
Changing by Grace

Titus 2:11-14

Introduction We are celebrating the completion of 12 weeks of very intense work on the part of the graduates who are here this evening. It has been a challenging 12 weeks, but, I trust, a very helpful and life changing 12 weeks.

It is customary for there to be a challenge to the graduates at these kinds of events, and that is what I would like to do this evening. To summarize the task that lays before these graduates as they leave here to serve God in this important ministry of counseling others with the Word of God by the grace of God.

I go to the book of Titus for this challenge. Paul is writing to a young pastor who finds himself in the midst of a very challenging group of believers who live in the midst of a very sinful culture. In chapter 1 verses 10-13, we read <read text>. Paul observes that these believers in Crete were characterized by being liars, evil beasts, and lazy gluttons. And his comment is that this IS TRUE. So, rebuke them sharply! What follows is what Titus should be teaching the different groups of believers – old men, older women, young women, young men, etc. And then in chapter 3 Paul says to remind them of certain things and then gives a list of issues to remind them of.

But in the middle of this is chapter 2 verses 11-14 in which Paul gives a summary of how change comes about – through the grace of God. And I believe that he gives us four graces that are involved in the change process. Let's ask this God of grace to help us this evening as we look at a summary of the grace of God for changing. <Pray>

Saving Grace

v. 11

The prerequisite for someone receiving Biblical counseling is a believing faith in the finished work of Christ. As we are engaged in people's lives who are struggling with hardships or are overtaken in sin, the counselor needs to assess whether that person is a child of God. This is one of the first items that needs to be asked and explored.

Why is this important? There are at least four reasons. Number one, an unbeliever cannot understand the truths of God's Word, nor does he have any desire to understand God's Word. As we counsel, we interpret God's Word to people. Those who are not believers cannot comprehend spiritual truth when they are spiritually blind. Number two, an unbeliever, even though he may make a change that the Scriptures require, will not make that change on a permanent basis. That change will not last. The cares and desires of this world will be more alluring and desirous than the change that has been made. He will return to his former way of living during future time of hardship. Number three, the unbeliever may be deceived into believing that what he has been taught and what he has done are all that is required to be a believer. And when he reverts back to his former way of living, he can say that he has tried Jesus and Jesus didn't work. We are doing a great disservice to that person by potentially misleading them to believe that they are a Christians when we counsel them as we would a

true believer. And number four, the unbeliever cannot please God with his life while they are an unbeliever. Even though his behavior is what God commands, it is still sinful since Paul tells us in Romans 8:8 that it is impossible for an unbeliever to do nothing to please God. So I teach an unbeliever to be a better Pharisee when I counsel him as if he were a believer.

So we need to be careful that we are counseling a believer when we seek to help those who are struggling. If they are not a believer, then the first step is to present the claims of Christ and seek to lead them to a saving faith in Christ.

Enabling Grace

v. 12

And then Paul tells us how this grace of God is an enabling grace for those who are believers. This grace of God is training us. It is enabling us to live lives that are pleasing to Him. And we see that there is the put off / put on dynamic that is spelled out here. This is the task of the Biblical counselor. He is to make sure that the person is stopping his behavior that is not pleasing to God and that he is replacing it with the behavior that is pleasing to God.

Training to renounce

On the put off side of the training, we are training to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions. As we present the claims of the Word of God to our counselees, we must help them to see how their lives are being lived in an ungodly way. They are believing a lie about their life and the situation in which God has placed them. They are believing that God is not a good, wise, sovereign God Who is working in their lives for their good and His glory. They have instead believed that they are victims, they are lacking in self-esteem, they are being disrespected, they are deserving of better treatment than they are getting, and a whole host of other lies.

And they are living life according to their own desires. They have a case of the “wantsies”, as Ed Welsh has describes it. They want comfort, ease, a life without troubles, respect, love from everyone in their lives. They want material wealth, good health, obedient children, a spouse who worships them, neighbors who keep to themselves, and a whole host of other wants.

Our task as Biblical counselors, is to help people to renounce the lies and lusts that control their lives. We must bring the appropriate Scriptures to bear on the situation in which they find themselves so they can see the lies that they believe to be true, and the wants and desires that are controlling their emotions and decisions. And it is the enabling grace of God which comes along side to help us and them to do this for God’s glory.

Training to live

On the other side of the training is the replacing lies with truth and the wrong desires with desire for God. We are to bring the Word of God into the situation in order to help this person live a life that is self-controlled, upright, and godly.

As part of the process of helping this person see the lies that they are believing, we have presented the truth of God’s Word. We have been confronting them with the truth using the powerful spotlight of God’s Word to shine on the darkness that is lurking in the

heart. As the floodlight of the Word penetrates, it exposes those lies that are hidden deep in the heart. And it roots out those godless desires that seem so right until the sword of the Word hacks through the jungle of pleasures gone amuck and overgrown and replants the desires that grow toward God.

When we believe lies and give in to the desires that seem so delightful, we live undisciplined and rebellious lives. And we live as though God were somewhere far off and unconcerned. But as God's enabling grace is ministered by the Holy Spirit through His Word, we live lives that are characterized by self-control, right conduct, and a devotion to God and His glory.

One of the areas that is so common to the human race is the lack of disciplined living. We are, by nature, lazy, undisciplined, and unorganized lovers of ourselves. God's enabling grace makes it possible for the counselor as well as the counselee to learn to be self-controlled in their living. Right conduct comes from a right heart. And we will never live beyond our love of God.

Our task as Biblical counselors is, through God's enabling grace to us, to help people, with the put off / put on dynamic through God's enabling grace to them.

Future Grace

v. 13

One of the major characteristics of those who are struggling with sin and hardship is that they cannot see beyond their own circumstances and suffering. Life is viewed through a narrow lens that is trained on the trial under which they are struggling. It is the focus of their waking thoughts. It is the subject of almost every conversation. It is the center of all of life to them.

The ministry of the effective counselor is to help the person see the forest that is beyond this very large tree that is right in front of their face and around which they cannot see. When their situation gets to a point that it appears to be unbearable, their vision is only on this present point in time. There doesn't seem to be anything else as important as what is happening right now.

But Paul wants us to remember that God gives us future grace in order to help us put life into proper perspective. This situation is a point in time which God has under complete control. It is just one small stitch in the mosaic of time that spans between eternity past and eternity future. They are here in this situation at this particular point in time in order to bring glory to God. The tapestry of God's completed plan for His glory for all of eternity has already been completed. God has a perfect plan that includes both the counselor and the counselee. The Biblical counselor needs to help this person view their present situation in such a way that it makes them yearn for their future guaranteed hope that much more. The glory of that future hope brings a God-honoring perspective to every situation. Our suffering and heartache are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. So God's future grace enables us to change in the midst of struggles and hardship. An effective counselor will help the counselee expand his to see the future grace that God is giving.

Perfecting Grace

v. 14

But behind all of this work for changing by the grace of God is the perfecting grace of Christ through the Holy Spirit. Change is a process with two sides – there is our responsibility to work for change by God’s enabling and future grace, and there is God’s perfecting grace working behind the scenes enabling us to change for His glory.

Redeeming us

Christ died in order to redeem us from every kind of sin. He has made it possible for every believer to change by His death, burial, and resurrection. He has made it so that we are free from the bondage of our enslaving sin, and has freed us to serve Him and worship Him in spirit and in truth.

Purifying us

Not only did He die to redeem us from every kind of sin, but He also is in the process of purifying us to be His own possession. We have difficulties and trials in this world because of sin. Thank God that Christ died for sin. There is great hope because there is forgiveness for sin and the power to live a godly life.

Making us totally committed

If we were left to ourselves, we would not be characterized as being people who pursue God. God has pursued us from the very beginning. We love Him because He first loved us. We find our joy and pleasure in Him because He has made it so that our joy is complete in Him alone. So in addition to God’s behind the scenes work of redeeming and purifying, is His perfecting grace that makes us zealous for good works. Pleasing God with our heart and actions becomes the desire of our lives. The person becomes totally committed to being the kind of person that honors God with their life no matter what the circumstances or the situation.

So here are three ways that the counselor can know that the counselee is a believer. Does the person seem to have the ability to forsake sin? Does the person have a sensitivity to sin and a desire to forsake it? And, is there a desire to serve and love God with their whole being? Is there a desire to please God and to work at dealing with the sin of heart and behavior that has overwhelmed him? If there is no desire for God, no grief over sin, and no concern for his standing with God, then we need to encourage them to examine whether they are really in the faith.

So as I finish this charge to you who have given yourselves to seeking God’s grace in your lives as well as helping others pursue change by God’s grace, let me leave you with these charges:

Conclusion

- Don’t forget that you are a recipient of God’s grace and must be constantly examining yourselves to make changes where they are needed.

- Don't get back into your old patterns by slacking off in your reading of good and helpful books. Your ability to help others is tied to your understanding of the Scriptures and their practical application to life.
- Take courage in the fact that God will not give you more than you can handle. That doesn't mean that He won't stretch you, though.
- Be poised to give Godly counsel at all times. We all give counsel. The question is what kind of counsel are we giving?
- Don't be too proud to ask others when you are stumped or need help. We are all in the process of learning and growing every day.

May God grant much fruit for your faithful labors for Him in this great work of helping people change by the grace of God.