

[p.17>] Once upon a time in a faraway galaxy, there was a highly advanced people. They had everything they could ever desire: technology to solve every problem, and more leisure than we get in a lifetime. But they were bored. Bored to tears. They needed something new—something exciting—to liven up their planet.

A committee was established to look into the matter. They discussed coming up with a new sport. Or developing a new amusement park. Finally, an alien named Beezy proposed the winning idea.

"How about creating a god?" he suggested.

Everyone agreed it was a wonderful idea. "It will give our people something to do on Sunday," one said. "And it will be great for conversations," said another.

So they tried to invent a god. But to no avail. Beezy, who had been placed in charge of the research and development of a new god, called all the committee members together.

"Look, this just isn't working," he said. "What good is a god we can invent ourselves? We're smart enough to know that's not a real god. Why don't we find us a god instead—like that God the earthlings worship?"

The committee agreed, and soon afterward Beezy took a business trip to the Planet Earth. Under his invisible cloak, he visited dozens and dozens of churches and religious institutions. He took copious notes and spent hours writing up his report.

When he returned, the committee gathered, eager to hear of his findings. "Fellow aliens," he greeted them. "I have returned not with one god, but with two."

A gasp of astonishment rippled through the room.

"The name of the first god, or should I say goddess, is Grace. A **[p.18>]** very attractive goddess she is. She talked about love often. 'Get along, be friends, be nice,' she'd say. 'And if you can't be good, I'll forgive you anyway.' " Beezy looked perplexed. "The only thing is, I'm not sure what she would forgive, since they didn't seem to have any rules to break."

Beezy went on. "I especially liked the things the followers of Grace did, like feeding poor people and visiting prisoners in jail. However"—he shook his head—"these followers of Grace seemed so *lost*. They kept doing the same bad things over and over, and they never seemed to know where they were going.

"Then there's the other god." Beezy took a deep breath. "This god is definitely a man, and his name is Truth. Truth is just as mean as Grace is nice. He kept telling the people all sorts of things about them that made them feel very bad, and his followers did the same thing. But there's a good side to Truth," Beezy reassured the committee. "He campaigns against some very nasty enemies, such as lying, cheating, adultery, abortion, and drunkenness. He's like a big religious street sweeper, sweeping away all his enemies. The only trouble is, he not only sweeps away bad things; he also sweeps away the people who do the bad things. As for the smiles you see on the followers of Grace—forget it. All Truth's followers do is scowl and scream."

Needless to say, after hearing Beezy's report, the committee were ready to opt for the new amusement park because they didn't like either god. But Beezy had one last suggestion.

"We have all this wonderful technology for mixing repelling elements, like oil and water," he said. "How about if we try mixing Grace and Truth?"

GRACE AND TRUTH DIVIDED

Our God *is* a God "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). We often hear the phrase "full of grace and truth," but we rarely stop and realize its implications for our struggles here on earth. What *are* grace and truth? Why are they so important?

Let's take grace first. *Grace is the unmerited favor of God toward people.* Grace is something we have not earned and do not deserve. As Frederick Buechner says, "Grace is something you can never get but only be given. There's no way to earn it or deserve it or bring it about any more than you can deserve the taste of raspberries and cream or earn good looks or bring about your own birth."

To put it another way, grace is unconditional love and acceptance. Such love is the foundation upon which all healing of the human spirit [[p.19>](#)] rests. It is also the essence of God. "God is love," writes the apostle John (1 John 4:8). And God loves us freely, without condition.

The Bible itself does not clearly distinguish between grace and love. As the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* comments, "Love stresses God's personal disposition toward unworthy creatures, while grace stresses his freedom from obligation in saving them. But the distinction is not clearly nor consistently made. Both love and grace come to us through Christ (Rom. 5:8; Gal. 1:6). And both are unique in that they are undeserved."

Grace is the *first* ingredient necessary for growing up in the image of God. Grace is unbroken, uninterrupted, unearned, accepting *relationship*. It is the kind of relationship humanity had with God in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were loved and provided for. They knew God's truth, and they had perfect freedom to do God's will. In short, they were secure; they had no shame and anxiety. They could be who they truly were.

Perhaps you have experienced this kind of love and grace with someone. You can be exactly who you are. You do not need to hide your thoughts or feelings; you do not need to perform; you do not need to do anything to be loved. Someone knows the real you, and loves you anyway.

Grace, then, is the relational aspect of God's character. It shows itself in his unconditional connection to us. The first "god" Beezy discovered had this characteristic: Grace was a goddess of compassion and relationship. Her followers did all sorts of loving things for one another; they gave of themselves freely. They tried to connect with people who were in pain and to help them out of their pain. They lived in togetherness.

Those who worshiped Grace had only one problem: they heard little truth spoken. As a result, they continued to fall into bad situations that required more and more grace. It's not that the goddess Grace minded giving more. Grace's grace had no limit. However, Grace's followers needed direction to keep them from falling into the same old patterns over and over again. They needed guidance to steer them away from trouble.

This is where Truth comes in. The second god that Beezy found was very good at setting limits on bad behavior. He gave his followers lots of direction; he told them exactly what they could do and what they could not do. They knew clearly the difference between what was right and what was wrong, what was

good and what was not good. They had firm boundaries about where they could play and where they could not.

Truth is the *second* ingredient necessary for growing up in the image of God. Truth is what is real; it describes how things really are. [p.20>]

Just as grace is the *relational* aspect of God's character, truth is the *structural* aspect of his character. Truth is the skeleton life hangs upon; it adds shape to everything in the universe. God's truth leads us to what is real, to what is accurate. Just as our DNA contains the form that our physical life will take, God's truth contains the form that our soul and spirit should take.

All of this sounds wonderful, but as was the case with Grace, Truth had his own problems. He was mean. He didn't seem to care about the people who were violating his standards. All he cared about was wiping out the bad. He had none of the compassion Grace demonstrated; at times he seemed downright uncaring. In short, he had no relational aspects: he lacked forgiveness, favor, mercy, compassion—all of the attributes that flowed freely from Grace. If people failed, he just threw them out, or yelled at them.

As Grace left Beezy wanting structure, Truth left Beezy wanting love.

All of us, to some degree, have experienced these two gods—the loving one for whom anything goes and the hard one who lets nothing slide. As you have probably already realized, these two gods are aspects of the one true God's nature, aspects that different churches emphasize. What you may not realize is that these different "gods" are really symbols of the human condition after the fall, when sin ripped grace and truth apart.

TRUTH WITHOUT GRACE

When Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden, they had both grace and truth united in one God. When they sinned, they drove a wedge between themselves and God; they lost their grace-filled and truthful relationship with God.

Without grace, Adam and Eve felt shame: when they heard God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, they hid from him. When God calls out, "Where are you?" Adam explains that he was hiding because he was afraid (Gen. 3:8-10). Shame and guilt had entered the world; human beings were no longer safe.

After Adam and Eve cut themselves off from a relationship with God, they also severed their connection to grace and truth, for those come through relationship with God. However, God did not let them stay isolated for long. Seeing Adam and Eve in their lost state, he decided to give them direction; he gave them truth in the form of the [p.21>] law. The law is a blueprint, or a structure, for people to live by. It offers them guidance, and it sets limits for them.

There was only one problem: God gave them truth without grace. Adam and Eve had to try to live up to God's standards. They soon learned that they could never measure up. No matter how hard they tried to perform, they would always come up short. *Truth without grace is judgment.* It sends you straight to hell, literally and experientially.

Paul writes to the Romans about truth without grace—the law—and the things it does to us:

| Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every

mouth may be silenced, and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. (3:19-20)

Law brings wrath. (4:15)

The law was added so that the trespass might increase. (5:20)

For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death. (7:5)

Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. (7:9-10)

And to the Galatians Paul writes:

All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." (3:10)

We were held prisoners by the law. (3:23)

You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. (5:4)

And James gives us this discouraging bit of news:

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. (2:10) [**p.22>**]

When we look at what the Scripture says about the law, about truth without grace, we see that the law silences us, brings anger, increases sin, arouses sinful passions, brings death, puts us under a curse, holds us prisoner, alienates us from Christ, and judges us harshly. No wonder Beezy did not like Truth!

The law without grace destroys us. No one ever grows when they are under the law, for the law put us into a strictly legal relationship with God: "*I'll love you only if you do what is true or right.*" Getting truth before grace, or truth before relationship, brings guilt, anxiety, anger, and a host of other painful emotions, as this story of Ruth shows.

Ruth's missionary father had insisted that his twenty-two-year-old daughter come to see me. Ruth, a college student, was suffering from depression. She had no appetite and had trouble sleeping and studying. Her father accompanied her to the appointment.

"What's the problem?" I asked Ruth, after we had chatted for a few minutes. But it was her father who responded.

"Well, it's pretty obvious," he said, folding his arms across his chest. "She's not living like she should."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"She's doing drugs and sleeping around," he said with disgust. "Plus she's flunking out of college, and she has no idea what she wants to do with her life." Before I could ask another question, he continued,

"If she read her Bible and went to church, she wouldn't be so depressed. But all she wants to do is hang around those reprobate friends of hers."

"What would happen if she began to do all of the things you think she should?" I asked.

"Well, then she would be happy like her mother and I, and the Lord would bless her."

I could see that I was not going to get very far with Ruth's father, so I thanked him for his information and asked if I could talk with Ruth alone.

When her father had left, Ruth was still hesitant to talk. She refused to answer any of my questions with more than a yes or no. Finally I said, "Ruth, I think if I had to live with your father, I'd take drugs too. Does his attitude have anything to do with your discouragement?"

Ruth nodded. Her eyes filled with tears.

"You are an adult and this is an adults' hospital," I said, "I don't see that you are in any danger to yourself or anyone else, so you are free to go. But before you leave, let me tell you what I think is going on. [p.23>]

"I don't know all of the story, but I can tell that you're very depressed, and I *don't* think it is because you aren't doing the things your father thinks you should do. I think there are other reasons, very good, logical reasons, that he doesn't understand. If you would like to stay, I think we can help you to feel better. If you do stay, though, it will have to be your choice, not his. If he's upset about something, he can get help for himself."

Ruth sat stiffly in her chair, staring at me through her tears. "I'll leave you alone a few minutes to think about it," I said.

Ruth did decide to check in, and what I had suspected was true. Ruth had had many years of "truth without grace." As a result, she was experiencing the things the Bible says the law produces: bad feelings and failure. Everywhere she turned, she ran into some "should," and very little acceptance. The law of sin and death had taken its toll on her, and it was a painful struggle for her to break free of its grip.

As I watched her struggle, I could not help thinking back to what the Bible says about truth without grace: it silences us, brings anger, increases sin, arouses sinful passions, brings death, puts us under a curse, holds us prisoner, alienates us from Christ, and judges us harshly.

GRACE WITHOUT TRUTH

Truth without grace is deadly, but as Beezy discovered, grace without truth leads to less than successful living as well. In Grace's church, Beezy saw people who were loving, but directionless. In actuality, Grace was not this goddess's real name. In the same way that Truth (without grace) can be called Judgment, Grace (without truth) can be named License. The Scriptures write about her also:

You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature. (Gal. 5:13)

The acts of sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and

witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Gal. 5:19-21)

What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? (Rom. 6:15-16) [p.24>]

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. (Col. 3:5)

For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, carousing, and detestable idolatry. (1 Peter 4:3)

He who ignores discipline comes to poverty and shame, but whoever heeds correction is honored. (Prov. 13:18)

In the same way that Ruth's home—one of truth without grace—had led to negative consequences, a home of "grace without truth" can also have devastating results.

Sam was admitted into our hospital program after an accidental drug overdose. He had neglected to keep track of how much cocaine he was snorting. Although Sam was twenty-eight, he dressed like a teenager—torn jeans, a faded Hard Rock Cafe T-shirt, and high-top tennis shoes with the laces untied.

In the first few sessions we discovered that, although Sam had a genius IQ, he had flunked out of two colleges and had never been able to hold down a job. His relational life was equally troubled. He would totally lose himself in a relationship and recklessly abandon the rest of his responsibilities. In the process, he would smother whomever he was dating and scare her away. At the time he was admitted, his latest girlfriend had just left him.

When we asked Sam about his family, he told us that his father had died when Sam was four. Depressed and withdrawn for many years, his mother had never remarried. In an attempt to make up for the loss of their father, she had tried to be as nice to her children as possible. To hear Sam tell it, he had lived "the life of Riley." He had had few responsibilities and plenty of money. His mother had rarely disciplined him when he got into trouble. In fact, several times she had bailed him out of jail when he had been arrested for shoplifting, disorderly conduct, and drug possession.

At first, Sam's lifelong patterns continued at the hospital unit: he would sleep late, miss activities, forget assignments, and fail to groom himself properly. The lack of limits in his life—the lack of truth and discipline—had led to a chaotic lifestyle.

The hospital staff, however, refused to protect Sam from the consequences of his actions as his mother had. Sam learned, after some strong guidance and painful confrontations, to fulfill his responsibilities. [p.25>]

And, to his surprise, he discovered that he felt much better about life when he was pulling his own weight.

The Bible doesn't commend either one of Beezy's gods: Truth apart from Grace, nor Grace apart from

Truth. Beezy's final suggestion was a good one: how about mixing Grace and Truth together? He wasn't the first to think of this: "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*. From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; *grace and truth came through Jesus Christ*" (John 1:14, 16-17, italics mine).

This passage shows both how people fail and how they are redeemed. Failure comes through the law, and redemption through Jesus. It is only through him that we can realize two ingredients of growth: grace and truth. It is through him that we can come back into the same relationship Adam had: an unbroken connection (grace) to the One who is reality (truth).

We have seen the destruction that occurs when grace and truth are divided. Let's look at what happens when grace and truth get together.

GRACE AND TRUTH TOGETHER

Grace and truth together reverse the effects of the fall, which were separation from God and others. Grace and truth together invite us out of isolation and into relationship. Grace, when it is combined with truth, invites *the true self*, the "me" as I really am, warts and all, into *relationship*. It is one thing to have safety in relationship; it is quite another to be truly known and accepted in this relationship.

With grace alone, we are safe from condemnation, but we cannot experience true intimacy. When the one who offers grace also offers truth (truth about who we are, truth about who he or she is, and truth about the world around us), and we respond with our true self, then real intimacy is possible. Real intimacy always comes in the company of truth.

Jesus' treatment of the adulterous woman in John 8:3-11 provides a wonderful example of safety and intimacy:

Jesus had gone to the temple at dawn to teach the people. He had just sat down when the teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in an adulterous woman and made her stand before the group.

"Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery," they said. "In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do [p.26>] you say?" The Pharisees were trying to trap Jesus. The Romans did not allow the Jews to carry out the death sentence, so if Jesus said, "Stone her," he would be in conflict with the Romans. If he said, "Don't stone her," he could be accused of undermining Jewish law.

But Jesus refused to fall into their trap. He bent down, and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he stood up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."

When they heard his answer, they began to slink away, one by one. Soon Jesus was left alone with the woman. He asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

"No one, sir," she said.

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

In this one encounter, Jesus shows what it means to know grace and truth in him. He offered this woman grace in the form of forgiveness and acceptance. He said, in effect, that she did not have to die

for her sin. She was accepted and did not have to be separated from him. He also showed the power of grace as an agent to end separation from her fellow human beings as well. The Pharisees were no different from her: she was a sinner, and they were sinners. Jesus even invited the Pharisees to commune with her as a member of the human race, an invitation they declined. Grace has the power to bring us together with God and with others, if others will accept it.

But Jesus did not stop with just acceptance. He accepted her *with full realization* of who she was: an adulteress. He accepted her true self, a woman with sinful desires and actions. He then gives her direction for the future: "Go now and leave your life of sin." These two ingredients together—acceptance and direction—serve to bring the real self into relationship, the only way that healing ever takes place.

Jesus said it in another way in John 4:23-24: "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in *spirit and truth*, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit and his worshipers must worship *in spirit and in truth*" (italics mine). We must worship God in *relationship and in honesty*, or we do not worship him at all. The sad thing is that many of us come to Christ because we are sinners, and then spend the rest of our lives trying to prove that we are not! We try to hide who we really are.

THE REAL SELF VERSUS THE FALSE SELF

When the real self comes into relationship with God and others, an incredible dynamic is set into motion: we grow as God created us to [p.27>] grow. It is only when you are connected to the Head (Jesus Christ) and connected to others (the Body) that "the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow" (Col. 2:19). A coming together of grace and truth in Jesus Christ is our only hope, and indeed it is a hope that does not disappoint.

Jake, a friend of mine and a recovering alcoholic, put it this way:

"When I was in church or with my Christian friends, they would just tell me that drinking was wrong and that I should repent. They didn't know how many times I had tried quitting, how many times I had tried to be a good Christian.

"When I got into Alcoholics Anonymous, I found that I could be honest about my failures, but more important, I could be honest about my helplessness. When I found out that God and others accepted me in both my drinking *and* my helplessness to control it, I began to have hope. I could come forth with who I really was and find help.

"As much as the church preached grace, I never really found acceptance there for my real state. They always expected me to change. In my AA group, not only did they not expect me to change, they told me that, by myself, I could not change! They told me that all I could do was confess who I truly was, an alcoholic, and that God could change me along with their daily support. Finally, I could be honest, and I could find friends. That was totally different, and it changed my life."

Jake found that when he could be himself in relationship with God and others, healing was possible. Problems occur when the real self, the one God created, is hiding from God and others.

If the true self is in hiding, the false self takes over. The false self is the self that is conformed to this world (Rom. 12:2). The false self is the self we present to others, the false front, if you will, that we put

up for others to see. Paul speaks of the false self this way:

You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. (Eph. 4:20-25)

As long as the lying, false self is the one relating to God, others, and ourselves, then grace and truth cannot heal us. The false self tries to "heal" us by its own methods; it always finds false solutions, and the [p.28>] real self that God created to grow into his likeness stays hidden and unexposed to grace and truth.

THE GUILT BARRIER

Grace and truth are a healing combination because they deal with one of the main barriers to all growth: guilt. We have emotional difficulties because we have been injured (someone has sinned against us) or we have rebelled (we have sinned) or some combination of the two. As a result of this lack of love or lack of obedience, we are hidden in a world of guilt. We saw earlier that Adam and Eve had to hide themselves because of the guilt and shame of their sin, and also because of what they had become (less than perfect).

Guilt and shame too often sends us into hiding. If we have to hide, we cannot get help for our needs and brokenness; we cannot become "poor in Spirit," and therefore be blessed. When grace comes along and says that we are not condemned for who we truly are, then guilt can begin to be resolved, and we can begin to heal.

Sometimes the church reinforces our inclination to hide. My friend Jake found an end to his hiding only after he joined an AA group. When he came into a culture where he did not have to be ashamed of his failures and was forgiven for his sins, then truth and grace began to have their effect in his life.

It is interesting to compare a legalistic church with a good AA group. In this kind of church, it is culturally unacceptable to have problems; that is called being sinful. In the AA group it is culturally unacceptable to be perfect; that is called denial. In the former setting, people look better but get worse, and in the latter, they look worse but get better. Certainly there are good churches and poor AA groups, but because of a lack of grace and truth in some churches, Christians have had to go elsewhere to find healing.

It is clear why the aliens in Beezy's world decided against worshiping a god. This religious stuff was for the birds. On the one hand, there was acceptance without direction, and that was not good; on the other hand, there was direction without relationship, and that stung! It is only in a combination of grace and truth that the real Jesus is present. It is only when the real Jesus is present that we can begin to grow into the likeness of our Creator. And we really can be healed, if we have one more ingredient....

Henry Cloud, Changes That Heal (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 17-28.