

“The one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” John chapter 1 verse 14

This is how John introduces Jesus in his gospel; “Full of grace and truth.” You would have thought that truth would be enough, wouldn't you. After all, isn't that what everybody is looking for, and isn't that what is in such short supply these days? The equation is very simple; find out what the truth is, conform everybody to it and everything will be alright.

The history of mankind is testament to the naivety of that thinking. Many have proposed many truths, but none of them have found universal acceptance, much less conformed everybody to an agreed set of values and behaviours. Even the law of God in the Old Testament was, according to Paul “weakened by the sinful nature.”

But the problem is obvious, when you think about it. Truth on its own sets standards by which people can be judged to have succeeded or failed. Success means acceptance, failure means rejection, and no one can argue that it is unjust. Truth can be used as a rod to judge, condemn and punish people. It can be used as a goad to force people to behave in certain ways, willingly or not. It can be used in many ways to justify many things, not all of them good or healthy by any means. How do we make truth work for people's good without violating or diminishing it?

The answer is grace. As we saw yesterday, grace describes an attitude of loving kindness towards others which does not depend on their belief, behaviour, effort or performance but has its source in the capacity to love of a generous heart. It is grace that makes truth a blessing rather than a burden.

Grace reserves judgment until every possibility of salvation, reconciliation and redemption has been tried and refused. Because of grace, truth can be softened by mercy. Truth alone has no need of compassion or pity, but simply demands to be conformed to, but mercy sees beyond failure to the reasons behind it and seeks to understand and heal them. Grace completes truth, because it applies the Spirit of the law, which brings life, rather than the letter of the law, which kills.

In Jesus, the relationship between grace and truth was perfectly expressed in his dealings with others. As a result he was able to call hypocrisy and deliberate wrongdoing to account while demonstrating forbearance towards the weaknesses of others and forgiveness for their failings. God expects us, as disciples of Jesus who are being conformed to his image, to do the same.

Prayer.

Father, thank you for the life that Jesus modelled for us. He could so easily have come simply to lay down the law and demand conformity to it, but instead he recognised our weakness and frailty and ministered your saving truth into that. Help me to do the same. In Jesus' name, amen.

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