

03 VANCE

A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Leading Grace

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05 MIKKELSEN

GROWTH

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SECURITY & ASSURANCE

Design: Grant Hawley

Editor: Grant Hawley

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Free Grace Alliance

13 HAWLEY

GOD WITH US

17 FANKHAUSER

IS SO & SO FREE GRACE?

CONTENTS

I have a longtime friend and mentor who introduced me to Free Grace theology over thirty years ago when I was a strong proponent of what I now know as Lordship Theology. He is a pastor and has been connected to a handful of other pastors who also understand, promote, and spread the gospel in its original form. For years I have been inviting him to come to our annual Free Grace Alliance International Conference. This last conference his wife and he came for the first time. He lives in another state than me so we don't get to see each other face-to-face very often. It was so good to see them. My wife and I picked up with them right where we left off the last time we saw them several years ago. Having come, his wife and he both said what an uplifting and edifying conference it was. They connected with people they hadn't seen in years. They were comforted by others who were there that went through similar struggles in their life. They met new people who inspired them. And they left feeling equipped to serve their congregation with the clarity of the gospel and the strength of a broader group of others that they now feel are their allies.

What my friends experienced is a snapshot of what the Free Grace Alliance is all about. We exist to connect, encourage, and equip the body of Christ to advance the grace message throughout the world. Our annual conference is one way we do this (by the way, mark your calendars for next year's conference: October 10-12, 2022). We also have regional conferences, which are a smaller version of our annual conference (if you would like to host a regional conference or attend one just get in touch with us through our website). This coming year we plan on doing regional conferences internationally for the first time in our history!

In addition to these face-to-face opportunities, we continue to help people network with each other for we know that we are stronger together. We also publish this electronic magazine that comes out quarterly, we have a podcast that goes by the same name as this magazine (find it on all podcast platforms), and we publish books that promote the pure gospel and the spread of it throughout the world.

I want to share with you our big goal for this coming year. We want to bring our Executive Director on full time. His name is Grant Hawley—many of you know him, and those who know him know that he has been sharing the grace message graciously, he is a hard worker and is deeply committed to the mission of the Free Grace Alliance. He currently is part time, but in order for us to become stronger and more effective in our mission, we need him to be full time.

All those things I listed in the paragraph above he will make sure are happening with excellence. In order for this goal to be accomplished I am asking all of you to consider supporting the Free Grace Alliance with either a one-time gift, or a monthly contribution. Every person on the Executive Council has committed to supporting this goal, and I hope you will join us. To be candid with you, to function as a 501C3, not-for-profit organization we need no less than \$8000 a month to reach our goal. This will cover all of our expenses as we work with a shoe-string budget.

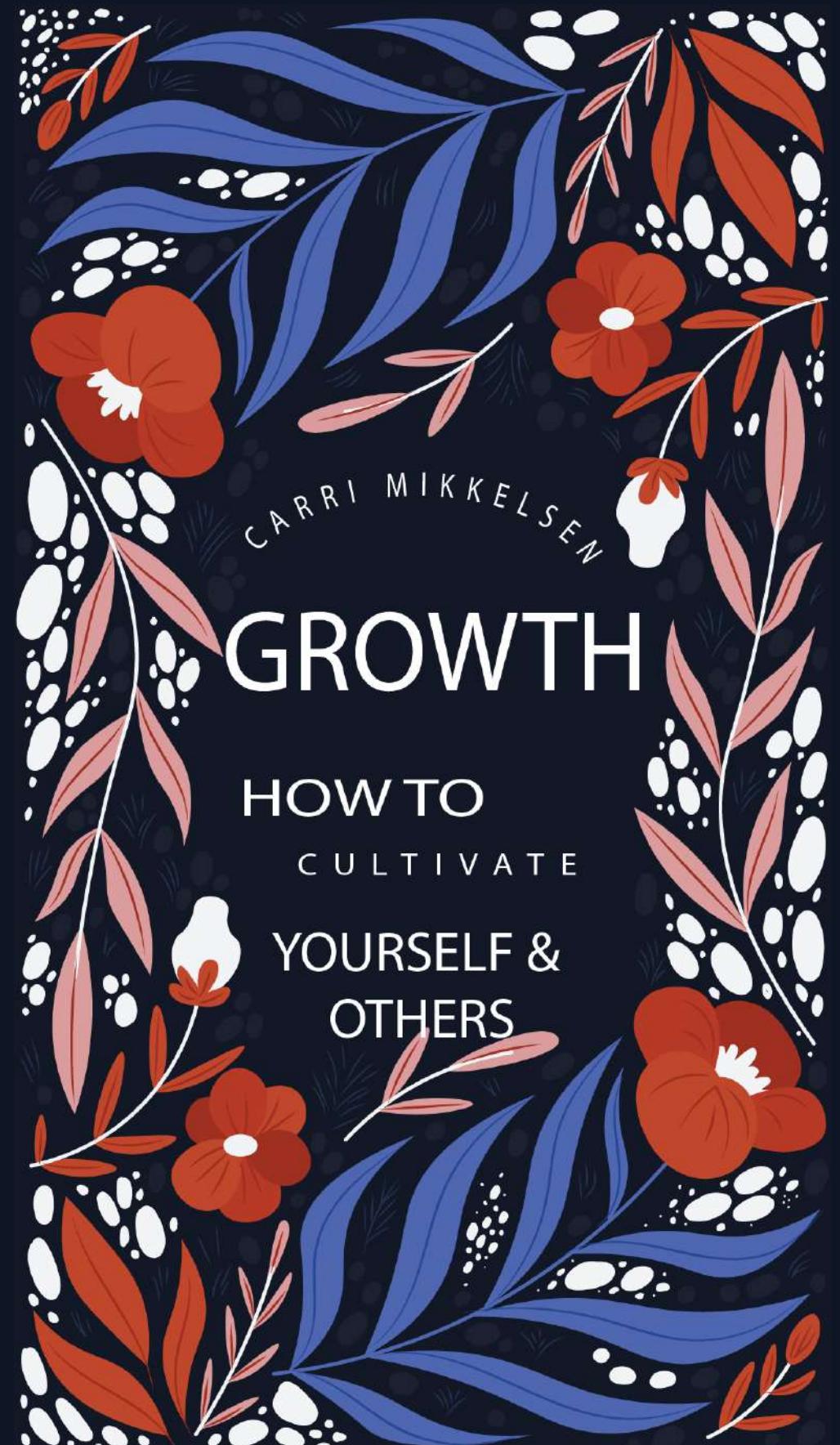
As 2021 comes to a close, please consider supporting the Free Grace Alliance with a generous gift. And please pray for us as an alliance that we can continue to grow in our effectiveness to reach the world with the unadulterated, original gospel of Jesus Christ.

Serving Christ with You – Joyfully,



Jeremy Vance
President





GROWTH

HOW TO CULTIVATE YOURSELF & OTHERS

When my daughter was young, we used to tell her she was growing like a weed and she would reply, "I am not a weed. I am a flower!" We joke about how being like a weed was so offensive to her. Our culture uses this idiom to describe something that is growing fast and needs little work or cultivation. However, weeds are often unwanted and pesky and can take over the real fruit of the garden.

I have lived in the Great Pacific Northwest for my most of my life, particularly in the Willamette Valley where the Willamette River meandered over much of the land creating fertile soil. Life just wants to grow. Fruitfulness on this land took work, but the silty soil created the perfect ground to grow delicious fruits and veggies. I now live a little further north and the soil is filled with cobble a foot down and the climate is just a bit cooler. The growing season is shorter here and so we created a false climate by building a greenhouse that insulates the air and protects the produce from the cold.

As we think of our own personal growth, cultivation is key. Our growth is not automatic. In fact, we need an enabling power, the power of the Holy Spirit without whom we could do nothing (Jn 15:5). The Holy Spirit in us is our hope (Col 1:27). We bear fruit by abiding in Him and living a life of faith. However, without the right food, climate, light, soil, and timely pruning the Holy Spirit has little to work with to spur on our growth. By abiding in Christ, the right ingredients are available for the Holy Spirit to use for our development. We need the watering of the Word and the fertilization of prayer to feed us. We need a good climate to insulate us and a fair amount light to be able to bear fruit. Our non-productive and fleshly aspects need to be pruned for fruitful quality and stewardship. The right soil is paramount for receiving nutrients and allowing our roots to spread and make us firm and deep in our faith.

Those weeds of worldliness that surround us need to be plucked so they do not sap the energy and nutrients needed to create a life of faith.

However, it is sometimes easy to let one thing that grows very well to take over the whole garden, such as my wandering pumpkins. Left to themselves they could take over the whole green house, but if I let them do so, I would be left with only have a few pumpkins. No tomatoes. No green peppers. No herbs. Here in the Northwest, we see this all the time. Our blackberry vines swallow up whole houses and grasslands. The berries are yummy, don't get me wrong, but they could take over the whole land. Instead, we must work at cultivating the land to allow for a variety of fruit and to allow other infrastructures to stand. It would be easy to let the blackberry grow and grow because it easily roots itself and is in the perfect conditions for growth, but we all know we need variety. For health and organization, we need many differing fruits that provide differing nutrients. How true is this of life? It is easy to let those easy fruit bearers take on the whole job of the church. They are great but God wants all believers to bear fruit, even those for whom it is hard to cultivate and take root. This task takes the work of leaders and friends: a humility, a servant attitude, and an understanding we all are made in God's image and have been tasked with the mission of evangelism and discipleship. Enabling, serving, and equipping others is true leadership and shepherding.

Peter encourages the leaders of the persecuted church which has been

scattered in differing regions of Asia Minor in this:

Therefore, I urge elders among you, as your fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and one who is also a fellow partaker of the glory that is to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not with greed but with eagerness; nor yet as domineering over those assigned to your care, but by proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because God is opposed to the proud, but He gives grace to the humble (1 Peter 5:1-5 NASB).

Peter is encouraging leaders to shepherd or cultivate the flock. Leaders are not to leave the flock to grow on its own, but to take time to enrich the body. Leaders are not to shepherd out of duty or out of ambition, but out of God's love for people and a desire for their best. Leaders are to equip, not control. Leaders are to help others see their great value and that they too are to play a part in God's great mission to save and disciple all mankind. By doing so, these shepherds or cultivators will reap great reward and know that they stewarded well what God gave them. Cultivators make disciples who use their gifts and abilities to make disciples.

Winter is here, and it may seem odd to think about the garden at this time of year, but winter is the time for preparing for the spring. Winter is a time for planning for new life. Take a few months and prepare for a new season of cultivation and growth.

- How fertile is your soil? Are you reading the Word, keeping a life of prayer, and living in community with others in order that the Holy Spirit can teach, encourage, and exhort you?
- What areas of your life need pruning in order to thrive? What attitudes and behaviors are stunting your growth and development?
- What climate do you find yourself in? Are you in the light, darkness, or shade? Do you need a climate change to better serve and equip those around you? Or can you change the climate? Can you be the light?
- Are you creating a good climate and soil for growth output for those around you? How are you equipping those around you to serve? Do you hold onto your areas of influence or are you finding ways to incorporate the next generation and other cultures and gender to multiply the work output?
- How are you cultivating others? What steps can you take to enrich and equip your family? Your friends? The body?

"Whoever speaks is to do so as one who is speaking actual words of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen" (1 Pet 4:10-11).

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SECURITY & ASSURANCE

BY JOHN KANTER



Spoiler Alert: I'm 100% convinced the Bible teaches with crystal clarity eternal life is eternal life. This means that at the precise moment of trust in the finished redemptive work of the Lord Messiah, we are irreversibly delivered from an endless state of separation from union and fellowship with God and can be sure we will never go to the lake of fire.

Why do so many struggle with the magnitude of this liberation? Perhaps in part it's because there is nothing within our experience that perfectly corresponds to God's radical grace. We have always lived in a behavior-driven, cause and effect world of reward and validation.

When engaged in online apologetics and evangelism, I find that people are usually more forthcoming about spiritual matters than they would tend to be in face to face conversations. In a keyboard chat, if someone says they are relying on Jesus to be reconciled with God, I'll then ask if they have assurance of their salvation. Sadly, the answer is often "no!" I then ask if they are familiar with the doctrine of security. Again the answer is often no. And usually their response indicates that uncertainty about their own perseverance has more impact on their thinking than the certainty of divine preservation. Plus, people often simply summarize the views of their favorite Bible teacher without first reading relevant Scripture passages in context for themselves.

Over the years, I have learned that to speak constructively about theology, we have to define key terms clearly, precisely, and concisely because even when using the same words, people can mean significantly different things. So let's begin with some baseline definitions.

The doctrine of security is the unconditional guarantee that once a person has been saved, he will never lose his relationship with God and will be preserved unto eternal life. The doctrine of assurance is the absolute conviction that we have spiritual salvation now and will be eternally kept. It is a state of mind. It differs from security in that security is true whether one realizes it or is assured of it.

The bases for the truth of security involve all three persons of the Godhead. With respect to the Father, there are His unconditional promises (cf. Rom. 8:38-39) and His keeping power (cf. John 10:29; 1 Pet 1:5). In Romans 8:38-39, Paul unpacks the immensity of God's unconditional promises by listing four contrasting pairs which emphasize that no force or space can separate His redeemed from His loving care. These contrasted items are death/life, angels/heavenly rulers, present things/future things, and height/depth. Then, a summary statement stresses that the actions of a created entity can never separate the redeemed from God's love demonstrated in the Messiah Lord.

Concerning the Father's keeping power, in John 10:29, Yeshua reminds His Jewish audience that because He is executing the Father's will, both He and the Father will keep His "sheep" (believers) secure in their possession of eternal life (cf. John 10:28). Also, in 1 Peter 1:5, it is important to note that the phrase "through faith" in connection to God's keeping power is not implying that the elect will inevitably continue in faith. In fact, Paul warned that followers of Messiah may stop believing the truth (e.g., 1 Tim 4:1; 2 Tim 2:17-18). Rather, the point here is that faith is the means by which one receives salvation initially.

With regard to the Son, the issue of security centers on Messiah's substitutionary death for sin (cf. Rom. 8:1; 1 Jn. 2:2) and His present intercession or prayer for preservation (cf. Jn. 17:15; Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25). The context of Romans 8:1-11 is the believer's freedom from the enslaving power of sin through the power of the Spirit. And so, the phrase "no condemnation" in Romans 8:1 is not just referring to deliverance from eternal judgment, but it also underscores the need to recognize the reality of their permanent acceptance before God in order to become more holy in character and conduct. Regardless of what any person's sin may be, Yeshua has fully satisfied all the requirements necessary for the righteous exercise of divine justice in response to human rebellion (cf. 1 Jn. 2:2).

In addition to the perfect justice resulting from perfect payment for sin, there is also the Son's present work as our advocate. Romans 8:34 speaks about Messiah's death, which has removed our guilt, His resurrection, which has enabled Him to give life to those who trust Him (cf. John 1:25; 14:19), and His ascension, which has placed Him in a position of supreme authority in heaven, where He represents us (Rom. 8:29). These three elements, His death, resurrection, and ascension, have culminated in Him presently interceding to the Father for our welfare (Heb 4:4-16; 7:25; cf. Rom 8:26). As the Father's appointed judge, the Son will condemn the unrighteous (Acts 17:31), but He will not condemn the elect (cf. Rom 8:33). Our Judge is also our Advocate.



John Kanter serves with *Sojourner Ministries*:
Exploring the Jewish Heart of Christianity.

For information on John and his work go to
www.sojournerministries.com/about/representatives.

Also, concerning this complementary sealing and indwelling work of the Spirit, it should be noted that the redemption mentioned in Ephesians 1:14 differs from that referred to in Ephesians 1:7. Justification (deliverance from sin's penalty) is the focus in verse 7, while glorification (deliverance from sin's presence) is in view in verse 14. The point is that the Holy Spirit given to believers ensures that the full measure of God's salvific intention will be completed and experienced.

In view of the Trinitarian bases for security, we can draw some significant conclusions. To counteract or undo these works, a person must have power greater than God's. If a believer can become unsaved, all that happens when that person trusted Messiah will have to be undone too. And lastly, while fellowship may be broken, union never can be (cf. 1 Corinthians 3). For every problem passage, there are many that are clear and conclusive on security. If properly understood, this doctrine does not lead to loose living, but rather to obedience because its ultimate goal is the praise of God's glory (Eph 1:14).

What, then, are our sources of assurance? First and foremost are the promises of the Word of God (cf. 1 John 5:13, 11-12). Simply put, if we do not believe these promises, in effect we are calling God a liar.

WHAT, THEN, ARE OUR SOURCES OF ASSURANCE? FIRST AND FOREMOST ARE THE PROMISES OF THE WORD OF GOD.

The Holy Spirit further confirms our assurance. The Spirit witnesses within us (Rom 8:16) and leads us (Rom 8:14). Regarding His witness within us, here the objective nature of the Holy Spirit joins with the subjective nature of our spirit in testifying to God the Father (Rom 8:15) that we are in fact His children. Concerning His activities in leading us, while His work can comfort us and strengthen our assurance, nowhere in Scripture does Paul imply that those who live in accordance with their old nature will forfeit or prove they do not have eternal life.

We don't need to be anxious or feel insecure about our salvation. The healthy and proper response to the fact that God means what He says and says what He means is to rejoice in what He has done and continues to do on our behalf. And then, to share this good news with others as well. This kind of lifestyle doesn't flow from the exertion of human perseverance, but from the joy of knowing and experiencing divine preservation.

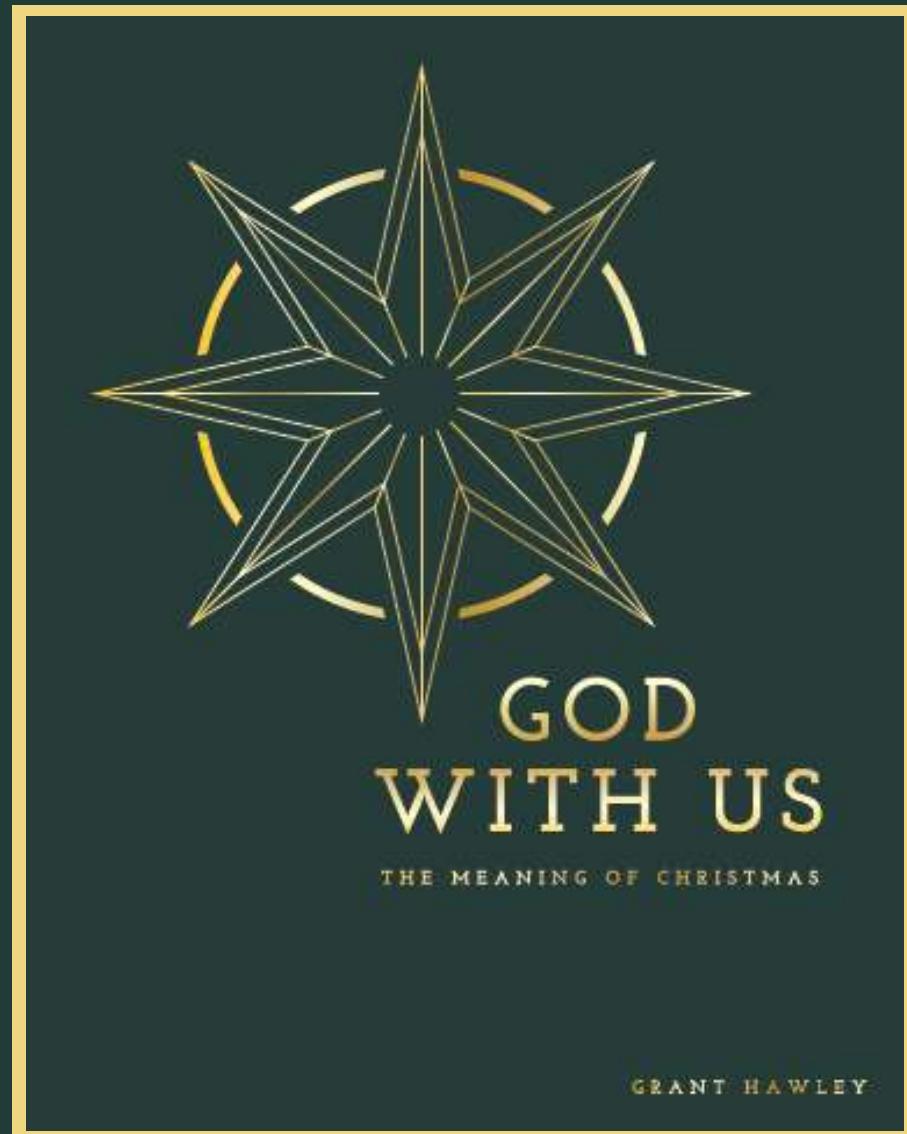


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BACK TO THE BEGINNING

The incredible thing God did that we celebrate this time of year changed everything. As we explore what it means, let's start by going back to the beginning of the human race:

Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

GENESIS 1:26-28
NKJV HERE & THROUGHOUT

When Moses was writing Genesis, the common practice for kings was to set up an image of themselves in all areas they control, declaring to all who the king of that area is (God said it this way long before, but He knew the significance of it beforehand). Man is God's image, the declaration to all that God is King.

We were to fill the earth and have dominion. We were to rule as God's proxy and to cultivate the earth so that the whole world would be an Eden (compare 1:28 with 2:15) and the goodness of God's kingdom would be declared everywhere.

We fell short. Satan convinced Eve to take of the forbidden fruit; she gave to Adam who ate with her (Gen 3:1-6), and by this one act of disobedience, Satan and the other fallen angels stole man's place as rulers of this world (2 Cor 4:4; Eph 6:12; 1 John 5:19). Only he does not rule as God's proxy, he rules for himself, and men live according to his will (Eph 2:2). His rule has created the kind of world we see today, with endless wars, genocides, murders, and a widespread agreement that good is evil and evil is good.

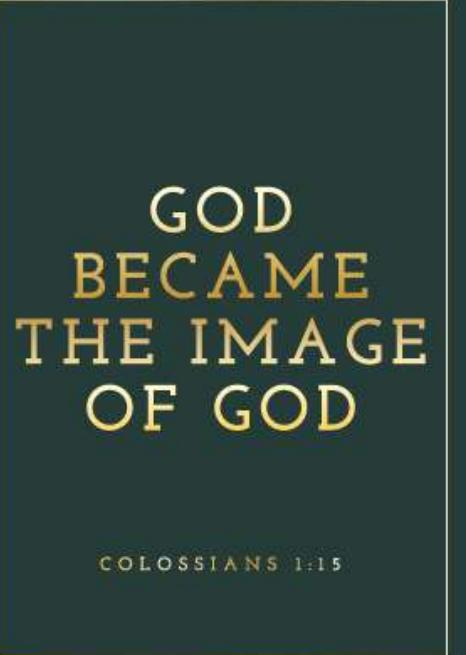
A BABY IS BORN

Then, a Baby is born. He is not just any baby; He is the eternal Son of God. God became a man. God became the image of God (Col 1:15). And the course was set to restore God's original purpose for mankind, with an added bonus—a great deal of glory for the world. Let's take a deeper look at who this Baby is.

In Col 1:15-17, Paul says:

He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.

This means that everything that exists, exists because He created it and He maintains its existence. In addition to this, it was made for Him. If this is true, and it is, He is worth far more than the whole world.



But Paul goes on to make another point about this Person. In the next verse, he says, "And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence."

Paul loves to use the phrase, "in Christ." What he means by this, and by the verse above, is that those of us who believe in Jesus actually become part of Him. We become His body. The Bible calls this "the new creation" (2 Cor 5:17), and God's "masterpiece" (Eph 2:10). So, Christ made the old creation, the world, humanity, etc. And He made a new creation, His body, the Church. And He is preeminent over both.

We experience great blessing by being in Christ, but there is more to come. In Eph 1:10, Paul tells us what God's plans are with us, "that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him."

When He returns, Christ, the Man, will rule the world in truth and grace, and He will rule it with His bride as His consort.

Just as God intended from the beginning, man will fill the earth and subdue it as God's proxy, only now, we will be "like Him [Christ]" (1 John 3:2), unable to sin and full of lovingkindness, and the Man who sits on the throne will be both Man and God. There will be no hunger, no wars, no sickness, and the whole world will be united in righteousness. The whole world will look upon God's image and say, God is King, and His rule is good.

By this, the angels, even those who chose foolish independence, will know without a doubt that God's wisdom is supreme (Eph 3:10-11).

CONCLUSION

So, Christmas is a celebration of a birthday, the birthday of the Lord. But it is more than that. It is a celebration of when God became a Man and forever set us back on a course to fulfill our purpose of ruling this world as God's proxy, proving to every being everywhere that God is good.

3 Billion people live in areas with little to no access to the Gospel.

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I hear the question, “Is So & So Free Grace” often. Or a related spin-off statement: “So & So can’t be Free Grace because he believes XYZ.” Often, people use the term “Free Grace” as a label. And like any label, it sometimes takes on a life of its own. We try to make it say more than it says. However, it turns out neither the question nor the spin-off gives a satisfactory answer. A better picture comes into focus if we re-word the question a bit and ask two more questions. The questions help resolve the spin-off issue.

The original question needs to add the word “soteriology.” The reason is, Free Grace Theology is not a stand-alone theological system. It focuses primarily on the issue of salvation (soteriology). The better wording would be, “Is So & So’s soteriology Free Grace?” In other words, what is his (or her) view of salvation? In simple terms, Free Grace soteriology boils down to this: “A person is saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, with no strings attached to earn, keep, or prove one’s salvation.” I would add that salvation by faith alone applies to both the Old Testament and the New (see Romans 3-4), even though the object of faith is clearer in the New Testament than in the Old. This definition touches on the relation of justification (when we are justified and receive eternal life) to sanctification (how we then live having been once-for-all-time justified) as well as a believer’s assurance and security. Of course, the definition only provides the backbone. It doesn’t spell out how one lives out his or her life as a believer. It doesn’t address rewards. And it doesn’t specify what an unbeliever must know about the Jesus in whom he needs to believe (a hot topic in Free Grace circles!). But the backbone helps with the first step in evaluating where someone’s teaching or writing fits concerning Free Grace.

The next question brings in the broader scope of theology that we must necessarily consider as well. “Is So & So orthodox?” For example, in its introductory statement of beliefs, the Free Grace Alliance states,

As members of the Evangelical Tradition, we affirm the Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the inspired Word of God and is therefore inerrant in the autographs. Furthermore, God is a Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each an uncreated person, one in essence, equal in power and glory.

In other words, Free Grace soteriology fits within the larger scope of orthodox theology. It may be possible for a person to hold to free grace soteriology while denying some aspect of orthodoxy.

A third question fills out the rest of the picture, “is So & So’s teaching sound?” One popular speaker seems to hold to a free grace soteriology, and appears to be orthodox, yet is not sound in other areas. This person holds that grace promises health and financial prosperity. Another person holds 1 John 1:9 has no bearing for the believer; that the New Testament teaches nothing of family forgiveness with God. Yet others may be otherwise orthodox but teach that Christians are obligated to keep the Sabbath. While none of these falls outside the scope of orthodoxy, they do fall outside the scope of sound teaching. Someone might be Free Grace in their soteriology but be unsound in other areas and thus not be someone we can recommend as a solid Free Grace teacher or author. (Notice how questions two and/or three takes care of the spin-off issue?)

Keep in mind, not all differences imply someone is not sound. I have seen instances where the issue is one of interpretation, but the writer or speaker disparages the other with labels like “false teacher.” Some people might put issues like dispensationalism or rewards or the relationship between Israel and the church in this category (differences of interpretation); others might include them as necessary components of soundness. False teaching exists, but oftentimes people will use the label to make their position sound stronger when the real issue is one of interpretation. We need to allow differences without pejorative language. I suspect no one gets all the answers 100% correct 100% of the time. Differences in interpretation may serve as cautionary notes, but not necessarily as red flags.

So, the next time you ask, or hear someone ask, “is So & So Free Grace?” change the question. Ask these three questions:

- Is So & So’s soteriology (view of salvation) Free Grace?
- Is So & So orthodox?
- Is So & So sound?

A “no” to any three of these questions should serve as a red flag. A “yes” to all three should serve as an affirmation about So & So’s teaching. And by asking all three, we can give a more useful answer—and maybe even defray some debate—rather than by just asking, “Is So & So Free Grace?”

FREE GRACE ALLIANCE

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has been a blessing to you.

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