

LEADING GRACE

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Dear Fellow Free Grace Believers,

Up in Wisconsin, where I live, we are always thankful to make it to this time of year. It is an indication that the sandhill cranes will be coming back soon, the robins will start to be seen again, and we can finally take off those big heavy coats because spring is in the air. Spring is a time of rebirth and fresh beginnings. The days get longer and the sun feels warmer. For me, at this time of year I find it is easy to have a thankful heart for the blessings in my life.

When I count my blessings, I truly am thankful for the Free Grace Alliance. Over the years that I have been involved in it, I have been blessed in so many ways. First among them are the blessings of gaining friendships with people literally from around the globe who share in their passion for preserving and spreading the pure, original gospel that the Word of God is so clear about. Like stepping outside and breathing in that fresh clean air, these relationships refresh my soul. I have also been blessed to be connected to educational institutions and the brilliant minds of the professors and administrators who teach and lead in those institutions. They keep us on track with defending and instilling the truths that surround the pure gospel. The Free Grace Alliance has also blessed my life by the missionary organizations that are affiliated with our alliance. To hear how different people have been called by the Lord to work in different ministry fields and locations is so inspiring to hear and be challenged by. And, given that I am a pastor of a local church here in Wisconsin, connecting with other Free Grace pastors through the Alliance encourages me every time I visit with them and see what the Lord is doing in their churches.

To connect, encourage, and equip the Body of Christ (in all its facets) in order to advance the grace message throughout the world is what this Alliance is all about. I hope for all of you that, like the blessings of Spring, you can literally feel the blessings of being a part of the Free Grace Alliance. May this issue of Leading Grace Magazine breathe fresh air into your soul.

Serving Christ with You - Joyfully,



Free Grace Alliance, President



“KIDS ARE THE LEADERS, DISCIPLE-MAKERS, TEACHERS, EVANGELISTS, PARENTS, AND NEIGHBORS OF TOMORROW—AND A VITAL PART OF THE CHURCH TODAY.”

BY JANINE MCNALLY

INTRODUCTION

The world has changed. Families have changed. Today, as shocking as it sounds, parents will choose a church they don't particularly like or enjoy, as long as their children are happy. Families will leave a church if the youth programs are subpar. We can debate for hours over the pros and cons of the seemingly superficial commercialism that we see in the youth departments, but it won't stop the "church shoppers" from looking for the perfect programs for their kids. The reality is that if we want to attract families to our building, and ultimately to Jesus, we need to prioritize Children's Ministry. We now live in a child-centered world where parents will do just about anything to keep their kids happy. Our world has changed. Families have changed. And the church must also change.

SOME HELP FROM STATISTICS

Statistics tell us that at least a half of believers trusted Christ between the ages of 3 and 12.¹ What is it about children that makes them so receptive to the gospel? Many possible reasons exist to answer that question, but history has shown it to be true. Few parents and church leaders realize that a child's moral development is also set by the age of nine. It is therefore critical to start developing a child's biblical worldview from the very earliest years of life. George Barna states, "More often than not, what a person decides about truth, sin, forgiveness and eternal consequences during their pre-teen years is the same perspective they carry with them to their grave."² If that is true, then the ministry to children is critical.

In addition to this, research shows that nearly six in 10 highly engaged Christian parents say children's programming is the primary reason they chose their current church. This suggests that for churches to attract and retain families, children's programming must be a major priority in the church's ministries.³ If churches want to keep growing and spreading the gospel, Children's Ministry is one of the most effective ministries they can develop.

What is the perception of the Children's Ministry in your church? Childcare or babysitting? Rest time for parents? A break in the monotony of school and home? Or a critical opportunity to reach the children in your care?

PRIORITIZING KIDS MINISTRY

“**KID'S MINISTRY IS THE MOST IMPORTANT MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH**”



1 “Evangelism Is Most Effective Among Kids.” Barna Group, 2009. <https://www.barna.com/research/evangelism-is-most-effective-among-kids/> (accessed December 15, 2021). Also “Kids and Salvation Survey,” Ministry-To-Children, 2019. <https://forms.gle/yz6FkME67Py1qSqf7> (accessed December 15, 2021).
 2 George Barna, *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions*, page. 63.
 3 *Guiding Children to Discover the Bible, Navigate Technology & Follow Jesus*— January 29, 2020 by Barna Group.

THE PROBLEM

One of the issues that the church is beginning to identify is the number of kids who have grown up in the church who are now abandoning their faith. They have grown up in a culture which is opposed to Christian values, and the influences have overridden their once biblical foundation. They lack biblical literacy, have no desire to be involved in church, and worse still, have a confused understanding of the gospel. They have been bombarded by mixed messages which have rattled even the strongest of values. They have witnessed the dissolution of the family and marriage, sexuality, and now even genders. It's no wonder they are confused. What can we do about it? How can we retain our kids? As free grace churches, this ought to be a major priority. If we can't “get it right,” who can?

THE PRIORITY

I believe that these statistics reveal that Kid's Ministry THE most important ministry in the church, and yet, too often, it's the ministry that receives the least qualified staff, the least budget, and least priority. Most pastors will agree that children's ministry is important, but what is telling is that most children's pastors feel unsupported, under resourced, and under paid. Most kid's ministries lack visibility, taking place in the back room, away from the “real” ministry. Most adults don't even realize what happens in the “kid's area.”

It's often said that your check book reflects your priorities. What percent of your budget supports the Kid's Ministry? Are the volunteers constantly asking for donations of candy for the community outreach because there is no money in the budget? How do you view Children's Ministry? Where does it fall in your church priorities? How are you addressing the needs in your circle of influence?

THE NEED FOR QUALITY MATERIALS

One of the largest frustrations I faced during my tenure as a Children's Ministry Director was a serious lack of evangelistic resources which taught the gospel in an unambiguous, theologically sound manner. Constant editing was required for even the most basic materials. Otherwise high quality curriculum was lacking in this area and very few gospel tracts or brochures were available for purchase.

Senior Pastors – do you know what curriculum is being used in your kid's classes? Have you read it? How does it present the gospel? How well are your KidMin staff and volunteers trained? Can they recognize error or unclear messages? As a free grace movement, we should be prioritizing the production of children's resources – excellent quality with clear theology. This is the reason that “Grace 4 Kidz” was begun, and I'm thankful also for an opportunity to work with the Spyence team, which is producing a great curriculum for kids.

THE NEED TO EQUIP PARENTS

The ministry that happens during our weekend services and throughout the week is an absolutely critical part of raising up followers of Christ, but even the most highly trained, godly KidMin leaders can only do so much with the short time they have with the kids. That time is only a fraction of

their lives compared to the time they spend with their families. If churches want to have a lasting impact on what children believe, they must begin to focus on equipping parents.

Between school, sports, and other extracurricular activities, parents are busier than ever and it's easy for them to allow the church to shoulder the responsibility for the discipleship and spiritual development of their children. Furthermore, most will admit that they feel terribly inadequate and would rather allow the so called “experts” to handle it. However, the reality is that not only does that mantle belong to the Christian parents, they are also in a much better position to disciple and minister to their kids than KidMin leaders and volunteers ever will be.

Unfortunately, the church hasn't always equipped and empowered parents for this. Parents often lack the biblical knowledge themselves and feel entirely inadequate when it comes to the spiritual training of their children. The answer is for churches to come alongside parents to provide them with biblical training, parenting information, and encouragement that will equip them to help their children become the spiritually mature church of tomorrow.

CONCLUSION

It's hard to overstate the importance of children's ministry. Kids are the leaders, disciple-makers, teachers, evangelists, parents, and neighbors of tomorrow—and a vital part of the church today. Investing in the spiritual development of kids has an immeasurable impact on the future of our faith communities. What is the perception of Kid's Ministry in your church? Let's make 2022 a year in which we re-evaluate our church priorities so that our children have the opportunity to hear the gospel presented in a way that produces committed disciples for Jesus.

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DISCIPLESHIP

BY CODY WALLACE

WHAT IS A DISCIPLE?

The term “disciple” over the millennia has been closely linked to Christianity, and in particular, the group of twelve men that had an intimate, learning relationship with Jesus. For many, the term is synonymous with “believer,” but as we will see, this term does not refer to someone as a person who is saved, but as one who is a learner. If we do not get the definition of “disciple” right, there is a potential we could disobey the command to make disciples, and sadly keep individuals confused about their salvation.

It may be surprising to learn the term “disciple” was not first used of those that followed Jesus. Socrates, Aristotle, and Plato had disciples and used the term. “Plato...used the term freely to refer to ‘learners’ and ‘adherents’ where there was no danger of misunderstandings... Five hundred years before Jesus was born, a disciple was one who committed his all to follow a master teacher.” (Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 2006, 54). Though the ancient Greeks had disciples associated with their philosophies that guided their lives, the origins of discipleship are even older than the Greeks and Romans.

Discipleship was a way of life for the Old Testament Jewish people. Examples can be seen in Ezra (1 Chr 25:8), Isaiah, who repeatedly refers to the position of discipleship (Isa 8:16; 50:4; 54:13), and perhaps the most familiar relationship of training in the Old Testament, Moses and Joshua (Exod 24:13). Joshua was Moses’ constant attendant in training till he would eventually replace Moses as the leader of Israel (Deut 31:1-30; Josh 1:1-2). This type of training one’s replacement or training someone to emulate your leadership was the prevalent training style in Jewish culture when Jesus spoke about it (Matt 10:24-25).

THREE GROUPS OF DISCIPLES IN THE NT

Scripture mentions three types of disciples during the time of Jesus: The twelve disciples of Jesus, John the Baptist's disciples, and the Pharisees disciples (John 1:35; 3:25; Luke 5:33; 7:19). Likewise, when the Apostle Paul was known as Saul of Tarsus, he was discipled by Gamaliel, a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:34; 22:3). Rabbis also practiced this method training, but to become a student of a rabbi, one had to have completed formal school and been a top student. "If the rabbi thought the student could make the cut, he extended an invitation to follow him until the age of thirty, which is when most rabbis began their own ministries. Three prominent first-century rabbis were Hillel, Shammai, and Gamaliel." (Robby Gallaty, *Rediscovering Discipleship*, 2015, 34). It can be presumed that Paul was seen as a star pupil and was being polished to eventually become a rabbi himself (Acts 9:1-2; Phil 3:4-5). For all intents and purposes, the definition of a disciple is follower or learner. Disciples are under the tutelage of one who has mastered what is being taught.

In the Jewish sense, this would mean learning the books of the Law. Since Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law (Matt 5:17-18), His disciples were learning a direct application of the Law, which Jesus states and Paul later reiterates, is love (Matt 22:37-40; Rom 13:8-10; Gal 5:14).

MAKE LEARNERS

If we want to understand Jesus' last command, we need to understand what a disciple is. Before ascending to His throne in heaven as an accomplished High Priest (Heb 10:11-13), Jesus gave His last instruction to His disciples:

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matt 28:18-20, NASB).

Within this passage, Jesus designates how He wants His followers to accomplish His goal of reaching the lost and leading them into discipleship. He starts with, "Go" (this participle takes the imperative force of the main verb). He wants His disciples to leave Israel, the place He called them, and share the news of the Messiah with all the nations (cf. Acts 1:8). The importance of His command to go or get moving was emphasized by the angel who appeared immediately after Christ ascended and asked, "Why are you still looking up and not doing what you were commanded?" (Acts 1:9-11). Blessing all the nations was always Christ's intention (Gen 22:18; Matt 15:21-28; Luke 19:10; John 4; Acts 10; 11; 15:7-9; Rom 1:16; Gal 3:8).

It is important to recognize that whenever the apostles addressed Jewish people in Acts, the message was repentance from the rejection of Jesus. Partnered with the call to repent of their rejection, Peter called them to be baptized (Acts 2:38). This is seen as an individual's initiation into discipleship. Paul would baptize people that had believed as well (Acts 13:33).

BAPTISM AS INITIATION

"The first mark of a disciple is baptism. It is one of the first acts that identifies us as a follower of Jesus Christ and initiates us into a life of obedience...baptism is the initiatory rite of the Christian...the symbolism of baptism serves as a public statement of the believer's personal commitment to Christ..." (John Koessler, *True Discipleship*, 2003, 14).

New believers would be immersed (baptized) into water as a means of initiation into discipleship and immersed into His teaching as part of the walk of a disciple. Observing all He commanded "involves more than downloading information. Disciple-making is about comprehensive training in obedience leading to reproduction and multiplication" (Dave Earley & Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is*, 2013, 5). Baptism would set these individuals apart as followers of Jesus and His teaching as well as start them in the process of being multipliers.

THE POINT IS "DO IT!"

Every believer is called to disciple, instruct, and immerse others in relationship with Jesus. The structure of Jesus' command in Matthew 28:18-20 is written as a chiasm, and the entire book of Matthew is structured as one giant chiastic work, which was the style of teaching many rabbis used in the time of Christ. The emphasized element is the center of the chiasm, in the case of the Great Commission, it is, "in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."

If the structure of this chiasm is as Gary Derickson states (Bib Sac 163 Oct.-Dec. 2006, 425-26), the teachings' chiastic layout would look like this:

- A All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me.
- B Go therefore
- C and make disciples of all nations,
- D baptizing them
- X in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
- D' teaching them
- C' to observe
- B' all that I have commanded you.
- A' And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

In this diagram, A matches with A' and B to B' and proceeding down, with X being the central theme to all. In taking into consideration that chiastic structures tend to follow rules of three, the passage could look like this:

- A All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me.
- B Go therefore
- C and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them
- X in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
- C' teaching them to observe
- B' all that I have commanded you.
- A' And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

However the chiasm is structured, making disciples is a matter of observing Christ's commands. Obedience is where discipleship starts, and it was where Jesus began with His call, 'Follow Me.'

Still, the most critical aspect of growing someone in Jesus is to teach them all about Jesus! This lies at the heart of the rabbinical practice. As Hull points out, "Disciples learned the teacher's words verbatim to pass along to the next person. The highest calling of a disciple was to imitate his teacher." (Hull 2006, 63-64). To be immersed in the teaching of Jesus, our Rabbi, is of the utmost importance. It guides (Psalm 119), instructs, and corrects (2 Tim 3:16, 17) the learner.

THROUGH HISTORY

The concept of creating learners of Jesus, initiating them in the immersion of water, and growing them in obedience to His teaching has remained relatively unchanged through the ages. The first church was committed to teaching and application (Acts 2:42).

The Apostle Paul, a central figure in the early church as a church planter and evangelist, viewed discipleship in the same way Jesus did. He instructed those who were teachable (2 Tim 2:2), and he taught Timothy, his disciple and son in the Lord, to do the same.

Paul also believed that a disciple was to experience teaching in action, much like Jesus did with the twelve: “Timothy had the opportunity to see Paul in action for a three-year period as he did evangelism and discipleship.” (Earley, 161). There is no better instruction than on the job training.

Tradition states John and Peter had multiple disciples that eventually became disciplers and teachers themselves. “Peter commissioned Clement to ministry.” (Hull 2006, 75). John disciplined Polycarp, who was “by him ordained bishop of Smyrna.” (78). John invested time “as Ignatius’s mentor.” (77). John is believed to have disciplined Ignatius, Polycarp, Clement, and Papias.

John’s disciples carried the torch of their discipler. Ignatius was considered a mentor to many heads of the early church and guided them in their positions. “Irenaeus, the bishop of Lyons...considered himself Ignatius’s disciple.” (76-77). Eventually, someone took the time to reach out to you—so the chain has remained unbroken.

The church is where individuals take ownership of their personal walk with Christ and help encourage the growth of others. What churches and the believers that make up the churches need to do today is focus less on programs, politics, and pew filling, and focus on equipping the saints to take charge of ministry so that they can invest in others spiritual lives as followers, learners, disciples of Jesus Christ.

What Is Free Grace?
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INTRODUCTION

There are a lot of passages in Scripture that people intentionally avoid. Usually it is because they have an idea about what it says, and they don't like that idea. Romans 9 is one of those passages for many, and there are a lot of jokes at the expense of non-Calvinists because of it. Calvinists use it as a proof text for the idea that God unconditionally predestined some to salvation and some also use it to suggest that the unelect are predestined to damnation. It says things like, "He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens," and that is assumed to mean that God chooses individuals for each from eternity past and without conditions.

I don't expect this article to solve the debate about Romans 9,

or even to persuade those who are committed to Calvinism. That isn't the point of this article. What I'm hoping to accomplish is to help those who say, "I'm not sure I understand Romans 9, and I haven't wanted to spend a lot of time there" to have a foundation to study the passage without fear. It's an amazing passage that fiercely defends the righteousness of God, and it's a shame that so many are missing out on it.

A BIT ABOUT INTERPRETATION

One paradox of Bible interpretation is that one needs to understand the whole book before he can understand the individual passages, and he needs to understand the individual passages before he can understand the whole book. The way we address this

something called the "hermeneutical spiral," which is to say we go back and forth between reading the whole book and digging into the individual passage we hope to understand. In this way, we can get a good understanding of individual passages in context as we gain a better-defined big picture of the book.

CONTEXT AND THEMES

I recently taught through Romans in the church I serve as pastor, and one of the most important things I discovered through the hermeneutical spiral process is the particular aspect of wrath and judgment that Paul uses as a theme in the book. He sets the definition in Romans 1 when he writes, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness" followed by "Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness"

and "For this reason God gave them up to vile passions" (Rom 1:18, 24, 26). So, the aspect of God's wrath Paul calls to mind is that as a response to their "suppress[ing] the truth in unrighteousness," God gives people over to their sinful desires.

This theme continues in Romans (4:12; 5:9; 9:22), but it isn't just with the term "wrath" it also shows itself in other terms of judgment, such as "death/die/died" (5:21; 6:16, 23; 7:5, 9, 10, 13; 8:6, 13) "condemnation" (5:16, 18; 8:1), and, more explicitly, "hardens" (9:18). The basic idea is that God's righteous judgment is shown in that he gives people over to sinful passions/desires in response to their rejection of Him. Paul uses Pharaoh as an example of this in Rom 9:17, and this follows what we see in Pharaoh's story. Pharaoh suppressed the truth in unrighteousness (first, by exalting himself to divinity, then by keeping God's people enslaved, then again in Exod 5:2, 6-9; 8:15, 32), so the LORD hardened his heart
In judgment.

Another interesting thing about the book of Romans is that Romans 9 actually picks up a discussion that began in 3:1-7. After demonstrating that the Jews outside of Christ are just as much under God's condemnation as the Gentiles (Romans 2), Paul asks, "What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of the circumcision? Much in every way!" (3:1-2a), but he only lists one advantage in that context: "Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God" (3:2b). He doesn't get to the rest of the advantages until Rom 9:4-5.

There are two other questions posed in Rom 3:1-7 that aren't answered until Romans 9-11. The first is, "For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect?" (3:3). The question here is asking if God will still keep His promises to Israel if some don't believe. Paul answers "Yes!" which is most clearly seen in Rom 11:26a, "And so all Israel will be saved" and 11:29, "For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable." God hasn't forgotten His love for or His promises to the Jews.

The next question from Romans 3:1-7 that is answered in Romans 9 is: "But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unjust who inflicts wrath? (I speak as a man.) Certainly not! For then how will God judge the world? For if the truth of God has increased through my lie to His glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner?" (Rom 3:5-7). In other words, if God gives people (and, in this case, nations) over to sinful desires as part of righteous judgment, why does God still find fault with those whom He has given over to sinful desires? Who could resist His will? This argument is addressed in Romans 9:19-29. So, Romans 9 (and 10 and 11) is about defending God's righteousness in regard to His dealings with Israel.

UNDERSTANDING ROMANS 9

GRANT HAWELY

THE SUBJECT OF ROMANS 9

The primary subject of Romans 9 is nations, not individuals, and especially God's dealings with Israel versus His dealings with the Gentiles. In the example of "JACOB I HAVE LOVED, BUT ESAU I HAVE HATED" (Rom 9:13), the nations of Israel and Edom are in view. We know this because, in Rom 9:12, Paul recalls Gen 25:23: "And the LORD said to her [Rebekah]: 'Two nations are in your womb, Two peoples shall be separated from your body; One people shall be stronger than the other, And the older shall serve the younger.'" Esau, the individual, never served Jacob. In fact, it was the opposite (Gen 32:4), yet the fate of these nations was set.

The reason so many can't see this is because for more than a thousand years, the church, for all intents and purposes, universally rejected the idea that God would fulfill His promises to Israel. Instead, they believed that God had rejected Israel and instead will fulfill His promises allegorically in the Church. With that basic foundation missing, Romans 9 can't be understood literally. To try to make sense of it, people read into Romans 9 the idea of God choosing individuals for salvation and damnation, but that idea isn't there unless we put it there.

GOD AND HIS CHOSEN NATION

What is there is a look at the advantages the Jews have as God's chosen nation, a defense of God's righteousness relative to His keeping His promises to Israel, and a defense of the righteousness of God's judgment.

Romans 9 teaches us that God hardens some people and shows mercy to others. Calvinism says that God does this as a sovereign decree without consideration of any response or activity on the part of human beings.

This Calvinistic doctrine is called Unconditional Election, and it forms the U of the TULIP acronym. But Paul tells us explicitly why God chooses to show mercy on some and harden others right here in this section of Romans.

"PAUL TELLS US EXPLICITLY WHY GOD CHOOSES TO SHOW MERCY ON SOME AND HARDEN OTHERS RIGHT HERE IN THIS SECTION OF ROMANS."

Calvinism also teaches that all human beings are already hardened from birth to the point that they cannot respond to the gospel by believing unless they are first regenerated (regeneration is when people receive eternal life and the Holy Spirit comes to indwell the person). This doctrine is called Total Depravity (or, better, Total Inability) and it is the T of the TULIP acronym. Scripture teaches that regeneration comes as a result of faith, not the other way around (Eph 1:13; 2:5, 8), but that's another article for another day. What we discuss in this article is when and why this hardening occurs.

WHY DOES GOD SHOW MERCY OR HARDEN?

Is God's choice to show mercy and harden a mystery hidden in the mind of God, or is it something He has revealed in His Word?

Before we answer this question, we need to understand why it is that some think that God's decision is a mystery. The verses which, out of context, can seem to suggest this are Rom 9:10-13, which says:

And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), it was said to her, "THE OLDER

SHALL SERVE THE YOUNGER." As it is written, "JACOB I HAVE LOVED, BUT ESAU I HAVE HATED."

This is confusing for many because they are missing one of the main themes of Romans 9, namely, that it looks at the advantages of the Jews in God's program for the ages. As mentioned above, when Paul quotes Gen 25:23 in Rom 9:12, he is referring to nations ("two nations are in your womb"), not individuals, just as Moses was, and as God was when He first said it. Thus, "the purpose of God according to election" (Rom 9:11) has to do with God's choice of Israel to be His representative nation. We see the same thing when Paul writes of Israel, "Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers" (Rom 11:28). If election in this passage (Romans 9-11) had to do with individuals being chosen from eternity past to be regenerated and then believe the gospel, how could those who are beloved concerning election be enemies concerning the gospel? Romans 11:28 only makes sense if election is not about believing the gospel.

When we understand that Israel's purpose as a nation is in view when unconditional election is concerned in Romans 9,

"NOTHING IN THE CONTEXT SUGGESTS THAT GOD'S DECISION TO SHOW MERCY ON SOME AND HARDEN OTHERS IS A MYSTERY."

then nothing in the context suggests that God's decision to show mercy on some and harden others is a mystery.

One major theme in Romans 9-11 is that, other than a remnant, God has hardened Israel for the time being (see especially Rom 11:7-10, 25). Israel has been pursuing righteousness, but instead they were hardened. Paul said, "So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy" (Rom 9:16). Paul also writes:

"For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOMEVER I WILL HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOMEVER I WILL HAVE COMPASSION." (...) Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. (Rom 9:15, 18)

Is God unjust? Is the answer simply that God gets to choose whom He will have mercy on and whom He will harden because He's God and we can't say anything about it because we are His creatures? It is true that God can do what He likes with His creation (Rom 9:20). We can't argue with God because He makes the rules.

"...HARDENING COMES AFTER REJECTION"

But thankfully, it is also true that God is truly just, and he doesn't do this arbitrarily.

Knowing God's righteous character, Paul asks the question we all have: why did God harden Israel when they were pursuing righteousness and show mercy on the Gentiles who didn't pursue righteousness at all? Romans 9:30–10:4 reads:

What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as [if] it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. As it is written: "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A STUMBLING STONE AND ROCK OF OFFENSE, AND WHOEVER BELIEVES ON HIM WILL NOT BE PUT TO SHAME." Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

God doesn't take into account how hard you run or will to do righteousness because, as Paul established back in Rom 1:18-3:20, no one meets God's righteous standard no matter how hard they try. We all fall short. In fact, the law does nothing but to condemn mankind. What He does take into account is how we respond to Jesus. God offers His righteousness as a free gift to anyone who believes in Jesus, and we can stumble at that stumbling stone, or we can believe and not be put to shame. By and large, Israel in Paul's day stumbled. They wanted their own righteousness instead of God's because in all their zeal, they still didn't know any better.

Thus, God hardens hearts in response to their response to Jesus Christ. It isn't done in eternity past, or even from birth, but only as a response to intentional rejection. This is exactly what we would expect from Paul's discussion about wrath from chapter 1:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. (Rom 1:18-21)

God's wrath follows man's rejection of His righteousness.

This also matches what we see in the Gospels. From Matthew 4-12, Jesus is preaching to Israel that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand and doing miracles to prove His message, but it isn't until the religious leaders attribute the miracles Jesus does to Beelzebul that Jesus begins to teach in parables, hiding the truth from those who were unwilling to receive it (Matt 13:10-11). Again, hardening comes after rejection.

CONCLUSION

Romans 9 is part of a strong defense of God's righteousness. God is just, and not only because He gets to make the rules. He's just because He always does the right thing. He always keeps His promises, and will be faithful to keep all the promises He made to Israel. And He does not deal out wrath/hardening arbitrarily, but in accordance with a clear, just, and revealed standard. What's even more is that He is incredibly patient before hardening anyone, as He says, "ALL DAY LONG I HAVE STRETCHED OUT MY HANDS TO A DISOBEDIENT AND CONTRARY PEOPLE" (Rom 10:21, quoting Isa 65:2). Even more so, He has sent His Son Jesus to die for our sins and rise from the dead so that He can give righteousness freely to anyone who is willing to take it freely.

WHAT

DIFFERENCE

DOES IT MAKE?

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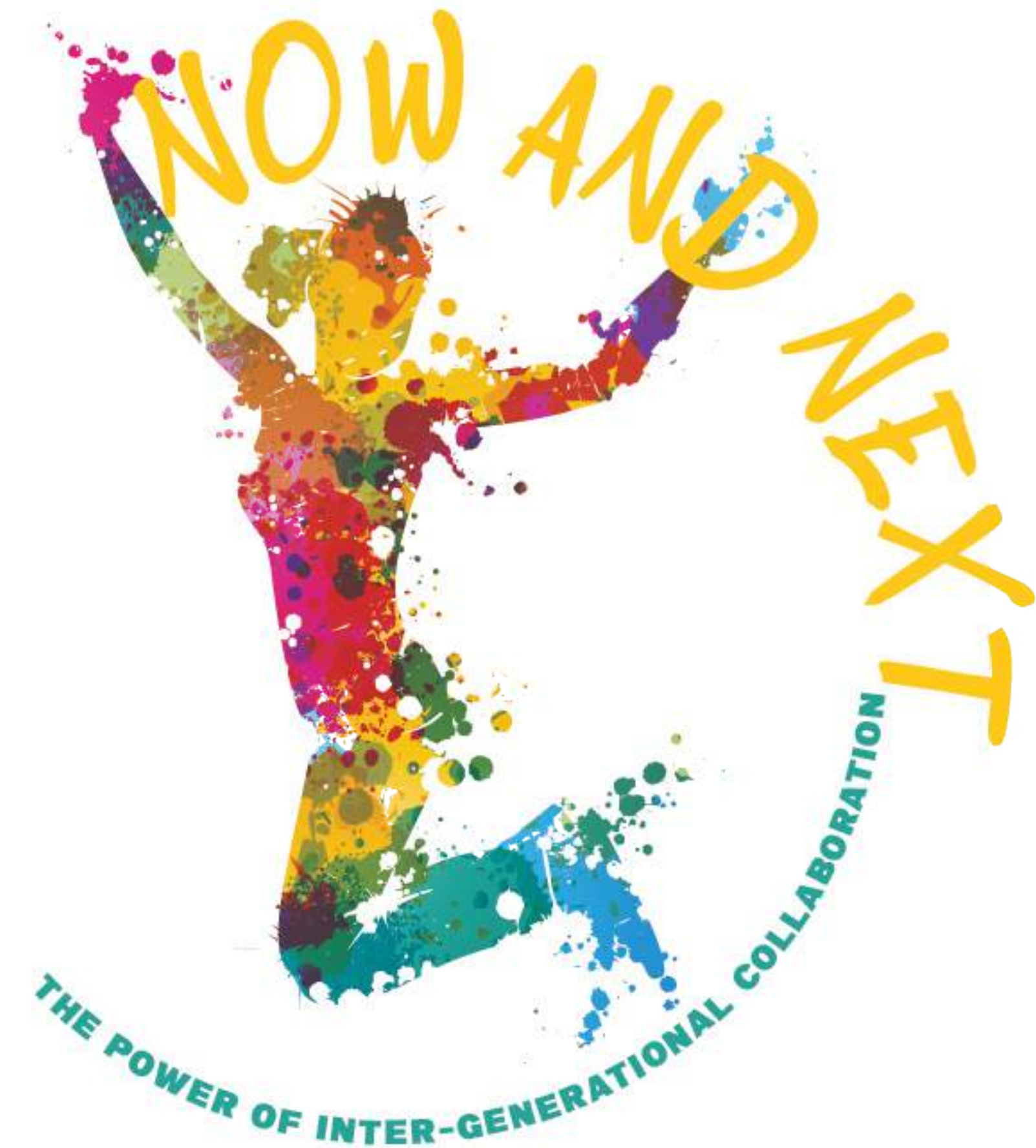
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INTRODUCTION

First Corinthians 12:18-26 says this:

But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. If they were all one member, where would the body be? But now there are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; or again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

This context of this is spiritual gifts, the next chapter is about love in the context of spiritual gifts, and the next chapter after that is about the application of spiritual gifts. I get that, I know you understand that, but I don’t think we’ll do any damage if we replace one word, not to suggest a different meaning of the passage, but just for the sake of conversation. “But now God has placed the [generations], each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.” In fact, right now, there are five generations in the local church at the same time for the first time ever.

And one generation, I would suggest to you cannot ever say to another, “We have no need of you,” the eye to the hand, the hand to the feet. And if that is true, and I would contend that it is, how do we get over some of the big difficulties that distract us from working together? Most of the things that we talk about regarding the generations are distractions from what is a powerful potential energy to change the face of world missions and to change the way the church engages the culture. But it’s where very few people are looking.

SCOT
POLLOK

WHAT SHAPES A GENERATION?

What shapes a generation? The first thing that we need to understand about generations is that what we do and how we think is in many ways a response to the excesses and weaknesses of the generations before ours. We look at our parents' and grandparents' lives and say, "I don't want to do that. I want to do that better. I want to avoid that." It's true of every generation. We tend to look at the previous generations negatively and adjust our thinking and priorities based on that. Also, we each have unique challenges and major cultural events that are different from every other generation. 9/11, the Civil Rights Movement, World War II, the advent of social media, and the Depression, are some examples. All of those are major generational and cultural shapers that define how a generation thinks, how people from a generation respond to and interact with one another, and how they shape the next generation. So, every generation is also creating and shaping the next generation.

All of this informs how each generation thinks about God and engages the local church. Hayden Shaw says:

When you were born colors and affects your perspective of everything. The era when you grew up fills your head with ideas and images that tell you what you can do with your emotions, how you should enter a conversation, what it means to be male or female, how you respond to others, and what you think about God and family and country. We don't think a lot about these ideas and images. We may not even realize they are there, and that's what makes them so powerful in controlling our lives. We don't think about them. We just do what they tell us. (*Generational IQ*)

Think about that for a second. Your generation affects the way you see *everything*. We talk about the glasses that we wear when we open the Scriptures.

Because most of us are Western Americans, we look at the New Testament and we read it through Western American eyes, and that's dangerous because it will inevitably in some way alter our view of the text. We have to work backwards; we have to cover the gaps with hermeneutics and try to read them as the original audience would have read them. The same thing is true of generations and how we see both the world and Scripture.

After World War I, they called PTSD "shell shock," and what did they do with Doughboys who survived WWI and came back home with shell shock? Almost nothing. Many of them turned to alcohol. Many of them have failed marriages. Many of them could not enter back into society. Now we have lots of information and growing information about it because of the difficulty of people now with PTSD from war. The suicide rate, the failed marriage rate, the anxiety and depression rate, the alcoholism rate, the addiction rate of current and former soldiers is skyrocketing, but now we don't call it "shell shock" and say, "Hey, um, we're sorry." We have a whole program, and ministries, and churches, and experts that are dedicating their lives to helping these women and men understand and cope with the trauma they saw or experienced. There is a difference between that generation and this generation. Most of the men who served in WWI didn't want to admit when they had shell shock. They thought it was weak. We've grown since then.

Thinking about marriage, there was a shift that happened when divorce for any reason became law. Divorce numbers went up, and it completely changed generations of people—the way they thought, and the ways they raised their families. In the 1970s, millions of Americans voluntarily sterilized themselves because they didn't want to have children. There was a number of years where that practice just spiked, and there's a cultural, generational reason for that.

MAKE SURE YOU LOOK OVER THIS CHART



THE FIVE GENERATIONS WE HAVE IN THE CHURCH TODAY



TRADITIONALISTS



BABY BOOMERS



GENERATION X



MILLENNIALS



GEN Z

WHAT SHAPED THEM?

- THE GREAT DEPRESSION AND WWII
- SAW MOVEMENT FROM FARM TO CITY
- RISE OF MASS MARKETING

- AFFLUENCE
- THE ADVENT OF TV
- SHIFT FROM FOCUS ON COMMUNITY TO FOCUS ON SELF

- BEING SQUISHED
- RISE IN DIVORCE
- DISNEY
- DOWNWARD MOBILITY
- PARODY AND SKEPTICISM

- SNOWPLOW PARENTS
- FEAR OF LOW SELF-ESTEEM
- PERVERSIVE TECHNOLOGY
- EMERGING ADULTHOOD

- SOCIAL MEDIA
- DISCONNECTION
- ANXIETY & DEPRESSION
- ACCESS TO WHOLE WORLD
- WORRY ABOUT MASS SHOOTINGS

WHAT ARE THEIR STRENGTHS?

- COOPERATION
- COMMITTED TO SERVICE
- GENEROUS

- PERSONAL EXPERIENCES WITH GOD
- THE IDEA OF FAITH AS PERSONAL
- VALUES CHRISTIAN PSYCHOLOGY

- RECLAIM OF COMMUNITY
- RECLAIM SENSE OF SPIRITUALITY
- RECLAIM VALUE OF LIFE AND FAMILY

- WANT MEANING
- DESIRE FOR AUTHENTICITY
- LOVE GROUPS AND TEAMS
- NEW LEVEL OF COMMUNITY

- LARGEST GENERATION EVER
- POWERFUL INTELLIGENCE

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?



Hayden Shaw writes:

We needed generational intelligence in the seventies during what was known as the “generation gap,” but we need it even more today because the world is really different. People now live 30 years longer than they once did. In 1900 the average life span was 48; today it’s 78. But as people live longer – for which we are all grateful – it presents new challenges that previous eras didn’t face. In previous eras there were only three generations. ...But today, for the first time in history, we have five generations in our families, churches and communities. Five. (*Generational IQ*)

All of these generations are present at the same time, and that leads to massive conflict.

METHODS

On the negative side, differences in methods become the point of tension and conflict between generations, i.e., “You do things this way and I don’t like it.” Have you noticed math has changed? My son brought home some math homework and I thought, “I know how to do this” and started to show him. He said, “No, that’s not how we do it now.” I wondered who changed it, and he said, “I don’t know, but it’s just new now.” But what does it help him if I try to force my old way of doing math on my son? It doesn’t help him. It’s just creating conflict.

On the positive side, because of the differences, collaborative genius is a powerful potential energy for us moving forward.

BIBLE

Relative to the Bible, the chief concern of older generations is that the younger generations are giving up on the Bible or compromising it, which is happening a lot. But for many in the younger generations, they’re not compromising at all, they’re just asking the Bible different questions and they’re using the Bible to answer different questions as it relates to culture, and that’s the thing we need to learn from. We sometimes see compromise where there isn’t compromise, there’s just a change of angle. We need to have the theological sensitivity and cultural respect to pay attention to the difference between those two things.

CULTURE

Younger generations are more focused on culture. They are engaged more in social justice issues, and all kinds of related things. There are many books written on these issues and some of them are very good. There is an inescapable reality in our culture that we need to understand and address with grace and truth. The younger generations see problems in the culture and say, “Do something about it.”

IDENTITY

Identity is in many ways the center of the battle, and in many ways, the center of the gospel—the identity of who Jesus Christ is and who we are and the change of identity we receive when we place our faith in Him. Younger generations use the term “identity” in ways that adulterate the very idea of the term. This is a challenge.

HOLINESS

The idea of holiness is and has been a foothold for bad theology. I have several friends who speak at big conferences and write books and are generally movers and shakers who are Reformed in theology. They are believers in Christ and I believe we’ll be together in heaven, but without exception, there is one common factor I’ve heard from them in person, in books, and in sermons, and here it is: “When I was at an influential age, I ran into nominal Christians who said they were perfectly sure they were going to heaven, but were living like hell, and I thought, ‘that can’t be true. Holiness must be much more important than they say it is.’” And from that moment, they began to shift.

I think this is an opportunity for us—for Free Grace men, women, and ministries—to start to shift the conversation, and to talk about how Free Grace, and the uncompromised gospel, speaks perfectly, accurately, and comprehensively to the subject of holiness.

When they talk about us, they say we don’t care at all about sin. We don’t care at all about repentance. We don’t talk too much about sanctification and personal growth in holiness. And that’s the straw man they set up against us. When I read that, I laugh out loud and say, “That’s not me. That’s not our church. That’s not how we do it.” But that’s what they think. I’m not sure why they think it, but I’m suggesting that this is an opportunity for us.

Here’s how we take hold of that opportunity. The first step is that we stop failing in First Corinthians 12. Stop suggesting, even inside where no one else hears, “I don’t need you, Millennial. You’re the problem and I’m going to work around you.” That’s sin, and it goes against the way God has set up the Church. If we don’t get over that, we will never move the ship. We’ll be bogged down in intramural conflicts while Satan steals a whole generation. And I don’t want to see that happen. I don’t care if their parents gave them all participation trophies. It’s not important. I want to learn from their strengths, I want to learn from the strengths of those in my generation, I want to learn from the strengths of those before me, and I want to work together, to collaborate to figure out the solutions that this present age needs on the mission field and in the church. Intramural conflict is translated out as irrelevant.

WHAT SHOULD WE DO?



What we ought to do is to say to the other generations, “Can you teach me your strengths? And I can share mine with you.” If we can tap into the strengths of the various generations: the generosity and service of the Traditionalists, the personal faith of the Baby Boomers, the focus on community and the value of family from Generation X, the meaning and authenticity of the Millennials, and the powerful intelligence of Gen Z, wow! Those are the ingredients of world-changing ministry. But if you take any one of them out, there’s something missing. And that’s First Corinthians 12. If you take out any part of the Body, the Body is not whole.

But we are distracted by the differences between the generations, and the devil—this is important—the devil is perfectly happy with that situation. Because as long as we never understand the potential power and energy in multi-generational collaboration, he’s just fine with letting us keep going. Because our impact will always be exponentially reduced, because that’s not how the church functions.

Just think, if we just took administrative gifts in the church and said they’re the only ones getting it right and told everyone else they need to learn from them. God says to that, “NO!” and the devil says, “Yeah, keep going!”

The future of the church is increasingly multi-generational and inter-generational. The success of the church’s mission in a hyper-speed culture is scaled generational collaboration.

God has given us everything we need for life and godliness. He’s given us everything we need for a fruitful mission, but we’re trying to build this without all the pieces. When we utilize all that God has given us. All the people God has given us to serve with, we will see all that potential energy transformed into effective, God-honoring work.



INTRODUCTION

I would like to apologize for Free Grace Theology. But before you judge me, let me explain. In classical writing, an apology was primarily defined as an argument for, or the defense of, a particular topic or situation. This concept is seen within Scripture (the Greek word ἀπολογία/apologia) when Paul makes a defense for a charge levied against him (Acts 22:1, 25:16; 1 Cor 9:3; Phil 1:7, 17; 2 Tim 4:16), as well as Peter’s admonishment for believers to give an answer to everyone that asks for a “reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:” (1 Pet 3:15, KJV, and throughout). Therefore, as a believer with a heart for Christian Apologetics, I see a need, not only to defend against charges raised against Christianity, but also to defend contextual theology, or the teachings of Scripture, based upon a sound understanding of the historical, cultural, and grammatical context. While many people see Christian Apologetics as merely defending from attacks outside the walls of Christianity, I truly believe there is a need to be on-guard inside as well (Jude 3).

3 BASTIONS OF FREE GRACE

While there is a lot that can be said of Free Grace Theology and its biblical support, I believe there are three bastions by which this teaching is secured.

1. GRACE IS FOR “WHOSOEVER”

The first bastion is realizing eternal life (i.e. salvation) is an offer given to everybody in the world. Arguably the most evangelistic book of the Bible, the Gospel of John, uses the term “whosoever” ten times, with six of those times used in clear reference to a belief that leads unto salvation (John 3:15-16, 4:13-14, 11:16, 12:46). This whosoever indicates that salvation is offered to everyone. This is also taught in Peter’s second letter, when he mentions that God desires all people to come to faith (2 Pet 3:9). Paul teaches this as well by revealing that God desires “all men to be saved” (1 Tim 2:4). While we know not everyone will be saved, these verses reveal that God desires everyone to come to faith and be saved. Finally, Jesus says He will accept every single person (whosoever) who comes to Him alone for salvation (John 6:37); from the adulterous woman at the well (John 4:5-26), to the murderous Pharisee on the Damascus Road (Acts 9:1-9). This first bastion of Free Grace Theology reveals that the grace of God is extended to whosoever believes.

2. FAITH, NOT WORKS

The second bastion of Free Grace Theology is realizing salvation is received by faith—belief—not by works. John’s Gospel opens up with a summary of Jesus’ life and mission. He pens that the ability to become a child of God is predicated upon the belief one places in the Messiah (John 1:12). Continuing through John’s Gospel, he consistently states the need to believe in order to receive eternal life, or salvation. (3:15-16, 18, 5:24, 6:29, 40, 7:38, 9:35, 11:25-26, 12:46, 20:31). Paul solidifies this teaching in Romans chapter 4, when he illustrates the distinction between a working person and non-working person, and what they receive. He states a person that works receives simply what is due to them for working, whereas a person that does not work, but believes, that person receives grace (Rom 4:4-5).



Using Abraham as an illustration, Paul points out that Abraham did not work, he simply believed God, and that is what led to his justification, i.e. salvation (Rom 4:3). Finally, the metaphorical poster child of the grace of salvation is found in the book of Ephesians. Just as Paul told the Romans that salvation by grace cannot be of works, here again he tells the same thing to the Ephesian church (Eph 2:8-9). This second bastion points out that there are no works anyone can do that would merit grace, because then it would no longer be of grace but debt. Therefore, if salvation is only to be received by grace, then it must be based upon faith, and therefore, free.

3. ETERNAL SECURITY

The third bastion that secures Free Grace Theology is the role of the Holy Spirit. While many people teach about the deity of the Holy Spirit, His gifting, and indwelling presence, many Christians forget about His role in eternal security. Paul reveals once somebody “believes” the Gospel, that person is “sealed” with the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13). Let us understand the concept of a seal. In first century-Israel, a king, or one in authority, would seal a letter by pouring wax onto it and with his ring, he would make an impression of the royal symbol. This impression would harden, thus securing his message for the recipient’s eyes only. It would be clear to anyone if the letter was opened because the hardened wax seal would be broken. And in Paul’s day, the unauthorized opening of a sealed letter could carry with it the death penalty. This is what the Ephesian church would have in mind when Paul spoke of a Christian being sealed with the Holy Spirit. From this passage in Ephesians, we realize the Christian is sealed, but then need to ask, who seals the Christian? We can infer from the surrounding context that it is God who does the sealing. We also see this confirmed in Paul’s letter to the Corinthian church, when he writes that God “hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts” (2 Cor 1:21-22). So, with God placing the seal upon the Christian, and no one able to break the seal, the question arises, how long does the seal last? In considering this question of duration, we see two terms found within Ephesians. The first term is that the Christian is sealed until the “redemption of the purchased possession” (Eph 1:14). And the second term is that a Christian is sealed “unto the day of redemption” (Eph 4:30). Both verses point to the fact that the Christian is sealed until Jesus comes back for the Church at the rapture and the immediate glorification of the body (1 Cor 15:52-57). This third bastion reveals that the moment a person places faith in Jesus Christ, he can never lose his salvation because God set His seal upon him through the Holy Spirit.

CONCLUSION

The teachings of Free Grace Theology provide freedom to whosoever desires the liberty found in Jesus through faith. An understanding of the free grace of God enables a Christian to fully understand God’s love in that He extends this offer freely; even while we were sinners (Rom 5:8). And knowing that the cost paid for eternal life is not our works (1 Pet 1:18), but rather the “precious blood of Christ” (1 Pet 1:19), Christians should strive to serve God not for, but because of this great salvation. Free Grace Theology reveals the fallenness of man, the great love and mercy of God, and the security of the believer due to God’s promise. Do I apologize for Free Grace Theology? Yes, I do. And I pray that you would defend it too.

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