

# What Grace Teaches

Titus 2:11-15

By Phil Johnson

"Legalism" has become the all-purpose evangelical retort to any mention of holiness, obedience, or good works. It's a potent scare-word, and legitimately so. I don't want to be a legalist. I *hate* legalism. I hate *every* expression of legalism. *Legalism*, as defined in Galatians 5:1, is the error of abandoning our liberty in Christ in order to take on a yoke of legal bondage. To the legalist, good works are necessary to earn God's favor.

I have no sympathy with those who believe the person with the weakest conscience (or the Bible college with the strictest rules) should get to define *holiness* for everyone. I'm quite happy to let Scripture set the parameters of sanctification. And where Scripture is silent, I think we should be, too. The principles of Romans 14 are sufficient to cover questions that Scripture doesn't answer either expressly or by giving us clear principles that may be deduced by good and necessary consequence.

So I deplore every hint of legalism, and I want to make that clear.

But just as emphatically, I despise the common evangelical tendency to write off as "legalistic" every call for obedience and every summons to holiness. As if *grace* were a sanction for disobedience and immorality. As if the gospel gave us license to "continue in sin so that grace may increase[.] May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?"

Now, the line of demarcation between gospel and law is absolutely vital, and you will never hear me say otherwise. One of the great advances of the Protestant Reformation came in the way Martin Luther stressed the distinction between law and gospel. Law is not gospel and vice versa. I

appreciate those who labor to differentiate between the two. There is hardly any more important theological distinction.

And let me say this once more, with emphasis: To confound law and gospel is no small error. It's an easy error to make, and let's be candid: there seems to be something in the fallen human heart that makes us prone to that error. It's the error that lies at the heart of every kind of legalism. I think it is a tendency of every fallen human mind to default towards legalism, and it is right that we should resist that tendency. There is no more deadly blunder in all of theology. Some of the strongest words of condemnation anywhere in the New Testament were aimed at those who supplanted gospel promises with legal demands (Galatians 1:6-9).

So are we clear on this? I hate legalism with a holy passion.

However, it is also a serious blunder (*also* condemned in very strong terms by the apostle Paul) to imagine that the gospel *disagrees* with the moral standard set by the law; that justification by faith eliminates the need for obedience; or that the perfect freedom of God's grace gives license for unholy living. Good works, obedience to Christ's commands, and encouragements and admonitions to be holy *are* necessary aspects of the Christian life. Not necessary (in the way the legalist suggests) to earn favor with God. In fact, our works are worthless—totally impotent—for that purpose. But obedience is a natural, and inevitable, and essential expression of love for Christ and gratitude for His grace. This is the chief practical lesson we learn from the principle of grace: grace compels us to love and good works. Grace constrains us to renounce sin and to pursue righteousness.

Listen: The gospel is more excellent than the law, but the two do *not* disagree. Believing the gospel sets us free from the law's condemnation, but it does not release us from the moral standard set by the law. Or to say it another way: the principle of *sola fide*—justification by faith alone—is not hostile to good works. The gospel puts good works in their proper place, but if we properly understand the principle of

*sola fide*, it should make us zealous for good works; earnest in the pursuit of holiness; and eager to obey our Lord's commands. We don't need to be the least bit hesitant to "provoke [one another] unto love and to good works."

And that's what we're going to see in the passage we're looking at in this hour—Titus 2:11-15. Let me start by reading the text, and as I read, listen with these questions in mind: *What lessons do we learn from a biblical understanding of the principle of grace? What is grace supposed to be teaching us? In all our talk about grace-saturated, gospel-focused, Christ-centered ministry, have we actually understood "grace" properly, or have we unwittingly fallen in step with "ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness"? [And are we as pastors doing a good job of instructing our people in the true lessons of grace?]*

Now, here's our passage (Titus 2:11-15):

11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing  
salvation for all people,  
12 training us to renounce ungodliness and  
worldly passions, and to live self-controlled,  
upright, and godly lives in the present age,  
13 waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of  
the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus  
Christ,  
14 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.  
15 Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with  
all authority. Let no one disregard you.

Let's start with a word about the context and the circumstances that prompted this epistle. Paul is writing to Titus, whom he has "left . . . in Crete, [so] that [Titus could] set in order what remain[ed] and appoint elders in every city" (1:5). So Titus is training and appointing structured leadership for the churches in Crete. And Paul sends Titus a short list of qualifications for the men he is to appoint as

elders in the churches. It's essentially identical to the list given in 1 Timothy 3. The central principle, of course, is that leaders in the church are "God's steward[s]" and therefore they are to be morally and reputationally "above reproach." Paul reiterates that same expression twice at the start of his list, in 1:6 and again in verse 7.

He follows that with a list of specifics that spell out what it means to be "above reproach." Notice: except for the ability to teach (which is a gift that is absolutely necessary to fulfill the calling of an elder) the requirements Paul names are *not* skills and talents. They are character qualities. And all of them have to do with maturity, self-control, and moral rectitude.

This is the kind of man who is qualified to lead the church. He is not a clown or a comedian. Not a frat-house bad-boy or a super-cool trend-setter with celebrity potential written all over him. Not (as one pastor here in Southern California likes to bill himself) a futurist, film-maker, innovator, and motivational speaker. The type of person Titus was to appoint is not a guy with a huge ego and a gift for being glib. There's nothing here about appealing to one generation or another; nothing about artistic ability, educational degrees, political correctness, business acumen, clothing style, cleverness and creativity, or his knowledge of popular culture. *None* of the things churches today tend to weigh heavily when looking for a pastor.

But the elders Titus was to train and ordain simply needed to be mature, godly, disciplined men, able to handle the Word of God accurately and teach its truths to others. Not young, restless, and culturally savvy hipsters, but godly men who are fully mature and steadfast.

If you grasp what Paul is saying here and compare it to 21st-century evangelical culture, it ought to cause a bit of cognitive dissonance. The strategy Paul is telling Timothy to use in the church planting enterprise is nothing at all most of like today's church-planting organizations say is necessary.

I cannot imagine that Titus read this epistle and took Paul to mean that he needed to start teaching classes on contextualization, sponsoring sex seminars, staging symposiums on innovation and church marketing, or offering courses on leadership borrowed from the latest works of whoever the first-century equivalent of Peter Drucker might be. It has always mystified me how so many church leaders today can read the dreck that is published by church-growth gurus and ministry-philosophy experts today and not see the glaring discrepancies between what the Apostle Paul commanded and what is actually being done in mainstream evangelicalism and the megachurch fringe.

And (I know this is a bit of a digression, but) I want to say this plainly: *The greatest threats to the gospel today are not government policies that undermine our values, not secular beliefs that attack our confessions of faith, not even atheists who deny our God. The greatest enemies of the gospel today are worldly churches and hireling shepherds who trivialize Christianity.*

And that's not a *new* problem. It was true even in apostolic times—in the very earliest churches. In Philippians 3:18-19, the apostle Paul wrote: "For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ." One of the chief characteristics Paul named about these enemies of the cross—enemies of authentic grace—was that they "set their minds on earthly things." They "pervert[ed] the grace of our God into sensuality." They twisted the idea of Christian liberty into an opportunity to gratify the flesh. They "[used their] freedom as a cover-up for evil." In the process, they trivialized the cross, corrupted the idea of grace, and perverted the gospel. None of the apostles were squeamish when it came to calling them out.

And here in our text, Paul employs the principle of grace itself to refute such a trivialized, worldly, lawless notion of religion. He says the true lessons we learn from grace fly in the face of everything that is shallow, worldly, unrighteous,

disobedient, or even merely passive in that deeper-life, let-go-and-let-God, quietistic sense.

As a matter of fact, Paul is admonishing Titus *not* to give in to the trends of secular Cretan culture. Chapter 1, verse 12: "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." That probably wasn't a politically correct thing to say, even then, but Paul adds emphatically, "This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith." He was telling Titus that the church is to be counter-cultural, resistant to the evils and character flaws of secular society. Church leaders are not supposed to be obsessed with gaining accolades and admiration from the world.

Instead, Paul says (2:1), "teach what accords with sound doctrine—"and he goes on to give a series of commands for specific categories of people in the church: "Older men" (v. 2). "Older women likewise" (v. 3). "Young women" (v. 4). "Younger men" (v. 6). "Slaves" (v. 9). And Titus as the missionary church-planting pastor is given a particular directive: "In all respects . . . be a model of good works" (v. 7)—especially for the sake of the young men who represent future leaders in the church.

Now, notice: verse 1 speaks of "what accords with sound doctrine," and then Paul goes on to itemize a short-list of things that *we* would probably label "practical duties" rather than the types of things we would designate "doctrinal truths." See, one of Paul's main points here is that he doesn't want Titus to spend all his time teaching doctrine as theory, focusing *only* on objective biblical, historical, and theological content at the expense of exhorting the church to obedience and practical holiness. And let's be honest: that is a peculiar failing in some of our Reformed and Calvinistic churches. We take a didactic approach that's heavy on material truth and objective doctrine—sometimes without ever getting around to any kind of practical exhortation.

Paul's point is that the vital *practical* duties of holiness and obedience are in perfect "accord with sound doctrine."

Calls to obedience and exhortations to virtue are *not* inconsistent with the doctrines of grace—much less are they *opposed* to grace. In the words of verse 10, what Paul has outlined in this chapter are actions and character qualities that "*adorn* the doctrine of God our Savior."

In other words (if you'll allow me to quote the NIV), these are things that "will make the teaching about God our Savior *attractive*"—not "attractive" in the sense that they turn the message into a story the world will like. The gospel is still "a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles." Christ Himself is still "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." His warning in John 15:18-20 still holds true: "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you." So in the words of 1 John 3:13: "Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you." You cannot change that and be faithful. Stop trying so hard to win the world's affection.

And yet, authentic virtue *is* attractive in the sense that it captures the attention of the world and gives our message an undeniable measure of credibility. In that sense, the cultivation of basic virtue is a thousand times *more* attractive than any currently-popular brand of stylish evangelicalism, hipster religion, or postmodern contextualization.

That's the apostle Paul's strategy for reaching a hostile culture. And what intrigues me is how he uses the principle of grace to make his point. In contrast to those who turn grace into licentiousness, Paul says the biblical principle of grace teaches us something entirely different.

In fact, I see three distinct lessons Paul says we can learn from grace. They all have to do with how we live (in other words, they are practical, not theoretical, lessons). All three lessons give us instruction and incentives for righteous living and obedience to the lordship of Christ. That, Paul says, is

what grace *ought* to produce—not a lax attitude about virtue and vice; not a casual acceptance of worldly values; but the exact opposite. *The real fruit of divine grace is a holy life.*

The three lessons grace teaches us are outlined for us in verses 12 and 13, but before we zero in on those two verses, pay attention to the structure of the larger passage, starting in verse 11. Did you notice the two occurrences of the word "appear"? Verse 11: "For the grace of God has appeared." Verse 13: We're "waiting for . . . the appearing of . . . Jesus Christ." It's the same basic word in the Greek (just like in English). The word in verse 11 is the verb form (*to appear*) and the word in verse 13 is the noun form (*appearance*). And the Greek word has the connotation of brightness (literally, "to shine forth" or "to be brought to light").

And those two words point to the two advents of Jesus Christ.

Verse 11: "the grace of God has appeared." How, specifically? In the incarnation and ministry of Christ. "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." That's John 1:7, and I think it's important to stress what John meant when he wrote that. He was not suggesting, of course, that the Old Covenant was devoid of grace. He was not saying that grace is something new that Christ introduced at his first advent. He simply means that Christ is the very embodiment of divine grace. Moses, on the one hand, was the lawgiver; Jesus, on the other hand, is the source and the living representative of God's grace. Law was the dominant feature of the Mosaic covenant; grace and truth are the dominant features of the New Covenant. John 1:14: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Moses was the representative and instrument through which the law was handed down on stone tablets. Christ is the Person in whom grace and truth are incarnated. But Moses and Christ are not adversaries. Quite the contrary.



Christ came as the fulfillment of everything Moses ever wrote about.

*And that includes the law.* Grace *fulfills* the law, it does not overthrow it. Jesus Himself said this at the start of His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:17): "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."

So grace "appeared" in a unique and definitive way through the incarnation and atoning work of Christ. Paul refers to this again in Titus 3:4-5: "When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us . . ."

The word "*appearing*" in Titus 2:13 (of course) is a reference to the *second* advent of Christ: "Our blessed hope, the appearing of the *glory* of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." Now, we don't have time to go into detail on this, but the way Paul words that statement is instructive. Here's an example where the King James Version is less helpful and virtually all the modern translations get it exactly right. This is a reference to one Person, not two: "our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." It's an affirmation of the deity of Christ, and it's an exact parallel to the expression found at the end of verse 10: "God our Savior." Jesus Christ is both our God and our Savior. It is *His* appearing in glory that we await.

Meanwhile, we live between those two advents—the two "appearings." At the end of verse 12 Paul refers to that time-span between the two appearings as "the present age." So he points us to the past, when "the grace of God . . . appeared." He wants us to live "in the present age"—exemplifying the virtues of grace in the hectic here and now. And he wants us to keep an eye expectantly on the future, as we "[wait] for our blessed hope," the return of God, our Savior in His full resplendence—which will be the final culmination of both grace and glory.

In other words, there are past, present, and future dimensions to grace, and the present dimension is the main

focus of our text. While we live between these two advents, grace takes us to school. This whole "present age" is the school of grace. And I see three main lessons grace teaches us. They are all *hard* lessons, because they run contrary to the natural tendencies of our fallen flesh, and we have to keep re-learning these lessons daily. But here they are. Lesson number 1. Grace trains us:

1. TO REPUDIATE THE WORKS OF THE FLESH

Verses 11-12: "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions." Now, I need to comment on verse 11, but we can't linger there. Obviously, this text is not saying that grace brings salvation to each and every person who ever lives, because Jesus repeatedly and expressly taught that "The gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many" (Matthew 7:13). Jesus' descriptions of the final judgment always included urgent warnings that many in that day will be told, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

So Titus 2:11, is not teaching any doctrine of universal salvation. The King James Version translates the text so that it says "the grace of God . . . has appeared to all men." But here, too, I think the majority of modern translations have it right. It's "salvation to all men." The ESV says, "salvation for all people." And that has to be read in its own context. Notice the conjunction "For" at the beginning of the verse. It ties the statement to what preceded it—and it's that long list of people-categories. "Older men . . . Older women . . . young women . . . younger men . . . [and] slaves." "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all [*kinds* of people—all] people [old men, old women, young girls, younger men, and slaves alike] , training us [all] to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions."

That is the first lesson we learn under grace as our instructor: "to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions."

That's a direct quote from the NIV again, and it's a pretty fair rendering of the sense of the text. The Greek verb is *arNEomai*, meaning "deny" or "refuse," or "disavow."

It's a strong word, like the English synonym I've used: *repudiate*. Not as strong, perhaps, as the word Paul occasionally uses elsewhere: "mortify." Romans 8:13: "Put to death the deeds of the [flesh]." Colossians 3:5: "Put to death . . . what is earthly in you." Galatians 5:24: "Crucif[y] the flesh with its passions and desires." The sense, however, is exactly the same. "Repudiate ungodliness and worldly passions." How forcefully should we repudiate such things? *Just go ahead and put them to death. Exterminate them.*

That is the first lesson grace teaches us. It's what repentance is all about: the total, unconditional renunciation and disavowal of fleshly works and worldly desires.

Now, this is not optional. The notion that repentance is optional is the very same lie that was at the center of the lordship controversy. No-lordship doctrine is found mainly in old-school dispensationalist circles. But it is a close cousin to a type of thinking that is currently popular in certain segments of the contemporary Reformed community: The idea is that every demand for obedience and every appeal for holiness is by definition legalistic, pietistic, moralistic—and therefore such things are to be avoided as if they were a serious threat to the gospel and the principle of grace.

If you're alert to what has been happening in the evangelical conversation recently, you know that there is a lot of discussion and debate currently taking place over some of the very questions we're dealing with here. On The Gospel Coalition website, for example, Kevin DeYoung and Tullian Tchividjian had a friendly, protracted debate on the question of what is the proper motive for obedience. Is sanctification rooted in the gospel and the doctrine of justification by faith, or is the ground of our sanctification union with Christ? We all understand (I hope) that sanctification is not effortless and automatic. Yet we also realize that "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the

flesh I live by faith in the Son of God." So what role does *effort* play in the process of sanctification?

Then over at the "Reformation 21" blog, William Evans and Sean Lucas have had a similar exchange of arguments, dealing with some similar questions: *How are the commands of the New Testament—the imperatives—to be preached in light of the promises of the gospel—the indicatives? Is it legalistic to stress the imperatives without giving even more stress to the indicatives? Is every appeal for true piety rooted in pietism? And which is the more imminent danger—pietism or antinomianism?*

Now, those are not easy questions to answer well, and if you read the dialogues of these men, I think you'll understand why I say there are valid points to be made on both sides. This, I think, is one of those debates where the right perspective is "both . . . and" rather than "either . . . or." Both neonomian legalism and antinomian libertinism are serious, deadly, gospel-corrupting errors. Both of them stem from a deficient understanding of grace. And we ought to be careful to avoid them both.

If you think every appeal for holiness sounds like legalism, you've got a problem. On the other hand, if you think the actual remedy for defeat in the Christian life is to double down and work harder at achieving holiness, you've got a problem, too. Above all, you have a skewed view of grace if you think grace eliminates any necessity for holiness. You have a skewed view of grace if you think grace simply overthrows righteousness in favor of free-and-easy forgiveness. Whether you think that brand of so-called "free grace" sounds dangerous or you think it sounds fun, if you think grace renders all moral duty moot, you don't understand grace at all.

Contemporary evangelicals are dangerously susceptible to both legalism and license, because evangelicals have been toying with a superficial understanding of grace for generations. The problem goes back, I think, more than a century.

Grace was first degraded into an escape-hatch from hell. Then it was portrayed as a means of personal fulfillment. Nowadays it is generally perceived as a principle that nullifies the need to be or do right. Perhaps some of you think that's what grace is: A principle that nullifies the need to be or do right. I'm tempted to say that may be the dominant idea in the contemporary evangelical attitude toward sanctification. It is a flat-out lie, and it is emphatically refuted by the apostle Paul right here: "the grace of God [teaches] us to renounce ungodliness."

Notice: this first lesson alone makes a stark contrast to the conventional notion of grace. Grace is not a syrupy sentiment that makes us always passive and positive. Grace itself is dynamic. It is the active expression of God's favor. It is *undeserved* favor. More than that, it is the exact opposite of what we *do* deserve. But it is a potent, powerful force. By grace God lays hold of undeserving sinners, unites them spiritually with Christ, clothes them with His righteousness, awakens their dead souls, removes their stony hearts and gives them a living, tender heart of flesh, and blesses them "with every spiritual blessing."

And the very first response grace elicits from the regenerate heart is a negative confession: we "renounce ungodliness and worldly passions." In other words, the first motion of our repentance is a gift from God—a work of grace. Every aspect of authentic repentance is motivated and energized by grace. The person who has not repented has not received grace at all.

We speak of "irresistible grace." I like that expression, because it conveys the sense that grace is dynamic, not passive. But it's also subject to misunderstanding. When we say grace is "irresistible," we don't mean God employs coercion or duress—dragging us or arm-twisting us to Christ. Grace is irresistible in the same sense that I find my wife irresistible. Not that she threatens or forces me to bend to her will, but that I am captivated in a very positive way by her inherent appeal.

In a similar but even more profound way, divine grace draws us to Christ by attraction, not by constraint. And if you have been drawn to Christ by grace—if you truly love Him—you will hate everything that opposes him. That is how the same grace that draws us to Christ teaches us "to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions." This, I think, is the very same truth Paul has in mind in Romans 2:4 when he says that "God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance"

In the famous words of Martin Luther, from the first of his 95 theses, "*When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said 'Repent,' He called for the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.*" We "renounce ungodliness and worldly passions" on a daily basis, and it is grace, properly understood, that instructs us to repent at the beginning of our Christian life, and then prompts and energizes daily repentance from then on. That is lesson number one that we learn from grace: to repudiate the works of the flesh. Here's a second lesson. Grace teaches us—

## 2. TO CULTIVATE THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Second half of verse 12. Grace trains us "to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age." Notice the threefold stress on sobriety, righteousness, and godliness. The first term is from a Greek word that literally refers to soundness of mind. Its connotation is self-control, moderation. The King James Version says "soberly," and the New American Standard Bible says, "sensibly." All those ideas are inherent in the word. The ESV says "self-controlled," and that's a decent English synonym. The idea is not merely temperance and moderation, but wisdom, prudence, circumspection—clarity of mind. It's describing a virtue whose chief benefit accrues to the individual himself. Grace trains us to be clear-headed and to exercise cautious self-control.

The second term describes a virtue that defines our relationships with others: Grace trains us "to live . . .

righteously." The ESV and the NIV use the word "upright." To quote the great Baptist theologian John Gill, this speaks of living "*righteously' among men, giving to every man his due, and dealing with all according to the rules of equity and justice; as being made new men, created unto righteousness and true holiness; and as being dead to sin, through the death of Christ, and so living unto righteousness, or in a righteous manner; and as being justified by the righteousness of Christ, revealed in the Gospel.*" That covers every dimension of righteousness—both practical and forensic. But because the context clearly is about how we live our lives, I think the stress here is on our dealings with our fellow human beings. "Upright" living is the fruit of grace's training.

And then the third term, "godly," by definition has a Godward focus. So grace teaches us our duty with respect to God, our neighbor, and ourselves. Keep that in mind. We'll come back to it.

This third word ("godly") is an adjective meaning "pious." The Greek word is etymologically the exact opposite of the word translated "ungodliness" earlier in the verse. "Ungodliness" is *aSEBeia*. "Godly" is *euSEBos*. They are negative and positive forms of the same root. Grace teaches us to shun impiety and live piously. This is all very simple and straightforward. Paul is not giving Titus some complex and mysterious idea. It's quite simple: Grace (*authentic* biblical grace; not the shabby modern evangelical substitute, but the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ) teaches us to repudiate the works of the flesh and cultivate the fruit of the Spirit.

Paul teaches this very same idea in Galatians 5, where he contrasts the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit. Galatians 5:18-24:

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. [Of course, believers are *not* under the law, but under grace. So what Paul is doing in this passage is making a clear contrast between what the flesh produces under the yoke

of the law, versus what the Holy Spirit produces in us through the liberty of grace. Listen to the contrast. And notice that the only commodity our fallen flesh can produce is corrupt works. But the Spirit's work in us is called "fruit," and it's entirely virtuous:]

19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,

20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions,

21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. [Those are the very things Titus 2:12 says we repudiate: "ungodliness and worldly passions." Now here are the things we cultivate:]

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

23 gentleness, self-control; [and notice this:] against such things there is no law. [Again: grace and law are distinct, but they are not in disagreement. Paul goes on in Galatians 5:24 to say this:]

24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

In other words, what defines us as Christians is this very thing: that we *do* repudiate the works of the flesh. Grace, not the law, is what trains us and motivates us and empowers us to do this. And at the same time, Grace teaches us to cultivate the fruit of the Spirit.

So, lessons 1 and 2 that we learn in the school of grace: To repudiate the works of the flesh; to cultivate the fruit of the Spirit; and now third—



### 3. TO ANTICIPATE THE BLESSEDNESS OF ETERNITY

Here is the key distinction between law and grace. For any thoughtful, self-aware, honest worshiper, the effect of the law alone, apart from grace, is sheer terror. Because we are sinners, the law threatens sinners with utter destruction. But *grace* fills us with expectation and anticipation for blessings that will last eternally. Verse 13: "Waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ."

In short, the eschatology of grace is different from the eschatology of law. Where the law pronounces condemnation and swears eternal vengeance, grace pronounces a blessing and promises eternal reward. Grace teaches us to live in the light of that hope.

All the lessons grace teaches us are incentives for holiness: our hatred of unrighteousness, the debt we owe to Christ's righteousness, the reward we are promised in eternity—all of these things are incentives for us to "renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age."

And notice: this was Christ's own aim in redeeming us in the first place. Verse 14: "[He] 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."

Now, don't tell me that there's anything inherently legalistic about being zealous for good works. And don't tell me grace rules out any kind of good works. Zeal for good works is the ultimate objective of grace.

Now bear in mind: this passage covers all tenses and all perspectives: past, present, and future. Self, others, and God. In every respect except one, the lessons of grace are in perfect agreement with what the law tells us. They say the same thing. Both law and grace say we should "renounce ungodliness and worldly passions." Both law and grace say we should "live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age." Both law and grace humble us and show us the virtue of self-control. Both law and grace say we should

live righteously and love our neighbor as we love ourself. Both law and grace instruct us to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. In every respect, grace is in agreement with the commands and directives of the eternal moral law of God. Don't ever entertain the thought that law and grace or law and gospel contradict one another.

But there is this one vital distinction between law and grace, and the difference lies in this third lesson: the law threatens us with destruction because we cannot obey perfectly. Grace gives us both the desire and the power to obey. That is what Philippians 2:13 says: "It is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." The will and the energy for obedience are gracious gifts from God. So while the law and grace agree in that they both urge us to be holy, the law can only condemn us for our failure and threaten us with destruction. Grace is the remedy for our failure, and it guarantees eternal blessing.

The one key difference, succinctly put, is that the law cannot give life; it can only bring death. Second Corinthians 3:6: "The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." We are saved "through sanctification by the Spirit," according to 2 Thessalonians 2:13. The gracious work of the Spirit in our hearts guarantees our sanctification. Listen to Romans 8:3-4: "God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, [And what? thereby overturned and eliminated the moral imperatives of the law? No:] in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

The distinction between law and grace has nothing to do with the *commandments*, or the moral content of the law. What grace eliminates and overturns are the law's *curses*. As far as the moral imperatives of the law are concerned, grace is in full agreement. Paul says so expressly in Galatians 3:6: ""Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly

not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law" (Galatians 3:21)." The problem with the law was our inability and our lack of desire to will and to work for God's good pleasure. Grace is the remedy for that.

And the result? Verse 14: That we should be "redeem[ed] from all lawlessness and [purified for Christ—] a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works." And there is nothing the least bit "legalistic" about that zeal.

Verse 15: "Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you."