



NEW BEGINNINGS CHRISTIAN CHURCH GOLD COAST, QUEENSLAND

QUALIFIED FOR EVERY BLESSING BECAUSE
OF THE FINISHED WORK OF JESUS

GRACE – PLAYING THE BALL

Recently a group of people completed Phase 1 of my “Legacy” program. This entitles them to 6 months mentoring via phone/email. Their first question was ‘How does a grace group or church operate? What are some of the things we should be aware of?’ An important question. I could write another book in response to it!

I have offered some suggestions in my book **Grace Roots**, especially in the chapter entitled ‘Think organically, not pragmatically’. However, there is an issue which has concerned me for some time which ought to be discussed. It is this. When a person gets a revelation of the unmerited, awesome, boundless grace of God they are usually overwhelmed with a sense of freedom, peace and joy. As many have said, ‘It’s like being born again, again!’ This liberty cannot be contained. When you receive something this good you just have to share it!

Yet in their zeal to share the good news with other believers some tend to go on the attack, maliciously ridiculing and even insulting those who have not yet had the same revelation. This is not only sad, it’s actually counterproductive. As one pastor said to me, ‘They teach there is now no condemnation, yet they condemn those who are not on the same page.’ I must confess that I have behaved like this at times.

I believe there is a better way and would like to humbly make some suggestions:

1) **Always seek to play the ball, not the man**

There is an issue which is currently being discussed in certain types of sport in Australia. When a key player of a team is regarded as a ‘play-maker’ he is targeted by the other side. The tactic is – ‘play the man, not the ball.’ The goal is to take him out through rough play.

It’s a sad day for sport when this happens. And an even sadder day for the church when Christians in their zeal to defend the truth against its critics end up attacking, insulting and mocking their fellow brothers and sisters in the public arena such as social media.

I am not suggesting for one moment that we cease to address the wrong teaching or abusive behaviour which has damaged Christians for centuries. In no uncertain way we need to expose the errors of legalism, control, manipulation, man-made doctrines, religious bondages, etc. But let’s play the ball, not the man.



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2) Teach grace, but don't forget to be gracious

Someone who is a lover of grace once observed that some teach grace but are not very gracious; whilst others who have not yet understood grace can be more gracious in the way they interact with others. Why is this?

I guess part of the answer is that it takes time to grow in grace. As time goes by we come to understand that grace is more than a doctrine to be believed, it is also very much an experience to be encountered.

We have all seen those ads where a man is walking along the road and is suddenly captivated by the sweet fragrance of the perfume of a passing woman. Well, there is an even sweeter aroma about the grace of God. People might not yet understand the doctrine of grace, but they will certainly know when they have been graced. We cannot open the eyes of people's spiritual understanding, but they can be enraptured by the perfume of grace in their encounters with us. Let's leave people with a sense of 'I don't know what that was, but I want it!'

3) Remember our goal is to win our brother, not every argument

Paul was very firm and uncompromising in his stand for the gospel of grace. When he went to Jerusalem to discuss the issue of circumcision, he stood his ground. Titus, a Gentile, was with him as he confronted the Judaizers over this matter. They wanted to make circumcision mandatory for all Gentile believers. But Paul said he did not yield submission to them, not even for an hour. I'm sure Titus was glad about that!

Yet, he was not as inflexible and finicky as some might think over religious observances. He understood that freedom not only means that we are free not to observe rituals and traditions, but we are also free to do so if we want to. As long as we make it clear that we know that these things do not endear us to God in any way. The gospel is Christ plus nothing.

But Paul, under grace, did observe certain practices at times, such as going to the synagogue on the Jewish Sabbath. He knew it made him neither a better Christian nor a worse Christian. His philosophy was simple: '... and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law... that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some' (I Corinthians 9:20-22).

Let's keep the main thing the main thing. The main thing is not to win arguments over issues such as tithing, Sabbath-keeping, fasting etc. It is to win people and bring them into the revelation that Jesus is the sum total of God's message to us, and that He is more than enough.

Let's trust the Holy Spirit to clear up the religious bits and pieces as people learn to rest in Christ.

Ken Legg