

God's grace leads to godly lives

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Sometimes the most confusing things can also be the most simple. What it means to be saved by grace can be like that.

In our catechism we confess that God has granted forgiveness of sins, everlasting righteousness, and salvation, out of mere grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits 价值. (Lord's Day 7) We also confess that "God, without any merit of my own, out of mere grace, imputes 归罪 to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ." And, "only the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ is my righteousness before God." (Lord's Day 23)

Or, to put it more simply and in the tradition of the Great Reformation we confess that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone and apart from any works of our own.

That sounds simple enough. But sometimes we get confused. If the way to be saved is only through faith in Jesus Christ and not through the good works that we do, why then are we so concerned about doing them? Why do we insist that we are saved by grace alone, apart from good works on the one hand, and yet insist that for the sake of our very salvation we must live a holy and godly life on the other hand? Is salvation a free gift of God's grace, or is it not?

And that is where the simple often becomes confusing.

Perhaps it can initially 最初 sound confusing to learn that we are saved by God's free grace alone and yet we are expected to live a godly life, but it is really quite simple, and Titus 2:11-14 explains this to us. And so I preach to you the Gospel of Grace under the following theme:

God's grace leads to godly lives.

1. **Godly lives start with grace.**
2. **Godly lives continue in grace.**
3. **Godly lives are completed in grace.**

1. Godly lives start with grace.

Sometimes small words of few letters can convey 传达 great meaning. The word "but" is one of those words.

"I love you . . . *but* you make me so exasperated 被激怒."

"I am sorry you are hurt . . . *but* you have to admit 承认 that you brought it on yourself."

"I appreciate the effort you put into this . . . *but* it is not working very well."

The word "but" works like magic: when we use it to join two contrasting 相反的, 对比的 thoughts, it effectively cancels out whatever was said before it. We should therefore be very careful how we use the word "but" not just in our everyday speech, but especially when we speak about the gospel of salvation.

When we speak about the gospel we are often tempted to use the word "but" to highlight the need to live a godly life. Sometimes the message of salvation by grace alone does not seem to sit right: it sounds too easy, too soft. If we are concerned that the standards in our church are slipping or when we speak to a person who is not living a godly lifestyle, we might then say, "It is true that we are saved by grace alone, *but* we also have to live a Christian life."

Now in itself that statement conveys much that is true. It is true that we are saved by grace alone and it is also true that we have to live a Christian life. It is also true to say that "God gives us His covenant promises out of grace *but* we now have to live as children of the covenant and that includes a life of obedience." The problem, however, is in the way that we use the word "but" to link God's grace and our obedience. When say something such as "We are saved by grace alone *but* we also have to live a Christian life" we place these statements in contrast to one another. And then, because we hold both of these statements to be true, we begin to juggle them as though they were two different balls. First we say that we are saved by grace alone and not by good works, but then we get worried that this fails to focus on the Christian life, the covenant obligations 义务 that we have. And so we drop the "grace ball" for a moment, to take hold of the "covenant obligations ball" and say "Yes, *but* remember that we have to live a life that is pleasing to the Lord." And then we go back to saying, "But our good works don't save us: our complete salvation lies in Jesus Christ alone." And then we seemingly put that thought to the side again to remind ourselves, "but if we do not obey God's commandments, we will be punished and we can

not look forward to eternal life with God on the new earth.” And then what tends to happen is that our juggling exercise fails and one of those two balls, either grace or works, gets dropped. Sometimes it is both balls and the person drifts away from God and the church.

Sometimes it is the “ball of covenant obligations”, of good works. When that happens a person rebels against what he sees as legalism 守法主义, works-based righteousness, and then he stops going to church and decides to serve God his own way, which often becomes no way at all. Titus 1:16 might apply in such cases:

“They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable 可惡, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.”

But at other times it is the “ball of God’s grace” that falls to the ground, and the consequence of this is that grace no longer has a meaningful part to play in the call to godly living. And then all our sermons and all our catechism teaching and all our personal words of encouragement and warning are no longer filled with the gospel of God’s grace but they become a harsh 苛刻 message where people constantly feel they are being knocked back and told to try harder to be a better Christian. And then what happens is that the gospel of grace, the good news that we are saved by the grace of God, apart from our works of righteousness, slips into the background, and what pushes us into what looks like godly living is no longer grace but the external pressure to conform and be a good member of the church. Or else, we try to do the right thing to avoid feeling guilty.

And there lies the problem when we use the word “but” to link God’s grace and our obedience.

The Bible, however, does not link God’s grace and our obedience with the word “but”; instead our obedience is commonly linked to God’s grace with the word *therefore*.

In his letter to Titus the apostle Paul focused on two things: first, He emphasized the true doctrine that we are saved by God’s grace alone through Christ and not by works of righteousness, and second that the members of the churches in Crete must therefore grow in godly living. But the letter to Titus does not present these two thoughts as contrasting teaching. Rather, Paul teaches that these two things are closely connected, that godly living comes out of the true doctrine concerning the grace of God. Titus 2 begins with the words,

“But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine.”

And then follows a long description of how all the different members of the congregation, both young and old, slave and free, were to live a godly life. But how is this description connected to sound doctrine? Well, that is explained in verse 11 and following.

“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age . . .”

What verse 11 is saying is that it is *the grace of God* that teaches us how to live!

So what is the grace of God? We can describe grace as the free and undeserved favour of God. The word “grace” describes the incredible generosity 慷慨 of God. Grace is being loved when we do not deserve to be loved, blessed when we do not deserve to be blessed.

But Titus 2:11 tells us something more about this grace of God. This grace has appeared or been revealed to *all men*. This does not mean to every person, but to all kinds of people, without distinction 分別. God’s grace has appeared to Jew and Gentile, to rich and poor, to slave and free, to man and woman. No one can claim that God’s grace has passed him by because of who he is, and no one can claim that he has a greater measure of God’s grace because he somehow deserves it more. Grace is not earned and it is not deserved, but it is something that God *lavishes* 慷慨给予 upon all His children.

And it is this grace that *brings salvation*. This salvation is indeed the forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life, but salvation is *more* than this. Titus 2:14 says that our great God and saviour Jesus Christ

“. . . 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.”

Salvation, then, is more than having our sins forgiven. What our great God and saviour did was to redeem us, that is, to purchase our freedom. By nature we were not free. By nature we were in bondage to sin and slaves to Satan. But Christ came to change all of that. He came to set us, with both body and soul, free from all the power of the devil. He came to bring us out of darkness and into His marvelous 令人惊异的 light. He came to make us, who once were not a people, His own special people! He is now our God and our Father, and we are His people. And as His people we have been redeemed from a life of sin and ungodliness, and we are zealous for good deeds.

Were we saved by our good deeds? Not at all: we were saved through the work of Christ, a salvation which was granted to us by the grace of God. But because we are saved, we are changed.

And so there is no “but” in the gospel of salvation. It is not helpful to say “We are saved by grace alone but we also have to live a

Christian life.” What we *should* say is “We are saved by grace alone. Period. *Therefore* we will live a Christian life.” Grace leads to godliness because the grace of God that brings salvation *changes us*.

And that is how the Bible explains it. The Bible does not use the word “*but*” to link our salvation to good works: the Bible uses the word “*therefore*”. And to see that for yourselves, I would encourage you go through the letters of Paul and circle every time he uses the word *therefore*. In his letter to the Romans, for example, he first explains the gospel of salvation and then he gives his “*therefore’s*”. Take Romans 6. In Romans 6:11 we read,

“Likewise you also, reckon 认为 yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

And then Romans 6:12,

“Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.”

Romans 12:1 says,

“I beseech 恳求 you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.”

Every time the apostle Paul uses the word “*therefore*” he links what he is about to say with what he had just said.

You can also see this in the letter to the Ephesians. The first three chapters of Ephesians describe the blessings we have being redeemed in Christ and then chapter 4:1 begins by saying,

“I, therefore the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.”

Colossians 1 and 2 also speak of our freedom in Christ and then chapter 3:1 says,

“If then (or this can also be literally translated as *Since therefore*) you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.”

The Bible teaches us that the reason why we live godly lives is because of the grace of God! By His grace the Lord has redeemed us from being slaves of sin to being slaves to righteousness. He has redeemed us from having Satan as our Father to declaring Himself as our Father. We are, therefore His own special people, zealous for good works.

And that means that we have to stop trying to juggle 耍玩 the balls of grace and of good works. It means that we should avoid saying, “We are saved by grace alone but we also have to live a Christian life.” For there are not two contrasting balls to juggle. There is only one thing to consider, and that is the grace of God. And so hold on to the grace of God with *both* hands, and never let go! And when you hold on to the grace of God, then you will understand how great a salvation you have in Jesus Christ. For God’s grace will teach you that you have been redeemed to a new life! A godly life is therefore a consequence of the grace of God that brings salvation .

2. Godly lives continue in grace.

We have seen that godly lives start with grace. When we were dead in sin and slaves to unrighteousness, we were saved by the grace of God. But what does it mean to continue in grace?

Titus 1:11,12 say,

“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age.”

These Bible verses tell us that the thing that is teaching, instructing, training, even disciplining us how to live is the grace of God! And that is a very different way to live. On the surface, looking at things from the outside, living a godly life out of grace might not look so different to leading a good life for any other reason. But grace gives us a new and an infinitely 无限 better motivation for good works and it does change everything.

If it was not for grace, the Christian life would be a burden. If it was not for grace we would find the Christian life to be hard. If it was not for grace we would be overwhelmed 压倒 with the burden of guilt, of failing in our Christian life. If it was not for grace, we would be doing everything in an attempt to seek the approval 肯定 of others, even of God. We would be trying our hardest to look good on the outside. If it was not for grace we would be comparing ourselves with others to see if we were doing ok – and we would come down very hard on those who do not measure up to our standards of holiness. And, interestingly, if it was not for grace we would also be looking for ways to minimize the demands of God’s holy law.

But the grace of God teaches us a new way to live. The grace of God teaches us that we have been freed from a life of sin and misery to be redeemed from every lawless deed and purified to be the special people of God. The grace of God teaches us to be zealous 热心 (literally to be *zealots*) for good works. Because it is not just that our sins have been forgiven but that we have been set free from all

the power of the devil and purified to be God's special people, we will have a love and a delight to live in all good works. The more we understand grace the more it is a joy to live a godly life.

We would then deny ungodliness. Now that we belong to Him and live in Him and for Him, there is no way that we can live a life without Him. Nor could we bear to imagine denying our great God and saviour, whether in words or how we live. Further, the lusts of the flesh, those carnal 世俗的 desires that titillate 使感到兴奋 the world will no longer hold the same appeal for us. Rather, we will be outraged at the indecency 猥亵 of the godless amusements 娱乐, 消遣 and wicked entertainment that the world promotes. But instead of all of this, we should live soberly 冷静地, righteously and godly in the present age. Living soberly we will not be self-indulgent 自我放纵, doing everything to satisfy the cravings of the flesh, but we will find our pleasure in the things that give God pleasure. Living righteously we will not see God's law as a burden but have a love and delight to live according to the will of God in all good works.

And then when our zeal for the Lord does drop, when our desire to be in His Church, to meet with His people, to grow in personal godliness and holiness does flag, what we need to focus on is the grace of God! Because of God's grace am I so filled with joy that serving God and living in all godliness as His special people is my greatest delight? Am I so thrilled to live before the face of God that I can not stand to deliberately 故意地 do any wrong that would grieve the Spirit of God? Am I crying out, "God I love You; help me to love You more"?

And when you do sin and when you do take your eyes away from the grace of God and find yourself looking back to the godless life from which you have been redeemed, what is it that drives you to your knees in prayer, that sends you back to the cross, that gives you the courage to carry on? Let the grace of God be your teacher. Remember that you have been redeemed, remember that you have been purified, remember that you are now God's own special people, and so be zealous to lead a grace-filled life of godliness.

3. Godly lives are completed in grace.

Even as the apostle Paul wrote these words to Titus, he knew our weakness. He knew how quickly we lose sight of the grace of God. He knew how quickly our zeal for good works begins to falter 踌躇, 颤抖. He knew how easy it is to turn back to the ways of sin and get ensnared 诱入陷阱 in it again. But that did not cause him to give up on grace. That did not give him reason to find another motivation 动机, other than the grace of God, for good works. Instead Titus chapter 2 tells us that the grace of God teaches us to look for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and saviour Jesus Christ. For that is where the grace of God is leading us. As John Newton put it in that well known hymn,

"Tis grace that brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home."

We can be sure of it, for it is a blessed hope. No, it is not a wishful sort of a hope that perhaps Christ will come to take me home; rather the hope of faith is steadfastly 踏实地; 不变地 holding on to the sure promise of the glorious appearing of our great God and saviour Jesus Christ. It is the appearing of the One Person, Jesus Christ, who is our great God, that we look forward to. He is the One who will take me and all His chosen ones to Himself into heavenly joy and glory. That is what we look forward to, and that is what we hold before us.

Today we do not yet see all of this, for we are still waiting for the glorious appearing of our Lord and Saviour. Today we may have been plucked out 拔出 of a sea of wickedness and placed on the Rock that is Christ, but that sea of wickedness is still there to disturb us and to call us back. But the grace of God teaches us to fix our eyes firmly on Jesus Christ, eagerly anticipating 期望 the Day when He comes back to take us to Himself.

That day will come when the appearing of our great God and Saviour will take place. We look forward to that day and we crane our necks 伸着脖子看 in eager anticipation. For on that day we will finally be presented without spot or blemish before the judgment seat of God. And so in anticipation of that, already in this present age we will live a life that is sober, righteous and godly. And then already in this life we will live purified lives of godliness, full of zeal for good works. We will fight against sin and the devil and his whole dominion, and we will see him being conquered 战胜. Although the struggle will remain, and we will stumble and fall, by lifting our eyes up to Christ in heaven, we will increasingly see Christ in us and we in Him. Until the time that our Lord returns to change our lowly bodies to be like His glorious body and He takes us to Himself forever. Amen.