

#168 “The Definition of Christlike Love”

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There is a prevailing misconception of the purpose of the first coming of Christ. This misunderstanding and spurious view of Jesus can lead to developing a wrong view of the Father, a view which ignores or negates the justice and holiness of God. It is easy to only view Jesus as simply a tender, loving, gracious, forgiving, and gentle figure. He is all of those things, but He is not just full of grace but full of truth as well (John 1:14). The grace part is not a tough message to preach or to receive until it is combined with the truth that all men have sinned and will suffer eternity in hell fire unless they repent and turn to Christ as Savior and Lord. Grace that enables people to stay in their sin is not a threatening, divisive message, but grace that requires a change of heart and lifestyle according to God's truth is a tough reality. The truth about Jesus is that, though He is a peaceful person Who desires peace on the earth as well, He did not come to bring peace on earth when He came the first time. It is common thinking that Jesus was born to bring peace on earth and good will toward men, but that is a poor translation of Luke 2:13-14. In the NAS, which is confirmed by the ESV, we read, “And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.’” In other words, the angels were not declaring that the whole earth would have peace because Jesus came the first time. They weren't saying that Jesus was simply going to become everybody's best friend without convicting them of sin. The only way to find peace, according to the angels in this heavenly declaration, is for mankind to first be reconciled to God such that He is pleased with them. In other words, the peace of God is only available to those people with whom God is well-pleased. This declaration should strike glory and hope in the hearts of those who love God, and it should strike fear into those who recognize that God is not well-pleased with them. The angels brought a message of division and distinction, separating the sheep from the goats and the wheat from the tares. Jesus will come back a second time to establish His own peaceful rule on earth, but until then, the gospel, though a unifying force for those who believe, is a dividing force between those who believe and those who do not.

Jesus says in Matthew 10:34-36, “Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to SET A MAN AGAINST HIS FATHER, AND A DAUGHTER AGAINST HER MOTHER, AND A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AGAINST HER MOTHER-IN-LAW; and A MAN'S ENEMIES WILL BE THE MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD.” Luke 12:51-53, the parallel account, says, “Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division; for from now on five members in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.” Jesus wanted His disciples and any listening to Him to understand that He came with a direct and express purpose, to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). That some people were lost indicates division, and the preaching of the gospel would delineate that division with the hope that some would see their lost state

and turn to Christ. Christ did not come to accept the entire world in their sin but to call the entire world to turn from their sin. This is highly divisive, and Christ understood that faith in Jesus could and would rip families apart. This isn't because becoming a Christian makes a person mean and nasty, for we are called to live peacefully with people as much as it depends upon us (Romans 12:18). However, sometimes people are so turned off by Jesus and the testimony of a life lived in holiness before Him (Hebrews 12:14) that they can turn to spite us because they spite Him. They don't want to own up to the fact that they are hopeless, sinful, evil, and corrupt. It is a blow to their pride. Thus some, receiving our testimony as an aroma of death rather than an aroma of life (2 Corinthians 2:16), could become angry rather than humble. Many believers can testify to the ridicule and persecution that they have faced because they took a stand for Jesus Christ. For some, maybe they just get teased at family gatherings. For others, their family may put a death threat out upon their life. Jesus came to bring a sword, the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17), which divides between joints and marrow and judges the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Hebrews 4:12). The message of the gospel is the only hope the world has, and some will receive it while others will reject it. Some will go to heaven, and others will go to hell. The dividing factor is what they do with Jesus Christ.

Let us not be fooled into thinking that if Jesus was present on earth today that He would only be giving out hugs and free food. Remember, He also drove out the corrupt businessmen from the temple of God (Matthew 21:12-13), and He boldly condemned the leaders of the day in their hearing (Matthew 23). When we remember the glorious message that Jesus was born, we need to remember that He is not just full of grace but also of truth. His peace is available to everybody, but only those who love Him can receive it. He did not come to bring peace without conviction, but He rather brought a sword that saves. This is because He loves us, knowing that the only way to true peace is through first being saved. May our lives, by the grace of God, be the perfect blend of grace and truth, showing forth love and acceptance while never hiding the truth about sin, repentance, and holiness. Jesus was full of both grace and truth, and may such be the case for us as well.