

# The Followership of Growth in Christ: God's Grace and My Growth

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[0:00] So let's bow together and pray and thank God for the way He's working to heal us and help us. And now pray for my mom and we'll get started. Almighty God and Father, we thank You for this opportunity that we have as brothers and sisters to be under Your Word and talking about what it means to be people who are given the privilege to grow in conformity to Christ, to be like Him, even in the way that we hope.

And serve You is like our Lord and Savior. So Father, thank You for Alonza and the wonderful, sweet, and just such an encouraging person that she is in our congregation. Been with us these 10 years and such a stalwart in our church life. We love her God and don't have a clue what we would be like without her.

So thank You for bringing her through this operation and bringing her here tonight with Brett. Thank You for Brett's ministry to his mom. What a sweet encouragement to see this love and commitment. And Brett honoring the truth about taking care of our parents and honoring our parents. We thank You for Mark and Jennifer and the contribution they make to our congregation. The way that You are growing them in the truth in maturity.

[1:24] For their plans to be of service to You. And how they look to You. To guide them and help them. Thank You for bringing Mark through this latest episode. And giving him some direction about how he can head this off in the future.

That's very kind of You, Lord. And we thank You for many other ways that each of us know we have seen Your grace at work in our lives and in the lives of those we love and care about.

And I pray for my mom tonight, Lord. I continue to ask You to be merciful to her. And that You would be ministering to her in a great grace and to the medical team. That You would give them a wonderful wisdom and skill in being able to face whatever they find.

And whatever needs to be done would be successful. That You would bring her into a strong recovery. Give her a quality of life for whatever life she has left.

And allow her to continue to serve You. If not, Lord, and You bring her to heaven. Then I pray You would help my family to reconcile with that.

[2:29] And accept Your sovereign care of her. We place this in Your hands, God. And we have the hope of eternal life in the Lord Jesus. And we thank You for tonight as we look to Your Word and ask You to open our spiritual eyes to see wonderful, marvelous things in this truth that sets our hearts free.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. All righty. So tonight, we transition a bit into the followership of Christ.

We've been talking about the foundation. All right. Now, before we move on, quick test. How would you summarize what I've been teaching in the way of what is our foundation for our growth in Christ?

How would you characterize that? You could do it very concisely. What is our foundation for our growth in Christ? Now, I've spent four sessions teaching on this.

Somebody needs to help me out. What do you think? A word. A phrase. Give me something. All right.

[3:38] God's Word. We definitely talked about that. And from that? Faith. Faith. All right. All right. It's okay.

That's all right. All right. Our identity in Christ. Identity in Christ in that we are... Once He accepts us, we don't work on that.

We're working on what? Right. That's exactly right. He establishes us in His character. And that is the foundation of our growth. Without new life, without the character of God, being formed in us because He positioned us in His Son, we couldn't be formed or conformed to Christ.

We first have to be... Remember I did it over here? We first have to be positioned. That is our salvation in the Lord. And then we are brought to the place where we can grow into what He's made us.

We're brought into new life. And now we spend the rest of our time on earth doing what? Grow to show. Do you remember that phrase?

[4:51] I said, hold on to that. That will help you remember the essence of what I've taught. We grow to show. We don't grow to get more righteousness.

We got all of Jesus we can get. Now we need to grow up in Him. We need to grow to show Him, reflect Him. Does that help? So next week when I say, what is the foundation of our growth in Christ?

You'll have that down. Okay, let's talk about this aspect of followership then. We're moving from our position in Christ that's fixed, can't change, God did it, done deal, that's our eternity, to now we're left on this sin-cursed earth with sin in our own life.

We're battling that. And we're growing to show that new life that God has given us in His Son. And so, Solomon, I'll pick on you a little bit. Solomon is growing to show the life of Jesus in him as a parent, as a husband, as a churchman, as a new believer in Christ.

What? A couple months now in the Lord? Something like that? So, a whole new life that he is learning to grow, to demonstrate, to show, to live in.

[6:13] Alright, that's the idea of what we're talking about when we talk about followership. God's grace and my growth specifically. So we want to talk about the grace of God tonight.

We want to better define it and better understand what the operating force of grace does and is in our life as Christians. Okay?

So don't answer. Let me ask this rhetorically. If I ask you now, how would you define God's grace at work in our lives as Christians?

How would you do that? What would you say to someone else if I ask you to turn to your neighbor and explain God's grace as an operative spiritual force in our life as Christians?

What would you say? Hang on to that question. Okay? Yes? How would you explain God's grace as an operative, active spiritual force in your life as a Christian?

[7:20] What is it? How does it work? Where does it come from? Why is it important? How do you know it's active in your life?

We are Grace Church Williamsburg. So, probably be pretty good if we knew how to define that word. Alright? Each of those words would be important for us.

Okay. So let's look at this together. Here's what we know. We can know that our great salvation comes to us by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

Do we know what that means? We also know that spiritual growth is a struggle. So, as we talk about the process of how you become more like Jesus, we need to understand the role of God's grace as an active spiritual force in our growth.

How do we understand God's grace operating in our spiritual maturity? If we don't better understand this, we will not know how to cooperate, obey, and give ourselves to this operating active force in our life.

[8:39] It is not helter-skelter. It is something that we are called to cooperate in, to obey, to walk in. Right?

Now, just before the apostle Peter was martyred, he wrote his second letter to Christians that were scattered across what we understand today as modern Turkey.

And the very last thing, the very last thing that we have on record that Peter wrote to these beloved brothers and sisters before his death was this intense pastoral concern for their ongoing spiritual

growth.

He did not leave the issue in doubt about where his concern was resting. So, let's go to 2 Peter 3:18. 2 Peter 3:18.

It is interesting to me how often we find in the New Testament epistles these commands that bear directly on how we are to live our Christian life.

[9:47] So that there is no ambiguity. It is very clear. Peter closes out this intense pastoral concern for these believers with this, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

That's a command. That's his final parting shot as it were to encourage these people in their walk with the Lord.

Grow, he says. This is a process. We are growing in it. We never arrive on this planet. Your Christian life will never come to the point where you hit the stopping mark of this command.

Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. So this is something that belongs to Jesus that we are commissioned to grow into.

It's a call for us to pursue. Alright, hear me carefully now. These are the words you want to hold on to that help you grab these concepts and run with them. This is a call for us to pursue.

[11:01] To pursue what? To pursue spiritual growth in the Lord Jesus and to develop our spiritual knowledge of the Lord Jesus. So, you're not surprised to hear this is all about Jesus.

Now, since your spiritual maturity depends on it, you need to carefully clarify for yourself what you understand about the Bible's teaching concerning the grace and knowledge of Jesus.

Pursue that spiritual growth and develop that knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, do you know what this grace of Jesus is? Because you've been commanded in Scripture through the Apostle Peter to grow in that grace.

Do you know what the grace of Jesus is? Do you know how to get this grace and do you know how to apply it, apply this knowledge of Jesus that you're to grow into?

See, if you're ignorant about this because you just don't know or if you're confused about it, about what it is and how to apply it, you're not going to be able to fulfill this command and this is one of the more basic commands about your spiritual life in the Bible.

[12:22] Grow in it. Grow specifically in Jesus' grace and grow specifically in the knowledge of Jesus. And that, I can tell you now, that knowledge is not just facts about who He is and how He lived.

It's a lot more than that. Alright. Now, before I offer you a definition of grace, I want to relate to you a very serious problem that I found throughout my three and a half decades or so in ministry.

It's not unique to American Christianity, but here's what I found because I minister mostly in an American context. In American Christianity, we have an ongoing struggle with understanding God's grace in Christ.

This is what I have found. I'm talking about how grace operates in our growth in Christ. We have a working knowledge of how grace works in our life.

How we're to pursue grace and how we're to pursue knowledge. And I want to give you an example of how that problem is expressed in the lives of many, many Christians that I have dealt with and that I am currently dealing with.

[13:41] And as a pastor, this is my life. I live and breathe this kind of thing. All right? Let me make sure I'm...

Let's see. Nope. I want to back up on that one. Where is... There he is.

I was counseling a man who was expressing disappointment. Now, this man does not live in our state. He's not part of our church. He's never been part of our church.

This is somebody I know from a different context in my life. Now, I was counseling this man and he was expressing disappointment. He was expressing discouragement that God had not, in his words, delivered him or at least diminished his battle with lust in his life.

This was his... He had other issues, but this is the one that plagued him the most. And what he wanted was to get to the place... He told me this. He wanted to get to the place where he no longer failed in personal purity in his walk with Jesus.

[14:58] He was so devastated by what was happening to him that he kept thinking in terms of, I just want to get to a place where this doesn't

dominate me anymore and compromise me anymore.

He thought his failure centered on his lack of power. His willpower. His power to say no. His power to stay pure.

If he could just pray seriously enough. Now, listen to me. If he could just pray seriously enough, that might be the thing that gets him over the hump.

He thought, if I can just feel bad enough about what I'm doing wrong, that will keep me from doing it again. Then, maybe God could take away my sin problem or at least greatly decrease its effects on him.

that's how he was thinking. I just need to get serious enough. I just need to feel bad enough. And maybe these will be the keys to God then doing something to help me with this.

[16:11] He wanted to be rid of the severe temptation to sin in this particular way and the failure he so often succumbed to. He wanted that gone.

He also desired to be rid of feeling so miserable about himself in his walk with Jesus because it really, really got him down. The guilt and the shame he felt were truly, literally overwhelming him. Overwhelming him. But the thing that he feared most was the shame and the embarrassment of people who were close to him finding out about this particular sin problem in his life.

Whether they be wife or children or work associates or church friends or pastors or whomever. He also worried very much about how he might lose relationships over this.

So he already knew the hurt. He already knew the deep sense of loss and disappointment his wife felt about this because he had confessed some of it to her.

[17:20] And then he carried the secret shame and fear of being found out. And he carried that with him 24-7. And it was just eating him up. He went to bed with it.

He woke up with it. He went to work with it. He tried to raise his kids in it. Now, those are genuine fears related to the consequences of living in unrepentant sin.

There are also consequences of living with a sin that has taken root in your life in such a way that it has become like a fortress. The Bible speaks of this.

It's become like a stronghold in your life. And now you're living with the consequences of that thing being very rooted and very difficult to extract, to deal with in your life.

Okay? But, here's the idea. Where does God's grace fit into this situation? Let me see if that's the next one or the one before. Yeah. Where does God's grace fit in to this situation?

[18:29] Well, there are two primary problems of understanding and application. You see those two words there that were keeping him from living in the grace and knowledge of Jesus and therefore keeping him from experiencing any lasting victory over his sin issue.

Now, if you're saying to yourself, tonight, well, I'm not aware of any ongoing deeply rooted sin problem in my life. You know, I'm not living in secret sin apparently like this person was.

I struggle with sin but I don't really have something that might fall under that category. You might. You might. But what if you don't? Is this for you tonight?

Yes, it is. Now, why would that be the case? Why am I still talking to you if you can't identify with some deeply entrenched sin issue that recurs in your life fairly often and you can't seem to quite shake it or overcome it consistently?

why am I still talking to you if that's not the case for you? Thank you Alonza. That's exactly the answer.

[19:49] Which, what are those, right? Yeah. Whatever's not pleasing to God. So we still, do you have pride? Have you slain pride forever so that it's never rearing its head in your life?

If you say yes, then you've got a pride problem. So, yeah, we're talking about ourselves, aren't we? We're all in that boat tonight together. So we have these two primary problems of understanding and application. We can also say this, these two problems involve misunderstanding and misapplying growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus in his life.

So I'm just using this person as an example of how this works in our lives, but you can use any sin issue, male, female, any season of life.

Now, here's one problem that we're going to break it down and talk about. Two problems, misunderstanding, misapplying, the primary problems of the understanding and application, right? [20:53] Now, let's take it apart a little bit more. So here's the first problem that we have with the way that this person has been approaching this sin issue in his life. One problem was his focus on his sin.

His eyes were firmly fixed on the earthly issues of his failure and on the darkness of the sin itself. You can already see a problem developing there.

This is the wrong approach if his goal is to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus. Now, the question is, why? I'll give you just a second to brainstorm with me and then we'll talk through this. Here's the question on the table. Why is this the wrong approach if his goal is to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus? What can you recognize first off that this is not going to be an effective or successful attempt?

He's focusing on himself instead of on Jesus? Okay, perfect. That's one. What's another one? He's earthly minded instead of heavenly minded.

[22:02] Alright, you guys are nailing it. It's almost like you go to a church where they teach the Bible or something. Good. Praise the Lord. Wow, encouraging. Alright, you've pretty much nailed the basic two things that we're going to talk about as we move through this.

Alright, let's say it in these words. Sin is corrosive and progressive. It's like acid that continues to eat through whatever it's touching.

It's also destructive and caustic. These are very similar concepts, but you understand what I'm saying here. Sin is never satisfied and it always seeks more.

It is progressive in its nature. Sin always wants to take you to the next thing or the next level or both. It's never satisfied to let you stay where you are.

It's insatiable. You feed it and feed it and feed it and it's never satisfied. So it's going to take you to the next place. It may take months, it may take years.

[23:13] Sin will also do this on you. And this is insidious. Sin will morph on you. So you have a drinking problem and you decide to give up your drinking problem only to find that the problem morphs into another problem that's very similar but it's I'm not drinking anymore.

And yet you have now adopted this other sin problem to take its place. We see this all the time working with people who have chemically related issues.

Whether it's pills or injections or liquids or whatever it is. They're constantly chasing something that will help alter their mood and calm their inner spiritual issues that are the root of these things and it can get pretty bad.

So sin will morph on you. Now if you put these two characteristics that we're talking about here together I know there are four bullet points but under corrosive and progressive just look it's never satisfied it's destructive and caustic it always seeks more.

Just take those concepts let's put these two characteristics together and what you have is a spiritual force that draws you here's the first answer into yourself and down into a spiral of hopelessness.

[24:37] This is what Satan wants to do with sin in your life. Because a hopeless Christian is not a thankful Christian. A hopeless Christian is not a joyful Christian.

So there's not much about your life that looks like it's being conformed to Jesus. So he can't rob you of your salvation but he can sure rob you of life. When I talk about life I mean living for Christ because he's deceptive isn't he?

He deceives you. This is real. Have you known people who walk with the Lord but have this constant battle with this kind of depression sliding into melancholy complaining all of the fruit that you see of someone who is rather hopeless.

Alright here's the deal. We don't want to dwell on the sin but the sin and its shame and its guilt seem to plague us.

Now remember we're talking about something in the way of a sin issue that's plaguing you that maybe you've gone unrepentant toward or maybe you're having a hard time repenting of and you feel like a failure in it.

[25:53] You feel like it's winning more than you do. It's winning over you more than you're winning over it. This is what we're talking about. Okay? It seems to hold us in its grip and it seems to remind us of our wrong and our failure.

I read a story today about an older Christian man who was a wonderful kind giving Jesus loving man for 70 years of his life after he came to know Christ.

Now he's old, he's in the hospital, he's dying. And a pastor came to see him and the pastor is the one that told the story. And as they sat there together the man teared up and said I'm having the hardest time because I am full of thoughts about the sins of my youth and the sins that I committed as a younger man.

And the pastor led him to a psalm and read him some verses that speak to the issue of God forgiving the sins of our past.

Forgiving us for the sins of our youthfulness when we were chasing idols and didn't know the Lord and all other sins and told him brother you are resting in the arms of a savior who has promised to forgive you and he has told you in this verse that he has forgotten those things.

[27:22] They're forgotten by God and so he said why are you thinking about them? And he asked him where you think that's coming from because we know it's not coming from the Lord.

Isn't this what sin does? Sin comes up and whispers. Sometimes it shouts. Most of the time it whispers. Alright, this is what so many Christians do in their battle with sin.

They think that growth will happen, spiritual growth will happen if they focus on the sin. Now hear me, the more you focus on your sin, the more your soul is focused on, Michelle said it, you.

And focusing on you keeps you in the mire of your own weaknesses, limitations, failures. So sin wants you to focus on your sin and to focus on the sin in others.

You have marital problems, you have relationship problems, you know why you have those problems? Because one or both of you are focused on the sin of the other person. It's the way it works.

[28:37] You see, we have differences in my marriage. It doesn't become a problem until Jeff stops dealing with himself and starts focusing on the sin of someone else.

Now there's a problem. It's not a problem to disagree. It's not a problem to have tension. You've got two sinners married living in the same house. They're going to be tension. That's not the problem.

The problem is what do we do with the sin that we bring to the issue? Right? You see why I was able to get a seminary degree?

Because this is not rocket science. I was actually able to go, oh, okay. I'm tracking. I'm tracking.

The Lord's good, isn't he?

So, all right, what's the biblical alternative which we're told to pursue in facing off with sin? Folks, it's not that sin is not important.

[29:41] And it's not that sin is something that you ignore and tell yourself it's not there. That's not what I'm talking about when I say don't focus on the sin. So, when I talk about the alternative, I think it'll make more sense about how the Bible tells us to deal with this issue.

Here it is. The biblical alternative in facing off with sin is to confess your sin, repent of your sin, and replace your sin. And so, my question to this person that I was dealing with was, what does that pattern look like in your life with this sin?

Are you calling it confession means that I call it, sorry, means that I call it what God calls it. I call it what God calls it. So, I call it lust.

I call it pride. I name it. I don't rationalize. I don't justify. I don't try to do something to make it sound like it's not as bad as it is.

And then repent. Repent means to turn away from. It means to no longer pursue. Repent is about pursue. It's about direction.

[30:57] Your heart's direction. So, to repent is to turn your heart in a different direction. You put your back to sin and put your heart toward the Lord.

And so, your heart begins to pursue the Lord while your back remains to sin. If you start doing this, you're in trouble. There's no backward glance.

That's what the Lord said. No backward glance. Look to the front. Do not look to the right. Do not look to the left. Look straight ahead. That's what he's talking about. And then finally, replace.

As you turn away from sin, you pursue the Lord. And so, what are you pursuing? You're pursuing conformity to Christ. You're pursuing Jesus. You're pursuing life with your Savior. So, you replace your sin with what pleases Jesus.

So, you ask yourself, instead of lust, what is it that I can replace lust with that will please my Lord in my pursuit of Him, in my walk with Him? When you determine that, you go to Scripture and you get a spiritual plan that takes that replacement and begins to apply it to your life.

[32:11] So, now you're thinking about what this looks like for it to be part of my life and my walk with Jesus each day. And it gets down to the nitty-gritty.

I've worked with people who've had all kinds of issues with chemical dependency and what the world calls addiction, the Bible calls enslavement.

And sometimes it comes down to, alright, we've determined that when you get off of work and you're worn out and you're stressed and you know you're going home to a marriage that's been tense, a lot of it because of you, and you've admitted that to me, right?

Okay. So, we're working on that, but you're still going home to something far less than ideal, and all that's in your mind, and so what do you want? Escape. You want relief.

And so, you're driving home, and what's been your habit now for the last eight and a half months? you take a certain route and drive right by the liquor store and you pull in. You could put your truck on autopilot because that's where it's going.

[33:13] So, what's one of the first things I want to tell this person to do? It's not rocket science. Now, is that going to change his heart?

No. But is it going to help keep him away from his drug? Yes. Because when he's on his drug, I can't help his heart. Because he's intoxicated his heart.

I need him to be not intoxicated. To work with him. So, that's a practical thing that you do.

Then I start working with him about, alright, you're not doing that, what are you going to replace it with? What does it look like for you to pursue Jesus in that truck on the way home?

Do you see what I'm doing? So, he's going to listen to, maybe what does it for him and inspires him is good Christian music. I'm going to help him pick the music.

[34:15] There's a lot of insipid nonsense out there that passes for Christian music. Or, you know, three by five cards that he has in his pocket and stuff now that you can turn on or put in or whatever that's, you know, get the Bible on, yeah, I started to say tape, that's not even a thing anymore.

Help me, Kevin, help me, bro. That's old guys, what can you do? Okay, any questions about that pattern right there? Pretty clear, huh?

you either do that or you don't. So, it comes down to what you think about and where you put your spiritual energies.

So, will you, here's the question, look at that, will you be more problem focused or solution focused?

Are you a glass half empty or a glass half full when it comes to your spiritual walk?

Half empty is problem focused, half full is solution focused. You'll either be sin focused so that, to Jen's point, you'll either be earthly minded or heavenly minded.

[35:30] It makes a difference. All of this now leads to the second issue, the second problem that I want to outline for you this evening.

It's the problem that sabotaged this man's fight for personal purity. And it's when your sins are at center stage, you aren't living from the fountain and foundation of your position in Christ.

Are you with me on that? So that you are not applying yourself to live in the grace and knowledge of Jesus. There's some other foundation, some other fountain flowing that's got you fixated on your sin problem which is another way of saying on you.

God's grace. So a biblical understanding of God's grace and your ability to consistently apply it in your life must be the foundation of all your efforts to become more like Jesus.

This is you trying to understand and live out who you are in the Lord. You've been made a new creature in Christ. Christ. Alright, now, what is God's grace in Christ?

[36:46] How would you explain God's grace to another person? Here is a scripture passage just to save us time. I put it up here on the screen for you. Titus 2, 11 and 12. Notice, for the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires.

and to live sensibly, righteously, and godly in the present age. What a great, great passage, huh? So, in this verse, in this particular verse, grace is personified as Jesus Christ.

So, it could read this way, for Jesus Christ has appeared, bringing salvation to all men and instructing us to deny these things and to live this way.

Alright? This is straightforward as that. Jesus brings us salvation as people made holy in Himself. He instructs us in holy living to the glory of Himself. And Jesus is, is our grace. Jesus is our favor with God.

[38:04] Right? Jesus is our favor. We only stand in the favor of God in the righteousness of Jesus. Is that not true? Amen.

He's our favor. It's beautiful. Jesus ministers also the attribute of grace to us.

So, here is the definition of God's active grace. grace is God's saving favor through Jesus Christ to people who deserve His disfavor.

This grace or favor is constantly active in our lives. grace. We deserve God's wrath and lived under His disfavor as unbelievers.

At the right time, Christ bore our curse and our disfavor with God in His own body as He suffered and died on the cross. That's good theology now.

[39:05] And then, God charged our sin to Christ and credited Jesus' righteousness to us. God treated Christ as we deserved to be treated so that He could treat us as Jesus deserved to be treated.

That's good, isn't it? That's Jerry Bridges. We taught that two times ago. That actually hit the screen two times ago.

So that's not new. It may be new to a couple of us, but we've been teaching this. So the question now then is this.

Let me put this up there. What are you doing to allow God's saving favor, His grace, to instruct you in holy living? Because that's one of the things it says. He instructs us in holy living, the grace of God.

We need to discipline ourselves in a walk of grace with the Lord Jesus. Okay, questions or insights or comments? Paisley.

[40:16] Been a day? Yeah. Me too. What do you think? Questions? Comments? Anything? No?

Alonza, is it boiling? Is it stewing? I'll give you, you need a few more minutes for it to gel. right? only way I can stay walking in grace is I've got to do the word I've got to be singing in prayer and I admit it's extremely long journey It's a long journey and get to that point where we can do that.

Yeah. It's not something, I mean, it's been so many years. Right, that's a great point. A very encouraging point from someone who's been walking with the Lord for some time.

Right, it's a process. And those things that she mentioned are what God uses to minister His grace to us. Look, folks, His grace doesn't just fall out of the sky and get infused into you.

[41:36] Yeah, but it doesn't. It comes through these means of prayer, understanding the Word, applying the Word, confession, repentance, replacement.

This is how God works His favor toward you and in you, in your life. That's the way it is. We call it around here, we refer to all of that as spiritual sweat.

It's not a work that we do to earn anything from God. Remember, over here in our position, everything that we need has been given to us freely in Christ.

We don't have to earn it. We don't have to merit it. We don't have to do anything to convince God to give us more of it. What we need over here is to walk in it, to apply it, to live it, to choose to do the right and then trust God in His wisdom and in His grace and His saving favor to empower us in that constantly.

Now, we trip, we fall, we struggle, and this is one of the reasons that God gave us the church. The church is where we come for solace, comfort, being built up, being made to feel welcome in this struggle.

[42:51] Not to ostracize people who come here and admit that struggle and, oh, well, we don't want you in here. Well, we put our arm around them and say, here, let's get messy together.

And we love each other through these seasons of life with our kids, with our parents, with loss, with death. You know, we rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep and we bear the burdens of one another.

When Greg and I helped establish this church, we've been one full decade together in ministry. When Greg and I helped establish this church, we both had the heart to make sure that this church family was built on the one-anothering of Scripture.

We wanted very much for people in our congregation to be encouraged in entering into the lives and messes of one another, of each other. And not to be intimidated by that and certainly not to be prideful and build a fence around yourself and tell everybody, the only time you have access to me is on Sunday for a brief period of time and then you go your way and I'll go my way and we'll live our lives.

See you next Sunday. Well, I'll tell you straight up, we're not having that here because that's not the church. It's not the church. We're not for you if that's your mindset. If you come here to hide or to pride and you don't want to repent, you won't be comfortable here and we won't let you be.

[44:28] Unrepentant sin is ugly and it's cancerous to the body of Christ. Cancerous. So, yes, bring your mess. But bring your mess in the sense of you want to deal with it.

You want people to come around you that will help you deal with it and keep you accountable. That's the way we walk with the Lord. Alright, let me ask you this.

So, are you leaning into Jesus? Or, are you feeding worldly desires through worldly attitudes and actions?

Are you losing the battle for personal purity? Are you feeling defeated in your fight against your sin because you're teasing and tempting your soul with selfish pleasure?

Are you catering to pride? Are you rationalizing or justifying some aspect of worldliness in your life? Well, it doesn't hurt me to see that.

[45:27] It might hurt another person to see that, but I can handle it. Oh, really? That's the wrong attitude and question to ask. It's not about what you think you can handle.

Does it please the Lord or not? Would you do it with Jesus sitting there next to you? Because He lives in you. Would you say that if Jesus was next to you? Would you treat your wife or your husband that way if Jesus were standing right there with you?

It's not about what would Jesus do. It's what did Jesus do. What is He all about?

The grace of God in Scripture is always a matter of God taking action to love us in His divine favor by doing good to us. That's our pattern. So this good that God does in your life is due to the blessings Jesus secured for you through His sinless life and sin bearing.

See, we can't get away from that foundation, can we? We're constantly growing from that foundation. Not into it, not to get more of it, but to show it, to reflect it.

[46:40] Jesus earned these blessings of God's favor for you. They're already earned. Jesus merited that favor for you on your behalf because you and I never could have done it.

Now, I want to help you know how you can respond to Jesus having earned God's favor for you. I want to help you see how you can obey and apply that Titus 2, 11 and 12 passage as your response of gratitude or thankfulness to God for all that He's done to love you in Jesus.

So if we go back to that passage in our Bibles, now it's time to turn there. Go to Titus 2.

And we're going to read verses 11 through 14 to stage the context of what this is and I'll make a few more comments. He says in verse 11, For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men.

Now we know that that grace is personified in Jesus. Jesus has appeared and He has brought salvation to all men. Jesus is the divine favor of God. And that grace instructs us to deny

ungodliness, to deny worldly desires, and instead in place of to live sensibly, righteously, and godly in the present age.

[48:08] I'm going to define that in just a minute. Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior. There's Jennifer's contribution in terms of heavenly mindedness.

There it is right there. Who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.

Verse 14 gives you that foundation again. Because Jesus has been this and done this for you, this is how you should live. That's what we're doing. Now, it's interesting because in verses 11 through 14, those, what we call verses, are actually one continuous sentence in the Greek.

All of that is one unbroken sentence. Okay? Because Paul is now at the core and foundation of what he's teaching.

That's the point. God has done something revolutionary for you and Paul didn't even pause to take a breath. He had to just get it all out.

[49:18] And what is that? God has supernaturally revealed or made known to you His grace to you in Christ. This is what Paul is so supercharged about.

It means that you've personally received God's greatest gift from heaven. You have Jesus. And in Jesus, you have all the blessings, you have all the treasures, you have all the benefits, you have all the wisdom that God revealed to you and secured for you in His Son.

Now that saving grace hasn't appeared to everyone, but it has to you if you're a Christian. So by the mercies of God on you, God has given you His highest and best gift.

When you get to heaven, there will not be a higher and better gift than the one you already have. You just haven't realized the full weight, benefit, and awesomeness of that gift.

But when you get there, Jesus Himself will outshine and outglory anything else God has for you. And that will be enough because Jesus will sustain us in His love and in His kindness.

[50:29] It's just a marvelous thing. This is the kind of thing you tell people on their deathbed. This is the kind of thing that we remind each other constantly because this is the Gospel.

Okay, so this specially revealed grace to us in Christ is actively teaching us. It's not a passive force. So we want to take full advantage of that instruction to help us grow in Christ. The word for instructing here in this passage, do you see that? It instructs us. It is from a Greek word, paiduo. Paiduo. Paiduo. And it means to educate, to discipline, or to train up. God's grace instructs us in godly thinking and living.

To educate, discipline, or train up. It instructs us in godly thinking and in godly living. Now remember, all of these slides, and we are recording this, so you can go back if you want and access any of this if you miss any of the notes.

[51:36] Then, it is God's gift that you can respond to this instruction with humble, thankful obedience.

The purpose of God's special training and instruction for you as a Christian has a negative and positive side for how you apply it in your life. So now we're talking about how God expects this grace to operate in your life.

what it looks like for you to live this out, to cooperate, to obey, to take it in and live it out. So, we're going to begin with the negative.

Alright? We begin with the negative. The negative side has to do with God's special instruction teaching you to deny certain things in life.

So, deny is a very strong word here used in Scripture. It's very strong. It is often used as denying faith in God. Denying faith in God.

[52:43] That's strong, isn't it? Denying faith in God means you go to hell. This is strong terminology. Or, as God's denial of those who deny Him.

So, this is the ultimate rejection. This is the ultimate denial. That's how strong this word is. The stress is on the action you take to keep certain things out of your life.

I deny them. I reject them. They have no place being in my life. It's as strong as God saying, I deny you.

You have no place in my heaven. Does that put it in perspective for you? This is what God says about grace operating in your life so that you can have this negative approach towards sin. Deny. Reject. Holy. Keep away from. It's not just keeping it at arm's length. It's more than that. [53:47] It's very powerful. All right? He says several things about this in terms of the denial. The first is ungodliness.

It has to do with that. Ungodliness, that means all that is against God and contrary to His truth. If it's anti-God or anti-word, anti-truth, then you're to reject it and keep it as far away from you as possible.

Keep it out of your home. Keep it out of your life. And don't think that you can take ungodliness into your life through any medium and not be affected by it, whether it's music or whatever.

Movies. Suzanne and I had this cool documentary. I don't even remember what it was now. This was maybe a month ago.

This thing or something we were watching and there was a theme that came up in it that was ungodly and they were making light of it and we just both said, yeah, well, we're done with that.

[54:52] Just be careful. We are to keep ourselves from this kind of ungodliness knowing that the wrath of God is being poured out on all ungodliness.

Romans 1.18. Okay? And then worldly desires. Instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and instead to live.

Worldly desires. Ungodly wants. Ungodly desires. Rooted in greediness for what God forbids.

That's what this means. You get greedy for what God rejects.

What God doesn't want in your life and you do it anyway. That is a worldly desire. Paul calls them deceitful lusts or lusts of deceit in Ephesians 4.22 if you want another reference.

And he says we're to put them off. We're to put off these ungodly desires. These worldly desires. But we're also to put something on.

[55:57] In this case, two things are mentioned. Okay? First, the first thing that we're to put on is something that I'm very glad he spells out for us because this is telling me what I'm to replace this other stuff with.

If I'm going to deny this stuff, then I turn this way. Now what? Right? Now what do I do? What should I pursue? What am I to live out? And we see this.

We are to live out something in verse 12. We are to look for something in verse 13. So look at it this way. I do this constantly to help myself.

What we're talking about is living out and looking for. What am I to live out? What am I to look for? So he's telling me what I'm supposed to do with my behavior and he's telling me what I'm supposed to do with my attitude.

Where should my attitude be fixed? Toward heaven. Look for Jeff. Where should my focus be? My hope be? Where should I prioritize from?

[57:07] What should be informing my decision making? A heavenly perspective. A heavenly attitude. You'll hear more about that Sunday. Heavenly perspective is a big theme for Sunday.

God willing and I have breath for life. Alright? So look at it with me. Instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously, and godly in the present age.

I'll put this up here so you can see it and then you'll have slides for it if you want to go back.

Sensibly is *sophronos*. And it means with a sound mind.

Self-controlled. Soberly. Hence sensibly. So you don't want anything clouding your judgment. You don't want anything confusing your mental acuity and your ability to discern and understand the will of God as it's been written in Scripture.

You don't want to confuse yourself. So this is you living wisely and prudently to keep control over your desires and your passions. You don't feed your desires and passions in earthly ways or you're going to get earthly results.

[58:21] Worldly. So you possess. You hold to. You keep yourself under good control through wise-mindedness. Now that last word is something we don't use often enough.

Wise-mindedness. What does it mean to be wise-minded? It means you're heavenly-minded. You're taking on the priorities of what God says are priorities. What He says is valuable. Important. Worthy of your pursuit, brother. Right? Wise-mindedness. You live sensibly so that you can live wise-minded. That's what it means. Righteously is dikaios. It means uprightly, justly, properly. So it describes our obligation to live the way God prescribes and describes as His standards for His kids.

[59:22] So you allow God's grace to train you to live in agreement with what God says is right for you. God is training your heart and your mind to live in full agreement with what He says is right and good.

So you're not redefining good. You're allowing God to train your heart and mind in what is good. And then you get after it. The alternative is that you disobey or you remain ignorant. Either one is a recipe for disaster. I hope you're seeing that grace is a very active and operative force in our life that calls us to action.

Okay? And then finally we have this word godly. To live godly in this present age. Usabos. In a godly manner.

It's the opposite of ungodly which we said means all that is against the Lord. So in our church we're fond of saying make it about Jesus. That's a way of each of us saying live godly.

[60:35] Live godlike. Make it about Jesus. Make your marriage about Jesus. I think about you guys going on vacation. Something as everyday as that.

Make your vacation about Jesus. You know? Make your parenting about Jesus. Doug, make your business about Jesus. I mean it's that practical isn't it?

Yeah. And if you say well I don't know how to do that. Just stick around. We'll show you. Godliness is making your life about Jesus.

It's about pleasing Him in everything you think, say, and do. Now we're also instructed by God's grace to look for something and looking for it emphasizes what you put your trust and hope and expectations in.

It's what you set your heart on. So this is a way of him saying, Paul telling Titus, set your heart on these things. Set your heart on these things.

[61:38] This is what you should look for. And so here it's talking about a watchful, glad anticipation. Do you have a watchful, glad anticipation about your Christian life?

It means you live looking forward to something. Looking forward to a cruise is so awesome. but that's not what this is about. This is beyond that.

The rest of verse 13 tells us what we're to gladly anticipate and be excited about. And here it is. The glorious return of Jesus. Which marks the ultimate triumph of godliness over ungodliness in our lives.

Now, I hope that does excite you. But I'm going to say the quiet part out loud. This might not immediately thrill you because you might not realize or understand how this relates to you overcoming your sin, your problems, and the difficulties of your life.

But it is here. I say this to people or teach this, whether I'm in a counseling room or whatever, and their face isn't immediately ready to go, oh, that's so wonderful.

[62:53] They want to say it because Jesus' return is what this is all about, but it's not immediately evident to them how this is going to help my marriage, how this is going to help me with this sin problem.

I'm glad Jesus is coming back. That's going to be a great day, Jeff, but before then I've got to live with this. So now what do I do? All right? That's fair. That's fair. But what this is talking about, it's talking about you being heavenly minded and not earthly minded about who you are and what you are here for.

Jesus' return has everything to say about who you are and what you're here for. If you're a Christian, his return says, I'm coming to get you, but in the meantime, you're here.

Now you need to ask yourself, why am I leaving you here? Why are you still here? Jeffrey?

More to do. I have breath for life because there's more for me to do in demonstrating conformity to Christ in my life. And that may involve you, that may involve you.

[64:18] I know it involves that woman on the back row back there. Alright, look, while you're not in heaven yet, and while you must still deal with sin in your life, you belong to Jesus.

He's your power over sin in your life. He's your power. Your relationship with Jesus is the key to you overcoming sin in your life. Sin doesn't define you any longer.

Jesus defines you because He lives in you. say, yeah, well, so does sin, Jeff. Yeah, well, you need to ask yourself who's more powerful, your sin or Jesus. He is more powerful, but you do have a choice.

You do have a choice who you're devoted to and who you're loyal to, and that will be the difference. Travis? Yeah, what dog are you feeding, he said. There's a lot of reality in that.

Mark? Mark? Mark? In what sense, brother? So, in, prior to you, you're not free.

[65:28] You are enslaved to the will of faith, and that is the will that you'll do. once you become saved, and that allows for the opportunity for us to please God and please him live with, and we are free to make that choice because he's no longer dead.

Okay. Thank you for clarifying that, brother. Let me see if I understand. If I paraphrase it this way, are we on the same page, or do I need to clean it up some? So, now I'm free to obey, whereas when I was an unbeliever, I wasn't.

Okay. So, you got that? Now we're free to obey. Man, can you imagine what a gift that is? Thank you, brother. What a gift. I couldn't obey before.

No. No. Now we can. So, what does it do for you to know that you can leave this place tonight, and before you ever go to bed, there are actually attitudes of your heart and actually behaviors of your life that can offer pleasing, pleasing aroma to you, a pleasing, satisfying gift to your Lord who did this for you.

I can offer that. Before I couldn't do that. Now I can. Now I can. that can come from me. All right, just a couple more things and we're done.

[67:08] God's grace, we're talking about grace being his special saving favor on your life, that's Jesus, is actively teaching you to deny this ungodliness and to be wisely self-controlled as you live in agreement with what God says is right and best for you.

Now God does all this through the power of the Holy Spirit, working God's word into your heart and out into how you live. What is it that comes in and short circuits that spiritual active process in your life?

Sin, worldly desires that you pursue, that you give into, that short circuits that in that moment. And if you stay on that course in unrepentance, then you will find yourself caving to more and more of those kinds of behaviors and attitudes and desires.

And you can really work yourself into a hole if you're not careful. So we need to learn to repent quickly and thoroughly. And so this is my last comment.

Make your life about Jesus in all that you think, say, and do, so that your heart is trained in a glad anticipation of Jesus coming, to get you and take you to his glory in heaven.

[68:30] So the second coming is more than just some distant hope. It actually trains our hearts in how to live for Christ now. And that's the whole point of this lesson.

And that's why we titled it the way we did. Okay, last minute or two, what questions or comments might you have about any of this? Any insights you want to share?

Maybe something triggered in your mind? Anything? Right? Do you feel like this is practical for you? So when I taught this in Poland, I remember a number of people coming up to me over the next day or two and saying to me, I have never heard anybody teach or had anybody say what you said about not focusing on your sin.

And that's not, I'm not stroking me. I'm saying the Word teaches this. We just need to teach the Word. Right? Just teach the Word because God does say this.

[69:40] And it's very, very plain. All right, we want to remember to pray for you guys as you travel. When do you leave, Kevin? Leave Saturday, you'll be gone for a few weeks.

Suffering for the Lord in? Oh, no. So we really do need to pray for you. Oh, my goodness. I'm sure.

Yeah. Okay. But we're glad for you. I'm teasing you, but we're glad for you, brother. I mean, y'all have been working hard your whole lives and now you get to do some things that allow you to be with some other people.

You take the Lord with you as you do that and it's just a wonderful blessing. All right, any other ways that we can pray before we close out tonight? Anything pressing that we can know about? Your continued recovery, your sanity. Hey, we love our moms, but you know, there's a reason that we move and we raise our kids and they drive us crazy.

[70:48] All right, God bless you guys. The Lord loves you. You're a delight and you're a tremendous encouragement to your pastors. More than we can tell you.

You're welcome. It's a joy and a great privilege. All right, let's pray together. Father, we thank you that you give us Jesus, your highest and greatest treasure, that you have not withheld from us the best of the very best.

How you must love us to give us what you love most. Thank you, God, for our Savior. Thank you for your gospel that leads us to good works and helps us to build treasure even in heaven.

thank you for all these blessings. We pray that you will bless Kevin and Angela and do keep them safe, Lord, in their travels. I pray that you will give them a refreshing and restful time together as a couple.

And I pray that you will deepen their love for you and for one another, that you will safeguard them in the gospel and give them many gospel opportunities to speak to others about their hope in Christ and make them bold.

[72:06] And ready to love others in that way. Again, I thank you for Alonza and just the sweet, sweet blessing that she is to our church. Thank you for bringing these folks out this evening, Lord, and teaching us your word.

May we live in this wonderful godliness that you tell us is your grace in Christ. It's in his name we pray. Amen. Amen.