

We Have a Choice!

The Gracious Woman of God, Part 1

Who are you? What do people say about you? Most likely whatever people say about you—and whatever they've said in the past—almost all of it is wrong. The moment you received salvation, that is, the moment you asked Jesus Christ to become your Lord and Savior, everything changed:

I. What happened when you were saved?

1) God took you out of darkness and put you into His marvelous light,
Ephesians 5:8 *For you were once darkness, **but now you are light in the Lord.** Walk as children of light.*

1 Thessalonians 5:5 *Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.* [KJV]

Philippians 2:15 *that you might become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, **among whom you shine as lights in the world.***

2) God delivered you from the power of darkness and conveyed you into the Kingdom of His Son,
Colossians 1:13 *He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.*

3) You became a new creation,
2 Corinthians 5:17 *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*

4) You became an heiress of every good thing God provides for His saints,
Colossians 1:12 *giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.*

This includes authority over the enemy, Luke 10:19, and access to the throne of God, Hebrews 4:16.

In conclusion, the rules have changed. You don't belong to Satan anymore. You did once, but you don't anymore. Satan—the one who kills, steals and destroys—has no more power over you—unless you let him. Instead, you have power over satan. Moreover, Jesus promises you abundant life,

John 10:10 [Jesus said,] *“The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. **I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.***

II. BUT—God never forces us to be the awesome women of God He wants us to be! God will never take away our free will.

You are not a robot, forced to obey God, and forced to do His will. God always gives you a choice; He will never violate your free will. You can choose to listen to Him or not. You can choose to follow Him or not. You can choose to be holy or not. You can choose to love, forgive and be gracious—or not.

Just because we got saved, doesn't mean we automatically become the loving, kind, holy, righteous people of God wants us to be. *We have to choose to walk with Him, and we have to choose to obey Him.* Yes, God does justify us by His grace, meaning that legally we are declared to be completely holy and righteous, Romans 5:1. Yet even while Jesus' own blood covers us, God's Holy Spirit is working in us to help us become what He wants us to be,

1 Thessalonians 4:3 *For this is the will of God, your sanctification....*

In the words of my old mentor, what God has imputed—Jesus' holiness—He now imparts to us, as we walk in obedience to Him. This is the process of sanctification. This is our choice.

Spiritual maturity is a choice! It is our choice.

If we do choose to obey God, and to follow Him—and if we obey God simply because we love Him, not because we are forced or fearful—then God enables us to become holy, pure, kind, merciful and loving. He enables us to become the gracious women of God He wants us to be.

III. Spiritual maturity is dependent on our working together with God. Here is a rule I heard many years ago from my spiritual mentor, Pastor Rick Merrill at Chelwood Park Foursquare Church in Albuquerque, NM:

>>>> “Without God, you can't. And without you, He won't.”

You cannot mature spiritually without God. But without your cooperation, God will not—indeed, cannot—help you mature either. It takes both you and God, working together, to help you become the gracious person He wants you to be.

You are God's lovely workmanship, you are God's holy vessel only to the extent that you cooperate with His work in you.

>>>If you don't want God to change you, fine. You can sit on a shelf. But is that what you want?

Avoid this fallacy: I once listened to a woman who told me that it was God's business to make her holy. She believed that there wasn't anything she needed to do herself. “It's all up to Him,” she said. And for awhile, I believed her—until I saw the rotten result of that attitude in my own life. SHE WAS WRONG!!!!

Scripture tells us that we need to work together with God to make changes in our lives,

Philippians 2:12-13 (12) *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; (13) for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*

“Work out your own salvation,” Paul tells us. He said that God is working in us, but we need to work too. We need to change. We need to receive God’s correction. We need to listen to Him. We need to obey God and follow Him.

Jesus Himself told us to take up our cross daily and follow Him,
Luke 9:23 *Then [Jesus] said to them all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”*

Since when is denying yourself and taking up your cross daily fun? This means daily, consistent denial of self—choosing to live for God, choosing to die to one’s old self.

Paul also tells us what we must do,
Galatians 5:24 *Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.*

“I die daily,” Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:31, speaking of the extreme trials he went through to bring the gospel to us. Each one of us is called to the same walk. Crucify the flesh. Take up your cross and follow Him. Is this fun? No. **But it brings great joy.**

There is a contrast between who we used to be—before we got saved—and who God wants us to be. **How do we choose to become the gracious women God calls us to be? Part of the answer is to realize that we have a choice.** We have two natures—the old and the new. We can choose to take off the old and put on the new!

Ephesians 4:17-32 (17) *So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. (18) They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. (19) Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. (20) You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. (21) Surely you heard of Him and were taught in Him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. (22) **You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; (23) to be made new in the attitude of your minds; (24) and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.** (25) *Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. (26) “In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, (27) and do not give the devil a foothold. (28) He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. (29) Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit**

those who listen. (30) And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. (31) Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. (32) Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. [NIV]

Colossians 3:1-17 (1) Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. (2) Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. (3) For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. (4) When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. (5) **Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature:** sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. (6) Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. (7) **You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived.** (8) **But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these:** anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. (9) Do not lie to each other, **since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator....**(12) **Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.** (13) Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. **Forgive as the Lord forgave you.** (14) **And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.** (15) **Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.** (16) **Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your heart to God.** (17) **And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus [in His character], giving thanks to God the Father through Him.** [NIV]

“And from the days of John the Baptist until now,” Jesus said, “the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, **and the violent take it by force,**” **Matthew 11:12.** How do the violent take the kingdom by force, I once asked God. Here is what He told me: We take the kingdom of God **by force of will. We choose to obey God and follow Him.**

This choice is yours today!

III. What is the result of obeying God?

There are two “IFS”:
IF we **obey God**, and
IF we obey Him **because we love Him**—

We will change tremendously. We will come to look like Him, 1 John 3:2; 4:17. All the fruit of the Spirit will be evident in our lives, Galatians 5:22-23. We will be wise and build up our families, Proverbs 14:1. We will be changed by Him—by His power, His wisdom, His righteousness, His sanctification and redemption, 1 Corinthians 1:24, 30; 2 Corinthians 3:18. We will walk in mercy and truth, Psalm 25:10. Jesus' holiness, peace, gentleness, mercy and good fruit will fill our lives, 1 Peter 1:15; John 15:4-5; James 3:17-18. We will bring comfort and encouragement to others around us, and we

will build them up, Ephesians 4:29; 1 Corinthians 14:3. More and more, the joy of the Lord will be our strength, Nehemiah 8:10; John 15:11. Above all, we will walk in love, for God is love, 1 John 4:16. We will also come to love God even more as we come to know Him better and abide in Him, John 15:12; Ephesians 5:1-2.

We will become gracious daughters of the Most High God!!!!

Obedience brings joy. This is true for every Christian. But there is an additional truth for women who love God. Because God has given women great influence on the people around them, not only will they change, but their families, households, work associates and work places will be affected as well. Everyone around them will be influenced.

The woman is the heart of the home. She can bring great peace and great joy OR she can make everybody miserable. There is a Texas saying, "If Mama ain't happy, ain't nobody happy!" This is true for Christian women as well.

But if Mama is filled with God's goodness and joy, then what?

Food for Thought—

What are the two "ifs"?

What are some of the ways we will change? How especially do you want to change?

Assuming we change--whom will we influence? *If I change, I will influence...*

Home Work—

James 1:22 *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves....he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.*

There are three things which will help you tremendously to grow in the Lord,

- 1. Pray every day.** Seek times to be together with the Lord and pray. Honor Him with worship. Ask Him to search your heart and show you anything you need to confess or change, Psalm 139:23-24; Psalm 51:1-10. Ask Him to cover you and your family with the blood of Jesus Christ, and put a hedge of protection around you, Job 1:5, 10. In the name of Jesus, break curses, judgments and every demonic attack against you, Luke 10:19; Isaiah 54:17; Psalm 63:9-11; Psalm 68:1-3. Declare blessings on yourself and your family instead, for example, Psalm 18:1-3. Then listen to the Lord, and choose to obey Him. Remember that if you are hearing God speak, it will always be consistent with His word and His character, James 3:17-18.
- 2. Read your bible every day.** Choose a version of the bible that is as accurate as possible, but also comfortable for you to read. If you haven't been reading the word regularly, then start by reading the book of John. Read slowly enough to think about what you are reading. Take passages that especially touch you, and pray them back to the Lord. Just reading your bible will help you change—see Psalm 19:7. It will also build up your faith, see Romans 10:17. Also, reading God's word will help you hear God's voice.
- 3. Choose a part of God's word to meditate on every day.** If possible, write it down either in a notebook or 3x5 card, and meditate on it. Say it over and over again to yourself. Pray for understanding. Ask God to show you how to apply it to your life. It is amazing how meditating on God's word can help you grow and change!