

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

Grace and Gray Areas

By Joe R. Price

Charles Swindoll wants to expose what he calls “grace killers.” He says the “grace killer” acts in ways which destroy grace. According to Swindoll, if you want to be a grace killer, do this:

“...leave no room for any gray areas. Everything is either black or white, right or wrong. And as a result, the leader maintains strict control over the followers. Fellowship is based on whether there is full agreement. Herein lies the tragedy. This self-righteous, rigid standard becomes more important than relationships with individuals. We first check out where people stand on the issues, and then we determine whether we will spend much time with them. The bottom line is this: We want to be right (as we see it, of course) more than we want to love our neighbor as ourselves. At that point our personal preferences eclipse any evidence of love. I am of the firm conviction that where grace exists, so must various areas of gray.” (*THE GRACE AWAKENING*, Charles R. Swindoll, 52-53)

This excerpt should especially concern us because some brethren are duplicating this argument as they attempt to convince us that unity in doctrinal diversity is not only allowed, but endorsed by God. Brethren are being convinced that when it comes to so-called “less clear, more difficult” passages and doctrines in the New Testament, we should content ourselves with saying “this is what I believe to be the truth” rather than boldly proclaiming from God’s word, “this is the truth” (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 4:2). Compare this with the bold preaching of the gospel of Christ in New Testament times: Acts 4:13, 29, 31; 9:29; 13:46; 14:3; 18:26; 19:8; Eph. 6:19-20; Phil. 1:14; 1 Thess. 2:2. Which of these approaches to gospel preaching is bold, and which is not? (cf. 2 Tim. 1:7-10)

Some despise their brethren for boldly preaching God’s word on “difficult” doctrinal subjects. They make statements like: “Who are you to think that you have arrived at the final, definitive truth on this subject?” “Do you have 100% perfect knowledge?” Boldness is disparaged while uncertainty is exalted (whether intentionally or not). This should not be so! **“These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee”** (Titus 2:15). We must appeal to the authority of Christ, revealed in the New Testament, as the basis for our boldness of faith and its confident proclamation.

Brethren who appeal to and apply 2 John 9-11 to difficult doctrinal subjects (such as marriage, divorce and remarriage) are accused of being intolerant, church-splitters and grace killers. Such accusations can and must be answered from God’s word.

“Everything is either black or white, right or wrong.”

Please tell us dear brother, you who would allow gray areas in the revelation of the gospel of grace, wherein is the “gray” area? Romans 14 teaches liberty in the area of personally indifferent matters before God – matters which are morally neutral in God’s sight (Rom. 14:3-5, 14, 18, 20, 22; cf. 1 Cor. 8:8). Therefore, we are not to dispute over these sorts of doubtful things, but receive one another (14:1, 13; 15:7). A close study of Romans 14:1-15:7 teaches us not to use this passage to justify ongoing fellowship with doctrinal error or moral sins. 2 John 9-11 establishes that fact, and it is not in conflict with Romans 14. So please tell us, what is the “black and white” of the gospel, and what are the “gray areas of divine revelation?” This is the language of Ashdod – the vernacular of modern-day Calvinism.

“Fellowship is based on whether there is full agreement.”

We are taught to agree with the apostles of Christ to have fellowship with God (read 1 Jn. 1:1-4; 4:1-6). Men

may agree and still not have God (if their agreement is error which goes beyond the doctrine of Christ). Such do ***“not have God”*** (2 Jn. 9). You see, kind brother, we must agree with Christ first, before agreement between ourselves means anything. Fellowship with brethren is based upon each other being in fellowship with God (1 Jn. 1:9).

By appealing to 2 John 9 and the ***“doctrine of Christ”*** as our absolute guide for fellowship with God and brethren, we are being accused of demanding perfect knowledge. Such is a misleading and inaccurate charge. God expects every Christian to mature and abound in our knowledge and discernment (Phil. 1:9-10). The babe in Christ, who is indeed in fellowship with God, is far from possessing a mature knowledge (1 Pet. 2:1-3). But notice please, that the babe in Christ can and must put away sin to have fellowship with God and to grow to maturity (1 Pet. 2:1-2). Every Christian is expected to grow in knowledge, thus helping us on to maturity (Eph. 4:11-16; Heb. 5:11-6:3). It continues to be true that ***“you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”*** (Jn. 8:32). Dear brother, if you disagree with the above teaching, be so kind as to tell us on which teachings of Christ we may disagree with the Bible and still have fellowship with Christ? Calvinism is raising its ugly head among us.

“This self-righteous, rigid standard becomes more important than relationships with individuals.”

The standard which is most important to the Christian is the word of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Col. 3:17). As noted above, relationships with men may exist which do not have God's approval (2 John 10-11; Eph. 5:8-11). God's standard of truth is set in place for our protection against sin and to afford us the proper relationships with men and women of like faith. Appealing only to the doctrine of Christ to approve our fellowship is not “self-righteous,” it is safe (cf. Phil. 3:1; 2 Pet. 1:12-15). The Calvinist does not like absolute, abiding truth (Matt. 7:21-23; Gal. 1:6-9; 1 Pet. 1:22-25). Do you?

“We first check out where people stand on the issues...”

Are we not under divine command to do exactly that? ***“If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him, for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds”*** (2 Jn. 10-11; cf. 1 Cor. 1:11-13; 3 Jn. 4, 11).

“...Where grace exists, so must various areas of gray.”

The Calvinist (i.e., Charles Swindoll) believes that grace allows us to tolerate doctrinal differences (Ibid., 231-233). And, so do some brethren. Therefore, when we appeal to absolute truth as the pattern we must apply and follow in our teachings and our lives, these brethren object. But they cannot have it both ways. If there is an absolute standard of truth, it is consistent with grace (Acts 20:24, 32; Titus 2:11-14). If grace says “be tolerant with doctrinal differences,” then there cannot be an absolute standard of truth.

Which will it be, brethren? The Calvinist has already told us his position. He denies doctrinal absolutes. To him, if we call for doctrinal absolutes we are “grace killers.” Will you follow his steps, or the footsteps of our Savior (1 Jn. 2:5-6; Gal. 1:10)? ■

“11 For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, 12 Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; 13 Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; 14 Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. 15 These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee” (Titus 2:11-15, KJV).

Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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