

***The Grace and Truth Paradox* by Randy Alcorn**, Multnomah Publishers, 2003, Sisters, OR (34 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols)

Chapter 1. A Two-Point Checklist of Christlikeness

1. Christians Recognizable

In the first century Christ's followers were recognized immediately. What gave them away?

It wasn't their buildings. They had none.

It wasn't their programs. They had none.

It wasn't their political power. They had none.

It wasn't their slick publications, TV networks, bumper stickers, or celebrities. They had none.

What was it?

"With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all." Acts 4:33

They testified to the truth about Christ and lived by His grace. Truth was the food they ate and the message they spoke. Grace was the air they breathed and the life they lived.

The world around them had never seen anything like it. It still hasn't. [Page 12]

2. Character of Christ Is Two Things

But what if the character of Christ was reducible to two ingredients?

In fact, it is:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... 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*." John 1:11-14, EMPHASIS ADDED

Jesus is full of two things: grace and truth. [Page 13]

3. Look at Us and See Jesus

The baby born in a Bethlehem barn was Creator of the universe. He pitched His tent on the humble camping ground of our little planet. God's glory no longer dwelt in a temple of wood and stone, but in Christ. He was the Holy of Holies.

But when He ascended back into the wide blue heavens, He left God's shekinah glory—that visible manifestation of God's presence—on earth. We Christians became His living temples, the new Holy of Holies (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19).

People had only to look at Jesus to see what God is like. *People today should only have to look at us to see what Jesus is like.* For better or worse, they'll draw conclusions about Christ from what they see in us. If we fail the grace test, we fail to be Christlike. If we fail the truth test, we fail to be Christlike. If we pass both tests, we're like Jesus. [Pages 13-14]

4. Need Grace and Truth

Some churches today embrace truth but need a *heavy dose of grace.*

Other churches talk about grace but cry out for a *heavy dose of truth.* [Page 15]

5. Grace and Truth Interdependent

The apparent conflict that exists between grace and truth isn't because they're incompatible, but because we lack perspective to resolve their paradox. The two are *interdependent.* We should never approach truth except in a spirit of grace, or grace except in a spirit of truth. Jesus wasn't 50 percent grace, 50 percent truth, but 100 percent grace, 100 percent truth. [Page 16]

Chapter 2. Essential and Inseparable

6. People Sensed Jesus Loved Them

Most sinners loved being around Jesus. They enjoyed His company, sought Him out, invited Him to their homes and parties. Today most sinners don't want to be around Christians. Unbelievers tore off the roof to get to Jesus. Sometimes they crawl out the windows to get away from us!

Why is that? What did Jesus show them that we don't?

Grace.

People sensed that Jesus loved them, even when He spoke difficult words. He was full of grace *and* truth. He drew them out of the night like a light draws moths. [Page 19]

7. Replacing Truth with Tolerance

Other churches try to make sinners feel comfortable. How? They never talk about sin. Never offend anyone. They replace truth with tolerance, lowering the bar so everyone can jump over it and we can all feel good about ourselves.

But Jesus said, "'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also" (John 15:20).

Something's wrong if all unbelievers hate us.
Something's wrong if all unbelievers like us.

If we accurately demonstrate grace *and* truth, some will be drawn to us and others will be offended by us just as they were by Jesus.

When we offend everybody, it's because we've taken on the truth mantle without grace. When we offend nobody, it's because we've watered down truth in the name of grace. [Page 20]

8. Need Both Truth and Grace

Martin Luther said that the devil doesn't care which side of the horse we fall off of-as long as we don't stay in the saddle. We need to ride the horse with one foot in the stirrup of truth, the other in the stirrup of grace. [Pages 20-21]

Chapter 3. What Is Grace?

9. Cost of Redemption

The cost of redemption cannot be overstated. The wonders of grace cannot be overemphasized. Christ took the hell He didn't deserve so we could have the heaven we don't deserve. [Page 29]

Chapter 4. What is Truth?

10. Speak More of Jesus

Godly living centers not on what we avoid, but on whom we embrace. Anytime we talk more about dos and don'ts than about Jesus, something's wrong. [Page 37]

11. More than Sin Management

The Christian life is far more than sin management. *Behavior modification that's not empowered by God's heart-changing grace is self-righteous, as repugnant to God as the worst sins people gossip about.* Children who grow up with graceless truth are repelled by self-righteousness and attracted to the world's slickly marketed grace-substitutes. [Page 37]

12. Truth Is More than Facts

Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:17).

Truth is more than mere facts. It's not just something we act upon. It acts upon us. We cannot change the truth, but the truth can change us. It sanctifies (sets us apart) from the falsehoods woven into our sin nature and championed by the world.

God has written His truth on human hearts (Romans 2:15). Shame and twinges of conscience come from recognizing that truth has been violated. When people hear truth spoken graciously, many are drawn to it because of the moral vacuum they feel. Hearts long for truth—even hearts that reject it.

We are to walk in the truth (3 John 1:3), love the truth, and believe the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:10, 12). All truth has a center of gravity: Jesus Christ, who declared, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6). He didn't say He would show the truth or teach the truth or model the truth. He is the truth. Truth personified. He's the source of truth, and the reference point for evaluating all truth-claims.

That's why if we get it wrong about Jesus, it doesn't matter what else we get right.
[Page 38]

13. What Is Actual Truth

We easily confuse what we *want* to be true with what actually *is* true. C.S. Lewis said he wrote to expound mere Christianity, "which is what it is and was what it was long before I was born and whether I like it or not."³ [Page: 39-40]

14. Christians Need to Be Bold

Some pastors and television preachers are well paid to play fast and loose with truth. But Charles Spurgeon said, "Christ's people must have bold, unflinching lion-like hearts, loving Christ first, and His truth next, and Christ and His truth beyond all the world."⁴ [Page 40]

Chapter 5. A Closer Look at Grace

15. Christ Does Not Withdraw His Hand

Spurgeon said:

"Our Lord Jesus is ever giving, and does not for a solitary instant withdraw his hand...the rain of His grace is always dropping, the river of His bounty is ever-flowing, and the wellspring of His love is constantly overflowing. As the King can never die, so His grace can never fail." ⁶ [Page 46]

16. Celebrate God's Grace and Truth

The apostle Paul himself was a murderer. Yet God not only forgave him; He elevated Paul to leadership in the church. *There are no limits to the forgiving grace of God.*

This world pours cold water onto the fires of grace and truth. As smoldering coals need each other to keep burning, we need to gather with others to celebrate Christ's grace and truth. A good church will teach you biblical truth and will also provide you with grace, acceptance, and support.⁷ [Page 48]

17. Amazing Grace

Imagine a slave ship captain, a cruel Englishman who acquired slaves from Africa and transported them in slave ships to be sold like animals at auction. Imagine that this man later writes lyrics that become the most popular song of English-speaking blacks in the entire world.

Unthinkable?

The song is "Amazing Grace." Some black churches sing it every Sunday. Sometimes it goes on and on, for ten or fifteen minutes. Many African-Americans love that song more than any other--even though it was written by a white man who sold black slaves and treated them like filth. [Pages 48-49]

18. Newton Remembered What Was Important

Eighty-two years old and blind, Newton said shortly before he died, "My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Saviour." [Page 49]

Chapter 6. A Closer Look at Truth

19. Don't be Deceived

This isn't a new problem. "Do not let the prophets...deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them,' declares the Lord" (Jeremiah 29:8-9)

You see, a speaker can be popular, a sermon can be greatly loved, a book can be a bestseller in Christian bookstores--and still be full of lies. [Pages 52-53]

20. Truth Is Bigger Than Us

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn said in his Nobel Prize acceptance address, "One word of truth outweighs the entire world." What did he mean? That the truth is bigger than us. Just as the Berlin Wall finally toppled, the weight of all the world's lies can be toppled by a single truth. Truth resonates in the human heart. People may resist it, yet it's the truth they need, for it's the truth that sets them free.

Tragically, Christians can be as untruthful as the world. Some Christian speakers regularly misrepresent the truth. The names of Christian celebrities are prominent on books they didn't write. Christian leaders take credit for columns written by their assistants. Christian

liberal arts colleges routinely publish doctrinal statements that many faculty members neither believe nor teach. Some Christian musicians take offerings for needy children, not divulging that they, retain 20 percent for themselves. When we fail to tell the truth, we fail to represent Jesus, who is the Truth. Pages 55-56]

21. Students Do Not Evaluate Truth Claims

University students, once known as truth-seekers, now have minds so "open" they don't critically evaluate truth-claims. They sit passively while professors affirm the random evolution of complex life forms. No mention is made of the biochemical discoveries of irreducible complexity at the cellular level, which refute Darwinism and constitute overwhelming scientific evidence for intelligent design. Many professors are not truth-seekers, but status quo gatekeepers, highly selective about which "truths" they allow in the classroom door.

Allan Bloom said in *The Closing of the American Mind* "There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative."¹⁰

"The really important thing (so they say) isn't finding the truth; it's searching for it."

Really? Try applying the same logic to your search for a job or parking space-or a flotation device when you're drowning."

22. Education Scorns the Existence of Truth

"Truth is whatever you sincerely believe. "

You can walk off a ledge sincerely believing you won't fall, but gravity cares nothing about your sincerity. We're not nearly as sincere as we imagine, but even when we are, we're often wrong. ¹¹

"What's true for you is true for you, and what's true for me is true for me. "

So, if we step off the roof at the same time, I'll fall because I believe in gravity, but you'll hover in the air because you don't?

Such silly statements are routine on some campuses. What's even sillier is that parents and students invest vast amounts of tuition money for the privilege of hearing them.

Think about it: Is education really possible in an environment that scorns the very existence of truth? Facts can be taught, skills learned, propaganda disseminated, diplomas dispensed. But that isn't education.

In many classrooms, those who believe Scripture are routinely accused of arrogance. Jesus said God's word is truth (John 17:17). It's not arrogance to believe what the Bible teaches. It's the opposite. Arrogance is when we try to tailor truth to our preferences. [Page 57]

Chapter 7. The Grace We Long For

23. Make Good People Nice

The story is told of a little girl who prayed, "Lord, make the bad people good and the good people nice." [Page 61]

24. Jesus Preached Against Self-righteousness

I'm not romanticizing taverns. But I am saying that Jesus, who had a reputation for investing time with sinners, would preach five sermons against self-righteous churches for every one against taverns! [Page 62]

25. Christ Raised the Bar of Holiness

Grace never lowers the standards of holiness. Jesus didn't lower the bar; He *raised* it! "You've heard that it was said, 'do not commit adultery.' I say don't look at a woman with lust" (see Matthew 5:27-28).

A home full of grace is also full of truth because grace doesn't make people less holy; it makes them more holy. Grace doesn't make people despise or neglect truth; it makes them love and follow truth. Far from a free pass to sin, grace is a supernatural empowerment *not* to sin (Titus 2:11-12).

Grace raises the bar, but it also enables us to joyfully jump over that bar.

Any concept of grace that leaves us-or our children-thinking that truth is unimportant is not biblical grace. [Pages 66-67]

26. Grace Unique to Christian Faith

During a British conference on comparative religions, scholars debated what belief, if any, was totally unique to the Christian faith.

Incarnation? The gods of other religions appeared in human form. Resurrection? Other religions tell of those returning from the dead. The debate went on until C. S. Lewis wandered into the room. The scholars posed the question to him.

"That's easy," Lewis replied. "It's grace."¹⁴ [Page 68]

Chapter 8. The Truth That Sets Us Free

27. Colleges Were Built to Teach Truth, Hospitals, Grace

The vast majority of American colleges were built with the vision and funding of Christians. Why? To teach truth.

Most American hospitals were built with the vision and funding of Christians. Why? To extend grace. [Page 72]

28. Not Avoid the Truth

The Christian life is not based on avoiding the truth but on hearing and submitting to it. The greatest kindness we can offer each other is the truth.

We've been schooled that it's inappropriate to say anything negative. Being a good witness once meant faithfully representing Christ, even when it meant being unpopular. Now it means "making people like us."

We've redefined *Christlike* to mean "nice."

By that definition, Christ wasn't always Christlike. He confronted people with sin, raised His voice, threw tables, and called people snakes, blind hypocrites, and white washed tombs. If we don't talk about sin and hell because we want to be nice, we're trying to be nicer than Jesus, who spoke a great deal about both. [Page 73]

29. Silence Isn't Grace, It's Cruelty

Grace is God's work to deliver us from the full extent of our depravity, and its full punishment. By underestimating depravity and denying eternal hell, Satan tries to lower redemption's price tag, cheapening the grace that paid the price.

Thirty years ago, many people chose churches based on whether the church believed and taught the truth. Today, many choose churches based on whether the church makes them feel comfortable. If a church tells the truth, it will gain some people but lose others.

One out of five women having an abortion in America claims to be a born-again Christian. Yet pastors tell me, "I don't talk about abortion because it will make our people feel guilty, since many have had abortions."

Isn't that exactly why we should talk about it? To help people-men as well as women since men are always involved-recognize and deal with their guilt and receive Christ's grace? And to help others avoid the sin that creates the guilt?

I know many women who have experienced God's forgiveness and profound healing after abortions. The women who suffer most are those who do not face the truth. Deep inside they know it, their consciences accuse them, and they pursue self-destructive behaviors. Our silence isn't grace-it's cruelty. [Page 76]

Chapter 9. Grace And Truth Together

30. Righteousness by Externals

In the 1930s, German church leaders defended Adolf Hitler as a leader who didn't smoke or drink, encouraged women to dress modestly, and opposed pornography.

If that's your checklist, Hitler was a swell guy. Whenever we judge righteousness by externals, we get into trouble. The Pharisees had it together on the outside. They used truth to elevate themselves while lowering everyone else. [page 78]

31. Offering Grace and Truth

Instead of the world's apathy and tolerance, we offer grace. Instead of the world's relativism and deception, we offer truth. [Page 87]

32 Need Both Grace and Truth

Truth without grace crushes people and ceases to be truth. Grace without truth degenerates into deceitful tolerance

Truth without grace degenerates into judgmental legalism. Grace without truth degenerates into deceitful tolerance. [Page 88]

33. Both Are Necessary

Grace and truth are both necessary. Neither is sufficient

We need to examine ourselves and correct ourselves. We who are truth-oriented need to go out of our way to affirm grace. We who are grace-oriented need to go out of our way to affirm truth.

"Hate the sin, but love the sinner." No one did either like Jesus.

Truth hates sin. Grace loves sinners.

Those full of grace and truth do both. [Page 88]

Conclusion

34. Thirst for the Real Christ

The grace and truth paradox is also a paradigm—a way of looking at life. People need the directions of truth to know where to go. Then they need the empowerment of grace to help them get there.

The world is weary of all the counterfeit Christs made in the image of grace-despising and truth-despising hearts. People thirst for the real Jesus. Nothing less can satisfy. Grace and truth are His fingerprints.

We show people Jesus only when we show them grace and truth.

Anything less than both is neither. [Page 92]

Notes

1. C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (New York: Scholastic, 1995), 80.
2. C. S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (New York: Collier Books, 1970), 214-5.
3. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Collier Books, 1960), vii.
4. Charles Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening* (Geanies House, Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications Ltd., 1994), Morning April 5.
5. As quoted by LaTonya Taylor, "The Church of O," *Christianity Today*, 1 April 2002, 45.
6. Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening*, Morning May 16.
7. If you are looking for such a church in your area but can't find one, contact our organization and we'll assist you: 503-663-6481 or info@epm.org.
8. James Patterson and Peter Kim, *The Day America Told the Truth* (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1991), 25-6, 49, 66.
9. See Michael Belie, *Darwin's Black Box* (New York: The Free Press, 1996); William Dembski, *Intelligent Design* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1999).
10. Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1963), 156.
11. J. Budziszewski, *How to Stay Christian in College* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 1999), 68-78.
12. "How America's Faith Has Changed Since 9-11," *Barna Research Online*, 26 November 2001. <http://www.barna.org/cgi-bin/PagePressRelease.asp?PressReleaseID=102&Reference=D> (accessed 24 September 2002).

13. Adapted from Philip Yancey, *What's So Amazing about Grace?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishers, 1997), 49-51.

14. *Ibid.*, 45.

The author and Eternal Perspective Ministries can be reached at www.epm.org; 503-663-6981; 2229 East Burnside #23, Gresham, OR, 97030.