

Theology 2.10 – Word made flesh

When considering your own theology, remember that there are always different views of Grace. Also, that normative theology is not a fixed matter, but something that changes through time. What was once normative may now be considered deviant. How faith changes through time is what Diachronic theology is all about.

A. Different Views of GRACE:

1. **Works based** – some people are more prone to a “Law” driven form of Grace. This is more about legalism and moralism where ‘you are what you do’:
 - a. This is more typical of those who don’t fully understand sin and redemption and is tends to engage weaker brothers & sisters.
 - b. This also is more typical of successful people and those who tend to be prideful. When you have accomplished much and become more self reliant.
 - c. This is also true of people who are more relationally challenged. It is easier to go here when you are less engaged with community and the needs of others.
 - d. There is a prevalent thought that if I work harder God will love me more. The truth is that God loves us perfectly and completely... before we ever came in search of Him.
 - e. Legalism is bondage – it is akin to returning to a more Pharisaic religious theology.
2. **Faith based** – some people are more committed to a more normative Gospel form of Grace. They have been convicted of their need for a savior, and respond in an attitude of gratitude.
 - a. Where legalism doesn’t hold them their challenge is not to abuse our freedom in Christ. The fact that there is nothing we can do to earn our salvation doesn’t mean we do nothing.
 - b. These people tend to define success in terms of Grace/faith – work that God completed on their behalf, not in their own specific actions.
 - c. These tend to be more relationally focused... they find it more easy to forgive others because they know their own need.
 - d. They understand that God loves me completely – there is nothing I can do to make Him love me more or love me less. I can’t earn His love, and I can’t lose it either.
 - e. Grace is freedom – this is what Paul argued for in his Epistles.
3. In addition to the two broad groups above there are hybrids where one can believe one thing, but practice or exercise another.
 - a. Truth is that the Spiritual life is not a one-size-fits-all program... we all have our own strengths and weaknesses and our own flavor of success and dysfunction.
 - b. There are always different paradigms and emphasis at play in our life, and being mindful of our own condition allows us to extend grace to others. A dear friend once told me when I was struggling with sin in my life in light of the person I wanted to be – “I will extend to you the same amount of confusion that I allow myself... which is considerable.” To be accepted warts and all and not judged was a freeing experience.

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- c. **Judaism, Islam and Mormonism – in these faith systems forgiveness is through repentance, prayer, and good works. Good works are a necessary requirement for demonstrating and achieving a saving faith.**
 - i. **In these systems personal sin and need are the responsibility of each person and because your good works will earn you good standing with God, you don't need vicarious substitution – thus in these systems Jesus didn't have to die. Not without irony then, they don't hold to Jesus as eternal God, but a lesser prophet or angelic being.**
 - ii. **Love as expressed in Deuteronomy is obedience from which blessing is derived.**
 - iii. **Some sins can't be forgiven in law based systems such as murder, etc. – if you go too far in these systems you are screwed and beyond redemption. That is not the message of the Christian Gospel.**
4. **Extreme free Grace Dispensationalists take another perspective where it is all about faith.**
 - a. **You are saved by Grace and whatever else you do is totally optional and unnecessary.**
 - b. **In this perspective your actions get you absolutely nowhere. They in essence burn the bridge between action and faith... there is no concomitant outflow of Grace leading to acts of love and charity.**
 - c. **They often maintain that repentance is an action not really needed... the conviction-repentance-transformed format of spiritual formation is ignored. In many cases the most extreme free-gracers hold that everyone is saved regardless of your thoughts or actions – they would argue that the benefit of Christ is so overwhelmingly potent that even Satan and demons will be saved. This is not what Jesus and His Apostles taught.**
 - d. **Thus, they have to develop a theology to overcome many Biblical passages that speak contrary to their position – passages that call specifically for conviction, repentance and transformation.**
5. **When evaluating our own theological position, we essentially have a choice to make:**
 - a. **Does faith equal commitment – where my response is cause and effect.**
 - b. **Does faith not equal commitment – or my response is decoupled from cause and effect.**
 - c. **Either way, how does that play out in your life... what does it look like? We should be able to present a reasoned argument or defense for the faith we hold to.**
 - d. **John's gospel focuses on Grace – it is all about the love of God expressed in Jesus.**
 - e. **Synoptic gospels focus more upon personal commitment.**
 - f. **The Epistles are a combination of the two.**
6. **Dispensational theology tends to focus more on the future rewards we earn now but receive in heaven.**
 - a. **The good we do will be rewarded in heaven – we will have crowns and mansions appropriate to what we accomplished for God's Kingdom.**

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- b. While I don't necessarily disagree with this, our motivation should always be to do what pleases God because He loved and saved us... so we want others to know and experience His truth. If we get differential blessings... great. But the motivation is obedience and serving.
- 7. Evangelistic crusades like the Billy Graham, Luis Palau and others have organizational approaches that tend to focus on getting people into the Kingdom of God.
 - a. Their emphasis is on forgiveness... being saved by Grace.
 - b. Most of these appeals focus on the 'come as you are' and 'confess with your mouth' model of conversion. Unfortunately, many if not most of these people who so respond have never really experienced a fundamental life change that always ensues in the Spirit led 'conviction-repentance-transformation' cycle.
 - c. People's lifestyles, values, convictions, behavior changes when Spiritual Formation occurs. The expectation is if you get people to the door that they will walk through it into the Kingdom of God.
 - d. Most churches take the approach of sowing seeds for the Kingdom, but using the farmer analogy don't often put together an integrated plow, sow, water, weed, and harvest mentality.
 - e. The idea is often if we just get them in the door and God will do the rest... that is inconsistent with the Great Commission – 'Go AND teach them to obey' is all about maturity in discipleship.
 - f. The real question is whether merely accepting an invitation is sufficient for salvation, or should we expect to see real life change?
- 8. Moderate Free Grace and Progressive Free Grace Dispensationalists – would argue that how you view Scripture and faith tends to plant you in one camp or another.
 - a. Some will still argue that you are somehow justified if not saved by the demonstration of your works.
 - b. Others will argue that you are saved for works – this is better than a works based system, but it still encourages a more reward based thinking.
- 9. There is a necessary relation and continuum among salvation, grace & works, and it is birthed upon your motivating factors.
 - a. If faith incorporates both eternal salvation and living in this world – then action and trust both play out both ways in grace.
 - b. If faith is primarily or exclusively about my eternal salvation – then there must be a point in time where I know I'm forgiven. The cross completed the work of redemption, but it must be accepted and the benefit appropriated by faith.
 - c. Faith, trust and action in harmony with the mind and heart of Christ is the goal.
 - d. Living in this world as action in faith in motion... is how we are living in the Kingdom of God here and now.

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B. GOSPEL Project thoughts:

1. Be careful what words you choose in defining what the gospel is.
2. The gospel is not primarily about the Kingdom of God... it is about the work of mercy in Grace to square us relationally with God... then the Kingdom kicks in.
3. Why did Jesus have to die?
 - a. Gospel coalition argues for the atonement of Christ – it was the only way for man to be reconciled to God.
 - b. Free Grace would argue that the Book of Romans teaches the inclusiveness of all people (also Num 15) regardless of their knowledge or responsiveness to God’s proffered provision.
 - c. Victory gospel – example of Christ being victorious over sin and death is paradigmatic and changes everything here and now and eternal. NOT! This totally overlooks the problem of suffering and death – which the Scripture says we will need to endure until God restores all of the created order. We have the Spirit now, but not the perfected world we wait for.
4. The atonement is the only reason Jesus had to die – the other approaches don’t require Jesus death. Yet it is clear from prophecy and Jesus’ & apostolic testimony that Jesus came to specifically to die... that was central to His ministry.
 - a. The atonement is why Jesus had to die on Passover as the fulfillment of OT prophecy.
 - b. Cross destroyed the Law – no longer the covenant principle as Grace replaced Law.
 - c. Opened the door into eternity – OT blessing had always been in the land... now in the NT era it is eternity in heaven... though some will get a bonus – whether a crown or a robe, etc., all who are sealed by the Spirit are guaranteed heaven eternally with God.
 - d. Parable of the talents shows that everyone is a winner in heaven... whether you have 5 talents or 2, it’s all good!
 - e. 1 Cor 3 – speaks of being saved as through fire – some will be scorched and smudged... maybe smell of smoke. This is similar to the parable of the workers – some worked all day, some for 1 hour... each got the same reward/pay. In either analogy, no one will say “ha-ha you smell of smoke... or Ha-ha you only worked one hour. Or Ha-ha you only have one talent.” Instead we will be totally fulfilled as God deems appropriate and all will be happy, content, with no sorrow or tears... it’s the best of places to be.
5. When defining what does the crucifixion and resurrection mean, be sure to use good word searches to validate your word choices.
6. How do you view personal sin?
 - a. Luke 7:47 – religious man loved little & forgiven little; sinful woman loved much and was forgiven much.
 - b. In this story it is obvious that God’s economics of faith are different than ours.

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- c. There are definitely signposts for redemption – but the order is not exactly fixed or clear. But at some point the conviction, repentance, acceptance, and transformation cycle kicks in.
- d. If you understand your own personal sin, and you appreciate the magnitude of all that God has graciously forgiven you... you will tend to be more gracious with others. The less you understand your own plight and need, like the religious Pharisees you will tend to judge and condemn others.

7. What motivates you to love God?

- a. Theology or religion alone is poor motivation. Knowledge and wisdom are important foundational components, but without personal transformation you won't persevere.
- b. Gospel centered spiritual transformation is the greatest motivation.
- c. Remember where you are from – and what God has done and is doing for you.
- d. If God is not real to you – transformation is a lost concept.
- e. If God is real to you – transformation is a blend of knowing who you are in Him, what He has done in redemptive history, what He is doing in my ongoing spiritual journey.
- f. It is the same God (One God – Shema) at work in deliverance and the conviction-repentance-acceptance-transformation cycle... we need to remind each other to continue to encourage our faith commitment and keep it fresh in our hearts and minds.
- g. The experiential component is motivationally compelling – remembrance was justifiably huge in OT theology.
- h. Dead faith is un-relational – it causes you to do things because of consequence of the credibility of works, instead out of love for God.
- i. Live faith is relational – you do things because of the consequence of love and remembrance of what God has done for you... which refreshes your faith.

C. THEOLOGY PLAYS OUT IN REDEMPTIVE HISTORY [Diachronically] IN WAVES & CYCLES OF CHANGE

- 1. What are the ramifications of normative faith as they play out in your own theology? How does my thinking affect eternity... or at least my concept of it or possibly my place in it? How much “correct” theology do you need to know to be saved? To be mature? How does change play out in leadership responsibility?
 - a. The thief on the cross beside Jesus apparently did not know much about theology, only of his own personal need and his faith that Jesus could meet it. The rich young ruler knew a tremendous amount about theology, but left his encounter with Jesus unjustified... unlike the thief.
 - b. Science and theology are not necessarily at odds, nor are they necessarily in concert.
 - c. I tend to think of this changing reality in terms of the Big Bang theory of creation – in my thought I think that the ‘Big Bang’ was actually a ‘Great Song’ sung out by God and

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- setting creation moving out in the universe which is still reverberating today. When scientists talk about finding residual reverberations of the 'Big Bang' I get excited!
- d. The universe is described as operating as a great clockwork running on pre-ordained principles – everything is in its place in order and symmetry... this cannot be accidental. The science of chaos theory would have random articles over time settling into ordered action. This is not what science has revealed about the world... for me I see it as a proof of the existence of God [Ps 19].
 - e. From the beginning God spoke order and reality into chaos and void. He also knew when Jesus would enter history, as well as for me and everyone else. This is not a random event or occurrence.
 - f. Into this clockwork I see the cross as the exclamation point – the Spiritual big bang ringing out simultaneously in both directions throughout redemptive history. It is the penultimate game changer.
2. Personal sin and forgiveness play out differently in theology:
- a. From a 'legalistic verses grace' centered perspective.
 - b. From an innocent (young) verses a worldly (old) perspective.
 - c. From an older or dying to a young & powerful perspective.
 - d. Doing your duty is not the same as acting upon relational dependence in love. Doing your duty is responding to the truth as you know it in light of God as we understand Him. This has both fixed [objective] normality and open [subjective] normality. It is a conundrum we will not solve this side of eternity, but we can have faith in God to accomplish His purpose in His timetable.
 - e. There needs to be an awareness at some point where the justice of God was satisfied by the cross, and the resultant grace is applied in my life.
3. Forgiveness in terms of heaven & hell:
- a. There are many issues we cannot completely understand and objectively resolve this side of eternity. One such matter is what enables someone to forgive someone who has abused you? What are the motivating factors for accepting and applying grace?
 - b. Jesus example – He forgives me and asks me to forgive others.
 - i. There is an inseparability here of thought and action... one necessarily leads to the other.
 - ii. The forgiveness I experience is not just on the wrongs I have committed, nor is it of the fundamental flawed nature I possess – both are involved, but the bigger issue is my escape from eternal hell.
 - c. The reality of heaven & hell should compel evangelism:
 - i. What is hell? At worst it is eternal torment and suffering, at best it is separation from God.

- ii. The reality and penalty of hell is real. This should compel us in love of preventing suffering in others.
- iii. What is heaven? At best it is eternal bliss and complete joy and satisfaction in the eternal presence of almighty God, at worst it is the release of pain and suffering and entering into peace and rest.
- iv. The reality of heaven is real and eternal. Again, this should motivate us to engage those around us.
- v. The cross is the bridge by which we escape hell and enter heaven... this is a mystery and a stumbling block, but none the less true.
- d. What does Jesus' death entail? Is it physical alone, or is it also spiritual?
 - i. Physical torture was commonplace in the ancient world – tens of thousands of people were crucified. It is estimated that over 1 million Jews and Christians were killed in the 1st century AD alone by the Roman Empire.
 - ii. If Jesus' asking this cup to pass were merely to avoid physical pain in light of His suffering in complete silent submission... if that is all it is, it just doesn't make sense.
 - iii. There had to have been a spiritual component in Jesus' suffering – but we just don't know what it was. It had to also have been connected to our own liberation... again we don't know what it was.
 - iv. Did Jesus experience spiritual death? Don't know... Scripture doesn't say.
 - v. Scripture does say that Jesus conquered Satan, death, and hell – not a bad day at the office! And those of us that believe in trust in, and follow in obedience to Him will enjoy a joyous eternity as a consequence.
- 4. Jesus' divinity, authority and power
 - a. High faith:
 - i. The Centurion – “just say the word and it will be done” Even Jesus admitted that He had not seen such faith before. This is amazing! More so because the man expressing such faith was a Pagan ruler.
 - ii. The Syno-Phonecian woman – “even dogs eat scraps for the table of their master” At this Jesus didn't refuse her, but rather granted her request for healing.
 - b. Low faith:
 - i. His disciples and followers who had a low appreciation and understanding of His authority and power. They were looking at things from a strictly worldly perspective.
 - ii. The result of low faith is not knowing Jesus as deity... the awe and wonder component that energizes faith was disconnected.
 - c. Personal response:

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- i. You have to know who Jesus is experientially to worship Him. Knowing about Him is not the same as knowing Him.
- ii. A natural response even if emotional is not worship... you have to know Jesus personally as deity.
- iii. Church services that create mood and sentimental feelings, etc., fall short of the transformational requirement of true faith and are not affective for salvation.
- iv. An emotive atmosphere is unsustainable and is ultimately doomed. Forming a community in some relationship with one another is good but not sufficient. The emphasis on form rather than substance is not Christian regardless of your intent.
- v. Personal deliverance is essential – at some point you need to know that transformational change has occurred in your own life. Then, sharing your story in community is a powerful encouragement to others to do likewise...

5. Charismatic movement

- a. God's Spiritual transformational activity in people's life and community is vital – this needs to be real. We need to tell our stories... our stories about the hand of God at work now in our life and remembering what He has done in the past is helpful to promote faith and hope.
- b. When God answers in mercy and power in actual people's lives – it is an encouragement because it makes Jesus' power and authority real.
- c. Prayer that acts as a spotlight on an individual is not worship – this is Pharisaical. Prayer that focuses on the person and nature of Jesus is what is needed.
- d. Routine thought and action that may be theologically sound but relationally disconnected to Jesus is worthless.
- e. Parameters on Spiritual gifts expressed in the church:
 - i. Apostolic ministry has ended with the living eye witnesses in the 1st century. This gift or office that produces new authoritative revelation apart from Scripture has ceased. The Apostolic ministry that has continued is the supernatural empowerment for ministry to connect with people to lead them to saving faith in Christ.
 - ii. Prophecy, healing, and miracles continue - these are real & active spiritual gifts. Though much of what passes for these revival meetings is often little more than smoke and mirrors – for which God will hold these charlatans responsible.
 - iii. Tongues is a real gift but has too often become a divisive element – and as such it should be viewed cautiously.

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1. Speaking in “ecstatic languages” was common in pagan cultures. Merely speaking such nonsense is not a Spiritual manifestation.
2. “Angel Speak” – as a means of communication with the Supernatural elements is unnecessary – because of the indwelling Spirit real language is all that was necessary. Since Pentecost we have an internal “direct-connect” [using Nextel language] with God.
3. Too much is made of Glossolalia [ecstatic utterances] as evidence of the Spirit within – it’s not.
4. Such communication needs to be beneficial to faith and community – as Paul warned, it should not become destructive or divisive of the unity of faith in community of believers.

6. Faith

- a. Qualification of true faith is the ability of God to do something... supernaturally in the natural order.
- b. Faith is exercised in looking for and experiencing God’s supernatural power or activity. As we do so, our expectation of God’s power and authority grows.
- c. The execution of response to prayer in faith is less about the strength of my faith, and more about God’s will and purpose.
- d. If something that is prayed for is not being answered the assumption is that my faith is deficient... this is not necessarily true. Instead, look not to the extremes of ‘pure faith’ and ‘doubt’ – because God works in His own way according to His own will and on His own timetable.

7. Views of humanity & the Deity of Jesus – there are numerous present and historical heresies:

- a. Gnosis Theory – Jesus having taken on the ‘form’ of a man... Jesus empties Himself not as God, but rather in lowering Himself to becoming human and taking on the humble tasks that are consistent with humanity. In this context there are ‘secret truths that must be known’ [gnosis] to properly understand and apply this knowledge.
- b. Aryanism – Jesus is a “Super-Angel” but not fully divine... this notion is held by several groups including Jehovah’s Witnesses.
- c. Apollonarian – Jesus was a 50-50 hybrid... a human body with a divine spirit. This is not fully God and fully human.
- d. Nestorian – 2 persons in 1 body... he was God and man simultaneously during His ministry. This group asserts that Jesus was born a normal human being but became divine when the Spirit descended upon him at John’s baptism. While the divine took over his body he was able to conduct miracles and preach God’s authoritative Word. They hold that since God cannot die, while Jesus was on the cross the Spirit left him and was once again only human. They use Jesus’ cry “my God... why have you deserted me” as proof of this approach. A better reason for Jesus’ cry was that He

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- was preaching with His final breaths... the quote is from Psalm 22 which read in whole is an accurate description of crucifixion... a Prophetic rendering of Messiah's death. This thought approach again negates the 'fully man-fully God' standard.
- e. Monophytism – this asserts that Jesus' human nature was absorbed by divinity, at which point he ceased to be human but was converted to divine. Again this does not meet the fully human-fully God standard.
 - f. These were some of the heresies that circulated in the few hundred years after Jesus crucifixion. It wasn't until the Chalcedon Council of 451 AD – when classic mainstream Christianity was affirmed:
 - i. Jesus was completely God and man – perfect in both in a mystical way that we don't know.
 - ii. 1 substance – both man and God.
 - iii. 2 natures without confusion in 1 person.
8. Kingdom teaching as advanced by the church:
- a. The Kingdom of God here today... it is advancing... it is present but not complete. We have the opportunity to partner with God in advancing His will and purpose... dependent upon His calling and empowerment. If we are working in our own strength in the name of God, we may do some good things... but it is not supernatural.
 - b. As a result of Jesus' victory on the cross, Satan is bound... he has been defeated and his power limited, yet he is still at work.
 - c. The cross has changed everything... in ways we don't fully understand.
 - d. The Son of Man is to come in glory at the end of days... in the meantime He is present with us in the Spirit, but not yet in physical nature.
 - e. We are to continue to call out people from the world into the Kingdom of God... this is part of the ministry Jesus charged His disciples with... the Great Commission.
 - f. Israel lost its place of exclusivity when they rejected the Messiah... though Numbers 15:26 & 29 indicate that originally God's plan included the 'sojourner' who were believing Gentiles.
 - g. The Word of God continues to go out into all the ends of the world... this is the work He commanded us to do in the Great Commission.
 - h. The last piece to be placed is when Jesus comes back to Jerusalem... the Kingdom advances until this time when Heaven and earth are remade and joined – symbolic of humanity and God having one dwelling place together. This is a restoration to the Garden.
 - i. There is a lot of mystery in the Kingdom parables:
 - i. Wheat & tares – look alike but are totally different.
 - ii. Mustard seed – is a small seed but grows far beyond its humble size.

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- iii. **Leaven – infiltrates the entirety of the dough until it remakes the dough into something fundamentally different.**
- j. **The end – the church will decay... having a semblance of righteousness but being false.**
 - i. **Peoples love will grow cold.**
 - ii. **Apostasy will become the norm.**
 - iii. **Lovers of pleasure and not of God.**
 - iv. **We faithful believers will finish the task of the Great Commission – but then will come the collapse, it is not going to be the church triumphant but rather a rescue mission.**
- k. **Jesus' ethical teaching as shown in the Gospels:**
 - i. **The Synoptics and John have a different focus on the same thing... told in different ways. They are not in conflict but are complementary.**
 - ii. **Focus on the age to come – atonement and salvation are balanced between life as it is now and our hope in the world to come.**
 - iii. **Grace and compassion in this world must reflect Jesus' priorities... it is His mission we are joined into.**