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HOW GRACE WORKS

Titus 2:11-14

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Titus Lesson 8

How Grace Works Titus 2:11-14

Our subject for today, the grace of God and how it works in our lives, is arguably the most important concept for you to understand and live by in the battle to be godly. Because it is so important, the enemy of our souls has created much confusion and controversy on this topic. But if you can fight your way clear in understanding and applying God's grace, you will experience a close relationship with God and consistent victory over sin (Rom. 6:14).

God's grace permeated Paul's thinking. One scholar writes, "Paul could not think of Christian truth and conduct apart from God's grace" (D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. by Frank Gaebelin [Zondervan], 11:439). Another writes, "The expression, *the grace of God*, may fairly be said to be the key word of Paul's theology.... He cannot think of Christian *salvation* apart from *the grace of God*..." (Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries [Eerdmans], p. 198, italics his).

The classic definition is the best: God's grace is His unmerited favor. Grace means that God showered favor and blessing on those who did not in any way deserve or earn it. They deserved His judgment and wrath. But He showed them favor.

God's pure grace gets polluted from two sides. On the one side, grace runs counter to the way the world works, so it's difficult for us to grasp it and get used to it. The world works on the merit system. If you do well in school, you get good grades and win awards. If you do well in sports, you make the team and get a lot of applause. If you get into college, the merit system continues to reward excellence. This carries over into the business world after college. Exceptional performance earns promotions and raises. Sloppy performance will get you fired.

In the spiritual realm, all of the world's religions, except for biblical Christianity, work on the merit system. Even the major branches of Christianity, the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, teach a system of merit-salvation, where you have

to add your works to what Christ did on the cross in order to go to heaven. Most believers who die go to purgatory, where after suffering for a while, eventually you will have enough of your sins purged away and enough merit to qualify for heaven. This merit system of salvation permeates the public mind. Ask anyone on the street his opinion of how a person gets into heaven and you will hear something about being a good person. It was at the heart of pharisaic, legalistic religion in the times of Jesus and Paul.

But God's grace also gets distorted from another side, which mistakes the grace of God for licentiousness (Jude 4). Many professing Christians wrongly think that God's grace means that He gives out free passes that allow us to sin, with no consequences for disobedience. If you emphasize the need to obey God's commandments or do good works, they call you a legalist. If you warn them that their sloppy view of sin will result in God's discipline, they don't want to hear it. Their mantra is, "I'm not into your rules kind of religion. I'm under grace, not law." For them, grace means permission for sloppy living.

Our text corrects both of these serious misconceptions of God's grace. Paul shows that...

God's grace first saves and then trains His people
for godliness and good deeds.

The word "for" that opens verse 11 links these verses to what he has just said. In 2:1-10, Paul has shown that various groups of believers should beautify their lives with godliness and good deeds so as to attract others to the Savior. Paul's mention of "God our Savior" (2:10) causes him to elaborate on the theological basis for our salvation and how understanding that inevitably leads to a life of godliness and good deeds. At the heart of everything is this crucial concept of God's grace.

1. God's grace brings salvation to all people (2:11).

When Paul writes, "For the grace of God has appeared," he is referring to the embodiment of grace in the person of Jesus Christ, who was "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). It is not that God's grace is missing from the Old Testament. No one was saved in the Old Testament apart from God's grace. But as John 1:17 states the contrast, "For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth

were realized through Jesus Christ." God rightly could have sent His Son to condemn us and judge us. But instead (John 3:17), "For God did not send His Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him."

Zecharias uses the verb *appear* to refer to the coming of Messiah, whom he calls the Sunrise from on high, who will "shine [*appear*] upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace" (Luke 1:79). The coming of Jesus Christ was the light of the grace of God's salvation dawning upon this sin-darkened world.

Paul says that the appearance of God's grace brought "salvation to all men." The KJV and the NIV err by translating that God's grace has appeared to all men. That never has been true, in that there have always been many that have never heard of God's grace in Jesus Christ.

Rather, Paul means that God's grace that appeared in the person of Christ offers salvation to all that hear of it. In the context, Paul has just spoken of various groups: older men, older women, younger women, younger men, and slaves. So when he goes on to say that God's grace brings salvation to *all* men, he means, "to all types of people, including those whom the world despises, even to slaves." No one is beyond the reach of God's grace.

This does not mean that all people are saved or will be saved. The Bible is uniformly clear that there are two separate, final destinations for all people. Those who by God's grace believe in Jesus Christ as Savior will go to heaven. Those who do not believe in Christ will pay the penalty of eternal separation from God in hell.

But the good news of God's grace is that no sinner is beyond the reach of God's grace. The apostle Paul was a persecutor of the church. He called himself the chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:13, 15). But he experienced God's grace through the cross. If the chief of sinners found mercy, so can you!

But, there is a major hindrance that will keep you from experiencing God's grace in salvation, namely, your propensity to self-righteousness. Paul says that God's grace brings *salvation* to all people. You don't need salvation unless you are lost and you know that you're lost. If you think that you're doing just fine on your own or

that you're going to be able to make it on your own with a little more effort, you won't cry out for a Savior to deliver you. As Jesus said (Luke 5:32), "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." By "the righteous," Jesus meant, "the self-righteous." The self-righteous Pharisees did not see their need for a Savior. Those who knew that they were sinners did.

Suppose that you were standing in a long line at the bank, waiting to deposit your paycheck. Suddenly, I grab you by the arm, jerk you out of line, and forcibly drag you out of the building. You probably wouldn't be very happy with me. You'd say, "What do you think you're doing? You hurt my arm, you tore my shirt, you made me lose my place in line, and you made me look like a fool in front of everyone in the bank!"

But, one simple fact would change your attitude to one of complete gratitude for the rest of your life: the bank had just been taken over by terrorists that threatened to kill everyone inside. In the first scenario, you didn't yet know the danger that you were in. In the second scenario, you had become aware of the danger and you knew that you were doomed unless someone rescued you.

Before you can appreciate God's grace, you need to know that you are justly under His wrath and condemnation. You are headed for eternal judgment unless someone intervenes. To use Spurgeon's phrase, you know that the rope is around your neck. God's grace cuts the rope, even though you are guilty as charged and deserve to die. Have you experienced God's grace that brings salvation? If so, you are a changed person. How?

2. God's grace trains us who are saved in godliness (2:12-14a).

The word "instructing" means, "child-training." It includes teaching, but also, correcting and disciplining. It is a process that begins at salvation and continues until we stand before the Lord. But, note that grace does not mean, "hang loose and live as sloppily as you please." Rather, grace trains, disciplines, and instructs us in godly living. Paul mentions three ways that grace trains us:

- A. Grace trains us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires (2:12a).

When you experience God's unmerited favor in Jesus Christ, it motivates you to want to please Him in everything that you do. As you read God's Word, you begin to realize that there is much in your life that displeases the Lord, who gave Himself on the cross to save you from God's judgment. So, you begin walking on the path that Jesus described as denying yourself daily, taking up your cross, and following Him (Luke 9:23).

This includes saying no to *ungodliness*. This refers to a person who does not reverence God and thus lives by ignoring God. It obviously refers to the person who is openly immoral or evil, but it also includes the outwardly nice person who simply has no place for God in his life. His everyday life is organized, motivated, and run by self, with no place for God. The person who has tasted God's grace will say no to such godless living.

Also, you must say no to *worldly desires*. This refers to desires that are characteristic of this world system that is opposed to God. John describes them as "the lust of the flesh," "the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life" (1 John 2:16). They include selfishness, pride, seeking after status and power, greed, lust, and living for sinful pleasure rather than finding pleasure in God above all else. Grace trains you to say no to these things, because God and His grace are far sweeter than anything the world can offer.

B. Grace trains us to live sensibly, righteously, and godly in this present age (2:12b).

It is not enough to say *no* to ungodliness and worldly desires. You must also say *yes* to sensible, righteous, godly living. *In the present age* emphasizes that we do not need to isolate ourselves from this evil world in monasteries or Christian communes. Rather, in the midst of this present evil age, we are to live sensible, righteous, godly lives, so that those in the world will be drawn to our Savior. Many commentators have pointed out that *sensibly* refers to how you are to control yourself; *righteously* has reference to your relationships with others; and, *godly* refers to your relationship toward God.

(1) Grace trains us to live sensibly.

This is the word that we have repeatedly encountered in Titus (1:8; 2:2, 4, 5, 6), which means, living in a self-controlled manner,

not yielding to various passions and impulses. It is synonymous with the last of the fruits of the Spirit, which is self control.

(2) Grace trains us to live righteously.

This refers to a life of integrity and uprightness in your dealings with others. It means conforming to God's standards of conduct, as revealed in the commandments of His Word.

(3) Grace trains us to live godly.

This refers to holiness and devotion to God, beginning on the heart level. It means to live a God-ward life, knowing that He examines your heart. You confess sinful thoughts to Him and live in the love and fear of God. As Paul expressed his concern (2 Cor. 11:3), "But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ."

If you live in the way that Paul describes in our text, denying ungodliness and worldly desires and living sensibly, righteously, and godly in the midst of this corrupt age, other Christians will call you a legalist. Many in the world will think that you're weird because you don't strive for the same things that they seek. But you will experience the joy of close fellowship with the God who rescued you from sin and judgment. His grace motivates you to live differently than the world, and differently than those who profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him (Titus 1:16). But there's a third way that grace trains us:

C. Grace trains us to live in godliness by looking ahead and behind (2:13-14a).

The forward look is toward the second coming of Jesus Christ. The backward look is toward the cross and its implications on our lives.

(1) Look ahead to the blessed hope of Christ's second coming (2:13).

God's grace instructs us to look "for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus." (Some Greek manuscripts read, "Jesus Christ.") Christ's first appearing was in grace, bringing salvation. During His first coming, His glory was mostly veiled. But His second appearing will be in

glory, bringing salvation to His people, but terrifying judgment to those who have not believed in Him. His second coming is a “blessed hope” for those who know Him, because then we will fully experience all of the blessings of His salvation.

If your focus is set on the hope of Christ’s return, you will purify your life from every known sin (1 John 3:2-3). During his time in the White House, President Carter did something that no other President (that I know of) has done: on several occasions, he stayed in the homes of common Americans. I don’t know how he picked them, but he wanted to convey that he was in tune with the needs of average Americans.

If you got a call this week from the White House, announcing that the President would like to stay in your home sometime next month (meaning that your living room and kitchen would be on national television), I predict that you would do some housecleaning! Your home would sparkle because you knew that the President was coming.

Someone far greater than the President is coming! Paul calls Him, “our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.” Scholars debate whether this refers to both the Father and the Son (as in the KJV), or to the Son alone (NASB). Either view affirms Jesus’ deity, in that He could not reveal the greatness of God’s glory if He were not God. But the Greek grammar, has one article governing both God and Savior, which is best understood to refer to one person, not to two. Also, every other time the New Testament refers to “the appearing,” it refers to Christ, not to God the Father. The adjective “great” is often applied to God in the Old Testament, but it is reserved for the Son in the New Testament (Luke 1:32; Heb. 10:21; 13:20). So this verse is a strong statement of Christ’s deity.

“Looking for” implies eager anticipation. Just as a young bride whose husband is away in the military eagerly looks forward to his return, so believers who have tasted God’s grace look forward to the coming of our Bridegroom. That hope motivates us to clean house on any sins in our lives.

- (2) Look back to the supreme demonstration of His love, which redeemed us from sin and made us His own possession (2:14a).

“Who” refers back to “our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.” None other than He “gave Himself for us”! If that thought doesn’t grip your heart, you’re in deep spiritual trouble. Paul shows that this past grace that was shown to us produces godliness in us.

First, Christ “gave Himself for us, that He might *redeem us from every lawless deed*” (2:14a). The word *redeem* would have gotten the attention of any slaves. It was the word used of buying a slave out of the market so as to give him his freedom. Before we met Christ, we all were slaves of sin. He paid the redemption price in His own blood to free us from bondage to sin. How, then, can a believer go back into slavery to sin?

Second, Christ gave Himself for us that He might “*purify for Himself a people for His own possession.*” Verse 12 focused on our need to purify ourselves, but verse 14 focuses on Christ’s purifying us through His blood. He bought us from the slave market of sin and washed off our filth. Now we belong to Him as His personal possession. He prizes us more than anyone prizes a valuable treasure, because He paid for us with His blood. Again, what a motivation to live to please Him!

One reason that we partake often of the Lord’s Supper is that it reminds us of these precious truths. Before we partake, we are to examine ourselves and confess any known sins. As we think on the great sacrifice that our God and Savior made by giving Himself for us, it will draw our hearts toward Him in love and devotion. It will make us long for the day of His appearing in glory, when we will be caught up to be with Him forever.

Thus God’s grace in Christ brings salvation to us. Then it trains us to live in godliness. Finally,

3. God’s grace trains us who are saved to be zealous for good deeds (2:14b).

“Good deeds” refer to deeds that are done out of sincere love for God and others in obedience to His Word. “Zealous” is a word that Paul used to describe his fanatical zeal for Judaism prior to his conversion (Gal. 1:14). It was also used to describe the fanatical Jewish sect that was devoted to ridding Israel of Roman domination. The Zealots were totally devoted to their cause, even to the

point of risking their own lives to achieve their goals. You would not call them lukewarm!

Could you rightly describe yourself as a fanatic for good deeds? It seems to me that the vast majority of Christians dabble at good deeds when it is convenient, when they don't have anything else that they'd rather do. But if we have been bought out of the slave market of sin by the blood of our great God and Savior, we should be fanatics for good deeds. We ought to be totally devoted to serving our new Master.

Conclusion

A book that has often convicted me of my own lack of love for the Lord and zeal for His work is Elisabeth Elliot's, *Shadow of the Almighty* [Zondervan], subtitled, "The Life and Testament of Jim Elliot." My copy is falling apart because I have thumbed back through it so many times. Elisabeth's husband, Jim, was only 28 when he and four other young men were speared to death in their attempt to take the gospel to the fierce Auca Indians of Ecuador.

Here are some quotes from his diary that show how he exemplified our text. God's grace motivated him. At age 22, he wrote (p. 110), "I see clearly now that anything, whatever it is, if it be not on the principle of grace, it is not of God." Regarding living in light of the second coming, at age 20 he wrote to his 15-year-old sister (p. 53), "Fix your eyes on the rising Morning Star.... Live every day as if the Son of Man were at the door, and gear your thinking to the fleeting moment.... Walk as if the next step would carry you across the threshold of Heaven."

Or, again at 22 (p. 115), "How poorly will appear anything but a consuming operative faith in the person of Christ when He comes. How lost, alas, a life lived in any other light!" His entire life portrayed intense zeal for the Lord and His work. He wrote (*Through Gates of Splendor* [Spire Books], pp. 19-20), "Wherever you are, *be all there*. Live to the hilt every situation you believe to be the will of God."

That's how God's grace works. It saves us and then it trains and motivates us to be godly people in this present age, zealous for good deeds, as we look for the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us.

Application Questions

1. Which is the greater problem in Christian circles today: Legalism or licentiousness? How can we avoid both errors?
2. Is it legalistic to go against your feelings in order to deny ungodly impulses? How do you obey from the heart if your heart is tugging you toward sin?
3. God's grace in salvation is completely unmerited and we are to live by grace. But blessing in the Christian life is contingent on obedience. How do you reconcile these principles?
4. How can a believer who has lost his zeal for the Lord and His work rekindle it?

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