

- Even one of the biggest fans of my sermons told me they didn't understand everything I said last week. Actually I think they said, "I didn't understand ***anything*** you said last week!"
- You "*gotta*" give me a break. Every now and then the unfulfilled "*professor*" slips out in a sermon.
- Since this morning is supposed to be about Jesus and not about my homiletical skills or lack thereof, why does this matter? Two reasons.
- ONE: I want to remind you the notes are online at fbccs.org next to the video of the day. It is often easier to follow difficult material when you can read it rather than simply hear it.
- And TWO: This ought to make you all rejoice that I believe in mainly preaching through books of the Bible. When I do that, rather than topical sermons as I am doing right now, my flights of fancy into all the things I want you to know in the world stated in 45 minutes are less likely. Preaching a text more closely controls the directions and the emphases for application.
- I feel the second half ***Genesis*** coming on after being so rudely interrupted by evidence of the *Fallen* world in the form of a virus that changed how we look at some many things
- However, right now, we are in the middle of an important but short series about some of our ***governing values*** a church.
- It is my desire to teach or preach these regularly because it is not my desire or my calling to simply open the doors on Sunday, calling something we do "church," with the main goal of attracting as many people to a ***meeting*** as we can figure out ways to attract them.
- In a crass way I have always said, "*If that is our goal, let's give away beer and have 'dancin' girls' because that will attract 'um'.*" The restaurant downstairs on the other side of where we are meeting right now has made a lasting business out of nearly that model.

Series: *Revisiting Three FBC Values*

Sermon: "*Free Grace: Foundational Truth*"

Text: *John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8-9*

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- Three of our governing values as a church that keep us from simply being an ongoing, habitual, traditional, ceremonial, religious meeting are 1. Be truly biblical; 2. Hold tightly to biblical Free Grace; and 3. Live-out our biblical mission—Biblical—Free Grace—Missional.
- Every more theologically conservative evangelical church will pretty much say they value these same three things. We define them in certain ways that require more than slogans or single words to express.
- It is possible that even inside a single local church such as FBC we will say we hold these values but in reality we hold a *false consensus* because we are not understanding them the same way. Eventually that leads to conflict.
- This conflict can happen more often when a church is changing, as we are, by leaving behind a major symbol of what we have been and seeking what, by God's leading and wise choices, we shall be.
- This puts a church in the *borderlands*—a liminal state with regard to our comfortable patterns in this world that we are so used to and find so comforting.
- If our unity involves false consensus on governing values, the cracks will often show up when bigger change is taking place—even when that change is on purpose by choice.
- Thus, now is a good time to think about the real meaning, for us, when we say we are "***Biblical, Free Grace and Missional.***"
- I spent three weeks on what we mean by being ***Biblical***, because I conclude this value is slipping away in many churches—and maybe even in FBC. Being ***Biblical*** as expecting God to speak sufficiently in a living and relational way to us through the Scriptures is easily being replaced today.

- In a secular educational system, **some** of us have been taught, almost certainly **all** of our kids have been taught, a now, without a doubt, all of our grandkids have been taught postmodern tenets of authority which is to say the fact that there is no real authority except the one we find inside ourselves—how we think, feel, emote, desire, etc.
- The “*this is **my** truth and you must hear it, accept it and now must actively promote it*” value has reached into even conservative evangelical churches like ours.
- ***You can’t live in a sewer and not expect to get some filth on you!*** Jesus told his disciples they were *clean* but would need frequent *washings of their feet* because of walking around in the filth of a nasty, fallen world. I am not quite being as indelicate as the Lord was here. Believe me, those guys knew what filth from the pathways needed to be washed off of their feet every single day they got out of bed to live life.
- The filth of an unbelieving, God-hating world system from its elite thinkers on down gets on our understanding of truth and how we hear it from God every day we walk around in the SKUBALA filled streets of our culture—even, especially now, our popular culture.
- That filth is spread in short “TWEETY” and long school lectures—in movies and in politics.
- It is spread nearly everywhere and nearly all the time now. The absurd part of this foolish intelligence has now reached our culture. Per Paul’s pronouncement concerning the inevitable downward, sinful spiral of all human cultures in Romans 1, our culture has reached the depths of inventing new creative ways to sin and not being satisfied to sin alone but rather convincing others to join in.

Series: *Revisiting Three FBC Values*

Sermon: "Free Grace: Foundational Truth"

Text: *John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8-9*

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- How? To run from God they make people believe—contrary to their own noses that their SKUBALA actually smells like rose scented potpourri—their garbage is actually the tastiest cuisine.
- How in the church? Death is love! Accepting sin is caring! How you feel is TRUTH!
- Value #1, being biblical, is critical today already. I will predict it will be even more critical in days not too far future when the our culture requires churches and Christians to eat their SKUBALA with a smile on our face and a complement to the chef.
- If we are not truly biblical as a church, we are done as a real church. Add us to the list of ***de-lamped churches*** in *Revelation 2 and 3*!
- Today, I'm supposed to cover the 2nd value I want to emphasize. It is a value because we believe it is biblical keeping in line with our first value. It is elevated to being part of this discussion of just 3 values because it is so foundational to how we God, ourselves, others and the church. This is the value of FREE GRACE.
- Let me see if I can make it simple—at least to start. My text today is John 3:16. **READ JOHN 3:16**
- This is Jesus himself telling Nicodemus, a known, respected, learned theological leader of the OT people of God, how God provided "salvation—i.e., how he can have ***everlasting life***—telling him in a simple way that is possible for him to accept this everlasting life as a FREE gift from God.
- I could have picked the woman at the well who comes next in John's Gospel or the Philippian jailor in Paul's story to talk about FREE GRACE and the fact that we value it as truth this morning. I picked Nicodemus because we know it and it is as clear as it needs to be if we will allow the text to speak God's Words to us rather than our human, theological systems.

- **READ John 3:16 AGAIN**

- I usually cannot talk about FREE GRACE as the topic without mentioning that the idea seems redundant to me but I understand why we need to make the emphasis. No evangelical would deny that we are saved by grace. The issue is, is that grace "**absolutely free?**"
- I like to look at how assumed outsiders to our biblical theology like to define things. This is what gets me in trouble making my sermon less understandable. But here we go anyway.
- If you Google the definition of "grace" you can see why we end up adding the qualifier of "free."
- Miriam Webster's Online Dictionary gives the first meaning of "**grace**" as, "**an unmerited divine assistance given to humans for their regeneration or sanctification.**"
- There is something very right in that definition and something very wrong. I bet the editors of Webster's dictionary have no idea of how theological they are in their definition. I bet they just think this is what it is.
- What's right? They suggest there could be a distinction between "regeneration" and "sanctification." They don't even know how Protestant and even Free Grace that makes them and their definition.
- What is wrong? It's that word "**assistance.**" They get that **grace** means that any "**divine assistance**" is "**unmerited**"—unearned—undeserved—a free gift from the divine provider.
- But that word "**assistance**" has connotations of the **divine** only providing an **unmerited extra bump** to what we humans can do. It suggests grace is somehow us PLUS God. It is absolutely not. And this is why we add the word FREE to FREE GRACE when the word should stand alone. **We humans bring absolutely nothing to God's grace!**

- This is what Paul was getting at in those familiar verses to the Ephesian believers. **"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast."** (Eph. 2:8-9)
- Very early in the church the waters of FREE GRACE were muddied. At different times, different human merits were added to grace which needed nothing to be added.
- I can claim FREE GRACE was the truth that was perverted early on because Paul's letter to the Galatian believers addressed the adding on of things to absolutely FREE GRACE. Galatians was likely the first part of the entire NT to be written and that was probably less than two decades after Jesus ascended to be with the Father.
- Some of the Galatians wanted to add "Jewishness" to the requirements for "salvation" by grace. Paul called them **foolish** and got their attention, in what seems to me to be a somewhat crass way, by suggesting to them that they undergo a more complete surgery than they were arguing was necessary for salvation.
- Very early in this early letter, without too many words given to nice greetings or any complements, Paul said to these brothers and sisters. **⁶ I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—⁷ which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.** (Galatians 1:6-7)
- Did this settle the matter for the church? Did it set God's biblical FREE GRACE free as the Church's clear way of salvation? No.
- A couple of centuries later, there was a famous theologian whom you may have heard of or maybe named your lawn after if you have lived in Florida. Some say his name was St. **Augustine** others say St

Au**GUS**tine (I forget which one is the smart way to say it) argued in a theological treatise against the CRAZY beliefs of some who—argued—IMAGINE THIS—they argued—and he tried to combat this strange belief—that Scripture taught that a person who believed and was justified--that even if they did no good works and sinned without repentance that they could still be saved.

- Can you imagine that? I can. It is what Jesus said and what the entire Bible teaches!
- The theology of FREE GRACE is not new. The systems that men write down concerning FREE GRACE may be new and updated but the truth is NOT NEW. The Galatians and the Augustinian and then Augustinian Calvinists found another gospel that was ***"really no gospel at all,"*** as Paul had written.
- Why does the church tend let this FREE GRACE truth slip? Because the world tells us there is no such thing as a free lunch and we let that seep into our theology when we are not fighting our laziness to stay biblical.
- Why do we so easily buy that worldly wisdom? Because every one of us has a flesh that likes to take some of the credit—get some of the glory. What did Paul say, ***"not of works lest any man should boast!"***
- I can't prove FREE GRACE to you this morning. I hope I don't need to do that. I can read you what Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3:16 and ask you if you think that was a trick or that was enough to truly gain everlasting life that—by the way—by definition lasts forever and can't go away even when I sin.
- I believe that FREE GRACE provides the most consistent way to interpret even the more difficult passages of Scripture if we will indeed let Scripture speak instead of theological systems do the talking.

- Context as always will always be critical. I have two things left to do but before I do those, let me be just slightly technical. This one exegetical consideration related to context can clear up almost any issue in understanding a passage while holding that FREE GRACE is truth.
- There are not as many young people that learned this some years ago but let's see if we still have some who remember. ***"Salvation is what kind of word?" (MULTIVALENT)*** First, let me assure you that ***multivalent*** or ***polyvalent*** has nothing to do with the words having confusion over their gender or sexuality. Multivalent and polyvalent simply describe words that have more than one meaning or connotation. The only way to understanding this meaning or connotation is to know the context in which the multivalent word is being used.
- Our word ***salvation*** translates Greek and Hebrew words that mean different things in different contexts. They always denote some matter of ***deliverance*** but the context determines from what and to what one is delivered.
- One can be saved from a flood and physical death by drowning or saved from eternal damnation to everlasting life with God. Both are "salvation" but they are very different.
- NT writers, Paul included, also can think in terms of salvation as justification (when I am born again by believing), sanctification (when I am being made more Christ like in this life by believing and acting upon that belief) and glorification (the absolute certainty that no matter how far along, or not, I get in the process of sanctification, I will ultimately be perfected—glorified to be sinless).
- All of these are by grace through faith but the first requires only that I choose to believe. The second requires that I choose to believe and

then act, by God's power like I really am in Christ. The third one requires only that God be faithful as Paul argues in Romans 8.

- Why does this matter? I'll give you one example you can use as you put the effort you put into studying the very Word of God this coming week. This will sound tricky and you'll not easily understand it unless you do the exercise.
- **Romans 10:9-10**, is passage central to the "Romans Road" plan of salvation that supposedly tells people how to go to heaven instead of hell when they die. **Romans 10:9** conditions "salvation" on making a "mouthed confession" of Jesus as Lord. Did Paul add something we humans must do to be justified? Does this destroy the absolutely nothing added to God's grace of our FREE GRACE?
- Read it and ask yourself, "Self, in this context what is the salvation in mind. It will make all the difference in the world to your understanding of what God said rather than a theological system said. But that is home work!
- In case you wonder what FREE GRACE is and how it differs from other theological systems, one of the two things I want to do is to give you an expanded definition of "FREE GRACE." I didn't get it from Miriam Webster's online dictionary. I found it in an even better place online. Wikipedia!
- I was shocked how close they come to getting it all just about right. I wonder if one of my more brilliant FREE GRACE friends actually wrote the article and had it accepted.
- Here that definition is with a few explanations and emphases by me...***Free grace theology is a Christian soteriological view which holds that the only condition of salvation is initial faith. Free grace theologians reject the necessity of good works for salvation. Free Grace advocates believe that good works are not the condition to***

merit (as with Catholics), maintain (as with Arminians), or to prove (as with some Calvinists) salvation, but rather are part of discipleship and the basis for receiving eternal rewards. This view distinguishes between salvation and discipleship – the call to believe in Christ as Savior and to receive the gift of eternal life, and the call to follow Christ and become an obedient disciple, respectively. Free Grace theology is mainly taught among: Baptist, Plymouth Brethren, non-Denominational and other Independent churches.

- Now break it down a bit...
- ***Free grace theology is a Christian soteriological*** ("soteriological" is the word theologians give to the study of "salvation" it comes from the Greek word for salvation) ***view which holds that the only condition of salvation*** (justification) ***is initial faith*** (I might say "belief" because of Jn 3:16 but "faith," understood biblically works as Paul used it in Ephesians 2) . ***Free grace theologians reject the necessity of good works for salvation*** (ah! Which meaning of salvation--JJustification?). ***Free Grace advocates believe that good works are not the condition to merit salvation (as with Catholics)(i.e., work to put it and keep in effect), maintain salvation (as with Arminians) (i.e., work or lose it), or to prove salvation (as with some Calvinists)(i.e., fruit-inspectors to determine if your "faith" was good enough to get it in the first place), but rather are part of discipleship*** (the process of sanctification) ***and the basis for receiving eternal rewards*** (had to be a friend of mine! they understand the difference between justification and sanctification with the ongoing process of discipleship Jesus commanded...and rewards) ***This view distinguishes between salvation and discipleship – the call to believe in Christ as Savior and to receive the gift of***

eternal life, and the call to follow Christ and become an obedient disciple, respectively. (Yep! Got it right!) ***Free Grace theology is mainly taught among: Baptist, Plymouth Brethren, non-Denominational and other Independent churches.*** (I would say those who are biblical!)

- Again, if that was hard to follow verbally. Check it out written down on the site fbccs.org or at Wikipedia without my comments.
- This will help you distinguish this value with more precision and to ask yourself do I hold this as a value? Do I think this is biblical and thus aligned with the first value we addressed?
- Then finally, why does it matter that we get this so clearly and not maintain a false consensus?
- Let me list a few reasons that come to mind.
- First, I think FREE GRACE is thoroughly ***biblical*** and can bring together even the largest contexts of whole books of the Bible and even the understanding of how the Old and New Testaments relate to each other. This doesn't mean there are not passages that can still be difficult to understand in light of FREE GRACE.
- Next, FREE GRACE reveals a very different ***foundation*** for how we relate to God. Must we bring something for him to accept us, to love us, to save us? A quid pro quo salvation, to any degree, requiring my goodness to any degree is very different than knowing I am totally accepted in Christ because of what he did rather than what I need to do.
- Then, FREE GRACE provides a very different ***foundation*** for how we ***relate to one another***. If I know you are fully accepted by God by his grace alone and I am fully accepted by God by grace alone we must look at each other as fully accepted even when we fail one another.

It is really, ultimately the only foundation that holds up to keep us loving one another when we are just not always very lovable

- Next, FREE GRACE provides a different ***foundation*** for ***living life***. Do I live out of fear always trying to earn or prove God's acceptance or out of a basis of knowing the truth that by God's grace alone I am irrevocably his child with everlasting life? Living life in front of a father who loves unconditionally is very different than living life for a human father who fails at that sometimes (ask my kids!) FREE GRACE lets us reflect in our lives now what we actually are in God's eyes out of growing love rather than desperate fear.
- Then finally, there are more but time is up, FREE GRACE is my only ***foundation*** for having any lasting ***hope***. This idea is much deeper than my personal feelings but let me tell you those. I came to recognize pretty early on in my Christian life that if salvation (justification) was not absolutely a work of God's FREE GRACE and nothing of me, I would be doomed—without any hope for after death and even for hard times in this life. When I was honest with myself I knew I could never do it—never add to it—I had to rely solely on God or I was hopeless.
- Thankfully, Biblical FREE GRACE tells me just this. God does it. I don't need to frontload salvation by making promises that I will be sinless or less sinful.
- I don't need to backload salvation by proving I deserved it with my good works for God.
- I simply need to rest in God's promise from the lips of our Lord and Savior who did everything that needed to be done for me... ***For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.***"
- I believe. My prayer is that all of you do as well.