

Fallen from Grace?

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We sometimes hear both Christians and non-Christians use the expression, "fallen from grace." Occasionally, they use it to refer to Adam and Eve's Fall in the Garden of Eden. At times, the media use the term to refer to someone—often a prominent Christian—who has had some secret sin, such as adultery, publicly exposed. Certain denominations frequently use the idiom to describe Christians who have so sinned that they have, according to their theology, lost their salvation (at least until they respond to another altar call). "Fallen from grace" is a biblical term with a specific meaning that matches none of the ways it is commonly used. Unfortunately, this confusion obscures the Gospel. In this article, I'd like to explain what the Bible really means by "fallen from grace."

Belying the False Notions

Can Adam and Eve be said to have fallen from something? Yes. But no one can fall from what he or she doesn't have in the first place. Nothing in the Bible says that Adam and Eve ever had grace. To say that they fell from grace is an assumption theologians make without any biblical evidence. God offered Adam and Eve grace through the tree of life (see "What Really Happened in the Garden of Eden?" (<https://www.wordofhisgrace.org/wp/eden/>)). But they never ate from it. When they disobeyed God and ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve went from a state of not knowing good and evil—a state of innocence—to a state of knowing good and evil. What Adam and Eve fell from, then, was a state of innocence.

When the media refer to someone as having fallen from grace, they mean he or she has fallen from a reputation or position that was highly esteemed by others. Although the media seem to take some pleasure in using this expression when the person they are reporting about is known as a Christian, they are really using "grace" in a totally non-theological way to loosely mean "respect" or "honor" and, sometimes, "trust."

As I mentioned, there are those who use "fallen from grace" to express the state of Christians whose sins have caused them to lose God's grace and lose their position before God as saved sinners. It

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should be immediately apparent that this belief is self-contradictory. Grace is God's favor, particularly as it refers to God's unmerited favor in saving sinners. If someone can lose God's favor because of what the person has done, it would mean that God's favor was not unmerited but earned by works. To say that a saved sinner can become unsaved because he sins is complete confusion.

Grace does not depend upon works. Sinners do not receive God's grace because they deserve it. For a sinner to receive God's grace and then fall from God's grace because she sinned means that the grace was not really unmerited. It means that the grace depended upon the sinner living up to a certain standard of righteousness. This would mean that grace is not really grace: "And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work" (Romans 11:6). Grace and works do not mix. If we are saved by grace, then our salvation is entirely apart from any works we may perform at any time—past, present, or future. Falling from grace and losing one's salvation because of sinful works is utter nonsense.

What the Bible Says

The Bible does use the expression "fallen from grace" or "fallen away from grace," but its meaning is very different from what we have seen. Contrary to the common but erroneous notions of what it means to fall from grace, the Bible clearly says, "You are alienated from Christ, you who desire to be justified by the law. You have fallen away from grace" (Galatians 5:4). The Bible does not say that those who have sinned by breaking a law or transgressing a moral code have fallen from grace. Nor does it associate falling from grace with losing one's salvation. (For much more information about the impossibility of losing one's salvation, read the booklet *Perseverance of the Saints: Once Saved, Always Saved?*) (<https://www.wordofhisgrace.org/wp/printable-booklets/>).

Those "who desire to be justified by the law" are the ones who have fallen away from grace. In other words, Paul is not saying anything about falling from God's favor because of a moral failure. He is speaking about falling away from reliance upon grace and into the error of reliance upon the law.

The concept is really quite simple. If you are looking to the law, you have turned from grace. You can't have both at the same time: "For sin will not have dominion over you. For you are not under law, but under grace" (Romans 6:14). Analyze that verse. You cannot be under

law and under grace at the same time (if you think that Christians must at least be under the law of Christ, see "Are We *Under* the Law of Christ?") (<https://www.wordofhisgrace.org/wp/under-law-of-christ/>). Romans 6:14 also logically means that, if we are under law, sin *does have* dominion over us. Because the law is contrary to our natural inclinations (Colossians 2:14), relying on the law results in more sin (Romans 7:5-9; 1 Corinthians 15:56), and turning from the law to grace completely ends sin's rule over us (Romans 6:14).

Wouldn't this mean, then, that falling from grace and relying on the law would cause us to lose our salvation? No! If someone, despite past professions of faith, reveals that he or she is really trusting in the works of the law and never turns from this, that person was never really saved. In appearance, such a person may look like he or she has fallen from grace, but that person was never really under grace in the first place.

On the other hand, one of God's elect, even after confessing faith in Jesus Christ as Savior, might temporarily slip into a mindset of trying to keep the law (often after hearing law-keeping touted by a legalist preacher). Paul pulls no punches in Galatians 5:4 about the state of this person while seeking righteousness from the law. He or she is *katērgēthēte apo tou Christou*—literally "idled down away from Christ."

An elect person who falls from grace will ultimately and finally turn back and put his or her trust entirely in God's unmerited favor given freely through Jesus Christ alone. In the meantime, however, while he or she is turned to the law, he or she is turned away from Christ and rendered powerless and useless. Why? Because, just like trying to power a cell phone with a dead battery, this person is putting his or her trust in something that is powerless and useless—the law.

It is a tragedy when brothers and sisters fall from grace and waste part of the time they have in this life "idled down." That's why we should pray for them, do what we can to restore them to full trust in Christ alone, and not shy away from exposing those who preach the false gospel of reliance on the law.