

Chapter 6

'Grace and Truth'

For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came with Jesus Christ

We were holding a wonderful open air meeting in a place called Eshisiru, near to Kakamega in Western Kenya. It was very powerful. Hundreds came to a personal knowledge of Jesus as their saviour. I remember it particularly because of Mary, a woman of about twenty who had been born deaf and dumb. The Lord both opened her ears and loosed her tongue. There were some really powerful miracles during that week

One evening a report came through to us of another open air meeting in nearby Bungoma. The first report was that the evangelist had been attacked by the Muslims in the town who had destroyed his equipment and burned his platform. Naturally, at first everyone agreed what a terrible thing it was that had happened to him, however, when I heard the full report, my sympathy rested with the Muslims. Let me explain.

The evangelist was not doing the work of an evangelist that day. Oh yes, he was preaching the Gospel but there was a missing element in his preaching that would have brought life to his hearers. When he saw that there were Muslims in his crowd he decided to target them and began to attack the Koran saying things, which in the ears of the Muslims, were blasphemous about Mohammed and Allah. The more he spoke the angrier they got. It may be that what he was saying was the truth. but his version of truth lacked something. The more he spoke the angrier they got until their anger over-spilled and they attacked him and his equipment. It is understandable. The problem was that by the time those Muslims went home they had been pushed further from Jesus than they might have been before the evangelist spoke.

That is not evangelism. Jesus said 'If I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all men to me.' (John 12:32). The purpose of evangelism is to lift up Jesus so that He can draw men to himself. We do not need to push down others; we do not need to speak against what others believe neither do we need to attack those things which others hold dear. We preach Jesus and Him crucified and He will draw men to Himself.

Oh yes! What was the missing ingredient in the evangelist's message? Let me tell you another story from the life of Jesus. It is found in John chapter 4.

Remember that the goal of Jesus' ministry is to draw men to Himself. This day, He was travelling with His disciples and they were going through Samaria on their way to Jerusalem. It was the middle of the day and they were tired, so they stopped at the well in Sychar. Jesus sat at the well and the disciples went to find food. An unusual thing happened. A woman came to the well to draw water. You may think that there is nothing unusual about that, but wait a minute! It was the middle of the day and she was alone. The normal thing was for the women to come together in the morning or evening when the sun was not so hot. It was a time of fellowship and they could help one another. This encounter was unusual.

The problem was that this woman was a sinner. Certainly there is nothing unusual in that. Her particular sin was that she liked men. She seemed to like husbands, and it also seemed she liked the husbands of other women. She had become an outcast. You can imagine the gossip among the other women. 'She's had five husbands already and she is not going to have mine!' She had a bad reputation alright. Jesus knew about her reputation and her sin.

I often wonder what would have happened if, instead of Jesus sitting at the well it had been one of many of the pastors I know. Some would say to themselves, 'Here is potential trouble. I must not be seen with such a woman, I have my reputation to think of. Imagine if the media get hold of a picture of me sitting here with her. I would be ruined!' Others would probably have seen a wonderful opportunity to speak the truth to her. 'Woman, you are a great sinner and an adulterer. Do you not know that you are going to hell? What do you think you are doing? You are ruining your life and that of others. Repent, you sinner!' That would be enough condemnation added to what she already knew. She did not need someone else piling guilt onto her. She knew she was a sinner. She needed someone to lift her out of her situation. She would probably run away from the above preacher of 'good news!' and miss the salvation that a preacher is supposed to bring!

For this woman, thankfully, it was not a self-righteous preacher that was at the well. It was Jesus. He spoke the truth to her also, but the result was different. "I'm thirsty. Please draw me some water." What is it about this man's voice? He should not be speaking to me. There is something in His voice that is different from other men. The voice of a man usually got her attention and now Jesus had her attention, but not for the reasons as other men. He was asking for something, but not for the usual thing men wanted from this woman!

Jesus did not speak to her from the heights of condemnation or self righteousness. He came down to where she was and simply asked for water. This drew her into conversation which led to a simple request from Jesus, "Go and bring your husband." Instead of confronting her with her sin He drew a confession from her enabling Him to address her real needs. "Sir, I have no husband!" As the conversation proceeds, so her perception of who Jesus is progresses from a man, to a prophet to 'one who told me everything I ever did' to 'could He be the Messiah?' The eventual result was restoration for the woman and salvation for many Samaritans in Sychar who came to put their trust in Him.

What a contrast! On one hand, the evangelist from Bungoma who pushed the Muslims away from Jesus and none came to salvation. On the other hand, Jesus who drew the woman to Himself and many came to salvation.

Let me misquote a verse from the first chapter of John's Gospel. I do not often do it (and I will correct it!) but I wish to make a point. My misquotation is exactly how some people read this verse. I have tested it with hundreds of pastors who have found this to be a revelation and subsequent revolution in their ministry.

'The law was given through Moses but truth came through Jesus Christ'

I am amazed how many people nod their agreement and confirm that this is what the bible says. True, this is what it says, but there is something missing. It is the same 'something' that was missing when the evangelist in Bungoma upset the Muslims. Now I will tell you!

GRACE!

Simply grace. Yes, the law was given through Moses. The law was truth. It was given by God who is the truth. Jesus did not come to abolish the law (or the truth) but to fulfil it. How did He fulfil it? By mixing it with grace.

*'The law was given through Moses but **grace and truth** came through Jesus Christ'*

How many times do we forget grace? In our words and actions. Grace would have spoken kindly to the Muslims in Bungoma. Grace was spoken to the woman at the well and saved her and others. As Christians, we love the truth. We preach the truth. We try to live by the truth. We certainly speak the truth when we wish to point out another brother's problem.

The problem with the truth is that it can kill! I am serious. The truth spoken to the Muslims in Bungoma will probably mean that they will not listen to another Christian preacher, and never receive the Gospel. That is eternal death! The truth may end up being the death of them. Someone once told me I was being unfair on the evangelist. They were already going to hell if they had not received Jesus. Maybe so, but the evangelist had the opportunity to give them life and rescue them from death. 'Grace and truth' will save life. Another Jesus story is needed. It is in John chapter 8.

Jesus ('grace and truth') was teaching in the temple and as is usual all the people came to Him. Naturally, also in the temple were the scribes and the Pharisees who were the self righteous keepers of the law. These men were under the law that came through Moses. They were jealous of Jesus because of His teaching, and more so because the people went to Him and did not come to them.

They were motivated by jealousy when they brought a woman to Jesus and threw her at His feet. They were looking for a way to trick Him and get Him to speak against their God given Jewish traditions (plus many hundreds of others which they themselves had added!). They said to Him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of adultery." Very interesting! These men, who were so concerned about the truth, had found a woman who could commit adultery on her own! It takes two people to commit adultery. If she was caught in the very act, where was the man? Truth was on their lips but not in their hearts! They continued, "Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned." That was true. Here is truth and what does truth demand? Death! Put simply, the truth of the matter is that this woman should die.

They were not concerned about truth, but were looking for a way to accuse Jesus. "What do you say, teacher?" Jesus did not reply immediately, but stooped and wrote in the dust with His finger. The Bible does not tell us what He wrote, but everything He did had a purpose. He was not stuck for an answer. It is possible that as He wrote

He was writing in the dust the various sins of those who accused the woman: 'jealousy' 'greed' 'adultery' 'hypocrisy'... The Pharisees were getting impatient and pressed Him again "What do you say, Jesus?"

He stood up and said to them in a voice of authority, "He who is without sin among you let him throw the first stone!" There was silence among them and probably quite a bit of shuffling of feet. Maybe they looked at what Jesus had written in the dust and saw the sin of their own hearts as Jesus continued to write with His finger. Notice what it says, 'They were convicted by their conscience' and went away one by one until He was alone with the woman.

Now there was just one man left with the woman. Here was the only man without sin. He is the only one who could have picked up a stone.

This man, Son of Man, Son of God, who came to fulfil the law, reached out His hand, not to pick up a stone, but to pick up a wretched lost soul. "Where are these men that accused you? Are there none that condemn you?" She looked up and looked around and said "No one, Lord." And Jesus said those wonderful words that we all need to hear, "Neither do I condemn you: go and sin no more."

Truth alone would have resulted in the death of that woman. 'Grace and truth' brought restoration and life.

There is a key here which will help us to understand the difference between the effects of truth and 'grace and truth'.

The work of the Holy Spirit will bring **conviction**. When Jesus exposed the sin in the Pharisees hearts we are told that they were convicted of their sin.

The work of an *unholy spirit* will bring **condemnation**. Jesus asked the woman "Where are those who condemn you?"

If we want to build unity into our lives, ministries and churches we must always avoid bringing condemnation. Jesus did not condemn the woman about whom the law said she should be stoned. 'Grace and truth' will never bring condemnation. People quote Romans 8:1 and teach that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. That is a wonderful truth, but what about those who are not 'in Christ Jesus'. Like the woman at the well at Sychar they are already condemned. It is not our work to further condemn them. It is the work of Satan to condemn:

The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. (John 10:10)

The verse that Christians quote more than any other is probably John 3:16:

'For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have ever lasting life.'

It rolls off the tongue so easily because we know it so well. However, even when teaching pastors, bishops and elders with the challenge “Can you quote the next two verses?” it is difficult to find someone. Yet they are equally important and I believe should also be memorised and often quoted by those who are preachers of the Gospel, whether evangelists or not.

‘God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but He who does not believe is condemned already, because He has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.’ (John 3:17-18)

Here is a truth that the world also needs to hear. Understanding John 3:16 will bring people to salvation. John 3:17-18 will lead people into an understanding of John 3:16 that will lead to salvation. The unsaved need to know that God does not condemn them. They are already condemned. They feel condemned and unworthy of a God who loves them. They do not need churches and pastors and Christians to pile on more condemnation. I know I will upset some with my next statement but I trust I will convict many more:

If you are preaching or speaking condemnation, whether to an individual or a congregation, whether from the pulpit or in your own home, whether to the saved or the lost, whether you are ordained or not, you are not doing the work of the Holy Spirit. To bring condemnation is the work of Satan.

It is certainly possible for a Christian to speak by an unholy spirit, even by Satan himself. It happened to the Apostle Peter. In Matthew 16:17 Peter has the wonderful revelation of who Jesus is. “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God,” Jesus commended Peter. He spoke through the Holy Spirit that which was revealed to him by God. Yet in the same chapter, just seven verses later after Peter has rebuked the Lord for saying he was to be crucified, Jesus rebukes the spirit by which Peter is now speaking. “Get behind me, Satan!” If we do not guard our tongues and discern the things of God then we too can speak by a wrong spirit, especially when we speak words of condemnation.

I am putting a lot of emphasis on our words and speech and on its power and quality. In much of our Christian life we put an emphasis on how we live and how it will have an effect on how Christians are perceived, and rightly so. One of the leaders at our church in London often used to quote, as he put it, an old Zulu proverb. ‘I cannot hear what you are saying for the noise of who you are.’ The reverse of this of course is that so often our words do not match our actions either. We can so easily begin to take one another for granted and become casual in our words to one another.

One of the greatest causes of division in the church is words. We speak many words to each other and about each other. We try to be truthful in what we say, but just as many people forget to include grace in John 1:17, so we forget to speak and act towards one another with grace.

I love the Bible. It is God's word for our living. There are, however, many very challenging verses. For me, one of the very hardest and possibly the most challenging of all is the sixth verse of Colossians chapter 4:

Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer everyone.

There is one small word in there that makes this command so difficult. It is the word 'always'. Consider the implications of *always* speaking with grace. It does not say that we speak with grace only when things are going well for us – its says *always*! It does not say that we can fight back with our words when someone accuses us falsely – if we do respond it must be with grace. When our children exasperate us – grace; when our husband or wife angers us – grace; when a promise is broken – we respond with grace. Always means always.

I confess that I fail in this, but since I became aware of this '*always*' I have tried to be slow to speak.

In the next chapter we will look and see how our collective failure in taming our tongues has brought about so much disunity in the church.