

When Theology Ruins Faith

By Jonathan Graf

PUBLISHER'S NOTE 

As a person with a graduate degree and a teacher's heart, I have always valued the importance of education. I love to see churches with good discipleship ministries. An understanding of theology is important. When people do not have correct theology, things can get a little wonky, especially in the prayer arena.

But I am also fascinated with the way we sometimes see God at work more clearly in places where the church is weak in teaching, where good theology is often lacking. Why is that?

Over the past few months, we have been working on the November/December 2014 issue of Prayer Connect, with the theme of prayer and faith. One of the articles deals with why we tend to see more miracles in third-world nations than here in the Western world. Author John Robb of the International Prayer Council is at the forefront of monitoring miraculous prayer activity around the world.

One of the major reasons John cites for the difference in the number of miracle sightings is the lack of childlike faith. He explains that adults tend to be encumbered by the baggage of doubt, fear, and a limited belief system. This keeps us from trusting God to do what He promises. We are captive to a "non-supernatural" worldview.

More than any other church in history, the Western church of the 1950s through the 1980s taught its people Bible knowledge

and theology. Multiple teaching times each week from the pulpit, Sunday school classes, small groups, conferences, and evangelism training—all centered on Scripture. You would think the result would have been a stronger church. But instead we seem to have a much weaker church, an almost miracle-less church today. Why is that?

We in the Western church want everything explained to us. We need to know why and how something works. If we don't understand something, we look for an explanation. We also like three easy steps, a clear process that works every time. But when it comes to theology and prayer, it is tough to have everything perfectly explained. God so often seems to work outside of our theologies—and He won't be forced into a box.

He admires childlike faith. "More knowledge" seems to work against that simple faith of a child. For adults, the fear of doing something wrong dictates our faith. We easily slip into skepticism and doubt. We have theological responses already prepared for when God doesn't answer our prayers the way we want Him to.

Paul poses the question in Galatians 3:5: "So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law [or good theology], or by your believing what you heard?" I am not opposed to strong theology—and I am quick to point out bad theology when I see it entering into a situation. But I also know that a person's theology can be wrong, and God is going to work the way He chooses to work, no matter how we try to explain Him in step-by-step theological terms.

I am interested now in gaining more childlike faith when I pray. It seems that when we do not have a supernatural worldview—especially regarding prayer—our theology can get a little wonky, too.

—Jonathan Graf is the publisher of Prayer Connect. He has

written three books on prayer and is a popular speaker on the subject.

(C) 2014 Prayer Connect magazine.