

## ***SAVED BY GRACE—HOW DOES THAT WORK?***

If I were to say, “God’s amazing...” how would you fill in the blank? I am sure that many of you, if not most of you would fill it with the word *grace*; God’s amazing grace! That would be the correct answer, but when you think about it, there are a number of words that would fit just as well, isn’t there? How about God’s amazing love or His amazing patience? How about His amazing wisdom, or power? Or how about God’s amazing plan, the one that came to pass with the coming of His Son, Jesus the Christ. All of that, and I am sure a whole lot more could easily serve as a complement to the statement, “God’s amazing...”

Nevertheless, many of you thought of the word grace. Maybe you did that because of the great hymn, “Amazing Grace,” written by John Newton. I would hope even more that many of you did that because you have experienced God’s grace, and continue to be amazed by it, again and again!

This morning I would like to speak with you about God’s grace, the grace which brought salvation into the world.

The apostle Paul made that very statement, didn’t he? He said that, in **Titus 2 and verse 11**. He said, *“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people.”* I am sure you have heard that many times, have probably read that many times, but if you would, permit me to give you something of the context for this verse. It’s rarely good to divorce a verse, much less just a phrase from its context. Sometimes people do that. They extract a phrase because those particular words convey some thought they wish to emphasize. In the context of Titus chapter 2, Paul had been writing Titus, who was one of his young co-workers. Paul had sent him to the island of Crete because there were some things that needed to be done, like the appointing of elders in every place where there was a congregation of Christians. Paul writes Titus to give him some instruction, some encouragement, and some important reminders. Paul tells him to teach what is in accordance with sound doctrine. Then he gives him some things that will help the older men, and the older women, younger women and the younger men. These are things like reminding them to be sober-minded, dignified, and reverent in behavior, not addicted to wine. Young women are to be reminded to love their husbands (I take that to mean, not someone else’s husband). Young men are to live self-controlled lives and be exemplary in doing good works, showing integrity, and making sure their speech is not blameworthy. There is some instruction also for those who are slaves. He is talking about slaves who have become Christians. They are to be submissive to their masters, not argumentative, or stealing things, but careful so that in everything, their lives are an adornment to the doctrine of God our Savior.

To adorn something means to show it or make it appear in a pleasing way. The doctrine of God our Savior is the message about how God, in sending His Son to die for us on the cross made it possible for people to be saved. That’s what Paul is talking about then, when he says in the very next verse—**verse 11**--, *“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people.”* That’s what the doctrine of God our Savior is. It is the teaching of Christ’s coming into

the world to make it possible for all men to be saved. But now I want you to notice this. In your Bible, is there a period at the end of verse 11? In the NIV there is, but in most versions there isn't one. Instead there is a comma, because the translators assumed the thought Paul was expressing continued on.

So you see (verse 12), Paul says, this grace of God that has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, also does something else. He says, "training us," some versions say "instructing" us, or "teaching" us. But, training or instructing, or teaching us what? "...*training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in the present age,*" as we wait "*for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.*"

I wanted you to see all of that because I want you to have a clear understanding of grace. So what do we learn from these scriptures?

First of all they teach me that grace is not just a loving disposition on God's part. It is true that God has a loving disposition. The apostle John tells us that God is love (4:8). Not only that, God is gracious, He is patient and longsuffering. He is merciful and kind. But God's loving disposition didn't just sit there, it did something! He didn't just say, "olly, olly, else in free!" He took action and sent His Son into the world to become a sacrifice for our sins.

But these verses also teach me that there is something we must do. If that isn't true, then it is the case that all men are going to be saved. If the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all men, then all men are going to be saved if there is nothing that men must do. Often we hear the definition of grace as God's unmerited favor? I think I know what people mean when they say that, but I have to be honest with you, sometimes I think people say that because they really don't know what else to say. It sounds good! It's comforting! But, if grace is God's unmerited favor, then why do some people get it and why do some people not get it? That's usually when people start trying to explain that well, some believe, and some do not believe. Well, that's confusing to me. If grace is unmerited favor, why do the believers get it and the unbelievers not get it? If the grace of God brings salvation for all people, why aren't all people saved? I'm not trying to be foolish, or stubborn. I really want to know, I really want to understand!

Well that's when the idea of faith or belief is introduced. We are told faith, or believing, is not a work. People point to Bible passages like Romans 11:5, 6 and Ephesians 2:8, 9. **Romans 11, 5 and 6** say, "*So too at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.*" And **Ephesians 2:8 & 9** say, "*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.*" I believe those scriptures. I get it; salvation is not something I can earn. I can't do enough work to merit forgiveness of even one sin. Paul is emphatic about that in passages like **Titus 3:4-7**: "*But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of*

*works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”*

I get that. I understand that I can't pile up enough good works to merit the forgiveness of even one sin, let alone a lifetime of sinning and falling short of the glory of God. I understand that, and I understand that faith, or believing is not the same thing as doing good works, but it is still something that I must do because if I have faith in God and in Jesus as the Son of God, I get forgiveness, I can be saved, but if I don't have faith, there's no deal!

So this tells me that grace, which is God's loving disposition that manifested itself in the sending of His Son into the world also calls for a response on our part. That response is called faith, but what do we mean by faith? Is faith nothing more than just a mental disposition? Well, was God's grace nothing more than a loving disposition? I've said it was more than that. God's loving disposition manifested itself in doing something and that something was the sending of His Son Jesus Christ into the world. In the same way, faith is more than simply a mental disposition. It is that, but it is a mental disposition that manifests itself in doing something, and that something is called faithfulness, or as Paul put it **in Romans 1:5, and 16:26**—like bookends to the great book of Romans, *“the obedience of faith.”*

Faith that doesn't obey is not faith, it is just talk. That's why Paul said the grace of God trains (or teaches) us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives. If we don't accept the training, if we don't learn what grace teaches us, if we do not renounce ungodliness, worldly passions, and live self-controlled, upright and godly lives, then we don't get the forgiveness; we don't receive eternal salvation.

Let's see if this understanding fits the context in which Titus 2:11 is found. Look again at **verse 1**. Paul tells Titus to *“teach what accords with sound doctrine.”* Well, verse 11 tells us that the grace of God teaches us. Titus was to teach what is in accordance with sound doctrine. **Verse 10**, Paul referred to this as *“the doctrine of God our Savior,”* so I think we are on the right track there. That doctrine tells older men to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love and in steadfastness. Obviously Paul is talking about believers, so we are talking about those who have believed, who have faith. But suppose, just for sake of argument, that an older man in Christ was not sober-minded? What if he wasn't dignified or self-controlled? What if he wasn't sound in faith, or in love? What if he wasn't steadfast? Would these things matter? Would they have any bearing on his salvation? Would they not manifest a lack of faith on his part?

**Verse 3**, Titus is told to teach the older women as well. They are to be reverent in their behavior, not slanderers, or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and train the young women to love their husbands and children, and to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind and submissive to their own husbands. Again, I am sure Paul is talking about women who believe. But, suppose again, just for sake of argument, that an older woman was

not reverent in her behavior? What if she went about slandering others, or was addicted to alcohol? What if she doesn't teach or train anyone to do anything? What if she doesn't live a life that is self-controlled, and pure? What if she does not work at home, but as Paul talked about in **1 Timothy 5**, "*learns to be idlers, going about from house to house, and gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not?*" What if she is not kind? What if she is not submissive to her husband? Would any of these things have a bearing on her salvation? Wouldn't that, in some way, manifest a lack of faith her part?

Well, I'm sure you get my point. The context here does not support the idea that faith is just a mental disposition any more than the context suggests that God's grace is just a loving disposition. The grace of God manifested itself in action, which is the basis for the gospel, or good news. God always had that loving disposition, but until He acted, until He sent His Son into the world to become a sacrifice for our sins, no one was going to be saved. In the same way, faith is a mental disposition that becomes useful only when it manifests itself in obedience, which includes not only one's initial obedience to the gospel, but a life of continuing obedience. It includes renouncing ungodliness. If we don't do that, if we don't renounce ungodliness, will our faith save us, grace or no grace? I don't think so! Faith that manifests itself in obedience also includes renouncing worldly passions. If it doesn't do that, will our faith save us, grace or no grace? The doctrine of God our Savior, the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith teaches us to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives. If we don't do that, if we choose not to live upright and godly, will whatever we call "our faith" save us? I don't think so.

Paul told Titus, "*our great God and Savior 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.*" If we are not zealous for good works, if we are not willing give up unlawful and ungodly things, will our faith still save us, grace or no grace? I don't think so.

Now, I'm not saying that if we did all of these things, we would somehow deserve to be saved. First of all, we could never do all of those things—even just the things mentioned in this context—all of the time and do them perfectly. And I'm not saying that if you don't do all of those things—even just the things that are mentioned in this context—and do them all the time and do them perfectly that you don't have shot at being saved. I'm not wanting to teach or imply either of those things.

The obedience of our faith, even at its best and fullest expression, would never merit the forgiveness of even one sin. But when our faith is at least making the effort to be obedient, then we put ourselves in a position where the merit of Christ's blood can be applied to us, resulting in the forgiveness of those sins which we have renounced, and repented of, and confessed. That's what salvation by grace through faith means.

To understand the grace of God, we have to keep in mind that God did something for us that we could not do for ourselves. The sending of His Son Jesus Christ into the world to die on the

cross as an atoning sacrifice for our sins makes it possible for us to be forgiven, if we will but respond to that gracious act with an obedient faith.

You may or may not know that John Newton, who wrote the song, Amazing Grace, wrote it as a witness to his own life. Born in 1725, at the age of seven, his mother died. His father was a ship commander and was gone almost all the time. At the age of eleven, he went to sea with his father, and made six voyages with him. Later he was drafted into service aboard an English war ship, but he soon deserted. He was caught and after being punished, he went to work as a sailor aboard ships plying the slave trade. He eventually became a captain of his own slave ship, but on one trip home, they encountered a storm that he was sure was going to sink them. He let go a prayer that many infidels often say without thinking, "Lord have mercy on us." When in just a little bit, the storm subsided, he began to reflect on what he had said, and how that God had been merciful to him, and so he began his search for God, eventually becoming a minister and a hymn writer. Shortly before he died in 1807, he wrote these words:

*Though I am not what I ought to be, nor what I wish to be, nor what I hope to be; I can truly say that I am not what I once was, a slave to sin and Satan; and I can heartily join with the Apostle (Paul) and acknowledge, by the grace of God, I am what I am.*

How about you? Do you know the grace of God? I am sure most of you do; you've heard the greatest story ever told, and you know what God did for you. So how have you responded? And how are you responding even now? Is your faith an obedient faith, or is it just one of words? Such are questions that every one of us need to take seriously. And as you think about these things, if you know you have not been obedient to the faith, we hope you will do that now. Our invitation song has been announced and if there is anyone who would like to avail themselves of God's amazing grace, will you come while we stand and sing