

The Appearance of Grace

M. W. Bassford, 9-9-12

It's a fairly certain thing that if we live long enough, we're going to have one or more life-changing experiences. I can think of several things that I've been through that have really changed my perspective, but the most recent of these is the experience of fatherhood. I think it's probably true that the daily routine of dealing with Mark and Zoë has made me much more easygoing. After the 20th time you find crayon on the dining-room furniture, you learn to shrug and move on.

Most of us can relate similar stories, but something that we don't think about as often is that our obedience to the gospel is supposed to be that same kind of life-changing experience. The effect that it has on us might be more subtle than the effect of sleepless nights and burping and full diapers, but it should be as profound. The longer we progress as a Christian, the more we should understand the massive life change that Christianity demands. Among other places, the second and third chapters of Titus explore this change. Let's look there to consider the effects of the appearance of grace.

Practical Living

As you've probably noticed, in my sermons, I like to explore a general principle and then make specific applications from it. In Titus, Paul takes the opposite tack. He begins with a discussion of practical living, and then, once he's through with that, he explains why Christians should live that way. We find this first part of the text in Titus 2:1-10.

The first group that Paul addresses in this context is the group of **OLDER MEN**. This text reminds me of the qualifications for elders that Paul lays out in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Even though this text isn't about elders specifically, all three passages present a similar vision for what a mature Christian man is supposed to be like. Basically, older men in the Lord's church are supposed to be men whom everybody has to take seriously. They can't be flighty, given either to excessive enthusiasm or excessive despair. Instead, they're expected to give thoughtful consideration to life as it comes. They must not diminish their standing in the world or the church by foolish displays that show them to be spiritual lightweights. Instead, God expects them to retain their dignity at all times. Similarly, they must always keep their thoughts and actions under control. Finally, these must be men of proven soundness. They have to show that they are sound in the faith we share, sound in the love they show for God and for their neighbor, and sound in the way that they dependably, reliably fulfill their obligations to the Lord and to everyone else. That's the kind of man they have to be.

Paul advises Titus to teach a similar pattern of behavior to **OLDER WOMEN**. If there's a key virtue here, like dignified was the key virtue for older men, it is reverence. The Greek word here is very interesting. Basically, it means, "behaving appropriately toward what is sacred." For example, when the high priests under the Law of Moses made such elaborate preparations before they entered the Holy of Holies in the temple, they were behaving reverently. The older woman of God, then, is one who has recognized that she spends her entire life before God, in service to Him, and controls her conduct appropriately. She takes great care with what she does, what she says, and what she thinks, because she regards the Lord with holy fear. The reverence with which she behaves necessarily excludes slander and gossip. Sure, unrighteous women love nothing better than to gather and speak ill of a brother or a neighbor, but the godly older woman knows that God hates such conduct, and she refuses to participate in it. Likewise, she hasn't surrendered herself to any of the addictions of the world, whether that addiction be to alcohol, to vanity, to materialism, or to anything else. Finally, the older woman needs to have the love and courage necessary to teach younger women what she knows about following Christ. The older we get, the more we learn, and she needs to be committed to passing that on to help others.

In fact, her teaching should reveal to **YOUNGER WOMEN** what God wants them to be. Interestingly, Paul makes teaching them the province of the older women rather than of Titus, the preacher. However, even though I don't qualify as an older woman, I'm going to explain what Paul says anyway. First up, younger women need to learn to love their husbands and their children. The Greek word here isn't *agape*. It's *phileo*. God, then, is commanding younger women to learn to regard their husbands and children with warm, affectionate liking. Though not a mother, I've seen enough to know that this isn't easy. When your children have been conspiring together all day to make life as hectic and noisy as possible, and your husband comes home, and the first words out of his mouth are "What's for dinner?", warm, affectionate liking is probably not Mom's first reaction. However, that's exactly why it has to be learned.

Similarly, younger women must learn to restrain the ungodly sides of their character, particularly with respect to sexual immorality. She must manage the physical business of her home with the same firmness and control that the man of God uses in governing the members of his household. There must be nothing in her of harshness or hard-heartedness, and she must never forget that God has made the husband and not the wife the head of the family. If the younger woman learns to think and behave in this way, she will be a credit to her family and to her God.

Next, Paul discusses the attributes of **YOUNGER MEN**, in which category he includes Titus. They too have to be self-controlled, never speaking or behaving in an unseemly or ungodly way. Younger men must live in such a way that all who encounter them recognize that they're living the way that God expects everyone to live. This spiritual maturity beyond his years will give the younger man the dignity he needs to teach others to follow Jesus. He can't be committed to

a particular viewpoint regardless of the truth. Instead, he must honestly present what God actually says, regardless of whether it will please his audience or not. This straightforward approach to the truth will make enemies, but those enemies won't be able to make headway against the young man of God, because he knows the Bible so well that he can back up every claim he makes with the truth. In sound speech and good works, younger men are to imitate the Master.

Finally, Paul advises **SLAVES** on how they are to behave, and this text also has a lot to say to us about how employees should behave. We need to recognize that as long as we continue our stint with a particular employer, they have the right to tell us what to do, and if we're not willing to do that, we need to leave. Likewise, we need to make life as easy on our bosses as possible, helping them do their jobs with a minimum of unpleasantness, not talking back, not stealing from them, either goods or time, and generally doing everything we can to live up to their expectations. Usually, Christians who behave in this way will find favor with their employers, but more importantly, when we are good and honest workers, our integrity glorifies the Bible we follow and the God we serve.

The Life of the Redeemed

To most people, the way of life that Paul lays out wouldn't seem very appealing or fun. What kind of young man wants to be godly and dignified all the time? What older woman is such a priss that she isn't willing to talk about the horrible thing So-and-So did? However, as Christians, this should be the life that we are willing to seek, because this is the life that the redeemed live. Paul explains the why to the first section's what in Titus 2:11-3:2.

This dramatic change is supposed to happen in our lives because we have tasted **THE GRACE OF GOD**. In the religious world, there's a strain of thought that teaches that grace is somehow opposed to obedience. However, as this context reveals, that couldn't be more untrue. Once we have received salvation, our reaction shouldn't be limited to, "I'm saved! Yippee!" Instead, we must recognize that as Jesus died for us, we have to die to ourselves too. The ungodly living and sinful desires that are so dear to the people of the world can't be for us anymore. We can't be fascinated by illicit sex and drunkenness and greed and outbursts of anger and all the other things that worldlings love. Because we are disciples, we have to be dead to those things. Instead, we are to live lives of discipline, integrity, and imitation of Jesus. In worldly terms, those things might not be fun. They might not offer a lot of short-term thrills. However, they offer a peace that is past understanding and a joy that is beyond expressing. They offer a life lived the way that our Creator intended.

However, we don't live this self-controlled life for its own sake. Instead, as we deny the flesh in the present, we look forward to **OUR HOPE**, Jesus Christ. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 that if there is no resurrection, we are of all men most to be pitied. This is not because the Christian life is a miserable life. Indeed, it isn't if lived rightly. Instead, what would make us pitiable if there were no resurrection would be the gap between the heaven we expected and the nothing we got. When Jesus returns, we confidently expect Him to give us nothing less than an eternity of joy with Him and His Father, the fullest expression of everything on earth that our spirits loved. Jesus made this blissful future possible through His own death, but He didn't die merely so that we could be redeemed from our sins. Instead, He died so that we could be reborn, recreated in His image with a heart to do His will. That was Jesus' intent all along, and He certainly didn't die so that we could collect our free gift of salvation and then loaf through life, doing whatever we wanted. He expects results, and only if we dedicate ourselves to doing His work can we realistically have any hope in Him.

We can't separate the gospel's message of grace from its requirements for our conduct, and so the necessary complement of our salvation must be **THE DECLARATION OF THE WORD**. Paul makes clear that he expects Titus to proclaim the truth, and it's the responsibility of every Christian to do the same. None of us are great people on our own, but we serve a God who is great, and His word is too important to be disregarded. Sometimes, I wonder if our culture's touchy-feely political correctness is one of the biggest barriers to our evangelistic efforts. Yes, we should speak the truth in love. Yes, we should use wisdom in the way we speak to outsiders. However, the fact remains that the people we know who don't follow the Bible are wrong, and they will lose their souls over it unless somebody teaches them that they will have to repent. For example, the Bible teaches that we must be baptized for the forgiveness of our sins in order to be saved. How many of us have told the people we know who aren't baptized that they will be lost unless they are? That's not my opinion. I'm not making it up. It's what the Bible says, and if the Bible is true, that is also true. I can prove that, book, chapter, and verse, and it is our responsibility as Christians to prove it whenever the subject comes up.

However, that is far from the only aspect of **GODLY BEHAVIOR** that Jesus wants to see from us. If God commands us to teach others, we have to teach others, regardless of the consequences. However, when it's a fight we choose rather than the fight God has chosen for us, it's our responsibility to be a peaceful people. This peace should first be apparent in the way we serve the government. We have to pay our taxes, whether we want to or not. We have to respect government officials, whether we want to or not. We have to water our lawns only on permitted days, whether we want to or not. In all things, God expects us to be model citizens, not only of the kingdom of heaven, but of the United States of America. Similarly, we must be ready to obey, whether the one giving the orders is God, our employer, a church leader, or a police officer. Whenever we have an opportunity to do good, we must be ready to spring into action, not merely for people we know and like, but for total strangers. We must never let insult or gossip pass our lips, regardless of

provocation. We must do everything in our power to remain at peace with our brethren and with everybody else. We must never use our position or strength of character to crush others, and we should never even be impolite. We are expected to preach the gospel, but more than that, we must live the gospel, so that others can tell that there is something different about us, simply because the way we conduct ourselves is so different from everybody else.

The Christian Transformation

In the final portion of this context, Paul discusses the nuts and bolts of our transformation as Christians, where we began, where we should end up, and where we shouldn't end up. This discussion appears in Titus 3:3-11. We'll use it to prepare our minds for the Lord's Supper. It begins with a reminder of **OUR FORMER STATE**. One of the interesting things to me about this part of Titus is the way that its descriptions of people are so coherent and recognizable. When I read what Paul has to say about older men or younger women, I feel like those texts give me a good thumbnail sketch of what those people are supposed to be like. Likewise, v. 3 here paints a picture of how we used to be, and it's not a pretty one. Foolish, aimless, enslaved, malicious, envious, hated, and hateful—those are powerful, ugly words, and yet they describe where we would be if we didn't have God. I think sometimes about what kind of a person I would be if I were not a disciple, and I have to acknowledge that the portrait of Titus 3 is pretty accurate. Where would any of us be if we didn't have the gentle, restraining influence of the word to lead us toward Christ? All of those things are where we would be without Him, and they are where we used to be before we encountered Him. Sometimes, sin seems powerfully alluring to the people of God, but this text ought to remind us that the more we practice it, the more it destroys us.

However, in sin is where we would be, were it not for **WHAT GOD DID**. As the text makes clear, our salvation is about God. It's not about us. We didn't do anything to earn our own salvation, and we didn't do anything to deserve His salvation. Instead, we have received His grace because of His kindness and His love, not our own. The way that God saved us bears an odd resemblance to Matthew 28, where, as we saw last week, Jesus commanded His apostles to make disciples by baptizing and teaching. Both of those things are on display here. The baptism part is easy to spot—that's the washing of regeneration. Renewal through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is a little bit more difficult to figure out. The key here is that Paul describes the outpouring rather than the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is something that every Christian possesses, but the outpouring of the Holy Spirit only appeared on two occasions: the day of Pentecost and the occasion of Peter preaching to the household of Cornelius. In both cases, that outpouring resulted in miraculous spiritual gifts, and today, we have both the record and the fruit of those gifts in the inspired word of God. If we wish to be redeemed from our former state, we must be regenerated by baptism and renewed by the word.

Next, Paul explains **THE RESULT** of what God did. On our own, we were far from righteous, but through the grace of God we were made righteous. We were justified. The record of our lives was aligned with the perfect standard of God's word. Before this happened, we had nothing to do with God. Indeed, we could have nothing to do with God because of the greatness of our transgression. However, because of His great mercy we have become His servants and indeed His adopted sons and daughters. Before, we could expect nothing from God. Now, we confidently await the end of our days on earth, when we will receive the inheritance of eternal life from Him. As John says in 1 John 4, none of this happened because we loved God. Instead, it is entirely the result of His great love for us.

Immediately following this, Paul reveals what **THE RIGHT RESPONSE** to the grace of God is. Paul doesn't want Titus to mention God's grace in a half-hearted, inconspicuous way. Instead, he wants Titus to insist on it, to assert it confidently, to hold it up in front of the Christians in Crete until all of them had thought it through. Paul didn't urge this because the sacrifice of Christ is worthy of abstract thought, although it is. Instead, Paul believed that as we consider deeply what we owe Jesus, we won't be content to continue in our old, familiar course. That would be ingratitude of the worst sort. It would be the equivalent of having a fireman rescue us from a burning building, and then walking away from him without so much as a thank-you. Instead, once we grasp what Jesus has freed us from and what Jesus has freed us for, we will think deeply about what we can do for Him, and we will be determined to live our lives in a way that pleases Him. This is why questions like "How many services can I miss before I'm forsaking the assembly?" and "How short can a skirt be before it becomes immodest?" miss the mark so completely. That's treating God's law like a book of IRS regulations, where the object is to figure out how to pay as little as possible. Brethren, Jesus has already paid everything for us, and if we're any decent kind of people at all, we have to take that into account in our service to Him.

However, some people don't take it into account, and that's why Paul next warns about **THE WRONG RESPONSE**. God set us free from our sins so that we could serve Him. He did not set us free from our sins so that we could engage in disputes and dissensions with one another. As we saw a moment ago, the Christian who recognizes what Jesus has done for him and gives his life back to Jesus in response is a Christian who gets it. Conversely, the disciple who doesn't dwell on the death of Jesus, that disciple thinks his life is still about him and what he thinks and what he wants. He stirs up quarrels and arguments about those things precisely because he doesn't get it. Every time dissension, as opposed to discussion or disagreement, arises in the church, it is because at least one party is being selfish and not

thinking about Jesus. Sometimes, factious Christians will see the error of their ways and repent. Sometimes, they reject repeated warnings, and in that case, it is the responsibility of the church to cast them out before they destroy it.

All of this puts our lives in very simple, black-and-white terms, doesn't it? Do we spend our days thinking about Jesus and how we can be conformed to His likeness, or do we spend our days thinking about ourselves, all the things that are due us, and how unhappy we are with the people who don't agree with us or give us what we think we deserve? It's easy for all of us to slip into that second way of thinking. All of us can fall prey to the siren song of selfishness. However, once we start thinking about the cross, all of those self-centered concerns dwindle into insignificance. Let's think about the cross now, then, and think about ourselves and our lives, as we prepare to partake of the Lord's Supper.