

HOW YOUR LIFE CAN MODEL THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL

Teaching Through Titus Verse by Verse - Part nine

Sunday, November 20th, 2011, a.m. - Teaching #1516

THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF FREELY RECEIVED GRACE

Titus 2:11-15 - "For the grace of God has appeared, *bringing salvation for all people*, [for how many people did God's grace in Christ Jesus come?] [12] *training us* [Not just *forgiving 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 [So the certainty of our eternal hope - our *unearned, grace-given hope*, doesn't make us lazy or indifferent to holiness], [14] *who gave himself for us* [Now we're looking *back* to the cross. *Forward* to our hope. *Backward* to Christ's cross. Two directions but the same effect] *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* [positive] and *rebuke* [negative] with all authority. *Let no one disregard you.*"

"*Let no one disregard you.*" Don't give the impression in the way to present these things that it's *optional* whether or not they take them to heart. This is too important to be left to people's tastes. Something terribly deforming has crept into the Christian faith when we start thinking of our state as Christians as more or less *ordinary - when we stop seeing ourselves as unbelievable miracles - saved against all odds*. It's a tragedy when we cease to marvel at grace. It's like forgetting when you've won the lottery.

If you've ever taken the time to wade through Fyodor Dostoyevsky's **Crime and Punishment** you will come to this amazing paragraph on the shocking, scandalous description of gospel grace:

"At the last Judgment Christ will say to us, 'Come, you also! Come, drunkards! Come, children of shame! And he will say to us: "Come, vile beings, you who are in the image of the beast...come all the same!' And the wise and the prudent will say, 'Lord, why do you welcome them?' And he will say: 'If I welcome them, you wise men, if I welcome them, you prudent men, it is because not one of them has ever been judged worthy.' And he will stretch out his arms and we will fall at his feet, and we will cry out with sobbing, and *then* we will understand it all - we will understand the Gospel of grace. Lord, your kingdom come!"

We all need to keep our minds clear and settled on the wonder of Divine grace. Nothing will go well for us if we ever *understand* all of this. Such grace is still best described as *amazing*. Or *shocking*. Or *unbelievable*. There's nothing ordinary or logical about it.

Brennan Manning is a writer who is sometimes orthodox and sometimes not. But he almost caught me off guard in his book, **The Ragamuffin Gospel**. He talks about our God as being a God who is constantly "*snooping around for sinful people*." God makes that His chief business. He can't help but love every one of them. He wants to bring every one of them home. I'm not overstating the truth in the interest of dramatic effect. The Apostle Peter tells us He (God) isn't willing that *any* should perish

Jesus told us the parable of the prodigal son. It hasn't really registered as it should if it all makes perfect sense to us. We're supposed to be almost caught off guard in this story of a God who loves to give everything He has for the scoundrel who ripped him off. He loves to sell the family jewels just to prepare a feast of surf and turf for the returning rebel who has just spent his last dime on a hooker. Grace is amazing indeed. God help us if we ever get used to it. At least at times, tears should fall as we fan the understanding of grace to flame in our minds.

Grace is Paul's subject in the text today - "**God's grace has appeared...**" In fact, everything Paul has been saying to Titus is predicated upon the appearance of that grace. What makes Paul so sure all these different groups of people in the church can actually *do* the things Titus is going to tell them to do? What hope could there be for a group of people who were, by the description of eye-witnesses, "*liars, beasts and lazy gluttons*"(1:12)?

There are rich lessons here:

1) TRUST IN THE POWER OF SAVING GRACE

I want to issue fresh *encouragement* to those who may be edging toward doubt today. Not that you'd ever *say* you didn't believe in God's saving grace. You've *experienced* it yourself. But, just perhaps, you are getting weary - impatient - a little thin of hope - that your unsaved husband, or mother, or wife, or son, or daughter is ever going to turn around and come to humbly love and serve Jesus Christ.

Listen to Paul today. Paul's confidence in the power of redeeming grace came from the clear, confirmed evidence of the most unlikely people being made brand new in Christ Jesus:

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 - "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality [no mention of the cause or source of the orientation], [10] nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. [11] And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

That's what God's grace is all about. These are the people who are the special objects of God's attention and effort. Never give up on

God's grace. Never view anybody as out of God's reach. Refuse that lie. Pray hard. Love patiently. Be the best example you can be. Don't nag. But above it all, trust in the continuous, ever-reaching, never ending, hunting power of God's grace.

Paul says God's grace has appeared for "**all people**"(11). No one is disqualified. God wants no one left out. Pick anyone you want. God wants them more than you do.

2) **AUTHENTIC GRACE NOT ONLY SAVES US, IT TRAINS US**

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, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age...."

Very simply, divine grace teaches two lessons: It teaches us what to **avoid**, and it teaches us what to **pursue**. We're to avoid **ungodliness** and **worldly desires**. We're to pursue **self-control, uprightness, and godliness**.

These are important words for a modern church to write down somewhere. We live in a day when the **saving** virtue of grace is emphasized far more than the **training** virtue of grace. We live in a day when **grace** is confused with **tolerance**, when **indifference** to wickedness is taken for **love**, and when **self-fulfillment** is more valued than **self-denial**. All of which makes the Christian life feel like a fairy-tale and the power of divine grace a stale religious relic.

So Paul reminds Titus to remind the people that grace isn't merely **received** by some kind of magic spell. It can't be embraced with detached wills. True, grace isn't **earned**. It is wondrously free and undeserved. And, as we've already stated, it **is** for the lost and the wicked.

But, having said all that, Paul still said grace must never be received "**in vain**": **1 Corinthians 15:9-10** - "For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. [10] But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was **not in vain**. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me."

God's grace comes like electricity comes. It always carries power. There is nothing **passive** or **static** about divine grace. Here is what it does:

a) **Grace trains us to "renounce ungodliness and worldly desires"(12).**

The **first** response to grace in the mind of the Christian should be **gratitude**. The **second** response, linked to the first, should be **diligence**. In fact, those two responses are constantly linked together in the Scriptures:

Romans 12:1-2 - "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. [2] Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

1 Peter 1:17-19 - "And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, [18] knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, [19] but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot."

This is where the power of **grace** exceeds the power of the **law**. Grace received produces the **motive of love and gratitude** in the heart of the recipient. Serving one you **love** is much easier than one you **fear**. I would do things for my wife I wouldn't do for anybody else on earth. But I **love** doing those things because I love her. Love makes devotion a joy and failure in devotion a heartbreak.

This is such an important point. We simply **must** believe that it **is** possible to deny worldly desires that war against the soul. God's grace is full of power to help us do precisely that. To underscore this point Paul says we are to heed these instructions, not in some distant day in heaven, but **right now**, and **right here**, in this "**present age**"(Titus 2:12).

I know this is an involved concept, but let me try to show you **how** grace does this in my heart. Let's look at **how** divine grace changes us inside:

i) **First, grace prompts gratitude and love for the One who calls us to follow Him.** That is why Christ's yoke is easy and light. It is certainly **challenging**. It is still a yoke, after all, and a yoke was perhaps the most universally recognized symbol for **exertion** known. But grace is a yoke with a difference. Jesus says there's a **lightness** in it. We serve with **joy** because we begin to **want to please** the One who died for us. We are **drawn** into devotion with new, soft hearts.

Psalm 119:57-58 - "The Lord is my portion; I promise to keep your words.[58] I entreat your favor with all my heart; be gracious to me according to your promise."

Notice, "**I entreat your favor...**" The attachment is **personal and warm**. There's something beyond mere duty in that phrase. This zeal isn't rooted in **law**. It's rooted in **loving relationship and a passion to please**.

- ii) **Second, 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."

Grace disarms all excuses. We start to see and hate the real enemy **inside**. This change comes to those who have a humble, sensitive spirit. Even when the godly **do** fall into sin, they don't sin with **full consent** - **Romans 7:15-17** - "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. [16] Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. [17] So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me."

Grace brings a **shift in loyalties**. We are **under new management**. We gradually and increasingly find ourselves **miserable** when we sin and **joyful** when we don't give in to the sins that used to satisfy. Over time, when we look back with more wisdom on times of temptation, we find we were more deeply joyful when we resisted than when we gave in.

Now, let me show you this same idea from the negative side of the principle. **Psalm 36:1-4** - "To the choirmaster. Of David, The servant of the Lord. Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart; there is no fear of God before his eyes.[2] For he flatters himself in his own eyes that his iniquity cannot be found out and hated. [3] The words of his mouth are trouble and deceit; he has ceased to act wisely and do good. [4] He plots trouble while on his bed; he sets himself in a way that is not good; he does not reject evil."

Here is the person who still lies to himself - "**flatters himself**"(2) - with the idea that he can independently create a meaningful pattern of living while ignoring God. He squeezes God out of his thoughts. The power of grace doesn't speak to his mind and heart. In powerfully descriptive words the Psalmist says "**Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart...**"And this fool listens.

My point here is God the Father, through the atoning work of Jesus Christ, God the Son, and by the present inward work of the Holy Spirit, wants to initiate and sustain a vivid new grace-life. It doesn't unpack its presence in your heart the your hair turns grey. If you use your mind and listen to the Holy Spirit and feed on the Word and turn from your wicked ways, God will cause grace to work in your heart the way an inhaler reaches a person in the throws of asthma. Let Him open you up to the power of grace.