

## Shepherds: Guard Your Flocks

During our marriage, my wife and I have moved several different times. The head pastors at almost all of the dozen churches where we became members (or attended) have been in the free grace camp. These pastors have been pretty clear in communicating that justification salvation is a free gift, and by faith alone in Christ alone. We are thankful for this, because it is often difficult to find even one church in any given area that is solid on the free grace Gospel.

Unfortunately, not all of the churches which we have attended have done the best job in warning about false doctrine. There are so many things being taught today that are leading people away from the teaching of Scripture. It is important for pastors and church leaders to guard their flocks by helping them to discern false teaching. And, one of the most important things that they can do is to warn their flocks to be discerning regarding the Gospel.

I would like to suggest something that could make a big difference in helping free grace pastors and church leaders do a better job in protecting their sheep concerning the Gospel. Giving attention to this suggested step would help guard the flock from false gospels. It would go a long way toward helping free grace churches be more *consistently* free grace, and perhaps also to experience more of God's blessings.

Sometimes, it helps to understand something better if we are able to clearly contrast in our minds not only what something *is*, but also what something *is not*. It was very helpful for me to read Dr. Harry A. Ironside's *What is the Gospel?* He originally wrote this pamphlet in 1896, when he was the Pastor of Moody Memorial Church in Chicago. Ironside does a good job in contrasting what the Gospel is and what it is not. For example, he writes:

“The Gospel is not a call to repentance, or to amendment of our ways, to make restitution for past sins, or to promise to do better in the future. These things are proper in their place, but they do not constitute the Gospel; for the Gospel is not good advice to be obeyed, it is good news to be believed. Do not make the mistake then of thinking that the Gospel is a call to duty or a call to reformation, a call to better your condition, to behave yourself in a more perfect way than you have been doing in the past.”

It is imperative that Christians clearly understand not only what the Gospel **“IS”**, but also what the Gospel **“IS NOT”**. And, they need to hear both often. Believers need to be convinced from the Word of God that eternal life **“IS”** a totally free gift, with no strings attached—because Jesus paid the full price for it. It is critical that they firmly believe that salvation **“IS”** by grace *alone* through faith *alone* in Christ *alone*. It **“IS”** by faith in Christ *plus* nothing.

But, it is also imperative that Christians clearly understand what the Gospel **“IS NOT”**. They need to be convinced from the Word of God and hear often that eternal life **“IS NOT”** conditioned on their:

turning from their sins, making a commitment to follow, committing to obey, surrendering their life, giving control of their life, putting Jesus on the throne,	giving their life, confessing Him, praying a prayer, walking an aisle, being baptized, or any of the other numerous conditions added today.
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None of these additions to faith communicate that salvation is *really* free. Nor, do they communicate that salvation is by faith *alone*. Plus, all of them leave room for boasting—taking credit for one's salvation (1 Cor. 1:29, 31; Rom. 3:27, 4:2; Eph. 2:8-9). Jesus should get *all* of the credit for salvation, and not us. We are given eternal life because what He did, and not because of something we *did*, apart from believing the Gospel. While the above conditions certainly aid in a Believer's sanctification/growth, they are not conditions for being born again.

Teaching the flock what the Gospel **“IS”** is the job of pastors, staff, elders, deacons, teachers, and small group leaders. Teaching the flock what the Gospel **“IS NOT”** is also the job of pastors, staff, elders, deacons, teachers, and small group leaders. Both are necessary to guard the flock.

<sup>27</sup>For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. <sup>28</sup>Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. <sup>29</sup>For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. <sup>30</sup>Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. <sup>31</sup>Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. (Acts 20:27-31)