

WE AFFIRM A BIBLICAL VIEW OF GRACE

GBC DISTINCTIVE SERIES | TITUS 2:11-15 | SEPTEMBER 2, 2018

We've reached the end of our GBC Distinctive series, and we've discussed quite a bit together. Primarily, we've seen the importance of Scripture in all that we do as a church—our governance, fellowship, and worship together. We saw how the Scripture informs specific beliefs such as the sovereignty of God, the Lordship of Christ, and our view of the end-times. We also examined how Scripture informs our individual lives—how we view ourselves as individuals and as a part of the church, our evangelism, etc. In other words, we've seen why we call ourselves a "Bible Church." Even so, there's one crucial aspect of our church we haven't examined.

For those of you who were there, you may recall that I preached through the Book of Titus a few years back, which focuses on producing a sound church. The challenge exists in the form of false teachers confusing poor souls about God or His gospel. To the degree someone is self-focused, he will be swayed by false doctrine. So, Paul tells Titus to appoint elders who have careful doctrine and lives, able to instruct others about *God* and *His* glorious grace.

If Titus is to establish a healthy church, he must understand and teach how God's amazing grace works in people's lives. Paul explains here that it appears, bringing two new realities for those who trust the gospel. So, as members of Grace Bible Church, we must trust that God's grace saves us (v. 11) and schools us (v. 12).

FIRST, GOD'S GRACE SAVES US (V. 11)

11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men

What is grace? Another word for it would be *kindness*, it's favor given with no expectation of return. The grace of God is best typified in Christ, which is why, even though the word predates the birth of Jesus, no one understood it well. For instance, "Aristotle, defining *charis* (χαρις), lays the whole stress on this very point, that it is conferred freely, with no expectation of return, and finding its only motive in the bounty and free-heartedness of the giver [SM—A good definition.]. But in pagan Greece, this favor was always conferred upon a friend, not upon an enemy."¹

The New Testament strips grace of the idea of it being earned through *friendship*. As Paul wrote, "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rm 5:6-8). With the terms *helpless*, *ungodly*, and *sinners*, we see God granting what we do not deserve.

Here, the incalculable grace of God **epiphanies**, appears out of the sky. Paul carries this thought forward into the next chapter, where, in v. 4, he says, "the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior *epiphanied*, appeared."

¹ Wuest, Tt 2:11.

God's grace gilded the sky in the past; in Luke 1:79, Zechariah prophesied over the infant Lord that the sunrise has visited us "to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." God's grace appeared through the entrance of the Son into the world through His first advent, when He came "full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:14).

HOW DOES GRACE SAVE?

The term "salvation" modifies χάρις, as in, "the saving grace of God has appeared to all people."² The word "saved" means many things. Physical salvation figures large in Scripture, especially in the Old Testament, where we see God delivering Israel from his enemies. Scripture also speaks of spiritual salvation; as Jesus warns in John 8:34, "I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins."

Death doesn't just mean closing your eyes for the last time. Jesus said, "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Mt 10:28). The doctrine of Hell has fallen on hard times lately, but let me give you the cold, hard facts (or, the hot facts). Hell is a real place, an "unquenchable fire" according to Jesus (Mk 9:43). In the last verse of Isaiah, God says, "And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh" (Is 66:24). That's the bad news.

But, praise God, we're talking about what grace does. First Thessalonians 1:10 says that Jesus "delivers us from the wrath to come." Here in Titus 2:11 and in 3:4, we read about God's grace appearing, and according to 3:7, it justifies or makes it as though, legally, we had not sinned. This is all "according to the riches of his grace" (Eph 1:7).

WHO DOES GRACE SAVE?

The text says that grace saves all men or people. Some might misread this to mean universal atonement, that God will eventually save every person in the world. However, God nowhere says this. If He were to save everyone, why should the early Christians face persecution by Roman swords? If everyone is saved, then there's no need to get everyone's theology right – Titus would only have to pat everyone on their heads and tell them to play nice. No; Jesus said you must believe in Him, requiring a response of faith and repentance.

What Paul means here is that all kinds of people are saved, that there is a universal availability. As such, we can pray that God's way and salvation may be known among all nations (Ps 67:1-2). So, regardless of whether Titus is instructing the elder or the younger individuals on the island of Crete, slave or free, man or woman, he can tell them about when God's saving grace appeared. The gospel of this grace is available to all and saves those who trust in it.

If that was all we could say about God's grace, it would seem to be enough! Even so, we see that there is more to God's grace, for we need more. It isn't just for when we die, it's grace for today. The next verses summarizes this point:

² Louw, p. 241.

SECOND, GOD'S GRACE SCHOOLS US (V. 12)

12 instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age,

God's grace is "instructing us." The term speaks of how children would be trained, like pedagogy. It's the same word used of Moses to say that he was "trained" in all Egyptian wisdom (Acts 7:22). We could say that grace operates according to the pedagogy of God. Since "grace" is abstract, a concept, how is this possible?

GOD'S GRACE TEACHES US THROUGH GOD'S MEANS

Grace isn't a force nor something to be imparted to us. God's grace doesn't travel along a circuit of our good works (Eph 2:8-9). What's wonderful about His grace is that, even though we do not merit it, nor can we grow by it through our efforts, it prepares us for good works (Eph 2:10). As such, we're commanded to "work out" what God is working in us (Phil 2:12-13). There are five means wherein we receive God's grace and are trained by it.

First, God's grace comes to us in Jesus Christ. In v. 13, we read that we're "looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus." He is God's grace manifest. The Gospel of John begins by noting, through Christ's fullness, we receive grace upon grace (Jn 1:16). If you do not trust in Christ for salvation, then you don't possess the saving and schooling grace we're discussing.

Second, God's grace instructs us through Scripture. This is where the information about grace comes, and learn that faith itself "comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Rm 10:14, 17). God's Word causes us to grow in salvation and builds us up in faith (1 Pt 2:2; Acts 20:32). In fact, Titus 2:11-12 parallels the idea of *Scripture* training us in righteousness (2 Tm 3:16). Therefore, God graciously trains us through the reading and preaching of His Word.

Third, God's grace increases in us through prayer. We need His grace every day, and as the disciples asked Christ to increase their faith, so can we (Lk 17:5). In Christ, we can "draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hb 4:16). As such, God's grace not only grants faith and brings us near, God promises that we can receive *more* grace in times of need.

Fourth, God's grace reminds us through the ordinances. We're united to Him in our spiritual baptism, meaning our water baptism reminds us of our freedom from the bondage of sin and the hope of His resurrection (Rm 6:3-6). When we partake in the Lord's Supper, we proclaim the death of Christ (1 Cor 11:26) and collectively participate in the blood and body of the Lord (10:16-17). These are precious moments in the Christian life.

Finally, God's grace leads us through Christian fellowship. The Spirit says that, "speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love" (Eph 4:15-16). We can encourage and build one another up in Christ (1 Thes 5:11) because we each have a manifestation of the Holy Spirit for the good of all (1 Cor 12:7).

So, God's grace comes through several means, but they have negative implications. Again, we can't know God's grace if we don't know Christ. If we skip church, we miss part of the activity of God's grace in our lives through Word, fellowship, and the ordinances. If we lack personal prayer and Bible study, we also limit God's means of working in our lives. Of course, God's grace can save us by faith in Christ regardless of our access to Scripture or church attendance, but sinful choices sometime cause a lack of fruit in our lives. If we *are* engaging with these means, however, this verse says that God's grace teaches us what *not* to do and what *to* do.

GOD'S GRACE TEACHES US WHAT NOT TO DO.

First, we see that it is instructing us "to" or "in order to deny [or renounce] ungodliness and worldly desires." To put this another way, grace is instructing us to make manifest a lack of practice of these sins.³ Contrast this to false teachers of Titus 1:16—"They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works." Instead of that, those who know God learn to deny iniquity by their works.

First, grace teaches us to deny ungodliness. Scripture motivates us to steer clear of ungodliness—instead of grace, the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness (Rm 1:18); righteous conviction will befall the ungodly and "all of their ungodly deeds" (Jd 15). Thankfully God teaches His beloved children how to do this, and we see an example in Moses—"when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt" (Hb 11:24). God's grace helps us to see the greater treasure in denying ourselves ungodliness, and it instructs us further:

Second, grace teaches us to deny worldly lusts. Dr. Nicolas Ellen defined lust this way: "Lust is something that one wants so badly that he is willing to sin to get it, or sin if he doesn't get it." We see this in children, sometimes: one child has a toy that the other wants so badly an argument or a fight breaks out. If the parent admonishes the second child for attempting to steal the toy from the first, then a temper tantrum breaks out. James 4:1-2 describes this same reality in churches: "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel." Thankfully, God's grace teaches us to deny this in ourselves, and more.

GOD'S GRACE TEACHES US WHAT TO DO

God's grace does more than teach us how to reject that which is wrong; it helps us replace the wrong with the right. So, instead of living in bondage to ungodliness and lust, we can live with a "sound mind" or "sensibly." Perhaps you find yourself thinking about sin and planning ungodliness, but His grace can teach you how to renounce and deny these with sober-mindedness. You begin identifying sinful tendencies and triggers, and then you make plans to chop off a hand or pluck out an eye if need be. Metaphorically speaking, of course.

We need more than sensibility—we need to be able to live out the righteousness Scripture calls us to. Wouldn't it be nice to see a police car in your rearview mirror, and you're not afraid? What about *actually* having the

³ Louw, p. 452.

confidence to go before the Throne of God in prayer? Rather than fear a just punishment like the thief on the cross (cf. Lk 23:41), we can live just and upright lives before God because of His instructing grace. Imagine the weight of guilt lifted because grace is training you to live by His Word!

The final point is vital—God’s grace is instructing us “to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age” or world system. Culture beckons you back to ungodliness and worldly passions, but God’s grace trains you in and for this present culture. We need His grace because 1 John 2:17 says, “And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.” His grace produces a life able to withstand the evils of this present age and survive into the age to come.

CONCLUSION

The grace of God turns us around. He shows us our need for a Savior and then His grace appears. He also graciously teaches us to deny ungodliness and embrace godliness. Another way to think about this is that the grace of God helps us repent, and Christian piety and devotion results from His grace being at work.

This is grace that is greater than all our sins—an amazing grace! Do you know it? I hope you are trusting in His grace available to all people in Christ. And may we have a solid and healthy church that upholds, models, and operates according to His grace.