



# The Reflector

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## Did My Generation Neglect the Grace of God?

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I cannot understand how so many of the younger generation of preachers (sometimes encouraged by a few older ones) can talk about how woefully the generation before them neglected to tell people about the grace of God. They boldly speak about it as though it was a settled fact of history and that their generation is going to correct the matter by speaking more about grace and less about commandment keeping. As a qualified member of the preceding generation, as one man once said, “I deny the allegation and renounce the alligator.” They have apparently not read the writings nor listened to the sermons of their predecessors.

All of my generation and those of the generation before me that I know said lots about various aspects of God’s amazing grace. While they may not have specifically mentioned the word “grace” repeatedly in every lesson, they repeatedly preached in a way to convey the idea of grace. When they talked about God’s sending his son as the savior of mankind, they were talking about the grace of God. When they talked about Christ dying and shedding his blood for us, they were talking about the grace of God. When they talked about God’s eternal plan in saving all men (Jew and Gentile alike) in one body (the church), they were talking about the grace of God. When they talked about the gospel plan of salvation, they were talking about the grace of God. When they talked about how Christians are to live soberly, righteously, and godly, they were talking about that which the grace of God teaches. When they talked about God’s marvelously revealing his will

for man through his chosen vessels, they were taking about the grace of God. When they even talked about keeping all the commandments of God, they were talking about the grace of God, because God has given all his commands for their good. (Cf. Deut. 10:13 – “and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I *command you today for your good?*” (Italics mine -EB).

Surely, these critics of the earlier generation do not think that those before them thought or implied that any of the above blessings came from themselves. Or, that God did them for man because he had earned or deserved them. I never heard anyone say or imply it. Surely, they do not think that when one responds to these actions of God by obeying him, they were claiming to be the author and finisher of their own salvation and were seeking to glorify themselves. My generation taught that it is essential that man respond to God’s acts of grace by believing and obeying his commands – that he is the Author of eternal salvation to all that *obey* him. In fact, were it not for the grace of God we would have nothing to obey – no commandments to keep – no salvation to work out with fear and trembling.

Admittedly my generation may not have mentioned the word “grace” in nearly every breath (though it was mentioned far more that we have been given credit for by these folks), but that does not mean that we did not teach or even emphasize that we are saved by grace. We did it by teaching the various things that God has done to give us salvation from sin and to give us hope of eternal

salvation in the world to come. The hearers understood that none of these things come by man's own efforts but by the grace or mercy of God.

By the way, when one sees believers "turning to the Lord" he sees the grace of God (cf. Acts 11:21, 23). Yet believers are the ones who do the turning (1 Thess. 1:9). The Thessalonians had been active and not passive in the turning. The text says, "you turned" not "you were turned." When one sees people turn to God, by their obedience, they see both the grace of God and the faith of man at work (cf. James 2:18)

Yes, my generation did emphasize obedience and commandment keeping in our preaching. We may have even mentioned it more often than we did grace. Why? Because we knew our hearers already understood that they could not be saved without God's grace. While we reminded them of this fact, they generally already believed it. It was obedience that many did not get and needed the detailed teaching about.

We suspect had if these young critics had followed more closely what my generation did say about God's grace they might not have become so fascinated with the brand of grace most of them think they have discovered by reading the writings and studying at the feet of theologians – especially Calvinists. ●

## **What about the Rapture?**

**R. J. Evans**

Much of The Rapture talk of the past seems to have tapered off somewhat. This might be because of the large number of failed predictions that have been made down through the years. Hal Lindsey in his book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, of the 1970s, predicted that the Rapture would occur in 1981. Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins have written a sixteen-volume series of books, *Left Behind*, dealing extensively with the Rapture, but have never predicted a date. But I'm sure they would be more than happy for someone to buy their books while thinking about the subject. One of the most recent failures was made by Harold

Camping, a denominational preacher from northern California. He predicted that May 21, 2011, then October 21, 2011, would be the day of the Rapture. Many of his followers quit their jobs and emptied their bank accounts. On November 1, 2011, Camping made a public apology for his false predictions.

What does the Bible say about the Rapture? Nothing! In fact, the word rapture is nowhere found in the inspired Word. Yet, the way some denominational preachers have talked about it, one might expect to find the word or subject on almost every page in the Bible.

According to the premillennial theory, Christ will appear secretly to all believers and silently snatch them away in the air. This "taking away" is called "the Rapture." In accordance with this theory, after the Rapture, there will be seven years of "Great Tribulation" here on the earth. Christ is then supposed to bring back the redeemed, win the battle of Armageddon, set up His kingdom on earth, and begin to reign on His throne in Jerusalem for one-thousand years. Following the Millennium, the wicked will be raised from the dead, and then the final judgment. This is a false theory!

Let us notice what the Bible teaches:

1. "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first" (1 Thes. 4:16). This context is only dealing with the righteous. The resurrection of the "dead in Christ" means that those who are alive on earth when Christ returns will not have any advantage over those who have died. Again, we emphasize that this context is only dealing with the righteous, not those who are lost. Also, when Christ returns—"every eye will see Him" (Rev. 1:7). There is nothing silent or secret about this.

2. "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of

condemnation” (Jn. 5:28-29). “...there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust” (Acts 24:15). According to the Scripture, we learn that there will not be two resurrections, but only one resurrection, including all or everyone, in the same hour.

3. Jesus clearly teaches that both the resurrection and judgment will be at the last day. See John 6:39, 40, 44, 54; 11:24; 12:48. On this “last day” the earth and the universe will be “burned up” (2 Pet. 3:10). There can be no seven years or ten centuries after the “last day.”

4. When Christ comes and raises the dead, “Then comes the end, when He destroys death, delivers the kingdom to God the Father, and puts an end to all rule and all authority and power” (1 Cor. 15:24). His kingdom was established in the first century (Mk. 9:1); it is spiritual in nature (Jn. 18:36); first century Christians were in the kingdom (Col. 1:13; Rev. 1:9); and the kingdom and the church are used interchangeably, and are one and the same (Matt. 16:18-19). The “end” marks the conclusion of His reign over His kingdom, not its beginning (1 Cor. 15:25).

5. “The Rapture” theory has two second comings, one for the saints, and another with the saints. This is a false doctrine which is not supported by Scripture.

We should be unequivocally opposed the entire false theory of Premillennialism, including The Rapture. Concerning the second of coming of Christ, Jesus Himself said: “But of that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Mk. 13:32). ●

## An Uncertain Sound

Greg Gwin

*“For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?” (1 Corinthians 14:8)*

In this context the apostle Paul was addressing the use of spiritual gifts in the first century church. The illustration is an obvious one: in a battlefield situation, the trumpeter must give clear signals so that the soldiers will know whether to advance or

retreat. In regards to spiritual gifts, Paul was making the case that speaking in tongues (one of the miraculous gifts given by the Holy Spirit) would not be beneficial if there was no interpreter (another gift) to explain the message.

While we no longer have the miraculous gifts Paul was discussing, the principle of his illustration has important applications to many pertinent matters. We are concerned that uncertain sounds are emanating from many brethren. Just as the apostle explained, people will not be properly advised, and their correct reaction to spiritual dangers will be lacking. For example:

**Social Drinking:** Too often we hear brethren who express a disconcerting lack of conviction against all alcoholic consumption. They typically express it this way: “I don’t drink, but I’m not sure we can say that it is absolutely wrong to do so.” These folks need to realize that their unclear warning will be taken by the weak and the young as a full license to drink alcohol. Good and positive arguments against social drinking are available. Use them, and warn the people!

**Dancing:** A preacher was reported to have preached a sermon about dancing, and at the conclusion he stated that everyone would just have to make up their own mind if it was sinful or not. You guessed it – all the young people rushed off to the prom. You see, his “uncertain sound” left them unprepared to make a right judgment – in fact it empowered them to make exactly the wrong decision!

**Immodest dress:** Again, we hear too many of our brethren expressing doubts about standards of modesty. They will be heard to say things like, “I don’t think you can draw any absolute lines.” They mean, of course, that no one can say for sure if this is too short, too tight, too low cut, etc. The implication is that everyone must just figure it out for themselves. We deny it! The Scriptures give clear teaching on what parts of the body must be covered to avoid “nakedness” – and modesty would keep one far away from those limits. Teach this, and help folks – especially young folks – know how to dress and act as God desires.

We need clear and plain teaching and preaching. We do not need to hear uncertain sounds coming from our pulpits and Bible classes. To put it bluntly, if you don't know or can't be sure, please keep your doubts and reservations to yourself! On the spiritual battlefield we need to hear clear and certain sounds. Think! ●

## Debating Religion

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

The word "debate," once in the singular (Rom. 1:29), and once in the plural (2 Cor. 12:20) is listed, in the King James version of the New Testament, along with other sins that a Christians must avoid. This has led many to conclude all kinds of "debating" is wrong – especially religious debates.

Yet, we read of several occasions where the Apostles and other early Christians engaged in disputing with other religious people. Did they do wrong? Of course not. Discussing religious differences both publicly and privately is not only lawful, but in most cases very expedient in helping people discern between good and evil.

But, what about the two times that it seems to be condemned. In both cases, most other versions translate it either "strife," "quarreling," "quarrelsome," or "quarrels." I notice one renders it "fighting." Thus, this is not the kind of "debating" where there is an honest discussion of differences. It is the kind that is reduced to hostile or angry quarreling or striving. This should never characterize a Christian and produces nothing positive.

On the other hand, many have learned and obeyed the truth after having learned it from hearing honorable debates of religious differences. These were the real winners in these debates. Such public discussions are not as frequent as they were in years gone by. This is partly because fewer religious people hold to distinctive convictions as strongly as they once did and see no need to defend them publicly. Hence, it is hard to find one willing to engage in such discussions or debates.

Frankly, it may partly be because some of these

discussions have been allowed to degenerate into quarreling and strife, where they became a contest of wits and barbs rather than a real study of the scriptures that bear on the issue – these generate more heat than they do light.

I truly believe that we need more honorable discussions with those whom we differ on vital religious matters. Such would help us understand each other better and help in weeding out error any of us might hold.

However, we all need to consider our motives and approach to "debating." As we go about looking for debate make sure that we do not act like "gun slingers" of western movies who are challenging one and all for a "shoot out" so we can see how many notches we can carve into our gun stocks – or to use another metaphor, see how many trophies we can hang on our belts. Nor should we attend the "debates" with the gladiator approach, where we are there to view the contest and cheer on "our gladiator" as he lands significant verbal blows to the opponent. Such approaches not only turn people off to debating, but is counterproductive to furthering the cause of truth.

Also, we need to be respectful to brethren whose judgment is that some subjects and some situations may not be ripe for a public debate at a time and place. Sometimes there may need to be proper groundwork done in order for such discussions to produce the most good. ●

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### A word unfitly spoken ...

John Cripps, a native of South Africa, told of an American preacher coming to S.A. for a gospel meeting. At the first service, the preacher mentioned that he was sorry that his wife could not be with them today because she was "under the weather" back at their hotel. Several of the brothers, disturbed by this announcement, approached him after the services, stating that such a remark would hurt his and the church's influence in the community and especially if what he said was true.

That is when he learned that "under the weather" in that part of the world did not mean that one is sick or just not feeling well as it does in the U.S.A. – there it meant a hangover from drinking!

No wonder James says that one that offends not in word is a perfect man.

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