

## Gracious Outrage, Outrageous Grace

Whenever the ancient philosophers described any virtue, they tended to look for a wise balance between extremes. For example, generosity was clearly not selfishness, but neither was it doling out for a person's needs to the point of keeping him dependent on the generosity of others (*i.e.*, giving a man a fish *versus* teaching him to fish). Love is clearly not hate, but neither is it revolving the world around another person to the point that he or she becomes narcissistic and indifferent to the needs of others. Virtue extended to another person to his or her detriment is no virtue at all.

Is it possible that we need to take a renewed look at how we extend grace? I know those are dangerous words, and I do write them with a degree of fear and trembling. Still, because we are creatures prone to extremes, is it possible that the church at large is putting forth the doctrine of grace in a way that is detrimental to the sanctification of some believers and even to the point of fueling a false assurance of salvation in others?

Whenever some actor, athlete, politician or other celebrity does something boneheaded, have you ever noticed that some talking head inevitably is on hand to remind the viewers of what a forgiving society we are "if people will just tell the truth." Apparently, the only factor in some sportswriters' minds that separates Pete Rose's baseball career from a Hall of Fame career is whether he would have come clean about gambling sooner. In the spirit of being bipartisan, I heard the same assurances of societal forgiveness issued in the aftermath of Nixon and Watergate as well as Clinton and Lewinsky:

"Just tell us! We'll go easy on you. We won't be shocked or outraged if we can just close the books on this story. After all, we are a very forgiving society."

Is that grace and forgiveness or is it just a promise to cease bothering a person if he will provide all the tantalizing details? (I am talking about societal acceptance beyond the requirements of the legal system.) Does society need that much information to cease bothering people, or is society just betraying its own voyeuristic tendencies? Are we really a forgiving society or just a nose-pretty morally indifferent one? Can there really be grace in the presence of sin apart from genuine outrage in the presence of that same sin?

I used to pride myself upon being unshockable. You could come to me for a shoulder to cry on or as a sounding board for the horrible things you had done, and I was always good for an affirming "There, there." I noticed over time that my reluctance to be outraged coupled with my tendency to move straight to grace inclined me to lower my expectations out of people, and eventually, out of myself. Perhaps, it would have been a greater service to a person to say, "You're right! You are despicable." Perhaps, that former marine drill sergeant in the *Geico* commercial has a more valuable role in the counseling field than is immediately apparent ... jack-wagon!

According to Paul, God found David to be a man after His own heart (*Acts 13:22*). It may not be obvious how that could be so given the fact that David was married numerous times and to foreign women, all in violation of God's Law. In one instance, he impregnated a trusted officer's wife and covered it up by orchestrating that officer's death and quickly taking the woman as his own wife. He ordered a national census born of his own ego, perhaps, just to assure himself of how powerful he was. He was a disaster in the child-rearing department. Yet,

whenever, his sin was brought to his attention, he was easily broken. In addition to how he had harmed others, he always saw the wreckage his sin had caused in his standing before God and he was devastated by it. He absolutely *hated* sin. But, the king was also very quick not only to forgive others of their sins, but to bring enemies and traitors back into his trusted circles.

Hatred of sin and a quickness to forgive, that's where David's heart was a reflection of God's own. Grace is not quite grace where sin is not hated on every level. Grace is not quite grace where everything that fails to bring glory to God is not despised. But, grace is quick to forgive even as the horridness of sin is confronted. That's what makes it grace.

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