



EXPOSITION

Monthly e-Bulletin from Virginia Beach Theological Seminary



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From My Window

My recent reading of history has taken me through the incredible WW II narrative of *Intrepid*. *Intrepid* was the code name for Sir William Stephenson, Winston Churchill's super spy. He developed *Camp X*, which became the famous spy training center in Ontario, Canada. Though unknown to Hitler and the Germans, he master-minded the breaking of the Ultra Code used by the German Enigma. His clandestine activities, which included guerrilla armies and resistance support, ultimately broke the proverbial back of the Nazi regime. As I read this book, I wondered, am I as ignorant of Satan's twisted devices to ruin me as was Hitler of *Intrepid*? Peter calls us to "Be watchful! Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him being firm in your faith..." (1 Pet. 5:8-9). Be aware that Satan seeks to ruin all godly saints. May we be on high alert against his schemes!



James & Laura Varner | MDiv, 2007 | Colonial Baptist Church

Alumni In Ministry Spotlight

James grew up in a pastor's home and developed a pastor's heart from the godly example of his dad and mom. After graduating from Bible College in May of 2002, he began attending VBTS three months later. James distinguished himself in seminary as a hard working student who was serious about the Word of God. For James, 2007 was a life-changing year! He graduated from VBTS with his M.Div., married Laura, and began his current ministry as the Children's Pastor of Colonial Baptist Church in Virginia Beach. Since then, the Lord has blessed them with three beautiful daughters. In James' words: "I love teaching the Word to Christ's church because God's Word radically transforms lives, from young children to the elderly." We pray God will give VBTS many more students with this kind of shepherd's heart!



VBTS welcomes Dr. Brent Belford and his family as the new Senior Pastor of Colonial Baptist Church



Truth for the Agora: “He saw the grace of God” Acts 11:23

How does one see a doctrine? In Acts 11:19-26, Barnabas was sent by the church of Jerusalem to the multi-cultural, affluent, and burgeoning city of Antioch in Syria. The Jerusalem church had recently heard that the gospel of Jesus had penetrated this influential city “and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord” (11:21). When Barnabas arrived from Jerusalem, the text gives an unusual account of what he discovered; it says, “he saw the grace of God and was glad” (11:23). What did Luke mean by this comment? And how is it possible to see grace in the lives of believers?

First, in the context of this passage “the grace of God” was the phrase used in Acts to describe the remarkable life-change of those who believed the Gospel. Luke records that “numerous people” of Antioch believed and “turned to the Lord” (11:21). The city was filled with about 500,000 people of multiple ethnicities (e.g., Greek, Egyptian, Persian, Arab, Jews), and they were called Hellenists because of their full submersion into the Roman-Greek culture of Antioch. As these Antiochenes were converted, Barnabas celebrated their visible transformation. The self-absorbed pagans of Antioch were *turning to the Lord* and were being *reshaped by God’s grace*.

Second, Barnabas was so stirred by the authentic change of this “first international church” (Stott, p. 203) that he interrupted his stay in Antioch, departed for Tarsus to find Saul, and returned with him to live with these *people of grace* (11:25-26a). Barnabas considered this grace environment to be the best place to encourage Saul in the ministry. Church history proves the correctness of Barnabas’ decision; for within a short time Saul penned his first inspired words of grace: the epistle to the Galatians.

Third, as Luke concludes this story in Acts 11, he writes that the transformation of the believers in Antioch was not only visible to Barnabas but also caught the attention of the city of Antioch. Luke concludes, “in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians” (11:26b). The appellation *Christians* may be “of more significance than might appear on first sight” (Polhill, p. 273). It was the term used by the “unbelieving public” (Stott, p. 205) to describe these new believers. The grace of God had so altered the daily lives of these believers that they were identified by the unsaved world as “Christ-followers.” In Bock’s words (p. 413), “The church . . . represented a distinctly counterculture way of life.” The result is clear: The public display of God’s grace in the believers’ lives caused the city of Antioch to see Jesus.

I began this short essay with the question: “How does one see a doctrine?” The answer should be self-evident by now from the text of Acts 11. Doctrine is truth, and truth, by its very nature, is transformative. In this specific situation, Barnabas saw the truth of grace in action as he observed the new believers of Antioch. What is instructive to me is this: Not only was the grace of God evident to Barnabas, but also to the unbelieving public. Grace had not just redeemed these new believers to God, but it also changed their lifestyle. And the public could not help but notice.