

Series: **The Scandal of Grace** – week 6 of 11

CDOBC – beginning on 9/10/17

Today's Title: **"Truth Unlocks the Power of Grace"**

October 15, 2017 - Selected passages

OBJECTIVE: To help everyone realize God's truth and grace work in perfect harmony, and they each have the power of God to give us new life.

She has a beauty which seems to be hidden under years of heartache.

When she was a little girl, she was full of life. She was the kind of kid who would have fun no matter where she was. A curious little mind with a contagious laugh.

As she entered her teenage years, and she was changing from a cute girl to a beautiful young lady, she never lost her joy in life. She could find joy and contentment in any situation.

Her wedding day was celebrated with family and friends - a joyous occasion. This was an arranged marriage, but in this case, her husband was a familiar face - a boy she had played with growing up - same neighborhood, same school, and now, they were part of the same family.

However, it wasn't long before she realized the darkness in her husband's heart. He was kind and loving to her in public, but in private, he was abusive, belittling and vulgar. After only 6 months she discovered he was having an affair, and when she confronted him, he became furious and hit her.

In those days, nobody gave much credibility to the wife's side of the story, and he soon spread lies about his wife, saying she was cold and unfaithful, and he divorced her. In a small town like theirs, everyone knows the details...at least they think they know.

Most people in the town looked at her differently now. Her own family wasn't sure how to deal with the situation. She moved back home, but her own father was treating her different. Pleasant on the outside - but something had changed.

Within a year, she met another man. They married, and after 4 years and 2 miscarriages, when she was suffering with a bout of depression, he divorced her, unable / unwilling to stay married to a wife suffering with such things.

Her 3rd husband traveled a lot - a salesman with a large territory to cover. They had a child - a little girl. Life was finally settling down, and she was 'recovering' from her first 2 marriages. Life was good. Then, shortly after their 7th anniversary, her was on a business trip and was robbed - and after they took all his money, they beat him to death.

The little girl who could find joy and contentment in any situation - she was gone - never again to be found.

In her place was a woman who was lost - beaten down by the evil and unfairness of this world. An outcast in her small town. Even though she was the victim - and for the most

part 'guiltless' in her marriages, the public's judgment is not always fair or partial to the facts.

People often judge by what they see - the appearances.

She moved back home once again - because she had nowhere else to go.

Her parents had raised her in faith - attending worship each week. But she hadn't been to worship in a very long time - a woman who had 3 husbands - let's just say she wasn't welcome there anymore.

She married for the 4th time. This time a man much older than her. She thought, *'Maybe an older man will treat me with more respect.'* This was not the case - and he divorced her within a few years - his reason: *'She has too many issues...too much baggage...at my age, I don't want to deal with that stuff.'*

By this time, everyone in her small hometown blamed her - treated her as a 'black widow' - she's the common denominator - she must be the problem. Who in their right mind gets married 4 times! What's wrong with her!

She never told anyone...but when she looked at the mirror, she thought the same thing as everyone else - *'What's wrong with me?'* *'Why can't I find true love?'* *'Why do men treat me this way?'*

No money, no husband, no future, no hope.

Five years later, husband #5 entered the picture. This marriage was about practicality - not love. She needed someone who could provide food and shelter for her and her now teenage daughter.

Love doesn't put food on the table - Love doesn't keep a roof over your head or clothes on your body.

It was predictable...and her parents warned her, but husband #5 didn't last long. A marriage without love is destined for trouble - and after 3 years, another divorce.

Her daughter is now married, living in a small town about 10 miles away, which allows for a few visits each year.

She's not married, but she is living with a man. Once again, a matter of pragmatism. He seems nice, but he's not the commitment type - especially to a woman who's been married 5 times!

Deep down she misses what life used to be like when she was growing up. She misses having a family where there was love in the house - where faith was part of the rhythm of life - and she could find joy and contentment in any situation. Now, she's an outcast - stared at whenever she's in public. She can tell when people are talking about her as they look at her, but cover their mouth to make sure their words can't be heard by others.

Life has robbed her of life - and she doesn't have any hope. She is stuck, with nowhere to turn and no future to look forward to.

Opening Prayer

Have you ever made the mistake of judging someone simply by looking at them?

You notice certain things about their appearance...their mannerisms...and maybe you watch them over a period of weeks or months...and based upon what you have observed, you make certain assumptions about them.

“She doesn't have much self-respect.”

“He certainly has his life together.”

“Someone needs to put that kid over their knee!”

Assumptions about someone's heart...about their character, is often devoid of the truth...and of grace.

The 2nd person I want to tell you about this morning is a devout, religious man. He's a well-respected member of the faith community. He's been a leader for many years - his life is an example to everyone of how to live in obedience - how to take God's Word and obey it in life.

From a distance, he is the image of 'respectability' - the image of 'self-control' and a life full of blessings from God. But in his heart and mind, he knows something is missing - something is not right.

He is faithful to God - faithful to worship, as they say,
“Whenever the church doors are open.” He ‘dots every i’
and ‘crosses every t’ - but his heart is empty.

The more he prays...the more he tries to obey what the bible
says...the more time he spends in worship...the emptiness in
his heart seems to grow.

He cries out to God: *‘What am I missing?’ ‘Why is my heart
not satisfied?’ ‘God, I’m doing everything I can to
obey...why isn’t that enough?’*

Person #3 is a hypocrite. He grew up going to church every
Sunday and Wednesday night. Sunday School, VBS, youth
group, special services, Sunday morning and Sunday evening
service. His parents are believers - faithful and serving in the
church. Their faith is genuine and their lives have been / are
being transformed by their faith. There was always joy and
love in their home - and God has blessed them in all sorts of
ways.

But this young man is a hypocrite. He is a Christian. When
he was younger he understood the Gospel. He understood
and believed that he was a sinner - and He needed a Savior -
and that Jesus Christ of Nazareth was God incarnate - and He
offered Himself as a sacrifice on the cross - to pay for the
sins of the world. He was buried, and then rose again -
conquering sin and death - offering new life - eternal life to
all who believe in Him.

He believes all of that...100% - but he was a hypocrite.
The pull of the world was stronger than the pull of
obedience.

He was so familiar with the church - with Jesus - that he
overlooked (maybe ignored?) the power, excitement and joy of
the Christian life - and he chose to follow the world's way of
living.

For many years, he looked the part on Sundays in church,
and the rest of the week, he left his faith in the church pew,
where he could pick it up next Sunday.

Drinking - drugs - parties - he jumped into the deep end of
the pool. These things were not actually the worst part. The
drinking, drugs, and parties were the symptoms - the deeper
problem was in his heart.

The deeper problem was a heart kept from God - a heart
which was holding onto and believing the promises of the
world. *'If you really want to have fun...'* *'Church stuff is
boring...'* *'Satisfaction and pleasure are not found in church
or with Jesus...'* *'You can have both...you don't have to
choose one or the other.'*

3 People...

One haunted and demoralized by their past.

One so religious and devout, but so empty.

One living a lie.

At first glance, God's grace and truth seem to be the Odd Couple. They seem to be in opposition to each other - on either side of the columns on the page.

Most people think you must choose one of them: *'It's either grace or truth...but you have to make a choice!'*

Many in the church believe if a church decides to fully commit to the path of grace, that a denial or at least a softening of the truth is only a matter of time.

Others believe a church which teaches the truth of the Bible cannot possibly be a place of grace - because in their mind, *'truth'* collides with grace.

But Jesus couldn't disagree more strongly with these two points of belief.

How do you think Jesus views grace and truth?

John tells us in **John 1:14**

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

God incarnate ("...the Word became flesh") - He revealed His glory, which means not only His supernatural power and resurrected body - but He revealed His perfection - He revealed perfect obedience along with an abundance of grace He offered sinners. To the woman caught in adultery,

"Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" 11 She said,

"No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more." (**John 8:10-11**)

To the cheat, swindling, stealing tax collector Zacchaeus He said, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.” (Luke 19:5)

To the thief on the cross, Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:43)

John tells us Jesus was “...full of grace and truth.”

Jesus was perfectly balanced in giving grace and giving truth.

His teaching the truth of God never violated or worked against the abundant grace of God.

In fact, the truth of God reveals our sins and our need for a Savior - which unlocks the power of God’s grace!

The truth, tracing back to the O.T. Law - reveals a problem (sin) we can’t solve without the grace of God.

The truth of Scripture opens the door to God’s grace - and on the other ‘side’ of saving grace, truth and grace, working together, guide us into fullness of our new life in Christ.

Truth & grace can overcome your past *John 4*

Your past may be full of painful experiences.

Your past may be full of sinful indulgences, it doesn’t matter - the grace of Christ can overcome your past!

The first story I shared is my fictional version of the *Samaritan Woman at the Well’s* past - her life before she met the truth and grace of Jesus.

The account of *'The Samaritan Woman at the Well'* is a well-known passage to many in the church - but so many (me included) judge the Samaritan woman Jesus talks with by the observable facts in the text. She comes alone to the well - which indicates she's a social outcast, and she has been married 5x - and is living with a man out of wedlock when she encounters Jesus.

I have always assumed she was a 'loose' woman - wild living - pursuing the flesh.

I took some creative liberty in the narrative I started the sermon with to prove a point: our judgments of her character may not be accurate. We may paint her with much more immorality than she deserves.

She may be more of a victim than we ever thought - and therefore, her heartache much more intense than we ever imagined.

There are many things going on in **John 4** - but one thing is clear: The woman has a great deal of pain - and is somewhat of an outcast in her town.

Another point made clear: the grace of Jesus overcomes her pain and guilt - overcomes her past - and she becomes the messenger of Good News to the town - and John tells us: (vs. 39-41)

Many Samaritans from that town believed in Him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." **(TRUTH & GRACE!!!)**

40 So when the Samaritans came to Him, they asked Him to stay with them, and He stayed there two days.

41 And many more believed because of His word.” (John 4:39-41)

Jesus told her truth and showed her grace - and her life was changed...and eternity was impacted and many Samaritans put their faith in Jesus!

Are you ashamed of your past - living with tremendous pain from your past? The truth and grace of Christ can overcome what you have done!

Truth and grace can free you from religion John 3

Nicodemus was a respected and accomplished Pharisee. He was “a ruler of the Jews” (vs. 1) and “the teacher of Israel” (vs. 10). These *titles* seem to indicate he held a very prominent role in leadership, along with teaching / communicating the Scriptures. Nicodemus was at the top of the Pharisee flow chart - he had a corner office with the executive restroom and a shaded parking spot. He was all about religion - he followed all the rules, yet something was missing, and it seems he thought Jesus would know the answers to his questions.

He had observed Jesus (vs. 2) - and rightly concluded He was not just another gifted teacher - God was with Him! As their conversation went on, Jesus shares with this Pharisee that he needed to be “born again”.

Jesus speaks of belief, not behavior - He speaks of new life, not simply reforming your life.

From vs. 15 - 18 Jesus mentions belief 5x! (*Read vs. 15-18*)

In **John 7:50-51**, Nicodemus, by this time possibly a believer in Jesus, he tries to slow down the Pharisees plan to arrest Jesus.

In **John 19:38**, John mentions Nicodemus a 3rd time. In this passage, Nicodemus is caring for Jesus' body as it is placed in the tomb. This would have been a public act done in opposition to the actions of the Pharisees - taking a public stand for Jesus - something which the Pharisees would certainly hear about if it wasn't seen by them directly.

The truth and grace Jesus shared with Nicodemus that night we read about in **John 3** gave Nicodemus the answers he was looking for - and he became a follower of Jesus.

What religion couldn't do, the truth and grace of Christ was able to accomplish.

Truth and grace can transform the hypocrite.

The 3rd person I told you about - the hypocrite...was me. I grew up in the church - a great family - blessed in so many ways - but I was a hypocrite - loving the world as I tried to love Christ.

But you can't have two masters. Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other." (Matt. 6:24)

I learned you can't love Christ and His Word...and love the world and the things of the world.

The truth and grace of Christ brought me to the point of realizing the good...the great things and great future I was risking because I was believing what the world was promising. I wandered from the truth, and I abused the grace of God.

In college, I began to realize the dead-end promises of the world - and I began to give my life back to Christ.

I can remember one Sunday night - in the church I grew up in - and I couldn't wait for the pastor to finish so I could go forward and recommit my life to Christ.

I didn't want to be a hypocrite any longer.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus talks of the house built on sand vs. the house built on the rock (7:24-27).

The rock-solid truth of God - and the grace of God's forgiveness is what helped me stop living a two-faced hypocritical life, and to live a genuine and real life of faith.

I don't live a perfect life by any means...but a real and genuine life - where I need the truth to guide me and the grace of God to cover me.

If you notice, in each case we've looked at this morning, God's truth and grace brought faith, a changed life, and in 2 of the cases created a desire to share God's grace (Gospel) and in the 3rd case to take a stand for Christ and serve in grace (Nicodemus)!

Have you experienced God's grace in Christ Jesus?
Have you been born again - put your faith in Christ -
been saved - converted?

Do you believe this *'theological odd couple'* - truth and grace - work in perfect harmony?

Or do you think if we commit to the path of grace it's only a matter of time before we abandon God's truth.

Or, if we speak the truth of Scripture we can't possibly be a place of grace.

The Samaritan Woman at the Well...

Nicodemus...

The woman caught in adultery...

Zacchaeus...

The thief on the cross...

The Apostle Paul...

Peter, John and all the other disciples...

All the O.T. Saints...

Every one of us...

We need both - we need the truth of Christ - and we need the grace of Christ.

Jesus was all about both - not one or the other.

John 1:17b

“...grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”

Apply it...

Learn to love God's truth and His grace.

They aren't opposed - they don't cancel each other out - they work together in perfect harmony.

God's truth leads us to God's grace.

God's grace liberates us to obey His truth with joy!

Know the difference between right judgment / wise judgment - and being judgmental - having a judgmental spirit.

The Samaritan Woman at the Well was lost - but we tend to judge her and make assumptions about her life with only a few facts in hand. We hold her to the standard we have - which is according to the *'light'* and truth we've been exposed to, and we fail to recognize she had much less *'light'* and truth than we do!

I don't think this practice is limited to her - I think we can easily fall into a pattern of judging the world: neighbors, co-workers, people we see at the grocery store - we look at their appearances, and make judgments of them - not knowing all the fact

and we judge according to the level of grace and truth we've been exposed to.

Lost people - those who never heard the name Jesus or never heard the truth and grace of Christ - are accountable before God to their level of Gospel exposure!

We must learn **NOT** to live with a judgmental spirit, but a spirit of grace and truth.

Let God judge.

We need to be His church - the *light of the world* - and we must be like Jesus - full of grace and truth, and sharing both at every opportunity we have.

Closing prayer