

LESSON 2

The Role of Grace in Change

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, instructing us to deny godlessness and worldly lusts and to live in a sensible, righteous, and godly way in the present age, while we wait for the blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to cleanse for himself a people for his own possession, eager to do good works.

— Titus 2:11–14

What should we say then? Should we continue in sin so that grace may multiply? Absolutely not! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Or are you unaware that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life.

— Romans 6:1–4

The grace that forgave us is the same grace that is raising us, which is why drifting is not what grace makes possible and effort is not what grace makes unnecessary.

The One That Hasn't Moved

MOST OF US HAVE ONE. It isn't the sin that would embarrass us in front of the congregation. It's the private one, the one we carried through the water and expected to leave in it, and it is still answering the phone. We have confessed it more times than we can count, and we believe what the New Testament says about forgiveness. What we have quietly stopped believing is that anything will be different a year from now.

Two doors lead out of that room, and most of us have tried both. The first is to tighten the screws: an earlier alarm, a harder promise, a rule made on Sunday night that holds until Wednesday afternoon. The second is to shrug: God knew what he was getting, and this is all covered. We settle in beside the thing and start calling the settling maturity.

Paul had already met the man who takes the second door, and he had an argument ready.

Something Appeared

Paul is writing to a young preacher on Crete about a church full of ordinary people: older men, younger women, slaves working for difficult masters. He tells each group how to live, and then he tells Titus why any of it is possible. The whole sentence turns on a verb.

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, Titus 2:11.

Appeared is a word for something breaking into view.⁵ Grace is not a mood God has always been in, off at a distance somewhere. It showed up. It has a date and a face; Paul names the face two verses later.

Then comes the clause we tend to read past:

instructing us to deny godlessness and worldly lusts and to live in a sensible, righteous, and godly way in the present age, Titus 2:12.

Instructing. The word belongs to a household raising a child, and it covers teaching, correction, and the long, unglamorous business of turning someone into an adult.⁶ Grace pardons and then grace raises; one appearing does both. Nothing has to be added to grace to get obedience out of it, and no second principle comes along later to supply the discipline. The training is what grace does once it has moved in.

Paul aims the whole thing forward: *while we wait for the blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, Titus 2:13.* One appearing behind us and one ahead, with the raising running between them. Then he says what it cost and what it was for: *He gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to cleanse for himself a people for his own possession, eager to do good works, Titus 2:14.*

A people he means to keep. That is the frame everything else in this lesson sits inside.

The Question Somebody Actually Asked

Earlier in Romans, Paul had written a sentence that would get him in trouble: *where sin multiplied, grace multiplied even more, Romans 5:20.* Somebody heard that and did the arithmetic.

What should we say then? Should we continue in sin so that grace may multiply? Romans 6:1.

It sounds like a smart-aleck question, but it isn't. It is the honest conclusion of a man who thinks grace is nothing but pardon. If grace is only the sponge that wipes the board, a fuller board means a busier sponge. The logic runs all the way down from there. That man is still in the pews, and he usually asks it in quieter language, with his own drift in mind rather than a doctrine.

Watch how Paul answers, because he does not reach for a rule.

Absolutely not! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Romans 6:2.

He answers with an obituary.

Buried

Or are you unaware that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life, Romans 6:3–4.

Think about what happens at a graveside: a family stands in the grass because something has ended, and the ending is total. Whatever the man owed on Thursday, whatever he meant to make right, whatever hold he had over the people standing there, all of it stops at the edge of that hole. Nobody hands a bill to

a dead man. Nobody argues with him either, or waits to see whether he will change his mind. Once the last car pulls out of the cemetery, the arrangement is simply over.

Paul says our baptism was a burial like that one. Something that had a claim on us went into the ground. What came up out of the water was a person with a life to walk in.

Then the honest part. The man drying off in the parking lot recognized his own hands, and the drive home felt like every other drive home. Paul knows this, which is why the chapter keeps going: *So, you too consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus, Romans 6:11*. Consider is a counting word. Paul asks us to reckon something true before we can feel it is true. That is a strange assignment until we remember what is being counted. It happened outside of us, and it never waited on our sensations to be real.

What the Training Looks Like

So, what does grace look like while it is raising somebody?

Mostly it looks like nothing much. A sentence in a chapter we have read four times will not leave us alone on a Tuesday. Something we did last year comes to mind, and it bothers us now in a way it did not bother us then. A friend asks a question with no agenda behind it, and it lands somewhere we were not guarding. None of that photograph well, and every bit of it is the same grace that appeared on Crete, doing the second half of its work.

Paul turns it into a promise: *For sin will not rule over you, because you are not under the law but under grace, Romans 6:14*. Rule is a word for what a king does. Sin can still get into the house and make noise and embarrass us in front of company. What it cannot do is sit on the throne and be obeyed as though it belonged there. Lesson 6 takes up the fight itself; this week the point sits underneath the fight. The power that ended sin's reign is the same grace that forgave us. It doesn't wait on us to earn a second installment before it goes to work.

Back to the Room

So, carry that private thing back into the room and look again at the two doors. Tightening the screws puts us on an audition floor, performing a part handed to us long ago. Shrugging leaves us sitting beside something Christ died to end. Grace offers something slower than either, or it is the only thing on offer that changes a person: being raised.

This is why Paul can call for serious effort and preach grace in the same paragraph without flinching. He is describing one thing from two sides.

A year from now that stubborn thing may be gone. It may still be there with less of a grip on us than it has this morning. Either way, the grace that appeared is not finished with us. Christ gave himself to make a people his own possession, and he did not go to that trouble to leave us where he found us.

4. Romans 6:1 is a question somebody actually asked. What would you have expected Paul to say back? Why do you think he answers with something that already happened rather than with a rule?
5. Read Romans 6:3–4 slowly. What ended in that burial, and what began? Where does our own effort show up in Paul's sentence?

Deeper

6. Most of us have something that hasn't moved in a long time. What does the tightening-the-screws door cost a person over a year? What does the shrugging door cost?
7. Romans 6:11 asks us to consider something true that we may not feel is true. How is that different from pretending? What would it look like on a bad morning?

Journaling Prompts

15–20 minutes. Nobody reads these but you.

1. Write down what you were taught, or absorbed without ever being taught, about how a person keeps God's approval. Where did you learn it? Don't argue with it yet. Just get it onto the page.

2. Name the one that hasn't moved. You don't have to write down what it is if that doesn't feel safe on paper. Write instead what it has cost you, and what you have quietly concluded about yourself because it is still there.

3. Copy out Titus 2:14 in full. Then answer in your own words: if Christ gave himself to make a people his own possession, what does that say about how patient he is likely to be with the pace of your change?

Weekly Practice

THIS WEEK. Write the date you were baptized at the top of a blank page and copy Romans 6:4 out in full underneath it.

Read both out loud every morning this week, before you look at your phone.

Looking Ahead

Lesson 3 – The Spirit Who Does the Growing, Galatians 5:16–25; Romans 8:9–14; Philippians 2:12–13

Lesson 2 said that grace does the raising. Lesson 3 names who is doing that work in us right now.

Paul tells the Romans something easy to read straight past: *the Spirit of God lives in you*, Romans 8:9. The verb is one of residence, and Paul uses it about ordinary Christians in a city he had never visited.

Read Galatians 5:16–25 and Romans 8:9–14 before the next class. In Galatians, mark every verb that has the Spirit as its subject, and notice how many of them name something we have been trying to accomplish on our own.

⁵ The verb is *epiphainō*, used of a light or a star coming into view — Luke uses it of the dawn *shining on those who live in darkness*, Luke 1:79. Paul uses its noun form two verses later for the second appearing, so Titus 2:11–13 is bracketed by the same idea: one appearing behind us, one ahead.

⁶ *Paideuō*, the ordinary word for bringing up a child, covering instruction and correction together. It is the word Paul uses of his own schooling under Gamaliel in Acts 22:3, and the word Hebrews uses of God's discipline of sons in Hebrews 12:5–11. It is never a word for a single lesson. It is a word for how somebody gets raised.

⁷ **ANSWERS:** 1. appeared · 2. instructing · 3. multiply · 4. buried · 5. rule