

GRACE AND TRUTH

- A. Introduction: For a number of weeks we've been talking about who Jesus is and why He came into this world so that we are equipped to recognize false christs and prophets who preach false gospels. Jesus warned that prior to His second coming false christs will abound and deceive many. Matt 24:4-5; 11; 24
1. Familiarity with the New Testament is our protection against religious deception. The New Testament is our only fully reliable source of information about Jesus—who He is and why He came to earth.
 - a. The New Testament was written by eyewitnesses of Jesus—men who walked and talked with Jesus when He was here on earth. These men saw Him die and then saw Him alive again. They wrote the New Testament documents to tell the world what they saw and heard.
 - b. Who Jesus is and why He came to earth is part of a larger discussion we've been having about the importance of becoming familiar with the New Testament through regular, systematic reading.
 1. The New Testament is made up of 27 individual books and letters. To read systematically means to read each of those document from beginning to end as quickly as you can.
 2. Then, do it over and over until you become familiar with the books and letters. Understanding comes from familiarity and familiarity comes from regular, repeated reading.
 2. In these lessons we've referred to the Gospel of John a number of times. The author (John) was a close follower of Jesus for over three years. He wrote to show clearly who Jesus is and why He came.
 - a. John opened his book with an introduction which states that the Word (as John calls Jesus) is a Pre-existent Being who created all things, and that in Him there is life (*zoe*). John 1:1-4
 - b. The Lord created human beings with the intention that they become more than creatures He created. He wants sons and daughters. Eph 1:4-5
 1. God desired that the human race choose dependence on Him and then become partakers of the life in Him, His uncreated life and nature (eternal life). Instead, the race (beginning with Adam) chose independence from God through sin.
 2. Adam's choice brought death to God's creation. Human nature was altered. Men and women became sinners by nature, cut off from the life in God. And, a curse corruption and death infused the material creation. Gen 2:17; Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12-19
 - c. John 1:4—Jesus came to restore God's creation by bringing life (*zoe*) to what is dead. In Him there is life and that life is the light of men. His life brings men and women out of the darkness of sin, corruption, and death into light and life.
 1. John 1:12-13—John wrote that those who receive Jesus become literal sons of God through new birth, through being born of Him and receiving His life (*zoe*), the uncreated life in God.
 2. John 1:14-17—John gives another important fact about Jesus: Jesus is full of grace and truth, and grace and truth have come to us through Him. These two words (grace and truth) help us understand who Jesus is and why He came. We need to examine what they mean.
- B. John 1:14—Before we talk about grace and truth, let's review the first part of John's statement. At a specific point in time the Word (Jesus) took on a human nature (incarnated) and was born into this world. Jesus is God become man without ceasing to be God.
1. Note that John refers to Jesus as the Only Begotten of the Father. In previous lessons we've discussed in detail what the term Only Begotten means. Let's briefly restate some key points.
 - a. Use of the word begotten has led some to mistakenly claim that Jesus is a created being and therefore lesser than God the Father. That can't be what John means because just a few sentences earlier he clearly identified Jesus as God. John 1:1
 - b. The Greek word translated begotten is *monogenes*. It doesn't refer to fathering children. It refers to uniqueness or one of a kind. The original hearers understood the word to mean unique.

1. Jesus is unique because He is the God-man, fully God and fully man, one Person, with two natures—human and divine. Jesus is unique because He is the only Man whose birth did not mark His beginning. He has no beginning because He is God.

2. John 1:15—In the very next verse John reemphasized Jesus' preexistence by citing John the Baptist's testimony about Jesus. Even though John was conceived six months before Jesus (Luke 1:36), the Baptist declared: He that comes after me has priority over me, for He was before me—He takes rank above me, for He existed before I did (Amp).

3. This is beyond our comprehension—how God could become man without ceasing to be God.

The men who walked and talked with Jesus (the eyewitnesses) weren't bothered by it. None of them tried to explain it. They simply accepted it based on what they saw and heard from Jesus.

c. Now, back to grace and truth. Before we talk about what it means that Jesus is full of grace and truth we must make sure we understand the definition of those words.

2. The Greek word translated grace is used in many ways in the New Testament. When used in connection with mankind's condition due to sin and God's remedy for it, the word refers to the unmerited (or unearned) favor of God. Favor means the friendly (unmerited, undeserved) regard or kindness shown toward another (especially by a superior). Grace is part of the big picture or God's plan for man.

a. Before time began God, motivated by love, devised a plan to have a family of holy, righteous sons and daughters. But sin disqualified humanity for the family. Although God loves men, He cannot overlook sin and still remain true to His holy, righteous nature.

1. The righteous penalty for sin is death or eternal separation from God who is life. If the penalty is enforced humanity can't fulfill its created purpose and God loses His family. Because of sin, mankind is in a condition from which there is no escape and nothing we can do to fix it.

2. God, motivated by love, chose to deal with us in grace, to do for us what we can't do for ourselves—save us from sin, its penalty and power.

b. Rom 5:6-7—While we were yet in weakness—powerless to help ourselves—at the fitting time Christ died for (in behalf of) the ungodly...God shows and clearly proves His [own] love for us by the fact that while we were still sinners Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One, died for us. (Amp)

1. Jesus (God) stepped into time and space and took on a human nature so that He could die for us.

He took the penalty due to us on Himself at the Cross. Hebrews 2:14-15; Isa 53:5-6

A. Because Jesus is God become man without ceasing to be God, the value of His Person is such that He could satisfy justice for us. Because Jesus, as a man, lived a perfect life and had no sin of His own, once the price for our sin was paid, death could not hold Him.

B. When a sinner accepts Jesus as Lord and Savior, the effect of Christ's sacrificial death is applied to them and they are justified—declared not guilty, cleansed of the guilt of sin.

God then indwells and regenerates them and makes them a son by (new) birth.

2. God justifies us by His grace—For all have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious standard.

Yet now God in his gracious kindness (grace) declares us not guilty. He has done this through Christ Jesus, who has freed us by taking away our sins. For God sent Jesus to take the punishment for our sins and to satisfy God's anger against us. We are made right with God when we believe that Jesus shed his blood, sacrificing his life for us (Rom 3:23-25, NLT).

A. II Tim 1:9-10—Grace is part of the plan, the big picture. God saved us from sin and made us His sons and daughters, not because of anything we did ourselves, but because of His purpose and grace, given to us through Jesus before time began.

B. No one killed Christ. He laid down His life for us. John recorded this statement made by Jesus: No one can take my life from me. I lay it down voluntarily. For I have the right to lay it down when I want to and also the power to take it up again (John 10:18, NLT).

3. When we read the New Testament letters (epistles) written by Paul (another eyewitness of Jesus) we see

two words contrasted, works and grace. Works is something you do. Grace is unearned favor.

- a. Each of the following statements is made in the context of mankind's fallen nature and the sinful actions through which we express that nature.
 1. Eph 2:8-9—God saved you by his special favor (grace) when you believed the good news, the gospel. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift (grace) from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it (NLT).
 2. Titus 3:5-7—(He) saved us not because of the good things we did, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins and gave us a new life through the Holy Spirit (and) declared us not guilty because of his great kindness (grace)...now we know we will inherit eternal life (NLT).
 3. Eph 2:5—But God still loved us with such great love. He is so rich in compassion and mercy. Even when we were dead and doomed in our many sins, he united us to the very life of Christ and saved us by his wonderful grace (TPT).
- b. In other words, we did nothing to earn or deserve our salvation. Our good works do not give us a standing before God. Salvation comes by the grace of God expressed through the Cross of Christ.
4. Fallen humanity's concept of how to relate to God is based on works (our efforts to earn and deserve something from God: As long as I'm a good person or at least trying to be a good person, I'm okay.
 - a. However, according to Jesus there is none good but God. Almighty God is the standard for good, and all humans fall short (Matt 19:17; Rom 3:23). If God dealt with any of us according to our works we would all be separated from Him forever.
 1. If you don't recognize the problem and see your need, then you can't appreciate the solution—salvation through faith in Christ and not in our good deeds.
 2. The Bible reveals why we need salvation from sin, how God provides it, and how it impacts our lives in this present life and the life to come.
 - b. This is a topic for another lesson, but even Christians who understand that they were saved from sin by God's grace have a tendency to try to relate to God through their works after they are saved (I've prayed enough, enough money, suffered enough, etc.—I deserve help.) God's help and blessing can't be earned because it comes by grace (God's unearned, undeserved favor).
 1. There's something in fallen human nature wants to deserve God's help. It's called the pride of life—[assurance in one's own resources or the stability of earthly things] (I John 2:16, Amp).
 - A. Without a proper understanding of grace, we are vulnerable to false teachings such as it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are sincere and trying to be a good person.
 - B. During the life time of the apostles false teachers rose up and turned the grace of God into an excuse for sinful living (Jude 4). These kinds of teaching are becoming increasingly common in so-called Christians circles today.
 2. But the true grace of God teaches us to deny ungodliness and live righteous, holy lives because we understand the big picture. We were created to become holy, righteous sons and daughters of God through faith in Christ and grace has made this possible. Titus 2:11-12
5. Because of what Jesus has done for us we now stand in the grace of God. Rom 5:2—Through Him also we have [our] access (entrance, introduction) by faith into this grace—the state of God's favor—in which we [firmly and safely] stand (Amp). (Lessons for another day)
 - a. The point for now is that, as with any other topic related to Jesus and the salvation that He has provided, we need accurate knowledge from the Bible.
 - b. Listen to what Paul said to a group of Christians he did not think he would see again in this life. Paul established a community of believers in the city of Ephesus (present-day Turkey) and spent three years with them, teaching them. These are his parting words:
 1. Acts 20:32—And now, Brethren, I commit you to God—that is, I deposit you in His charge, entrusting you to His protection and care. And I commend you to the Word of His grace—to

the commands and counsels and promises of His unmerited favor. It is able to build you up and to give you [your rightful] inheritance among all God's set-apart ones—those consecrated, purified, and transformed of soul (Acts 20:32, Amp).

2. Jesus, the Living Word of God is a visible demonstration of God's grace. Grace comes to us through Jesus. From the written Word of God (the Bible) we see Jesus clearly, find out what true grace is, and learn what God has provided for us through His grace, both in this life and the life to come. Jesus is full of (abounding with) grace and truth.
 6. The Greek word that is translated truth means reality, the reality lying at the basis of an appearance—or the way things really are. (The English word has the same meaning). We could devote an entire lesson to the subject of truth and the truth that Jesus brings, but consider these thoughts.
 - a. Truth comes to us through the Word of God. Jesus, the Living Word of God, is the Truth and He is revealed in the written Word of God which is also called the Truth (John 14:6; John 17:17).
 - b. Rev 1:8—The resurrected Lord Jesus referred to Himself as the Alpha and Omega. Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet and omega is the last letter. Jesus' message it: I Am the entire Word of God. All knowledge is summed up in Me. Jesus (both His Person and His work) is the full revelation of God and His plan to man.
 1. Although John (the human author of the Book of Revelation) was writing in Greek, Jewish readers understood Jesus' words. Aleph and tau are the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Jewish writers used those two letters to express the whole compass of things.
 2. Jesus was stating: I Am from eternity to eternity. I Am the beginning of all things (Creator) and the end of all things (Restorer). All things are summed up and restored in and through Me. I have all knowledge and am the sum of all truth. (many lessons for another day)
 - c. The point for us is that we are living in a time when truth, for many people, has become subjective or based on one's personal opinion and feelings. However, truth by definition is objective—it exists outside of and despite personal feelings or opinions. Two plus two is four no matter how you feel.
 1. Truth as an objective standard has been largely abandoned in our culture and in much of the Western world, leaving people extremely vulnerable to religious deception.
 2. Our only protection against deception is the Truth, Jesus (the Living Word of God) who is revealed in the Bible (the written Word of God). Remember, the New Testament was written by men who walked and talked with Him when He was on earth—eyewitnesses of the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ.
 - d. John 8:32—Jesus told His followers that if you continue in My Word you will know the truth and the truth will make you free. God, who is the Truth, through His Word which is the Truth, sets us free from all bondage, every dead work, and all the effect of sin and corruption. The Truth of God as revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ sets us free from death and brings us into the light of life.
- C. Conclusion: We have more to say about grace and truth through Jesus next week. But consider these thoughts as we close.
1. All of us have problems and all of us need help in this life. But our greatest need is right relationship with God through faith in Christ. The Bible gives us vital information by revealing why we need salvation from sin, how God provides it, and how it impacts our lives in this present life and the life to come.
 2. If ever there was a time to become familiar with the New Testament through regular, systematic reading, it's now. It's the only way to know fully what God has done for us through His grace and it is our only protection against the deception that is already rampant in our world. Much more next week!