

## Amazing Grace

Titus 2: 11 – 15<sup>i</sup>

### Uncommon Grace

Amazing grace—how sweet the sound—that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.

We'll be singing those words a little later in the service. I guess when the sermon is entitled "Amazing Grace" it's not hard to predict what the hymn of response will be. What is hard is choosing among the hundreds of other songs about grace (and the various newer versions of "Amazing Grace" too), when you set about planning the rest of the service, because we all love the idea of grace. We love to think about it, talk about it, study about it, and sing about it.

Grace, grace, God's grace, grace that will pardon and cleanse within; grace, grace, God's grace, grace that is greater than all our sin!<sup>ii</sup>

And of course we do! The Greek word χάρις [charis], translated as "grace" in the New Testament, is used about 775 times, and about 625 of those times it shows up as simply "grace" in our English Bibles. It would be at least arguable that one of the most quoted and preached on passages in all of Scripture would be Ephesians 2, verses 8 and 9:

<sup>8</sup> **For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,** <sup>9</sup> **not a result of works, so that no one may boast.** Ephesians 2:8–9 (ESV)

And how many times have we heard someone say, "There but for the grace of God go I." How many times have we quoted or heard someone else quote that part of Romans 6, verse 15 that says:

<sup>15</sup> **...we are not under law but under grace...** Romans 6:15 (ESV)

There's more to that verse, of course, but we'll come back to that in a bit. The point is, we want to be people whose lives are characterized by grace—we want to be a church that is known for the proclamation of God's grace; we want to be a community that is filled to overflowing with the "marvelous, infinite, matchless grace"<sup>iii</sup> of God—and that's a good thing, because this is how we are made right with God. Out of God's free, immeasurable, uncommon grace, out of "sheer grace", as the Heidelberg Catechism names it,

God grants and credits to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner, as if I had been as perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for me.

This is the grace by which we have been saved, and this is the testimony of each and every true follower of Jesus Christ, our faithful Savior.

By grace I am redeemed, by grace I am restored...<sup>iv</sup>

### The Grace of God Has Appeared

But consider also our text this morning. Titus 2, verse 11:

<sup>11</sup> For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people... Titus 2:11 (ESV)

Of course, some would construe this as a universalist passage—a passage that teaches that all people everywhere, regardless of faith and life, will somehow be saved by the grace of God. After all, it does say

<sup>11</sup> ...the grace of God has appeared, **bringing salvation for all people...** Titus 2:11 (ESV)

but here's the thing. To make this text teach universal salvation you have to make this passage contradict itself, never mind all the other texts in Paul's writings and in all of Scripture that clearly teach the opposite. Passages like 1st Thessalonians 1, verses 6 – 10, where Paul wrote,

<sup>6</sup> ...God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, <sup>7</sup> and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels <sup>8</sup> in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. <sup>9</sup> They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, <sup>10</sup> when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints... <sup>2 Thessalonians 1:6–10 (ESV)</sup>

And there's Jesus himself in Matthew 25:

<sup>41</sup> "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. <sup>Matthew 25:41 (ESV)</sup>

Consider these together with Titus 2, verse 14, which tells us that Jesus Christ gave himself both

<sup>14</sup> ...to redeem us from all lawlessness **and** to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. <sup>Titus 2:14 (ESV)</sup>

Since Paul was not writing with a split personality that could contradict itself within the space of a single paragraph, and because we believe

<sup>20</sup> ...that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. <sup>21</sup> For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. <sup>2 Peter 1:20–21 (ESV)</sup>

it should be evident that there can be no final conflict here—no contradiction between these passages. Besides, 11 – 15 follows after 1 – 10, where Paul instructed his protégé to teach what accords with sound doctrine to older men, older women, young women, younger men, and bondservants. In that light it is evident that he is not saying that the grace of God has brought salvation to every human being who has ever lived or ever will, but rather that it has brought salvation to all kinds of people.

Then, factor in the conjunction at the beginning of verse 11, and it becomes obvious that Titus is to teach what accords with sound doctrine to the whole of the church without distinction “**For**”, as one commentator has stated,

...this is the very aim and business of Christianity, to instruct, and help, and form persons, under all distinctions and relations, to a right frame and conduct.<sup>v</sup>

### Training Us

But someone will say, “I thought this was about grace. How did we come to be talking about forming persons “to a right frame and conduct”? On Reformation day aren’t we supposed to teach ‘Grace Alone’, and after all, ‘we are not under law but under grace.’ Right?” Well, the full quote from Romans 6 begins with just this question:

<sup>15</sup> What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? Romans 6:15 (ESV)

And Paul’s answer?

...By no means! Romans 6:15 (ESV)

As he had already explained in verse 14 of the same passage:

<sup>14</sup> For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. Romans 6:14 (ESV)

So, far from teaching a cheap grace which “amounts to the justification of sin without the justification of the repentant sinner who departs from sin and from whom sin departs,”<sup>vi</sup> as one author has described it, the thought that we are not under law but under grace is intended to motivate us to present ourselves to God

<sup>13</sup> ...as those who have been brought from death to life, and [our] members... Romans 6:13 (ESV)

(all the various parts of our bodies),

...to God as instruments for righteousness. Romans 6:13 (ESV)

This is also evident from the first words of Titus 2, verse 12. Having been told that

<sup>11</sup> ...the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people... Titus 2:11 (ESV)

we are then told what that grace does. Titus 2, verse 11 and 12:

<sup>11</sup> ...the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,<sup>12</sup> **training us...** Titus 2:11 (ESV)

See? Grace is not a mere declaration that one thing has become another thing. Grace is the power of God that transforms us from the former to the latter because grace trains us; grace teaches us.

### What Grace Teaches

And what does this amazing, uncommon grace of God teach? Again, verse 12, it teaches us

<sup>12</sup> ...to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age... Titus 2:11–12 (ESV)

So, a negative instruction—a “no” if you will—followed by a positive. First, grace trains us—grace teaches us—“to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions.” In a word, grace begins by teaching what we might call repentance. It teaches us to turn away from the deeds of the flesh and the vain pursuits of this world. Then, on the positive side, grace teaches us to be sanctified in the truth. To borrow Paul’s words to the Colossians, God’s grace teaches us to

<sup>5</sup> Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry Colossians 3:5 (ESV)

(among other things, of course), and to

<sup>12</sup> Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, <sup>13</sup> bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. <sup>14</sup> And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. Colossians 3:12–14 (ESV)

And grace teaches us to do this in the here and now. We are meant to live

<sup>12</sup> ...self-controlled, upright, and godly lives **in the present age**... Titus 2:11–12 (ESV)

In the words of the old Puritan:

Thus the gospel first unteaches that which is evil, to abandon sin; and then...the gospel teaches us to live well here, not, however, as our final state, but with an eye chiefly to a future: for it teaches us in all...to look for the glories of another world, to which a sober, righteous, and godly life in this [world] is preparative...<sup>vii</sup>

### **Grace Greater than All Our Sin**

See, grace is not a doctrine to be held and admired in the abstract; to be stored in a theological closet and then trotted out to be celebrated for an hour on Sunday mornings. Grace is not a change in God’s attitude toward sinners that leaves the behavior of the sinner unchanged. Grace is the transformative power of God unleashed by the sovereign Spirit of God right here in the nitty-gritty details of our day to day living. The Lord Jesus Christ did not pay for our sin on the cross so that He could abandon us in it. As we read in verse 14, He

<sup>14</sup> ...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. Titus 2:14 (ESV)

This is parallel to that other text on God’s amazing, uncommon grace, Ephesians 2, verses 8 – 10.

<sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup> **For we are his**

**workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.** Ephesians 2:8–10 (ESV)

In other words, we are not only saved *from* something. Hallelujah! we certainly *are* saved from something, even our sin and its consequences—but we are also saved to something. We are saved that we might no longer live for ourselves, but for Him who for our sake died and was raised.<sup>viii</sup>

And the former is not grace if the latter is regarded as optional, as if salvation is this mighty work of God by which He declares us righteous in His sight and sanctification is a luxury accessory that we can choose depending on whether or not we want to pay the extra cost. Salvation includes sanctification—sanctification is a part of salvation—and both are first, last, and always the work of God. This is what we mean when we sing of God’s “Amazing Grace.” This is what we mean when we sing of grace that is greater than all our sin.

And I think we need to be reminded of this, because even in some of our current struggles there is a tendency to retreat to that idea of grace that justifies the sin and not the repentant sinner—cheap grace that comforts us in our sin rather than freeing us from our sin.

Imagine, if you can, Jesus, finding a leper along the side of the road. As He approaches the leper in all his uncleanness looks up with hope that this might be the day he gets to leave his exile and go home to his family and friends. But instead of those hoped for words, “I am willing; be thou made clean,” Jesus simply produces a lovely comforter and wraps it around the man, leaving Him in his brokenness and disease. It’s hard to imagine because it never happened. Such comfort would be sorry comfort indeed, not worthy to be our only comfort in life and in death.

And in Luke 5, when a man “full of leprosy” fell on his face before Jesus and begged Him, saying “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.”

<sup>13</sup> ...Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, “I will; be clean.” **And immediately the leprosy left him.** Luke 5:13 (ESV)

This is grace that is greater; grace which does not leave us in our sin but rather sets us free. This is the wonderful, infinite, matchless, amazing grace of God to us in His Son, Christ Jesus our Savior, so please stand and confess it with me this morning. Congregation of Jesus Christ, How are you right with God?

**Only by true faith in Jesus Christ.**

**Even though my conscience accuses me of having grievously sinned against all God’s commandments and of never having kept any of them, and even though I am still inclined toward all evil,**

**nevertheless, without my deserving it at all, out of sheer grace, God grants and credits to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ,**

**as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner, as if I had been as perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for me.**

**All I need to do is to accept this gift of God with a believing heart.**

Indeed. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound. Let's stand to sing.

- 
- i All Scripture citations, unless otherwise noted, *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016).
  - ii Julia H. Johnston, "Grace Greater than Our Sin", at [https://hymnary.org/text/marvelous\\_grace\\_of\\_our\\_loving\\_lord](https://hymnary.org/text/marvelous_grace_of_our_loving_lord) (last accessed October 28, 2023).
  - iii Johnston, "Grace...", at [hymnary.org](https://hymnary.org).
  - iv Niki Shepherd, Jonny Robinson, Rich Thompson, "Grace", at <https://cityalight.com/song/grace/> (last accessed October 28, 2023).
  - v Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2371.
  - vi Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1995) 44.
  - vii Henry, *Commentary*, 2372
  - viii Cf. 2 Cor 5:15.