

The Power of Grace  
 Titus 2:11-14  
 Series: Grace Works! #3

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Intro

Eph. 2:8, “*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.*” Verse 9 adds “*not of works, lest anyone should boast.*”<sup>1</sup> That was our text two weeks ago. In that message we focused on salvation by grace alone (*sola gratia*). We used as our definition of grace, unmerited favor. Grace is the undeserved, unearned goodwill, love and acceptance that is freely given to us because of what Christ did on the cross in our behalf. We have not only been forgiven of our sin, but we have been adopted into the family of God and we enjoy rich benefits simply because God loves us and Jesus bought us with His own blood. If your name is written in the Lamb’s Book of Life, you have a whole lot to be happy about this morning.

The definition I gave you is true. However, it needs to be further explained. That’s what I want to do this morning. Many Christians are in trouble because they do not understand the grace of God in their lives. Paul spent a lot of time talking about the grace of God. It is a major theme of the New Testament. All those verses are there because it is important.

The Greek word translated grace in the New Testament is *charis*. Strong’s definition of grace says that it is “especially the divine influence upon the heart, and its reflection in the life.”<sup>2</sup> Grace is more than an abstract legal transaction that is recorded somewhere in heaven.

**I. Grace is the influence of the Holy Spirit** that works a change in the person from the inside out.

Phil. 2:13 puts it this way. “*For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*” That is grace: divine influence upon the heart. It causes us to want to do good; and then it empowers us to do good. Rom. 6:14 “*For sin shall not have dominion over you....*” Why? “*... for you are not under law but under grace.*” The power of grace in your life is greater than the power of sin in your life. Therefore, because of the divine influence (we call grace), “*...sin shall not have dominion over you.*”

Let’s put Phil. 2:13 in the context of the verse that precedes it. Phil 2:12 “*Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*” So which is it? Does God do the work or do I do the work. Verse 12 tells me to work: “*...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.*” Yet verse 13 tells me it is God working. Paul is showing us how sanctification works. He is talking about our cooperation with the influence of the Holy Spirit. God causes us to want to please Him; He influences our will. He does not take free will away from us. But He influences us. And if we receive that influence, we are then motivated to step out in faith to do His good pleasure. Then He empowers us to do it. We cannot take credit for it because God

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture quotes are in the New King James Version unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>2</sup> NT:5485 *charis* (Biblesoft’s New Exhaustive Strong’s Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary. Copyright (c) 1994, Biblesoft and International Bible Translators, Inc.)

motivated us to do it; and He enabled us to do it. Otherwise it simply would not happen. *“for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.”*

New Testament grace bears the fruit of good works.<sup>3</sup> It changes the heart. It influences the will. It empowers believers to do His good pleasure. If I have a grace that fails to do that, it's not New Testament grace. If the grace I claim is simply an abstract concept or an assumed legal transaction in heaven that really works no change in my desires or in my behavior, something very serious is wrong! James tells us that if we have real faith, it will be demonstrated in what we do. Faith without works is dead (James 2:17). It's just empty talk. Real faith produces good works.

Let me come back to Eph. 2:8, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.”* We are saved by grace. That was our central theme of our last message. Notice the words in that text *“through faith.”* God gives us the faith; but we have to use it. Faith is an action word. When you look at the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11, you find people of action. *“By faith Abel offered....”* Offered is an action word. *“By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark....”* There was a lot of work that went into preparing that ark, in obedience to God's warning. *“By faith Abraham obeyed....”* Abraham is called the father of faith. His faith was demonstrated by his obedience. Real faith obeys.<sup>4</sup> *“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac....”* *“By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come....”* We could talk about the action Moses' parents took by faith. We could talk about Moses *“choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin.”* *“By faith he forsook Egypt....”* *“By faith they passed through the Red Sea....”* Biblical faith acts in accordance with the belief. James 2:18 *“...I will show you my faith by my works.”* That's the evidence that the faith is really there.

There is a message of grace that is popular in America. It says all the things I said in my last message. But it fails to address grace as a divine influence that produces good works. *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.”* Now let's complete the thought in the next verse. Eph. 2:10, *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”* We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for what? *Good works.* The objective of God's grace has not been fully realized if there are no good works.

Forensic theology is theology that focuses on the legal aspect of our salvation. This was particularly prominent in Luther's revelation and in the Protestant Reformation. And because our churches are a product of that reformation, we have put a lot of emphasis on that dynamic of salvation. We are justified by faith. By His grace, God declares us not guilty and righteous. When we have genuinely put our faith in Christ, that declaration is made in heaven. But more than that happens. A genuine conversion includes a change of heart. A genuine conversion includes repentance: turning from sin and orientating our lives toward God. A genuine conversion will inspire a change of lifestyle. Eph. 2:1 *“And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, 2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world....”* The course of a person's life changes when they are genuinely converted. I'm not saying they

<sup>3</sup> You can identify true grace (1 Pet. 5:12) by the fruit it bears in a life (Matt. 7:16).

<sup>4</sup> Rom. 4:11; James 2:21-23.

totally get their act together. That will be going on for years.<sup>5</sup> But the desire to live pleasing to God will be there. The person will not just continue in sin as if nothing has happened. We have put a lot of emphasis on the legal declaration of our righteousness in Christ: the forensic aspect of our salvation. It should be taught. But we should also teach people the other things that happen when we get saved. We are regenerated. We receive a new nature that causes us to desire the things of God. We are adopted into the family of God and receive a new identity in Christ. We are delivered from the power of darkness into the kingdom of His dear Son (Col. 1:13). All of those facets of salvation have to be taught. If we only emphasize one, people do not get a full understanding of what is happening.

On May 31, 1975 Jeanie and I were legally married. A record of that translation is documented at Potter County in Amarillo, Texas. Because of that, I can introduce her as my wife. She can sign papers as Jeanie Tow. A legal transaction occurred. But what if that were all there is to our marriage? We don't live together; we don't sleep together; we don't eat together; we don't talk; we seldom see one another. There would be something significant missing in that marriage. Even though the marriage puts me in a certain legal standing with her, marriage is primarily a relationship! If you take the relationship aspect of it away, you've removed the most important part.

We have thousands of church-going people who said the sinner's prayer. Somebody told them they now have a ticket to heaven. They go about their lives just as they did before. They lie on their income tax; they cheat in their business dealings; they steal from their employer, live in fornication with their girlfriends, embrace homosexuality, have abortions, and think everything is fine. They do not realize that all of that is evidence that all is not fine. Saved by grace means we're genuinely saved, and not just theoretically saved.<sup>6</sup> Salvation is not just an abstract action of the heavenly court. It is a life-changing transformation.

Grace is the divine influence of the Holy Spirit.

Yes, it is unmerited favor.

But that favor is given through the divine influence of the Holy Spirit.

## II. Let me share with you three things grace will produce in your life.

### (1) Grace Produces Righteousness

1 John 3:7 "*Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.*" Here we have a warning about possible deception. What is the potential deception? To think that a person could be righteous in the eyes of God, yet not practice righteousness—not live right. "...*let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous.*" That's pretty simple and straight forward.

Jude also issued this warning in his epistle. Jude 4 "*For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.*" How does a person turn the grace of God into lewdness (KJV says *lasciviousness*)? One of the Gnostic errors that was emerging in Jude's day was the teaching that since I'm saved by grace, it really

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<sup>5</sup> Phil. 3:12-14.

<sup>6</sup> The angel of the Lord told Joseph in Matt 1:21, "...*you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.*" Jesus saves us from our sins, not in our sins.

doesn't matter whether I sin or not.<sup>7</sup> I just ask God's forgiveness and all is well. "*Where sin abounds, grace much more abounds*" (Rom. 5:20). So teachers were telling people to not worry about sin, you have received the grace of God; you're going to heaven; God understands that you're only human. As a result people were living in a false confidence and called it grace. Grace does not leave us in sin and just tolerate it. "*Sin shall not have dominion over you for you are not under the law but under grace.*" Without that divine influence, sin would have dominion over you. If you were just trying to be righteous by keeping the rules in your own strength, sin would win out. But you are living in the divine influence of the Holy Spirit and "*greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world*" (1 John 4:4).

Titus 2:11-14 "*For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, 12 teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, 14 who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.*"

Grace does not just acquit us before the court of heaven. Grace redeems us from lawless deeds, purifies us as God's own special people, and makes us zealous of good works. That's what the divine influence does. What does grace teach us? Does it teach us to continue in sin and all will be well? No, it teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts. It teaches us to live soberly, and righteously, and godly lives. It teaches us to live with a hope and expectation of the coming of the Lord. In other words, grace changes our whole orientation to life.<sup>8</sup> A grace that does not do that, is not a biblical grace. Paul said to the church at Corinth, "*We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain*" (2 Cor. 6:1) or literally, "to no purpose."<sup>9</sup> Let grace have its perfect work in you. Let it influence you to the things we read about in Titus 2.

Some people take grace to mean almost indifference toward sin. Grace has lowered the standard so that God accepts about anything as "good enough." I know you're just living with your girlfriend instead of getting married; but that's ok. And if people are gracious they will accept it as it is. I know you don't give anything for the furtherance of the gospel; you want it all for yourself; but that's ok too. In some ways grace has been interpreted as tolerance. But as a divine influence, grace is most intolerant toward sin. Grace works to overpower it and destroy it. Grace never takes a cavalier attitude toward sin. When people take a cavalier attitude toward sin in the name of grace, they are misrepresenting God's purpose for grace.

Grace is designed to win loving obedience to God. Remember when Zacchaeus went up the tree to see Jesus. This man was a notorious sinner, an efficient tax collector who got rich by ripping others off. Jesus graciously accepted an unacceptable man; went to his house even

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<sup>7</sup> GNOSTICISM: "Antinomian development. - But another and contrary result also followed from the principles of the sinfulness of matter and of redemption as deliverance from the flesh, namely, that there was an easier way of relief, by treating the soul and the body as separate entities which have nothing in common. Let the soul go its way on the wings of spiritual thought, while the body may indulge its fleshly desires. For, so it was held, as body and soul are entirely distinct in their nature, the spiritual cannot be defiled by anything, however carnal and gross, that the body can do. This was the antinomian development of Gnosticism." (from International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Electronic Database Copyright (c)1996 by BibleSoft)

<sup>8</sup> Political correctness tells us we are to accept any orientation people may choose to have. Grace changes the orientation rather than accepting it (Eph. 2:1-5).

<sup>9</sup> 2 Cor 6:1 (from Vincent's Word Studies in the New Testament, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1997 by BibleSoft)

when other ridiculed Him for doing it. How did Zacchaeus respond to the grace of God? Luke 19:8 *“Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, ‘Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold.’”* Grace turned him around. Grace won his heart and allegiance. Grace turned a taker into a giver.

Acts 13:43 says that Barnabas and Paul persuaded the people at Antioch *“to continue in the grace of God.”* Keep submitting yourself to the divine influence of the Holy Spirit. Keep relying upon the goodwill of God. Keep trusting His kindness. Let it lead you further into His purposes. *“Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (2 Pet. 3:18).

Biblical grace produces righteous living.

## **(2). Grace Produces Ministry.**

In Eph. 3:7 Paul says *“...I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.”* I want you to notice two things about that comment. First, his ministry was *“according to the gift of the grace of God.”* Our ability to minister to one another comes to us as a gift from God. All real ministry is the product of grace. Secondly, notice that grace was given to Paul *“by the effective working of His power.”* You cannot separate grace from the workings of the Holy Spirit. And this is the problem that I see in the misunderstanding of grace that many people have. Grace works! Grace is active! It is not just a legal document somewhere in the sky. It is the influence of the Holy Spirit in and through you.

Eph. 4:7 *“But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.”* I won't bore you by going to all the verses in the New Testament that show grace as something more than just an abstract standing before God. Grace is the engine that fuels ministry. The gifts of the Spirit in 1 Cor. 12 are grace gifts. 1 Cor. 12:4 *“There are diversities of gifts (charisma), but the same Spirit.”*

Rom 12:6 *“Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them.”* We are to cooperate with the grace God has put in our lives.

1 Peter 4:10 *“As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”* In the context of ministry, grace is unmerited favor. The abilities come to us as a gift from God. But it is also something we are to steward. We are to exercise those gifts by faith. We are to allow the Holy Spirit to function in our lives and through our lives.

Acts 4:33 says, *“And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all.”* Can you feel the dynamic of that verse? With great power they gave witness to the resurrection of Jesus. Grace and power go hand-in-hand. *“And great grace was upon them all.”* What is that saying? It is saying that the Holy Spirit was working in a powerful way. And Luke refers to that as *“great grace.”* Yes, unmerited favor; but also something active and dynamic in their lives.<sup>10</sup>

In our last message I used a cruise ship to illustrate grace. We said legalism is like trying to swim the Pacific Ocean to Hawaii; and grace is like boarding a luxury liner for the trip. The

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<sup>10</sup> Hans-Helmut Esser writes, “In Acts grace is that power which flows from God or from the exalted Christ, and accompanies the activity of the apostles giving success to their mission (Acts 6:\*; 11:23; 14:26; 15:40; 18:27).” *Dictionary of New Testament Theology, Vol. 2, gen. ed. Collin Brown* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1986) p. 119.

point of the contrast is that grace will empower us and carry us for the journey. But there is a flaw in that illustration. It leaves the impression that you will live a life of ease if you will just rely on the grace of God. But that was not Paul's experience. He worked his fingers to the bone financing his missionary team.<sup>11</sup> He was beaten, he was stoned, he was shipwrecked, he was imprisoned. Perhaps we should have used battleship instead of cruise ship in our illustration. Nevertheless, God's grace is sufficient for any challenge we face.<sup>12</sup> Our own willpower and resources is not.

Paul worked hard, but he understood the power behind it all. In 1 Cor. 15:10 he wrote, *"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."*

So grace produces righteousness and grace produces ministry.

### **(3) Grace Produces Rewards**

I was approached after the last message on grace with this question. If we do not gain God's favor by our works, then why does the Bible talk about rewards? That's a very insightful question. The Bible guarantees rewards to the faithful. In Matt. 19:27 Peter asked Jesus about that. *"See,"* Peter said to Jesus, *"we have left all and followed You. Therefore, what shall we have?"* Verse 28, *"So Jesus said to them, 'Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. 30 But many who are first will be last, and the last first."*

The Parable of the Workers explains what Jesus means by his last statement. *"But many who are first will be last, and the last first."* In that parable a landowner goes out to hire laborers to work in his vineyard. The first group he hired early in the morning and promised to pay them one denarius (which was the standard day's wage). Then at the 3<sup>rd</sup> hour he hired another group telling them he would pay them whatever is right. Other groups were hired at the 6<sup>th</sup> hour, 9<sup>th</sup> hour, and finally at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour. When pay time came, the landowner paid the last ones first. He gave those who came in at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour a full day's wage, one denarius. When those who were hired first saw this, they thought they would get more. But they also received a denarius, even though they worked more. They complained to the landowner that these that had only worked one hour received as much as they did who worked all day long. Listen carefully to the landowner's answer. Matt 20:13-15 *"Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? 14 Take what is yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. 15 Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things?...."* The rewards will never be less than what the Lord has told you they would be. God will always treat you right. But He has the right to give out rewards any way He wants to. *"Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things?"* If He chooses to show generosity, it is His prerogative to do so. A parable is designed to make one point. And the point of this parable is that God has the right to do with His own resources as He chooses.

Jesus gave additional insight on rewards in the question he asks in Luke 17:7-10

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<sup>11</sup> Acts 20:34; 1 Thess. 2:9.

<sup>12</sup> 2 Cor 12:9, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." This was not just an assurance of God's favor, but also of His power (divine influence) to enable Paul to deal with the issue.

*“And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and sit down to eat’? 8 But will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink’? 9 Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. 10 So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.’”*

God is not the one indebted to us. We are indebted to Him. Jesus paid a price we could not pay. Even if we had the willpower to die on the cross, our sacrifice would not suffice because it is tainted with our own sin. God has generously given to us eternal life through Jesus Christ. We could work tirelessly for 100 years and never begin to repay that debt. And He does not require us to do so. He gives us life freely with no strings attached.

However, it is unreasonable for us to think our labor for Him has somehow indebted Him to us. Rom. 4:4, *“Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.”* God does not reward us on the basis of some indebtedness to us for our good behavior. Even our best behavior still comes short of the glory of God.<sup>13</sup>

So then, why even try? Why work hard if God doesn’t pay up the way we think He should? Actually He does reward us. He just doesn’t do it because He somehow owes it to us. He does it on the basis of grace—His own generosity toward us. My works are like the picture a 4-year old child presents to his mom. He has done his best. But in reality, he colored outside the lines quite a bit. The colors he chose to use were not realistic. When he tried to write, “I love you” it was barely legible. And when he hands it to Mom, her face lights up; she commends him for a job well done, and she hangs that picture on the refrigerator for all to see. All that praise and affirmation, flows out of Mom’s heat of love for her child. It is not warranted by the child’s performance. But it is received anyway.

2 Cor 5:9-10 *“Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”*

The reward will come according to what we did in this physical body. But it will be tempered by grace; and we don’t want it any other way. None of us want to receive what we deserve. Amen? I would rather trust His grace in the matter. The Judgement Seat of Christ will be an awesome demonstration of God’s grace. We will come before Him, not with arrogant expectation of God paying up on what He owes us. We will come humbly before Him realizing *“I am what I am by the grace of God”*; realizing our best efforts still come short of His glory; realizing God owes us nothing. We will come with an attitude, “I’m just glad to be here; thank you for Your mercy toward me.” Then our Heavenly Father will smile at His children and say, “I know I don’t owe it to you; but I want to lavish my riches upon you; “it is my good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” Rewards will come; not on the basis of debt, but on the basis of grace.

## Conclusion

Grace is unmerited favor expressed in and through us by the divine influence of the Holy Spirit. It is not just an abstract court ruling in heaven. It is something alive and dynamic.

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<sup>13</sup> Westminster Confession of Faith XVI.3.

Biblical grace produces righteousness. It empowers service. And it rewards God's children, not because God is indebted to us, but because God is lavishly generous to us. Pray