**When Grace Works**

Titus 2:11-3:3

**Introduction:**  Distractions and forgetfulness are dual killers in relationships. How many of us have felt the sting of neglect as the person we are trying to have a conversation with is on their phone, there presently but worlds away in a technological universe that is difficult to compete with? Or how often have we forgotten to follow through on a request from a loved one, not-so-subtly communicating a lack of care or affection? We are easily distracted by good or ok things rather than what is most important, and quickly forget what we know to be true. This is why the Bible regularly calls us to “remember”, “remind them”, and “declare these things”, not because they are new and revolutionary, but simply because we are quick to forget the core principles of our life in Christ.

This last week the Southern Baptist Convention met, and there are dozens of friends of ours that participated, from personal friends and those of whom we read their books and listen to their sermons. They are in the midst of dismissing a long standing pastor and seminary president, to discussing the role of women in churches, to having VP Mike Pence speak, each of which carried its own weight of controversy and distraction. One comment from this convention caught my attention, however, from an unlikely source:

From Daniel Burke of CNN:

“I’ve spent the last couple of days covering the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention. They’ve spent the vast majority of that time talking about evangelism: not politics, not the role of women, not culture wars. **Church planting and baptisms are the core focus.”**

It takes an immense amount of wisdom and discipline to stay committed to our primary call as believers, holding fast to the gospel of Jesus and not become distracted by so many more flashy and externally satisfying pursuits while forgetting the deep foundation of grace on which our spiritual house is built upon. Paul moves his explanation of ***making truth beautiful*** with Titus from the church, to the home, and now out into the public realm, where we live so much of our lives. How do we interact with a government that does not uphold our mission and humanity that does not understand thus opposes our values. The answer is: **Remember the grace we have received in the gospel.**

**Grace Works in Salvation** (2:11-14)

*We must not tolerate a gospel divorced from grace, nor a grace that abandons holiness…*the first avoids heresy, while the second guards against delusion.

**Past Work of Grace**

For the **grace of God has appeared**, **bringing** salvation for all people (11)

**Good news is offered to all people**

**Offer of Salvation is real and available to everyone, which motivates us to share and hope**

**Present Work of Grace**

**Training** us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives **in this present age**

**Trains us what to renounce**

**Trains us how to live in the present age**

**Future Work of Grace**

**Waiting** for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to **purify for himself a people for his own possession** who are zealous for good works.

Anticipating the return of Jesus is not optional in our life with Christ. Not only do we all face the reality of death, as maturing Christians, we should see this day as more glorious rather than something to face with dread. When the believers at Thessalonica first came to faith, they were marked by repentance that showed in turning *from* idols *to* serve the living and true God, and *to wait* for his son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come (1 Thess. 1:9-10). We see that waiting, longing for, and hoping in the return of Christ was a mark of God’s grace as we move away from worldly passions to treasuring Christ. This is especially significant since **waiting, by nature, is difficult for us.** Whether it is waiting for the end of the work day, a special date on the calendar, for a boyfriend to finally propose, to the results of a body scan, waiting can be excruciating. How we trust and act during the time of waiting not only shows our faith but proves our character, and God’s grace gives us the means to wait well. Note a few amazing principles:

* **Our blessed hope is the Divine Jesus who is described God and Savior –** What are we waiting for? We are waiting for Jesus to return so that we will be with Him forever. We know we will become like Him when we see Him as He is (1 John 3:2). Notice here that this is a plain declaration of the deity of Jesus Christ. When Jesus returns we wills see Him, and in seeing Him, we see the Father, since He and the Father are one.
* **Jesus death was voluntary –** Grace shows itself in love, and we serve a unique God and Savior who “**gave himself for us.”** He did not wait for us to clean ourselves, to get right, to become worthy. He demanded righteousness, so He provided the means. No one forced Him to die for us, but freely gave Himself up. Forced servitude is not love, so we know that Jesus died to satisfy the wrath of God, to glorify the Father, and to give Himself for us.
* **Jesus death was vicarious** – How did Jesus buy us back? He gave Himself **FOR US.** He died in our place, taking on sin for us.
* **Jesus’ redemption was possessive –** *Why did He die?* We are His precious bride that He not only died for but desires to present pure and free from blemish (Eph. 5:25-27). We cannot live with Him forever in our sin, so Jesus not only took care of the penalty of sin in His death, He broke the power of sin in His ongoing grace, but one day He will do away with the presence of sin when we are fully redeemed. This reminds us that we are not our own, but were bought with a price, and that we are no longer slaves of sin but are slaves of Christ (Rom. 6:22). We have purpose, meaning, and direction in life as we wait for Christ’s return knowing that in the time here and now, we are like an engaged bride who is waiting for our wedding day, anticipating our groom, and preparing ourselves for Him. We engage in good works because that is what Christ wants us to do and what He has prepared for us to do in His absence. We are His, and that is good news since He will not let us go.

**Grace Works in Declaration** (2:15)

**Declare** these things; **exhort** and **rebuke** with all authority. Let no one disregard you.

**Keep Focused**

What is the role of a leader, be it a pastor, father, mother, teacher? To teach and live out sound doctrine, and to make sure that those who are following are doing the same. There is plenty of room within the rails of truth to live, but those rails must be established and reminded often.

**What are the “these things”?** It is all that Titus was to teach the older and younger, slaves, men and women: grow in your character by the grace that God supplies. If you do that, everything else will come into focus

**What are the tools in the tool bag?** Encourage and rebuke, as the moment and situation calls for. Most often, we need encouragement and exhortation, for someone to come alongside and help. However, sometimes we need discipline like children who forget that obedience brings more joy than disobedience.

**Operate with Authority** (*humbly)*

Where did Titus’ authority come from? He was an ambassador of the truth, a steward of the riches of the gospel, a mouthpiece of God’s Word. We do not wear God’s authority on our sleeve like an earthly power broker or monarch, but rather as a patient and humble servant. We are not wielding authority to our own personal kingdom, but instead pointing others to the only true One. Biblical authority knows that God’s Word alone is sufficient and authoritative and has the power to change, so we unleash it with the belief that it WILL be effective in its use.

**Do not get in the way**

I personally love this last call to Titus. Don’t let anyone disregard or despise you. This of course means there inevitably would be some that would. God gives us commands in the context of life, so this type of command reminds Titus that there would be some who would despise him. But his confidence and assurance was not in himself. That is why he was to continue to declare the truth and not get too down when he was rejected nor get in the way of the message by living contrary. This was a call of both assurance and confidence to a leader staying the course.

**Grace Works in Interaction** (3:1-3)

**Keeping Civility in Civil Circumstances** (1)

**Remind them** to be **submissive** **to rulers and authorities**, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work

**In our attitude:**

The word used here, just as it is in Titus 2:9, is the word huppatasso, which means to willingly place oneself under the authority of another. The command is broad, and is not specific to any level of government, but encapsulates all levels of government. At this time, the governing authorities were not diametrically opposed to Christianity to the degree of all out persecution, but the government itself was not pro-Christianity either. In other words, this government had an agenda other than glorifying God through Jesus Christ, thus was opposed to the goal of all Christians. But the question is, why submit to an authority that is set against the purposes of God?

***The Purpose and Response to Government***

**1. Romans 13:1-7**

* All government is established by God (1)
* Resisting authority is resisting God, and will receive judgment (2)
* Government is designed to restrain evil, and should be feared by those who do evil, not good (3)
* Government is divinely designed to promote good in society (4)
* Government is divinely empowered to punish evildoers (4)
* Submission is then for the sake of God’s wrath and our conscience (5), so believers are willing to pay taxes, revenue, respect, and honor to whom it is owed (6-7)

**2. 1 Peter 2:13-17**

* Government given to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good (13-14)
* It is God’s will to submit to every government (15)
* Submission to every government is a test of our freedom in Christ , living as true servants of Christ (16)
* Honoring the governing authorities shows a proper fear of God (17)

Obedience to the authorities placed over us is simply the outflow from an attitude of true submission. When Jesus was confronted by the Pharisees who tried to entangle Him in the messy world of politics, they asked Him about the legitimacy of paying taxes, whether it was lawful or not (Matt. 22:15-17). Jesus shrewdly understood their motivation and intention, so He answered them by saying that since Caesar’s face and inscription were on the coin, they were to give back to him his due (Matt. 22:18-22), which silenced the crowd. Jesus showed people that since God had placed the Romans as the governing body in the world, they were to submit to their authority, even though that money would be used to fund wars and debauchery. This principle has implication about how and where we spend our money, knowing that our tax money even now goes to fund things diametrically opposed to God’s Kingdom (i.e. abortion)

***When Obedience is not godly*:**

The one addendum to obedience to the governing authorities is if we are called to disobey God and His clear commands. In Acts 4, Peter and John were arrested because they were disrupting Jerusalem by proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. When they appeared before the Jewish governing body, they were very clear about how far their obedience would go. When they were told to discontinue their preaching, they respectfully declared that they could not stop proclaiming Christ (Acts 4:18-20), even though they were threatened and punished. Peter later said, “WE must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29) The fact is, if a government calls us to do something against God (i.e Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego) or to cease doing what we’ve been called to do, we must act with all wisdom and be willing to accept any punishment that will come our way. This principle is true of marriage as well. If a husband presses his authority to sinful means, this means a wife is free from following.

**In our willingness: Ready for every good work**

*…to be ready for every good work…*

This would not only set the church apart from the false teachers in the church, who were unfit for any good work (Titus 1:16), but would set them as a beacon in the culture. This command has to do with both **good citizenship** as well as **charity.** In other words, we as a group of redeemed people should be a benefit and blessing to the culture and society around us. Often we define ourselves by what we are against, and thus are unwilling to get in the mix with sinful people to help them. Being ready for every good work entails each of us looking at what we can do for our **neighbor, this city, and organizations** to help people. The difference between this call and the **Social Gospel** is that the social gospel engages with people to simply make their lives better, but we engage knowing that our lives have been made eternally better, and by engaging we can offer that same solution to others, called the gospel The question for us is, “Are we engaged in our culture to the point where we can do good work?”

**Staying Humane among fallen Humanity** (2)

To speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people

**In our speech**

**…***to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling…*

**Refusing to tear down**

This means that no matter what we think about the individual, his morals, standards, or views, we are not going down the road of reviling, maligning, or slandering. Our words are important and they are the first and often only things people will see from us. Again, we do not want to be known by what we are against but by what we are for, and so we must be careful, in all forms of communication (blogging and social media included) about how we talk about those around us, knowing that our mouths often start forest sized fires (James 3)

**Refusing to argue**

We often love the debate and interaction of ideas, which absolutely has its place (Acts 17 with Paul at Mars Hill), but often the debate takes on a life of its own and becomes an end in itself. This word means that we aim to be peaceful and peaceable, and we are not a fighter. This means we must use wisdom when engaging those opposed to us and the gospel.

***The Example shown by Jesus***

In Luke 13:1-5, the crowd who had just received a scathing rebuke from Jesus, tried to get Him to engage in a social/political discussion concerning an act of Pontius Pilate, the governor of Galilee at the time, and some Galileans whom he had put to death by mingled their blood with some sacrifices, which was a terrible abomination. The point was to throw Jesus off topic and get Him to take sides on a hot button issue. Jesus, however, was the Master at understanding man and fulfilling His purpose. He responded by bringing the issue to a matter of sin and repentance. He even brought up another social issue of the day (which showed Jesus was aware of what was going on around Him) and talking about 18 men who died while most likely working on a construction project in Jerusalem. He talked of the need for all the people involved in these incidents to repent, just as the crowd who brought the question up needed to do. Jesus gave an example of an opportunity to engage in argument or tearing down the issues of the day were turned into an opportunity for the gospel.

Instead of tearing down opponents and fighting fire with fire (debate, argumentation), we must keep a few things in mind.

* The Biblical call is to pray for those who are in authority over us (1 Timothy 2:1-4), not only so that we can live quiet lives in peace, but that God would literally grant salvation to all those in governing positions over us. It is impossible to spew rhetoric from our heart through our mouths about a politician on one hand, and truly hope for his salvation out of the other. One of those sayings will be false and hypocritical, because love for God and man calls us to desire those we oppose to come to faith.
* We must be willing to see others as having surpassing value greater than ourselves (Philippians 2:3). We must see others in light of the gospel, and in light of how we used to be without Christ (Titus 3:3-4)
* We should be **engaged, informed, and able to give answers** to issues of the day, since the Bible calls us to think in real terms about the world around us. This means that we should be willing to interact coherently on the issues of the day, but it is all with the purpose of bringing them back to the gospel.

**In our interaction**

…*to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people…*

**Responding in peace**

This word means that we seek to be kind, yielding, and gentle in our responses to others. That means that our speech is seasoned with grace, and we view people in honor and are willing to listen and respond in calm and kind ways. We should not be easily rattled or sent down a path that we lose focus or objectivity, and it should not be easy to offend us to the point that we spout off on somebody.

**Responding in gentle humility**

The works used for perfect courtesy here are the words used for “gentle humility”. This word was used to describe Jesus, who was meek and gentle (2 Cor. 10:1) and exemplified in Paul as he interacted with the church at Corinth. This is also the same word used to describe the fruit produced by the Spirit in Galatians 5:23, which means that gentleness is something that every believer possesses. It is finally the word that Paul uses in Colossians 3:12, where Paul instructs “put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience”. This should typify us as believers as we engage with others.

**Remembering who we were** (3)

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.

We fight against distraction and forgetfulness by declaration and remembrance. We remember the grace given to us, that not only worked in salvation, works now in our sanctification, but works into our blessed hope. We remember that this world is not our home, that people who do not believe are NOT our enemy, and that we are called to display the truth of God by living distinctly different lives. We were once lost, but now have been found. We are beggars who’ve been shown bread, and we simply want to show others where they can get it too.

*"  But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*

**Titus 3:4-7**