



CHRISTIAN: Part 5: When Gracie Met Truthy

INTRODUCTION

Jesus calls his followers to love the way he loved. But as recorded in the Gospels, there's a tension in the way he loved—it was messy, inconsistent, unfair, and confusing. At times, Jesus was harsh; at times, he was forgiving. At times, he pointed out sin; at times, he seemed to ignore it.

Our temptation is to try to resolve the tension created around Jesus' love. But if we try, we lose something important, something essential. The challenge for followers of Jesus is to love in the messy, inconsistent, unfair, and confusing way that he did—to hang onto the tension.

WEEKLY READING

The tension in Jesus' love was between truth and grace. It's the tension between being sinners and being forgiven. Jesus was comfortable with that tension. He was willing to minister through it.

At his crucifixion, Jesus' cross was placed between those of two criminals. One of the criminals mocked Jesus, saying that if he were the Messiah, he should free them and himself from punishment. The Bible relates what happened next. *"But the other criminal rebuked him. 'Don't you fear God,' he said, 'since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.'"* (Luke 23:40-42).

Jesus didn't say that the criminal had done no wrong and didn't deserve the punishment he was receiving. He didn't shy away from the truth of the man's crimes. But he also offered grace:

Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise." Luke 23:43

The criminal had only hours to live. There was no time to turn over a new leaf, no time to serve others as a way of making up for the sin that had characterized his whole life. Jesus didn't brush away that truth, but he did offer the man grace. He promised him paradise.

Throughout this series, we've said that Jesus calls his followers to love one another. If you want to know what Jesus meant by "loving one another," watch how he loved. He called sin, sin...and then he paid for it. And having paid for it, he didn't condemn any of us. He loves us even when we don't walk away from our sin. He loves us even when we're so broken by our sin or someone's sin against us that we aren't sure we can ever be free from it.

That's how we've been called to love.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever had to share a difficult truth with someone at work, in your family, or at church? Were you graceful in the way you communicated? How did that affect the way the person responded?
2. People focused on truth worry that others will get away with something, while those focused on grace worry that they might make others feel bad about themselves. Which better describes you? How does that affect the way you think about God and faith?
3. In your interactions with Christians, have you mostly experienced judgment, a wishy-washy avoidance of biblical truth, or a mix of truth and grace? Explain.
4. Read John 4:1-26. What do you find most startling about this story? What about it makes you uncomfortable? What about it is reassuring?
5. Read John 8:1-11. Talk about how Jesus navigates the tension between truth and grace in verses 10 and 11. Is it significant that Jesus tells the woman he doesn't condemn her *before* he commands her to leave her life of sin? Why or why not?

MOVING FORWARD

If Jesus is the embodiment of grace and truth, and the church is his body, then we have to be comfortable with the mess, the tension. The church is at its best when it embraces God's grace and truth and refuses to let go of either.

Let's be a group of churches that is all about the grace *and* the truth of God. Let's pray that God will help us to manage that tension.

CHANGING YOUR MIND

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:14