

THE GRACE OF GOD
TITUS 2:11-15

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

Marshall and Philip grew up in the Bible Belt in Georgia. Their lives were centered around the church. Their parents had a great interest in world missions. They determined to bring their young family to Africa. Unfortunately dad at the young age of 23 came down with polio. His sickness was severe. He was put in what was called an iron lung, which was the treatment which my own father had when he came down with polio when he was just a few years younger.

Marshall and Philip's parents prayed about this situation. After considerable reflection and meditation, they became convinced that God would heal their father. Against the advice of the doctors, the dad got out of the iron lung. He died a few days later. While grieving over her husband's grave the mom vowed that she would dedicate her two sons to missionary service in Africa. Mom kept careful watch over the school and church education of her sons. She saw that they were enrolled in a solid Christian college.

But then when Marshall decided to transfer to a different Christian college, his mom got really upset. She was convinced that this other Christian school was too liberal. She told her son, **"I'll do whatever it takes to stop you, young man. You listen to me. If you find a way to pull off this plan, I guarantee you one thing. I'll pray every day for the rest of your life that God will break you. Maybe you'll be in a terrible accident and die. That'll teach you. Or, better yet, maybe you'll be paralyzed. Then you'll have to lie on your back and stare at the ceiling and realize what a rebellious thing you've done, going against God's will and everything you've been brought up to believe."** (*Christianity Today*, October 2021)

How were her two sons supposed to deal with that kind of attitude? Her mother told her sons that she had not sinned in twelve years. How do kids from that background turn out?

There was a crucial element missing from their mom's theology. Correct theology requires a recognition that there is a God who has absolute standards, who holds His moral creatures accountable, who defines right and wrong. But the God of the Bible is also a God of grace. And it was grace which was seemingly missing from their mom's theology. It is grace which is the theme of the passage before us this morning.

We have seen that the Apostle Paul wrote this brief letter to his younger coworker Titus, whom he had left on the island of Crete in the Mediterranean Sea to strengthen the churches which had been established there. Paul told Titus to appoint elders for these churches. He told them the qualifications that were necessary for this position. He also

talked in general terms about the need to confront teachers with a wrong theology and to confront a culture which was characterized by their own thought leaders as filled with liars, evil beasts, and lazy gluttons. Then Paul proceeded to give general directions for the kind of character qualities to encourage for older men and older women and younger women. Last week we saw what he had to say about young men and slaves. According to v. 10 of #2 these positive character qualities are intended to adorn the doctrine of God our Savior. In today's passage the apostle elaborates upon that theology focused upon God our Savior.

I.

So in v. 11 and the first part of v. 14 of #3 Paul speaks about **THE GRACE OF GOD IN THE PAST**. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. THE GRACE OF GOD IN THE PAST) He writes, **“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people...”** In v. 10 Paul was telling Christian slaves to behave well **“so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.”** What is that doctrine? Most of Paul's letters begin with an explanation of correct doctrine. This one begins with an encouragement for Christians to pursue good behavior. Now he makes reference to the foundational beliefs that should produce that good behavior.

In v. 11 Paul speaks of the grace which produces salvation. From what are people being saved? In v. 12 he speaks of ungodliness and worldly passions. In v. 14 he speaks of lawlessness. Back in #1 Paul said that one of the respected thought leaders on Crete said that this lawlessness and ungodliness and worldly passions has produced liars, evil brutes, and lazy gluttons.

The deliverance in view is not just rescue from something bad, it is also a deliverance to something really good. Back in #1 v. 2 Paul spoke of a faith which produces eternal life. That sounds pretty good.

Crete was part of the Roman Empire. Its citizens had a reputation for being loyal to Rome and its rulers. They generally looked to Rome for protection and assistance. An inscription was found on a government building in Priene in Asia Minor. It dates to 6 BC. (PRIENE INSCRIPTION) The inscription reflects the attitude of many loyal Romans. It speaks of Emperor Caesar Augustus. This is how it reads in one part; **“...for when everything was falling (into disorder) and tending toward dissolution, he restored it once more and gave the whole world a new aura; Caesar ...the common good Fortune of all... The beginning of life and vitality... All the cities unanimously adopt the birthday of the divine Caesar as the new beginning of the year... Whereas the Providence which has regulated our whole existence ...has brought our life to the climax of perfection in giving to us (the emperor) Augustus ...who being sent to us and our descendants as Savior, has put an end to war and has set all things in order; and (whereas,) having become (god) manifest, Caesar has fulfilled all the hopes of earlier times.”**

Notice the language similar to what Paul is using. The inscription speaks about a deliverance from disorder. It speaks about a savior who is the divine Caesar. It says that

Augustus has become god “manifest.” The word for “manifest” is the noun form of the Greek verb translated in v. 11 as “has appeared.” So Paul’s words to Titus are, in effect, a challenge to the cultural thinking of the day about the source of ultimate salvation.

Of course it is difficult for us today to relate to such issues. For no one today thinks that salvation comes from government or a political leader, do they? Oh, wait, maybe they do. It seems like I have heard a couple of political candidates say that if the other guy gets elected, it is the end of democracy. We Christians may have strong political convictions. But maybe we need to be a little cautious about thinking that any political leader can be our Savior. If we are Christians, there is only one Person who holds that title. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Back in #1 vv. 3 & 4 the apostle spoke about the source of true salvation. He wrote, **“...and at the proper time manifested--- there is that word--- in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior; To Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.”** Christ Jesus is our Savior. He is the source of the salvation which Paul is describing.

According to v. 11 grace is an essential part of this salvation deal. Grace has been often defined as “unmerited favor.” It is getting something good that we do not deserve or have not earned. Paul uses a past tense verb to indicate that this grace thing has happened in the past, and that it has brought salvation with it. One of the best explanations of this past appearance of the grace of God is found in Philippians #2 vv. 6-8. (PROJECTOR ON--- PHILIPPIANS 2:6-7) There Paul writes, **“...Though he was in the form of God, [he] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being found in the likeness of men. (PHILIPPIANS 2:8) And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”** This is a reference to the first coming of the Messiah. It is a reference to His birth and His death. This coming of Jesus was an act of grace. It is this first coming of Jesus which is in view in v. 11 in our passage.

The further implication is that the salvation brought by Jesus in the past is also appropriated by grace. Our Mormon friends have a misunderstanding of this. In their Book of Mormon in 2 Nephi 25:23 they are told, **“It is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.”** What is it that constitutes “all we can do”? If we have to do something, if we have to be good enough, then it isn’t really grace. (EPHESIANS 2:8-9) The Bible tells us in Ephesians #2 vv. 8 & 9, **“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”**

This grace thing makes Christianity unique among all the religions of the world. To the best of my knowledge every other religion in the world, including perversions of Christianity, claim that there is some membership that is required, some ritual, some sacrifice, some level of behavior which is required before we can be accepted by the

God, or gods, who is there. True Christianity says that the price of our salvation has been paid by Jesus. The only thing that we can do to enter into the benefit of that is to believe, to put our trust in Jesus. **“By grace you have been saved through faith. It is not of works so that no one may boast.”** The worst sinner gets in on the same basis as what we perceive to be the most holy person.

The objection to this is that it seems too easy. What incentive is there to be a good person if this eternal salvation comes simply by faith? There are two things that come to my mind. The first is that the Bible is like an owner’s manual. It tells us about the best way to live. The most fulfilling and meaningful life comes from following God’s directions in the Bible. The second thing is that the New Testament tells us that believing in Jesus makes us part of God’s family. We now have a Heavenly Father who loves us more than the best earthly father we could have. Because He loves us, He will discipline us if we get too far out of line. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Verse 11 also tells us that this salvation has come to all people. Students of the Bible have looked at this statement in isolation and have come to different conclusions. There are some who have used this to support the idea of universalism. This is the idea that all people will eventually be saved and end up in heaven. There was an English philosopher and theologian by the name of John Hick who subscribed to this view. He taught at Princeton Seminary and Cambridge University, among other places. He said, **“The old exclusivist view that only Christians are saved has been abandoned by the majority of Christian theologians and church leaders.”** (*A Pluralist View in More than One Way?*, 1995, p. 29) I have doubts about whether the majority of church leaders have abandoned this view. But universalism does depart from the traditional, orthodox view of the Bible.

A second interpretation of this statement is known as inclusivism. The claim here is that Jesus is the only Savior, but perhaps some may be saved without personal trust in Jesus. A theologian who teaches at Hendrix College by the name of John Sanders writes, **“...God applies that work even to those who are ignorant of the atonement. God does this if people respond to the revelation they have.”** (*A Trinitarian Theory of Religions*, McDermott and Netland)

The traditional, orthodox interpretation of this statement in v. 11 is known as exclusivism. It says that only those who trust in Jesus experience God’s salvation. In the Gospel of John #3 a religious Jewish leader by the name of Nicodemus came to Jesus and asked him about this salvation deal. Jesus did not tell him not to worry about it, that everyone would be saved. He did not say to Nicodemus that the sincerity of his belief in his understanding of the God of the Old Testament was enough to get him to heaven. He said, **“...unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”** A few verses later He declared, **“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”** Eternal life comes only by believing in Jesus.

What is the meaning then of the statement that grace has brought salvation to all people? Proper interpretation of the Bible always requires looking at the context in which statements are found. In the preceding verses Paul has been talking about several groups of people. He has talked about old men and old women, young men and young women, and slaves. A reasonable interpretation of v. 11 in this context is that God's grace has brought salvation to all kinds of people, to young and old and even slaves, not to all human beings without exception.

Consider then the first part of v. 14: “[**Jesus Christ**] gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness.” This is part of God's grace accomplished in the past. The original word for “redeem” was used of buying freedom for slaves by paying a price for them. The Greek word for that price is related to the word for “redeem.” It comes to us in English as “ransom.” (PROJECTOR ON--- MARK 10:45) Thus it is that Jesus declared in Mark #10 v. 45, “**For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.**”

Why do we need a ransom? Because we have been in bondage to sin and its consequences. Apart from Jesus we are headed for hell. To whom is the ransom paid? Some Christians in ancient history said that Satan needs to be paid off. But that gives Satan too high a place in the scheme of things. It is rather the righteous demands of a holy God which must be met.

(1 TIMOTHY 2:5-6) Thus Paul writes in 1 Timothy #2 vv. 5 & 6, “**For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.**” Thus the grace of God accomplished in the past through the death of Jesus means that Christians have been freed from every lawless deed. We have been freed from our bondage to sin and its consequences.

II.

In v. 12 and vv. 14 & 15 Paul speaks about THE GRACE OF GOD IN THE PRESENT. (II. THE GRACE OF GOD IN THE PRESENT) In v. 12 the Bible speaks about this appearance of the grace of God “**training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age...**”

The New Testament uses different words for training and teaching and instruction. This particular term has a nuance of discipline. We may not normally think of discipline as stemming from God's grace. But most of us older Christians can look back toward at least some of the hard things which we have experienced in life and appreciate how those hard experiences contributed to our maturity and growth in faith in God.

The grace of God here is involved in instructing us, or training us, to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions. Without Jesus we would not know that some of our behaviors are bad. The Apostle Paul had been involved in persecuting Christians, probably killing some of them. He was convinced that he was serving God in doing that. He received a personal appearance of Jesus which changed his life.

Some of us have had messed up world views. We have been convinced that it is OK to kill babies in the womb, that it is OK to get drunk on weekends, that it is OK to chase people of the opposite sex, or perhaps the same sex. When Jesus comes into our lives, our world view gets changed.

Some of these wrong views involve worldly passions. The grace of God involves not only a revealing of what is right and wrong, but it also includes a power to overcome them. In Acts #1 v. 8 (ACTS 1:8) Jesus told His followers, **“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”** We need divine power to overcome these worldly passions and temptations. Peter had recently denied knowing Jesus in front of a group of people. He and his fellow disciples often appeared to be weak and bumbling in the four gospel accounts. But after the Holy Spirit came upon them at Pentecost, they became a bold group of guys. Such is the power which we also need. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Then positively in v. 12 the grace of God enables us to live **“self-controlled, upright, and godly lives.”** There are several varieties of trees which are called live oak trees. (PROJECTOR ON--- LIVE OAK TREE) One of the things which distinguishes them is that their leaves grow dark and dingy in the fall and winter. But they still hang on to the tree. They only shed their leaves when spring comes and new leaves replace them. Such it is when the new life of Jesus invades our lives that many of these worldly passions are replaced. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Skipping down to v. 14 Paul writes that Jesus Christ **“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.”** Jesus changes us. He purifies us. He cleanses us.

Paul uses this imagery in Ephesians # 5. (PROJECTOR ON--- EPHESIANS 5:25) He writes, beginning in v. 25, **“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, (EPHESIANS 5:26) that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, (EPHESIANS 5:27) so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”** In this imagery the church comprised of Christians is compared to a bride who is being prepared for her wedding and the wedding feast to follow.

(PROJECTOR OFF) The product of this purification process, Paul says in v. 14 in our passage, is a zealousness for good works. This is in contrast to lawlessness, which is mentioned earlier in the verse. Good works is a broad category. It would include all kinds of things in which we serve as a blessing for others. On the top of the list for Paul was sharing the gospel with others.

Then in v. 15 Paul continues this theme about the grace of God in the present by saying to Titus, **“Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one**

disregard you.” Titus was to be bold and confident in his teaching. Why would anyone disregard him? He may have been a somewhat younger guy. Paul had initially been with him in the ministry in Crete. He was the strong and dominant and gifted apostle. Titus did not have the same status. But Paul encourages him to speak with authority. The application to him is the same as the application to us. The authority and power is ultimately resident in the Biblical message we present. If we are sharing what the Bible says, we can be confident that the authority of the Lord God of heaven is behind us. Such is the grace of God in the present.

III.

We come then to v. 13 in our passage, which describes THE GRACE OF GOD IN THE FUTURE. (PROJECTOR ON--- III. THE GRACE OF GOD IN THE FUTURE) Paul says that we Christians are **“waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.”**

Many of us here are in the latter part of our earthly lives. The deadline of life is drawing ever closer. We may be feeling our age. We may have some significant health challenges. Our hopes for this life are realistically more limited. We may have hopes for our kids and grandkids and even for our local church. But the prospects for abundance and great experiences in this life are declining. But the Bible reminds us that we have a hope, a blessed hope. Hope in the New Testament is not just a wishful thinking. It is a confident expectation.

This confident hope has to do with another “appearing.” This is the same word that was used in v. 11 for the first appearing of Jesus. The word is more literally “epiphany.” The first epiphany was the incarnation of Jesus. His appearance then was of a humble nature. He was born in a manger to poor young peasant parents. His earthly life ended in crucifixion. But then there was a resurrection and an ascension.

The second epiphany will be marked by glory. The New Testament word for “glory” refers to the visible expression of God’s power and character. We are dealing in more detail in our Sunday evening Bible study with this Second coming and what is to follow.

We find one description of this appearing of the glory of Jesus Christ in Revelation #19 vv. 11-14. (REVELATION 19:11) In his vision of this future coming the Apostle John says: **“Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. (REVELATION 19:12) His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. (REVELATION 19:13) He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. (REVELATION 19:14) And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses.”** We Christians will be part of this army. What follows is the establishment of God’s kingdom upon the earth. Jesus will reign for a thousand years. This will be followed by the coming of the new heavens and the new earth. It will be glorious. (PROJECTOR OFF)

At times we may get little glimpses of what this glorious coming will be like. In early April of 1865 Confederate defenses of the Southern capital of Richmond, Virginia, collapsed. President Abraham Lincoln went with General Grant to Petersburg. He told the general there that he wanted to see Richmond. Admiral Porter was the officer who took him to see the Confederate capital. It was now abandoned by the Southern forces. President Lincoln sat down in the study of President Jefferson Davis who had left his office just forty hours earlier. Abraham Lincoln walked the streets of Richmond with an escort of only ten sailors. But he was soon surrounded and greeted by a crowd of recently freed slaves. They were recorded as shouting, **“Glory to God. Glory, glory! The Great Messiah! I knowed him as soon as I seed him. He’s been in my heart four long years. Come to free his children from bondage. Glory, Hallelujah!”** (*Battle Cry of Freedom*, pp. 846-847) It must have been a wonderful scene of deliverance, but there is a greater Messiah coming who will bring greater glory which will usher in an even greater freedom!

There are some sermon illustrations commonly used among pastors which are supposedly true. But it is often difficult to determine whether they are true and what the source of the story is. I tracked down this next story a few days ago. I found an account of it in a newspaper from December 1, 1900. There was one William Montague Dyke who was born in 1877. His father was a baronet and a member of the British government.

When William was ten years old, he was involved in an accident when he was playing with a friend that resulted in blindness. Doctors did not know of a way to recover his eyesight. Young William determined to overcome his handicap. He was a bright guy. He was accepted at Cambridge University. In spite of his blindness he graduated with high honors. During the course of his studies he met a daughter of an admiral who developed an interest in William.

About this time William became aware of an eye doctor in London who had developed a reputation for new treatments for eye diseases. This doctor took on William’s case and tried a new treatment for his injured eyes, while trying to limit William’s hopes of regaining his sight. About the same time a wedding date was set for William and his fiancée. It was October 12, 1900.

William’s eyes had been wrapped in linen, and the doctor agreed to have them removed on the date of the wedding to see if the treatment would work. The newspaper article describes what happened: **“Miss Cave entered the building on the arm of her white-haired father, the admiral, who was all decked out in the blue and gold lace of the quarterdeck. So moved was she that she could hardly speak. Was her lover at last to see her face--- the face that others admired, but which he knew only through his delicate fingertips?”**

“As she neared the altar, while the soft strains of the Wedding march from ‘Lohengrin’ floated through the church, her eyes fell on a strange group. Sir

William Hart Dyke stood there with his son. Before the latter was the great oculist in the act of cutting away the last bandage.

“William Montague Dyke took a step forward, with the spasmodic uncertainty of one who cannot believe that he is awake. A beam of rose-coloured light from a pane in the chancel window fell across his face, but he did not seem to see it.

“Did he see anything? Yes! Recovering in an instant his steadiness of mien, and with a dignity and joy never before seen in his face, he went forward to meet his bride. They looked into each other’s eyes, and one would have thought that his eyes would never wander from her face. ‘At last!’ She said. ‘At last!’ He echoed, solemnly, bowing his head.” (*New Zealand Herald*, Vol 37, Issue 11544, 1 December 1900, p. 2)

In 1 John #3 vv. 2 & 3 (PROJECTOR ON--- 1 JOHN 3:2) we find this promise: **“Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared---** verb form of epiphany which we have earlier encountered; **but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. (1 JOHN 3:3) And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.”** This is the grace of God in the future. This is our hope, our confident expectation, for what lies in our future, if we are indeed a follower of Jesus.

It is the grace of God which has appeared and will appear again. It is this grace that we need to work into our personal theology. The mother of Marshall and Philip excluded this grace. Her son Marshall eventually rebelled. He became a hippie. He declared that he was an atheist. He moved to California, and he became addicted to alcohol and drugs. His life was very hard. He was estranged from his mother. At age 97 his mother and he had not spoken for many years.

Things turned out differently for Philip. He went to a Christian college, but he remained skeptical of the claims of the gospel. He was scarred by his graceless background. According to his own testimony, Jesus one day revealed Himself to him and showed him the grace of God which was available to him. Since then Philip Yancey has become an author and a speaker who writes and speaks about the grace of God. This is one of his books: “What’s So Amazing about Grace”

We need that grace. Most of us have received that grace. We need to display that same grace toward others.