

Stealing Letters

At the small country church where I first obeyed the gospel, there was a sign out by the road. Messages inviting people, meeting times, and Bible verses were regularly displayed. For a time, however, letters began to go missing from that sign. Each time a message was posted, someone would remove part of it. Undoubtedly, someone was up to mischief. In a way, that act of stealing letters from a church sign illustrates a much larger spiritual truth. What was left behind was often incomplete or confusing. It didn't take much as just a single missing letter could change the entire message.

God has given us His Word which is complete, perfect, and all-sufficient. Yet there is always a danger when people begin "taking away" from it. Moses instructed God's people long ago, *"You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you."* (Deuteronomy 4:2).

At the end of the book of Revelation the warning is repeated, *"...If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life..."* (Revelation 22:18-19)

When truth is altered, the message no longer says what God intended. Just like a sign missing letters, it becomes distorted. Sometimes the changes are subtle: a word is skipped here, or a principle overlooked there. Over time, those small omissions can lead to significant misunderstandings. We may never take letters from a church sign, but we must be careful not to "remove" truth from God's message in our own lives. Ignoring certain teachings, minimizing difficult commands, or picking and choosing what we will follow can have the same effect.

On the other hand, there is also a positive reminder in this illustration. When the sign is full, clear, and intact, it communicates with purpose. People can read it, understand it, and benefit from it. In the same way, when we hold firmly to the whole counsel of God, our lives send a message that is clear, faithful, and meaningful. Let's be people who do not take away, but who hold on to every word God has given. Because the message matters, and every "letter" counts. As the Psalmist said, *"Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven."* (Psalm 119:89)

- by Josh McCord

Wash Your Face

When you see a dirty face in the mirror, you wash your face, not the mirror. Likewise when we see error in our lives portrayed by truth revealed in the Bible, let us simply clean up our lives and quit criticizing the Bible. What do you think of a man who breaks a mirror because he doesn't like what he sees? Then what do you think of one who criticizes the truth that simply reveals the inner man that we can't see with the physical eye?

- by Leslie Diestelkamp

Consider this...

"Cast out the scorner, and contention shall go out; yea, strife and reproach shall cease" (Proverbs 22:10).

Would my home, the place where I work, or the church where I am a member be more peaceful and harmonious if I were "cast out?" If I am a scoffing, murmuring, complaining scorner, they would be. Is it not a sad thought to think that life might be better for others if I were not present?

- selected

The Essential Need for God's Mercy and Grace

There are certain words in the Bible that are so familiar we may fail to appreciate their true depth. Two of those words are *mercy* and *grace*. We sing about them, we speak of them, and we

depend upon them - but do we really understand what they mean and how desperately we need them?

Let's begin with a simple distinction:

- **Mercy** is God withholding the punishment we warrant. Because of our sins, we stand condemned. "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Justice demands a penalty - but mercy intervenes. God, in His great compassion, does not give us what we rightly deserve.
- **Grace**, on the other hand, is God giving us blessings we do not deserve. Not only are we spared the punishment, but we are granted His good favor. We have forgiveness and the hope of eternal life. Grace goes beyond mercy. It does not merely cancel the debt - it enriches the undeserving debtor.

Think of it this way: Mercy says, "You will not receive the punishment." Grace says, "You will receive a gift instead."

The truth is, we are entirely dependent upon both. No amount of personal goodness can erase sin. No accumulation of righteous deeds can obligate God. Paul wrote, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). There is no room for boasting. We did nothing to earn such blessings. They are given by a loving, merciful, and gracious God.

We serve a God who is rich in mercy and abundant in grace toward those who are humble and faithfully obedient. May we never take that for granted - and may we strive to live in a way that honors the incredible gifts He has given His children.

- by Greg Gwin