

The freedom to make mistakes



Only by being certain of God's unchanging affection (Rom. 8:1), can we truly live. Those who constantly worry about overstepping the bounds of God's acceptance can never exult on this great journey.

Understanding our security in Christ is the key. Knowing there is a safety net makes all the difference in the types of moves we are willing to execute on this high wire called Life.

NO MATTER WHERE WE GO, WE CAN NEVER LEAVE HOME

Grace does not leave us without boundaries. But even if we could see to the farthest corner of the universe, we would still be light years from the edge of God's hand. And yet God purposely keeps our personal boundaries hidden from us. Why? There is joy in the process of discovery.

Life is an adventure of discovering who we are, not only in Christ, but in the world. Thank God for the grace that releases us to seek, and yet, at the same time, assures us that we can never leave home.



Martin Zender's Clanging Gong News

"If I know all mysteries and all knowledge, but have no love, I am a clanging gong" --1 Cor. 13:1-2



Two out of three isn't bad.

Grace is joy and freedom—to live

The face of the baboon and the outrageous neon stripes on some brands of fish bear witness to a God Who enjoyed Himself creating the world. In the bringing forth of life from His celestial palette, God out-Picassoed Picasso. Were the rings of Saturn *practically* necessary? No. But they assure us that God was happy when He spun them.

Grace is what allows us to enjoy life. You may be surprised at the basic meaning of the word. The Greek word translated grace is *charis*, and it means, "joy." The definition of grace is: "An act bestowing happiness." As corny as this sounds, that's as simple as it is.

In theological usage, grace is "a benefit bestowed on one who deserves the opposite." This is what produces happiness. The best example of it in action is what God did for Saul when the rabid Pharisee was en route to Damascus to kill believers. The following is from the New American Zender Bible:

"Saul? Saul? I know you're a raving lunatic murder machine, but I like you. No, wait. It's more than that. I love you. I'm serious, Saul. This Jesus you're persecuting? It's Me. I died for you."

This did not turn Paul into a theologian. Paul did not become a religious prick after this, as some who read his letters might suppose. He was a religious prick *before* this happened. What he became was joyful; the man got happy. We must never read anything Paul wrote subsequent to his Damascus Road experience without tapping that underlying well. *What?* Happy even after his Rescuer blinded him? Yes.



Again from the NAZB:

Saul: Um, I can't see.

Jesus: I know. I just blinded you.

Saul: Is this permanent?

Jesus: No.

Saul: Okay. Good.

Jesus: Tell me what you're feeling.

Saul: This is weird but—I'm feeling happy.

Jesus: How can you be blind and happy at the same time?

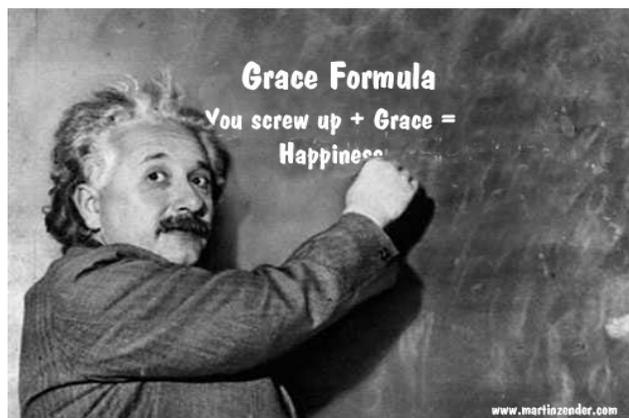
Saul: I don't know.

Jesus: I just freed you from the law of Moses.

(Continued on page 2)

What a genius. Einstein realized that grace, being more than a theological concept, is a method by which God makes us

HAPPY



...joy and freedom to live

(Continued from page 1)

Saul: You're kidding.

Jesus: Most certainly not. You are now free to do whatever you want in this life, without condemnation.

Saul: I want to serve You.

Jesus: A predictable reaction.

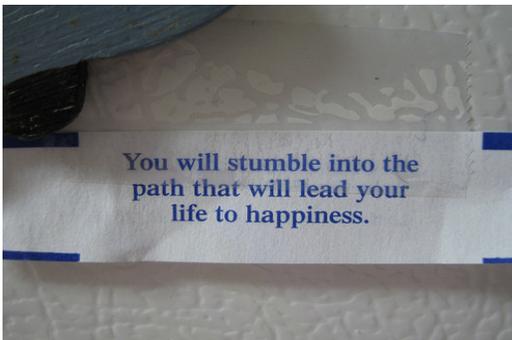
Saul: Will this feeling ever go away?

Jesus: Yes.

Saul: Crap.

Jesus: Don't panic. The happiness itself won't go away, but your feeling will come and go.

Saul: Why?



Jesus: I can't give you the details on that now. Just let Me say that you will suffer some things for My sake.

Saul: I would do anything for You.

Jesus: I know.

Saul: How will I get the feeling back?

Jesus: Easy. Just remember how bad you felt thinking I was a strict and unyielding Sourpuss waiting to condemn you from behind My iron curtain.

Saul (after a lengthy pause, during which time he stubs his toe on a rock, but doesn't even feel the pain): Oh my gosh. It's working already. I'm getting renewed gushes of happiness.

Jesus: It works every time. You're going to write many letters.

Saul: I don't know how to write.

Jesus: I know; your run-on sentences are ridiculous.

Saul: I have a problem with punctuation.

Jesus: That's why the Greek doesn't have any punctuation; I did that just for you. Anyway, I'm going to use your weakness.

Saul: Am I still a logical bastard?

Jesus: No changes there. Except now you're a *happy* logical bastard.

Saul (tripping on another rock): I'm still blind.

Jesus: Give it three days. You will blind people with literary science.

Saul: Will people detect the happiness underlying the science?

Jesus: I'll remind them to look for it. ■

What a Revelation!

A BASTARD GOSPEL EXISTS

"I am marveling that thus, swiftly, you are transferred from that which calls you in the grace of Christ, to a different evangel, which is not another, except it be that some who are disturbing you want also to distort the evangel of Christ" (Gal. 1:6-7).

In Paul's day, as today, there are two evangels: 1) the evangel of the Circumcision, which is God's message to Israel concerning political supremacy of the earth, and 2) the evangel of the Uncircumcision, which is God's message to the nations concerning political supremacy of the heavens. The former evangel is a mixture of law and grace, while the latter is pure grace.

Paul chides the Galatians for being transferred from the grace of Christ to "a different evangel, which is not another." What does this strange phrase mean?

The "different evangel" was a distorted grace message, watered down by law. Thus, Paul considered it a non-evangel. But instead of putting the word evangel in quotation marks (as in, "Nice 'evangel' you have there, Galatians"), Paul calls it, "different, but not another." If it had been the Circumcision evangel, it *would* have been "another evangel," because the Circumcision evangel was, and is, a legitimate evangel. But it wasn't another evangel; it was a bastard evangel, born of an *unholy* alliance between law and grace.

It's the same "evangel" taught today in "evangelical" Christianity: *Save yourself by total grace.*

Q&A

SAVED BY WORKS OR FAITH?

James says that faith without works cannot save us (Js. 2:14), but Paul says we are justified apart from works (Rom. 3:28). Which is it?

You misstate the question. James says that faith without works cannot save *Israelites*. The title of his book is "James to the Twelve Tribes." Paul is writing to the nations; in Romans 11:13, he calls himself, "the apostle of the nations." This works/faith argument is the difference between the evangel of the Circumcision and that of the Uncircumcision.

James is a square peg, and Paul is a round hole. As soon as you realize that, the Bible will stop contradicting itself.

The Everest Principle

RELIGION TAKES PEOPLE TO THE DEATH ZONE

I watched a documentary last night about a blind climber, Erik Weihenmeyer, who summited Everest in 2003. One of Weihenmeyer's comments particularly struck me: "You can take 100,000 correct steps on Everest, but that's not good enough. It only takes one bad step to die; the mountain won't tolerate a mistake."

That's the law of Moses. As Paul writes (with much happiness) in **Galatians 3:10**, "For whoever are of works of law are under a curse, for it is written that, Accursed is everyone who is not remaining in *all* things written in the scroll of the law to do them."

One mistake in the law spells death. What if God was still this way? Many think He is. He assumed this role while administering the Mosaic law, but only to provide the necessary backdrop to a stupendous display of grace. Now that grace is displayed, only fools wander into the Death Zone.

The Death Zone is what climbers call the area above Everest's

(Continued on page 3)



Erik Weihenmeyer

Rants & Stuff

The Apostle Paul says we should not murmur.
Therefore, I shall rant (Philippians 2:14).

Me Tire Man, You Bike Thrower

My wife Melody and I bicycled across the United States in 1984. We started on June 10 in Santa Monica, California, and ended on September 20 in Ocean City, Maryland. I went crazy on August 15; she lost her mind on the 27th.



August 15, State Route 54. Linn, Missouri. Hot day; stupid hot. Road tar popping into bubbles; brain cells dying. *Hssssssss*. No way! Twelfth flat tire of trip. **Melody:** How come you keep getting flats? **Me:** Ask God when we get to heaven. May happen soon.

Stop to fix tire. Get tire off, replace tube. Try to wrestle tire back on rim. Can't align valve and rim hole. Try 95 times; do not cuss once. Try 96 times; set world cussing record. **Me:** For the love of Jesus, fix this *&%\$# tire! Throw bike helmet into chain link fence; walk down road. **Melody:** Where you going? **Me:** St. Louis. **Melody:** One hundred miles away? **Me:** I will write.

Turn around after one hundred yards. **Melody:** Back already? **Me:** Arch is overrated.

Melody has tire fixed. **Me:** Thank you very much. **Melody:** You're welcome.

August 27th. Indiana. Where is Bloomington? Long day. 80 miles so far. Seven p.m. Never out this late. Rough day; Melody not happy. **Me:** Only 5 more miles, then Bloomington. **Melody:** You better be right. **Me:** I always am. **Melody:** Bad exaggeration, right there. **Me:** I know maps. **Melody:** I know a lawyer. **Me** (worried): We will get expen-

sive motel. **Melody:** I hope you like your room.

Ride 5 miles. Melody at end of rope. Can't take much more. Where the hell is Bloomington? Oh, good. See a sign. Oh, no. Sign says: BLOOMINGTON, 5 MILES.

Melody stops; brakes squeal, smoke comes from brakes. Nearly run into her. **Me:** Please signal next time. **Melody:** Enjoy rest of trip.

Melody dismounts, picks up bike with both hands; amazing; girl so strong when mad. Truck coming. Oh, no. Girl couldn't! Girl wouldn't!

Girl does. Throws bike into road; bicycle now truck bait. Girl crosses arms, satisfied. **Me:** No! Run into road, pull bike to shoulder. Just in time; *zoooooom!* truck whizzes by. **Me:** You're crazy! **Melody:** You're insane.

Motel in Bloomington: \$37.50. Bad pizza; no sex.

Next morning, beautiful sunrise. Leftover pizza better than fresh. Birds sing; God gives tailwind.

Paves new road with grace. ■

...death zone (...continued from page 2)

Camp 4, at 26,000 ft. At this altitude, the body begins to die. The trick is to get down as quickly as possible. From "The Route," Copyright ExplorersWeb Inc.:

The death zone has taken many strong and skilled climbers' lives. That implies that Everest requires intensive training. This is also the place where fun is definitely gone. Only fear remains on everyone's face. You might be lucky and [things] might go well even if you didn't do your homework. But you will certainly notice that Everest lives up to its fearful reputation should the conditions turn against you. By then though, it might simply be too late if you are not well prepared.

Substitute "religionists" for "climbers'," and, "this here church" for "Everest," and you have a pretty good description of the precarious life available now at a religious institution near you. ■

Famed British climber George Mallory's corpse on Everest. Wrong step: 1924. Body discovered: 1999.

