



GREAT COMMISSION LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

GRACE / THE DOCTRINE OF THE SCRIPTURES

Grace

Grace is defined as the “unmerited favor of God.” As you read these articles, you will gain a greater understanding of God’s grace to us and how we can create an environment of grace in our churches.



GRACE

Our Greatest Pastoring Tool - Jesus Christ and His Gospel of Grace

Pastor John Hopley · Columbus, OH

The following are some of the events that have had a significant impact on my life:

- In 1973, I heard for the first time the gospel message; that Jesus Christ died for my sins, that salvation is a gift, and that all those who believe in Him have eternal life.
- Later in 1973, I heard for the first time that Jesus Christ will be returning to the earth in the future, that He will rapture His Church, and that He will establish His Kingdom on this earth. Later that month, I made a decision to follow Jesus Christ.
- In 1975, in reading the Word, I came to a startling conclusion that Jesus is God. This was a revelation that had a major impact in my life.
- In 1975, as I got involved with the church and began reading the Scriptures, I came to understand all of the gifts I received when I put my faith in Christ. I understood that I am in Christ, that I own all things, that I am washed in His blood, and that I have His very own righteousness. This had a significant effect, not only on my self-esteem, but also on my respect for, and relationships with, other believers.
- In 1976, I heard the message, “God Really Loves You” by Jim McCotter, which showed me a new aspect of God’s character, how He is very enthusiastic and emotional in His love for me in Christ. This also had a dynamic impact on my overall view of life.
- In 1977, our church went to a conference where Jim McCotter shared a fresh and exciting view on God’s forgiveness. It was a message that transformed our church that year.
- In 1977, I worked with a Christian attorney who talked to me about God’s sovereignty; how we have been elected by God through His grace. This truth also transformed my life, causing me to be more at rest in my faith in Him.
- In 1979, as I was faced with many disappointments in ministry, the Lord refocused me upon my eternal hope (“Fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” 1 Peter 1:13). My hope in His Second Coming gave me the perspective I needed for my daily living.
- In 1980, I went through a crisis of conflict with my fellow elders and national leaders, as I had developed some doctrinal convictions that were different than the ones they had. The truth that God had placed His Spirit in them and in me, and that He would see to it that there would be unity of

*“Amazing grace! How sweet the sound,
that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see.”*

- John Newton

mind and heart through the power of the Spirit, was what encouraged me to persevere in pursuing the unity that God eventually gave to us.

- In 1981, I made a terrible mistake in my law practice, leading to quite a few problems for my client, my boss, and myself. Through this ordeal, God taught me in a very practical way the lesson of grace and mercy, that God loves to bless the one who is aware of his sin. And bless me He did, as He, in a very wonderful way, cleaned up the whole mess I got myself into.
- Throughout the early 1980s, God continually refreshed me as each morning, and then throughout the day, I would meditate on some aspect of the gospel of Jesus Christ—His coming, His death on the cross, our forgiveness, the Holy Spirit's work, His grace, etc.
- In the late 1980s and the early 1990s, the Lord led us, as a movement, to a greater focus on the Holy Spirit. He did this by stressing the ministry of each member according to his or her unique spiritual gifts; by emphasizing the freedom we have as Christians (“*Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty.*”); and by having more of a bottom-up approach and a “releasing to ministry” approach in the leading of the church and the nation of churches.
- Also in the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was a greater awareness of the spiritual battle, and a greater understanding of Christ's once-for-all victory over Satan at the cross.
- During the last few years, countless believers in Great Commission have meditated on the truths of this position in Christ (the “Who We Are in Christ” card). This new outlook has radically changed people's view of themselves in Christ.

“Grace isn't a little prayer you chant before receiving a meal. It's a way to live. The law tells me how crooked I am. Grace comes along and straightens me out.”

- D. L. Moody

What is my point?

It's simply this: WHAT CHANGES LIVES IS THE GRACE THAT COMES FROM THE MULTIFACETED GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST. By “multifaceted gospel” I mean:

The message of Jesus Christ:

- Who He is (the Christ, God, Man, Savior, King, Lord, Servant, Judge), - what He did (His ministry on earth, His death and resurrection, our forgiveness, our position in Christ)
- What He is presently doing (the work of the Holy Spirit, His gifts to us today, the work of His body, the Church)
- What He will do in the future (the Second Coming, Judgment, Heaven and Hell)
- Together with the practical ramifications of that message (primarily loving people, believers and unbelievers, preaching this message to them).

Why is this important?

This is important because it is so easy to take our limited time and energy and major on the minors and minor on the majors. If we understand that the gospel is what transforms, we will FOCUS our minds,

“When the Law was given 3000 were put to death (Exodus 32:28). When the Gospel of grace was given 3000 were made alive (Acts 2: 41).”

- Unknown

our energy, and our efforts to study the gospel, practice the gospel, and teach the gospel, so that the gospel will transform our own lives, and the lives of others who come to Christ.

Ourselves

For years, I have practiced meditating each morning on gospel truths. I have done this by taking some aspect of this multifaceted gospel about which God has been speaking to me and meditating on verses and thoughts from those verses that speak to that aspect of truth (God’s love for me, my position in Christ, the Holy Spirit’s work, the Second Coming, etc.) combined with verses dealing with the practical working out of those truths (faith, repentance, love, prayer, etc.). I consider this to be the most important activity of my day. I get encouraged, I get empowered, I become renewed, I become transformed by the gospel which is THE power of God. (No one is more powerful than God and nothing is more powerful than THE power of God.) If everyone in our churches had this habit, it would transform their lives, and our churches, more than anything else we could do.

But you might say, so many people do this already. That’s true for some, but my experience is that people either aren’t meditating at all or they are meditating on the Law or on the practicals of the Christian life exclusively. Our spiritual eyes need to be refocused daily and moment by moment upon Jesus and His gospel so that we will be transformed from glory to glory (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Others

Paul, I believe, was the master at motivating people. In his letters to the churches, he is constantly flooding their minds with the truth of the gospel. Every page of his writings is focused on Jesus Christ. (In fact, take some time some day and count how often he mentions “Jesus” or “Christ.”) Paul, in his letters to the Romans and Ephesians, spends the first half of those letters overwhelming the believers with the multifaceted gospel and then exhorts them to live in accordance with it. To the Corinthians, he says that the word of the cross is the power of God-not to those who aren’t saved, but to those who are BEING saved (1 Corinthians 1:18). He points out to the Colossians that the gospel has been increasing in THEM (Colossians 1:6) and tells them to allow the word of Christ (the gospel) to richly dwell within them (3:16). The point is that the gospel is for believers; for our introduction into this relationship with God and our continued growth in that relationship.

Two Big Pitfalls

Pitfall # 1

In saying all of this, I think it is important to recognize that there are pitfalls into which Christians fall. The first pitfall is one Paul warned against: legalism. Like the Galatians, we as believers can fall into the trap of focusing on the Law rather than the gospel. We do this by having an overemphasis on the Old Testament or we take on responsibilities as believers without understanding God’s grace and power first. We look at ourselves first without looking at God and His grace.

Pitfall #2

Oftentimes, other things become “the gospel” to Christians. These things may be good things, such as:

1. Our church service
2. Our church’s vision
3. Our church’s distinctive ministry
4. Our personal vision
5. Our small group
6. A new Christian book we’re reading
7. Our pet doctrine

A young man was asked “How did you get saved?” His answer was, “God did His part, and I did my part. God’s part was the saving, and my part was the sinning.”

-A.W.Tozer

A telltale sign that these other things have become the gospel is when we’re talking about these things more than Jesus Christ and His gospel. (“*[The] mouth speaks from that which fills [the] heart,*” (Luke 6:45).) When we’re excited about Jesus Christ and His gospel supremely and uniquely, it is only then that the gospel transforms our lives. When people “cut” us and we “bleed” Jesus Christ and His gospel, only then does the gospel do its work in us. (And, by the way, only then will we ever be truly effective in winning souls to Christ.)

So where does this lead us?

In my opinion, this leads us to the following conclusions. To be the most effective in ministry, we need to:

1. Have each believer in our churches focused on the multifaceted gospel of grace in their personal lives. Everyone will be growing if they are thinking on the gospel, living the gospel, and speaking the gospel.
2. Make it a priority in our teaching (Sunday services, seminars, one-on-one) to share the gospel of Jesus Christ and then to share practical ramifications of the gospel in our daily lives.



GRACE

How Grace Affects a Church

Pastor Mark Darling · Minneapolis, MN

Grace is the major theme of the New Testament. It is critical that we talk about it. The Bible shows that the gospel equals the grace of God. In Romans, Paul says that grace equals power. That is often the opposite of how we think God would deal with us. Why would God deal with sinners, people who can't reach His standard, in such a loving way, instead of just blasting us for our sin? This "unearned favor" (grace) doesn't seem powerful, but it is the most life-changing concept Christians and non-Christians alike can grasp. It brings strength and courage, along with favor and blessing in spite of sin and failing on our part.

We know in studying Christ's life that He is God. As we read in the Gospels, we see that God (in Jesus) associated with sinners, prostitutes, etc. Sinners were comfortable with God. He made the religious people uncomfortable. In His presence, sinners were accepted and knew that they mattered to Him. Many whom He healed never became His disciples, but He healed them anyway. Seeing how God (Jesus) lived among the sinners and showed them His grace and mercy, shows us the way God wants us to see holiness. Often we have a wrong concept of holiness.

I lived by the Mall of America for several years (one of the largest malls in the US). People poured in and out of that place each day. Preaching there would not have done any good; nobody would have listened. The purpose of the Church is to reach out to the lost people in the marketplace. Try to do this with a neighbor or your co-workers. Take them to lunch, minister to their needs. Establish friendship and credibility. Then, they will listen to what you have to say about Jesus.

Evergreen has tried to recreate the marketplace, make our own "mall" to attract people to us. Churches have messed up as God's ambassadors, being overbearing, intolerant, and judgmental of people who walk in their doors. We need to accept people as they are right now as they come in search of God. Grace is the miracle of the power of growth, the power of salvation to unbelievers. The grace of God is what teaches us to say no to ungodliness (Titus 2:12). Evergreen is designed to accept and extend grace to people as they are, no matter their dress or speech. By this, we say to them that we relate to them as God does; come and be yourself. If many of them walked into "regular" churches, there would be stares and comments. They would think God thinks this way of them too.

Our small groups extend grace to brothers and sisters, as well as the non-believers. This generation is the most dysfunctional group of young people ever. Baby boomers are the worst parents; the most selfish parents, in America. Baby boomer parents have killed 33 million GenXer's, deserted their kids, lied about their commitment to marriage-all offered up on the altar of career and achievement. Those who are 30 and under have no moral compass, no parenting to guide them in decision making. Our

"Grace is given to heal the spiritually sick, not to decorate spiritual heroes."

- Martin Luther

small groups try to provide some of that guidance, especially in pointing people to God (the best guide of all!).

While God was on this planet, His heart was not stirred with righteous indignation (we think this is how God is), but was moved to pity and compassion. He viewed us as sheep without a shepherd and saw how our problems weighed us down (Matthew 9:36). This is a very different view than maintained by today's churches, or even many pastors.

Paul's life and his teachings showed that he tried to be all things to all men. Today, this refers to movies, clothing, and use of questionable phrases. All this is done (following Paul's effort to be all things to all men) so that many who don't know Christ will come into our churches. Many of these people have denominational backgrounds and have experienced condemnation in that setting. As they visit us here at Evergreen, our prayer is that they walk out of here feeling love in a good environment. It's only in this kind of a situation (one of love and acceptance), that the hard truths can be spoken. We all love our kids and when we share hard things with them, things that they don't always want to hear, but in their hearts know are right, they can take it from us. Why? Because they know that it is said in love and concern for their well being, that the love won't stop. It's the same with many of the people who come to Evergreen.

As Christians, we live in Christ as justified and forgiven people. We live in liberation. In the Bible, if sacrifices could have cleansed the worshippers, Jesus Christ's blood wouldn't have been needed. But it was needed. Jesus Christ's blood cleanses, sacrifices don't. We are no longer guilty. Guilt is the number one reason for nervous breakdowns and discouragement. Many feel this way and no longer want to be a Christian. The message of justification and forgiveness breaks the back of Satan. What can he do if he doesn't have anything to hang over our heads?

Babies are demanding as they crawl, walk, make messes, and fall down. We don't condemn them for their actions. And it doesn't make them feel guilty. It's just a natural part of growth and development. But many Christians do feel guilty and give up. They need love and encouragement. When you do something wrong, you know it in your heart, don't you? Well, most of them know they've done wrong things. Often we overemphasize the "talk" part of wrong-doing. God says, "Get up! Let's go! I'll help you."

It's imperative that pastors create a climate within their churches with a grace environment. It has to start at the top and move down. Our people need to hear stories of the pastor's struggles (personal, marital, spiritual). People then will get a proper understanding that will shatter their false pretenses of what it means to be a Christian. This must be a pastor's number one priority. Growth depends on the soil having fertilizer, sun, and rain. Shattering false pretenses and a grace environment will promote growth. In Ephesians 3, Paul shares what it means to let your roots go down deep into the fertile soil of God's love. This is only done through the grace aspect of love. We pastors must bring rich soil (the grace of God) into our churches. If we have a desert atmosphere, there will be no growth. *"May your roots go down deep into the soil of God's marvelous love. And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love really is. May you experi-*

"Abounding sin is the terror of the world, but abounding grace is the hope of mankind."

-A.W.Tozer

“The gospel is so simple that small children can understand it, and it is so profound that studies by the wisest theologians will never exhaust its riches.”

- Charles Hodge

ence the love of Christ, though it is so great you will never fully understand it. Then you will be filled with the fullness of life and power that comes from God” (Ephesians 3: 1 7b-19, NLT).



GRACE

Acting in Love (Grace in Action)

Pastor Herschel Martindale · Columbia, MD

A. Biblical Passage: Romans 14

“If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love” (14:15).

Romans 14 focuses on the multitude of personal convictions, desires, and preferences that are not clear biblical commands or instructions, but dramatically affecting our attitudes and actions toward one another. At that time, it involved eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols and observing certain days, such as the Sabbath. Some common issues today are music, dress codes, hair and cosmetics, jewelry, musical instruments, philosophy of church and ministry, teaching styles, advertisements, doctrinal emphases, prophecy, head coverings for women, Communion practices, ways to baptize, different translations of the Scriptures, and leadership practices. Each of these will probably have different verses of Scripture that we feel relate, but are not conclusive on the subject.

Romans 14:1-3 says, *“Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. One man’s faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The one who eats everything **must not look** down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything **must not condemn** the man who does, for God has accepted him”* (emphasis added).

Attitudes and actions are the issue here:

1. Must not look down
2. Must not condemn

Those who feel more liberty will be tempted to look down on (think less of) those who do not. Those who feel less liberty will tend to judge and condemn those who do. The Apostle Paul makes it very clear that both of these attitudes are wrong and should not be indulged. The real issue is not the preference, but the wrong attitude. It is not an attitude of love and grace. Judging and criticism is one of the most prevalent sins of many Christians today. These attitudes are often even considered spiritual and justified by those who hold them.

- B. *“Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls”* (Romans 14:4). Judging others in disputable issues and especially the motives of men’s hearts is just not our responsibility or right. We take the place of God when we do this. James reminds us, *“There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor”* (James 4:12)? Paul further reminds us that each of us is responsible to our Lord. *“For this very reason Christ died and returned to life so that He might be the Lord of both the dead and the*

“The longer I live the larger allowances I make for human weakness.”

- John Wesley

living. You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God" (Romans 14:9-12). What an awesome thought! We really have a great challenge keeping our own lives pleasing to our righteous and holy Lord and God. As He deals with us in grace, so we should "act in love" and grace toward one another.

***"There but for the
grace of God go I."***

- John Bradford

C. What actions should we take in these disputable areas of concern?

1. *"Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind"* (Romans 14:5). We need to come to our own personal convictions so we can walk in faith.
2. *"He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God"* (Romans 14:6). Whatever we do, we should do it as unto the Lord and to please Him. This takes away pride and the tendency to think of ourselves more highly than we should and to judge others.
3. *"Make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way"* (Romans 14:13). Love builds up and encourages one another. All of us have difficulties, trials, distresses, discouragements, and failures in our lives from time to time. Oh, how we need the love, encouragement, and fellowship of one another! It is impossible to really love and encourage when we are judging, critical, and condemning one another in our hearts. So many churches have split, families have divided, and Christians have forsaken friendships over these disputable matters.

D. *"The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men"* (Romans 14:17-18). What a statement! Do I want to serve Christ in a way that is pleasing to God and approved by men? Who wouldn't? It's simple. Pursue righteousness, peace, and unity with all and walk in the Spirit! I'll be pleasing to God and my brothers and sisters. If I fill my life with these goals, I won't have time to judge and criticize others and God will be pleased. The Kingdom of God is NOT _____ (please fill in anything disputable that divides you in heart from another Christian).

E. *"Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification"* (Romans 14:19). The language here in this verse is of great importance. *"Therefore"* (in the light of the exhortation given in the preceding verses) make every effort. I must ask myself, "What efforts am I taking to guard my heart from these wrong attitudes?" Are there attitudes that I have or actions toward others that may be grieving to the Holy Spirit in these disputable areas? I must remember that my thought life is the first place to start in correcting these attitudes. Read over the list of common areas today in Section A, and see if any apply. What efforts do I take to pursue peace and practical unity with my fellow believers and especially leaders? How important is it to me to take initiatives regularly to "build up" and encourage my brothers and sisters in the Church?

"Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself with what he approves" (Romans 14:22). May each of us walk daily in love and grace toward one another.



GRACE

Grace in Dealing with Criticism

Pastor Dave Bovenmyer · Ames, IA

In December of 1989, during a prayer and planning meeting of the national leaders of Great Commission Churches, the conversation turned to ideas about how to handle the many and persistent criticisms and accusations that our association was receiving. As we talked about the different accusations, it seemed to us that many, if not most of them were unfounded or dealt with fairly isolated incidents or things that had been corrected years ago. Some criticisms were outright falsehoods and some accusers appeared to us to be overtly malicious. Yet, as we discussed and prayed and considered our past, we agreed that we had made mistakes, exhibited weaknesses and committed sins that in many cases were the source of the criticism. We decided to write a statement summarizing our perception of errors in our past.

In July, 1991, after several vigorous discussions, much prayer, some deep soul searching, and many revisions, the national leaders developed a *Statement Recognizing Early Errors and Weaknesses in the Development of the of the Great Commission Association of Churches*. The statement was sent to our pastors for feedback, and after additional revisions, was ratified by the association's pastors on July 19, 1991 in a near-unanimous vote. (This paper can be found following this article.)

The statement acknowledged errors and weaknesses in two areas—a prideful attitude, and a misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the Scriptures.

Our prideful attitude resulted in:

- an improper and overly defensive response to criticism;
- an elitist attitude.

Our misunderstandings or misinterpretations of scripture resulted in:

- a failing to distinguish between commands, principles, and preferences
- authoritarian or insensitive leadership;
- overly visionary leadership with inadequate planning and management improper application of church discipline in some cases;
- a lack of emphasis on formal education;
- a belief that every man should become an elder.

Having been personally involved in the many hours of difficult discussion and the hours of prayer that went into this statement, I can testify that our effort to acknowledge our errors and weaknesses

A man warned George Whitefield of criticism by others. Whitefield replied, "I thank you sir, for watching over my soul. As for what they say, I know worse things of myself than what they say concerning me."

“Never let the sense of failure corrupt your new action.”

- Oswald Chambers

arose not from an attempt to simply deflect criticism, but from a sincere desire to acknowledge wrong and seek reconciliation with those who had been harmed by our errors. Copies of the final statement were sent to our pastors to be given to all the leaders in each church and to be made available to anyone interested. We encouraged our leaders to ask God to bring to mind individuals who were critical or were estranged from our churches through our errors and to send them the weakness statement.

Happily, this process resulted in hundreds of instances of reconciliation with people who had been hurt by our failures. Several meetings were arranged with some of our staunchest critics in an attempt to listen and confess our errors. We tried to take the approach that even if the problem seemed to us to be 90% the fault of the other party, still we should seek forgiveness for the 10% that seemed in our eyes to be our fault. Before we can see clearly, we must take out anything that is in our own eye. And, as our Lord said so graphically, what is in our own eye is often a log.

Sadly, our efforts did not result in full reconciliation in every instance. But even where there were still disagreements and opposing perspectives, the process resulted in greater understanding and opportunities for future communication.

At the same time, we opened up our ministry to Christians outside our circles and sought their counsel and input. Many leaders of other Christian movements commended us for our attempt to honestly acknowledge our faults and seek reconciliation with those who had been hurt by them.

Anyone who leads God’s people knows that criticism comes as part of the territory. Sometimes criticism is right on the mark, sometimes it is an exaggeration of an actual weakness, and sometime it is totally off the wall. The prophet Nathan confronted King David concerning His actual and horrible sins of adultery and murder. On the other extreme, Shimei cursed David for his alleged bloody destruction of Saul and his family. Shimei’s accusation must have really stung, since David had extended such incredible grace and mercy to Saul, his family, and those who served him. And, yet, in spite of the vicious and hurtful nature of the accusations, David, true to his character, extends mercy to Shimei and doesn’t allow his men to kill him.

How we respond to criticism reflects our mettle and forges our character perhaps more than any other thing. Do we faithfully go to the Lord, seeking His wisdom concerning the truthfulness of the criticism? Do we humbly acknowledge anything that rings true and seek forgiveness? And are we able to extend grace even when unjustly criticized or when the criticism is painfully exaggerated? Our Lord suffered for things he didn’t commit—should we not expect to do the same?

The grace of God teaches us that we can acknowledge our genuine errors and still find acceptance and compassion. Also, His grace teaches us that we must extend grace and mercy, even when we have been brutally and painfully injured by others, as our Lord did when he asked His Father to forgive the very ones who had driven the nails through His flesh. Our hope is that our efforts to acknowledge our errors and respond in grace to some instances of baseless criticism has demonstrated the grace of our Lord and in a small way allowed us to walk in His footsteps.



GRACE

Errors and Weaknesses Paper

A STATEMENT RECOGNIZING EARLY ERRORS AND WEAKNESSES IN THE
DEVELOPMENT OF THE GREAT COMMISSION ASSOCIATION OF CHURCHES

July, 1991

Introduction

The Great Commission Association of Churches (GCAC), formerly Great Commission International (GCI), is an association of evangelical Christian churches in the United States, Canada, Latin America, and Asia. Most of these churches are less than twenty years old and originated with a group of Christians at Southern Colorado University who set out to preach the Gospel and so fulfill the Great Commission, the last command of the Lord Jesus Christ to “Go . . . and make disciples of all the nations.” From Colorado, they reached out to other campuses across the country, so that there were fifteen loosely affiliated student fellowships by 1973, thirty-two campus or community churches by 1981, and seventy-six churches at the present time. The goal of those few men, and of the men and women who eventually chose to labor with them, was to “reach the world” with the Gospel of Jesus Christ in their generation and in doing so, glorify Him. To reach that goal, they modeled their churches as nearly as possible after the New Testament church, and took literally the Lord’s command to “Go.” As the name of our association suggests, it is and has been our constant goal and desire to help fulfill the Great Commission, and consequently, the churches in the Association have always been characterized by a strong commitment to witnessing and evangelism.

Over the years, our churches have been used by God to see thousands of people come to know Christ, grow in their love for Him, and go on to faithfully serve Him. But just as a young person growing up will make many mistakes on the road to maturity, so our churches, in the process of growing up in the Lord, made mistakes, exhibited weaknesses, and allowed a prideful attitude to develop, in part, as a result of our immaturity. In addition, the churches experienced a number of problems inherent in starting a new church or association of churches. These problems were exacerbated by our youth, our focus on evangelism and a failure to adequately recognize other spiritual gifts, and the fact that even very early on we had many churches and no clear organizational structure to formalize their relationships with one another. Some of the problems were minor while others were more serious in nature. Some of the problems were a result of the actions of local church leaders and so were isolated both in time and place. Others were a consequence of mistakes by leaders who had influence in many of the churches, and so were widespread. Many of the problems were resolved years ago, others were resolved more recently, and some are currently being addressed. And because we realize that our churches and leaders, while doing our best to follow the Lord’s leading, will make mistakes in the future, we are in the process of developing a Book of Government to formalize procedures on how to approach and respond to those mistakes and grievances.

We, the local pastors and national leaders of the Great Commission Association of Churches, are preparing this statement with the hope that we might accomplish three goals. First, it is intended to be a clear statement of the mistakes we believe we have made and the steps we have taken, and will continue to take, to rectify them. Secondly, the statement is a confession and a request for forgiveness from those who have been hurt by our errors. Finally, we have prepared this statement with the hope that it will be an important part of our plan for reconciliation, where possible, with former members, leaders, and others who, for various reasons are now estranged from us.

The mistakes made, weaknesses exhibited, and problems experienced by our churches can be roughly grouped into two categories: (I) Those that were caused by a prideful attitude; and, (II) Those that were a result of a misapplication or misinterpretation of Scripture. The balance of this statement will address the specific problems that fall within each of these two categories.

I. Prideful Attitude

We confess that, especially in our early years, we had a prideful attitude about the ways we believed that our churches were distinctive from others in the body of Christ. And while, to the best of our knowledge, it was never expressly taught that we were better than other churches, it was very much implied by our too narrow view of how God accomplishes His purposes through the church. For many years, we believed that because we were committed to reaching the world with the Gospel in the way we believed was mandated by the Scriptures and that had been virtually abandoned by most Christians since the first century, that God would use our churches in a special way. This allowed a prideful attitude to develop toward other churches, para-churches, and organizations, a sinful attitude we deeply regret. It is difficult to know just how pervasive this attitude was, but we believe it was common, especially during the early years of our history. Our pride manifested itself in a variety of ways, which we now turn to.

1. Improper response to criticism.

The problem. A commitment to responding to criticism with patience, understanding, and a desire to learn is a mark of spiritual maturity. And while parties with different points of view might finally have to “agree to disagree,” it is important that they first make a concerted effort to discuss and, if possible, resolve their differences. We confess that we have too often responded defensively to those both within and outside of our churches who questioned or criticized us, and at times exhibited an unwillingness to listen to their perspective. Instead of too quickly concluding that these individuals were acting divisively or irresponsibly, we should have made a greater effort to carefully consider and respond to their views. Moreover, we should have made more of an effort to pursue those individuals who had voiced various concerns about our doctrine or practices, and aggressively pursued reconciliation with former leaders and members.

Steps taken to correct. We are grieved by the rift that has developed between our churches and a number of former leaders and church members who have believed, in part because of our unwillingness to listen to them, that reconciliation was impossible. We apologize for failing to listen to their concerns and for failing at times to obey our Lord’s command to be reconciled. We ask that anyone who has a concern about, or complaint against, a Great Commission church or leader to contact that church or leader. If that does not satisfactorily resolve the issue, please write to David Bovenmyer at the address noted on page 13.

Many of the most serious grievances that former leaders and members had might have been resolved many years ago if we would have had a formalized, written policy on handling complaints, addressing divergent views, and resolving grievances. That is why we are developing, as previously noted, a Book of Government that will provide that needed formality. Of course, even the best policy will be ineffective if both parties to a dispute fail to approach the dispute with love and humility. For our part, we apologize to each former leader or member who we did not respond to in a spirit of love and humility, and express our commitment to excel in this in the future.

2. An elitist attitude.

The problem. It is a truism that when one chooses something, whether a home, automobile, job, or spouse, it is usually because that person believes his choice to be the best one. It is no different with a church. Most people choose to become members of a church because that church, for a variety of reasons, most closely reflects what the person perceives to be the “ideal” church. There is nothing wrong with that. The problem arises when one makes the subtle shift from believing that “this is the best church for me” to a conviction that “this is the best church, period.” We confess that this latter belief, though never, to the best of our knowledge, publicly taught and probably only rarely expressed, infected our churches for some time. There is no simple explanation for how or why this happened, but there are a number of factors we believe were, in some way, responsible.

Perhaps the most important factor responsible for our elitist attitude was our strong conviction that God’s plan to accomplish the Great Commission relied upon New Testament churches following the geographical progression described in Acts 1:8, and our belief that our churches were unique in their commitment to pursue that plan. We acknowledged that God could and did use other instruments and methods to accomplish His purposes, including para-churches, mission boards, Bible Schools, seminaries, and individuals with a particular vision. We had much respect for these individuals and organizations, often spoke highly of them, and indeed were both influenced by them and, in the case of some Billy Graham crusades and Campus Crusade outreaches, were active and enthusiastic participants with them. Nevertheless, we confess that we as leaders believed, and at times expressed, that these individuals and organizations were not necessarily doing “God’s best” like we were. For our lack of humility, we apologize.

Another factor concerns the fact that in the early days of our movement, most of the men and women involved were quite young, the majority in their early twenties. Few of us were married, had children, owned homes, or had many other “worldly” responsibilities to distract us from our commitment to sharing the Gospel. Consequently, we had much time and energy to devote to our local church, and we tried to closely follow the example of the New Testament Church described in Acts 2:42 (NIV):

“They devoted themselves to the apostle’s teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

There was a very active church life, and members were encouraged to actively pursue witnessing and evangelism.

The positive effects of living in and with a devoted, Christian community were many. Individual believers developed a closer relationship with the Lord, many non-Christians were born again, and ultimately, God received glory. But, because of our immaturity, there were negative effects as well.

One was a tendency to believe that our approach to the Christian life was not merely a “good” one, but the “best” or “only scriptural” approach. We considered those who we thought were not as zealous as we were to be “lukewarm.” Instead, we should have believed and clearly taught that, “this is the way the Lord has shown us. God can and does lead differently.” Another was the expectation that all believers be as actively involved as we were in sharing the Gospel and the conclusion that if they were not, they were not obeying God’s perfect will for their lives. This expectation was partially a result of our pride and partially a result of our youth and ignorance of the added responsibilities that age and a family can bring.

One very negative effect concerned members who chose to leave our churches. Because of our conviction that God’s plan to accomplish the Great Commission relied upon New Testament churches following the geographical progression described in Acts 1:8, and because we believed that our churches were unique in their commitment to pursuing that plan, there was a concern that a person leaving would miss out on God’s will for their life. Our overemphasis on the things that we believed distinguished our churches from other churches and organizations and our failure to recognize that God might desire to use those individuals outside of our association of churches made it difficult for some to leave without feeling guilty and inadequate, or believing that God could use them for His purposes in another church. It also caused some of those who remained to view those who left as choosing something that might be good, but wasn’t what was best. We deeply regret this, and express our sincere apology to those who suffered because of our pride and insensitivity.

Steps taken to correct. In the last five years, as we have come to better understand and appreciate our niche in the larger body of Christ, the elitism of our early years has, for the most part, disappeared. Still, our association of churches is committed to preventing an elitist attitude from again infecting the churches. Individuals and churches who seek to be most devoted to the Lord would seem to be, paradoxically, those most likely to be tempted to be proud and to have an elitist view. Since it is our goal individually and as churches to be devoted to the Lord, and because pride is a sin common to all people, we will need to continually be on guard against elitist attitudes.

We have committed ourselves to communicate, especially when discussing convictions or preferences that distinguish us from other Christian churches and organizations, our appreciation for those churches and organizations and for their different convictions, strategies, and methods. In addition, we are eager to learn from other Christian churches and organizations, to work with them on projects within our local communities, and to attend church management seminars, church growth seminars, and other programs and seminars sponsored by other churches and organizations.

Concerning a member who wishes to leave a church that is part of our association, we are committed to expressing our appreciation, both verbally and in a letter, for that individual’s service to the Lord while part of the church, as well as the hope that God will continue to use them in the future. In addition we will do all we can to make their departure and transition a comfortable one.

II. Misapplication or Misinterpretation of Scripture

God’s Word, as He has revealed it to us in the Bible, is and has been the “Constitution” that our churches have been guided by since their inception. Overall, we believe we have properly interpreted and applied the Word in developing our convictions about the purpose, goals, and day-to-day

operation of the church. However, we have at times in the past misapplied or misinterpreted certain verses, over and under emphasized certain principles, and failed to live up to the high standards of conduct the Scriptures command. In this section, we will address these failings.

1. Failing to distinguish between a command, a principle, and a preference.

The problem. In the past, we did not always clearly communicate the difference between a scriptural command, a scriptural principle, and a personal preference. And while it is not always easy to determine those differences, it is important to do so in order to allow individuals in the church to hold and express biblically-based convictions that are different than those of their leaders. This will promote tolerance and acceptance of alternative viewpoints and allow church members to fill their unique place in the body of Christ.

Our failure in the past to clearly distinguish between a command and a principle or preference manifested itself in a variety of ways. One example of this failure concerns our view of Acts 1:8. That verse says:

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (NIV).

We have believed and continue to believe that this verse is an example of the geographic progression that the New Testament church followed in their effort to take the Gospel to all nations. Moreover, we have derived from this example a principle that we try to apply, i.e., in pursuing the Great Commission, it is wise to begin by influencing one’s city for Christ (Jerusalem), then moving out geographically to one’s state and nation (Judea and Samaria), and finally to other nations (the ends of the earth). Because we failed to distinguish between a command and a principle, and because we emphasized our view so strongly, we effectively elevated a strategic principle to the level of a scriptural command. The effect of this error was that we tended to view those who had a different conviction on how individual Christians were to pursue the Great Commission as not fully obeying God’s perfect will for them.

Similarly, our convictions concerning the centrality of the local church as God’s vehicle for evangelism and discipleship were communicated in such a way as to cause Bible schools, seminaries, and para-church organizations to be viewed as “unscriptural.” We now believe that God’s plan for reaching the nations is more complex than that, and that He employs and commissions Christian churches, para-churches, missions organizations, Bible schools, seminaries, and individuals in a multitude of ways to accomplish His purposes.

A third example of our failure to clearly distinguish between commands and principles concerns the area of dating. Many of us in the early years of our churches encouraged young men and women to refrain from dating until they had a fairly strong conviction that God was leading them toward marriage to a particular individual. This had some very positive results including the lack of many problems that casual dating can cause (temptation to immorality, trauma and strife because of romantic breakups, distraction from a devotion to holiness and service to the Lord) and contributed to the formation of many, many strong marriages. However, it also had negative results including alienating believers who did not share our preference and causing some who did to develop a bad attitude toward Christians who dated. It is our present understanding that discouraging casual dating was a preference of many of us leaders and not a command or even a principle of Scripture,

although there are many principles that may be used to support the preference. We believe that individuals are free to have different preferences as to how serious they want to be before they begin dating someone. Pastors may suggest or encourage their own personal preference concerning dating, as well as their reasons for that preference, but they should be careful to clearly communicate that it is simply their preference, and that others may be equally valid.

Finally, failing to properly distinguish a command from a principle or preference resulted at times in legalism. An individual who had a conviction contrary to that of the pastors was sometimes considered rebellious, even though that conviction was one permitted by the Word. The result was that a person might be forced to choose between violating his or her conscience or remaining “rebellious.”

Steps taken to correct. Scripture instructs us in Romans 14 to express tolerance and acceptance of other believers and their convictions and preferences. For this reason, it is essential for church leaders to clearly distinguish in their public teaching and private counsel whether the point they are communicating is a scriptural command, scriptural principle, or personal preference. Failing to communicate this distinction may create an atmosphere of intolerance of alternative views and cause individuals with those views to feel restricted or judged for having that alternative point of view.

We are truly sorry for the difficulties we caused by this failure, and apologize to everyone who felt a lack of acceptance or intolerance on our part toward them. We are committed to accepting and appreciating those with different convictions, opinions, and preferences, and insuring that our teaching, counsel, and informal communication clearly and accurately differentiates between commands, principles, and preferences.

2. Authoritarian or insensitive leadership.

The problem. We acknowledge that there were instances where some of us in our immaturity tended to lead more by coercion and compulsion than by inspiration and example. Some men, especially in the early years of our movement, were appointed as pastors, or assumed the responsibility of a pastor, before they fully met the qualifications set forth in the Scriptures, and so were unable to consistently lead in a God honoring way. Others who were properly recognized as pastors acted in some cases in an authoritarian and insensitive manner. At times, we were overly directive in the personal affairs of church members and were not always sufficiently sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s leading in the person’s life. When giving counsel, we at times advised church members to make decisions in their life based almost wholly on the goal of “reaching the world” with the Gospel. And as noted earlier, we did not always distinguish between a command and a principle and so may have treated a scriptural principle as a command. The consequence was that a person who had received counsel in some area might feel compelled to act in what he believed was obedience to a scriptural command when, in fact, the area was one where they were free to choose how a scriptural principle applied.

Steps taken to correct. It is a great responsibility to be a leader of God’s people, and we take very seriously the warning that pastors will one day “give an account” for the lives of those in their local church. We regret that some were given pastoral authority before they were qualified and apologize for instances where we acted in an authoritarian or insensitive manner. We are committed to being sensitive to the working of the Holy Spirit in the lives of individuals, and sensitive to the impact that we, because of our position and influence as church leaders, can have on the lives of church members. It is our desire and prayer that individuals will develop personal convictions based on God’s Word, not simply their pastor’s opinion.

In order to rectify these problems, we have addressed the issue of the proper use by church leaders of their influence and authority at our annual, leader's conference, and at our regional leader's conferences as well. At these conferences, we have addressed many issues relevant to the question of a leader's authority including the importance of distinguishing between a scriptural command, principle, and preference. In addition, our pastors have, in recent years, benefitted from their efforts to interact with other evangelical churches and organizations in their area. This not only provides the pastors with new ideas and fresh perspectives on how to more effectively oversee their church, but also prevents local churches from becoming or remaining isolated from other churches in the area.

3. Direction, planning, and management.

The problem. Through the years, we have zealously pursued the Great Commission. However, our enthusiasm was not always tempered with knowledge, proper preparation, or strategic, long-term planning. A major problem was our lack of the necessary sophistication to enable us to manage a rapidly growing group of churches that were spread out across the country. Also, in the early years of our movement especially, our attitude toward church management, church growth, and the Christian life generally was, "just do it." And while we still believe there is much merit to that approach, and indeed, that it may even be a necessary approach in the early years of a new church if that church is going to be successful, we now realize that as a church grows, the leadership must begin to develop a proper balance between "planning" and "doing." Our failure at times to preface our actions with careful planning and preparation can be attributed to our youth and our desire, at times even impatience, to accomplish our goal of reaching the world. A lack of proper planning caused a number of the projects we undertook to fail, resulting in people being hurt.

Steps taken to correct. We regret that our lack of adequate planning prevented us from achieving certain ministry objectives we set, and apologize to those whose life or ministry was adversely affected. As we grow, we are learning to recognize the importance of careful planning and the value of a certain degree of stability in our member churches. In our attempt to retain the vision, zeal, and spontaneity of our early years while at the same time managing our churches in a competent and Godly manner, we continue to seek input from books, seminars, and the counsel of other Christian leaders. We are learning much in the area of long-term planning and are striving for an orderly, Spirit-controlled growth.

4. Church discipline.

The problem. Early on, some of us had an incorrect understanding of church discipline. In some cases, this resulted in some individuals being placed under church discipline for actions that were not, according to scriptural standards, sufficient to merit it. In other cases, we demonstrated a lack of patience and too quickly administered discipline without affording the individual adequate time for private correction.

Steps taken to correct. Church discipline is the most serious action that a church can take against one of its members, and it should only be imposed for offenses mandated, and according to procedures described, in the Scriptures. The realization that our churches did, in a number of cases, improperly exercise church discipline is, therefore, a very unhappy one. We sincerely apologize to those who were treated wrongly, and express our commitment to clear up such cases, even if they occurred in the very early days of our movement. Because many of our churches were only loosely affiliated for many years, we are unaware of the exact number of times that church discipline was

improperly imposed, and consequently, are unaware of the specific circumstances of each of those cases. We have made and will continue to make attempts to resolve cases of improper church discipline, and request anyone who believes that they were improperly disciplined by a Great Commission church, or who is aware of someone who was, to contact David Bovenmyer at the address noted on page 13.

To guard against future problems in this area, the Association is preparing a Book of Government that includes clear procedures that our churches must follow in exercising church discipline as well as other church judgments, including an appeal process. To insure that those procedures will be followed, the Association has developed a policy that no church discipline may be instituted without first consulting one of the Association's national leaders.

5. Lack of emphasis on formal education.

The problem. Until the mid-to-late seventies, our zeal for evangelism and tendency as young people to live in the present and be shortsighted about the future resulted in a lack of emphasis on the value of a college education. We believed that because most of the Lord's disciples were uneducated, yet effective in spreading the Gospel, that we could do the same. Many of us had a lack of appreciation for the value of a college education as a building block to a successful career and life. And because we had few "worldly" responsibilities and could afford to live on a shoestring, we didn't appreciate the value of a college degree to help meet the added financial responsibilities that marriage and a family would bring. In most cases, this lack of emphasis on education resulted in a failure by church leaders to stress to students the importance of committing their time and effort to excelling in their studies, and the resulting belief that involvement with church activities was more important than schoolwork. In some cases, students at some of our churches were encouraged to leave school so they would be more free to "serve the Lord."

Our failure to stress to college students the value of pursuing their education was also, in some cases, a failure on our part to help those students honor the parents who had sent them to college. Overall, we tried to strongly encourage students to love and respect their parents, and to view their parents as God's authorities in their lives. However, by not actively supporting the commitment the parents had made to a college education for their child, we implicitly encouraged some students to choose to leave college, contrary to the wishes of their parents. This undoubtedly caused some strife within those families and contributed to strained relationships between students and their parents. For this we apologize.

Steps taken to correct. We began to address this problem in our churches in the mid-to-late seventies, and currently there is, in our churches located in college communities, a strong emphasis on pursuing a college education and the importance of excelling in that pursuit. Indeed, our mission organization, Great Commission Ministries, requires that those who wish to minister on campus as staff members have a college degree.

Concerning a student's relationship to his or her parents, Great Commission Ministries staff persons are encouraged to help students learn to honor and respect their parents and to publicly teach the Bible's clear instruction on the subject. In addition, our staff personnel manual provides information on how student leaders can help students to love and respect their parents in practical ways. Finally, seminars on the subject are given at staff training conferences.

We realize that a number of individuals made poor decisions concerning their education and career partially because of our encouragement or because of the examples they saw in our churches. To these people, we offer our sincere apology and regret that our mistakes contributed to career decisions that caused problems, financial or otherwise.

6. A belief that every man should become an elder.

The problem. For many years, our churches taught that every man should aspire to become a full-time pastor/elder. Our conviction was based in part on 1 Timothy 3:1 which says:

“Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task” (NIV).

Because of this verse; because of other verses exhorting every Christian to seek the character qualities a pastor is required to have; and because of the large number of leaders that our churches would need to fulfill the Great Commission, we encouraged every man in our churches to aspire to become a pastor. In doing so, we mistakenly failed to emphasize the diversity of gifts that members of the body have been given, and frustrated many men by suggesting that unless their goal was to become a full-time pastor, they would never become fully mature.

Steps taken to correct. Our present position is that, while any man is free to aspire to become a pastor, and that it is indeed a very good thing to aspire to, he is not required to do so, nor is every man even encouraged to do so. The clear implication of the verse is that some will not choose to become pastors. We encourage men in our churches to consider whether the Lord would have them aspire to the work of a pastor and encourage them to develop the character qualities described in 1 Timothy 3. However, we no longer communicate, either expressly or implicitly, that the work of a pastor is God’s desire for every man.

We regret that this incorrect teaching applied pressure on individuals to aspire to become something that God did not intend, and apologize to those who suffered because of our error.

Conclusion

In preparing this statement acknowledging our early errors and weaknesses we have sought input from supporters and critics outside our association of churches, as well as perspective and feedback from leaders within. We have tried to present a balanced treatment that focuses on accurately conveying our failings while, at the same time, providing context and some sense of the many good things God was accomplishing through us. No doubt, some critics will believe that we haven’t gone far enough while some of our church leaders and members, especially those who are involved with local churches that have experienced few of these problems, may believe we went too far. It is not easy preparing a statement of this kind and we do not expect that it will satisfy everyone. However, we believe it to be a fairly comprehensive attempt to document problems we experienced in our formative years, and the steps we have taken to remedy those problems.

In the interests of clarity and brevity, we have just touched on a number of important and complex issues, e.g., the authority of a pastor, dating and marriage, church discipline, etc. The position papers that we are currently developing will address these issues in greater detail.

If anyone has questions or concerns about this statement, or about any of the issues addressed in it, please contact a pastor at your local Great Commission church or write to:

David Bovenmyer
3611 Eisenhower Avenue
Ames, Iowa 50010

This statement was ratified by the pastors and national leaders of the Great Commission Association of churches on July 19, 1991.



David Bovenmyer, Secretary



GRACE

Giving Grace to Pastors

Pastor Rick Whitney · Manhattan, KS

The word “grace” is defined as, “Unmerited, divine assistance given man for his regeneration or sanctification.”

Pretty straightforward language. At the very first, while lost, our God gave us what we did not deserve. And now when we remember His actions and thoughts towards each of us, this love will always bring us back to a posture of thankfulness.

Now as Christians, He just keeps on giving us what we don’t merit.

If we are going to imitate this kind of grace in our speech with other pastors, other leaders, we have a tall order to fill. But I am convinced that God wants us to copy Him and increase in grace, in both our conversation and actions towards our fellow leaders.

We all know that “gracious speech” is a foundational requirement for any pastor that hopes to persevere in the ministry. When I sat down to write this, I was much aware that you men already believe the importance of this scripture, “*Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were with salt*” (Colossians 4:6, NASB).

But in these GCLI papers, we hope to give you a little more “grist for the mill.” When you meet in your GCLI leaders small groups, we hope that these short essays spark conversation and good discussion.

So what could I add that would instruct and maybe inspire you to increase in the grace we need to show toward each other? I turned to my cards.

I have a fair collection of quotations, written on 3 x 5 cards, that I have kept in a drawer in my desk. Thumbing through them, I pulled the following on this topic of “Showing grace to each other through our attitude and through our speech.”

Here are the best ones that I found:

“God is no faultfinder, always looking for things to condemn in us. He estimates us at our best, not our worst.”

- Unknown

“We have met the enemy and they is us.” -Pogo, a comic strip figure.

I always need to first examine my own heart and spirit. Either before the phone call or meeting or just by routinely examining my heart every morning. First, I need to heal myself.

“You will not become a saint through knowing about other people’s sins.”

-Anton Chekhov

A gracious man doesn’t want to know some things.

“I have more trouble with D.L. Moody, than with any other man I’ve met.”

-D. L. Moody

So brothers, unless we think that we are that much more spiritual than Mr. Moody, maybe we should also begin with ourselves and work on our own walk.

“We evaluate others with a godlike justice, but we want them to evaluate us with a godlike compassion.” -Sydney Harris

Always remember that love speaks first with humility and always with hope.

“How rarely we weigh our neighbor in the same balance in which we weigh ourself.”

-Thomas A. Kempis.

We need to realize when we are being harsh in our spirit, because our spirit will affect our speech.

“See everything. Overlook a great deal. Improve a little.” -Pope John XXIII

We need to always remember how dangerous our criticisms can be. Often our words lack balance, and they are easily tainted by our personal emotions and reactions. Bee careful of too many words, words that can wear others out.

“You cannot sin as much as God can forgive. If it comes to a pitched battle between sin and grace, you shall not be as bad as God is good. We can only sin as a man, but God can forgive as a God.”

-Charles Spurgeon

Even when there are specific things we see in each other’s life, we need to remember these words.

“Pride grows in the human heart, like lard on a pig.” -Solzhenitzyn

This one makes me laugh and keeps me a little more careful about my own tendency to think that I can always understand a particular issue, as well as understand my brother’s heart. “My, what arrogance, Rick!”

“If anyone would like to acquire humility, I can, I think, tell him the first step. The first step to humility is to realize that one is proud. And a big step that is.” -C.S. Lewis

Humility is always required, if we ever hope to grow in gentle, gracious speech.

“On the whole, God’s love for us is a much safer subject to think about than our love for Him.”

-C.S. Lewis

I include this to remind us again to always search our heart first, before we speak to our brother, our brother who has God also in his heart.

“The longer I live, the larger allowances I make for human weaknesses.” -John Wesley

We are always called to be patient in our dealings with each other. And this patience needs to be shown through our speech.

*“The glory of
Christianity is
to conquer by
forgiveness.”*

- William Blake

“ ... gods fade, but God abides and in man’s heart... speaks with the clear, unconquerable cry ... of energies and hopes that cannot die.”
-English sonnet

“He who trusts men will make fewer mistakes than he who distrusts them.” -Anonymous

While we do know each other better and better as the years mount up, I would challenge you to never become pessimistic in your belief in your fellow elder and his progress and growth in the Lord. “He is completing what He has begun.”

“No Christian pastor can be a pessimist, for Christianity is a symbol of radical optimism.” -G.K. Chesterton

“When you say a situation or person is hopeless, you are slamming the door in the face of God.”
-Charles Allen

“If the preacher is angry, he soon puts the congregation under bondage.” -Charles Stanley

“It will not do for us to be all united together by yielding to one another’s mistakes.”
-Charles Spurgeon

This important truth forms the hub of our dilemma. What if someone is wrong? Then what? How can we practice grace and still speak truth? We need to stand for truth, but we need to stand carefully and very graciously.

“Being a minister is just reminding people over and over, and then reminding them again, of what is most important in life.” -Clifford Peale

As pastors, as men of God, let’s make sure that we are reminding each other about what is eternal and not talking so often about the petty, the mundane, or the trivial - those things that wait for us every Monday morning.

“There is one sin which I believe I have never committed. I think that I have never been afraid of any of you.” - Charles Spurgeon (speaking to his church family)

If we are afraid, we will be out of the Spirit and then always out of balance in our speech and our behavior towards each other and towards our flock.

“I do not expect to live long...therefore I speak very plainly.” -Robert Murray McCheyne
Keep it simple and get to the point. This, too, can also be a mark of graciousness.

Brothers, please chew on these great words from great men. I hope they challenge you as they have continually challenged my heart for many years.

“The grace of the Spirit comes only from heaven, and lights up the whole bodily presence.”

- Charles Haddon Spurgeon



GRACE
Exercise

1. What was the main lesson you learned from these articles?

2. How do you, as a leader, personally stay strong in grace? What practical steps do you take?

3. In what way would you like to see your family grow in the area of grace? What practical steps can you take to see this become a reality?



GRACE
Exercise

4. Dave Bovenmyer wrote about a time when GCC took some steps to confess wrongs and weaknesses to members and former members of the movement. Is there anything in the history of your church that might lead the church leadership to take a similar step of humility toward members and former members?

5. In what way can your church grow in the area of grace? What practical steps can you and the other leaders in the GCLI program take to see this become a reality?
