

Abused And Disgraced Grace

Abused and disgraced grace can be described as using the great New Testament teaching on God's grace as an *excuse* for disobedience to any of His New Testament commands about godly, righteous daily living and as an excuse for not turning from our known sins.

There are various forms of the abused grace false "*gospel*" – some more extreme than others, but all having a similar evil root. Abused disgraced grace refers to the wicked perversion of the glorious Gospel of grace as a supposed licence or justification for regular deliberate sinning.

Jude 4 refers to a situation in which the continual deliberate sinning of churchgoers in sexual matters was *excused* by misusing the New Testament teaching on God's grace. 2 Peter 2:18-22 speaks of false teachers in the Early Church who taught a form of abused grace based on a misinterpretation of our freedom in Christ.

In Matthew 23:25-28, Jesus strongly attacked *religious hypocrisy* which *whitewashes sin*. Abusing God's grace is one form of such religious hypocrisy. 1 Peter 2:1 commands all believers to rid themselves of *all* hypocrisy.

An example of churchgoers using God's grace as an excuse for sin is as follows: A pastor friend told me how he counselled a young couple, who were living de-facto, to either marry or separate. They answered he had no right to say this because they "were under God's grace, not the Law".

In Titus 2:11-14, Paul says: "***For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age...Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.***" One of the reasons God's grace was expressed to us so we can say "No" to all ungodly sinful thoughts and behaviour and so we can live self-controlled, godly lives.

In Romans 6:1-2 and 15, Paul attacks the abusing of God's grace. Romans 6:1-2 says: "***What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?***" Romans 6:15 declares: "***What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!***" One reason God was gracious to us was so we can defeat sin.

"Neither do I condemn you, go and sin some more"

There are many who do not relate God's grace to godly holy living. They seem to imagine that when Jesus said to the woman caught in adultery, "***Neither do I condemn you; go and sin NO MORE***" (see John 8:11) that He really meant, "Neither do I condemn you; go and deliberately *sin some more*". They have the ridiculous notion God's grace is given as some sort of religious excuse for their continued enjoyment of sin.

Jesus' words "***go and sin no more***" meant "turn from your known sins immediately and continue to do so in the future".

God's grace must lead to repentance

In Romans 2:3-5, Paul declares: *“And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgement of God. Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgement of God.”* God's undeserved goodness, kindness and grace must lead to repentance.

The word “repentance” means a change of heart attitudes about God, Jesus Christ, unbelief, faith, sin in general and specific known sins. True repentance involves planning not to commit the sin again. It does not involve the common attitude of “I *never* want to do this sin again...*tonight*”.

If we only intend to not do the sin tonight, we have not fully repented. If, however, we do not intend to do it later but still fall into it again, this is different.

Judas

Judas Iscariot is a classic example of someone who abused God's grace. For about three years, Judas experienced the enormous love, grace, mercy and total acceptance of Jesus Christ. Jesus also gave Judas supernatural power and the anointing of the Holy Spirit to heal every kind of disease, to raise people from the dead and to cast demons out of others (see Matthew 10:1-8). Judas was one of the most powerful ministries at the time. But he ruined himself and his ministry by his slack attitude to sin.

Rasputin – a classic example of God's grace being abused

A classic example of God's grace being abused can be seen in the life of Grigorii Rasputin, a so-called “holy man” who exercised great influence in Russia in the reign of Tsar Nicholas II. Rasputin had miraculous powers working in his life. He was supernaturally able to know what other people had said about him far from where he was and to heal a number of sick individuals.¹

Rasputin was praised for some of his sermons. Here is an excerpt of one of his sermons:

*“Salvation is in God. You can't take a step without God...After church pray and go out of town into the fields. Go on and on until Petersburg is out of sight and there is open horizon ahead. Then stop and think about yourself, how insignificant and helpless you are, and you will find the capital will shrink to an ant heap peopled by ants. What then becomes of your pride, power, riches and position? And you will feel pitiful, unwanted, useless. Then you will look up and you will see God and feel with all your heart that the Lord God is your only father, that only God the Father needs your soul and only to Him will you surrender it. He alone will support and help you.”*²

When commenting on this sermon, a listener said:

¹ Alex De Jonge, “The Life and Times of Grigorii Rasputin”, Collins, London, 1982, pages 146-148.

² Ibid, page 169.

*"I have heard many sermons of great substance, but can remember none of them. The sermon Rasputin preached fifteen years ago I remember to this day..."*³

Rasputin preached a simple faith in which *love* was seen as more important than intellect, doctrine or ritual. Here is an example of his comments on love:

*"If you love you will never kill; all commandments are subservient to love, it contains all wisdom, greater than Solomon's, and love alone is real, all the rest is scattered fragments, through love alone can heaven be reached."*⁴

If he was still alive Rasputin would possibly have been a popular preacher in Western countries because of his emphasis on love, healing and miracles and his minimising of the importance of God's other commands.⁵ Like many modern followers of *situational ethics*, Rasputin spoke much of the love commands but did not emphasise God's other specific New Testament commands as being expressions of such love.

Rasputin had and taught some attitudes to the grace of God, sin and repentance which were wicked. Like the people mentioned in Jude 4, he used God's grace as a licence for sin. In many houses, Rasputin convinced young girls or women to allow him to share their bed with him, supposedly in order to increase their resistance to sexual sin.

He warned various village girls to be careful not to be seduced by pilgrims. Supposedly in order to protect them from being seduced, he would urge them to let him kiss them continually until they were disgusted with kissing. He claimed if these women fell into sin during such times, their guilt would be forgiven by repentance and confession of sin to him. Then in order to test their repentance, he would invite them to have a bath with him in the nude.

Rasputin persuaded his female disciples to have a bath with him supposedly to assist them in their struggles against temptation. He would invite these women to wash and scrub him. Then he would kiss and fondle them, claiming this would increase their resistance against the sinful sexual advances of other men.

Sometimes, Rasputin would teach his unbiblical wicked view of repentance. He would tell his female disciples that sin was the first necessary stage on the path to repentance. De Jonge quotes a contemporary journalist's comments on Rasputin's behaviour:

*"All Rasputin's disciples sincerely believed in his power, his teaching and its basic rule that without sin there can be no repentance; repentance is pleasing unto God; in order to repent you must sin in the first place."*⁶

In the following quote, Akulina Laptinskaya, Rasputin's servant for many years describes Rasputin's usage of the New Testament teaching on grace in order to justify his sexual sins:

*"He would be surrounded by his admirers, with whom he also slept. He would do his thing with them quite openly and without shame. He would caress them...and when he or they felt like it he would simply take them into his study and do his business...I often heard his views, a mixture of religion and debauchery. He would sit there and give instructions to his female admirers. 'Do you think that I degrade you? I don't degrade you, I purify you.' That was his basic idea. He also used the word 'grace', meaning that by sleeping with him a woman came into the grace of God."*⁷

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid, page 195.

⁵ Note I believe God wants to heal and perform miracles today in Jesus' Name.

⁶ Ibid, page 170.

⁷ Ibid.

Rasputin's life is a tragic example of how easily the Biblical teaching on God's grace can be abused and *cheapened down to the level of the gutter*. Like many other heretics who misuse God's grace, he also believed in the wonderful Biblical teachings on confession of sin, God's forgiveness and His great love for us, as Rasputin's following words dictated by him to a woman indicate:

*"Rejoice in simplicity, woe to the rebellious and the wicked, the sun warms them not...Forgive me Lord, I am a sinner. I am worldly, and my love is a worldly love. Lord, work miracles; humble us. We are thine. Great is Thy Love for us, do not be angry with us. Send obedience to my soul and the joy of Your Love and Grace. Save and help me O Lord."*⁸

Old Testament examples of abused disgraced grace

The prophet Jeremiah spoke of an Old Testament example of abused disgraced grace in Jeremiah 7:9-11: ***"Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know, and then come and stand before me in this house which is called by My name, and say; we are delivered to do all these abominations'? 'Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of thieves in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen it,' says the Lord.*"** These religious people thought God has delivered them in order that they could continue to steal, commit adultery, murder, lie and worship idols.

Isaiah 1:11-17 records the Lord spoke strong words to many people who regularly participated in many God-ordained religious gatherings but who refused to turn from their known sins.

Charles Finney met many abusers of God's grace and love

In the 1800's in the United States, the great evangelist Charles Finney knew of many churchgoers who used Jesus' love and the Gospel of grace as an excuse for their sins. He said: *"I have been amazed to see how a certain class of professors want ministers to be always preaching about the love of Christ. If a minister urges Christians to be holy, and to labour for Christ, they call it 'legal' preaching. They say they want to hear the Gospel. Well, suppose you present the love of Christ. How will they bear testimony in their lives? How will they show that they believe it? Why, by conformity to the world they will testify point-blank, that they do not believe a word of it, and that they care nothing at all for the love of Christ, only to have it for a cloak, that they can talk about it, and so cover up their sins."*⁹

The abused grace attitude to God's New Testament commands

In Western countries today, there are many Christians who have a poor understanding of the Biblical teachings about works of law and the differences between grace and legalism. As a result, they are easy prey for falling into disgraced grace – the opposite error to legalism.

Followers of disgraced grace do not mind teaching about the New Testament commands about loving God and loving other people, but they only talk about these in a wishy-washy

⁸ Ibid, pages 224-225.

⁹ Charles Finney, "Revival Lectures", Fleming H. Revell, Old Tappan, New Jersey, page 161.

general sense. They do not like teaching from New Testament verses which give more specific applications of the general commands about love.

But note this is not how the Apostle Paul operated. He revealed that loving others is the general command God has given for New Testament believers. But he also gave God-inspired New Testament commands which are *specific applications* of the general command to love others. For example, in Romans 12:9-13:13 – verses which surround and include the Romans 13:8 and 13:10 mentions of the general command to love – Paul gave specific commands about how love is manifested in practical living. Paul commanded us:

- to help those in need (see Romans 12:9),
- be hospitable (Romans 12:13),
- bless and not curse others (12:14),
- not be proud or conceited (12:16),
- not repay evil with evil (12:17),
- live at peace with others and not take revenge (12:17-21),
- submit to God-ordained authorities (13:1-6),
- pay taxes (13:7),
- not commit adultery or murder (13:9),
- not steal, lie or be greedy (13:9),
- avoid drunkenness, sexual immorality, lust or greedy desires, quarrelling and envy (13:13).

In Colossians 3:14, Paul again commanded us to love others. But observe in the preceding verses – Colossians 3:5-13, he gave a number of commands which are *specific applications* of the more general love command. These specific commands are:

- not to sin through sex outside marriage, filthy attitudes to sex, evil desires or greed (Colossians 3:5), anger, malice, filthy language (3:8) and lying (3:9)
- and to be merciful, kind, humble, meek or longsuffering (3:12), patient and forgiving (3:13).

Not only Paul gave specific applications of the general love command. James did it also. In James 2:1-9, James applied the love commandment to the specific situation of not showing favouritism to richer people.

One reason for the spread of the abused grace heresy

One reason why many modern Evangelicals, Charismatics and Pentecostals in Western countries are open to the abused grace heresy is they were brought up in legalistic churches previously. Because they were so glad to be freed from the bondages of legalism, they have now leant towards the other extreme – abused grace.

Paul's wonderful balance

There are two wrong extremes in the Church. There are those overly-mystical people who love talking about being filled with the Holy Spirit in ways not related to practical

obedience to New Testament commands and teachings. They hate New Testament “dos” and “don’ts”. These “Holy Ghost swingers” love spiritual experiences but abuse God’s grace and live compromising hypocritical lives. Then there are those legalistic people who love Biblical “dos” and “don’ts” but hate any emphasis on experiencing being filled, ruled by and transformed daily by the Holy Spirit.

Paul was not like either of these extreme groups. He was Biblically balanced. Ephesians 4:25-5:18 expresses this wonderful balance in Paul’s teaching. In Ephesians 5:18, Paul stresses we must be filled and ruled by the Holy Spirit. But in surrounding verses, he balances this out by giving a *list* of “dos” and “don’ts” which relate to practical moral living.

A “lovey-dovey” humanistic type of Pentecostalism

A few years ago, one of my Bible College students told me of his past experiences in a very large Pentecostal church in Australia. He said this group was successful in having many unchurched people attend its larger gatherings and home meetings. The church had found many good ways to establish relationships with unbelievers. But tragically, the leaders of this church had only a very minor emphasis in its ministry to believers and unbelievers on their need to turn from their known sins.

This church believed unbelievers needed to hear only about God’s love, grace and mercy. The leadership of this church did not think the unsaved should be told about their sins, God’s anger against their sins, their need of repentance in their hearts at conversion and the importance of the fruits of repentance in their daily post-conversion living. Because of God’s grace, some unbelievers were converted despite hearing such a one-sided imbalanced version of the Gospel.

But there were tragic results of such “lovey dovey” humanistic attitudes. For example, some so-called “believers” from this church still smoked marijuana after being supposedly converted 2 to 3 years earlier. Two of these “believers” used to say that a person can still be saved while *continuously practicing* things like homosexuality and taking drugs. They said proof of this was they knew of a Christian man who had sex with a non-churchgoing male. While having sex with this fellow, the first guy preached his watered-down version of the Gospel to the other. As a result, the other guy was supposedly converted and began to attend church regularly.

The two “believers” mentioned previously said this event proved God can bring others to Himself through what other Christians regard as sin. In other words, they believed in the wicked pagan philosophy of *the end justifies the means*.

The attitude that only results are important is a *doctrine devised by devils*. In Romans 3:8, Paul condemned this false idea: “***And why not say, ‘Let us do evil that good may come’? – as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say. Their condemnation is just.***”

God is concerned about both what is done to bring about the results and the results themselves.

It is little wonder Pastor Neil Miers, the leader of a Pentecostal denomination in Australia – the Christian Outreach Centres – warned in 1996, “*We are living in a day where there*

seems to be hardly any difference between the Church and the world. People can commit immorality and think nothing of it".¹⁰

These sin-compromising "believers" at the above Pentecostal church insisted that only the Holy Spirit can rebuke or correct believers and unbelievers. They said church leaders should never rebuke or correct others about their sins. But this attitude is contrary to Luke 3:19, 1 Thessalonians 5:12, 1 Timothy 5:19-21, 2 Timothy 4:2, Titus 1:9, 1:13-14 and 2:15.

Romans 15:14 refers to all believers admonishing or warning or reproving other believers gently: "***Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.***" The verb "***admonish***" here in the original Greek New Testament means "to admonish someone for having done something wrong...to advise someone concerning the dangerous consequences of some happening or action".¹¹ Vine said that the Greek word for "***admonish***": "is used, (a) of instruction, (b) of warning. It...has mainly in view the things that are wrong and call for warning..."¹²

Admonishing involves saying something is wrong and warning about the bad natural or spiritual consequences of such wrong.

Colossians 3:16, 1 Thessalonians 3:15 and 2 Thessalonians 3:15 also refer to admonishing.

The means used to silence those who question their teachings

One common means which liberal preachers of abused grace use to try to prevent anyone challenging their teachings is by saying that doing so is "touching the Lord's anointed" or "resisting the work of the Holy Spirit". Usually threats of divine judgement are made by these preachers against anyone who challenges their false teachings and lifestyles.

The Biblical concept of touching the Lord's anointed in its original context has nothing to do with Biblically examining and disagreeing with the teachings and lifestyles of various preachers. 1 Samuel 26:7-12 reveals the Lord's anointed means physically murdering someone who was in a God-ordained position of authority.

Note 2 Samuel 12:1-14 records Nathan the prophet was led by God to *publicly* rebuke the wrong behaviour of David, the Lord's anointed. Nathan did not commit the sin of touching the Lord's anointed by doing this.

Another means used by abused grace teachers to silence all those who challenge their sin-justifying ideas is to label all their opponents as legalists.

Churches which abuse God's grace can attract many churchgoers

The teaching and preaching of abused grace sometimes results in large numbers in the short term in those churches who follow its sinful attitudes. This is because compromising with the world and the flesh attracts many who want the *benefits* of a relationship with Jesus Christ but not many of the *responsibilities* associated with such a relationship.

¹⁰ "Outreach" magazine, June-July 1996, Christian Outreach Centre, Mansfield, Queensland, Australia, page 5.

¹¹ Louw and Nida, pages 436-437.

¹² Vine, page 13.

But in the long term, abused grace teachings never produce large revival and masses of sound converts who regularly walk in the Holy Spirit.

The main problem of the last days

In 2 Timothy 3:1-5, Paul prophesied that the main problem in the church in the last days will be a liberal abused grace attitude: ***“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!”***

The people mentioned in these verses are *religious*. They *love religion*. Also, these “Holy Ghost playboys and playgirls” love their sins, selfish pleasures and entertainments far more than they love God.

Sometimes, we think only legalistic people are religious in a wrong way. But liberal abused grace people are usually very religious in their own way also. Note in Acts 17:22, Paul told the Athenians they were ***“very religious”***. Many of these Athenians were involved in various forms of sexual immorality, idolatry and other blatant sins. So it is possible to live a very liberal sinful life and be classified by God as “very religious”.

Bible Study Questions

1. What does it mean to abuse and disgrace God’s grace?
2. Explain the full meaning of Jesus’ Words in John 8:11.
3. What does Romans 2:3-5 teach us about the relationship between God’s grace and repentance?
4. What was wrong with Rasputin’s attitudes and practices?
5. What was wrong with the attitudes of the religious Jews Jeremiah wrote about in Jeremiah 7:9-11?
6. Did Paul only command us to love others? Or did he also give other commands which are specific applications of this love command?
7. What does 1 Samuel 26:7-12 reveal that touching the Lord’s anointed is?
8. What does 2 Timothy 3:1-5 predict will be the main problem in the Church in the last days?
9. Being religious in a wrong way can involve legalism. What other extreme can it involve?