

The Servant



Newsletter for Under-Shepherds and other Servants of God /5523 Newberry Drive/Raleigh, NC 27609

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The purpose of this newsletter is to pass along information and ideas to help the Lord's servants as they minister to others. Feel free to use any of it in your ministry

Books



A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows Through Loss
by Gerald L. Sittser. Zondervan 1995, 184p
Catastrophic loss snatches from us of some very precious thing. Sooner or latter we shall all be robbed. This is one of the best books I have ever read about the pain that accompanies such an experience. The loss of a loved one, health, wealth, a home, marriage, or a job can leave a life in shambles. This book is the story of one man's trip through tragedy and an aid to all who have been or will one day be there. No "pat" answers here, but a wonderful look at Grace disguised.

Graceful Grace

I am a little tired of stone faced hyper-Calvinists who think the doctrine of election is the cornerstone of Christianity and that somehow God's sovereignty is being threatened when someone is given a real chance to choose. They point out some very wonderful verses that are powerful and precious by themselves, but somehow they always twist them until they glare at us rather than glow.

The way they tell it, man is dead in sin, and is incapable or lifting a finger to receive the gift of God. The way they see it, because man is spiritually dead, and blind, deaf and crippled (once your dead, does it matter that you add the blindness and palsy?), that men have do not have any part to play in God's plan of salvation.

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Grace or Faith?

I know that it was God's will and desire that we (his church) would be one. Jesus prayed that it would be so in the garden (Jn. 17). It was never his plan or purpose that the church should be broken up like a shattered pottery. One awful breach that has broken the fellowship of men of faith is that between the Sovereignty of God and what is commonly referred to as free will. I believe that both Sovereignty and free will are sacred. Both are holy ground. It is only when Salvation is taken apart and dissected in an attempt to explain it that we are given to extremes. Grace and Faith are both at work in Salvation. Should a child be forced to choose between his mother and his father? Can some sword of Solomon divide Salvation between "joints and marrow" and not do it harm?

I will, Thy will

I rejoice in my salvation
and all that Christ has done.
Sings my soul with full elation
Praise the Father and the Son

For the Spirit moved to draw me
and convict me of my sin
I had not the strength to break free
nor my own freedom win

Yet from the start I had a part
in life the chance to choose
When Christ came knocking at the door
"I" must let him in or lose.

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Christendom sits uncomfortably on the fault line of this doctrine of the will. Some insist that man has the ultimate and final word on his salvation or lostness. The other position says he has no word at all. I think both positions are equally wrong. No one can or ever will be saved apart from grace. Grace is the unmerited and undeserved favor of God gently falling upon man; much the way sunlight falls upon a flower's petal. "For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God not of works lest any man should boast." But grace alone no more saves a man than God's love. If love could save, every soul around the foot of the cross would have been saved, for who could escape the spectacle of so great a love? No, love alone will not save. It is true that we cannot take any credit for our salvation and that God must get all the glory, yet if a doctor spoons the potion into the patient's parched mouth, the patient had better not spit out what he must swallow. And should he swallow, he would be an ungrateful fool to boast and attribute his deliverance to his great powers of swallowing. No, it is the caring, compassionate, and wise physician who is worthy of praise and gratitude.

A man is saved as much by faith as a beggar is saved by closing his dirty fingers around a golden coin. The beggar can take no glory away from the beneficent gesture of generosity. A sinner is in fact saved by grace (the beneficent, kind generosity of God) and not by faith which is but the closing of unworthy fingers around the coin. Grace is the kindness, faith is the capacity to stretch out the opened hand, love is the power behind the incredible initiative, and salvation is the coin backed by the value of Christ's sacrifice upon the cross.

To say that the beggar must take the coin is to remove the one element that causes great emotion and rejoicing in heaven when one sinner repents and believes. It gives God no glory, to reduce the sinner to being but another finger or appendage attached to the sinews of omnipotence's hand. There must be a gulf that separates the two wills if love is to be given the chance to bridge the gap. To say that when God gives his coins of salvation to beggars he somehow first manipulates them to beg, is to reduce salvation to a farce. And to suggest that other beggar's may beg all they wish, but shall be ignored by predestination is preposterous.

To say that man has no part in his salvation and that his will never enters into the equation is strange doctrine. I came to Christ at age twenty one. It is accurate to say "I was saved from the foundation of the world," but there is a painful space between that twenty one years and eternity. Those years were years of darkness, and of doubt, and of spiritual deadness, and in it all my own will, not God's held me in my lost condition. The directive will of God is that I come to Christ, the permissive will of God allowed me live in folly as much as in faith. It would come dangerously close to blasphemy to suggest that it was God who kept me in darkness. I take no credit for my salvation. God gets all the glory. And if I heard not his voice, it was because I would not, as much as I could not hear.

When you asked your wife to marry you, she became your choice. Hopefully, you became her choice as well. Who chose first and who chose hardest is unimportant. What is important is that love and promises brought you together. To say that the bride had no choice in the matter describes more slavery than marital bliss. The Chris-

tian couple hopefully see each other as God's choice for them, but their choice as well.

But did not Jesus say, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you?" Yes, but how can you be certain he was not speaking about discipleship rather than salvation? John 6:65 proves that God draws us, but he does not drag us. There are many places in Scripture where man is given the opportunity and obligation of choice. The parents of Rebecca turned to her when the servant of Abraham wanted to bring her to his master's son, and asked "wilt thou go with this man?" To say that God was not surprised by her answer, is not the same as saying she had no choice. She had a choice. Likewise, while it was providence that brought Esther to stand before king Ahasuerus, it was her choice if God would use her or if "enlargement and deliverance [would] arise to the Jews from another place."

Election does not erase free will from the human race, nor is grace the incapable will of God. Grace is as graceful and gentle as God is great. To make it something else is to make man simply the figment of God's imagination and having no more of an influence or effect on things than a shell on the sea shore.

Bartimaeus (Mk. 10)

1. Jesus command him to be called. (v. 49) Sovereignty
2. "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee (v.51) free will and grace
3. "Go" that's God; "thy faith" that's man.
4. "whole" that's salvation



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