

Qualified for Grace?  
John R. Gavazzoni  
July 31, 2002  
Thousand Oaks, CA

Editor's note: the following essay was written by John to a brother who was troubled about what his responsibility is to God. I consider the writing "manna" for the troubled soul. Jan Antonsson [John has, for this latest posting, done some editing for greater clarity].

Hi Brother,

I'm going back through your recent e-mails in the order I received them in order to connect with you in a way that might be the most helpful in the Lord. It just so happens that I was browsing through Oswald Chamber's daily devotional book, "My Utmost for His Highest," and came across something that is very pertinent to, and lies at the heart of the issue before us.

What I came across was a very concisely expressed perception, a perspective, quite uniquely representative of a general evangelical notion, a notion that I considered, at one time in my life, to be an incontrovertible conviction, and in this case, pressed upon me by one I would have been inclined to consider a superior saint who was more willing than I to be "sold out to God." But this time around---as now consistently happens to me in regard to conventional pietistic literature) my reaction to what he wrote bordered on revulsion. It involves an issue that I very much want to help you understand.

In the particular devotional that caught my eye, he makes the statement that consecration is our part (what we do) and sanctification is God's part (what God does). Though I'd be the first to acknowledge that the ministry of Oswald Chambers, and particularly his classic devotional book have been a blessing to many thousands of people seeking a deeper walk with the Lord, in this particular devotional---and, in fact this thread keeps cropping up, here and there, all through the book---he is found operating from a general evangelical assumption that is quite fundamentally contrary to understanding the true source of spiritual consecration.

This is one of those bits of ignorance that in times past God winked at but, concerning which, He now commands all men, everywhere to repent. In regard to this, you spoke of the great travail you've been through in hoping to be found with at least some goodness of heart before God that would qualify you for continued grace from Him, some reason to believe that you are still redeemable---I'm paraphrasing your comments.

It would seem that, you are in serious doubt as to whether or not you are bringing to the table your utmost, in order to have His best, an inference that the title of Chamber's book seems to call for. As you know, this was the very thing the Lord had me address in the article, "Gift and Grace" (Link at end), and I still recall clearly how passionately the Lord laid that message on my heart.

Somehow we've been sold a bill of goods about how God becomes all in all. That bill of goods has many variations, but the essential thread running through all those variations is that it's a matter of God being some and we being the rest, or vice versa. It says that the way the victorious Christian life works is that we keep doing our part and learn to do it better and better, and with more and more determination until God becomes all in all.

Interesting theology that; we are to reach the goal by using a means that is contradictory to the goal. It would seem to me, that if God is finally to become all in all, the path to that finality would be one involving us progressively having any contribution on our part being removed from the process.

The principle is clear: The more we try to be something, the farther we move from God being all. But, thank God, He is Lord even over this calamity. He has so ordered it and arranged it that sooner or later we get sick and tired of being sick and tired spiritually. How terrible must be, for most of us, that particular "dark hour of the soul," when we are brought to despair of ever finding anything good in ourselves. I've "been around the mountain" my share of times on this.

Man was never created to cultivate an increasing autonomous consecration- proclivity, some inner inclination and/or volition toward obedience to God with which God can work and to which He would

add His mercy and grace. We were created to participate in God's goodness, for only He is good, as Jesus taught.

I was personally admonished by the Spirit of God concerning the nature of this participation, that it sprang from a non-contributing partnership with Him. I receive His riches in glory by Christ Jesus as an heir of God and joint heir with Jesus Christ (Gal. 4:7) but I bring NOTHING to the partnership. I've got nothing to offer.

Natural man was created with the capacity, in relationship with others, to be filled with the fulness of God, but he is entirely incapable of doing anything toward fulfilling that capacity. That capacity has no ability of self-realization; it must be acted upon by grace. And the grace of God contains within itself the impetus not only of the giving part, but also the receiving part. In the very act of giving us grace, God opens our hearts to it.

When most evangelicals speak of "receiving" from God, what they really mean is "getting" from God, that is, qualifying ourselves in order to get what God is giving. But God can be only received; He cannot be gotten, or taken, or made to be anything. The passion of God's givingness opens our hearts to being receptive, and we are conscious that a decision has been made, but there exists in our flesh that contrarian ego that loves to steal the credit for that decision, and are encouraged by religious mentors to understand it thusly.

But really, it is God's decision that is the operative dynamic which catches us up in its determination, and we end up doing what God is doing, but it is Him, in us doing it. We don't get grace by bringing even our willingness to the table. Add to the self-realization incapacity of our God-given God-capacity the fact that the natural man has been corrupted by sin and death and you have a pitifully helpless creature.

But, in the face of the above, how good the good news is! God decided, and God acted, and "By this will (the will of God) we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:11 NAS). I found it absolutely fascinating and so very much to the point when I read in Billy Graham's autobiography, "Just As I Am," that he had an interview with the great Swiss theologian Karl Barth and that they had two quite different perspectives on the salvation that is in Christ.

Billy was very frustrated with the fact that Barth kept returning to the fact that the good news was that God had acted in Christ, whereas Billy wanted to talk about the necessity of an act of the will on our part including what corresponding exercise of will was called for to bring others to a "decision for Christ" (a phrase that he helped to popularize). Having read a little of Barth, I knew exactly where he was coming from and why he refused to be moved from a position of God-centeredness to, what was undeniably, a man-centered gospel in spite of the lip service given to Christ-centeredness.

We talk about accepting Christ, but the Bible talks about us being accepted in the Beloved (See link at end). We talk about making a decision to receive Christ and the Bible teaches that He begat us by His own will (John 1:13). We teach repentance as something that man must reach down and find within himself, and the Bible speaks of repentance as something which God grants. We demand that men "choose" Christ and Jesus said, "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you and ordained you that you should bring forth fruit and that your fruit should remain" (John 15:17).

Frankly, we've got it ass-backwards. Not only is salvation completely of God, but a life lived pleasing to God, is completely of God. "As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him" (Col. 2:6). We received Him by grace through faith (and THAT not of ourselves, it's the GIFT of God) (Eph. 2:8), and so that is how we walk in Him. Paul teaches emphatically and explicitly that Christ is our Life (Col. 3:4). Whatever is going around claiming to be your life with some independent element of goodness or badness is, simply and categorically, a lie.

"Sing them over again to me, wonderful words of life." God bless you, and I say that knowing that He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ (Eph. 1:3).

Stay tuned for future serious, seminal samplings.

John Gavazzoni

