



Chronicles of Diversity

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Chronicles of Diversity Contact Information:

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Unconditional love

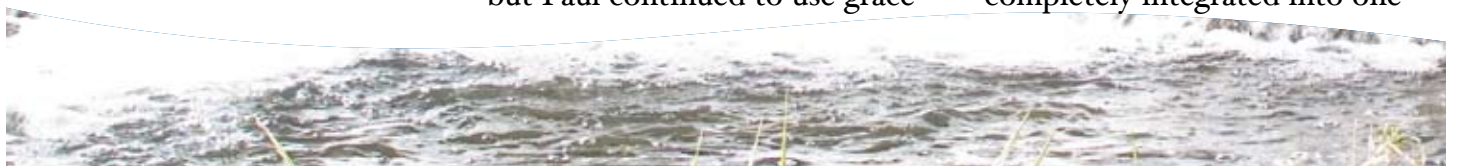
In the Bible the Apostle Paul begins most of his New Testament epistles with the introduction something along the lines, “Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

It has only been very recently that I have been thinking about why Paul might have used these words in his introductory remarks. Sometimes he went on to praise the people, much more often he added stern words of correction, but he never really mentioned, “It really bugs me that I am in prison as I write this.” or, “Praise our Lord that some of you were not fed to the lions last month.” I’m sure we all could come up with a much more relevant introduction, both in the context of Paul’s known situations and our own situations that would be more user friendly.

There are other words that could be used to describe the Christian situation in the world, but Paul continued to use grace

and peace. As I have ruminated on these words and their usage, I am becoming more convinced that for two words by themselves, I believe that grace and peace, best describe what should be the Christian status, both as an individual and as a community. Thankful for the grace that saves everyone into the Body of Christ, the church, and through that grace a peace should flow that is completely foreign to any secular worldview.

In evangelicalism today, we would probably say, “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.” This sounds good, but really this includes a paradigm shift to a completely future tense. Paul knew better, the peace and grace he was talking about was completely time neutral, past, future, and most difficult to grasp the present. Furthermore, as we evangelicals for some reason like to separate our heart feelings from our head knowledge, Paul addresses us as whole people, completely integrated into one



personality, corporately being part, again uniquely unified and sanctified, with the church universal.

What Paul is writing about is in essence, the gospel of God's Unconditional Love. Like the John 3:16 banner at the sporting event, but not in that kitsch sort of way, but in the actual gift of present eternal life.

Unconditional love, is something us guys have a tough time discussing. This probably comes from a tension between physical strength and internal fortitude. I suppose gals have a similar problem for different reasons, outward looks tensioning inner beauty. However, unconditional love is really what separates Christians from the rest of the world. Christians have access to unconditional love, the rest of the world does not. Unconditional love means you give something, and really do not expect it to be returned except in ridicule and scorn.

Unconditional love is the ultimate gift that you can receive in the world, sometimes it comes directly from God, but for some reason known only to God he has chosen normally to use human instruments. As a gift, especially an intangible gift, like manna from heaven, the only way you can keep it fresh is to give it away. Sometimes that gift is to be given to people you consider truly lovable, way too many times you are called to share it with people you consider completely vain, arrogant, and beyond anything you could consider to be the reach of God's grace.

I learned this lesson of just loving on people in a truly applied sort of way from a church planting brother on a missions trip. I have used it off and on in circumstances when I really would like to severely bring my wrath upon another, either physically or psychologically, but instead I remember I am called not to be a servant of God's wrath, but a giver of God's grace through love. Simply put, because of God's unconditional love given to me in my life, past, present and to come, I have access to that love, to love on another human personality who's condition at the time is not as blessed as mine. Our job as Christians is simply after prayer, we can "Go out and love on people." That is individually, or as in a group.

I knew this missionary briefly before he was married. He is first to admit that without his wife, he would be nothing but a loser. I probably would not go that far, but she is definitely a woman of God. On that trip she walked up to me and boldly said, "Jerry, you need a nap, come over to our apartment, go into the bedroom and get some sleep. You recently have had real major surgery and you have been dealing pretty much night and day with teenagers. You need a nap!" A few hours later, I awoke much rested, but what was more important than the sleep, was the fact that all the busyness had also stolen my grace and peace. Unconditional love is not sloppy agape, as we like to say it, unconditional love speaks God's truth into the lives of other people in a way you believe they need to hear, whether they understand it or not at the time.

Over the last month or so I have been reminded of this loving on people concept and have shared the power of Christian's loving on people in varied circumstances. As I told a prospective missionary, I have been using this illustration quite often recently, maybe God is trying to tell me something.

The reason I have written "Chronicles of Diversity" for these eight calendar years, is for missionaries. I have not been able to support them financially, but this weekly whatever, is something for them to think about, agree or disagree with, and maybe gain some insights about what might be happening in America. Furthermore, after spending almost three years in Germany while in the service, a good portion living close to the local economy, I found out that in graduate school, I really didn't like Americans who have only lived in America. Compared to any of the foreign students, the true Americans were all self centered, materialistic and a whole host of other unflattering adjectives.

God has blessed my life with skills and talents to be of use to pretty much any large missions organization working in the emerging world. Without going into specifics, I am now beginning to see that in my life that it is God's unconditional gift of love, that has guided my path all these years, what I do with those gifts, how I can give them away, is completely in His control and it isn't in a way I understand completely at this time. I guess to put it in some Biblical perspective, I have been given a Moses crash course, and because of my aortic replacement miracle of modern medicine, I feel

better than I did, when I was enthused with the idealism of my twenties. I do have a few aches and pains, and I now have to read with glasses, when my eyes get tired. I have, just like some of those Bible dudes, been blessed, in the past, present and future, beyond, anything I could think or imagine.

One of those gifts that seems appropriate to this writing and that I have had the opportunity to share with others of different theological persuasions has to do with spiritual gifts for today. Having been raised Lutheran, my present theology is basically conservative Lutheran, but as best as I can remember, I got none of my “systematic theology” from my Lutheran training, I learned it through God’s grace. Why and how, I’m really not too sure. However, virtually all Lutherans today believe that the so called spiritual gifts spoken about in the Bible ceased with the lives of the apostles.

During some years I spent in a Pentecostal church, I had the opportunity to serve as an altar worker, when one of the traveling evangelists came through town. As is a requirement in all these services, sometimes in conjunction with the altar call for salvation, there is also a call for those needing prayer to come forward and the evangelist would lay hands on the person and pray for them in the fashion he felt led.

In this case a very attractive high school girl, was planning on going into the Marine Corp when she graduated from high school. This evangelist was working his way down the line, laying hands on the people and praying in the spirit. When he came to this girl, he put his hand upon her head, paused a moment, and without asking her anything about why she was there, said basically, “Be careful about going into the Marines.” and moved on.

I was shocked because there were only a few adults in the whole congregation who knew she was planning on going into the Marines, and none of them were anywhere close to the evangelist, or the girl. The only obvious conclusion was this was what is generally called a word of knowledge. True to the evangelist’s words after graduation, she went into the Marines and a couple of months later she was

home, convinced that she should have never gone in the first place.

As I have had the opportunity of sharing about loving on people recently, I have come to believe that the post Christian, United States, is one of the largest mission fields in the world for the foreseeable future. We have George W. Bush and the so called Christian Right, and much of American evangelicalism to thank for accelerating this post Christian transition by a generation or so.

Instead of proclaiming grace and peace, from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and showing unconditional love, Christianity in the broad sense, proclaims a gospel of social justice through political action, and justification before God through materialistic prosperity. That is more than likely also why the United States will now withdraw from Iraq, without us leaving any type of stabilizing force in the region. This will be closely followed by emblazoned Islamic terrorist attacks within our country, bringing us and our economy to our knees, truly for the first time since our founding over 200 years ago.

As I said earlier, I learned a long time ago, I don’t like American’s very much. If God had truly asked my opinion on where I wanted to serve for His Glory, I would have chosen Innsbruck, Austria, to plant a nondenominational church. Also if I was younger, I would not even have minded serving with one of those hard core missions organizations that puts you out in the bush with the natives, a couple of hours up or down the trail from the fly in base camp. As a country boy who has spent many a night out in primitive conditions, I know how to cope with the reality of abasement from this world’s so called necessities and find most necessities really an impediment to the true Godly abundant life.

However, again for a reason I do not understand, I definitely desire discussions about life’s reality on a whole host of topics. I doubt I would find that in the mission’s base camp. Again I am perceived quiet and somewhat shy, because most of what Americans consider important, I find at least misguided, if not vain and vulgar. America is truly a missions field where even my attempts to show God’s unconditional love, struggling its way through me, might find fruit.

How do Christians train their missionaries, either to go into jungle lands, or on the mission field here in America. For the most part it is, "So Justin Grace you want to be a missionary, well Praise the Lord, I will send you 50. a month when it doesn't interfere with funding my required morning latte and I will pray for you when I remember to pray at all, like once of month or so, you know I am really busy, busy, busy .

I suppose this is best sketched in a missions story. I don't remember the details of the story that well, but it is true about a missionary who returned to England after many years on a remote mission field. While there he had buried his wife and children, pouring out his life in the name of God's unconditional grace, peace and love. Upon finally reaching home, tired, broken, and old, he heard that the missions organization at his home church was holding a meeting. Entering the room, none of his old acquaintances recognized him, and instead of praying for their missionaries or doing any worthwhile missions benevolence work, they were bickering amongst themselves about completely transitory matters.

Much is made about Paul being a tent maker. I would suspect, part of the pride Paul took in his work was the fact that he could more easily support his ministry by being a tent maker, than he could by relying on the offerings of the church to support his missionary adventures. So when he did receive an offering from someone, for God's glory and unconditional love he was able use it gracefully, many times to invest it in those less fortunate.

There are more than six billion people now on this earth, about two three billion are considered Christian. Virtually all of them, including the Christians, need a better understanding of God's unconditional love that was prepared for them before the foundation of the world. The way to do that is to become a missionary to somewhere, that may be different than where you are right now. That may be just a different way of doing the same things God has trained you to do all ready, so God can get the glory, not you or the organization that gave you the job.

I suppose one thing I am beginning to understand about God's unconditional love, is that you might think He is calling you to sacrifice your future promise on an altar, like Abraham was called to sacrifice Isaac. What He is really doing however, is to show you what he already knows about you, that is your faith and devotion to Him. He will build His church with or without you in a certain place, but He wants you to know the depth of your commitment and for you to remain flexible as He works out your life in Him. You might be content to spend your life on sixty people, He might have plans for you to touch six million or everyone alive today. God's rules are determinate, you are indeterminate, blessed are the flexible.

Patricia, that high school girl washed out of the Marine Corp, because only a traveling evangelist had guts enough to truly speak the word of God into her life. Everyone whom God might have used locally were too busy with themselves, and too insecure in their own relationship with God, that included the church pastors and other leaders, to take the time to really just love on her with unconditional love, until she realized for herself that maybe God had a better plan for her life, the Marine Corp was just that faith sacrifice.

As a missionary to anywhere, you learn quickly that the only persons that you can truly count on in faithfulness is the triune God. In His image you were created, truly to be His agent of unconditional love in the world. Few and far between are the people who truly commit, to anything more than a few bucks from their affluence, and a week or two every year or so, to go on a short term missions trip.

A number of years ago, there was a native Nepalese, traveling through Seattle on the way to some YWAM conference in Colorado. There were no more than eight of us there including our guest. We had really nothing in common with the persecutions he had gone through from when he first learned of God's unconditional love for him. But this we did know without a doubt, and was commented upon in the meeting, that as different as each of us were, we were all of the same family, the church, the Body of Christ. God's unconditional love filled Lisa's home that night, we were all aware of it, we were all changed by it, it most succinctly can be described as the Apostle Paul begins all his letters and also ends many, "The grace and peace of God

the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ be with you all.

The world is now rapidly growing darker, it is still also a few weeks until the church celebrates the humble birth of Jesus as Messiah, around the winter solstice. Should the Lord tarry, after Christmas the days will begin to get longer, but the spiritual darkness will not subside. Just as in Narina, our world is becoming the place where it is always winter and never Christmas, even in the Christmas season.

This is the season however, when the sky is at it's darkest in this northern hemisphere, it is also just the time to spread a little unconditional love, that can change the desperate lives of many people on the great mission field of planet earth. Go out and love on somebody today and tomorrow with unconditional love. It will change lives, through grace and peace.

Our 2006 Chronicle Archives are now available for PDF download at www.wondersprings.org. It is our plan to have the whole Chronicles of Diversity Archives stretching back to 1999 in a searchable database by the first of 2007. Beginning in January we will be changing the name of Chronicles of Diversity to The Wonder Springs Chronicle posted on a dedicated blog server.