

Changing Grace

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Preacher: Paul Barker

[0:00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 7th of March 2004.

The preacher is Paul Barker. His sermon is entitled Changing Grace and is based on Titus chapter 2 verses 11 to 15.

Let us pray. God our Father, we come before you, your word tonight.

We come to hear you speak to us and to our hearts. And we thank you that you are a God who reveals himself and his purposes for us and for this universe. In your word which testifies about your son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we pray that the power of your word and gospel will not only inform our minds but transform our lives. So that we may adorn the gospel with our godly living.

[1:12] Amen. One of the caricatures of Christianity is that it's all about laws. Don't drink, don't smoke, don't dance, don't have fun.

Go to church on Sundays, do this, don't do that. Do this, don't do that. And you can understand such a caricature in many respects. After all, the Bible has numerous laws.

In the Old Testament there are whole books given over, more or less, to laws about doing this and not doing that. And various sorts of behaviour that's commanded by the laws of the Old Testament.

And in the New Testament the same, not quite perhaps the same extent. But certainly many of the books of the New Testament have some sections about how to live, how to behave as Christian people.

What to do. Indeed, if we just took last week's passage by itself, chapter 2, verses 1 to 10. We've pretty much there got a set of laws, we could say, about how different groups of people are to live.

[2:19] Older men, you've got to be temperate, serious, prudent, sound in faith, love and in endurance. Older women, don't drink, don't be slanderous, be reverent in behaviour. Younger women, be self-controlled and chaste and good managers of the household.

And so on through the 10 verses that we looked at last week from Titus chapter 2. Now if the letter to Titus stopped at chapter 2 verse 10, if there was nothing more, so you had two Sunday nights free instead of tonight and next week's sermons, then in one sense the caricature of Christianity all being about laws could well be true, at least from the letter of Titus in its abridged form if it stopped at chapter 2 verse 10.

Well, that's one caricature, that Christianity is just about laws, doing this and doing that. Sometimes, of course, the opposite extreme is part of not only the caricature, but part of the reality for some Christians.

In fact, over the centuries, sometimes Christians have rebelled against that, what seems to be that tight stricture of doing this and doing that, maybe in a very strict Christian upbringing, to reject that and go to the other extreme, to say that Christians are free, we've been liberated, we're free from law, we're free from obedience to the law, if we read some verses in the New Testament in certain ways.

We're saved by grace so that we're free, no longer bound by this law and that law, doing this and doing that. Legalism or licence?

[3 : 56] They're the two extremes in a sense. Legalism, the view that we've got to slavishly obey various laws in order somehow to win our rights with God. Licence, that we have freedom, saved by grace and that's it, free.

Two extremes, two pitfalls for Christians, veering to one end or the other. Two misunderstandings of the Gospel, in effect.

Having instructed the old and the young and the male and the female and the slaves in the section we saw last week from the first bit of chapter 2, Paul doesn't stop there.

Now he undergirds all of those instructions about right behaviour, doing this and doing that we might say, with the right foundation, the right motivation for how and why to live such lives as described in the earlier part of this chapter.

What is to motivate the Christian readers of this letter, including Titus, but those to whom Titus is ministering, what's to motivate them to do and be as commanded in the verses that we saw last week?

[5 : 14] Is it about their insecurity for whether they're saved or not? Is it just an attempt to be goody goodies? Or is there something perhaps deeper and richer that is to motivate them?

Simply, the answer is grace. Grace is the answer, the reason why and the how that Christians are to behave in the way described in the first part of chapter 2.

The answer simply is grace, both amazing grace and powerful or changing grace. Now, we might say that grace is a prayer that we say before meals, that's not what we're talking about here.

We might say that grace is elegance, such as in a ballet dancer, that's not what we're talking about here. What the Bible means by the word grace is in fact profound but central.

Grace, God's grace that is, God's grace that is his lavish generosity towards undeserving people. It's not God being stingy but the opposite.

[6 : 29] Not just being generous in giving but lavish in giving. That is, what he gives is an extraordinarily precious gift and all the more so because those to whom he gives it, you and me, people of age and youth, male and female, including slaves, of all generations for the last 2,000 years or so are completely undeserving.

Grace is God's gift to us that we don't earn or merit or achieve. It is God's free and unconditional gift of salvation, of a relationship with God that will last for eternity, of sins forgiven and a guaranteed and sure and certain hope of heavenly life.

that's God's gift, a lavish gift and what's more, we don't deserve it. In fact, the opposite. We deserve the opposite but God gives us this great gift.

That's what the Bible really means by the idea of grace, the word grace. Nothing to do with elegance or a prayer before a meal. I remember when I was a teenager, I think, and hearing and singing from time to time the hymn that we've sung, Amazing Grace, I was very confused because there was this story that I remember reading in a children's book of a lady whose name was Grace who went out in a lifeboat and saved people at sea in the north of England and I always thought that this lost but now I'm found song about Amazing Grace was about her until someone explained the real grace.

It's nothing to do with some woman saving people from a lifeboat, but it's to do with God. That's God's lavish gift, an expensive, precious gift that He doesn't hold back from us and all the more full of grace because we don't deserve it.

[8 : 31] The focus of that gift is Jesus Christ, God's Son. In essence, that's the gift. He's the gift. God's grace. In particular, God giving Jesus to be born as a human being to identify with us but all the more to die for us, to take away our sin and give us salvation.

That grace from God focused in Jesus Christ is the reason for, the motivation for, the instructions of the first part of chapter 2.

Why and how should the older men be temperate, serious and prudent? Why and how should the older women keep from drink and not be slanderers and so on?

Why and how should the younger women love their husbands and their children and be self-controlled and chaste? Why and how should the younger men be self-controlled? Why and how should the slaves give satisfaction to their masters and not pilfer and work hard?

Grace. For grace, verse 11 says. Paul doesn't start a new section here but he's building the argument of what he's been saying.

[9 : 41] The reason for it, you see in the very first word of verse 11, for, this reason, grace. Grace, the grace of God has appeared verse 11 says.

Paul of course is talking about God's Son, Jesus Christ. He's appeared. He's come to earth. He's lived the human life and he's hung on a cross and he's died and he's risen from the dead and he's appeared again before he's ascended to heaven.

All of that event is encapsulated by Paul saying God's grace has appeared. For the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation.

or rescue. That's what salvation means. Rescuing. God is our saviour, he said at the end of verse 10. That is, God has brought salvation.

He's talking about Jesus being our saviour and it's Jesus who was given to bring us salvation or rescue. We'll see more of that later on. And he's brought it to all, to all kinds of people, to older men and older women, to younger women and younger men and slaves and all sorts of other people if you can think of other categories as well.

[11 : 01] Schoolies week's a new thing it seems to me since I was at school. I didn't have a schoolies week but now it's quite a big thing as some of you have experienced and some of you maybe are looking forward to it.

The imprisonment of school and all the exams and classrooms and then the last exam over and you get out of prison so to speak, you get out of jail and so you go and live it up for a week in what's called schoolies week to party.

Well there's some Christians who think that the Christian life is sort of one long schoolies week. That we've been enslaved and imprisoned to sin and guilt and law and obedience but now the grace of God means our sins are forgiven, the debts cancelled out as though we can walk out of sort of the old school and live it up as Christian people freed from the shackles of guilt and sin and so consistent with that view is that the essence of Christianity is forgiveness.

The burden is released and taken by Jesus on the cross. We're forgiven. Now we're free and there are plenty of our songs that we sing that are full of the language of being free. I've been released. I've been set free and so on.

That's just the first half of the story. You see we're not set free to a lifelong schoolies week type liberation. Free grace is not cheap grace to use the expression of the German theologian Bonhoeffer from 60 or 70 years ago.

[12 : 29] The same grace that forgives and sets us free is the same grace that trains and educates us to godliness and this is the hub of Paul's argument in this letter to Titus.

See what verse 12 goes on to say. Having said that the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to all Paul doesn't stop there because it's not cheap grace. it's not grace that leads to this schoolies week of doing whatever.

The same grace that brings salvation trains us to renounce impiety and worldly passions in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled upright and godly.

This grace trains us. It disciplines us. It's a hard work type of idea here. It's as though the grace of God is like our gym instructor who is pushing us to more and more pain doing laps of the oval so that we become fitter and stronger and more enduring in our athletic prowess.

But of course Paul is using the idea of training or educating here not for physical activity so much as spiritual godliness. The grace of God is training us disciplining us educating us that's the idea behind that word to do two things to say no to some things and to say yes to other things.

[14:01] Literally verse 12 says in our translation to renounce impiety but the idea is to say no to impiety and worldly passions. The idea is that the grace of God at work in us is training us to say no to things that we would otherwise say yes to.

Impiety is general term for ungodliness sinful activity. Worldly passions are lusts or desires that are confined to this world the fleeting pleasures of our world greed sexual lust lust for power or money or beauty or some other sort of idolatry.

the grace of God is disciplining us and training us to say no to such things. I remember when I was living in England there was a sort of campaign for child protection that had the slogan say no to strangers and I often used to smile when I'd see those signs and think about you imagine walking down the street or walking through Doncaster shopping town 98% of the people are strangers and this says say no to them no no no that's a bit rude now it's not really quite the idea saying no to strangers like that the idea being that if a stranger approaches you as a child to go with them you say no to them that's the idea of course the same sort of idea here that as various worldly passions and ungodly behaviours present themselves before us to stimulate our desire to pursue them we say no I'm not going that way I've been trained I'm being trained disciplined not to head in that direction but rather the positive as verse 13 of the end of verse 12 goes on to say in the present age to say yes in effect to lives that are self-controlled upright and godly in effect those three words summarise all the instructions that we saw last week in verses 1 to 10 whether you're an older man or an older woman a younger man a younger woman a slave or whoever in effect the summary of behaviour is this to be self-controlled a word that actually occurred three times in last week's passage upright and godly in a sense general terms about right and godly behaviour although some identify that to be self-controlled is in effect getting your own self under control to be upright is to have right and proper dealings with other people your neighbours and godly is about a right and proper relationship with God maybe that breakdown is helpful to think getting yourself right your relationships with others right your relationship with God right saying no to wrong things and saying yes to right things because unless the grace of God is disciplining us and changing us we'll be saying yes to all the wrong things and ignoring all the right things remember though the idea here is of training disciplining it the grace of God is not like a steroid injection that will automatically make you run the hundred metres in ten seconds the grace of God is the hard yards of discipline practice hard work not left on our own because it's the grace of God that's actually disciplining us and changing us and working on us but nonetheless it's not taking the pain away the difficulty the striving either it's not the steroid injection to give us a quick fix instant answer it's the discipline instruction of the grace of God in us and for us the context of all of this as verse 12 says is in this present age or in the present age that is the grace of God is working to enable us to live now here and now but not just here and now with a sense of present that's true but in particular in the present age has got the connotation of this present ungodly or evil age that's the general way in which the present age is described in the New Testament so here the grace of God is training

God's people Christian people to live godly lives in an ungodly age that is it will make us stand out we're beginning to live the future now is the idea here raises the question then for us can people tell that you're a Christian does your behaviour your actions your words do they reflect the fact that the grace of God is disciplining you does your behaviour stand out at school in the way that you relate to other kids and staff for that matter at school is your uprightness evident at university by contrast with those who are not Christians can your colleagues at work detect your godliness in your words behaviour attitudes and actions the grace of God is disciplining us now so that we live the lives of the future already in this age that is ungodly now so far

Paul has been arguing in one sense that Christian behaviour comes from the grace of God that saved us looking back to Jesus in the past there's an element in which right behaviour is motivated by what God has already done for us there's an element of gratitude and thanksgiving there as we look back to what Jesus dying and rising for us has accomplished and meant but not so only because there is an essential future dimension as well one that I think is often overlooked or neglected in Christian circles God's grace is not only looking to the past to spur us on not only equipping us to live now but it's forcing us to look to the future as well verse 13 says that all of this is happening while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great

[20:55] God and Saviour Jesus Christ our world lives for the present and that's it seize the day eat drink and be merry for who knows what will happen tomorrow carpe diem seize the day it's the motto of our age but not so for Christians we are to use our time wisely but we're to have a firm focus on the future as we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ the idea of waiting here it's important to get right seems to me that there are two sorts of waiting if you're ringing the bank then you wait on the phone for an eternity if you're like me you either try and have a speaker phone or you have a cordless phone so that as it happened to me about two years ago when

I waited for two and a bit hours on a recorded message with the bank I was able to eat my lunch go to the toilet read a book prepare a sermon do all sorts of other things and really that was a waiting that the time was just sort of ticking by the other sort of waiting is the sort of arrivals lounge waiting when you're standing there outside those closed doors at Tullamarine for example waiting for your loved one to appear after two or three months or something away you see while that's happening you're not just sort of idly you know flitting around and doing other things you're standing on tiptoes looking over people thinking will he or she be the next person out two different types of waiting and it's the second type of waiting that is to characterize us you see we're not just passing time on a treadmill waiting for the manifestation of the glory of God when Jesus returns the waiting for us is to be an eager anticipation a looking a longing a sort of straining our neck and standing on tiptoes and thinking is he coming is he coming a wanting and a longing that is associated with the waiting for us as Christians then living our life is to be like that that here in this world we're not just sort of waiting one day for the future but we're longing for it and we're looking for it and we're expecting it and we're aching for the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Saviour

Jesus Christ when he returns that's what that's talking about in the first appearance of Jesus his grace was evident grace appeared verse 11 said and now verse 13 is saying when he returns and appears same word his glory will be evident for he'll come then in great glory the same Jesus who's been is coming again and the grace of God is training and equipping us to live godly lives now in an ungodly age so that we're ready for when Jesus comes to take us into the godly age so that our lives now are changing by this powerful grace so that we're not really fitting in this age but when Jesus returns we will fit the age to come which he'll take us to our waiting our eager anticipation of Jesus return will be expressed by godly living if we're living godly lives it will be because we're aching for

Jesus to come but if we're not living godly lives if we're not heeding the instructions of the new testament about how we should live as Christian people then we couldn't care tuppence about Jesus return but when we do then the grace of god is disciplining us and training us so that we're ready for that day when he comes just like an athletics coach is training an athlete for the day of the great championship race so that they go through the hard yards and the pain and they discipline themselves to persevere and run faster and straighter and so on or whatever their particular discipline is so the grace of god is training us educating us disciplining us ready for the great day to come when Jesus comes so that we will be ready to meet him and our readiness will be shown in godly life paul summarizes what he said so far in verse 14 jesus it is who gave himself for us at his first appearing so that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds it's a neat summary really of the gospel jesus gave himself willingly not sent as a sort of punishment from god the father but jesus willingly giving himself and giving himself for us for you and me 2 000 years later for paul and titus 2 000 years ago for people of any age any place old and young male and female slaves or not jesus gave himself for us all and the language of for us is strictly speaking on behalf of us or in place of us as our substitute there's no getting around that that when jesus gave himself meaning ultimately his death he died in our place on our behalf as our substitute like the stuntman in a movie does all the difficult things so that the tom cruise actors can sit back and get paid more and they get the easy way out why did he do that firstly to redeem us from all iniquity old testament language to liberate us from sin and its guilt that's what iniquity is about but secondly to purify for himself a people so that we're not just forgiven for our sins but we're actually cleansed and purified from sin and from its presence so that we become fully godly like jesus himself again old testament language really to redeem is an old testament idea to release or liberate by the payment of a ransom price jesus himself was that precious price to purify himself old testament language to do with sacrifice again the first is to remove us from the control of sin the second is to remove the stain of sin from us and that's the purpose of jesus dying not just the first to forgive us to redeem us which is often where we stop when we think about why jesus died but he died also to purify us so that we will stand transformed perfected godly on the day when he returns the result of all of that should be that we are zealous for good deeds oh most of us do good deeds most of us our society would say would be good people but we may not be zealous for

good deeds that expresses something of the heart not just an outward obedience where we do good things because it's expected of us because mum told us or dad told us or the minister told us or someone else told us or someone else expects it we're actually zealous for good deeds because from within our heart's been changed so that our desire is to do everything good that is possible not just an avoidance of bad things but a positive doing of good things as well to be keen and enthusiastic for good not just reluctant or indifferent for what is good we've seen in these weeks from this letter this is week five out of six on Titus that God's gospel's goal is godliness godliness is why Jesus came in the first place godliness is why Jesus gave himself to die on a cross for us godliness is what Jesus expects when he returns and so when we yield to impiety when we give in to worldly passions we deny

[29 : 49] God's grace we reject Jesus death we don't look forward to his return Paul is instructing Titus here to teach what he's passing on to the church in Crete Paul's not just telling Titus but he's telling Titus so that the rest of the church of Crete and subsequently us I suppose know and understand and do what is being commanded here he's wanting the people of Crete to be godly but he's not just telling them be godly come on be godly do this do that these few gems of a verses are the undergirding the motivation for the instructions to be godly if Paul stopped at chapter 2 verse 10 his exhortation to be godly and do good things would in the end become just hard work we've just got to keep doing the right thing do this don't do that do this don't do that it'd be easy to give up it'd be easy to stop saying no to impiety and worldly passions it'd be easy to stop saying yes to self-control and godliness how would you preach or encourage personally a Christian who is not showing godliness or who's given up showing godliness who's flagging in godliness it'd be easy as a Christian minister or an older

Christian brother or sister to say to this person this is what you've got to do do this don't do that and it would be easy in the end to be legalistic do this don't do that it'd be easy then to be giving advice that is in one sense impotent do this don't do that but Paul shows here Titus how to minister to people who are giving up godly lives he's not simply saying do this don't do that although that's part of it but to them he's preaching grace because it is the grace of god that trains for godliness the same grace that brings forgiveness is the grace that brings purification Paul is saying to Titus what to do preach grace the grace of the cross the grace of justification the grace of sanctification the grace of the second coming when weary in this earthly race I rest on his unchanging grace the title of the sermon is changing grace unchanging grace because god's grace never changes but it's changing us in which case it's changing grace see the motivation for godliness is not simply thanks for sending Jesus certainly the motivation for godliness is not simply saying to us in your own strength express your thanks and not even is the motivation for godliness also a looking forward to the future and getting ready for

Jesus to come the motivation for godliness is that god's grace is changing us is disciplining us is educating and transforming us and the power for godliness comes from the grace of the gospel god's gospel's goal is godliness and god's grace is powerful to save and god's grace is powerful to produce godliness so Paul instructs Timothy declare these things exhort and reprove with all authority let no one look down on you or despise you so don't despise those who exhort you to godliness they are agents of god's disciplining grace don't despise those who reprove you for your ungodliness they are agents of god's training grace and don't despise sound teaching or those who preach it for they are agents of god's powerful grace god's gospel god's gospel's goal is godliness godliness and preachers of sound doctrine like Titus like Paul are one key way that God brings about godliness through his gospel amen