

Where's the Grace?

Joseph Smith never understood the gospel of Christ. And so he attempted to replace it with his own brand of Old Testament style legalism.

My wife, Leslie, taught at a Jewish synagogue school in Los Angeles for 13 years. A fellow teacher once traveled to Texas for a wedding and returned with a question. "Leslie, what is this Christian thing with grace?" When Leslie asked what prompted her question, she replied, "We saw a number of Christian churches while we were there, and many of them had 'Grace' in their name. We figured it must be a significant Christian concept." What a wonderful opening! Leslie then did her best to explain the Christian gospel of grace. But the concept never seemed to register. You see, this woman was a very observant Jew. She kept a strict kosher home, religiously kept the Jewish Sabbath and invited us to a festive Jewish ceremony where her husband circumcised their newborn son. No wonder Leslie's explanation of grace never registered; there is no room in such a system for the Grace of Christ. This is why Jesus abolished their system.

But this woman was right when she observed that grace must be a significant Christian concept. In fact, grace is the very *essence* of Christ's gospel, as Paul says, "For it is by *grace* you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the *gift* of God — not by works, so that no one can boast" (Eph. 2:8–9). Interestingly, the Greek word for grace, *charis*, may also be translated *gift*. That's why Paul also describes salvation this way, "For the wages of sin is death, but the *gift* of God is *eternal life* in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). Accordingly, he had dedicated his entire life to "testifying to the gospel of God's *grace*" (Acts 20:24). Time and again the New Testament makes clear that Jesus' gospel of salvation is in fact a *gift*, which can never be merited or earned through works of legalism. We honor God by simply trusting Him and accepting His gracious offer. Period. Consequently, there is no room for legalism in the gospel of Christ. The inseparability of *grace* and *gospel* is the reason *grace* appears in the New Testament 123 times!

Joseph Smith's emphasis, however, is exactly opposite of that found in the New Testament. In his Doctrine & Covenants (D&C) for example, Joseph Smith mentions *grace* 26 times, but *law(s)* 75 times – nearly 3 times as much! And 3 additional times he characterizes God as the church's *lawgiver*. When Joseph Smith does mention grace, it is mostly lip-service in order to make his pronouncements sound more Biblical. Most of the time grace is simply an attribute of deity, such as "full of grace and truth" (D&C 22:4, 21; 36:1; 66:5, etc.). On the other hand, he makes numerous references to a wide variety of *laws* being given to his church by their *lawgiver*. One of Joseph Smith's clearest proclamations of his legalistic "works salvation" is in connection with the resurrection of the just; people obtain this resurrection "by keeping the commandments, they might be washed and cleansed from all their sins" (D&C 76:5b). Consider also his astonishing claim from the Book of Mormon, "And notwithstanding we believe in Christ, we keep the law of Moses..." (2 Nephi 11:45). That Joseph Smith was solidly rooted in legalism is further evidenced by his creation of an Aaronic priesthood and High Priests, mimicking the

Old Testament legal priesthood of Israel. However, this officiating priesthood was an inseparable part of the Mosaic law and was forever abolished by Jesus' completed work on the cross. The Apostle Paul is most emphatic on this point.

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, *having cancelled the written code [Mosaic law], with its regulations, that was against us...he took it away, nailing it to the cross* (Col. 2:13–14).

You who are trying to be justified by law have been *alienated* from Christ; you have fallen away from grace (Gal. 5:2–4).

Laboring under their burden of false scripture and doctrine, is it any wonder that Latter Day Saints are lost?

Each fall we have a Ministry Picnic for former RLDS members, although others attend as well. A couple of years ago, with well over 100 in attendance, I asked how many were former RLDS members. Nearly every hand went up. I then asked how many never understood the gospel until they left the RLDS church. As far as I could tell, the same hands went right back up. And that's because they never understood the *grace* of God. Conversations with hundreds of Latter Day Saints over the years have confirmed this.

Latter Day Saints are just as lost as Leslie's Jewish teacher friend. When we try to talk to them about the *grace* of God, they look just as puzzled as she did. They need to be set free from their legalistic trap, and introduced to the beautiful Gospel of Grace given us in Jesus.... *because the entire work of Joseph Smith can only be characterized as a disgrace.* 🙄

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