

## Full of Grace and Truth

*(John 1:14) The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

*(This and all further quotations from the New International Version of the Bible.)*

### Introduction

I have for a number of years now been engaged in a wrestling match. Not one that involves a physical opponent, but one that engages my mind in understanding a spiritual truth that has immense significance both to my view of God - and of those around me.

What I want to do in this short pamphlet is to share what I believe is something of a growing revelation for me, that God holds together in His very nature and particularly as revealed through Jesus, the two apparently separate and contradictory 'tracks' of grace and truth.

I am not attempting to set myself up as an expert and certainly not as a theologian - I am simply attempting to explain in a way that I hope others will understand, what I believe the Lord is speaking to me about grace and truth. I hope that this might be of benefit to you - whether you clearly identify with one track or other - or like me you stand somewhat uneasily between the two - may this draw you closer to the One who brings the two together in complete harmony, and closer to your brothers and sisters who may be on a different track - but are heading for the same destination - fullness of grace and truth in Jesus.

### Amazing Grace

Firstly I would like to spend a few moments explaining what I mean by Grace. Charis was the Greek word translated in the New Testament as Grace. What Christians understand by the word is taken not so much from its literal translation from Greek - but

rather from it's use in the New Testament and in particular from the teaching of Paul.

The working definition that I would use is that Grace is 'the unmerited favour of God' - or to put it another way it is God looking upon and acting towards us with an extravagance of love and blessing that we don't deserve. Or again, God giving us freely something that we could never earn for ourselves.

Ultimately the gift that God has given freely to those who follow Christ is salvation, for as Paul says in Rom 3:22-24 *'This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.'*

The thing about Grace is that it is totally outrageous - most of us grow up with an innate sense that you get what you deserve, or at least you should in an ideal world. So if you do things right and well you will be rewarded - if you do things wrong you will be punished. (You will feel this particularly strongly if you are approaching Jesus along the 'Truth Track' (see below).

God in His grace says, however, you have messed things up (Rom 3:23 *'for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God'*) you all deserve death (Rom 6:23 *'For the wages of sin is death ...'*) but I am going to give you the gift of life (Rom 6:23 *'...but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.'*)

We cannot earn salvation - we cannot buy it or win it, we need only receive it through repentance and faith.

### The Prodigal Father

For me one of the clearest demonstrations of Grace is given in the story of the 'Prodigal Father' told in Luke 14:11-32. Traditionally this parable of Jesus has been know as the 'prodigal son' but over recent years it appears that the Holy Spirit has been shining His light on this passage and highlighting that it was written more to describe the wild and extravagant (prodigal) grace of the father,

comfortable' or abandoning love and relationship with people in order to ensure that we are not identified with, or condoning their sin. Jesus did neither.

## Conclusion

I'm sure that as you have read through this pamphlet you will not necessarily have agreed with every point. You may or may not recognise the distinctions I have highlighted but I hope it has helped you to appreciate the importance of recognising that Jesus brought together both grace and truth and that we, made in God's image, are called to do the same.

The enemy has sought to distort both grace and truth seeking to draw us away from God. The answer is not to become entrenched in one or other, or to abandon both but instead to grow closer to the Lord and towards one another recognising that the two together bring strength.

May God bless you in your walk towards Him and towards your brothers and sisters as together we seek fullness of grace and truth.

rather than the wild and extravagant living of the son. For those who would like to explore this more I would recommend the book 'The Father You've Been Waiting for: Portrait of a Perfect Dad' by Mark Stibbe - but there are also a number of other books that have been published over recent years from a similar perspective.

What this parable shows is that God's grace actually flows from His heart and attitude towards us. Not that of a distant, cold, harsh Father who is quick to condemn and slow to forgive. Instead our God is like the father in this parable - though terribly wronged by his sons callous, thoughtless and selfish words and actions - the father continues to love and longingly watch for the sons return. When he does return the father is outrageous and undignified in rushing to receive, forgive and restore his son.

So grace means that God gives us what we do not deserve. It's not to do with fairness - it has nothing to do with justice as we would normally understand it - it is to do with God's amazing and overwhelming love for every one of us - whoever we are, whatever we have done.

If you would like to explore more about God's Grace I would recommend the book 'What's SO Amazing About Grace' by Philip Yancey.

## The truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth

The word for truth used in John 1:14 is Aletheia (al-ay'-thi-a) - This conveys the concept of absolute truth, about anything and in particular about God and the Christian faith.

We live in a World where relativism reigns. What people regard as true will depend upon our culture, our education, our upbringing and our religion.

## Being 'Creative'

In terms of the physical world around us, many look to the scientists as the 'defenders of truth'. If the scientific community state something as true then it must be! Anyone who speaks against the dominant scientific paradigm of the day is quickly

ridiculed. Take for instance the debate of creationism verses evolution in which the dominant scientific view is that the universe was created through 'the big bang' and that humans 'evolved' through billions of years. Those Christians who hold to the concept of creation, whether the concept of 'intelligent design' or a literal interpretation of the account in Genesis', are maligned and even seen as dangerous in case they undermine the 'truth' of the big bang and evolution.

The problem I have with some of the scientific community is that they can tend to present as fact what is actually theory. So, unless I am very much mistaken, no one was around observing and taking notes at the point of creation. Christians believe that God revealed what had happened to Moses who wrote the Genesis account. Scientists have developed elaborate theories to explain how we came to be by chance. I have no problem in them presenting their theories, but when they state it as fact and dismiss any alternative explanations then they are on dangerous ground. *(See the leaflet 'Glory in the moment' for an example)*

Firstly it should be noted that scientific theories change and develop through the years. One theory that everyone believes and appears really rational according to the knowledge of the time (e.g. the earth is flat) is later dismissed and replaced by a new theory which takes into account new discoveries and greater understanding. It would be fair to say that perhaps the greatest breakthroughs in scientific advance have come from those who have refused to be limited by the dominant scientific paradigms of the day, but have 'thought outside the box'.

The other thing to note is that although most scientists may hold a certain view there will always be many others with different theories. Take, for example, the current debate about global warming.

The point I am making is that scientists do not hold the 'absolute truth'. They have part of the picture and they create theories to explain the rest. Think of it as a great, beautiful and intricate painting. The painting has been torn into a million shreds. A few

'truth' and condemned the woman to stoning, He would have abandoned 'grace'. If He had demanded the woman be released, He would have rejected 'truth'. Jesus does neither. Instead He holds together grace and truth, saying in effect, 'Yes this woman has done wrong and sinned. What about the rest of you? Have you ever done anything wrong and been in need of forgiveness? Can you condemn this woman without condemning yourselves? If you want to receive grace and forgiveness you must exercise forgiveness.'

Jesus was the only one who, Himself without sin, could have condemned the woman without a hint of hypocrisy. Instead, He forgives and releases her, setting her free but warning 'go and sin no more'. Jesus demonstrated grace while upholding truth.

### Moving towards the point of merger

In dying for us Christ brought together fullness of grace and truth - forgiveness and judgement for sin.

I come from the 'truth' track but it has been prophesied that I will have a ministry of grace!

Although we may have a 'default' or a 'tendency toward' one track or other, once we realise that wholeness, perfection, or 'shalom' (shown in Jesus) brings together grace and truth then we can begin to see the good in others views and approaches. We can begin to read the bible with our eyes open to both aspects of God's character. We can begin to appreciate and develop, with the help of the Holy Spirit, those aspects of our character that are lacking.

As we move towards Jesus we become closer to our brother's and sisters on the other 'track', seeing that they too love the Lord. We cease to dismiss everything they say as 'judgemental' or 'liberal' but start to recognise that they too hold some revelation.

We do not reconcile the two tracks by jumping from one to the other. Abandoning the objective standards of truth revealed in God's word in order to 'make everyone feel accepted and

## Jesus - full of Grace and Truth

When Jesus came He brought together grace and truth. Firstly in Him the apparent impossibility of fully satisfying God's love and grace to forgive and restore men while also fully satisfying His righteous wrath and judgement of sin.

Read Romans 5:6-10, God shows His love by justifying us (making us right with God) through Jesus blood (suffering and death) saving us from God's wrath.

Through many aspects of Jesus life He demonstrated how grace and truth could exist together and actually form strength in unity. I am not an architect, but I believe that I am right in saying that there are some structures that hold together because of two opposing forces being held together in tension. So imagine two planks of wood joined by a strip of cloth. Both planks are leaning outwards at about 45° from vertical - they stand because the cloth holds them together. If the cloth is cut then they both fall. The strength is in them being held together.

Jesus lived a righteous life - He was the only person ever to have lived 'without sin' (see Heb 4:15) and He was keen to *'fulfil all righteousness'* (see Matt 3:15) but He vigorously and passionately opposed the judgemental, self righteous hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees, who as teachers of the scriptures had unprecedented access to the 'truth' but who distorted and abused it to bring people into bondage (read Math 23). Jesus, however, came to show how the truth can set people free (John 8:31-37).

Perhaps the greatest single incident that demonstrated how Jesus brought together grace and truth is shown in John 8:1-11. The Scribes and Pharisees had caught a woman in adultery (interesting to note where was the man? According to the law they quoted both were to be put to death. Were they applying double standards even in this?) They brought her to Jesus and correctly quoted the law.

Jesus recognised their double standards, their hypocrisy and their attempt to rip apart grace and truth. If Jesus had agreed with

hundred of these are discovered and form a tiny part of the picture. Although only a very small part is revealed those who have seen it are fascinated, intrigued and impatient to see the whole picture.

Several artists come along. They copy the fragments that exist and then use their skill and expertise to create a whole picture. Using the way that the colours blend together, the direction of the brush strokes, the direction of the light, as well as the overall impression of the picture.

Each of the artists comes up with an impression wildly differing from each other but each having a beauty of its own. Gradually through the years different strands of the original painting are found and added to the picture. As they are added then the artists impressions are discarded or adapted and the overall pictures re-worked. As the years go by, more strands are discovered and added. Some of the artist's impressions appear to fit much better than others - when new strands are added only minor amendments are needed. More and more people look at the remaining impressions. A number of them look very similar. Surely this must be what the picture looks like they say.

An original oil painting, roughly drawn millennia before is dismissed as crude and out of date. Most people prefer the new paintings. Although, of course none of the strands discovered contradict the old painting, it can't possibly be a true likeness. After all the old artists did not have access to the colours and brushes and techniques of modern artists.

I do not know how much of the secrets of the universe have been discovered -whether using my analogy it is hundreds or thousands - but I suspect that there are very many more to discover. I am certain that the modern paintings will continue to be re-drawn as more is discovered, each becoming closer to the final picture, but I believe the old oil painting drawn in Genesis will never be contradicted by the new discoveries. All I want is for the 'artists' to be honest. They have done their best to fill in the gaps. They

have been skilful, 'artistic' even, but they do not hold the whole picture, or the 'whole truth' - only part!

## Having Faith

If you think the truth about the physical world around us is difficult to 'pin down' then the 'truth' about who we are, why we exist, what is right or wrong, good or evil, is even more complex and diverse.

On the whole people are happy to embrace the concept of many 'truths' living alongside one another - you have your 'truth' and I have mine.

Where people come together in community, then they will embrace for certain areas in their lives a common ground of 'truth' which will form the basis of their community rules. For some these are formed as a result of religious doctrine, e.g. Sheria law for Islam, the Talmud for Jews. For some it will be as a result of history and culture, for example tribal communities. For some it may be through democracy. Of course for many of us it is a combination of all of these influences, and many others.

What is important to note with all of these things, however, is that few of these 'truths', whether formal written laws or just widely accepted beliefs, are 'absolute'. Religious beliefs often change and develop as differing understandings of ancient writings are developed and different 'rules' around those writings are introduced or dispensed with. Culture moves on and changes - particularly as it interacts with other cultures. Democracy changes as what the majority consider to be 'right' or 'wrong' changes e.g. in my lifetime our attitude to sex has changed beyond recognition and with that not only has our understanding of what is 'right and wrong' changed but so have our laws to accommodate this new version of 'truth'.

Sometimes Christians and those of other religions are derided for being people of 'faith'. The truth, however, is that we all live by faith in something or someone. It may be God, or false 'gods' - it may be faith in the 'majority will or understanding', faith in a

side they are likely to be quick to forgive, generous, demonstrable in love, tolerant of others and slow to judge.

On the negative side they may tend to 'bend' truth in order to make everyone feel comfortable and accepted, sometimes leading to the heresy that 'all are saved'. There is the danger of using grace as a license to sin and an excuse to rebel against authority (what right have they to tell me what to do!)

If you tend towards the 'grace' track you are liable to read the story of the 'prodigal father' and identify more with the younger son. 'There but for the grace of God go I' you are likely to proclaim. How could the older brother be so self-righteous and judgemental, but as I said above, the Father loved and embraced both sons, taking time out of the celebrations to reach out towards the son who was confused, angry and embittered about the apparent injustice of it all.

I would identify Abraham as a good example of someone from the 'grace track'. Called by God he followed him with faith through the journey of his life, however, apparently without any qualm of conscience he was happy to lie and allow Sarai his wife to be taken by Pharaoh as one of his wives - in order that he might be safe and prosper. (Gen 12:10-20.) Much later he did the same thing again at Kadesh and Shur (Gen 20). Surely it would take someone from the grace track to make a statement like Abraham did to Abimelech in Gen 20:11-13. More or less saying, well although Sarah is my wife and I pretended she wasn't and although I opened you up to the danger of sin and Sara to the possibility that she could again be taken as a wife by someone else, technically speaking, I haven't done anything wrong after all she is my half sister!

Abraham's concern for grace led him to plead with God for the city of Sodom and Gomorrah. Surely it would be better to spare the whole cities for the sake of a few righteous than to judge the righteous with the wicked.

killing of the Egyptian. Mystified that his own people did not recognise that he was merely standing up for what is right and fearful of consequences of his actions he flees into the desert.

Ironically Moses moved from the place of being both judge and jury to the place of himself being judged and condemned by both Pharaoh and his own people.

I wonder if the 40 year gap between leaving Egypt and meeting God at the burning bush was partly to give Moses time calm down, to deal with the anger and bitterness of the 'injustice' of what had happened to him and even to recognise that he was in need of God's forgiveness and mercy.

Moses, coming from the 'truth track' was eminently suited to be the one through whom God gave the law but not until He had drawn close enough to God that he had experienced and been changed by His grace, to such an extent that on several occasions he pleaded with God to forgive the sin of the people despite their blatant sin and rebellion.

Ironically Paul, who taught us more about Grace than any other person in the Bible other than Christ Himself, was himself clearly from the truth track.

He was brought up as a 'Pharisee of Pharisees'. His zeal for the 'truth' led him to persecute Christians but in meeting Jesus who was 'full of grace & truth' Paul had such a dramatic personal experience of God's grace that he spent the rest of his life in thankfulness, teaching others about God's grace.

It is interesting, however, that even as a Christian who so understood and was thankful for God's grace he struggled so much with forgiving and receiving Mark back after he had let him down' to such an extent that it caused a bust-up with Barnabus and they split. (Acts 15:36-41)

### The 'grace track'

Those who tend towards the 'grace track' will see things more through the prism of what is 'loving' or 'unloving'. On the good

person, or a political view, it might be as described above - faith in 'scientists', it might just be faith in ourselves - that we have the 'truth' even if no-one else has.

### Absolute Truth

As Christians we believe in the concept of absolute truth. Evangelical Christians believe in the 'absolute' truth contained in scripture (although we accept that some of our interpretations are not 'absolute') but all Christians believe that absolute truth can ultimately be found in the person of God Himself and that truth has been revealed to us most completely in Jesus.

In John 14:6 Jesus said about Himself '*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*'

Jesus makes clear here that He is **the way, the truth and the life** - not a way, a truth and a life. As our starting verse from John 1:14 states Jesus is full of truth. Where many others have some truth, some of the picture, Jesus has it all. In terms of the physical world around us Jesus has the whole truth about how it came to be, how it was and is sustained. Earlier in chapter one John tells us (v 2) '*Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made*' or again in Col 1:17 '*He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*'

Jesus also provides the truth about who we are, why we exist and what is right or wrong, good or evil. Through his life and teaching Jesus revealed those things. We accept what Jesus taught and demonstrated as 'absolute truth' because they came from the very source of truth or the fullness of truth.

### When the tracks diverge

Now if you accept that in Jesus is absolute truth and complete grace i.e. that He is 'full of grace and truth' then we should accept that we as the pinnacle of God's creation, made in His image (Gen 1:26, 27) have within us both aspects of God's character - grace and truth.

It is clear, even from the point before the fall that as humans we were not given 'fullness of truth', for otherwise why would there be a 'tree with the knowledge of good and evil' from which Adam and Eve were commanded not to eat. 'Fullness of truth' would only come as men and women together (since together they were created in God's image) communed with God.

After the fall things were far worse. No longer did men and women have such a close walk with God, who alone possessed fullness of truth, but even their relationship with one another became fragmented - dividing even the truth they did hold.

It is an irony that the 'knowledge' that we craved so much that we disobeyed God and ate from the tree became far more distant to us as a result of our disobedience.

What was lost by our distance from God and one another can be re-gained only as we draw closer to God and towards one another.

### An observation

What I now describe is an observation and what I believe to be some what of a personal revelation, about myself and those I have interacted with through the years. I am not claiming this as new doctrine just as an explanation of what I have seen and experienced and what I understand from scripture.

You may find the diagram in the centre of this booklet helpful as I describe the following.

I have noticed that there appears to have been a schism between 'grace' and 'truth' in the characters of people in the world, both now and through history. It is as if the 'tracks' have diverged. Let me explain what I mean.

There appears to be a 'default mode' which most of us have built into our character that tends towards grace or truth. The extent to which this is obvious to others will depend on other aspects of our character and on circumstances and various other elements. Also, as I explain later, it can change the more that we draw close

to God who is 'full of grace and truth' and towards those who are on the opposite track.

As I explain below the characteristics of each track be honest with yourself about which track you tend towards - understanding where we are, can help us as we seek to move on.

You may also find it helpful to think of others, perhaps those around you, perhaps characters from the Bible or from history who might appear to fit firmly onto one track or other.

### The 'truth track'

Those who tend towards the truth track (yes, I confess it like me!) will have a tendency to think in terms of right or wrong. On the good side, we may well have a passion for justice and righteousness. We will probably accept authority readily (providing we think that authority is 'right' or 'just'). We will also have a tendency to command authority.

On the negative side we may tend towards being judgemental of others and self righteous. We will tend towards being religious and there is the danger of hypocrisy, as we set such high standards that we can't even meet them ourselves, so we avoid all mirrors! 'Truth track people' are more likely to themselves be gripped by fear and therefore seek to control and dominate others by using fear.

If you identify with the 'Truth Track' you are likely to read the story of the Prodigal Father and confess that actually you identify more with the elder brother in the story than with the father. Surely the reckless son did not deserve his father's forgiveness and generous gifts and of course that is the whole point, he didn't but neither did the older son. The Father offered His love and forgiveness to both with equal generosity it was up to them whether they received it.

I would identify Moses as a good example of someone who would probably have approached God from the truth track. Consumed by the injustice of his people's oppression his anger overflowed in the