

# “Amazing Grace, Amazing Graciousness” //

## Titus 3:1–11 // *Everyday Theology* 3

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### Prayer time for MLK; Sanctity of Life Sunday

Good morning, Summit Church... I want us to begin by recognizing **how important this weekend** is in the life of our nation. Each year, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of January is Sanctity of Life Sunday, 1<sup>st</sup> established about **30 years ago** to **highlight the truth** that the life of every human being, at all stages, is sacred, including those not yet born. In my lifetime, **more than 50 million children** have been terminated by abortion. **Each of those represents** not only the loss of a life but a story of tragedy that affects everyone involved.

This is **never a time to condemn**; it's a time to **redeem, to receive and give grace**, but also to **pray for a better way**—a way forward that embraces life.

And Monday is **Martin Luther King, Jr day**, a day in which **we remember** the accomplishments made **not only** by Martin Luther King but by many others who fought to bring **justice to our society and to recognize** that all people are made equally in the image of God. Here we are, **50 years later**, having enjoyed **real progress**, but having yet to achieve the dream of which Dr. King spoke.

**These two observances aren't in competition with one another.**

They confront us, in fact, with the same reality: the reality that each human is **made in the image** of God; that **each human life**, of whatever type, and at whatever stage, is precious to God. The sinful human heart has a habit of demeaning human life when it gets in the way of our own expediencies... so this is a time for us, as the people of God, to repent, and to ask for God's kingdom to come.

So would you join me in prayer?

### Introduction

TITUS 3: *Several years ago I read a book about being a Christian on a college campus and it asked one of the most **honest, insightful questions** I'd ever considered: What do you do when you feel like you want your neighbor to go to hell?<sup>1</sup>*

It explained that many **Christians feel a considerable amount** of anger toward the culture around them. They feel angry at **how they seem to be portrayed** in the media; how the other side seems to **twist reality** and get away with it.

- I'm **watching a show** right now... Christian politician. She's like the worst person. Judgmental. Mean. Dumb. A knuckle-dragging Neanderthal.
  - And nobody seems to object. In fact, the more a **movie** does this, the more the critics seem to love it.
- Or when the news finds **somebody to interview** to get the Christian perspective, *“Well, God sent the tornado because of all the gay people and the Democrats...”* And I'm like, *“Where do they find that guy?”* I have a church where more than 9K Christians gather on the weekend... and I don't know that guy... I mean, you're probably here right now, but you're not prevalent; you don't make up the majority.” Talk to these people.

But a lot of Christians **feel anger** at always being presented that way. (*And I am **not saying that is the whole truth**, but it is a feeling.*) You are tired of **liberal professors** rewriting history; **activist judges** redefining morality; **liberal theologians** rewriting the Bible.

- Or you hear a guy like Christopher Hitchens say, *“Faith causes people to be more mean, more selfish, and perhaps above all, more stupid.”* And you say, *“He's talking about me!”* Is this group more mean, more selfish, and more stupid than everyone else in our community?

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<sup>1</sup> Randy Newman, *Questioning Evangelism*, 228.

**Randy Newman**, author of the book I was telling you about a minute ago, said, “Many Christians appear angry in the media because they are angry.” And **we’d never say it out loud**, but we have this attitude of “Well, you’ll get yours one day.” (Is **anyone tracking** with this? ONLY ME?)

• We feel **defensive, guarded... Illus.** When I lived in SE Asia, there was a small **Christian church** tucked right in the middle of a **Muslim community**... small ethnic church that had been there for years... been robbed and vandalized so many times, they had walls with broken glass. I always thought this gave a picture of our heart. Fearful. Guarded. “*Cross me, and I will cut you.*”

In **Titus 3** Paul talks about **how the gospel re-shapes** how we feel about people on the outside. **People who dislike us; who misrepresent or even persecute us.** He says, [1] Remind them (believers) **to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, [2] to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.** (Key word: ‘all.’ Not just Christians, but toward all people... even, or especially, your enemies).

• He tells them to **disagree without dishonoring**. Great **example** of this is depicted in the movie *Selma* that’s out now about MLK. Here you have a **guy representing a group** in our country who had every right to be angry. But we see **Dr. King leading people** to be **gentle and courteous**, to return **good for evil**; to be **both submissive** toward government and **subversive** at the same time; to **disagree without dishonoring**.

**That’s the command** Paul gives. But look what he does **next** (this is so **classic Paul**) [3] **For...** (because)... and then he gives one of the **clearest, most concise** explanations of the gospel found anywhere in all of his letters.

**This is** the key to interpreting all of Paul’s teaching: **Commands** always **flow out of gospel declarations**. It’s **not that we do** these things and that makes us better people that God approves of. **It’s that**

**when we become aware of** what God has done for us in Christ, we become these ways.

**Luther said it this way: Imperatives (in the Bible) always flow out of indicatives.**

- *Remember English class?* (Sentence diagramming) Imperatives are commands; indicatives are statements of fact. Imperatives (commands of what God wants us **to do**) flow out of indicatives (declarations of what he **has done**).
- Before the gospel tells you to behave or become it tells you to behold, for beholding is the way to become and when you become you’ll behave. Beholding makes your heart become righteous; and when you become righteous, you do righteousness naturally.

So we’ll divide this message into 2 parts: **indicative and imperative**. We’ll look first at the indicative of what Paul declares to us about the gospel; and then the imperatives of what he wants us to do in response.

*Vs. 3, he starts with a description of us, and it is a really dismal one:*

[3] **For we ourselves were once foolish,**

- **“Foolish”** is a word in Greek meaning “ignorant” and “warped.” Literally, our hearts became spiritually stupid. We became **moral morons**.
  - The Apostle John says we began to **love “darkness”** rather than light.
    - The **light looked dark**; the dark looked light; **right seemed wrong** and wrong seemed right.
  - Paul said (Romans 1:21) we became **twisted in our minds** and disordered in our emotions.
    - Martin Luther paraphrased that verse to say we **“curved inward”** on ourselves.
- **“disobedient”**: It’s **not just that our morality** got distorted; we disobeyed even those things we knew to be right.
  - **Schaeffer**: Invisible tape recorder/SIRI

- **“led astray”**: *Our hearts got into a condition that we were susceptible to deception.* It’s not that we were **honestly tricked**; we wanted to be tricked. (It’s like the person who wants to hate somebody else and so finds reason to justify his hatred.)
  - **People often blame** their issues on those who influenced them... **“Oh, I just hung out with the wrong crowd.”** But the reason you hung out with the wrong crowd was you liked them better than you did the right crowd. We didn’t just hang out with the wrong crowd; we were the wrong crowd which is why we preferred them.
  - We were **born with a disposition toward** the wrong, **which makes us so deceivable!** We see this in our **kids**, don’t we? Nobody gets up on Sat morning and their 5<sup>th</sup> grader has cleaned the house, sitting there reading his Bible, journaling, “I just need to surrender more of my life to the Lord.” No... We say, “Uhh... Who set the backyard on fire? And no, don’t point at your sister, she’s 2 months old.”
  - No one had to teach my kids to lie. I’ve never sent them to “disrespect camp.”
  - Our hearts are **ready** to be led astray.
- **“slaves to various passions”**
  - Our **separation from God** left a gap in our hearts that made us dependent on other things.
    - **Blaise Pascal**: God’s absence left a void... vacuum. We couldn’t say no to the desires of our bodies.
    - Think of it like **drowning**: You don’t die from holding your breath; you die from breathing in water. When you are not breathing in air, you have to breathe in something else. **Same with spiritual breath!** When you are **not breathing in the glory** of God, you will find something else to breathe in.
  - Y’all... the **biggest lie of our culture**: rejecting God’s laws leads to freedom. It is **exactly the opposite**... When we reject God, we become addicted to, slaves to other passions...
    - **Like a fish...**
    - It is the **absence of the love of her Heavenly Father** that makes the high school girl the *slave* of boys... Serial dater.
    - It is the **college guy’s sense of alienation** from his heavenly Father that makes him a slave to other people’s opinions.
      - We are made to hear “Well done, son!” from our heavenly Dad and absent of that we crave to hear it from someone.
    - **It is (often) the absence of purpose and identity** ir Christ creates a craving that enslaves you to your bodily desires. (pornography and alcohol)
    - Your soul can’t hold its breath; you have to breathe in the fulfillment of these false idols.
- **“...passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.”**
  - **Whenever you put something** or someone else in the place of God, you end up hating it when it inevitably disappoints you. **Jonathan Edwards said**, “*What you idolize, inevitably you demonize.*”
  - I know it’s **ironic**, but it’s the way it works. You put **so much weight on it** that it collapses and you hate it.
    - Like an **old bridge** with a sign: “Max weight 2 tons.” In other words, if you are driving a tractor-trailer filled with a cargo of steel building tresses, don’t drive it across this bridge! This bridge is not designed for that kind of weight... it will collapse.
    - Same thing happens with your soul. We put too much weight on these things and they collapse so we hate them.
  - That’s why **some marriages that start out so well** go bitter.
    - Drowning in a sea... sucks the life out of each other and hate each other.

- That's why some you so struggle with jealousy toward those who have more money than you... **you want money** and they have it and you don't, or they have kept you from it and you hate them for it.
- ~~If you **love the praise of others**... you hate others who get praised more than you because they are *stealing your glory!*~~
- If you **idolize family**... you end up become bitter and self-pitying when your family disappoints you.
  - Or maybe you **hate your spouse** because they have messed up your family.
    - Inability to forgive is a form of hate. You hate your ex-spouse because they destroyed the family situation you had always yearned for, and you could never forgive them for that reason.
  - You hate others; you are hated by others. Your kids resent you because you are always trying to control them.
- **What you idolize you demonize!** When you put something in the place of God, it puts you into a place where your **soul shrivels** and you become **guarded and hateful** toward anyone who threatens it.
  - Great picture of this in J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy with Gollam... "*My precious.*" When *Lord of the Rings* was published in the 1950s, a woman wrote Tolkien, objecting that the Dark Lord would never put all his power into a ring. That would make him vulnerable. "Yes, but this is always what we do. We place all our hope and power, in some external object, which is thus exposed to capture or destruction with disastrous results to oneself."<sup>2</sup> Our life depends on that *one thing!*

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<sup>2</sup> See story in Tim Keller, *Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering*, 169.

*Hated by others and hating one another... Foolish... disobedient... led astray... slaves to your passions... living our days in malice and envy... This is who you are. God has 1000 reasons to condemn us.*

- We like to think of ourselves as mostly good with a few rough spots to sand down... a couple bad spots to cut out.
- No, **sin has corrupted and killed you.**

One of my **favorite depictions of this** is in Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*...

- A young handsome man named Dorian Gray decides to have his portrait painted.
- As he gazes at his finished portrait, he thinks, "If only we could **reverse our roles!** If only my portrait would do all the aging, while I remain youthful and unchanged forever."
- He gets his wish—he remains a **handsome young socialite**, while the portrait, hidden away in his attic, begins to age.
- The portrait also begins to bear the **consequences of the real man's behavior**:
  - Dorian makes a **cruel comment**, and the mouth on the portrait twists into a cruel grin;
  - Dorian **nurses hatred** for a rival, and the eyes of the portrait narrow in rage;
  - Eventually Dorian **murders** a man, and the hands of the portrait drip blood.
- When Dorian finally recognizes that the terrible portrait represents his true inner self, he despises the painting so much that he slashes it with a knife.
- Later, a servant finds that the portrait in the attic has vanished, and Dorian Gray lies dead on the floor with a knife through his heart.<sup>3</sup>

This is what Paul says had happened to you.

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<sup>3</sup> Philip Yancey, *Rumors*, Ch. 9: "The Gift of Guilt," 153.

**“Well, how was your day at church?”** “We heard a talk on eternal damnation and why we all deserve it. How was yours?”

But can’t you admit that there’s a problem, and the problem is in your heart?

- A. Stanley point out. As we get older, we get better at filtering things. But all at once, in a moment of weakness, something will break through to the surface. We like to say, “Oh, that is not really me.” But it is. That is the real, unfiltered you.
- Ever play that game with a lover... “What are you thinking now?” When you’re infatuated it is safe. That’s a game you learn is not safe several years into your marriage, because they might ask it when you’re thinking: “How much weight have you gained?”
- *How would you like it if there were someone who, at any point, could read out what you’re thinking?* You learn to mask your heart, but you are sick *in here*.

Paul calls that problem “spiritual death.” We are dead in our sin.

[4] “But...” That’s a huge but. The beauty of the gospel is in that word ‘but.’

But notice that before Paul gets there he has brought you face to face with your depravity.

- “We were once foolish...”
- Sometimes we want to skip over this to get to the gospel...
- You’ll never appreciate the beauty of the gospel until you understand your depravity. It will never make you **weep for joy** or change you...
- **SPURGEON:** “Too many think lightly of sin, and therefore think lightly of the Savior. He who has stood before his God, convicted and condemned, with the rope about his neck, is the man to weep for joy when he is pardoned, to hate the evil which has been forgiven him, and to live to the honour of the Redeemer by whose blood he has been cleansed.”

- SCHAEFFER: Francis Schaeffer, one of our country’s greatest defenders of the faith, was once asked, “What would you do if you met a modern man on a train and had just one hour to talk to him about the gospel?” Schaeffer replied, “I would spend 45–50 minutes on the negative, to really show him his dilemma—that he is morally dead—then I’d take the last 10-15 minutes to preach the (good news of the) gospel.”<sup>4</sup>

[4] But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, [5] he saved us,

- **God is the only actor.** It’s not that I did my best and he graded on the curve? No he did it all.
- What was my part of salvation?
  - I did all the sinning; he did all the saving.
  - I’m not in vs. 4; he’s not in vs. 3.
- You say, “What is my part?” Do I have to **be good**, and do **my best**, and he’ll take care of the rest?
  - No, from start to finish it is his work and must be received as a gift.
  - Like waking up in an **ambulance**

...not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy,

- Not goodness in my heart that led to salvation, but love in his.
- It owed nothing to my righteous works, or my good intentions, or my promises to be better.
- Mercy: God withholding from us what we deserve.

He did it:

...by the washing of regeneration

- “Washing”: He cleanses us from the stain of sin.
  - Like Jesus healed the lepers...

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<sup>4</sup> Schaeffer continued, “...I believe that much of our evangelistic and personal work today is not clear, simply because we are too anxious to get to the answer without having a man realize the real cause of his sickness, which is true moral guilt (and not just psychological guilt feelings) in the presence of God.”

- (Naaman)?
- Baptism is a picture of this. Durham tap water... *There is a fountain, filled with blood, drawn from Emmanuel's veins, and sinners plunged beneath that flood... The dying thief...*
- “...of regeneration”
  - That’s a **very powerful and explosive** word in Greek. *Paliggenesia*. Term the Greek philosophers used for reincarnation... they believed life **goes in cycles**: the world **corrupts and is reborn**. Paul says, “No... the world does not simply go in cycles; regeneration happened once in the resurrection Jesus and he puts that power in you now when you believe in him.”
  - Greek philosophers in Paul’s day would have gone nuts when they read that because that was *their* word. Paul says, “This regeneration you are looking for is something God puts in you when you believe on Jesus.”
  - The power God is going to exercise at the end of time to heal everything (the whole world) comes into your life now. Partially, yes, but actually. It begins to do its healing work...
  - Tim Keller calls it **time travel**.
- **Never underestimate the power of the new birth!**
  - It’s the power of resurrection; the power that God will use to restore the entire earth *There is no hurt, no fear, no guilt, no corruption, **nothing** in your life this cannot remove, redeem, or heal.*
  - The people God used to change the world were deeply flawed people. Peter was a coward. Paul was harsh and abrasive. The new birth made them incredible men of power.
  - *They changed history, and they were not made of more promising material than you.*<sup>5</sup>

...and **renewal** of the Holy Spirit,

- Re-new. Made new again. Our hearts are “retrained” for righteousness.
- In chapter 2 Paul talks about how the grace of God “**trains**” (2:11) us in righteousness. Training is “**paideia**” and it has the idea of not of imparting knowledge, but of strengthening or maturing, like you do with children, or an atrophied muscle.
  - I once was working with a trainer and he was trying to get me to adopt a certain form... I couldn’t do it. He kept saying, “Do it this way...” (as if **explaining to me** is what I needed!) “I know what you are trying to get me to do! I get that—here (in the mind). My muscle can’t do it.”
  - **That’s what we need morally**. We need **power**. We don’t need to turn over a **new leaf**; we need infusion of new life. Not a **resolve to do better**, but a resurrection in power.
  - And **that’s what God’s grace** gives us: Grace is power, not just pardon.

[6] whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,  
[7] so that being justified by his grace

- Whereas Mercy.... God withholding from us what we deserve; grace is God giving us what we do not deserve.
- See the words, “He poured out... richly... lavishly...” Costly for him but free for us.
- GRACE: God’s riches at Christ’s expense.

...we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

- In him you get everything that God has to offer. All the promises of God are yes in Christ Jesus!
- **Illus.** “The one who gets the son takes it all.”

**That’s the indicative: He declares to us the core of our faith.** But Paul was not just giving us a doctrinal lecture for the sake of a lecture; he was urging us toward a behavior. Those are the imperatives, and I have two:

<sup>5</sup> Keller, T. J. (2013). *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive*. New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church.

## The Imperative for Unbelievers: *You must be born again.*

- **You are under the condemnation of sin.**
  - *It's left you guilty... TWO WAYS TO PAY*
  - *Dead... you don't need reformation; you need new life*
  - *You need death and resurrection!*
- *This is **vastly different** than moral reformation. People often confuse Christian conversion with moral reformation.*
- **With moral reformation you're mostly good.** God looks at you and sees you like you see a banana with a bad spot. He said, "I see some potential."
  - No: "Sin didn't knock us down to God's JV team or put us on probation or put you on a slower track to get our mansion in heaven. Sin wiped us out."<sup>6</sup>
- **With moral reformation you're in charge.** *You decide what to do. You decide how far to go. You decide to do it. You set the goals, and you get to them.*
  - **Receiving the power of the kingdom of God** *is something that's done to you, and you have no idea where it's going to take you. You can only surrender and receive it as a helpless beggar.*
- **It has to be received as a gift!** The only way it can be received. Nothing in my hands I bring...

## The Imperative for Believers: See the unbelieving world through this lens.

Go back to that list in vv. 1–2. What do you see there?

- Humility (the word he used is 'submissiveness')
  - God saved you; you didn't save yourself. And he didn't save me because I was smarter or more moral...
  - Essentially we were a world of zombies...
- Gentleness (or, patience)
  - Of course they don't understand.
  - Restored to sanity on top of building.

- The means God uses is the gospel
- Deeply compassionate
  - Vs. 1, He says, you show a regard *for all*... Because they are dead like you were, but made in the image of God like you
  - **And then, the world starts to look different.** 2.2 billion people around the world
  - You'll find yourself **giving away your money** and your **time** to serve
- Ready (eager) to do good works: not just that you have to. You **want** to, to **glorify God** and **love others** because it is your nature!

*God is after a people who are gracious because he is gracious; who treat others as they have been treated.*

***These things, Paul says, authenticate our faith before the outside world!*** [8] *The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works.*

Roy Hattersley, the former deputy leader of the Labour Party in the UK, and a public, outspoken atheist said, (and this is fascinating) –

*The arguments against religion are well known and persuasive... Yet men and women who believe... are the people most likely to take the risks and make the sacrifices involved in helping others.... Good works, the Christian John Wesley insisted, are no guarantee of a place in heaven. But they are most likely to be performed by people who believe that heaven exists.*

*The correlation is so clear that it is impossible to doubt that faith and charity go hand in hand... It ought to be possible to live a Christian life without being a Christian.... Yet men and women who, like me, cannot accept the mysteries and the miracles, do not go out with the Salvation Army each night.*

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<sup>6</sup> From Louie Giglio sermon on John 3, "Choose Life."

*The only possible conclusion is that faith comes with a packet of moral imperatives that... make them morally superior to atheists like me. (We may boast that the truth of atheism has freed us from the shackles of religion...) but it has not made us as admirable as the average volunteer in the Salvation Army.”<sup>7</sup>*

Paul says, “**These good works authenticate your faith to the outside world.**” In fact, he asks, “**Without these changes,** can you really say your faith is real?”

- (Remember the **Mack Truck** illustration?) You can’t have encountered the grace of God and still treat **sin casually**... you can’t understand salvation and be **lukewarm** in how you see God; you couldn’t have tasted of God’s incredible grace and still be a **stingy, ungenerous, unforgiving** person toward others.

## (Conclusion)

So, Paul says in conclusion (to the whole book)

[8] The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people. [9] But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. [10] As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, [11] knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned. (Titus 3:1–11)

The point: **Don’t get distracted.** This is the main thing. Make the **cross the center** of your life and the focus of your ministry!

**Avoid controversies**... People who major on rules; rituals; styles of worship; minor points of doctrine like Calvinism or eschatology.

Because **when you talk about those things** all the time you’re covering up, or neglecting, the major part of Christianity, and the **only thing with power**—the cross!

The only thing in the Bible called the “power of God” is salvation! (Romans 1:16). All the **powers of the new age** and new life in it... **by believing it** resurrection is released into you!

So **get yourself into a place** where the gospel of grace is heralded and rejoiced in and talked about and soaked in every week

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<sup>7</sup> Parentheses indicate a paraphrase by me for the sake of clarity, though I believe I remain faithful to his intent. Quoted in Tim Chester, *Titus*, 113–114.



