

Living As People of Grace and Truth

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[0 : 00] What do you think the average person in this country who is not a Christian would say if they were asked, describe your opinion of a Christian?

How would you describe Christians? Now think about it. We're talking about the average person in this world, in this country, who is not a believer. They don't go to church.

How would they describe Christians? Now I want you to think for a moment, there's a lot of people who do not know Christians. And here in the South we may think, well everybody, even non-believers, even atheists know a lot of Christians.

Everyone does not. Many people live and function in circles of unbelievers. So what they know about Christians is what they hear, what they read, what they see from a distance maybe.

Well according to Tom Rainer, the former president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Lifeway Christian Resources and Lifeway Research.

[1 : 05] His research teams found this response of non-Christians when asked, what do you think about Christians?

Rainer and his team summarized it like this. Christians are against more things than they are for. All the responses that they got, they described it this way.

Christians are against more things than they are for. That's how unbelievers think. Now Rainer quotes one unbeliever in how they responded to the survey.

Look at it. It just seems to me Christians are mad at the world and mad at each other. They are so negative. They seem unhappy.

I have no desire to be like them and stay upset all the time. Now that's just an opinion. What somebody thinks.

[2 : 09] Let's go a step further. How do you think most non-Christians would describe Christians right now as they observe our attitudes, words and actions during this year's election?

What do or would unbelievers around here say about our church? Now when I say our church, that's us. What would they say about me if they've heard me preach over the past three months? And then what would they say about you if they've had a few conversations with you about what's going on right now? About the political landscape.

Now hold that thought. Hold that for a moment. I want to switch gears and ask another question. If you could use only three words to describe how the Lord wants people to view us as Christians, what would those three words be?

Now just think. What would Jesus or how would Jesus want people to describe us, His followers?

[3 : 33] And let's use three words. In terms of our character, our speech, the way we interact with them. Well I think a strong case can be made from the life and teaching of Jesus for these three words.

Love, grace, and truth. Now I am positive, absolutely sure that love is at the top of the list because that's what Jesus actually said in John chapter 13.

Look at this. This is how Jesus wants us to be known. A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also are loved one another.

By this all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another. No doubt is there. Our Lord and Savior has called us to be known for demonstrating love really in everything that we do but especially for one another.

I think that applies to our discussions of issues. The way that we present our views defend our views politically even.

[5 : 02] Now you might scratch your head think for a moment you can't do that. You can't discuss politics. You can't discuss the issues of today with an attitude of love.

Well it's hard. I agree. But it's not impossible when you understand biblical love Jesus did it. He perfectly demonstrated the qualities of grace and truth throughout his life here on earth as John tells us in the first chapter of his gospel.

If you would turn to John chapter 1 because we're going to look there this morning and as you're turning I want to point out some things. Over the past three months we in these studies on Sunday morning we have looked at some of the most controversial issues of our day from a biblical perspective.

I did a series calling Thinking Biblically and we tried to think biblically about a lot of different issues hot button issues of today. I began back in July emphasizing how we need to support law enforcement.

[6 : 20] God has ordained that government Romans chapter 13 keep order that the government punish evildoers wrongdoers reward good behavior.

We talked about how law enforcement officers they enforce that law. They're the ones actually on the ground government agents so to speak to keep us safe to punish wrongdoers lawbreakers even to reward those who do what's right.

Well we looked at that in light of all that's going on today. We looked next at a biblical view of race hot button issue isn't it?

Well we looked at some of the things the Bible teaches about race. Then we looked at the evils of socialism over about three weeks how that is not a system that God approves.

It's not how God designed for people to take care of themselves and their families. We've also looked over these past three months at such issues as the sinfulness of homosexual behavior.

[7 : 36] How same-sex marriage violates God's design for marriage. and how transgenderism is just not real.

It's not how God created people. He created people male and female. Now I tried to address each of those issues from a biblical perspective and I make no apologies for any of those messages. I affirm each one. As I prepared this message I thought about saying I support every word I said but I probably said some words I know I let some come out that I wish I could have taken back the words but I make no apologies for those messages and everything we looked at in scripture it is true it is right.

I affirm each one. I am glad that they're available online for anyone to see. now I know that 90 something percent of this church believe with me what the Bible teaches on these issues but I also know that while I was excited even zealous at times in preaching on the truth of God's word about these issues I need to be equally zealous in preaching it in a loving and a gracious way because that's what Jesus did I mean he was firm hard at times called a hypocrite a hypocrite but Jesus that's the loving thing when you point out error and evildoers it's wrong it's not an act of love to let it go to pretend something does not exist

Jesus demonstrated a perfect balance of love grace and truth throughout his life throughout his teaching I want you to see where it begins or where the description begins in John chapter 4 and what I want us to do this morning is to see what we can learn about being the Lord's faithful representatives witnesses in today's culture and doing it both graciously as well as truthfully 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 John bore witness about him and cried out this is John the Baptist this was he of whom I said he who comes after me ranks before me because he was before me for from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace for the law was given through Moses grace and truth came through

[10 : 48] Jesus let's think together what is grace and truth that Jesus demonstrated that we're to follow suit with let's look at grace first outside the New Testament this word in the first century this word for grace referred to something that caused joy it was used to describe something that was attractive in a person something that brought pleasure to others it could be a simple thing somebody's gracious their smile brought joy their their willing to help their word of wisdom word of comfort just whatever outside the New Testament this word grace when John was writing it was used to describe something that was just good and positive attractive in another person he came to have the idea of a favor or a kindness that was done to another person when New

Testament scholar Leon Morris says that this idea is included in the New Testament word grace but the New Testament emphasis a different aspect of the word undeserved favor more specifically the undeserved favor of God you are aware know when you talk about grace from the Bible's

perspective you're usually talking about God's undeserved favor well when scripture says that Jesus was full of grace it means it does mean that he had a winsome personality he was kind and loving he demonstrated such grace to people who did not deserve it Jesus' greatest demonstration of grace though is seen in his death on the cross to save undeserving sinners like you and me that's also the father's greatest demonstration of grace he sent

Jesus into this world as the scripture says in Romans 5 while we were still sinners Christ died for us so Jesus was full of grace but he was also full of truth look at the word truth we usually think of that simply it's the opposite of faults remember those true faults tests in school well that's how the word is used in the Bible at times but the word is broader in the Bible the word truth in the Bible is sometimes translated faithful reliable trustworthy God a lot of times is referred to as a God who is reliable he's faithful he's trustworthy talking about he's true well Jesus described God's word as truth in John chapter 17 John 17 is Jesus prayer and Jesus in the course of praying said your word talking to the father your word is truth that should give us confidence when we read the Bible whenever you read it whenever we look at this passage this morning that is God's faithful reliable and trustworthy word now get back to Jesus when the scripture says that Jesus was full of truth it means that he embodied he demonstrated and he taught the reliable faithful trustworthy truth of God Jesus was always full of both grace and truth he balanced them both in the way that he lived the way he interacted with people and in things that he taught now as Christians we are followers of Jesus he is the one we are to become like God's working in us to enable us to become like him we need to learn to balance grace and truth just like he did we need to learn to balance it today so number two how can we be people of grace and truth first thing

I want to understand is we cannot on our own we will struggle and everyone in this room you have a tendency to be more the person of truth or more the person of grace but the idea is we need to be both just as Jesus was both by the power of the Spirit of God who lives within us we can develop more balance if you're struggling with grace by God's grace help enablement you can become more gracious you can learn to speak the truth in love so to speak but in order for that to happen we've got first of all right now start by admitting admitting where we are out of balance some of us in this room we are more focused on truth to the neglect of grace some of us know this very well some of us maybe don't even worry about it because we think truth is so much more important some of us we like to emphasize and talk about the issues of this that

[16:24] I've been looking at the last three months some of us like to really emphasize the sinfulness of same sex marriage we like to really major on what's wrong in this country in other people's lives and just really hammer it home with no thought of grace of mercy of showing love to those who disagree that can make us come across as harsh as angry that can cause some people to think we hate the sinner just like we hate the sin a commitment to truth with no grace turns people against the Christian faith it's not enough just to be right just to believe right think right speak right condemn what's wrong that can turn a lot of people off as

Tom Rainer's research pointed out that can turn a lot of people just close the door to their even thinking about becoming a follower of Jesus now in this room there are other people who are more focused on grace to the neglect of truth some people in this room live in fear of offending someone else they never want to ruffle anybody's feathers and so in their attempt to never offend they avoid the truth some people only focus on being gracious and no matter what they're not going to take a stand they're not going to speak up there are times when in trying to be gracious trying to never cause controversy trying to never rock the boat there are times that our silence can make people think we disagree with the truth we won't stand on the truth that misrepresents what it means to be a

Christian no one can follow Jesus without embracing the truth of God's word and the gospel message itself is offensive Paul talks about that in great length in 1 Corinthians the first chapter only in chapter 2 the gospel message that we are sinners and can't save ourselves and the only source of salvation is Jesus who died on a cross and arose from the grave Paul said that's foolishness to pagans the gospel is offensive the truth of the word of God in many ways is offensive to today's culture so what I want us to see is you cannot ignore the truth try to distance yourself from what the Bible says is clearly right and wrong and be a faithful follower of Jesus but at the same time now we're talking about balance we've got to be people of grace and truth just as an airplane needs two wings to fly

Christians and churches need the two wings of grace and truth in order for the gospel to fly as God intends for it to right now we in this room we need to ask God to help us to be both a person of grace and a person of truth here's a thought on how to do that we need to learn to look at people as Jesus did Jesus looked at people with love compassion with mercy we need to understand that no one is beyond God's ability to save to change to forgive no one is beyond God's ability to make a child of God grace so we can't just write people off and that applies to people in any kind of sinful lifestyle no one is beyond the reach of

God's grace you know many people like the hymn amazing grace for a lot of people it's their favorite one one of the hymns that more people know than any other probably well if we really believe what we sing when we sing it if we really believe we need to act like it we need to never write anybody off think no one can be touched by God changed by God and made a Christian in fact we need to be channels of God's grace and God's mercy for people you know many times God works through our witness our example our words our encouragement maybe even our confrontation so we need to be people who to be gracious we need to look at people as

[21 : 55] Jesus did through these eyes of grace and mercy number two we need to look at life as Jesus did according to the truth of God's word we need to understand that no one is exempt from living life the way God describes it in his word every human being on the face of the earth is going to stand before God on judgment day and they're going to give an accounting of their life and God's going to evaluate it based on the truth of his word the moral principles ethical principles of his word everybody's going to be evaluated according to their relationship with Jesus but the Bible says much about we're going to be evaluated according to how we've lived and the standard is revealed in God's word now what I want to ask you to do this morning admit where you are on this continuum of grace and truth

I want to ask you to make a commitment with God's help to become a more balanced person and be both gracious and truthful let's just be more specific now some in this room need to focus more on being a person of grace I'm in that category I know that a lot of you in that category you know that we have a tendency sometimes to focus so much on the truth on what we know is right that we just we're not gracious about it here's a thing we need to realize we can be right about a lot of things but because we emphasize the truth in such a harsh unloving kind of way we don't have the effect on people that we want to have we don't help people come along and embrace the truth not because of what we believe but the way we express it the way we don't listen to other people the way we don't try to be gracious in maybe convincing them and that may be the case in your home or where you work your friends at school truth is sometimes we can turn people against the truth because of our lack of grace our lack of mercy our lack of love

I want to challenge you if this is your problem you're all about the truth you're all about what's right to the neglect of grace focus more on being gracious ask God to help you to see it ask God to help you see how you turn people off not because of the truth but the way you portray or speak about the truth and keep in mind that grace is undeserved you don't wait until somebody deserves it to show them this kind of grace you give it while they're still undeserving just like God shows it to us now some people in this room you need to become more committed to the truth think about it are you so gracious that you don't ever want to rock the boat in any situation are you reluctant to ever take a stand on a controversial issue because you're afraid of offending someone do the people you work with people you go to school with people you associate with do they not know where you stand on the issues of today because you'll never speak up you'll never let it be known because you just can't stand controversy you're afraid of potential conflict

I want to encourage you believe God's word and don't be ashamed to believe it to talk about it to live it when the Bible is clear and I want to emphasize this when the Bible is clear about something being morally right or wrong you can't be afraid to embrace that you can't be afraid somebody's going to find out about that you've got to learn to believe the truth take a stand on the truth and when needed speak that truth in love as Paul tells us to God's goal for every Christian is that we become like Jesus demonstrating a balance grace and truth God will use us as people of both grace and truth to be effective witnesses for him to be effective representatives of him everywhere we go in life this way

God will use a church that is full of grace and truth to impact a community if you are a Christian I want you to ask the Lord right now to help you develop this balance of grace and truth in your attitude that's where it begins in your heart within you and then in your words the way you talk about

people the way you talk about issues the way you debate and there's nothing wrong with the debating there's nothing wrong with discussions there's nothing wrong with having discussions where the other person disagrees with you that is actually healthy it used to be a part of the political process in our country to have civil debate to speak and listen and you didn't have to agree but you heard facts you heard reality not little sound bites designed to cut people down or to avoid serious discussions as is the case today we me all of us we need to ask

[28 : 56] God to help us develop this balance and I want to encourage you in this politically hostile time don't compromise the truth don't be afraid of it don't run from it but at the same time don't beat people over the head with it don't cut people with it speak the truth in love be gracious allow people to agree to disagree if you're not a Christian I want to encourage you this morning to come to Christ now admit your need of a Savior admit your sin and repent of it turn from it put your trust in Jesus that his death on the cross was for you commit your life to him commit your life to being a person of grace and truth like him with the help that he'll give you

I want to stress it again it is only with God's help that we can live as people of grace and truth both so right now listen to the Lord Lord because he's speaking to just about everybody in this room I need to be more a person who will stand for the truth or I need to be a person who will speak the truth and love more I need to be more gracious in the way that I live out and talk about the truth so listen to the Lord now ask him to help you and respond to him in whatever it is he's calling you to do would you pray with me Father help us right now to hear you to listen carefully help us to see dear God that it's not enough just to believe and stand for the truth of your word we need to do it the right way Lord help me as pastor of this church not to speak the truth in anger and frustration help us as a church not to speak of the truth promote and defend the truth in ungracious unloving kinds of ways

Lord help every individual in this room to not misinterpret boldness for the truth of your word with anger bad attitudes hateful spirits as they discuss and defend the faith Lord I pray for people in this room who who are gracious but afraid to offend when it comes to standing upon your word help them dear God to know that silence while is great on many occasions it's not always good it's not always healthy help them to know dear God while they should never seek controversy sometimes being faithful to the truth is controversial even costly

Lord you know where each of us needs work to achieve this balance Lord we know we'll struggle with it till we die or Jesus comes back but help us not to accept just totally focusing on either extreme help us to desire right now and then put forth the effort day by day situation by situation to be both people of grace and truth just like Jesus and let's just in attitude of prayer listen to the Lord and respond to him do what he's calling you to do right now make that kind of commitment go to God kind of