

Shouldn't Grace Make Us Nice?

You can learn a lot of things on Facebook in terms of “Christian” interaction, and unfortunately, much of it is anything but nice. In fact, the interaction is often downright rude and ugly and, ironically, some of the worst offenders are fervent proponents of the “grace” message. How can this be?

Recently, I asked my Facebook friends to help me give feedback to my publisher regarding which of two books I should finish first. I have been deeply burdened to get both of them out, but since we can't publish two books at the same time, I asked this question: “Between these two books, *Hyper-grace: Exposing the Errors of the Modern Grace Message* and *Can You Be Gay and Christian?*, which would you rather see published first?”

I received hundreds of helpful responses (the great majority voted for the hyper-grace book), but along the way, some friends (and friends of friends, whom I didn't know) began to get into a discussion of the subject matter of the books themselves. So I politely reminded them that I had provided many other online threads where they could discuss those issues but that this thread was just for the purpose of polling—and that since it was very difficult to sort through lengthy discussions, I'd be deleting comments that weren't relevant to the question.

One “Christian” got very upset with me, immediately proclaiming me a “snake and viper.” I didn't bother responding to him.

Another gentleman wrote, “Quit being a moderator. ... Nobody will care for your one-sided books. Keep deleting, and you prove you're just a jerk.”

I decided to reach out to him personally, and since I had no idea who he was, I closed my email saying, “I do pray and hope that you'll come to know the Lord in a personal, life-changing

way. (Also, I'm the moderator of my FB page. Nothing new about that.)"

This only provoked him further, and he responded, "Come to know him in a personal way? Are you insane? Because I promote a loving God, you assume I don't know Jesus? Why do you feel you know and others do not? Your head is too big! I don't go for the false humility, but thanks anyway."

Well, at this point, he really had my interest, and I wrote back to him, "Wow. I'm not used to people who know the Lord personally calling people 'jerks' and throwing around other kinds of insults—as you do here. Perhaps there are better ways to promote the 'loving God' of whom you speak—the one whom I love dearly and have walked with for 41 years? I wish you His mercy and grace."

Amazingly, he got even more upset: "Oh, you're never angry? Never say anything out of line, or insulting? I doubt it. You are self-righteous in your assumptions, and this is why we are different. You rely on your own moral goodness, and I don't. Otherwise you wouldn't bring it up (my insults, insinuating I don't know him) thank you oh God I'm not like this hyper Grace believer, or this homosexual, or this insult thrower. ... You're a modern day Pharisee. I've been known by the Lord for 34 years ... what of it?" How remarkable!

Deciding to give things one more shot, I responded, "Honestly, I have no idea who in the world you are, and you obviously don't know me at all either. I rely on God's grace, and His grace has overcome my anger and other junk—so no, I don't attack people the way you attacked me. I died to that in Jesus a long time ago, and that's why I really hope and pray that you will experience Jesus and His grace in a deeper way. It will radically change you from the inside out!"

He did eventually apologize, and I forgave him from the heart, but his posts and emails were just one example of a small

torrent of anger, name-calling, and judgmentalism—all in the name of grace.

Another brother whom I don't know wrote, "Love how you sit up on your high horse all holier than thou, and pen the term 'hyper-grace' to cause division and scare people away from the truth that they have been set free. Maybe your next book should be about how arrogant you are."

When I reached out to him and asked him privately if he wasn't being judgmental, he replied, "Mate, I am not judgmental, it's no concern to me whether you're living a holy life or not, it's not my business. However I am fairly irritated by you and other speakers that have no problem pointing the finger at me and writing articles and books about how I and thousands others are deceived."

He added, "I'm fine for disagreement on things, but not for proverbial slinging of fecal matter at one another in books and sermons. If you disagree on things, sit down with a few of us and talk about it, try approach it from a 'I could be wrong' perspective."

What's interesting is that he knew virtually nothing of what I had written or preached, and it turns out that I had actually tried to interact with his favorite "grace" teacher a number of times, all without receiving a reply from him. (I actually gave him a list of these teachers with whom I was in private interaction for the sake of unity and truth.)

Another sister had no problem bashing me and making clear that, in her opinion, I was differing with aspects of the modern grace message in order to control people and get their money (seriously), and she wanted me to know she had been in ministry longer than me.

When I challenged her judgmental comments and tried to build a bridge of communication, she replied, "We have nothing in common Michael so there is no point in either one of us

continuing communication ... I am not judgmental, Michael, I just major in the truth, while you are still very much a part of the system we came out of!" Extraordinary!

All this reminded me of a meeting I participated in in the late 1990s. A number of us who were seminary and Bible college presidents met with a group of pastors, at one point asking them how what we could do better in our training of young leaders.

One of the pastors raised his hand and suggested, "How about teaching them to be nice?" To this I would add, "Especially if they major on the message of grace!"

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