

Grace in Gear

Titus 3:1:8

Intro. In his book entitled, Experiencing God, Henry Blackaby exhorts believers to “*find out what God is doing, and join Him in the work.*” That’s a good explanation for what the construction team from Mayfair did last week. God is at work among some friends in Greeneville, TN. What started as a Bible study 2 years ago with 3 or 4 couples has grown to a congregation of about 100 every Sunday. Their mission is to be used of God to reach the unchurched in their city. Having met in a rented building for the past year, the Lord provided the people of Arrowhead Church with a commercial building. Teams from their congregation gutted the building while an architect designed the interior. What a thrill it was for us to sense their excitement and to contribute four work days to frame their interior walls.

God is at work all over the world including right here at MBC. This afternoon, our Vacation Bible School team will meet to get organized and excited about our summer opportunity to reach many in our community with the truth of God’s Word. I hope you’re planning to be involved in some way.

This AM, I want to draw your attention to a verse that is challenging and motivational for all of us who know Christ as Savior and Lord. In **Titus 3:8** Paul wrote, **This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.**

God's Words can't be improved on, but sometimes we can restate their impact in a helpful way. I think Paul's challenge to Titus can be stated this way...**Underscore what is reliable** so believers will **understand what is important**. Then as a result, they will **undertake what is necessary**. (REPEAT)

I. UNDERSCORE WHAT IS RELIABLE - This is a trustworthy saying... You don't have to live long to realize how few people and things in life are reliable. So much of the world seems to operate by the slogan which says, “*Promises are made to be broken.*” Friends let you down. Repairmen don't come when they say they will. Internet deals prove to be fraudulent. Politicians don't follow through on campaign promises. Even pastors sometimes forget appointments. Who can we trust?

In a world where people and promises routinely prove unreliable, Paul wrote, **This is a trustworthy saying...** This preface is similar to those occasions when Jesus said, **verily, verily or truly, truly**. The Greek text indicates this preface doesn't refer back to just any saying...it refers specifically to the content of the verses that immediately precede it. So let me **READ Titus 3:4-7. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life... This is a trustworthy saying.**

I'd like you to make note of something. In these verses, you and I are not the active agents / the performers / or the doers. We are simply the recipients...the recipients of a tremendous gift. God is the active One / the provider...the doer...the benevolent giver. These verses exalt the wonder of God's grace and say nothing at all about our performance. Our only role is to believe and receive the benefits of God's salvation. Here again we are reminded that salvation is not something we could ever earn or achieve by any means. As **Eph. 2:8, 9** declares so plainly, **For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast.** So here in **vs. 8** Paul wrote, **This** (that is the Gospel of salvation by grace alone) **is a trustworthy saying...** Claim it! Trust it! Enjoy it! Rest in it! Live like you own it!

By grace you have been saved! In a world where so much is unreliable...this good news is reliable...so **underscore it!** Count on it! Make much of it! Tell others about it!

But notice how **v.8** continues... **And I want you to stress these things...** What **things** is he talking about? What does Paul have in mind? What things should Titus stress when ministering to God's people? He's talking about the blessings of the Gospel outlined in **vs.4-7**. Let me list them:

- **God loves us!** He really does. At the root and basis of our salvation is the love and kindness of God. Salvation originated in God's heart. God thought it up and then executed the plan to save us. **Jn. 3:16 - For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.** Max Lucado wrote something like this, *"If God had a refrigerator your picture would be on it. If He had a wallet, your photo would be in it. He sends you sunrises every morning and flowers every spring. And when you consider the cross...let's face it friend, He's crazy about you!"*
- **Salvation is not a reward for what we've done but the result of what God has done.** He saved us / He justified us / He washed us / He renewed us / He generously poured the Holy Spirit on us. Because we were powerless to do anything to remedy our lost condition, God did what was necessary to effect our salvation! He is the saver and He is the doer! There's no room for boasting in God's plan because it's based entirely on His grace and mercy.
- **What God did for us, He did in a big way!** Sinners who trust the work Christ has done for them, aren't saved partially, momentarily or conditionally. Mercy and grace don't trickle from God to man like water dribbling through leaky faucet or crimped garden hose. **v.7** says, the Holy Spirit was poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior. On a Thursday afternoon 61-years ago I trusted Jesus to save me. On that very day I was saved abundantly, completely, and forever by the generosity of God's grace. From the moment you trusted Jesus, the same has been true for you whether you've always felt that way or not!
- **The best is yet-to-come! ...so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life** We are heirs of God and joint heirs-with Jesus Christ. That means that everything given to Jesus who made everything, belongs to you and me! We are people with an extraordinary future...people going somewhere. Good days are ahead no matter what troubles may happen down here. Try this on... *"life for a Christian isn't merely weathering storms, it's dancing in the rain!"* (I like that)

So when Paul wrote, **And I want you to stress these things...** this is what he had in mind. Right here is a list of data points that demand constant repetition. Right here is a message we must never forget / grow tired of / or neglect. We must stress the reality of salvation by grace alone. So **v.8** says, **Underscore what is reliable.** Make much of the Gospel of grace! But there's a reason for this. Pastors and teachers, like Titus and others must underscore what is reliable for a reason...so God's believing people will **understand what is important.**

II. UNDERSTAND WHAT IS IMPORTANT - Here's a couple of questions for you: In your opinion, what is the single most revolutionary concept in the Bible? Here's a second question...What is the most misunderstood and hard to grasp concept in the NT? (maybe you want to phone a friend) And then just one more question...What NT concept is addressed more than any other because it's so misunderstood and misrepresented? Here's a hint...each of these 3 questions has the same answer! The answer is...salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

The grace of God is the key to everything though it often takes years to come to terms with it. There's nothing greater or more earth shattering than God's grace! It's the most far-out reality the mind can conceive. *Grace is everything for nothing to those who don't deserve anything.* Grace flies in the face of performance. It negates all striving to achieve and possess. The world says, "You get what you pay for", but through the Gospel the Judge of the Universe says, "I want you to claim what Christ paid for." / The world says, "There are no free lunches", but the Lord invites sinners to a banquet at His own expense. Grace is unmerited favor / but it's much more than that! God's grace is favor extended to those who deserve the very opposite! It's Mephibosheth, the crippled relative of King Saul, whom other kings would have destroyed, invited to live in David's house and dine at the king's table. When God turns our heads to recognize and understand what is truly important He has only one reality in mind...and that reality is the Good News of His grace. Do you know why grace needs to be stressed and why grace demands constant repetition? I can think of at least three reasons:

First, God's grace needs repetition because you still don't get it...and neither do I. In a performance based world, grace is elusive. Don't you still catch yourself imagining that God will be good to you if you're good? Don't you sometimes worry that God won't accept you unless you turn in a stellar performance? When you see a fellow believer experience some misfortune, don't you wonder what bad thing they've done? Listen...grace is greater than our understanding. It's bigger than anything we can assimilate in a classroom setting. It's a life long quest to comprehend something so radical and unearthly as God's grace lavished on believing sinners.

Second, grace needs to be stressed and repeated constantly because it's the key to Christian living and service. Because grace is God's primary motivating force, we shouldn't be surprised that it's so often confused / marginalized / and denied. Satan hates it / the world denies it / and our proud flesh resists it! Yet **Titus 2:11, 12** says, **...for the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.** Notice, the grace of God brings salvation. Then as we grow in this book and learn to rest in God's salvation, a deep sense of peace, joy, and gratitude grows within us. The Christian who is amazed by God's love / thankful for His forgiveness / and overwhelmed by His mercy...is the Christian who wants to be what God wants him to be and do what God wants him to do. The Law could never **teach us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions!** Israel's long history of failure proved that! What the Law could never do, grace does! Let me tell you, nothing motivates a believer like a deep awareness of God's grace. Not guilt...though many appeal to it. Not fear, though we often slip into it. Even pastoral pressure can never motivate people to do God's will from the heart! Nothing puts believing sinners into gear more than a generous understanding and confidence in the grace of God!

Let me ask an incriminating question. Did you ever forget your car keys or lock the car doors with the keys in the ignition? Let's see-the hands. (I'm not talking about the lady with yellow hair who got locked in her car.) How many who didn't raise your hands have a problem with lying? Would you agree that car keys are quite essential to the function of your "driving machine?" (as the Russians call it) In the same way...the life and service God calls us to, doesn't work without a deep up-to-the-minute appreciation of His grace. Grace is the key. This explains why serving the Lord sometimes becomes stale and "old hat." We lose the joy of service when our eyes wander from Christ and His grace. Even worship grows dull when we lose the wonder of the grace by which we were saved.

The **third** reason grace needs to be stressed in a continual way is because human nature is so quick to trade grace for performance based thinking and living. Unless God's grace is kept in the foreground, we quickly lose sight of it.

That was the situation Paul addressed when he wrote to the church at Galatia. **Gal. 5:4 - You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.** To **fall away from grace** means to forget or lose sight of the principle our salvation and new life is based on. The believers at Galatia who **fell away from grace** were foolishly trying to relate to God on the basis of their works or performance. They felt God could only accept them when their lives toed the line and were squeaky clean. Instead of focusing on God and His grace to them, their focus had turned to their own devotion to His rules. They fell away from grace despite some very sincere intentions!

Here's how Christians reason who have fallen away from grace: If it's a good day that starts with a quiet time and things shape up favorably, it feels as though God is near. We smile with confidence that God approves and is blessing. But if the bottom drops out and something disappointing happens, God seems distant. We wonder what we've done wrong and suspect His approval and blessing have been withdrawn. We wonder if we spent enough time in Bible reading and prayer. We wonder if we failed to do enough of this or if we did too much of that. We relate to God as though His goodness is metered out according to a system of quotas and performance standards. Ups and downs like this are fun for a roller coaster ride, but they're a lousy way to live your Christian life! Yet these ups and downs are precisely what occur when our focus is wrong. It happens whenever we forget that God's salvation includes a permanent standing in His unmerited favor. **Rom. 5:1, 2 - Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.**

The remedy when we've **fallen away from grace** isn't complicated. As Jerry Bridges recommends, we must preach the Gospel to ourselves again...and again, and again, and again. We need to remind ourselves of all that God did for us before we ever did anything for Him. In short, we need to get the focus off ourselves and back on our Savior. We need to revisit passages like **Titus 3:4-7** and **Eph. 2:8, 9**. We need to remember the principle of grace.

This problem of **falling away from grace** wasn't unique to Galatia either. Christians everywhere are prone to forget or marginalize grace. Sometime after God saves us and His grace seems so incredibly amazing, a fog begins to settle in and we begin to think incorrectly. We imagine that we are better and more dedicated than other sinners. We'd never say this out loud, but we begin to think we're special or that we have something incredibly significant to contribute to God. (I mean, God saved me because He knew I had such potential!) It happens subtly, but human nature wants to tie blessings to behavior in a cause/effect relation. A sinister voice whispers lies like this...*"grace is a nice idea, but it's too good to be true. There's more to it. There has to be! You have to hold up your end of the deal or God will drop His! Grace gets you in, but good works keeps you there!"*

Yet here's what happens...the Christian who forgets the key of grace soon loses motivation. None of us can maintain or sustain a fruitful Christian life based on our performance! To try is exhausting. Those who **fall away from grace** aren't locked out of heaven, but they're locked out of joy / and victory / motivation / and fruitfulness. In this fallen condition we have no sparkle / no zeal / no spiritual get up and go. It happens when we take our eyes off Jesus and begin to think life and service and blessing is up to me. Like Peter who took His eyes off Jesus, we sink like a rock. At a time like this we need to do just what Peter did...we need to turn our attention to the One who saved us.

Now watch how this comes together. **v.8 - This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good.**

Paul encourages preachers to **underscore what is reliable** so God's people will **understand what is important** and as a result, find all the motivation needed to **undertake what is necessary**. The motivation comes by way of deep appreciation...through gratitude for what God has done for us. There's nothing so pure as the love of God received and returned! Mary demonstrated that when she poured out the costly perfume and wiped our Savior's feet with her hair.

III. UNDERTAKE WHAT IS NECESSARY – So what is necessary? What is truly important in the sight of God? What validates our message? What moves a church from surviving to thriving? What gets believers in gear and glorifies God? What does the world need to see in us? Here it is. (Are you ready?) The necessary thing is for believers to be diligently devoted to doing what is good. The whole world is occupied with doing evil...but God calls His people to invest our time doing what is good. The world needs to see grace put in gear.

This letter from Paul to Titus contains a strong emphasis on good works: Survey the verses with me.

- **2:7 - In everything set them an example by doing what is good.**
- **2:14 - ...who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.**
- **3:1 - Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good.**
- **3:14 - Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives.**

While the NT makes it clear that we're not saved by works, it's equally clear that the salvation we received will change us and result in good works. **Eph. 2:10 - For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.**

So here in **vs. 8** Paul insists that it's imperative for believers to be **devoted to doing what is good. Devoted!**..what a challenging word! We're not to dabble in doing good. We're not to experiment with doing good. We're not to occasionally venture out to do good. We are to be constantly committed to doing good. We're to keep grace in gear and to be proactive and intentional about finding ways to further Christ's kingdom. Everyday we should be looking for opportunities to share the love of Christ and to bless others. We're not saved because we do this. We pursue opportunities to do good because we are saved. And remember how **v.8** ends. **These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.** Can you imagine what the ministry of a church would look like if everyone got on board and bought into this? The church office would be transformed into a job placement service with people lined up asking how they can be involved.

We jokingly called ourselves "the power team" last week...not because we were powerful but because our little team was willing to put God's grace into gear. The energy we contributed and the work we accomplished was nothing short of remarkable. God's people in Greeneville were amazed and encouraged. We simply joined God in the work He is doing there. He multiplied our efforts and He receives all the glory for it.

So **Titus 3:8** explains that the ultimate motivation for living a devoted Christian life is the grace of God. What the Law / fear / guilt motivation or even promise of reward could never produce, grace does. Let me wrap this up by connecting the important facts of **Titus 3:4-7** to who we are and what we do.

- *When God's love for us is the main thing...the important thing...the reality we cling to and refuse to forget...His love will compel us.* That's what Paul wrote in **II Cor. 5:14 - For Christ's love compels us...**
- *When remember that salvation is not a reward for what we've done, but the result of what God has done for us, we'll be in the right frame of mind to serve the Lord in the power of His strength instead of our own.* **II Cor. 12:0 - For when I am weak, then I am strong.**
- When we rejoice in utter amazement that what God did for us, He did in a big way...we'll understand how reasonable it is to give Him our best. **I Cor. 10:31 - ...whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.**
- Then finally, *when we look ahead and remember that the best is yet to come, we find all the motivation we needed to persevere through tough times.* **Col. 2:23, 24 - Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.**

Just like the mammoth farm machines we saw in rural TN last week...machines capable of accomplishing enormous amounts of work...grace is a mammoth thing that accomplishes nothing until it's put in gear. We put grace into gear when we sincerely ask God to use us. We put His grace in gear when we respond in the affirmative to someone who asks for our help. We put grace in gear when we look at fields white to harvest and then start each day looking for ways to bless someone in need. We put grace in gear when we recognize the talents God has given and seek ways to use them for His glory.

May I encourage you to remember that we are saved and kept by the amazing grace and goodness of God. This God who loves us sacrificed the Son and asks us only to trust Him? Until Jesus returns, He challenges us to **underscore what is reliable**, so we'll **understand what is important**, and **undertake what is necessary**.