



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Articles

Motivated by Grace

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How is the church to survive, let alone thrive, in a culture of increasing decadence and intellectual pluralism where the only tolerated intolerance is the refusal to be always tolerant?

Let's ask John and learn from his counsel to the churches of Asia Minor. He reminded them of great blessings, but said those blessings were conditional upon obeying the words he wrote (Rev 1.3; 22.7). He relayed Jesus's expectation that they would be rewarded or punished according to their works (Rev 2.22-26; cf. 2.2, 5, 19; 3.1-2, 8, 15). He held them accountable to the highest standard and told them to repent if they weren't measuring up (Rev 3.19; cf. 2.5, 16; 3.3).

John's challenge continued what Jesus began. From Jesus he had learned that being a disciple was about self-denial and taking up crosses—every day (Luke 9.23-27); about counting the cost and going all in (Luke 14.25-33); about being a slave to Christ (Rom 6.16). Jesus's way was at odds with society's norms and success standards (Rom 12.2; 2 Tim 2.3-6; 1 Pet 2.11-12; 1 John 2.15-17). It was a vocation, a calling, not an avocation (Eph 4.1-2; 2 Thess 4.11; Heb 3.1; 2 Pet 1.10).

Some would tell us that such an emphasis diminishes grace. But in fact, it is where a proper understanding of grace leads. Grace is what led Paul to the work of bringing about obedience (Rom 1.5). It was when grace was accepted that followers yielded themselves as slaves to Christ (Rom 6.14-17). To embrace non-conformity included using gifts received by grace (Rom 12.2, 6). Paul worked to build churches "according to the grace of God" (1 Cor 3.10) and said that grace prompted him to "work harder than" the other apostles (1 Cor 15.9-10).

Given these truths, we should ask how our commitment compares with Paul's, John's, and Peter's. We should also ask what lax commitment says about a real understanding of grace.

"I worked harder than any of them," Paul said, "though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.... Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (1 Cor 15.10, 58).

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