



As If

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Chances are you have heard this little theological maxim that masquerades as solid biblical advice but is loaded with unbiblical assertions (if you are like me you actually once believed it):

“Work *as if* it all depends on you; pray *as if* it all depends on God.” *As if?* This little gem is the theological equivalent of having your cake and eating it too. This apocryphal axiom is a flawed assumption that we can hedge our heavenly bets, so that just in case God’s grace isn’t enough to cover us, we will be able to present our own righteous deeds to God. *As if!*

Does anyone really think that God has a Grace credit card that might max out? *As if* ...the sins have been so outrageous this month, the requests for forgiveness so excessive that the plastic of his Grace credit card is just too hot to handle. *As if*, any minute now...a vice-president from the Bank of Grace might call God to tell him that his account is over-drawn.

This kind of fuzzy thinking and shallow misrepresentation of God is religious double-speak. Christians are called to peace. No one can condemn us if Christ is with us and in us (Romans 8:1).

God will never forsake us (Hebrews 13:5) and nothing can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:39). Christians rest in Christ (Matthew 11:28-30). We can bring our cares and troubles to the throne of God and be assured that he will take care of them.

Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross was the once and for all payment for all of the sins of mankind forever, the debt has been paid, and we don’t need to worry about God’s heavenly Bank of Grace declaring “Chapter 11.”

So what is all this stuff about working *as if* it all depends on us? Do we actually think that a human insurance policy, underwritten by our deeds and performance, can actually work like an overdraft on our spiritual account in the event that God’s grace fails?

It seems to me that some would have us

believe (often in the name of religion) that God is ladling out his grace in measured quantities—somewhat like the stereotypical stingy cook in the high school cafeteria line. There’s only so much grace to go around, and when the pot of grace is empty, then there certainly won’t be any seconds—in fact there may not be enough to go around for everyone to have a first serving. And, according to religion, those who have earned all of the brownie points and merit badges religious institutions can fabricate are at the head of the line. How convenient.

Guess who, according to Jesus, is at the head of the line in the grace cafeteria? “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:31-32).

I know that some who advance the bogus biblical teaching—“Work *as if* it all depends on you; pray *as if* it all depends on God”—believe that God will help you if you are really trying hard. Of course their idea is that God is impressed with our attempts to be good and before stepping in to help us God wants us to show him our desire to do the right thing.

The problem with this teaching is that it is still rooted in the thought that what we do makes some contribution to our salvation. Such a teaching is completely at odds with “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” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

If you accept the maxim that we should “work *as if* it depends on you; pray *as if* it depends on God” then it is a short journey to even deeper and more toxic religious swamps. Those legalistic swamps are inhabited by people who believe this maxim: “God helps those who help themselves.” *As if!!* The truth is the exact opposite—God helps us because we cannot help ourselves. □

—Greg Albrecht