

Main Idea: According to Titus 2:11-14, we are utterly dependent upon grace for three events to occur in the Christian life.

- I. We need grace to begin the Christian life (11).
  - A. The source of grace is God.
  - B. The result of grace is salvation.
  - C. The revelation of grace is mandatory.
  - D. The beneficiaries of grace are diverse.
- II. We need grace to live the Christian life (12).
  - A. Grace teaches us to deny.
    1. Ungodliness must go.
    2. Worldly desires must go.
  - B. Grace teaches us to develop.
    1. Am I exhibiting self-control?
    2. Am I exhibiting righteousness?
    3. Am I exhibiting godliness?
- III. We need grace to finish the Christian life (13-14).
  - A. We are expecting an event.
  - B. We are expecting a Person.
    1. He gave His life for us.
    2. He wants us to live our lives for Him.

Make It Personal: When you know you are dependent upon grace...

1. It changes the way you view yourself.
2. It changes the way you view others.
3. It changes the way you view God.

### *Scripture Reading: Luke 18:9-14*

Give thanks. The Scriptures command the activity and God is worthy of it. We gave thanks to the Lord this past Wednesday evening in our Thanksgiving praise service, for many things, and this morning we’re going to zero in on another.

I’ve entitled this message, “*Giving Thanks for Grace: Past, Present, and Future.*” Give thanks for grace. The grace of God is amazing, and we’re indebted to His grace for every phase of our existence, hence, past, present, and future.

Several year’s ago I read Brother Yun’s book *Living Water*. You may recall Brother Yun as the author of *The Heavenly Man*, a book I recommended in the past. Brother Yun is a Chinese preacher, evangelist, and former prisoner whom God has used to point many to Christ. In *Living Water* Brother Yun shares how the grace of God sustained him during his darkest hours and even turned that darkness into indescribable joy. In a chapter “Lessons from Esau” Brother Yun shares the following:

There is an important truth that I think many Christians have not properly grasped: it is *only* the grace of God that can help and train us to overcome temptation. Paul told Titus that ‘the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age...’ (Titus 2:11-13). Some Christians think they can conquer their fleshly desires and temptations by their own willpower and strength. Some are even willing to go to great lengths in that battle, but if your struggle does not draw its strength from the grace of God, it will likely be in vain.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>\*\*</sup>Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

<sup>1</sup> For a previous message on this passage, see the “Amazed By Grace” series in 2001 at WBC.

<sup>2</sup> Brother Yun, *Living Water*, pp. 27-8.

Let that sink in. It is *only* the grace of God that can help us overcome temptation. In truth, we are utterly dependent upon grace. We cannot be saved without grace. Nor can we live without it.

In the Old Testament, you will find the word "grace" 39 times (in the KJV)—the more prevalent term used is *loving-kindness* (from the Hebrew *chesed*). The New Testament is full of grace. The word appears 131 times. Paul used the term to introduce and conclude nearly every letter he wrote. For instance, in his introduction to Titus he writes, "*Grace* and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior (1:4)," and his conclusion echoes the same theme, "*Grace* be with you all (3:15)." Indeed, the final verse of the Bible says we need grace (Rev. 22:21).

Yes, we need grace! Few would argue the fact. It's kind of like saying, "We need air to live!" We know it's true, but when was the last time you acknowledged your need for air? Likewise, we're prone to take grace for granted.

"How much do we need grace?" is the question before us. We could turn many places in God's Word to answer that question, but I have chosen the passage cited by Brother Yun as our text. It may well be a familiar text to you, and that's a good thing, for what is says is so fundamental to Christian living.

In Titus 2:11-14, God gives us one of the most powerful assessments of grace to be found anywhere in the Bible. According to Titus 2:11-14, we are utterly dependent upon grace for three events to occur in the Christian life, and for these three expressions of grace let us give thanks!

#### I. We need grace to begin the Christian life (11).

The book of Titus bears its name because a man named Titus received it from his mentor, Paul. It was somewhere between the years AD 63 and 65, and Titus was serving on the island of Crete, the fourth largest island in the Mediterranean Sea. There was a young church on the island, a *very* young church. Paul and Titus had introduced Christianity to the Cretans, but soon afterwards Paul moved on and left Titus to do the mop-up work of organizing the church.

It was no easy task for Titus. Crete had a reputation (and it wasn't good). The inhabitants were known for their dishonesty, gluttony, and laziness (1:12). It was Titus's task to put things in order in the church, and Paul told him how in this epistle.

Notice 1:5, "The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished." The young church needed help, and in this letter Paul told Titus exactly what they needed. According to chapter one, they needed godly leaders. According to chapter two, they needed godly members. And according to chapter three, they needed a godly reputation in the community. It was Titus's job to make it happen.

How? To initiate the changes, Titus needed to teach the Word of God. The immediate context of our study is chapter two. There Paul tells Titus to teach the people how to live out their faith. "You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine (1)."

Then in the following verses Paul identified five groups within the church that needed instruction. He was to teach the older men (2), and the older women (3), who in turn would teach the younger women (4-5). He was to teach the young men (6-8) and the slaves (9-10), with this aim in mind: "so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive."

That's key. It was Titus's job to teach the Cretan Christians how to live in such a way as to make the gospel of Christ attractive.

I know of nothing that does greater harm to the gospel than people who *profess* Christ but don't *live for* Christ. I talked to a missionary some time ago who shared the tragic story about a team of American missionaries working in Africa. The team was fractured by unresolved conflicts, strife, and bitterness. It had gone on for years, and was so bad that one of the African, national pastors came to my friend and said, "You missionaries are hurting the reputation of our church. We can't be around you."

To profess Christ and not be Christlike stifles the gospel. On the other hand, when a group of people choose to truly live for Christ, they can turn a community upside down!

Titus 2:1-10 shows us how to do it—through practical, Bible teaching. Titus 2:11-14 shows us what makes it possible. It's *grace*. Verse 11, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men."

Why do we need grace? First, we need grace to begin the Christian life. Notice four insights about grace from verse 11.

**A. The source of grace is God.** "For the grace of God." Grace begins with God, not with man. He's the God of grace. In fact, 1 Peter 5:10 calls Him the God of *all* grace.

**B. The result of grace is salvation.** "For the grace of God *that brings salvation* has appeared to all men." Paul can't think of salvation apart from the grace of God. No one is a Christian because he deserves it. No one. There are no "good prospects" in God's sight, only sinners who are saved the same way, by *grace*. It's the grace of God that brings salvation.

Just what is grace? Guthrie says, "Grace is God's free favor in dealing with man's sin." Wiersbe suggests, "Grace is God's lavish favor on undeserving sinners."

**C. The revelation of grace is mandatory.** "For the grace of God that brings salvation *has appeared* to all men." Notice something special about grace. Grace is unknown apart from God's revelation.

According to Romans 1, an unregenerate person can look at the stars and know that God exists. From creation, he can perceive the *power* of God. But he knows nothing of the *grace* of God. The natural man is blinded by sin and is oblivious to the grace and love of God. You need special revelation to grasp grace. Which is exactly what God gave.

"For the grace of God that brings salvation has *appeared*." Sinners don't discover salvation. Rather, God's salvation has "appeared." The Greek term is *epiphany*. Paul's using a light metaphor. He's saying that just like a sudden ray of light breaks the blackness of night when the sun appears in the morning dawn, so the grace of God in its brilliance has penetrated the blackness of a sin-infested world.

When did this revelation of grace appear? John 1:14 tells us, "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us; and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of *grace* and truth." Grace appeared when the Son appeared.

To whom has grace appeared? Insight #4...

**D. The beneficiaries of grace are diverse.** "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared *to all men*." What does Paul mean by "all men"? Remember the context. In chapter two, Paul has just dealt with five categories of people (older men, older women, younger women, younger men, and slaves). Who needs God's grace? The answer is, *all* types of people do. Male or female, old or young, rich or poor—all are guilty before God. And to whom has God's grace appeared? It's from *all* types of backgrounds that God gathers His people.

I hope we realize (and appreciate) that there is great diversity in the Church of Jesus Christ. One day when we gather around the throne of God to worship the Lamb there will be people from every tribe and language and people and nation (Rev 5:9). God doesn't call people on the basis of skin color or gender or economic status. No, the basis of His call is *grace*.

Oh beloved, ponder the grace of God! You wouldn't be a Christian today were it not for the grace of God. We need grace to begin the Christian life. God did for us what we could not do for ourselves. The Bible says we are *called* by God's grace (Gal. 1:6). We are *regenerated* by God's grace (Tit. 3:4-5). We are *forgiven* by God's grace (Eph. 1:7). We are *justified* by God's grace (Tit. 3:7; Rom 3:24).

We are indebted to grace. Listen to Paul's admission in 2 Timothy 1:9-10, "[God] has saved us and called us to a holy life--not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and *grace*. This *grace* was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus."

You will never appreciate your salvation fully until you see yourself as dependent upon grace. As Haldor Lillenas did, who wrote:

*Wonderful grace of Jesus, greater than all my sin;  
How shall my tongue describe it, where shall its praise begin?  
Taking away my burden, setting my spirit free,  
for the wonderful grace of Jesus reaches me.*

Thanks be to God for the grace that enables us to begin the Christian life. But the need doesn't stop there, nor does the grace.

## II. We need grace to live the Christian life (12).

The KJV ends verse 11 with a comma, and shows the close connection between verses 11 and 12. In fact, in verse 12 Paul bridges grace from the past to the present, and uses a Greek participle to show us what grace does. Grace *teaches* us. Yes, grace transforms us (that's verse 11), but grace also teaches us (verse 12).

Here we see the tie between theology and ethics, between what a person *believes* and how a person *behaves*. Why did Paul want Titus to teach the older men and women, the younger men and women, and the slaves how to live godly lives? Because grace demands it! And grace enables it! Grace is a *teacher*.

Don't miss this. The basis of ethics is doctrine. If you want to be a strong Christian, you need more than a "feel good" service on Sunday. You and I need a church where we can learn sound doctrine together.

The Greek word for "teach" in verse 12 is a term that means "to train" (*paideuo*). It was used of training children, and in Hebrews 12:6-7 carries the idea of family discipline.

Parents, how do you teach your children? A little at a time, right? Step by step. I remember when our girls were learning to walk. They learned to take one step at a time.

Grace is a great teacher, so much better than the Law which says, "Do this! Don't do that!" Grace is not anti-Law, and it certainly doesn't give a person a license to live however they want, but grace goes deeper. Grace changes a person's *want to*. When grace teaches, it gives incentive. When we've been taught by grace, we *want to* live differently.

When I was a ten year old boy, my mother had a great method to get me to comb my hair and wash my face. She *told* me to! And I knew there would be consequences if I disobeyed her.

But a few years later she didn't have to tell me any more. The desire to please a special young lady in my life was all the incentive I needed to get cleaned up.

That's the difference between Law and grace. Law tells me to get cleaned up. Grace gives me the desire to do so.

Yes, grace is a great teacher. It trains us how to live in the present. What curriculum does grace use in the teaching process? Or simply put, what do we learn from grace? Grace informs us of two responsibilities, one negative, and the other positive.

**A. Grace teaches us to deny.** "It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions." William Hendriksen put it this way (371), "No one *sleeps* his way into heaven." Grace calls us to get rid of two things. What are they?

1. *Ungodliness must go.* Ungodliness is whatever is unlike God. Whatever is unattractive to God should have no place in our lives. Grace tells us to say no to it.

2. *Worldly desires must go.* Worldly passions, worldly lusts--these must go. But what are they? Chrysostom said that worldly things are things which do not pass over with us into heaven but are dissolved together with this present world. A man is a fool if he pours his life into that which is doomed to destruction. I like Barclay's definition of "worldly things." They are things we could not show to God.

Is there anything in your life you would be embarrassed to show God? Grace says get rid of it *now*. It may be an attitude, like bitterness. It may be a habit, like stretching the truth or playing with alcohol. It may be music with ungodly lyrics. It may be a vile TV show. Get rid of it.

You say, "That's legalism."

Well, it could be, if you do it thinking you will earn God's favor from it. But it could also be you're listening to the teaching of grace. Grace teaches us to deny. Grace teaches us to *say no* to things.

When was the last time you consciously *said no* to ungodliness and worldly passions? When was the last time you turned off a television program or changed the radio station or refused to run with the crowd in order to *say no* to ungodliness and worldly passions? If we're listening to grace, we ought to be continually *saying no* quite often.

The apostle John gave counsel similar to Paul's in 1 John 2:15-16. "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world."

Before Christ saved us, we couldn't say no, for we were enslaved to sin. But now we must. Grace teaches us to *deny* ungodliness and worldly passions.

But there are two sides to godly living. Grace tells us to deny, that's side one. Here's side two.<sup>3</sup>

**B. Grace teaches us to develop.** "It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, *and* to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age." In Ephesians 4, Paul says the same thing in a slightly different way when he tells us to "put off the old man" and "put on the new man."

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<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 1:16-17 says, "Cease to do evil; learn to do good."

Grace involves a negative assignment—*deny*. And grace involves a positive task—*develop*. The Christian life is an ongoing process of growth (the biblical term is "sanctification"). We haven't arrived.

"What are we to develop?" you ask.

According to verse 12, we are to be growing in Christlikeness in three areas. The text says we should live *self-controlled* [*soberly* in the KJV; that deals with the believer's personal life], *righteous* [that deals with the believer's interpersonal life], and *godly* lives [that deals with the Christian's relationship to the Lord].

If we're listening to grace, these three virtues will be priority to us. We'll be seeking to live self-controlled, righteous, and godly lives.

So let's make this personal. Let's ask ourselves three questions.

1. *Am I exhibiting self-control?* Before we came to know Christ, we demonstrated self-indulgence, not self-control. And even if we were highly self-disciplined (which some non-Christians are), it wasn't for God's glory but for some other motivation.

So now you're a Christian. Do you control your passions, or do your passions control you? Young people, do you have Christ-honoring relationships with the opposite sex? Today's society assumes young people will have sex before marriage. Even so-called "professionals" are convinced that you can't expect a warm-blooded teen with active hormones to remain pure, so they talk about "safe sex."

This is an insult to the Spirit of God, for the fruit of the Spirit is *self-control*. Yes, you *can* live a pure life, and so can I, by God's grace.

2. *Am I exhibiting righteousness?* Verse 12 says, "And to live self-controlled, *upright*, and godly lives." Would the people who know you well describe you as righteous (not *self-righteous*)? Are you a person who strives to do what is *right*? Are you a person of integrity at work? On the cross Christ broke the power of sin and gave us the merit of His righteous life. If we know Him, we can live upright lives.

3. *Am I exhibiting godliness?* Can people tell that God is living in you by looking at your life? Do they see godliness? Not perfection, for sure, but do people see that you are growing day by day into the likeness of your Savior?

Grace teaches us that we need to grow. Grace tells us where we need to go. And grace takes us there. Peter writes, "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:18)."

Know this, my Christian friend. *You* can grow. The Christian life will work *for you*. But you need to appropriate grace. And what you need, God extends to you, for which we give thanks today.

We need grace to begin the Christian life. We also need grace to live the Christian life. Thirdly...

### III. We need grace to finish the Christian life (13-14).

The Christian life is a race, but it's a unique race. There is not just one winner. Every contestant can win, but not all *will* win. To be a winner in the Christian life, you must finish well. There's no prize for a good start.

Professor Howard Hendricks shared the following results from his personal study. There are 2,900 people mentioned in the Bible. Of these, the Bible gives us enough data concerning 100 to see if they finished well. Hendricks concludes, "Of these 100 Bible

characters, only one-third finished well." I would propose the percentages aren't much different in the church today.

The Southern Baptists did a survey awhile back and came up with an alarming statistic. 116 pastoral couples are leaving the ministry in the SBC *every week*--for a variety of reasons (such as stress and moral failure). They started well, but for one reason or another, they didn't finish well.

But pastors aren't the only ones who are throwing in the towel. When it comes to marriage these days, many are not finishing well. And in the area of church life, many are not finishing well.

What does it take to finish well? According to this text, the answer is *grace*. We need grace to finish the Christian life. And what we need, God freely offers to us.

Notice verses 13-14, "While we wait for the blessed hope--the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good."

Grace teaches us to live with anticipation. We are expecting something according to verse 13, two things actually.

**A. We are expecting an event.** What event? Paul calls it the "blessed hope." What is the blessed hope? It's not the blessed *hope-so*. It's not an event we *hope* will happen, but may not. It's an event we *know* will happen, on the authority of God's Word.

**B. We are expecting a Person.** We are awaiting "the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." People who finish well are people who live in constant expectation of an event and a person, the return of Jesus Christ.

Do you see the connection between verses 12 and 13? Why is it important how we live in the present? Why should we be motivated to live self-controlled, righteous, and godly lives in this present age? It's because we're expecting an event—the blessed hope—and a person. Our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, is coming again!

Having mentioned the person of Christ, Paul can't miss an opportunity to reflect on the atonement which he does in verse 14. We need to remember two things about the Person we're going to see.

1. *He gave His life for us.* The first five words of verse 14 sum up the gospel, "Who gave Himself for us." Christ died as a substitute in our place.

But why? Why would the spotless Lamb of God give His life for wretched sinners like us? There's only one answer. It's *grace*. Yet though grace is wonderful, it's not whimsical. When our Savior gave His life for us, He had a purpose in mind.

2. *He wants us to live our lives for Him.* Notice verse 14 again, "[Jesus] gave himself for us [here's the purpose] to redeem us from all wickedness and [here's the second purpose clause] to purify for himself a people that are his very own."

Christ didn't give Himself for us merely so we could have personal fulfillment today and "fire insurance" from hell tomorrow. Those are by-products of His intent. He gave Himself to redeem and purify a people *for Himself*, a people that are *His very own*.

Those are key words. Do you need incentive for holy living? Here it is. We are His. We exist for Him. He redeemed us so we would be eager to do the good that pleases Him.

Notice the order. Good works follow grace like a caboose follows an engine. Good works don't merit grace, but are the consequence of it.

It's mind-boggling to think that Christ would give His life for us. It's just as mind-boggling to realize that He—the One who needs nothing—wants us to live our lives for Him. He's on our side. He wants us to finish well, and He gave us His own resources so we could. Do you know what that is? That's *grace*.

Past grace, present grace, future grace. Give thanks for grace.

Make It Personal: When you know you are dependent upon grace it changes three things.

1. *It changes the way you view yourself.* Several years ago, I listened to some teaching by Leroy Eims (of the Navigators) who observed that when it comes to grace, many of us hold to false theology and don't realize it. We know the Christian life began by grace--we were saved by grace (Eph. 2:8). And we know the Christian life ends by grace--we will be glorified by grace. But we think the Christian life is a "bunch of works." Work, work, work. We think the present Christian life is up to us, and depends on our own merit.

But that's not true, he said, and pointed to Jesus who taught, "Abide in Me, for without Me you can do nothing." Grace is the basis of the entire Christian life—past, present, and future. God chose us and saved us by His grace in the past. He will glorify us by His grace in the future when Christ returns. And He expects us to live by His grace now in the present. It's all of grace.

There's no room for pride in the Christian life. If you have the attitude, "I'm doing a pretty good job. I've got my life in order. Look what I've done...", then you don't understand grace. When you see yourself as dependent upon grace, it changes you. When grace grips you, pride flees.

How do you finish your day? I learned something from CJ Mahaney I've found helpful. Go over your day and transfer the credit to the Lord for what He helped you do that day. They are evidences of His grace for which He deserves thanks and honor.

2. *It changes the way you view others.* Others need grace, too, just like you. What are you doing to share the grace of God with others? Listen to Paul in Acts 20:24, "I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me--the task of testifying to the *gospel of God's grace*."

They are all around us. Do they see grace from us (are we gracious people)? And do they hear about God's grace from us?

Three months ago I gave our five community groups a \$50 bill with the assignment, "Take this, add to it if you want, and show someone in this community that we care for them at WBC, with a desire to communicate why we care, which is Christ." And that's been happening. Next Sunday evening we'll hear the stories of the creative ways our church family has been showing grace to this community, and we'll give the Giver of grace all the glory.

3. *It changes the way you view God.* I like how the hymnwriter, Robert Robinson, put it. We'll finish with his testimony in mind.

*O to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be!  
Let Thy goodness, like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to Thee.  
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love;  
Here's my heart, O take and seal it; Seal it for Thy courts above.*

Closing Hymn: *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross* (#185)

Harvest Offering: Tri-State Bible College