RECIPROCAL GRACE by Al Diestelkamp

God is gracious (Eph. 2:7). As Christians we are called to be followers of Him (Eph. 5:1), which means that we also should be gracious. We manifest grace—or lack thereof—by how we act toward one another.

The need to be gracious toward one another is especially evident during the “present distress” brought on by a worldwide pandemic coupled with social and political unrest. I fear the ease of being able to voice opinions on social media from a cell phone or laptop has emboldened people to leave their grace toward others behind. Accusations of brethren having “a lack of faith in God” or “a lack of love toward others” are judgments that don’t seem very gracious.

We all have our own opinions about how the governing authorities should handle the pandemic crisis or which set of “experts” we should believe. We are in uncharted territory, so to insist that you agree with me would be an act of arrogance. Therefore I need to be gracious toward you and should expect the same in return.

Even most of the so-called “experts” on all sides of the controversies surrounding this crisis are assuring us that eventually “we will get through this.” If the Lord wills, we will; but, in the meantime, just think of the damage that will be done to the cause of Christ by the vitriolic debate amongst brethren over opinions and disagreements that cannot be settled simply by a “thus sayeth the Lord.”

What we need to practice is reciprocal grace. The price God paid for the grace He has showered on us is beyond our ability to repay, but He asks us to “pay it forward” toward others—a lesson we surely learned from Jesus’ parable of the unmerciful servant (Matt. 18:21-35). This is not limited to being willing to forgive those who trespass against us. We also must deal graciously with one another—even those with whom we disagree.

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