 3:4 NKJV)

Praise be to God for what he has made us to be! “To Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen” (Revelation 1:16).

Yes, even the most faithful Christians still sin at times, but they do not make it their practice. They correct it as they go rather than wallowing in either the guilt or practice of it (1 John 1:7-10).

I prefer to praise God for what *He* has made me into, even making me *His* workmanship, rather than glorying in *my* “great humility.” ■

Are Grace and Law Mutually Exclusive?

Jonathan L. Perz

An oft-repeated, though poorly-conceived, notion is that Christians must relate to God through an avenue of grace, rather than law. Says who? Are grace and law mutually exclusive? Are grace and law an either/or proposition? If so, by what standard do we make this claim?

First of all, is it possible to relate to God through both grace and law simultaneously? I wholeheartedly believe it is not only possible, it is necessary.

Under both the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, in every age of man, grace and law are interdependent. Law teaches us right from wrong (cf. Gen. 2:16-17a; Deut. 11; Rom. 3:20; 7:7). Law teaches us the consequences of right and wrong (cf. Gen. 2:17b; Lev. 26-28; Rom. 2:5-11). Law is the standard of judgment (cf. Gen. 3:8-24; Ex. 24:3-8; John 12:48-50). Whereas, grace is that free, but conditional, gift God gives us to atone for and find forgiveness of our sins so that we will not have to face the consequences of them (cf. Gen. 3:21-24; Lev. 17:11; Heb. 9:6-10:10; also Rom. 5:9; Jer. 31:31-34; Rom. 4:7; Heb.8:12; 10:17).

Grace and law are both given of God. The very idea of justice is rooted in law (cf. Prov. 31:5; Isa. 51:4-5; Hab. 1:4; Matt. 23:23). The very idea of God’s grace is rooted in justice (cf. Rom. 3:24-26; Tit. 3:7). They are not independent, but interdependent. To suggest we must view God

through one and not the other is like accepting only the goodness of God, while rejecting the severity of God (Rom. 11:22). It is like accepting Jesus as full of grace, but rejecting that He is simultaneously full of truth (John 1:14). It is like accepting Jesus as Savior, but not as Lord (2 Pet. 3:18).

Without law, how would we know God’s grace? Where there is no law, there is no sin (1 John 3:4; Rom 5:13). It is law that not only teaches us how to obtain grace (cf. Mark 16:15-16; Rom. 1:16-17; Acts 2:38; 1 John 1:8-9), it is the violation of law (sin) that causes us to appreciate God’s grace (Rom. 6:1, 15, 23; 1 John 2:1-2). If we only view God through the prism of His grace, we will find that grace pretty bland because we won’t see or appreciate our need for it. But then again, we would not find God’s grace at all except by the law, for it is there that God instructs us about His grace and the conditions of obtaining it.

Nevertheless, in light of all of this, someone might still be foolish enough to argue, “You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law: you have fallen from grace” (Gal. 5:4). Is Paul telling us in this passage to view God through the avenue of grace and not law (generally)? Or is Paul actually talking to a group of first century Christians who are trying to find justification by the law of Moses? The context suggests that Paul was not speaking of all law, but a law—the law of Moses (see Gal. 5:1-6 in light of Acts 15:1-5). To generalize this passage is to twist it, and it is not even a difficult passage to understand in the first place (2 Pet. 3:16).

The reason they could not be justified by the law of Moses was because the covenant that Moses’ law was a part of is no longer in force (Heb. 9:16-22), since Christ fulfilled it (Matt. 5:17-18; cf. Gal. 3:19-29). The blood of animals could not save them because God always intended for His Offering to save them (Heb. 10:1-10; John 1:29). The law could not save them because they would not live by all of the law (Gal. 3:10-14; 5:3; Jas. 2:10). So, it is a false doctrine that suggests from Galatians 5:4, and passages like it, that grace and law (generally) are mutually exclusive, and that Christians must learn to view God through an avenue of grace, and not law!

Thus, rather than trying to draw a line between law and grace, we need to view grace and law as

symbiotic, or having a relationship of mutual benefit or dependence. For the righteous, God's law brings joy, peace and salvation. For the unrighteous, God's law brings fear, turmoil, and condemnation. For everyone, God's grace brought Jesus His Son, and the continual, but conditional, cleansing of His blood (John 3:16; 1 John 1:8-9). Praise God for His wonderful gift of grace and His amazing law that is light—that lamp unto our feet (cf. Prov. 6:23; Psa. 119:105)! ■

That Suddenly Uncomfortable Cheerleading Uniform J. S. Smith

Parents in Southern California are understandably disturbed that videos of their teenage daughters cavorting about in sexually tantalizing clothing have been showing up for sale on the Internet auction site e-Bay. That's not exactly how the news media begin their reports on the story, but still it is a pretty fair assessment of the situation.

Some lecherous entrepreneur carries his camcorder to high school football games, blending in among the band parents and middle-aged dads reliving their own gridiron glory vicariously through their sons on the field. Lecherous Entrepreneur, however, is not taping the trombonist or right tackle; surreptitiously, his lens is zoomed in on the young girls in miniskirts and belly-bearing tops as they perform gymnastic and dance routines which expose more and more of their desirable flesh. Immoral? Yes. Unjustified? Of course. Exploitative? Obviously. Criminal? Apparently not.

Prosecutors in Southern California would just love to go after this guy, even more forcefully than the investigative reporters who track him down through his Post Office box. The trouble is that there is nothing illegal about videotaping people in public places. He was not peeping through their bathroom windows or hanging out around the locker room. Every detail captured on his camcorder was performed in public before thousands of people.

One family sat down with their cheerleader daughter, and an intrepid reporter, with a copy of the \$70 videotape. "You can feel the discomfort in the room and see it on their faces because for the

first time they're seeing their child through the eyes of someone else," reports Ana Garcia. Lecherous Entrepreneur has trained his trusty lens "on their mouths, breasts and crotches, freezing shots under their skirts, during kicks and splits."

But there is a short-circuit in everybody's indignation. Lecherous Entrepreneur did not manipulate the video to make it appear these girls were doing things they were not. He did not digitally place their pure heads upon the borrowed bodies of Vegas Showgirls. These young girls performed every suggestive motion and exposed every inch of flesh caught on tape. Mom says, "I don't want that out on the Internet. This is really upsetting to me." Granted the video brings the viewer up close and more personal with her daughter than a spectator would ordinarily get at the football stadium, but, again, the sights that sicken her are on display every Friday night for any pervert with binoculars or a front row seat. And if \$70 a pop can be made, apparently legally, on this kind of smut, rest assured that Lecherous Entrepreneur will have company this fall...at a football field near you.

The moral issue with cheerleading is not the leading of cheers, and in its infancy, cheerleading was a rather wholesome celebration of school spirit and youthful beauty. It has evolved through the incorporation of gymnastics and racy costumes to something that is the epitome of lewdness. The uniform skirt has steadily crept up the leg to the point that it affords little coverage to begin with and practically none when the cheerleader moves even slightly, let alone when she performs flips, splits and tosses. The uniform top has likewise shrunk to the point that it exposes the belly and accentuates the chest, much to the delight of Lecherous Entrepreneur and his satisfied customers. Cheerleading has become something of a misnomer. Few spectators are actually willing to be led in cheers by the young women who spend most of their time performing dangerous gymnastics or often racy dance routines.

In spite of its roots in school spirit and extracurricular participation, modern cheerleading traffics in immodesty and lewdness which cannot be sustained under the New Testament. The Holy Spirit's desire is that women "adorn themselves in modest apparel...which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works," having

long ago warned that a “lovely woman who lacks discretion” is like a swine with a gold ring in its snout (I Timothy 2:8-10; Proverbs 11:22). She should be defined instead by the hidden person of her heart, having the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit (I Peter 3:4).

The indecent bodily movements of the modern cheerleader suggest sexual invitation to the young, weak or perverted heart (Galatians 5:19-21). The private and more alluring parts of her anatomy are exposed, emphasized and animated in an enticing fashion which only a fool would deny.

After seeing herself on the e-Bay video, one cheerleader complained, “I won’t feel comfortable going out on the football field in my uniform again. You have no clue who is watching you and for what reason.” True -- but that is the case with or without a camcorder in the hands of Lecherous Entrepreneur. Is this what it takes to get through to the people -- many of them Christians -- who condone or encourage cheerleading today? ■

Via: LaVista church of Christ Website
<http://www.lavistachurchofchrist.org/>

Let’s Rejoice That Christ Is Preached

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“Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and some also of good will: the one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: but the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defense of the gospel. What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretense, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice and will rejoice” (Phil. 1:15-18).

We wish that everyone who preaches Christ were sincere, but all are not. In every age people have attached themselves to the cause of Christ for ulterior reasons. It was so in the age of Paul, it is so in our age. We know preachers whom we strongly suspect are preaching for reasons other than a real love for souls, love for God and love for His kingdom. It cannot be doubted that love of money, love of being “looked up to”, love of publicity, love of argumentation (for its mental exercise alone) and such like, likely lures some into preaching the gospel. But even here there is some cause to rejoice, if Christ is indeed preached. If the truth of Christ is preached in its fulness and purity, we can rejoice as Paul did in our text.

We wonder if too much time and energy is not

wasted in trying to figure out what makes this or that brother “tick”. If we are not careful we will focus so much attention upon *why* one preaches that we will miss *what* he preaches. Let’s not rob ourselves of good lessons because we may suspect the preacher to be less than sincere. He may well be. If he is, he cannot be defended in his insincerity and God will judge him for it – but the truth that he preaches is still the truth and will make one free.

Good can come from *truth* preached, even by insincere persons. If one hears and obeys the truth from the heart – he will be saved regardless of the motives of the proclaimer. In this we can rejoice and will rejoice.

On the other hand, no good can come from error preached, even by sincere men. My brethren often become incensed at our attacks upon error in and out of the church, because of the apparent sincerity of its proclaimer. If one believes and obeys error – he is lost regardless of the sincerity of the preacher (2 Thess. 2:11,12). In this we can find no room for rejoicing. ■

