

God's law gives us direction, God's grace gets us there

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 September 2018

Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[0 : 00] I have the word in front of you, Titus 2, verses 11 through to 15. As I said, this is really the fulfillment of these four messages that we've had.

And we began with direction, and we're going to finish with direction. And I'll just open with the illustration that I use, just because two people are in a car, knowing that they're heading to, let's say, a wedding.

They know where they're going. They know they both want to get there. But at the first junction they reach, or possibly the 15th, it really doesn't matter, who decides whether they should turn left or right?

So the issue is not about focus and agreeing on where you're going. It's really about how you live your life down here, the lefts and the rights of the Christian life.

And the Christian life contains a lot of lefts and rights, a lot of rights and wrongs. And Romans 7, in particular, which we've not read, explains that the Christian life is a battle.

[1 : 07] And the battle is between going the right way rather than the wrong way. And it's not always that we choose the right way. And that constant battle continues all the way through the Christian life.

But it's not enough simply just to focus on Jesus. We must follow Jesus. It's not enough simply to say, well, heaven is the place where I'm going because I believe in Jesus, when our focus should be on following Jesus, because that's what Jesus called us to do to follow him.

To summarize this, what we're actually saying is that what does the saved life look like? Jesus Christ has saved you. You're now in a saved relationship.

So what does that salvation look like? Well, one of the things it looks like is it looks like the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. So there's no argument over what we should be like, because there's no argument really over what Jesus was like.

And if God wants us to be like his son, then there's no difficulty over what we're becoming, or even the direction that we need to go in in order to become like the Lord Jesus Christ.

[2 : 19] No difficulty whatsoever. But often that's where the difficulty is found. People make decisions that may not necessarily be consistent with wanting to live a life with Jesus.

And listen, as a pastor, I know exactly what that feels like, not just as a pastor, just as an ordinary Christian. To get out in the bed in the morning and be faced with the challenge of, do I want to be like Jesus today or not?

Okay, some days here real struggle, because of the demands and the responsibilities placed upon the Christian life. But as we're going to notice here, it's not without God's grace.

God's grace. God's grace permeates everything. And therefore, one of the things that Titus wants to point out, or rather Paul wants to point out to Titus, so that Titus can then point it out to everybody else, is that God's salvation is normally, in most cases, much greater than anybody believes it to be. Much, much greater than anybody believes it to be. Even the Christians, that God's salvation is much greater than many of us believe it to be.

[3 : 32] The same is true of God's grace. God's grace is also much greater, far more extensive, deep and wide, than most Christians actually believe it to be.

You know, these nagging doubts of, am I truly forgiven? Well, I think if you come to understand God's grace, then that's the only thing that can clear those doubts up. That's the only thing that can get rid of those, sort of, perhaps, perpetual worries.

Only God's grace can solve that problem. But then, the third thing, of course, is that God's standards are much higher than many Christians believe.

And that one always catches us out. And I think that's the difficult one, isn't it? That we know we can, okay, God's salvation, it's great, and perhaps I don't understand it fully.

God's grace, again, perhaps, I'm not really grasped that fully, but God's standards also. And what we see in salvation is that God, through saving people, by grace, elevates us to the standards of God, and nothing less will do.

[4 : 44] And so, God's standards are far greater than any of us can perhaps imagine. And so, when Paul writes to Romans, as he does, in Romans 7 in particular, you know, the standard is set forth, but also the battle is set forth as well.

In Galatians, you've got the battle between desiring to do one thing and the Spirit of God convicting you not to do that, grace. And then here in Titus, he is very clear, again, about the standards of God for the Christian life.

Now, here's the thing. None of us could ever reach these standards by ourselves. We can even get close to meeting the first standard. In fact, we're not saved because we've met any of God's standards.

We are saved in order to meet God's standards. Okay, let me say that again. We are not saved because we have met the standards of God. We are saved so that we can meet the standards of God.

It's a very opposite way around. Okay, God's grace elevates us, enables us to live to his standard because without it, none of us can. This is why salvation can never be arrived at through being good.

[5 : 55] Now, I've got a nan who's now very old and she lives with a lot of pain in her body but she is as sharp as ever.

Perhaps too sharp because she's too shrewd even for me now. I can't keep up. And my conversation with her every year, I speak to her on the phone but I'm going down to see her in October because she's getting old and I don't want a year to go by without seeing her. And every year my conversation with her is the same. Nan, I love you to bits but you're not good enough. You're not good enough. God's standards are just so much higher than you can imagine. But Jesus has met them for you. That's grace. That's the grace of God. But the grace of God is really a battering ram to human pride, isn't it?

I once met a lady on her, well, I didn't meet her, I met her son on her deathbed and her son was a Church of England vicar and he sat with her on her actual bed and he said to her, look, mom, I'm going to have to tell you the gospel again and again and this is what she said to him.

[7 : 13] She says, for me to admit at my age that Jesus Christ is the only way, it would be for me to admit that I've lived my whole life for the wrong reason and I'm just not willing to do that.

Do you know what that's called? It's called pride. Grace and pride. That's deeply challenging, isn't it? When a person truly understands God's grace, one of the things that they come to terms with really quite quickly is actually, I can't meet the standards of God and that hurts my pride because most people think that they are good enough.

So the grace comes into our life enabling us now to say no to ungodliness, to renounce ungodliness, to say no to sin. Why? Because God's grace doesn't want us to continue in sin and that's the blessing and that's the benefit.

We are saved in order to live up to the standards of God, not because we have lived up to the standards of God. So here's the summary of these few verses. In verse 11, you'll notice that it is God's grace that brings salvation to us.

Verse 11. Verse 12, that same grace of God trains us to renounce ungodliness. In other words, say no to sin. In simple terms, sin is saying no to God and grace is saying no to sin.

[8 : 40] Okay? That's the way you would teach it in a Sunday school lesson perhaps. Sin is saying no to God and grace is saying no to sin. Completely different, as you can see. Verse 13.

We have received grace in order to get ready to meet Jesus because we are going to meet Jesus. Jesus, verse 14, is the one who gave himself to save us, rather redeem us from all lawlessness. There we go. Making us pure and making us his possession. A people zealous to do good works. And then Paul then teaches Titus that you have to go and tell people that this is the truth.

You have to go and tell people that if they're living by grace, then they're going to be saying no to sin. Now, Titus knows that he's got a whole bunch of people on Crete and the other surrounding churches where this isn't happening.

If I'm saved by grace, I can do whatever I please. Well, that grace it says teaches you to say no to ungodliness. And so Paul is saying to Titus, you're going to have to go and tell people this, that they need instructing in what grace actually is rather than understanding it as a depth of love that now allows me to do anything that I please.

[9 : 59] It's not that. Rather, grace is enabling us to say no to sin. And that's the joy. Why? Because saying no to sin is how we get to enjoy our relationship with the one who saved us.

So Paul here is teaching Titus to go ahead and tell those in the churches to do that. Paul has responsibility. Titus has responsibility. And his responsibility is to tell these Christians, look, I'm going to have to teach you how to think through the issues.

I'm going to have to teach you how to think through the issues. In other words, I said that if someone read the Bible for a chapter a day, in three and a half years you've got through the whole book, the whole Bible.

It doesn't take long to read a chapter either. But how long does it take to understand those chapters? Well, maybe three and a half years again or maybe another three and a half years on top of that. It takes a long time.

So Paul is instructing Titus to instruct these Christians continually because it takes a long time to understand these. It doesn't take a long time to read. It takes a long time, perhaps, to understand.

[11 : 08] So what are we understanding? Well, this is it, verse 14. In particular, the work of Jesus. The work of Jesus. Jesus, verse 14, gave himself to redeem us from lawlessness.

In other words, the standards of God are higher than we can imagine. And this is seen in the laws that God actually gives us. Most famously are the Ten Commandments.

If you think, well, where does God give us laws? Where are the standards of God? Well, most people would point, you know, first place would be Mount Sinai, Exodus 20, the Ten Commandments.

That's where God's law is stated. Well, that's where ten of them are stated. There's a few more elsewhere that are not found there. Now, Paul, over in Romans 7, teaches that God's law is good, but God's law does something to a sinful person which a sinful person is not always ready for. And that is, it provokes them. You've seen how children provoke other children? You know, you have to say, let's stop. Can you stop doing that? And children's response is often, I've done this because he done that.

[12 : 20] And you remember how in the Garden of Eden that when Adam sinned, you know, most people think, well, he blamed his wife. You know, but if you read it carefully, he doesn't actually blame his wife.

He says, the woman you gave me caused me, he actually blames God. Okay? So, you know, talk about sort of taking it out on God.

He blames God. So, there's an order, there's a standard, the standard gets broken and the first thing you do is you blame God. The woman you gave me caused me to sin. In other words, God, it's your fault because if you didn't give her to me, I wouldn't have done it.

Right, understand. We're all the same. We're all the same. How does it work? Well, imagine it this way. As a parent, you say to your child, don't do that. What do they do? Well, immediately you know that the child does the very thing that you tell them not to do and then this is how you reason it out as a parent.

Well, perhaps if I never told them, perhaps if I never put the idea into their head in the first place or that was said to you by somebody else, they would have never gone ahead and done it. And, by and large, it's almost true.

[13 : 30] But is what you have told them wrong? No. What you've told them is not wrong. But what you have told them has provoked them to go ahead and do the very thing that you told them not to do.

And the law of God, when people come face to face with the standards of God that says don't do it, what's the very first thing that they do? Well, they go ahead and do the very same thing.

It's not that God's law is bad. It's not that God's law should never have been told to people. But rather, what God's law does is it exposes the inner desire in all of us to do the opposite of what God

wants us to do.

The law of God exposes in all of us the opposite of what we, God actually wants us to do. So God's law is not bad.

Okay? Lawlessness is bad, but God's law is not bad. It does, however, reveal to us that we want to do the opposite. God's law is like a signpost saying walk this direction.

[14 : 35] Or rather, God's law is like a ladder that's saying if you climb this you can be godly. The trouble is none of us can climb it. Okay? Because the sin that we have is like breaking our legs.

We've not got the capability to be able to get from where we are to where God wants us to be. It's not that the ladder is bad, it's just that our ability to be able to climb it isn't there.

So what Paul says and what Titus says here or what Paul is telling Titus to say is that, look, lawlessness is bad, but the standards of God are good. But what the standards of God do is that it points out to everybody who's in sin that they can't keep them.

They can't keep them. I've often said to you that at school when there was no goal I was the best scorer in the world. I was, and same with basketball, when there was no net, I didn't miss once. But the moment you put a net on the court, then suddenly, does the net make me sinful? Does the net make me miss? No. The net points out, or rather the presence of the basketball net or the presence of the goal points out a truth that was always there that actually I couldn't score.

[15 : 48] I couldn't hit it. Well, God's law does exactly the same. It doesn't make you sinful, rather it points out the standard by which we have all fallen short.

Salvation, then, Paul says here, is that we have been saved from lawlessness, that we have been redeemed from lawlessness. We have not been separated from the law, but we have been separated from the sin that causes us to break God's law.

That's what we've been separated from. We're separated from the cause of breaking God's law. We're not separated from the law itself. We're separated from that inability to be able to say yes to God.

We're separated from our desire of always saying no. And what this means is, is we get to live as God's possession. I think that's really special, to live a life knowing that you are the possession of God.

That God owns you and that you belong to him. He has redeemed you, that is, redeemed you with a price, redeemed you with a very valuable price in the death of his son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[17 : 04] And he has redeemed you for this one purpose, or rather many purposes, but one in particular, that you are able from now on as a saved person to say no to sin, to say no to ungodliness.

And I think that this kind of grace discipleship is something that we're not always ready for. I'll give you a couple of examples. Jesus, of course, was the best one at discipling.

And Jesus disciplined, Jesus disciplined his disciples. But the way he disciplined them, we get to see some of the ways where he sits them down and teaches them, but then some of the other ways that we completely miss.

One of my favorite ones is Zacchaeus up the tree and he says to Zacchaeus, I'm coming to your house for tea and I want to go, what, without an invitation?

Who do you think you are? And what about Peter? Jesus gets into the boat of Peter and he says, don't do it that way, you do it this way. Jesus gives orders to both men.

[18 : 10] They're going about their daily business, Jesus steps into the boat and he gives orders to Peter. He comes to the tree of which Zacchaeus is up and he says, I'm coming to your house with tea. He orders Zacchaeus down.

But this ordering of Jesus is actually, if you read it carefully, a reordering of their life. Do it differently. So this reordering that Jesus introduces is one of the ways that the grace of God begins to take work in your life.

that you know where you're under God's grace because your life begins to be reordered. It becomes orderly to the standard of Jesus.

Jesus, very carefully and very gently, but nevertheless moves in and says, you're going to put that over there, you're going to put that over there, we're going to move this here. He's moving around everything and that's disruptive for a Christian, especially those who, but it's always been there for the last 50 years.

Okay, but not anymore. Why? Because the standard is much higher than you think. Jesus doesn't reorder unnecessarily. He reorders things purposefully.

[19 : 26] And this is really, really important to understand that the discipleship of grace that takes place in the believer's life is one of reordering. It comes in the form of an order, the law, but its application is a reordering of our life.

Why? Why is it so important? Well, here's why. Because you are God's possession. If I came into your house and I started moving around the furniture, I'd either have to be an exceptional sort of home designer and you wanted me there, which I'm not, or you're going to say, what do you think you're doing?

Well, you know immediately that because it's your possession, you have the right to put it wherever you please. You have the right to organise it however you choose. And clear enough throughout the whole of the New Testament, when a person is saved, they are told over and over again in different ways, you are not your own.

Why? Because you were bought with a price. What was the price? The price was Jesus redeeming us from lawlessness. Jesus redeemed us and therefore we are no longer our own but we are the possession of God and this is what it says here in verse 14, that Jesus is purifying for himself, purifying us, a people for his own possession.

In other words, you belong to Jesus and now Jesus has the right, because you belong to him, to reorder you. But it's going to be a glorious reordering, it's going to be a reordering that favours you, not disadvantages you, it's going to be a reordering that brings much blessing to your life, doesn't take any blessing away, it takes a lot of sin away, but not blessing.

[21 : 19] The blessing comes in the reordering. Why? Because you are a possession of God's, you belong to him. In other words, Jesus doesn't save perfect people.

He says people who are imperfect in order to make them perfect. He doesn't save people who can keep the law, he says people who can't keep the law so that they can keep the law.

A very simple transaction that Jesus actually achieves. And think about it this way, I don't know if you've ever tried to make room in a room that's already filled with stuff.

but I want you to imagine that the thing that you have to make room for is going to take up a lot of room. And now you bring it into the room and you think, okay, what am I going to keep?

You know there's an immediate conundrum. And that is you look at everything in the room and you don't want to throw anything away, but you know you can't have both. You know you can't have something move into the room and at the same time keep all the other things that are taking up the place that this new thing should have.

[22 : 31] What goes? Well at some point you realise that something has to go and what goes will always be the thing that you love the less, the least rather.

You will order it in accordance to desire and want and which one you want the most in the room. It's no different with Jesus. Jesus comes in, God, how much room do you think he should have in your life?

Does he get the box room? Does he deserve the box room? Or suddenly you begin to understand that Jesus won't fit in the box room.

Jesus needs every room because he's huge, he's very big. And so suddenly as you move or rather as Jesus himself moves into your life, there becomes this automatic reordering where things that perhaps weren't necessarily sinful but not helpful for your relationship with Jesus suddenly get moved out.

Well, that's what it means to be the possession of God, that Jesus has the right to purify. He comes into your life and he spring cleans.

[23 : 52] He reorganizes. He orders through reordering. Why? Because the standards of God are much higher than any of us can possibly imagine. And the grace of God is far deeper and wider than any of us perhaps have truly experienced, although we have if only we knew it.

And salvation means this. But here's the exhortation as we sort of try to bring it to the end. God's grace teaches us to follow God's word.

God's grace also teaches us to say no to ungodliness. God's grace helps us to live under grace, obeying God's laws. God's grace begins to reorder through the ordering of scripture in our life.

God's grace is at work in us every day, all day, all the time, constantly purifying us. Why? Why? That's very simple. Because you're not your own. You're God's possession. Grace instructs.

[25 : 06] And therefore, we know that everybody who lives under grace, who has received grace, receives exactly the same instruction. Why then do Christian lives look so different from each other?

Well, it all comes down to how much room you make, isn't it? You know, I can remember several times where my wife thought it was funny to put some things out ready for the skip.

I brought them back in and put them back into the room because I didn't think they were fit for the skip. And this went on for some time until she found out a very clever way of being able to do it without me figuring it out.

That's not sin, but it could have been. That kind of in and out, in and out, you know, we do exactly the same with God, I feel. I think God moves stuff out perhaps one year only for us to move it back in the next year.

I think God moves it out on one occasion only for us perhaps in a few months' time to move it back in. In other words, it's not that God hasn't got rid of it. He got rid of it. We just brought it back in. You know, I'm terrible, I can't throw anything away, which is good for my wife.

[26 : 15] You know, that was a joke. I wouldn't throw my wife away. But it's bad for my wife in this case in that I can't throw anything away. She just have to get rid of it.

I said, I can't get rid of it. It's mine. But it's just taken up too much room. It's not taken up any room. Anyway, what he sees his room being taken up, I think is perfect. And do you know, Jesus in the same way, I think does exactly the same to us.

We have to be convinced that this is actually getting in the way of walking with Jesus. And I think that backward and forward of moving out, moving in, moving out, moving in, moving out, moving in, it's just a process of God saying, who's going to get tired first?

Okay? Who's really going to have their way here? Well, we're God's possession. Okay? It's better to give up because you're going to get tired, because you're not going to be able to keep up with God.

Here's the final thought. Here's the final thought. One of the most important things about understanding the whole Bible is to understand that grace always comes before the law.

[27 : 24] But too often, Christians tend to believe that the Old Testament is about the law and the New Testament is about grace. It couldn't be further from the truth. The whole of Scripture has always been about God's grace first and then the law afterwards.

You look at the Garden of Eden. God creates a whole garden full of all good things and then two trees of which there was a law. First grace, then law.

Adam and Eve had a garden full of yeses, but only one no. One no. But then you look at the Ten Commandments. I am the Lord your God, God says, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

You shall have no other gods before me. Notice in the very first commandment that grace comes first. I am the Lord your God who redeemed you from Egypt. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of slavery.

I am the one who took you out of that place from which you were in bondage. Now have no other gods before me in the further nine commandments that come. First grace and then the law.

[28 : 32] The Christian is meant to understand this. God's grace comes in the form of God's law as well as forgiveness, as well as salvation, as well as all the other blessings which come.

God's law and God's grace teaches us in two different ways. God's law tells us the direction to go in and God's grace gets us there.

Okay? God's law gives us the direction and God's grace gives us the ability. And most importantly, most importantly, God's grace not only teaches us to say no to ungodliness, but it teaches us very importantly the distinction between being accepting and what is acceptable.

Sometimes Christians are far too accepting when they need to be more discerning in what is acceptable. And I think that's the reason why we have so many difficulties living the Christian life is because we're accepting of things in our life that are actually unacceptable to the standards of God. But God is gracious and God keeps working with us until, let's put it this way, the rooms are clean, the life is purified.

[29 : 58] And remember, he does it for this reason, because you belong to him. You are his. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.