

HOW YOUR LIFE CAN MODEL THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL

Teaching Through Titus Verse by Verse - Part ten

Sunday, November 27th, 2011, a.m. - Teaching #1518

THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF FREELY RECEIVED GRACE (continued)

Titus 2:11-15 - "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, [12] training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, [13] waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, [14] who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. [15] Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you."

Last week we began studying exactly how divine grace enters and manifests itself in the life of those who receive it. **First, grace trains us to "renounce ungodliness and worldly passions"** - **Titus 2:11-12** - "...For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions...." And please notice the care Paul takes to **identify** the kind of grace he's describing. It's the kind of grace that "**brings salvation**"(11). There is no **salvation** grace without **training** and **renouncing** grace. They're the **same** grace. They're the **only** grace offered to "**all people**"(11).

Now this is a great general concept. But it still isn't quite specific enough. Exactly **how** does grace do this. Most of us just think in terms of a rather vague - though beautiful - somewhat **passive** reception of God's grace. If it actually **does** something once freely received, **what** does it do and **how** does it do it?

We studied two answers given by Paul to shine light on this subject. **First, grace prompts gratitude and love for the One who calls us to follow Him** - "**....who gave himself for us....**"(2:14). And here's why this matters so much. There are only three possible reasons for specific acts of devotion and service (remember, Paul says we're all **slaves** of Jesus Christ - 1:1) to our Lord. I can serve Him because I'm trying to **earn my way to heaven**. This is works righteousness, and the Bible says it's really the hallmark of all religious unbelief in the gospel of Jesus Christ. So that won't work.

Then I can serve Him because I'm **supposed** to do so. Here's the list of commands and duties, so just suck it up and do what you're told because you **have** to. The problem, of course, is people will quickly find such devotion a chore. Resentment builds over time rather than love. So the way Jesus Christ has won our obedience is by winning our hearts. Or, to say it differently, He makes the **tree** good by the amazing grace of redemption and regeneration, so the **fruit** will be good from the grace received.

You can't create a good tree by sticking good fruit on all the branches. No. Divine grace makes the **tree** good from the roots up. It makes the tree of your life thankful and humbly dependant. All of the good fruit grows from the divinely regenerating grace empowered good tree. Love makes devotion a **delight** rather than a mere **chore**.

So that's the first answer to the "**how**" question as to the way grace trains us to renounce ungodliness. **Grace prompts gratitude and love for the One who calls us to follow Him**. But we studied one more way in which grace trains us away from ungodliness. **Grace turns the inclination of the heart against worldly desires**. **Psalm 19:13** - "Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression."

But remember, this is a **training** process - **Titus 2:11-12** - "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, [12] training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions...." This is why, especially in the early **forming** stages of this divine process, the Bible stresses **yielding** our members to righteousness, and **yielding** to the Holy Spirit. The early training in divine grace requires more work against our natural instincts than the later stages. Later on, you'll have the advantage of looking back on the **evidence** of trusting Christ over your own initial reactions. You'll have the proof that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

That gets us up to date. Now for the **third** way grace trains our hearts to renounce ungodliness:

- iii) **Third, grace recoils from sins previously committed**. There is more than being forgiven for sins committed. When the godly person falls prey to worldly lusts, he repents and rejects them at the first pangs of conviction when tempted to **repeat** those sins in the future.

Perhaps the Apostle John makes this link more clearly than anyone else: **1 John 1:9, 3:9** - "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness....3:9....No one born of God **makes a practice of sinning**, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God."

John is saying a great deal here. We **sin** and we **don't** sin. **Both** those statements are true. And they don't contradict each other. Christians **do** sin, but they **don't** sin like they did before the entrance of saving grace. While Christians may **fall into sin** they don't **enter into sinful actions fully**. Sin is now **against** their nature, not **with** their true nature, since God's seed abides in them.

I think the point of these verses is frequently missed. John isn't making contradictory statements about sin. When he says we don't "**practice sin**"(3:9)he doesn't mean we will never sin again. That should be our aim. But by "**practice sin**" he means repeating the **same sins** over and over again with consciences eased by the false claim of receiving divine grace.

Genuine repentance and reception of grace drives a wedge between forgiven sins and future carelessness about those same sins. When Christians **do** fall into sin, they **repent from it** and **learn from it** so as not to be tripped up again and again. In other words, they don't **remain** in the sins they commit. Sin goes against the deepest desire and purpose of the Christian's heart.

iv) **Grace teaches the mind to see the unmasked intention of the devil in playing toward our inward 'worldly passions.'**

This is right in our text: **Titus 2:12** - ".....training us to renounce ungodliness and **worldly passions....**"

Without God's transforming grace these desires become the **end and goal** of our earthly living. That's why Paul says the pagan mind is a **slave** to sin. And when you're **born into** that slavery you don't feel anything abnormal about it. Paul says sinners simply walk "**in the course of this world**" - **Ephesians 2:1-2** - "**And you were dead in the trespasses and sins[2] in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience....**"

So Paul calls us away from all the hype and all the advertisers by reminding us there is never anything genuinely **creative** in sin. It's the world's ultimate rut. It's the ultimate manifestation of all that is **non-original**. So it really is best described as the "**course**" of this world.

But the first thing God's grace does is awaken the mind to the **downhill mindless rut** of worldly desires. When God's grace comes through the cross it opens my eyes to my true spiritual condition. That's what we sing about all the time in churches across the world without realizing it. This is what **John Newton** meant when he wrote, "**I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.**" Or, "**At the cross, at the cross where I first saw the light....**" Grace opens the eyes to a problem I couldn't diagnose before. It reveals the **spiritual bondage** behind **worldly desires**.

Paul calls them "**worldly passions**" because, while they're common and widely accepted (by the **whole world - worldly**), they aren't innocent or neutral. They pull the affections down from the God above to the world below. They **fix** the heart on earthly matters and concerns to the point that these earthly things **take the place of God in the life**.

This is why Paul calls the covetous man an **idolater** - **Ephesians 5:5** - "**For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.**"

The person who doesn't **deny** worldly desires is a **worshiper** of them. They are called **worldly** desires because they will rob the person of any time or energy to focus on anything other than **worldly** fulfillment. You can call it **industry**, or **ambition** or **drive** or whatever flattering label you choose, but these desires **root people's attention and affection earthward in such a way that nothing is left for spiritual pursuits**.

Stop and think about this. We **know** this is true. We **know** there is a worldly spiritual power in these earthly ambitions because those in their grip **never** possess the **same level** of ambition of drive or single-mindedness in their pursuit of **spiritual** things. And they **would** if their all-encompassing ambition were just their natural state. They would be ambitious and focused in **everything** - including their **pursuit of God**. But they **don't**. And, says Paul, they **can't**. And that's the proof they are bound by the spiritual darkness **behind** these earthly ambitions.

Now, enter the grace of God revealed on the cross of Jesus. Grace immediately starts orienting the life toward a different kingdom and a different realm - **1 Peter 2:11** - "**Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.**"

So grace comes to freely save. But it doesn't **stop** there. The very next thing grace does is teach us to "**deny ungodliness and worldly desires.**" Then divine grace teaches us something else:

b) **Grace trains us to live "....self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age...."**

i) **Self-controlled** - Paul has already praised this virtue four times in this short letter. This was obviously a much to be sought after virtue for the spiritually minded. The word basically means **sober-minded**, or having a mind, where thoughts and desires and ambitions form, **ruled and held in proper order and proportion**.

The self-controlled person keeps **proper priorities** arranged in his or her life. He isn't drawn away **inwardly** from Christ by **outward** circumstances. He doesn't allow his life to be shaped by **bad examples** around him. He rules his spirit. He doesn't allow **temper** or **feelings** to set the direction of his Christian walk.

- ii) **Upright** - This has to do with consistently shaping the life by the righteous standards of God's Word. In all relationships with family, workers, worshipers, friends and enemies alike, God's Word is the only regulator adhered to: **Psalm 19:9** - **"...the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether."**
- iii) **Godly** - This is what separates true grace from mere morality. Christians **should** be moral. They must never be **immoral**. But being moral isn't enough. Being **moral** isn't necessarily being **godly**. Grace isn't revealed from heaven in Christ Jesus just to make people **good**. Grace is offered to bring people to **worship and love God through His Son, Jesus Christ**.

Atheists can be **good**. Only Jesus Christ can make you **godly**. There are people who are **kind to their neighbors** but **blaspheme the Name of God**. There are people who **care for the dying and lonely** but **are covetous idolaters with regard to the things of this world**.

So these three virtues must be sought and possessed **together**. True saving grace, thriving in the heart, will not leave the Christian feeling free while ignoring any of these elements.

3) **SAVING GRACE PUSHES OUR LIVES INTO THE FUTURE, EMPHASIZING THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS CHRIST**

Titus 2:13-14 - **"...waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, [14] who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works."**

We've already looked at the incisive way in which Peter addressed this very subject: **1 Peter 2:11** - **"Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul."**

Notice how Peter joins these two ideas together. Like Paul, he tells Christians they must **"abstain from the passions of the flesh."** And, just like Paul, he tells us we will never be able to do that until we **consider ourselves - reckon or count ourselves - as actually being "sojourners and exiles"** here in this present world.

Otherwise, why would I deny myself worldly desires? If this world is where I belong, those desires make perfect sense. If this world is my real, permanent dwelling place, then these desires are the path to maximum fulfillment. Until I see myself as **belonging** to another kingdom and **heading** for a different destination, and **actually preparing myself** for another future altogether, I will never muster the will power to renounce worldly desires. As long as the future coming of Jesus and my future participation in His eternal kingdom are treated as **religious doctrines** and **churchy slogans**, they will never have the power to transform my affections and priorities.

Make yourself think every day about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Don't miss one day. At least seven times a week obey this command from the Scriptures: **Colossians 3:1-2** - **"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. [2] Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth."**

Finally, Paul says all these things are to be taught so thoroughly that nobody will be able to disregard them. Some people will like hearing them. Some people won't. Some people will listen to these instructions. Some people won't. There will always be people who only want to embrace **one side** of saving grace. There will always be people who want to **use saving grace as God's credit card to continue in carelessness and sin**.

"But," Paul says to Titus, "make sure nobody will be able to say you didn't tell them. Don't let them disregard this truth!" **Titus 2:15** - **"Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you."**

Why would anybody do that? Why would anybody be so foolish to ignore the biggest part of life? Don't drift into apathy. Stay passionately responsive to Jesus. Long for His appearing with a pure, careful, passionate heart.