

# Truth Without Grace

2 March 2022



A young woman is standing in an auditorium, waiting to argue with a man at the podium. She wants to point out the inequality she perceives in society and brings up the example of the Boy Scouts: *"Why should only boys be allowed to join?"* The man reinforces his point firmly. He wants equal opportunity, but he also wants things to be straightforward. Girl Scouts are for girls, and Boy Scouts are for boys.

*"Where is that written, though?"* she asks as they interrupt each other.

*"In the name Boy Scouts,"* he deadpans, and the crowd erupts with laughter.

## **The Rise of the Mic Drop Moment**

That exchange is what people call a "mic drop moment" – a one-liner that smashes someone's argument, exposes their lack of logic, and ends the debate. It's the kind of clip that travels around social media, gift-wrapped for anyone who wants to see someone with an opposing ideology looking foolish, and there are plenty of them out there. A seemingly endless supply of YouTube video descriptions leap off the screen, offering bite-sized slices of people being put in their place. Caps-locked captions inevitably describe someone being DESTROYED, DEMOLISHED or DISMANTLED, and if you happen to feel frustrated about the revolution of redefinitions that has gripped western society, those clips can be quite addictive.

We want people to stand up, talk straight and fight for truth. But often, truthful words are delivered without consideration for the person hearing them. The problem with fighting for truth is that it can become all you care about. And we can become so desperate to contend for it that we forget exactly how we're meant to contend for it. In other words, even if someone is right, they can be right in the wrong way.

We want people to stand up, talk straight and fight for truth. But often, truthful words are delivered without consideration for the person hearing them.

# Jesus as Our Example of Fighting for Truth

Paul, writing to his precious brothers and sisters in Corinth, urged them to act like he acted. *"Follow my example,"* he wrote. But even Paul, that great apostle, added a crucial caveat to his instruction: *"... as I follow the example of Christ."* Jesus dealt with people perfectly, always in step with the Holy Spirit, always fighting for truth and always reaching out. And so, to the example of Jesus we must go as we ask ourselves how He dealt with different groups of people that opposed or even frustrated Him during His ministry.

## Salvation, Forgiveness and Grace

As we go to the Gospel accounts, we begin to find interesting details. Somewhere along the line, we may have internalised the idea that Jesus was warm and compassionate with the underbelly of society – prostitutes and tax collectors – but harsh and dismissive with the Pharisees, scribes and teachers of the law. While it's true that some of His strongest words were reserved for that latter group, we find that even through their tests, taunts and tricks, He reached out to them with love and redemption. Think of the entirety of John 5, in which a thrilling Sabbath healing turned into an angry interrogation. The Jews, irritated that the now-mobile man was carrying his mat on the day of rest, confronted Jesus, raging against His description of God as His Father. In reply, Jesus did not back down: He invoked truth, eternal life, condemnation and judgment; He spoke strongly and unflinchingly. And yet, in the midst of what would have been quite a tense, heated exchange, He said this: *"You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth. Not that I accept human testimony; but I mention it that you may be saved."* (John 5:33-34, NIV)

Look at His words: He wanted them to be saved. He told them to their faces, broadcasting it directly to these furrow-browed enemies who would so often badger and hound Him from town to town. He desired to forgive them, not to one-up them.

Then, a matter of sentences later, again: *"You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life."* (John 5:39-40, NIV) We often use that line to underscore the danger of glorifying doctrine over God but think about this: He was openly appealing to them, pleading with them to come to Him. He desperately wanted to give them grace.

He desired to forgive them, not to one-up them ... He desperately wanted to give them grace.

## A Gentle and Patient Confrontation

The very next chapter is John 6, and Jesus again had the opportunity to, in today's YouTube language, SILENCE, SHRED or SHUT DOWN people with His unanswerable truth bombs. We're told that a great crowd had followed Jesus to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee – so many of them, in fact, that suddenly there was a crisis. There was no food. We all know what happened next: Jesus took five small barley loaves and two small fish, multiplying them so that five thousand people (and they probably only counted the heads of families) could all eat, with food left over. It was a wonderful miracle, but here's the subsequent development that would've made you or I quite angry: the following day, after Jesus and the disciples had moved on, the crowd found them again. But this time, their self-interest was so blatantly obvious that Jesus straight-up called them out on it. *"I tell you the truth,"* he said, *"you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but*

*because you ate the loaves and had your fill.” (John 6:26, NIV)*

Any single one of us would have been perturbed or even enraged by such a self-seeking audience, and Jesus rightly confronted them with the truth, even though it must have been fairly awkward. Yet He came with gentleness and patience, even then. Wedged in between that charged moment and their barbed request for some kind of a miracle was this: *“What must we do to do the works God requires?” they asked. “The work of God is this,” Jesus answered: “to believe in the one he has sent.” (John 6:28-29, NIV)*

Even in a discussion that must have been disturbing and disappointing for Jesus, He still reached out to these needy, one-track-minded people. He reached out with an invitation to them. Just believe, He said. He was on a redemptive mission, calling them into God’s plan, ready for them to respond. He came with truth – so much of it, in fact, that the entire crowd ended up abandoning Him – but it was couched in grace. Hope. Kindness. Love. An open hand beckoning.

When John, who witnessed these things play out in front of him, wrote down his version of events a lifetime later, he remembered not only what Jesus said but how He had dealt with people. *“We have seen his glory,”* John wrote as a misty-eyed old man, *“the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14, NIV)* Full of grace and truth. That’s part of the glory of Jesus. He spoke the kind of truth that divides, that separates people unapologetically and uncompromisingly, yet He came with grace – the kind of grace that tearfully pleaded with the hard-hearted Pharisees and patiently invited the freebie-seeking crowd. That’s Jesus. He still comes to us in that way today, exposing our hearts with cutting truth but covering our sin with redemptive grace.

He still comes to us in that way today, exposing our hearts with cutting truth but covering our sin with redemptive grace.

## **Motivated by a Higher Goal**

In this generation, as we find ourselves continually forced into combat mode as foundational truths are attacked, we cannot afford to take our cue primarily from the voices lining up on our YouTube playlists; the voices encouraging us to SHATTER or SMASH or SLAM those opposing the truth. Anyone taking a public stand for biblical morals and values should be commended, but their approach can sometimes descend into pure argument-winning smackdowns, where the goal is to silence someone. Jesus was aiming higher than that. His goal was not to win arguments; it was to win people. And so He came with grace and truth. One hand pointed a finger directly at the sin of mankind, and the other beckoned the sinner towards forgiveness. Truth was never compromised, but grace was never neglected.

Paul, writing a letter to a young man constantly [contending for the faith](#), specifically outlined how a servant of the Lord should act in an argument: *“Those who oppose him he must gently instruct,”* he wrote, *“in the hope that God will grant them repentance, leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.” (2 Timothy 2:25-26, NIV)* That’s grace and truth. That’s Paul following Jesus. That’s not shying away from [conflict](#); it’s engaging with the hope of redemption. That’s what we’re aiming at.

Jesus was aiming higher than that. His goal was not to win arguments; it was to win people.

YouTube debate clips generally aren't going to teach us that. Being with Jesus is going to teach us that. [Reading the Scriptures](#) is going to teach us that. And as we go deeper into the true heart of God, we will indeed step forward in our generation to contend for truth. But as we do so, our arms won't be held up like fighters, ready to strike a telling blow. They will be held outward, open in love, ready to receive people with grace. Ready to be like Jesus.