

How This Radical Grace Message Dismisses the Fear of God

Since I have been a believer (since 1978) I have witnessed many theological and thematic trends in the church. (For example, “The word of faith,” “inner healing,” “deliverance,” “prosperity gospel” and more.) During the past decade, we have witnessed a “radical grace” message sweep across the global church.

In the context of this article, “radical grace” refers to any teaching that:

- de-emphasizes the relevancy of the gospels as a model for discipleship
- states there is no repentance and confession of sins after one’s initial salvation experience
- states there is no judgment in the New Testament for believers

There are other earmarks of the radical grace message; however, I want to focus on just three for the sake of brevity. Also—any teaching that de-emphasizes the whole council of God as found in both testaments is doing a grave disservice to the church.

The Proverbs teach us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 9:10), and the early church was healthy and growing when it walked in the fear of the Lord (Acts 9:31). When believers no longer respect or fear God (I am not referring to being afraid of God but a healthy respect of God), they are prone to falling into sinful lifestyles and habit patterns.

The Relevance of the Gospels for the Church

First, regarding the relevancy of the gospels, the proponents of radical grace believe that passages in the Gospels that teach us to take up our own cross (Mark 8:34, 35), as well as many other admonitions in the gospels, are not applicable to the church today—since the gospels are still under the Old Covenant.

To state this is ludicrous, since we have only one Bible, and the New Testament is a continuation of the Old Testament. (The ethics of the Ten Commandments are still standards in the New Testament—only the ceremonial law has been done away with in Christ; read John 1:29 and Hebrews 9-10.) Furthermore, Jesus said that He did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it (Matt. 5:17-20).

To further clarify, Jesus continually violated the ceremonial law of the Old Testament in the gospels—hence, the Gospels were not fully under the Old Testament's Levitical system but were a transition towards the New Covenant. (He touched dead bodies before raising them; he touched a leper; he violated the Sabbath by healing others; He allowed a hemorrhaging woman to touch Him and much more.) That being said, the argument against the standards of the Gospels as the ethos for the church and a model for discipleship in the New Testament does not hold water.

Repentance and Confession of Sins in the New Testament

Second, to say there is no confession of sins and or repentance for believers in the New Testament is also not Scriptural. 1 John 1:8 was not written to Gnostics (as one proponent of radical grace stated in his popular book) since the apostle John wrote the book so the readers would have fellowship with each other and the Godhead, and the context of the letter is written to God's children (read 1 John 2:1). The apostle John also says that "if we say we have not sinned, we

make Him a liar and His word is not in us" (1 John 1:10) ("we" includes the apostle John and all Christians).

Furthermore, the apostle Paul implores the Corinthian Church to repent and experience godly remorse and grief for sin (2 Cor. 7:9,10). More can be said about this but I will move on.

Third, to say that God does not exact judgment in the New Testament is almost blasphemous. I am not sure what Bible some of these teachers are reading. (These teachers and preachers interpret all Scripture through the lens of radical grace, which blinds them to the plain text of Scripture.) For the sake of their argument, I will leave out the warnings of judgment Jesus gave in the Gospels (they are numerous to say the least). Since they do not think the Gospels are relevant, I will stick with the book of Acts and the Epistles.

Instances or Teachings of Judgment in the New Testament

(I will just cite a few passages as this is a brief article.)

– In Acts 5:1-11, God struck down and killed a husband and wife in the church for lying to the Holy Spirit about the offerings they gave the church (This passage alone is enough to rebut the erroneous position of radical grace teaching).

– In 1 Corinthians 5:5, Paul the apostle said that God would cause the destruction of the flesh for an immoral man so his spirit would be saved.

– In 1 Corinthians 11:30, Paul says that God caused the sickness, weakness and death of those who caused divisions in their church and did not receive communion in a proper way.

– In Galatians 6:7-9, Paul also warns the church that God is not mocked, and that they will reap according to what they sow. (The fact that he said "God is not mocked" implies that God is the agent who will judge and repay those Christians who sow to their flesh.)

– In Ephesians 5:1-6 Paul warns the Ephesian church that the wrath of God is poured out on those who practice sexual immorality, idolatry and covetousness (he warned the church in this context, not the world).

– In Hebrews 10:30-31, the writer is telling believers who were contemplating leaving the faith that “The Lord will judge His people” and that “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

– Finally, in the book of Revelation chapters 2 and 3, Jesus Himself commands various churches to repent or He would shut them down in judgment (Rev. 2:5, 16; 3:3; 3:19. He even warns a false prophetess that He will make her sick and strike her children dead (Rev. 2:20-23.)

There is much more that can be said, but even a quick review of the passages above smashes the erroneous radical grace view of some that there is no judgment in the New Testament.

In conclusion, I believe that any teaching taken to the extreme, whether it be radical grace or holiness, causes harm in the church. Both extremes cause believers to fall into sin. On the one hand, radical grace’s premise of “once saved always saved” goes along with their view of having no need for repentance and confession (because they say the blood covers all sins in the past and future); I agree with this. However, a lack of repentance stops applying the blood of Christ in our life and interrupts our fellowship with God and can cause further backsliding and result in apostasy.

This teaching lends itself to living an immoral life since there are (supposedly) no repercussions (and hence, no reason to fear the Lord for disobedience). On the other hand, an extreme view of holiness without being balanced by grace promotes legalism, which also provokes the flesh to sin even more (Read Rom. 7:7-25).

May the Lord protect us from all extremes, so that we can grow

up in the fear of the Lord and the admonition of the word of His grace that is able to build us up and give us an inheritance among all those being saved.