

Grace and Truth

John 1: 17

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The earlier verses of John chapter 1 invest the words of verse 17 — "Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" — with outstanding preciousness. How glorious indeed is the One who "came"! With what holy substance was He freighted! Eternal in His Person — "The Word was God;" the Father's love His portion from "before the foundation of the world" (John 17: 14), He came into the world of which He was Creator (v. 3) in order that, as the Eternal Word, He might reveal to men the depths of divine affection which filled the heart of the blessed God from eternal ages. He, and He alone, was competent to make known the wonder and glory of the eternal purpose of God Himself.

Sadly do we read that the world, engrossed with its own pursuits (the germ of which is plainly seen in Genesis 11: 3, 4) — "Let us make us a name"), "knew Him not;" and the nation so specially favoured of God "received Him not." We thus observe that the rejection of Christ is mentioned much earlier in John's gospel than in the Synoptics. To such a scene the Son of God came, dispensing grace to man and maintaining in every detail the truth according to God.

In the earlier chapters of John the Lord is dealing with individuals, men and women of varying character and with different needs, conditions which the blessed Saviour meets as He, in the skill of love, brings "grace and truth" to bear on the issue. We may briefly consider one or two such incidents. It will be seen that each case under review involves some increased appreciation of a title or name of the Lord.

John 3 relates the incident of Nicodemus — a ruler of the Jews — coming to Jesus. He confesses Him to be a Teacher, doubtless thus influenced by the signs which the Lord had done; but he has little conception of what is involved in the title of Teacher. He must learn that fallen man, how ever intellectual or cultured, cannot appreciate or receive that which had come "by Jesus Christ." Hence the Lord shews by the *truth* of God, that man's condition needs a total change, and then speaks of the *grace* which so fully meets that condition. Grace and truth were indeed revealed most preciously in the *Person* of Christ, but if sinful men were to enjoy the blessing which was in view, then His atoning death on the Cross of Calvary was a divine necessity. The succeeding verses of the chapter illustrate this most clearly! Verse 14, linked as it is with Numbers 21, stresses the solemn *truth* of man's rebellion against God and his complete lack of appreciation of Christ. The *truth* of the cross, the lifting up of "the Son of Man," is a divine necessity if that state is to be met to God's satisfaction, and men brought into the blessing of eternal life. Then verse 16 shews that *grace*, God's love in its activity, is the source of all. "FOR God so loved that He gave." *Truth*, without the slightest compromise, reveals the hopeless state in which men are found, and then *grace*, pure unmerited favour, meets the position in the fullest possible manner.

Thus the Lord Jesus brought "grace and truth" to bear upon the exercised but unenlightened heart of the Pharisee. Precious "Teacher" indeed! — the Eternal Word, eclipsing (and yet confirming) every precious word of truth. The incidents recorded in John 7 and John 19 would indicate how Nicodemus profited by the teaching.

How clearly the woman in John 4 comes before us as one to whom Christ brought both "grace and truth." She had some glimmer of truth — traditional ideas of worship and of the coming Messiah,

but withal a completely unsatisfied heart. If in infinite love that heart was to be refreshed and filled with "living water;" if she was to know and enjoy the blessedness of that which *grace* could supply, then she must come under the searching scrutiny of the *truth*. Do we not observe both grace and truth in the Lord's command (v. 16)? "Go, call thy husband" was sufficient to unmask her true position; but do not the remaining words — "and come hither" bespeak the love and grace that would dispense joy and happiness to every burdened heart prepared, in His gracious presence, to face the *truth*? Both she and her guilty partner were included in the gracious invitation, for *grace abounds*. The dim light of tradition must now be eclipsed by the glory of the Person of Christ Himself — no longer a distant hope but a present blessed reality. Human ideas of worship must be displaced by the desires of grace so fully expressed in the revelation of the Father's heart by the Son! "If thou knewest the gift of God, and *who it is* that saith unto thee, Give Me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water." Free unmerited grace — the substance of which is in Christ Himself.

Did she appreciate in any measure the full implication of her words in verse 25? What a holy subject for *our* meditation — Christ and "*all things*"! In this paper we cannot enlarge upon the blessedness of this precious theme; sufficient is it to say that, through grace, we each may realize our own *personal* portion in this glorious truth. The broad outline of the truth as seen in the expression of verse 25 is to have its own special place in the heart that knows the Saviour (verse 29). The divine influence of grace and truth upon her heart is now, by her unashamed testimony, reflected in her life. Every fresh appreciation we may receive of the glory of Christ and the substance we find in Him, should result in a more intelligent spirit of worship to the Father and a clearer, brighter testimony to men.

In John 9 the precious theme of "Grace and truth" continues, with an increasing appreciation of the One by whom they came. As the woman in John 4 travelled in her understanding from "a Jew" (v.9) "a prophet" (v.19) to "the Christ" (v.29), so the blind man progressed in his thoughts of Christ, reaching the grand truth of the "Son of God." We observe that this progress of soul was made in an atmosphere of hostility to Christ. He was rejected — His words of truth (John 8) and His works of grace (John 9) alike refused. The *truth* of this is brought home to the blind man; he learns that association with the rejected Christ puts him outside the established order of men. He had already faced the *truth* that he was blind (descriptive in a moral sense of the nation and of men in general) and in facing that fact he had come under the *gracious* touch of the Lord; Now he faces the *truth* of being "cast out" by the world (v. 34) and in *that* position he becomes the subject of wondrous *grace* — "found" by Christ and his heart opened to the glorious fact that He by whom "grace and truth" came is none other than the Son of God. As in the case of Nicodemus and of the woman in John 4, his appreciation of the One who has so fully met his need and filled his heart, is seen — he becomes a worshipper!

Briefly, we touch the same precious theme in John 11. The sisters Martha and Mary are brought face to face with the solemn truth of death and corruption, but both they and the disciples, and indeed others too, are to learn the outstanding *truth* of His holy Person (a truth surpassing in full measure the previous thoughts expressed by Martha in verse 24) — "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." Glorious truth indeed! Will it not be manifest in its power and glory at the rapture of the saints? "The *dead* in Christ shall rise first: " and we who "remain shall be caught up . . . to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thessalonians 4).

As our hearts are thus enlightened with the truth of the "Son of God in power" (Romans 1: 4) are we not moved towards Him in our affections as we read the words in verse 35 of our chapter — "Jesus

wept." Oh! the abounding and infinite grace of the Saviour's heart. He who as "the resurrection and the life" could command the dead to come forth in obedience to His voice, would yet weep over the sorrow and grief which the inroads of death had brought to the human race. Precious vessel of the eternal love of the heart of God!

Do we wonder that with this increased sense of the glory of His person we find Martha quietly and happily serving and Mary pouring out her heart-felt appreciation on His holy Person (John 12).

Beloved brethren, as we recognize our Lord as "a Man who has told (us) the truth" (John 8: 40), exposing the whole position of sin and need and indeed the non-appreciation of the natural mind, may we appreciate more fully the ocean of grace which subsists in Him, from which ocean "grace upon grace" is poured into our hearts. Let us value Him increasingly as the Teacher; as the Christ who has all things in His blessed control; worshipping Him as the Son of God and knowing the blessedness of His own company in a scene from which as "the Resurrection and the Life" He has lifted the shadow of death.