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GRACE**

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**Self-Improvement  
Self-Righteousness  
and  
Christ's Righteousness**

(2019)

Bible House of Grace contains an easy to read New and Old Testament commentary full of spiritual treasures and pearls, complete with an insightful resource guide illuminating God's love and grace.



Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

## Self-Improvement, Self-Righteousness, and Christ's Righteousness.

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After sinners have repented and accepted the Lord Jesus Christ and the Gospel of salvation, it is common to hear them testify, that their life totally changed from loving the things of the world to loving the things of God, which is true, the life of those who accept Jesus is changed for the better. Based on this life changing experience, some claim without Christ, self-improvement is impossible. The focus of this study is to discover if this is a true statement. At face value, the following verse appears to indicate, changing ourselves is beyond our control:

- **Jeremiah 13:23:** Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then may you also you can do good who are accustomed to do evil.

This is spoken to the whole house of Israel (i.e., Jerusalem, Judah, and Israel), obviously, Ethiopians cannot change their skin colour and leopards cannot change their spots, the idea presented here is that it is impossible for the full house of Israel to change from their evil ways, at this time, they were full of abominations, great pride and stubbornness, and serving and worshipping other gods, and rather than head God's prophets were following their own heart. The implication is, mankind is accustomed to do evil, and will continue to do evil. History and experience can only give a sorrowful and depressing no to Jeremiah's question, "can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots?" Based on this verse it appears impossible for mankind to change their behaviour. Then we read:

- **2 Corinthians 5:17:** If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Though we could only answer Jeremiah's question with a definite no, all faithful Christians can confidently and joyfully agree with this statement of Pauls, for all who are redeemed by the power of Christ, have no doubt that he has the power to fully transform a life, and make those who truly know his love and grace, willing commit to living a godly life, and grow in the fruits of the Spirit (i.e., love, kindness, compassion, forgiveness etc.), and hate all that is ungodly.

However, this does not mean that we have no power of self-improvement, or that we cannot change our behaviour and character for the better, for if this was true, it would be unjust to blame any of us for our wrong behaviour. Experience and testimonies of many throughout the world show that Christians do have considerable power to change their lives for the better, and many there are many secular men and women who have made vast self-improvements in character and behaviour for the better.

In my early years in the Christian faith, the underlying thought and consciousness was, Christians were the good guys, and the secular world was the bad guys. This is a completely wrong mindset, for the following reason, though it is true no one can be saved without Jesus, and that no one can attain to righteousness that leads to eternal life without Christ, for it is only by his righteous being imputed to us that any of us are saved, it is also true, Christians do not own the rights to, kindness, mercy, love, compassion, and forgiveness etc. However, though these facts are all true, and Christians and those in the secular world can improve their character and behaviour for the better, it is not always easy to do so for the following reasons:

- We can be stuck in a habit, which establishes physical cravings in our hearts and minds by repetition. It is much easier to do something a second time than it was at first, especially regarding sinful acts, once the hedge is broken down, it is very easy to get through it again. If one drop, of water has seeped through a dam, it is not long before it will become a roaring flood, likewise, by habit we come to do things routinely, easily and without effort.
- Sin rewards in some way (i.e., revenge satisfies hatred, crime can give one power and riches that could never be gained legally, immorality is pleasurable (if it was not, it would not be such a global problem). This means overcoming it can only be won by denying what the flesh craves.
- Uncultivated soil bears thistles and weeds, likewise sin in some form or other is more likely to spring forth within a child left alone and without love, rather than good.
- Anyone can roll downhill, likewise, it is easy to follow the path of the crowd and one's peers and remain on the familiar road that we have always been travelling on, rather than take an opposite and unknown road.
- Years of culture, custom and tradition blinds judgment and conscience, often people who are raised in a dominant culture, custom or tradition are not aware of any faults or errors that they have inherited and are following, which makes change difficult.
- Individuals and nations can take years to awaken to a consciousness of some national crime, even when the nation is somewhat Christian, two good examples are slavery and racialism.
- It is enormously hard to change the human will that has been weakened by long observance and conformity to a culture, tradition, or habit.

Putting all these together, it should be no surprise that self-improvement is not impossible, but often difficult. It is almost certain we all at some times have tried to overcome some trivial habit, just to find that when we thought that we had conquered it, we later found that all that had been done to overcome it had to be done over again. The apostle Paul himself wrote:

- **Romans 7:21-23:** So, I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. <sup>22</sup>For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, <sup>23</sup>but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

However, no matter how much a person is, able to improve and better their life (and all who do should receive the credit due to them), self-improvement cannot save a person to eternal life, this can only be achieved by repentance toward God, faith in Christ, and by God's love and grace that is granted to those born again into the global family of Christ. This is because no matter how good we may think we are, sin remains in our human nature, and given the right circumstances or promptings will raise its ugly head in any of the following ways, jealousy, anger, selfishness, pride, lustful thoughts and actions, envy, and such like things.

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*As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.*

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