

Applying Grace with Truth and Justice with Mercy



If you read only one chapter of this book and you intend to minister in a Rescue Mission, please consider this the one to read and heed. We wrestle with the balance in ministry between tough and gentle. Is it enough to serve a man compassionately? Is it more important to preach to him than to show him respect? Is it okay to leave the justice and truth thing to someone else and just let me show tolerance? We know we have a responsibility to dispense food, shelter, and safety...meeting physical needs. Whose job is it to dispense grace, truth, love, compassion?

A truth-based ministry would look like...Jail? Legalism? No hope? Condemnation?

A grace-based ministry would look like...No accountability? No responsibility? No change?

How do we get a balance? I used to think it was just by making sure we had staff gifted in either mercy or justice working side by side...but that can produce disunity, criticalness, disgust; all things that clients pick up on quickly.

Some staff are gifted in mercy, some in exhortation, but all are to speak the truth in love. All are not to lead people astray; all are themselves recipients of mercy and justice. Jesus took me where He found me (Grace) and cared enough not to leave me there (Truth).

Isaiah 30:18 (NIV) "Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; therefore He will rise up to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for Him!"

Let's get some definitions in place so we are all on the same page:

Grace is what a person needs...to cover what they can't do.

Mercy is what a person needs...to cover what they have done.

Without truth and justice, there is no need for mercy and grace.

Without mercy and grace, there is no impact for truth and justice.

Jesus is our example in all things. He not only had the balance in this area, He was FULL of grace and truth.

John 1:14 "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."

John 1:16-17 “For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.”

John 14:6 “Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life.’”

I am very indebted to Randy Alcorn for his willingness to teach all of us through his God-given wisdom and writings. Here are some excerpts from his book *The Grace and Truth Paradox, Responding with Christlike Balance*:

“Without truth, we lack courage to speak and convictions to speak about. Without grace, we lack compassion to meet people’s deepest needs” (p. 72).

“Unfortunately, many nonbelievers know only two kinds of Christians; those who speak the truth without grace and those who are very nice but never share the truth. What they need to see is a third type of Christian—one who, in a spirit of grace, loves them enough to tell them the truth” (p. 77).

“If we minimize grace, the world sees no hope for salvation.

If we minimize truth, the world sees no need for salvation.

To show the world Jesus, we must offer unabridged grace and truth, emphasizing both, apologizing for neither” (p. 87).

Achieving Balance

Grace and truth are not only compatible, they are interdependent. If we practice one without the other, we will find ourselves having no long-lasting impact. Most people, when they arrive on the job at a Rescue Mission, come with a strong inclination toward one or the other. It has been my observation over the years that most experience a swing in their actions. Those who come believing that all the client needs is a little love and affirmation, come to realize their plan is not working. Those who come with a strong sense of justice begin to observe that they cannot get through to the client like some of the other staff who employ gentleness. When the pendulum stops swinging, the staff person must come to the realization that both are necessary.

The Questions that Plague Us

- ❖ Whose job is it to dispense mercy, justice, grace, truth?

Proverbs 3:3-4 “Do not let kindness and truth leave you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good repute in the sight of God and man.”

- ❖ Where does accountability fit?

We are responsible to observe when someone is heading into sin but must watch the manner in which we go to them. “Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted” (Galatians 6:1).

Exhorting and comforting should work together in our approach with people. “Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing” (1Thessalonians 5:11).

Most translations of Proverbs 27:17 put sharpening in the context of friendship. "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend" (KJV).

Accountability means there is more than one person in the equation. Are you willing to partner with your clients in accountability and help them see the value in this? "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up" (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 (NIV)).

❖ Is there a place for tolerance?

The truth is, I need to hate sin, but grace means I need to love the sinner. Let's reword that sentence. The truth is, I need to hate sin, *and* grace means I need to love the sinner. *Both* hating sin and loving the sinner are required. And be careful when you use the word "tolerance." Tolerance means many different things to today's world.

❖ How do we preserve the unity of the Spirit?

Please note that you are not being told to develop the unity but to preserve it. Letting God be in control of our responses to others will afford us a consistent atmosphere of unity. Appreciating each other's gifts as we minister together allows us to utilize all that God is providing in working with each individual client. Many come to the ministry of Rescue with different spiritual giftings. The most common are Mercy, Exhortation, Truth-telling, and Helps. The ministry is enhanced when God gives a variation of giftings within the staff and when we appreciate each other's involvement.

❖ Why do we have problems with this balance?

I know of only two reasons. The first is education. This is why I claim that this chapter is so important. Many have not thought through how Jesus was able to do what He was called to do while still maintaining the godly balance. He did it because He was FULL of both truth and grace and I must ask Him to help me model after Him in this matter each day. The second is commitment. This is what I am called to do. This is what I will do.

❖ What can we do to improve personally and corporately?

I suggest the answer is based in prayer. The Colossian church found the balance when they heard truth and understood God's grace.

Colossians 1:3-6(NIV) "We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people—the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace."

2 Corinthians 3:4-5

"Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God."