

The Biblical Understanding of SIN AND GRACE

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By Jan Lilleby

□□□□ Humankind has a special inherited “crack” in character – influencing how we understand certain issues in the Bible. This so-called “crack” in our character□□ harms us more than just messing□□ up our understanding of things□ - it is a result of the fall in Eden, the nature of sin which we inherited from Adam. We really□□ want□□ to understand, but have great problems trying to; we would *rather not*□□ do evil things, - and still, we cannot avoid committing sin. Paul’s words in Rom. 3:23, 24 is clear – and it is inter-dispensational as such: □□□□ (Amplified Bible) - *“Since all have sinned and are falling short of the honor and glory which God bestows and receives. - □□ All are justified and made upright and in right standing with God, freely and gratuitously by His grace in Christ Jesus.”* To us, the redemption is in the declared facts...that we are saved by□□ *faith, without works.*□□ But without faith, it would be entirely hopeless! Salvation is given only to those who do believe on Him, and nobody else. So, it is necessary that things are scrutinized and studied from different angles, ending up with a better understanding and clarity regarding the Bible. To jump right into it, let me use one of many examples of how we so easily go ‘off track’ by not getting things in the right contexts:

THE LORD’S PRAYER ON THE CROSS



A few years back, I came across an article found in one of the magazines (here in Norway) issued by a group of Christian Zionists, in which the writer explained the crucifixion and the Lord’s prayer entirely in□□ error – so that the conclusion of His prayer was□□ *that all Jews were automatically forgiven the sin of having killed their Messiah! Flat out, automatically*

and unconditionally.

It couldn't get more lopsided than this!

That magazine was issued in the cause of propagating Israel's existence and everything they did to keep that piece of land, killing their neighbors – it was all excused because of the Lord's prayer on the cross. They used His prayer as an excuse to kill and terrorize anyone who opposed Israel's effort to expand their cause and settlements.

Jesus said, in Luke 23:34,

"...Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do..."

But if we go to verse 31, right before He prayed – we clearly understand that Jesus did not mean that His killers were unconditionally forgiven their sins:

"...For if they do these things when the timber is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

(In Norwegian Bible of 1988 it says: For if they do this with the green tree, what shall happen to the dry one?)

This point to Jesus as the green tree, and to unbelieving Israel as the dry one!

What would happen to the dry tree – that is exactly predicted by Jesus as we find it in Luke 13:6, 7 – telling His parable of the barren fig tree. He used that parable to tell that the unbelieving Israel would in the end be chopped down. Finding no fruit on this dry tree is the very same as having no faith. Israel rejected their Messiah king, effective as we find it in Acts 28:25-28. They would not repent.

In Luke 13:1-5 we learn how Jesus warned the Jews that destruction would fall upon them (the nation) if they did not repent from their sin and unbelief, and in particular verse 3 is very clear:

"...but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish and be lost eternally". Jesus referring to Pilate, who recently had killed several rebellious Galileans and mixed their blood into their sacrifices.

These warning words of Jesus came to fulfillment in the years 66-70 AD when Rome destroyed Israel because of their long lasting rebellion.

We cannot find anything in the Bible at all which gives us reason to think that God forgives sin because of Jesus' prayer on the cross almost two thousand years ago.

To receive forgiveness of our sins in the eyes of God, each one of us must first believe on Him, and on He Who God sent to earth to atone for sin: Jesus Christ.

The world out there, as it may seem at any time with its many wicked deeds, wars and all of that brutal cultures – is not automatically saved; not by Jesus' prayer on the cross or any other prayers.

Salvation can only be granted in the very instance a person takes to faith in Jesus Christ. Paul summarized that in his well-known passage – Eph. 2:8, 9:

"For it is by free grace that you are saved, through faith.

And this is not of yourselves, but it is the gift of God. – Not because of works, lest any man should boast.”

BOOK OF ACTS PROVES THAT THEY HAD TO REPENT

After Jesus' death on the cross, the apostles were sent out to preach to Israel the gospel of the kingdom of God (the millennial kingdom on earth!) – and they told them to repent and believe on Jesus and be baptized. The people were thus NOT automatically saved just because Jesus prayed for them on the cross. Yes, God answered His prayer, but in the exact manner shown to us in Acts: They had to repent and believe on Jesus! Peter's speech on Pentecost in Acts 2:38 says

so:

“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of and release from your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

In Peter's second speech a few months later, Acts 3:26 we still find the same conditions for salvation held forth:

“It was to you (Israel) first that God sent His servant and Son Jesus Christ, when He raised Him up, to bless you in turning every one of you from your wickedness and evil ways.”

To this historic narrative of what happened to Israel because of their unbelief, I have to make a point of the very time limit given them. God had given them some thirty years extra (after the crucifixion) to show before Him that they would obediently repent to Jesus all of them. It is those thirty years (slightly over) we see in the Book of Acts.

This particular time limit set by God, is clearly set forth by Jesus in His parable of the barren fig tree in Luke 13: The vinedresser begs the owner of the garden to give one extra season for the dry fig tree, so he could dig up the soil and add fertilizer to see if it would bring forth fruit again. If it did not, then he could chop the tree down.

The original normal year in this equation, is the time of Jesus on earth – almost 33 years, and the extra year (season) for to try to make the dry tree come back giving fruit, can be likened with thus another round of 30-33 years. That would total about 66 years of effort to have Israel believe on Jesus Christ. The apostles made up that vinedresser's voice, they dug in the soil and had on fertilizer – the gospel of the kingdom, hoping Israel, the dry tree, would come up with fruit. But no, it was all useless, Israel was judged by God through Paul's meeting with their leaders at Rome, and he told them by Isaiah 6, that they conclusively would NOT repent so God could heal the land (Acts 28:27). And so we can read in the books of history how Israel was destroyed and scattered in the civilized world in 70 AD. The Jewish writer Flavius Josephus has it all in his book *The Jewish War*.

As said above, their spiritual fall from God as a nation can

be learned from Acts 28:25-28 as Paul uttered the judgmental words from Isa. 6 against them of their blindness, deafness and their unrepentant attitude. After telling them of this judgment Paul informed them, *verse 28: So let it be understood by you then that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen to it (understood: They will believe on Jesus).* The dispensation of the Church began from this moment on, as Israel was fallen from God. And Paul followed it up by writing the epistles to the Ephesians and the Colossians – in which we can find the Doctrine of Faith for the Church. The free Grace Gospel of Paul.

The Israel we have before us today is a nation made up of Jews and many others (Jews are in minority, only 3-4% are genuine Jews) – and it is estimated that there are about 12-15 000 Messianic Jews among them. And only such Messianic Jews can be considered as saved, and not the unbelieving ones. Christian Zionism likes to make it look as if Jews and Israel are blessed/saved because of their return to the land. As we can understand, this is totally crashing with the word of the Bible.

Only one thing works regarding our salvation: The faith in Jesus Christ.

THE UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN GRACE AND SIN

So here we come to the questions which most Christians are carrying in their mind, trying to comprehend.

Am I safe in the faith and will I arrive heaven one day? Can anything disturb my position so I will fall away from salvation? And questions like these.

In the Bible we find great parts of the character of God displayed, what He can accept and what He cannot accept, and we learn how He dealt with people in the old times.

Is God considerate with us whether we accumulate great quantities of sin committed...or does He look more favorably on us if we keep sin at a minimal level...with only a few small every-day-sins?

Is it so with Him that if we exceed a certain number of serious sins, then all hope is lost?

Let me quickly come to your assistance here with some tips.

If you happen to be a non-believer, and you have only committed (unbelievably enough) just ONE sin in life, I can actually say that you will not get lost of salvation for this one singular sin; with God it is so that even if you had not committed sin at all, you would still go lost!

It is the fact that we ARE BORN SINNERS that will get us going lost, and not the countable sins you commit during your life time. If you are an unbeliever, you will go lost because of inherent sin from way back to Adam and Eve! That is what Paul pointed to in my quote of Rom. 3:23, 24 above.

We have the status before God of being born sinners. The early Methodist believers (Wesleyans) in England were

unfortunately entering a *grave misunderstanding* in relations to sin and grace told in the Bible: They believed that one had to perform *"Sinless Perfection"* in their lives in order to get saved. A believer had to constantly exterminate sin and not have any committed sins. It went into measures close to madness, - everything was sin, sin and more sin. No end to it. But by the grace of God, many were reformed (fractions of the Methodist assemblies) and they managed to grasp the correct teaching of this topic. We are saved only by grace alone, and we can never ever manage to get rid of all sin in our lives.

There is but *one factor* that can make us lose salvation. And that is if we by our own free will choose to go against God and the Christian faith. In other words, one has to declare by himself that he or she is no longer a believer in Christ.

We cannot lose salvation because of slip-ups in life. Things we happen to do in error because we could not see or understand or manage certain things in life.

Our lives here on earth are, as you easily can observe, strewn with mistakes and the likes. Full perfection is non-existent. We lie to avoid being exposed and put to shame in situations, - we are cast into situations in which we try to push others out in order to put ourselves in a better position, yes, there is no end to it what concerns our creative and desperate measures to secure ourselves before we care for others. All because we inherited that lack of character due to Adam's sin. If we should have been judged because of bad vulgar thoughts and such, then no human being would ever get saved! Nobody can manage a perfect life or lifestyle no matter how hard we try. Or, - having only perfect super-clean thoughts in our minds...we are actually *"locked in with our sin"* because we are sinners by nature. Only God and Christ can deal with this.

Jesus' death for our sins are described by Paul as an absolute fabulous deed for us, in that God by this actually look upon us as those who have been *made perfect and made ready to enter heaven up above* already while we still are on this earth. Just read:

Eph. 5:27,

*"That He might present the church to Himself in glorious splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such things, that she might be **holy and faultless**".*

Col. 1:13; 22,

*"The Father has delivered and drawn us to Himself out of the control and the dominion of darkness and has transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love. - Yet now has He reconciled you in the body of His flesh through death, **in order to present you holy and faultless and irreproachable in His presence.**"*

(I recommend to the reader my article on the Colossians).

If God, by your faith in Jesus Christ, has considered you as having been made absolutely and immaculate irreproachable

human being – abilities you did not possess earlier, then it is this standing/status with God we must observe hereafter when we look at our wonderful grace salvation in Christ. God has done it, not us. ☐☐ He has positioned us before Himself entirely holy and pure in Christ – and even if ☐☐ *sin can be found with us* ☐☐ here on earth, there exist no sin which we can be punished for! Can you beat that?

All that remains in regard to the complete experienced salvation is that prophesied “Day of Redemption” – Eph. 4:30. The very day that the entire church will physically enter heaven up above, and so become heavenly persons with heavenly super-bodies. That day will soon be coming.

THE BALANCE BETWEEN GRACE AND SIN

Paul, he who was sent by God as the Apostle to ☐☐ the Gentiles, in other words, our chief teacher in the faith and the gospel, sets for us a “Weight-Balance” up against the glorious superlatives quoted from Ephesians and Colossians above. Sure, we really are counted as such ones who are totally irreproachable and holy in the eyes of the Lord.

But so we should not drift sideways into senseless over-courage and just not care much of how we conduct ourselves as Christians, since God is so “Full of grace and forgiveness” – he warns us and exhorts us so we shall take care and try to avoid the big blunders in our lives.

Col. 3 and 4, likewise Eph. 5, are filled with such advice and words of how to conduct our lives in a proper manner as Christians, avoiding evil deeds and a bad morale.

Col. 3:5, 6 is a good passage in this regard,

“So kill the evil desire lurking in your members; sexual vice, impurity, sensual appetites, unholy desires, and all greed and covetousness, for that is idolatry. – It is on that account of these very sins that the anger of God is ever coming upon the sons of disobedience.” ☐☐ Read the rest of that chapter 3 to yourself and get hold of Paul’s exhortation – it may be of great help to you!

Both the Ephesians and the Colossians are thus packed with Paul’s “Weight-Balance” which shall help us cut clear and not let us ‘use’ God’s grace as an excuse to commit ☐☐ evil and grave sin.

It is quite clear to us when reading Paul’s teachings, that if one go on with such vice and lude lifestyle, such a person has in effect left the faith! His actions testifies that he really don’t believe on Christ, since he just keep on with a rotten lifestyle. If such attitudes are kept up, one is sure to lose salvation. It is difficult to interpret ☐☐ Paul in any other way!

His expression...***“kill the evil desire lurking in your members...”***☐☐ is of course in the meaning of...*let not these carnal weaknesses and temptations get a free ride on your emotions and will, giving it easy access to your life, but resist it, be an ☐☐ enemy of sin*☐☐ even if we cannot fully manage to live without committing sin.

ABRAHAM'S SAYING ON GOD'S CHARACTER

When we read of Abraham as he negotiated with the Lord about the sinners in Sodom and Gomorrah, we learn something regarding God's character. These cities (plus a few more nearby) were destroyed by fire from heaven falling on them, and it is without doubt a judgment caused by these cities' grave *homosexual sins, their brutal violent actions* against normal citizens, so God had to destroy them.

Gen. 18:20 gives us the basics,

"And the Lord said, Because the shriek of the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is exceedingly grievous..."

From verse 23 we learn that Abraham dare start a negotiation with God on the citizen's lives.

"Will you destroy the righteous together with the wicked?"

And so a downward-pointing curve is coming forth from this conversation, as Abraham gets the Lord's promise that He will not destroy them if He found *fifty righteous* in them. And so he ended up with a promise from Him that He would spare them, could He only find *ten righteous* ones there (verse 32).

But there were not even ten righteous people there, and God had these cities destroyed by fire, see Genesis chapter 19. Angels of God lead Lot and his family out, and He allowed them to flee to a place later called Zoar. It was not enough for God that one man there, Lot, was righteous and a man of God, so He took him out of the city to save him.

Thus we see that there were a vast number of men, both young and old say the Bible, who had turned into full homosexuality and gotten brutal and violent, yes, a large flock of criminal wicked rapist homosexuals. In verses 4 and 5 we see that these gathered outside of Lot's house and commanded him to deliver up the two guests that he had given room for the night... *"Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know (be intimate with) them."*

Only Lot knew that these two men were angels sent by God.

It is interesting also to check what the apostle Peter wrote of these same things,

2 Pet. 2:6-11:

*"And he condemned to ruin and extinction the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, reducing them to ashes and thus set them forth as an example to those who would be ungodly. **And He rescued righteous Lot, greatly worn out and distressed by the wanton ways of the ungodly and lawless – for that just man living there among them, TORTURED HIS RIGHTEOUS SOUL every day with what he saw and heard of their unlawful and wicked deeds – Now if the Lord knows how to rescue the godly out of temptations and trials, and how to keep the ungodly under chastisement until the day of judgment and doom...**"*

In the epistle of Jude we read from verses 7, 8 and 16 about these wicked people, and we learn of God's judging character against grave open sin,

"The wicked are sentenced to suffer just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the adjacent towns – which likewise gave themselves over to impurity and indulged in unnatural vice and sensual perversity (compare this with Col. 3:5 of Paul's warnings!) – are laid out in plain sight as an exhibit of perpetual punishment of everlasting fire. – Nevertheless in like manner, these dreamers also corrupt the body, scorn and reject authority and government, and revile and libel and scoff at heavenly glories – These are inveterate murmurers who complain of their lot in life, going after their own desires; their talk is boastful and arrogant, and they claim to admire men's persons and pay people flattering compliments to gain advantage."

Quite a salvo delivered here by Jude as well as by Peter! Has God changed character and attitude against grave sin and the wickedness of this world as times passed by? No, absolutely not. God grants grace and salvation to those who believe on Jesus Christ and Himself, the Father of Christ – as the believing sinner tries his best to resist and avoid sin – totally in line with the exhortations given by Paul. But in the other end of this scale, we find God's fierce judgment upon grave sin and evil blaspheming boasting wicked sinners, such ones that display harsh pride and arrogance using their sinful ways to demonstrate against God.

It has always been like that in the world, and God does not back out of His character regarding this.

It is for this reason Paul brought his "Weight-Balance" in Ephesians and Colossians (as I quoted above) telling us to kill our carnal sin and desires etcetera. Even as he first told us how it is with God's phenomenal grace salvation by faith. He made us holy and blameless by the faith in Christ! We just need to understand correctly the rhetoric of Paul and get this right as he explained the salvation given us by the free grace gospel.

JONAH'S SAYING ON GOD'S CHARACTER

After that Jonah had been vomited out of the 'fish' (Jon. 2:10) he started to obey God's original calling to go to Nineveh and prophesy to them His warnings – they were given 40 days to repent, or else God would destroy the city. □

Jon. 3:10 reports of how Nineveh repented and so God turned away from His wrath:

"And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God revoked His sentence of evil He would do to them and he did not do it".

The incredible in this narrative is that Jonah was fuming with anger over God having spared the city! Can you imagine? Jon. 4:2 thus says a lot about God's character:

"...for I knew that You are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness, and You revoked the sentence

of evil against them".

Notice that we are not only served the "Bright and Merry" side of God's character, but also the darker gloomy side of it. God can definitely turn angry and send doom and death upon ungodly individuals as well as groups.

Certain powers inside Christianity are trying hard to portraying God as one Who is "Only good, merciful and forgiving" thus using this as an excuse to allow sinfulness inside the church – like... "Oh, it is not so serious about same-sex-marriage and gay lifestyle, only be sure that it is genuine love..." and so on and on. They choose to look away from the Word of God in the Bible which is warning us of all types of sin, greater or lesser, whether hetero or homo relations. The Bible portrays homosexuality in a particularly serious manner, a sin which is infuriating the good Lord so much that He can wipe out whole cities to punish it! Such grave sin is clashing against God's order of creation and the wellbeing of mankind. He did not create – in the Garden of Eden – Adam & Allan to live together...nor Eve & Ellen...no, He created them with two sexes, one male and one female, Adam and Eve. Do I have to give it to you by a tea spoon? God takes his order of creation so seriously that the Bible is full of examples warning us of it. Even if we live in the age/dispensation of the grace of God, we must oppose such a sinful lifestyle.

We are much into same sort of suffering as said of Lot in 2 Pet. 2: Tormented in our souls by what we see and hear, of people in their wicked sinful ways. Lot was suffering every day as he lived in Sodom, Peter says.

Concerning people out there in the world, outside of the Christian church, yours truly cannot interfere or trying to "arrest" such people of wickedness and sin, hetero or homo, or whatever. We cannot enter and interfere with their private lives; even though I disagree with such provoking sinfulness as described here. But we as Christians have no real authority to physically stop such things. The world is the world, but one day...after this dispensation of the grace of God is concluded, God shall again take affair and will send doom and destruction upon evil – as we have learnt from the Bible.

One can have a gay mind/attitude, since people are influenced by their parents/friends/school-culture/sports-activities etcetera, for they have been victims of such influences and can't help themselves. So grace salvation by faith in Christ will thus give salvation to any homosexual who does not live out his/her sexuality with a person of same sex. We cannot help having a mindset of certain things, but we can abstain from any practice which supports such mindset. If one goes practicing homosexuality, this is the same as rejecting the faith, and such a person will lose his/her salvation. Read again my quotes from Col. 3 above!

But if any man or woman stands forth as Christian believers and saved, then it ***has to be the Bible*** which has the final word in any case of moral ethic character. If the Bible says NO, then we human beings cannot say YES and think we get away with it. We are not in power to decide right or wrong in such matters, only the Word of God contains such power and authority.

Romans 1:21-28 is a passage concerning morale and right behaviors, what God accept and do not accept. You should read it by yourself. It is quite mindboggling and shocking to think of priests and pastors and preachers daring to shut their minds and eyes over these strict exhortations from our apostle Paul!

JESUS' WORDS ON MAN'S SINFUL CHARACTER

We have checked out some of God's character – reading what Abraham and Jonah said of Him.

But let us check out humankind's character. What did Jesus say on that delicate matter?

Mark 7:21-23,

(Amplified Bible, including eventual words in clammers) - For from within, (that is) out of the hearts of men, come base and wicked thoughts, sexual immorality, stealing, murder, adultery, 22- Coveting (a greedy desire to have more wealth), dangerous and destructive wickedness, deceit; unrestrained (indecent) conduct; an evil eye (envy), slander (evil speaking, malicious misrepresentation, abusiveness), pride (the sin of an uplifted heart against God and man), foolishness (folly, lack of sense, recklessness, thoughtlessness). 23- All this evil (purposes and desires) come from within, and they make the man unclean and render him unhallowed."

In other words, these are the harsh consequences of having inherited the fallen sinful nature of Adam! All of these evil things have been taken away from us...in the meaning – it will *not harm us* or inflict on our salvation, as long as we stay in faith leaning on Jesus Christ – like Paul taught in his epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians. The grace gospel saves us from all of those elements Jesus listed up. We need to face this up close, and at the same time rest assured of God's saving grace in our faith in Christ.

When reading the gospels and find what Jesus said regarding morale – He actually said that a believer – in spite of having that inherited sin nature – could do GOOD THINGS, not only bad ones. Here are some quotes,

Mat. 5:16, *Let your light so shine before men that they may see your moral excellence, and your praiseworthy, noble, and good deeds and recognize and honor and praise and glorify your Father Who is in heaven.*

Mat. 5:44, 45, *But I tell you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, - - To show that you are the children of your Father Who is in heaven; for He makes His*

sun rise on the wicked and on the good, and makes the rain fall upon the upright and the wrongdoers alike.

Mat. 7:12, "So then, whatever you desire that others would do to and for you, even so do also to and for them, for this is the Law and the prophets.

John 13:34, "I give you a new commandment: that you should love one another. Just as I have loved you, so you too should love one another.

Salvation is a gift, and it is unmerited! No human being can ever earn or deserve such a glorious gift, and that is for sure. We are saved thus, without having to present or perform any "Sinless Perfection". Period. End of discussion.

SIN AND GRACE IN OUR DISPENSATION

In Eph. 3:1, 2 Paul is teaching that he (he only) was given the task of establishing the dispensation (administration) of the grace of God, by a revelation of God,

"For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for the sake and on behalf of you Gentiles – assuming you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was entrusted to me for your benefit." (See also verses 3-9).

This points out for us that the entire time in which the church, the Body of Christ, are on earth with the grace gospel, is actually a time/era/dispensation in which God only acts according to His grace, not casting doom and destruction on anybody.

Sodom with its doom of fire, or before that, the flood of Noah and other acts of judgments in Biblical history, are not repeated in this present grace dispensation with the preaching of the free grace salvation by faith alone. But the day when this era is concluded by God sending the Great Tribulation upon Israel (as seen in Revelation) – then it is finally the end of the grace-period we have had since the times of Paul AD 63-67, and no more free grace given. Then God will start judging serious sin and ungodliness.

In our time, during the remaining period of the grace gospel, we follow the exhortations given by Paul in Ephesians and Colossians which is the foundation for the church regarding doctrine of faith and salvation. Christ sent out Paul to us Gentiles (Acts 9:15) with this grace gospel, and it shows now that the world received it (many if not all) and believed and got saved! Paul's own prophesy in Acts 28:28 was thus fulfilled years ago,

"So let it be understood by you then that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen to it (receiving it for salvation)".

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