

## Saving Grace, Training Grace

Titus 2:11-15

August 11<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Big idea: God's grace saves and trains us so that we are freed from the penalty and power of sin.

God's grace for the here and now

Intro –

Two weeks ago, a well-known Christian author and former pastor at a large church announced he was separating from his wife and no longer considers himself a Christian. Many were left reeling, especially in my generation of Christians. He's a few years older than me. When I was a new Christian in my teens, he realized a bestselling book that he wrote at age 21 about dating that I remember kids in my youth group talking about. He went on to write other books that I've read and recommended, speak at conferences, and pastor a prominent church. Many were left wondering at this high-profile departure from the faith, and wondering how many other low-profile people may be going through the same thing but it's not known or talked about.

Of the many articles written in the past two weeks, one of the most helpful was from Brad Hambrick, an author, pastor, and Biblical counselor. He wrote "An open letter to someone considering renouncing their faith." It's part counsel for someone who might be interacting with someone else who is considering walking away from Christianity, part directly addressing the one who is considering walking away.

One of the most helpful parts of his letter is a series of questions that helps the person consider why they are doubting the faith.

- Are these obstacles primarily events (like a betrayal), personal hardships, theological questions, integrity matters in other Christians (like the failure of a Christian leader), or something else?
- Are you considering walking away from your faith because you think Christianity isn't true, doesn't work, is lived out poorly by the church, or some other reason?
- Do you believe that the central tenets of Christianity (creation, incarnation, resurrection) are true? (I Cor. 15:14) This should help you determine if you are struggling to believe Christianity or disillusioned by how Christians (yourself or others) live out their faith.
  - If you answer "yes" be patient with yourself and ask, "What makes believing Christianity and living as a Christian acutely hard for me?" Doubtless there are dozens of smaller questions, but don't let them distract you from the main one or two things. Narrowing your focus to the primacy obstacle will allow you to better steward the emotional energy you're spending on these questions.
  - If you answer question #1 with "yes" and question #2 honestly ask, "What would it look like to live authentically expressing my faith and acknowledging my doubts or hardships?" Remember, doubt and faith can co-exist. Be patient with yourself, as means of embracing God's grace towards you, as you continue to have these conversations. Doubt is often something God uses to purify, deepen, and grow faith.

What I noticed in his article is he puts his finger on two different but related reasons someone might become disillusioned.

One reason might be intellectual – they just aren't sure it's true or have theological questions.

But another reason might be experiential – they are unsatisfied with how Christians, "the church," or even themselves are living out their faith in Christ.

My personal interactions with people reflect these two reasons as well. Some have real intellectual questions, and I've enjoyed working through those questions with people at a pace that fits for them. Others though have had bad experiences, frustrating encounters, or ongoing personal struggles that have left them disillusioned.

Sometimes its because others they know might take the label “Christian” but don’t live in a way that “adorns” the gospel (Titus 2:10).

(Quick review of Titus 2:1-10)

What’s the first word in this section that begins in v. 11? “For”

Leads from the practical instruction of 2:1-10 to the theological instruction of 2:11-15. It adds the “why” to the “what” of 2:1-10.

It’s the opposite of Paul’s usual approach. Usually he moves from theology to behavior (Romans, Ephesians). In Titus 2 he moves from behavior to theology.

1. Saved by **grace** (2:11, 14)
  - a. Verse 10 ended by described how our lives can adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.
    - i. The gospel is the jewel and our lives can draw attention to the jewel like the setting of a ring.
  - b. Verses 11-15 develop the doctrine of God our Savior
  - c. His grace “appeared” in Jesus
    - i. God has always been a God of grace. It’s who He is. It’s His nature. Jesus didn’t change that.
      1. Grace is God’s undeserved kindness, favor, and helpfulness toward people; people who not only don’t deserve it, they deserve the opposite.
      2. **Exodus 34:6b** "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth"
    - ii. But Jesus appeared and put skin on that grace.
      1. **John 1:14** And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.
      2. **John 1:17** For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.
      3. “Has appeared” stands at the beginning of the sentence in Greek – stressing the historical reality of Christ and the manifestation of his grace
      4. Conveys the image of grace suddenly breaking in on our moral darkness, like the rising sun (it is used of the sun in acts 27:20).
    - iii. John Stott – it was brightly displayed in his lowly birth, in his gracious words and compassionate deeds, and above all in his atoning death. He himself was “full of grace.”
  - d. His grace brought salvation not destruction.
    - i. His saving grace came to all types of people – slaves, masters, older men, older women, younger women, younger men (2:1-10).
    - ii. His saving grace appeared to all men – not that all are saved but all are invited to come and be saved. His life and death are sufficient to save all who come. Unfortunately, not all do come.
    - iii. **John 3:16-18** "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. <sup>18</sup> "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.
  - e. Verse 14 further elaborates on the way in which He saved us with several loaded phrases
    - i. He gave Himself for us

1. Not an unwilling Son sacrificed by a cruel Father, as some try to distort the idea of His death in our place so it sounds like child abuse.
2. But a willing Son giving Himself for us.
3. Recently read an account of someone who came back from a camp and was taught that the idea of Jesus dying for us to bear God's wrath in our place is an abusive view and most Christians are moving away from it today. Instead we should see the cross simply as a declaration of God's love for us. She was confused and disoriented. Thankfully, she reached out to another woman at her church with her questions and he was teaching a view of the atonement known as the moral influence theory, that Jesus died to persuade us that God really does love us. There is truth to that view, in that Romans 5:8 tells us God demonstrates His own love for us in that while we were sinners Christ died for us, but it stands on the foundation of Jesus dying in our place for our sin to bear God's wrath. That's what shows us His love. This new view she was being taught wasn't so much inaccurate as inadequate.

ii. His self-giving sacrifice was to accomplish two things:

1. To redeem us
2. And to purify us
3. He redeemed us – he purchased us, bought us from “every lawless deed”
  - a. Lawless deed is a way of describing sin – we have broken God's laws, His rules and as the one who made the world He gets to set the rules. The rules aren't arbitrary. They match His character and nature.
  - b. He redeemed us from EVERY lawless deed. Nothing too big or bad. Nothing in your past or present. Nothing in your thoughts, motives, or actions.
4. He also purified us
  - a. He doesn't just forgive us, He takes away the guilt and shame and sense of being “dirty” or “defiled”
  - b. And He does it to make us His own possession – we're adopted into community with a new identity – we're His people.
    - i. As His redeemed and purified people we are to want to do good, we are to be zealous for good.

f. That's what leads into our next point that runs through this whole passage – His grace not only saves us, it changes us.

2. Changed by ***grace*** (2:12)

- a. If sin harms people – ourselves as well as others – God would not be kind to forgive us but then leave us in it. He not only saves us from the penalty of sin, He saves us from the power of sin and changes us over time so we can live differently.
  - i. A misunderstanding of the gospel of grace – the good news of His saving grace – can come across as anemic, as simply about life after death with no implication for today. So some get frustrated at Christians or see Christians as detached from real life struggles. They might say, “why are Christians going to impoverished places in the world and seeking to save souls when what they people need is clean water, sustainable food, education, and a government unhindered by layers of corruption?”
  - ii. The gospel, rightly understood is freely given and it trains us for personal holiness and lives of significance.

- b. In an ongoing, teaching, present-tense way God's grace continues at work in our lives.
  - i. His grace "has appeared" – past tense – and it is "instructing us" – present ongoing in a daily way teaching us to say no to some things and yes to others.
  - ii. We say no (we "deny") ungodliness and worldly desires
    - 1. Ungodliness – is a lack of respect or reverence for God that shows up in actions and motives
      - a. **Jude 1:14b-16** "Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones, <sup>15</sup> to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him." <sup>16</sup> These are grumblers, finding fault, following after their *own* lusts; they speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of *gaining an* advantage.
      - b. Rather than seeing ourselves as "His own possession" we see ourselves as serving only ourselves, doing whatever we want. That's ungodliness.
    - 2. Worldly desires – speaks to not just our actions but our inner selves
      - a. Paul Washer – When you said "yes" to Christ, you said "no" to the world.
  - iii. We say yes (we "live") to things that are sensible, righteous, and godly.
    - 1. New affections for Christ produce new actions.
    - 2. (Adapted from Stott or Chapel) Puritans – the power of new affections – what will ultimately make us holy is not willpower, nor guilt, nor an inspiring message, but deep apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ. The resultant love for God drives out and replaces our natural love for sin. The puritans taught this truth with the image of the live oak, a variety of trees whose leaves, though dead, stuck to their branches through the winter. What eventually forced the leaves from the tree was not the abuse of the cold or the beating of the wind, but the new life of springtime welling up within the branches and forcing out what was dead.
  - iv. Three directions – inward (sensibly, self-controlled), outward (righteously, upright), and upward (godly)
    - 1. Christians are to be whole, complete, mature, healthy – living in unity between their internal and external states, before God and before others.
  - v. We are to live this way "in the present age"
    - 1. Doesn't so much seem to be a commentary on the wickedness of this age but on the immediacy of it and the practical implications for today.
    - 2. Christians are not simply living in the past, stuck with our thinking on a 1st century event or focused only on future hope. The faith has implications for today. Older men are to live sensibly and maturely, older women are to be reverent and teach the younger women, younger women are to be good wives and mothers (if married with children), younger men are to be self-controlled, workers are to be honest.
    - 3. Those instructions are very "down to earth." – think about the meaning of that cliché phrase. Its daily living that impact how we live on earth today.
    - 4. Every age has its challenges. What are the challenges of our age? Will we shrink back from them or proceed headlong, joyfully and confidently?
- c. Does this mean the whole sin thing isn't a problem anymore?

- i. No. Sadly, no. That's not my experience and it isn't yours and if you thought that would be the case when you became a Christian, you've probably been frustrated and disappointed and perhaps feel like a failure as a Christian.
    - d. Jesus will return and change us completely one day (2:13)
      - i. Looks at His past appearing in history, His present work in our lives, and His future return.
- 3. The saving and changing work of grace rests on Biblical ***authority*** and should not be ***disregarded*** (2:15)
  - a. "These things" goes back to all of chapter 2
  - b. Titus is not to merely suggest people consider living this way, but is to do so with all authority. Why? Not because of his own power or to dominate and control people, but because it's what the Word says.
  - c. Who does this apply to today?
    - i. If ...
      - 1. The principle is clear in the bible
      - 2. And the application is clear
      - 3. And the person claims to follow Christ
      - 4. And the person is part of your local church
    - ii. Then ...
      - 1. They shouldn't be allowed to disregard what the word says in their life
- 4. Conclusion
  - a. Friends, rest in grace
    - i. Grace appeared historically clothed in a human body when Jesus came to earth.
    - ii. Grace is available to operate presently in your life.



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Brad Hambrick, *An Open Letter to Someone Considering Renouncing Their Faith*

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5

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8