

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

Hope for Change
Pastor Joshua Mack
Titus 2:11-14
December 13, 2015

Today we have, as I mentioned earlier, one of the guests that we have with us today is Joshua Mack. Josh really feels like a part of our family before he even got here because Dr. Wayne and Carol Mack are so dear to us, and Beth Mack de Swardt has been a missionary and dear part of our church as well for eight or nine years now, maybe ten. And so, anyway, Josh is here today to bring God's word. I want to just say a word of introduction about him.

He and his wife, Marta, moved to Pretoria, South Africa nine years ago. He is the pastor of Living Hope Church, a church there in the city of Pretoria. And also, the leader of One Hope for Africa, The Baby House, and the effort to unite orphans with homes that can care for them. We've talked about before the great problem in Africa of so many orphans because of the scourge of AIDS, so that has been a great ministry. He shared about that in Sunday morning Bible study. He has his Master of Divinity from The Master's Seminary, and his Doctorate of Ministry from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. But he is a dear friend and brother in the Lord, and we are delighted to have him bring God's word this morning.

Well, it is great to be with you, and I'm just so thankful for this opportunity. I bring you greetings from my parents, and from my wife, and from my children, and from our church there, and it is just so good to be family in Christ. It is a really great privilege to know that God's people are worshipping here, and in Germany, and in South Africa. So I'm really thankful especially for the privilege of sharing God's word with you. So if you'll take your Bibles, and open with me to the book of Titus, I want us to look together at Titus 2:11-14, and think a little today about change. What does the Bible teach about change? Is it actually possible for a person to change? I was just at a counseling conference, and so I thought this would be an appropriate subject to speak about. That is one of the reasons why I'm here, a counseling conference this past week, and obviously a counseling conference is all about helping people change.

So I think it is helpful that we ask ourselves as Christians—*Do we really believe that it is possible for people who are struggling with serious sins to actually change?* I mean, we obviously *say* we believe that, but *why* do we believe that? Why do we as Christians believe that people can change? Because the fact is, a lot

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of people don't. They don't believe that, a lot of people don't believe that people can change at a fundamental core level. It is almost like you are who you are, just learn to live with it. That is how you came into the world and it is sort of useless for you to fight it.

In fact, it seems like in many cases it is actually becoming offensive to say that someone can change. If you want to make people angry, for example, you might talk about someone who struggles with homosexual desires changing. I know, for example, if you talk to a lot of people about teenagers, and sexual purity, there are a lot of people who would say, "That is simply not possible. Teenagers can't change." Or nowadays, you can actually even make people angry by simply talking about someone who likes to dress like a woman changing. You wouldn't think it was radical to say that a man who wants to be a woman can overcome that temptation and live his life as a man. But nowadays, that is becoming more and more radical to believe because people just don't believe in change.

And really, honestly, if you were going to just be super straight up, I wonder how many of you have ever wondered if people can really change. I mean, obviously, superficial changes, we all believe that can happen, but I'm talking deep down fundamental changes, at the heart level. Is it actually possible for someone who struggles with say an overwhelming amount of sexual lust, and has spent years and years looking at pornographic material, to become someone who lives a holy mature life? For someone who struggles with homosexual desires, we might believe change is necessary, but sometimes it doesn't feel like it is possible, and especially for those who sin struggles are different than our own. That is the thing, this is what sort of takes it to another level, because obviously it is sometimes tempting to even look at your own life, and wonder, "Can I change?" There may be some of you who are feeling hopeless in regards to your own personal struggles, but if that is tempting, when you are sitting down with someone who is struggling with a sinful desire, or a sinful issue that is different than one you have ever struggled with before, and he is feeling overwhelmed and hopeless, and you have the whole world telling you, "He cannot change," and that you are being unkind and uncompassionate to even suggest that he might change. It is tempting to wonder, "Are they right? Is change really possible for someone who is struggling with a sin like this?"

That is actually part of what I love about Titus 2, because we are not the first ones to ever ask questions about a group of people like that. In fact, Paul is writing this letter to someone named Titus who is living on the Island of Crete, and there were

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a lot of people in the ancient world who would have looked at the Cretans and been asking these very same kinds of questions. Many scholars say if there was one group in the ancient world that most people would have felt like was beyond the hope of ever changing, it would have been the people who lived on the Island of Crete. People didn't have a lot of hope for Cretans, not even Cretans actually. Paul says that one of their prophets has written in Titus 1:12, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons," and what gets me, of course, is that word 'always'. People didn't have a lot of hope for Cretans changing, but when it came to the church, and the Cretan believers, Paul definitely did. This is part of why he left Titus there actually. You know the book he is writing, Titus, is to show him how to help the churches that he had started in the Island of Crete, to get themselves in order. And one of the primary things that he is calling on Titus to do is to teach the church how to live in such a way that matches up with the Gospel that they have embraced. That is Titus 2:1, He says:

Titus 2:1 ~ But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine.

Not just teach sound doctrine, but actually teach what accords with sound doctrine. Teach a lifestyle that matches up with sound doctrine. Teach them a new way of living because, as you remember, there were all kinds of false teachers there in Crete, and you see that up in Chapter 1:10, He says:

Titus 1:10 ~ For there are many...

And these false teachers, they were popular basically because they were saying the same kinds of things the culture in Crete was saying. They were, in Paul's words, in Verse 16, professing to know God but denying Him by their works. Or to put it another way, they were offering up a religion that allowed people to continue in sin while feeling better about themselves, that allowed them to talk about God while sounding spiritual, while undergoing no fundamental change. And Paul is telling Titus, "It is vital that you be different than that. But as for you, in contrast to these false teachers who are just saying all kinds of words without actually getting to the heart, in contrast to that, Titus, you need to teach what accords with sound doctrine. You need to help the church learn how to live in a way that is suitable with what the Scripture teaches. You need to help these believers in Crete actually and truly change."

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And what I want us to ask today, as we look at the verses before us, Verses 11-14, is simply, *Why is it that Paul had any hope for that?* If the whole world was looking at Crete, and was thinking, “Ah, Cretans, they are always like this,” why is it that Paul had such hope for real and lasting change? Because he obviously does, in the nitty-gritty issues of everyday life. If we looked down at Titus 2, we see that he gets very specific, he tells Titus, “You are going to have to get in there, and you are going to have to work with all these different groups of people there in the church, and these old men, and old women. You need to have a plan for helping the young women. You are going to have to work with the young men even, in a serious way. You are going to have to urge them, and you yourself be a model of good works, and then don’t forget the slaves as well,” which in those days would have been considered a lower class. “You need to work with all these kinds of people because they all need to know how they are supposed to change.”

It is not that Paul thought it was going to be easy, I don’t want you to think that. If you read the letter, there is a lot that Titus is going to have to do. That is kind of the whole point. He is going to have to silence certain false teachers, and he’s going to have to constantly be teaching sound doctrine, and it is going to be serious. Paul says he is going to have to go about rebuking, and urging, and declaring, and exhorting, and not letting anyone disregard him. But I mean, all of those things that Paul is telling Titus that he has to do, at the most basic level, assumes of course that Paul thought these people could live lives that were suitable to the Gospel. Otherwise, obviously, it would have been a whole lot of wasted effort, and clearly Paul knows there is going to be resistance to change. It is hard enough to disciple people, but there is more going on here.

There is going to be an active antagonism to these people changing, especially from the ungodly people all around them who are going to be looking for them to fail. That’s why he talks about, you’ll see in Verses 1-10, the danger of the word of God being reviled. He talks about opponents who are looking for bad things about these people to say, but at the end of the day, still, Paul is convinced that the church, these believers, can live in such a way that is so different than the way they did before, that in everything they do in Verse 10, they can adorn or make beautiful the doctrine of God our Savior. Paul believes the Cretans, who nobody had hope for, could actually live lives that were so radically different they made the Gospel look beautiful to the unbelieving world, which sounds wonderful, we love that, it is a great goal. We want to live those kinds of lives, we want to help other people live beautiful lives.

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But the fact is, a lot of people are not going to think that is realistic. They are going to think it is not even possible. There is going to be a lot of pressure on us not to challenge people on specific issues where they need to grow. Sometimes we even make those excuses about ourselves, “We can’t change. We don’t need to work on changing because we are just who we are.” And people are going to be upset that we actually think others can change, or that we can change, and they might wonder about us, the way they wondered about what Paul was hoping to happen there in Crete. “Paul, how is it that you have any hope that what you are telling Titus to do can happen? How do you think this is even possible?” Titus 2:11, why do we have hope for people no one thinks can change? Paul says, “For...” That is how Paul begins Verse 11, “For...” This is what this verse is about, “Titus, get in there and teach all these people how to live lives, how to change.” “For...”

Now listen, I’ve always read these verses, and that “For...” there, as if it was primarily addressed to the church at Crete, meaning I always read this as if Paul were writing to encourage the church at Crete as to why they should obey all the commands he has given in Verse 1-10. And that is fine, older men, younger women, young men, lived this way, “For...” But actually, I think if you look a little more closely at this text, you can see that before Paul is addressing the congregation as a whole, he is actually talking to Titus, and to the leaders of the church. He’s been telling Titus that he is supposed to get in there with these believers, and help them not only understand what they are supposed to understand, but live the way they are supposed to live, which, if you are thinking about where Titus was ministering was no question going to be difficult. And I’ve got to believe that as Titus was getting in there, and as he was doing the work of discipleship on a day to day basis. Especially as an outsider in this culture, which had such a bad reputation, there was going to be some temptation for Titus to wonder whether these people he was working with could actually change.

So Paul here, pauses in order to give Titus some reasons why he could be confident change was possible. And even more than that, for believers that it was certain. That is what this passage is about. In such a sinful world, with such sinful people, what are the reasons we can be confident enough to go out there and teach the word, and counsel the word, and expect that people can really change? “For...” Paul says, this is important, “For...” It is important, we know these reasons. I know that life is really busy, and we are always in a rush, especially when it comes to ministry. I know I just want to get out there, I want to get out there and disciple. But ministry, and discipleship, and working with people is hard, and you can’t just know what to do, you need to know why you should do it. If you are going to keep

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on going with discipleship when everything is pressing against you, and Paul's answer here, in terms of why we should keep on discipling, why we should keep on counseling, why we should keep on even working on changing ourselves, has to do with the grace of God.

He says, "For the grace of God..." and that is absolutely essential, obviously. Paul did not have hope that people could change because of people. He was realistic about people. You think you know people, Paul knew people. I mean, even up in Verse 13 of Chapter 1, after quoting that one prophet about the Cretans, what they were like, how they were always liars and stuff like that, you know what Paul says? Verse 13, he says, "This testimony is true." Paul got it. He understood what the Cretans were like. He wasn't naïve, he wasn't writing Titus and saying, "Well, you can really get in there and work with these people," because he had some sort of fairy tale view of how people were. Paul knew depravity, he wrote Romans 1 and Ephesians 2. He knew what people were like. He knew what the Cretans were like. It was just that Paul didn't stop with what the Cretans were like. Paul was a man with a realist view of the sinfulness of people and a big view of the grace of God.

Because obviously, when it comes to people changing, if we look just at people, we have every reason in the world to be pessimistic. You know you, I know me. I mean, live such a radically pure life that people in the world around us notice, a radically holy life that the people in the world around us notice, seriously? You know me! And how am I going to help someone else do that? Do you even see the temptation that we have to deal with, Paul? Do you know the strength of a person's sinful nature? If all we did was focus on ourselves and what we can do, we would have no hope for changing, we would have no hope for helping people change. But of course, Paul won't let us focus only on ourselves, and what we can do, he takes us back to God, and what God has done. He says, "For the grace of God has appeared," and the word *'appeared'* reminds us that Paul is talking about a historical event. He's not just talking about an idea when he talks about the grace of God. He is talking about a point in time, in history, when the creator of the world broke into this world to demonstrate His kindness in a stunning, totally undeserved way, and of course he is talking about the life, and ministry, and death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

When we think about going out there and working with people, this is what we have to keep in the forefront. We're not just going out there and sharing ideas with people. We are not just going out there and sharing like really new philosophy with

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people about how to live life. And you know, Paul is not just telling Titus, “Oh man, you know, Cretans are bad people, you better help them, you better get in there and help them learn how to get themselves together, and be different.” No, as Christians, everything we are centers on this, flows out of this. Something has happened! Something has really happened. The grace of God has appeared. I think sometimes we get tired, and we just don’t stick with people, we don’t keep reaching out, and we don’t keep teaching, and we don’t keep discipling because we haven’t really been gripped with the significance of the reality of this the way Paul has.

It’s not that Paul was an optimist. “I just think if you try a little harder, maybe they are going to change this time.” No! That is not what is going on. Instead, Paul was gripped with the significance of what God had done through Christ. “For the grace of God has appeared...” “Something has happened, Titus, that changes everything about the way we work with people.” And I want us to see what he saw in the Gospel, in this event, this historical reality, so we too will have help to pursue change, and to help others keep pursuing change. As a church, as we look at this text, I want us to see three hope-filled truths that Paul shows us about the grace of God that has appeared. This grace that gives us hope that we can live beautiful lives as a church, and that we can change.

The first is simply this: *God intended His grace to bring salvation to all kinds of people.* God intended His grace to bring salvation to *all* kinds of people. Look with me at Verse 11, where Paul says:

Titus 2:11 ~ For the grace of God has appeared,...

That is like his theme statement and now he gets specific:

Titus 2:11 ~ ...bringing salvation for all people,...

It is kind of like we are looking back with Paul at this shocking, in breaking of God’s grace into the world. And we are asking, “What can we learn from what happened, about how we should view discipleship, and counseling, and change?” And Paul is saying, “The one thing we can learn from it is that this God who brings salvation, brings salvation for all people.” You need to think about that because salvation is an intense word. The grace of God brings salvation, which means what? It means rescue, or deliverance. If we look back at what God has done through Christ, we see it assumes that something is really wrong with all of us.

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Otherwise, God could have just sent instructions. “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing instructions.” But we are so broken, God had to bring salvation. That is the only way any of us could change. There is no real change apart from this salvation, which is part of what gives me hope that people can change, because there isn’t anyone out there who changes simply because of their own efforts. It is always only through this salvation that the grace of God brings.

I’m just trying to say sometimes when you go to minister the Gospel to people who are struggling with maybe intense sins, even Christians will tell you, “Oh you know those people. You know those people, you know the way they are. You are not going to get very far,” as if there were a certain group of people that are easier than others. And look, whenever people say that, I’m just thinking, “Dead is dead.” We don’t need someone to tell us, “These people are really bad kinds of people,” because we are all a bad kind of people. There is not a good kind of people to work with. We all need saving. If you think there are a certain group of people out there that are so good that they can take care of themselves, then you’d better read this passage again, because Paul is saying, “We’re all in such a desperate position, we need God and His kindness to break in and bring salvation.” And if you think there is a certain group of people out there that are so bad they can’t be delivered, then you better read this passage again, because Paul is saying, “God brought this salvation for all people,” which is why, again, it is kind of funny.

If someone comes to us and says, “I don’t think you realize how desperate a situation these people are in,” because sometimes that is offered up as a kind of excuse for not reaching out to people. “They are in such trouble, you know? They can’t fix themselves,” that is what they are saying. And we obviously don’t need someone to tell us these people aren’t able to fix their lives, because we weren’t able to fix our lives either. No one can. Otherwise, you wouldn’t need the grace of God to bring salvation. So when we look at people, and we are tempted to come up with all kinds of reasons why these people couldn’t change, and why we shouldn’t have hope for certain kinds of people. Many, if not most of the reasons are in fact part of the whole motivation for God doing what He’s done in the Gospel. For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation! It is God who does the saving, and what makes this salvation that God has provided so exciting to Paul, and to us, is that He came bringing salvation for all people, which I think it actually the emphasis.

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Obviously when Paul says *'all people'*, we have to think about what that means because I don't think it means that everyone in the world experiences God's saving power in the same way. I don't think he means that when Jesus came into the world, God saved every single person who has ever lived through what He did, and I don't think that for one thing, because it doesn't fit with what Paul teaches anywhere else. He is not going to suddenly contradict himself like that. This was a man who clearly believed in the necessity of faith, and repentance. He definitely saw the wrath of God as resting on those who didn't turn to Christ. Plus, when we study God's word, we have to look at the context. We have to actually look at what it actually says. And as we look at Chapter 2, we see that that way of looking at it doesn't really fit well with what Paul is saying in the rest of these verses.

I don't think we need to make this more complicated than it has to be because if we look down at the beginning of Chapter 2, we see that before Paul talks about the grace of God bringing salvation for all people, what he is saying to Titus is, "You need to talk to all of these different kinds of people in your church. You need to teach what accords with sound doctrine, and you need to teach it with all these different groups—men, women, rich, poor, old, young, Jew, Gentile." And so I think Paul here is a Jew who is writing to Greeks, even Titus was a Gentile, and he is just enjoying the fact that while for so many years before he was converted, he thought the Messiah was just coming for one group of people, that is how Paul would have thought of it. But now in the Gospel, God is revealed to him that it wasn't just for the Jews, it was for the Gentiles. And not just for a certain kind of Gentile either, not just for the elite, but also for the poor, and for those who were outcasts of society. It was for all kinds of people, from all kinds of places, with all different kinds of backgrounds, and Paul was amazed by that. He never got over that.

We actually find that idea popping up in all sorts of his letters, and so while we have all these categories we put people in, that's just the way the world works. "You're this, you're that." What happens as we do is it's easy for us to act as if a certain group were beyond the reach of God's grace. We do this to divide. We do this to feel superior, and that's why we need to remember God's approach is different than the world's. When the grace of God appeared, it appeared bringing God's saving power for all kinds of people. Not just people who look and act like me, not just people who struggle with the same kinds of sins that I've struggled with. As Christians, we sometimes think that the Gospel is only for a person who looks a certain kind of way, who comes from a certain kind of background. We may not think the Gospel is only for Jews, but we sometimes acts as if the Gospel

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were only for people like us, and yet when we actually look at the Gospel and we consider the way Jesus acted when He came into this world, we see He actively and deliberately pursued the kinds of people no one else would.

I'm tempted to just have you write down the one kind of person that you would almost be tempted to think the Gospel isn't for, the one kind of person you wouldn't want to share the Gospel with. And I just want to remind you the grace of God appeared for a person like that. In fact, if you look at Jesus, it sometimes seems like He was constantly drawing to Himself the worst of the worst, the prostitutes, Roman collaborators, the leprous outcasts, the demon possessed, and on and on. And that's because, as He tells us, the Spirit builds the Kingdom not with the noble, not with the powerful, but with the lame, the marred, and the hopeless. When the grace of God broke into this world, it went after all kinds of people. He went after all kinds of people. And when God in His grace appointed men to take the message of His grace out, He specifically told them to take this message to all nations as well.

We don't just have hope for people from good backgrounds, changing. We don't just have hope for people who don't really have bad habits, changing. We don't just have hope for people who are educated, changing, because we don't believe that God's salvation only came for a certain kind of person. We know this salvation is intended for all people. Looking back to what God did through Jesus gives us hope.

But that's not all. We don't only need to look back to receive hope for change. If you look down at the text, you'll see a second hope-producing truth about the grace of God, and that has to do with what the grace of God is doing now. Secondly, God demonstrates His grace by continuing to actively train people. Paul says in Verse 11:

Titus 2:11 ~ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, 12 training us...

And the word for training basically means disciplining or teaching. Paul is saying, and then this is in the present tense, so Paul is saying, "This is something God's grace does now." The same grace that came to save all kinds of people now works to train us. And here Paul's looking at our lives as believers, and he's reminding us God hasn't left us on our own as a church. It's like he's moving past the general fact that the grace of God came for all kinds of people, and now he's looking at

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what's actually happening in our lives as believers. He's saying the grace of God is teaching us. Or maybe better, he's saying the grace of God is tutoring us, because we sometimes think of teaching as just information dump. Instead when Paul uses this word *training us*, it's more like in the old days when you wanted your child to learn something, and you might hire a tutor who would move into your home and devote himself to teaching your child all that he needed to know. And what Paul is saying is that God's grace has moved in. He's present in our lives right now, showing us mercy by tutoring us in what we need to know to live holy lives.

As we go about working with people and even trying to change ourself, it's vital we don't forget that, because I'm telling you it is easy to. It is very easy to. It's easy to forget God is in this thing when it comes to spiritual growth. It's not just you, and me, and that person, and their problem. If that person is saved, God is at work in their life. That's the only way I can disciple or counsel, knowing that God's at work in their life. If I'm talking to an unbeliever, I don't have much hope for them changing until God changes them. And once God does change them, save them, I can't be pessimistic about their ability to change, because God's committed Himself to changing them. You might call this the great now of the Gospel.

I once heard someone talk—I think it was Paul Tripp about the *Then, Now, Then* of the Gospel. There's the past "then" and it seems like we're pretty good at remembering the past "then" of the Gospel in terms of looking back at what God did in bringing salvation. And of course there's a future "then" and sometimes we're pretty good about remembering the glory of God and what He's going to do in the future to save us and to deliver us. But it's sometimes very easy for us to forget that in the middle of these two great events, the past "then" and the future "then", there's also a "now" to the Gospel. The grace of God is still now at work to change us. God did not only save us, and not only will God save us, but God *is* saving us. It's not just you talking or that person trying. It's God transforming.

I was thinking recently about Jesus after the resurrection, and this was a great moment of victory for Him. And sometimes when we experience moments of great victory, we like to focus on ourselves. We kind of want to enjoy that moment, but we find Jesus after the resurrection if you think back, we find Him instead thinking about His disciples. And we might expect Jesus to be thinking about His disciples in a negative way, like, "Hey guys, where were you? I just rose from the dead and you had all run away." And so we might expect Jesus to want to get a message to them, but more like a message that says something like, "Hey, you shouldn't have run away? How could you do that?" Instead in the Gospel of John in John 20, we

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find Jesus speaking to Mary and He tells her to deliver a message to His disciples, and His first words to His disciples after His resurrection is, “Go and tell My brothers.” He wants them to know that in spite of their failures, they’re still family, which of course is an encouragement. But what does He tell Mary He wants her to tell His brothers? This is the point. He says, “Tell My brothers I’m ascending to My Father and your Father, to My God and to your God.” And what I love about that is Jesus wants His brothers to know that He isn’t finished seeking their good. “I’m ascending for you.”

Because He could have said to them, “Go and tell My brothers what I did for them on the cross,” which would have been great, but instead He says, “Go and encourage My brothers I’m not done working for them. I’m ascending.” That’s how the ascension is explained throughout the New Testament: Jesus being glorified and Jesus working on behalf of His people. And He is. He’s still working.

As Paul says here in Titus 2, the grace of God appeared. Jesus didn’t only come to save us. He’s still present in our lives working to train us. And so you might think, “I’m a really slow learner.” That’s okay, because Jesus is really a great Teacher, and this gives us hope in our lives, and it also gives us hope as we work with others, because I can imagine Titus as he’s there in Crete, there might have been times where he was looking at these people and thinking to himself, “I’m not really sure I have what it takes to teach them,” Paul. “Why did you leave me here? Their backgrounds are so different than mine. Their culture is so different than mine. It seems too far gone.” But Paul is telling Titus, “Be encouraged, because you’re not in this on your own. God is busy working in these believers so that they can learn what they need to learn in order to live their lives for Him.”

I know for myself that’s such a great encouragement. When I go to disciple and counsel others, I often think this whole teaching thing is really too much really. Here’s God, and here’s me, and here’s you, and how in the world am I supposed to teach you what you need to know about God? Besides that, sometimes people’s problems are so complicated. How am I supposed to help you change so that you can live a life that honors God?

Well, the reason I can teach, and you can disciple, and we can talk to each other about the word of God with an eager expectation to see what’s going to happen is not because we’re such amazing teachers. It’s because look, the truth is if it were just you or me teaching or counseling, you might think, “I can’t do this,” and you would be right. You’re totally right, but you’re not left to yourself in your training

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ministry. Yes, you're teaching, but Paul says here in Verse 12 that so is God. God's training them. You're counseling, but you know what? If that person is a believer, so is God. And if they're a Christian, God is way more committed to their transformation than you ever possibly could be. No matter how committed you are to that person changing, God is more committed than you.

Now, think about that, because that's really good news. I mean, if we look down here, it just looks kind of simple to us, training us to renounce the ungodliness and worldly passions. We might overlook it, but if you take a moment and you think about all that the grace of God is doing that you might become who He wants you to be, it really gives you hope. And you kind of have to do this, because when you're struggling or someone else is struggling, you only see the negatives. But there are some great things that God has done and is doing in your life to change you and to help other believers change. If you want to talk about undeserved kindness, He's given you every spiritual blessing. He's equipped you for the task of spiritual growth. He's given you the Spirit. He's given you the church. He's placed you in a family. He's given the people in your family spiritual gifts so they can help you grow. He's given you His word, and in His word He's told you everything you need to know so that you can live a life that pleases Him. He has His Son interceding for you, and the Spirit of God is helping you pray, and asking for help when you don't know how to ask for help. He allows you to come into His presence at every moment, freely and with confidence to find help in your time of need. That is no small commitment that God's made to your transformation and to the transformation of the believers you might be working with. God is all in.

What's really cool is if you look down at Verse 12, you see the very things that Titus is supposed to speak to the believers in Crete about, God is already at work in the believers in Crete about. Paul told Titus up in the beginning of Titus 2, "I want you to teach them this," and all this stuff, and then he tells Titus, "I want you to teach them this, for God is teaching them this." The grace of God is training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions. And I know sometimes we look at this world and we become discouraged because people are living their lives without reference to God. That's ungodliness, and we can be like, "How can we expect people to be holy in a world like this? Everywhere we're being confronted with temptations." Yet in the middle of that we need to remember God in His grace has already taught us to say no to ungodliness. There's a whole lot that God's done in the now that we need to be giving Him thanks for when we get discouraged about the possibility of people changing. We need to think about how God has and is changing us.

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We haven't all done this perfectly, but if you're a believer here, this is how you became a Christian in the first place. You look at someone and you say, "How can they renounce ungodliness in this world?" You did that if you're a believer. Yeah, there are a lot of discouragements about how slow people are to change, but there are some amazing miracles that you ought to celebrate here in this church, in the life of the church. I'm talking about the young man. He's living with these other teenagers who are watching dirty television shows, talking about sinful things, and he says, "No, that's not how I'm going to live my life. I don't want that." How does that happen? That's the grace of God at work training him to say no to ungodliness.

Think about your own life. You wonder if people can change? Think about how you lived your life before you were a believer? God only came into the picture when you could use Him. But otherwise you were right there at the center of your life. You were dominated by your own sinful desires. But what did God in His grace do when He saved you? He opened your eyes. He caused you to turn from that kind of lifestyle to say no to it. You said, "I don't want to live my life for me anymore. I don't want that. I don't want to be dominated by the desires that used to dominate me." And of course that right there is a miracle, and what God in His grace did back when we first were saved, He's still doing in us today, training us on a daily basis to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and He's doing that, Paul says, so that we can *live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age...* It's awesome.

I want to make sure I say this right, because I know sometimes people can get a little discouraged when they look at this commitment of God, and then they look at their lives, and they're like, "I'm not changing quickly enough. Am I even a believer with this commitment that God's made? I look at my life and I seem so slow to change," which is a question, of course. But at the same time, you need to know that being a Christian doesn't mean that you suddenly, instantaneously have less corruption in your heart than the unbeliever. That's not exactly what salvation means. Jonathan Edwards once said it like this, and you know with Jonathan Edwards you have to really listen, but he said:

There is not one less sinful desire in the heart of an unconverted, but it is also in the converted, but only there is this difference, that in the heart of the saints there is a contrary principle that is a bitter enemy to this corruption and resists it and struggles against it, and makes a warfare in the hearts against it, and makes the man to hate it and loathe it, and in his choice and inclination to reject and

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renounce it, and to lament it, and groan under it, and long to be rid of it, and strive against it.

That's the key, because sometimes when we as believers talk about change, even unbelievers especially have a wrong idea of what we mean. They think we mean Christians will suddenly be free of all temptation. "God's at work in this thing training us, and that must mean that we never struggle with sinful desires anymore." But that's Heaven. They think if God's at work in someone, immediately they should be perfectly holy. "That must be what this promise means. They should always be loving God, and almost living like an angel." But that's only because they're not aware of what corruption is left in us. In this world it's going to be a process. But the thing is, and this is where the encouragement is, God's all out committed to this process. That's a promise. He sent His Son to save us, and He's at work now changing us, and if there's any doubt about that, we need to just take a step back and look forward to what's coming, which is where Paul goes next. We see God's commitment to change in what He is doing and what He did, but we also see His great commitment to changing us in what He's going to do in the days ahead. This is really a rock solid reason for change. Think about this, Verse 13. It's almost like Paul looked back on what happened, and it's like, "Wow, the grace of God appeared." And then he calls us to look around at what's happening, and he's like, "My goodness, the grace of God is at work training us. Look at the church." In Verses 13 and 14, he shifts our attention to what is going to happen. Our God and Savior Jesus Christ is going to return. You see how Paul describes us in Verse 13. He says:

Titus 2:13 ~ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,...

I think Paul brings us to this because we so often get focused on the difficult realities of people not changing in ministry. That's all we can see, and Paul's like, "No, you've got to look up and look at all these other realities, like this one: Jesus is coming back." Can you imagine it the way Paul describes it here? He talks about glory. He moves from grace to glory. Just think about the glory. Just think about this kind of glory. Think about the day when this glory is revealed, because I know we might have a lot of questions about what Jesus can do right now as we look at people, but do you think there's going to be any question about what Jesus can do on that day that He returns? We sometimes question what Jesus can do, but do you think on the day when His glory is revealed, anybody's going to have a question about what Jesus can do? No, we're going to be in awe of His power. And as you

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think about His power and His glory, the way it's going to be revealed then, now as you look at the people around you that you wonder about, who you question whether or not they can change, Paul tells us in Verse 14 that this is in fact why Jesus came in the first place. This Jesus who is going to appear in the future in glory, appeared in the past for the purpose of changing us as believers. And this is so important, because when you wonder whether or not believers can change, you're not really wondering whether believers can change. You're wondering whether or not Jesus can change people. You see, when we think about the grace of God, we usually think about it in vague terms like it's a substance or something.

As Paul talks about the grace of God in this passage, he's speaking about the grace of God as a glorious person Jesus, and that's why we have such confidence as believers that people can truly and fundamentally change. It's because we have confidence in Jesus and we know this Jesus who we're waiting for, who will appear in glory, this Jesus, Verse 14:

Titus 2:14 ~ 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.

Why do we hope that people can change? First, God intended His grace for all kinds of people. When you're wondering whether people can change, look back on the grace of God. Why did Jesus come? That's first. Second, God demonstrates His grace by actively training people. Think about the commitments that God's made to people's spiritual growth. That's second. And third, God shows His grace through radically transforming people. Jesus gave Himself to accomplish something, obviously, and we see there's a day coming when His victory will be made clear to the whole world. No one is going to question what Jesus can do. He didn't just die in defeat. He's won, He's victorious, and that victory is going to be revealed. And because we look forward to that, we know that His death was meaningful. It's part of a certain plan that God has made that's already been written by God. And so it will accomplish exactly what He wanted it to accomplish, and what He did want it to accomplish, Paul tells us in Verse 14, was to redeem us from all lawlessness. Jesus died to set us free from rebellious living, but He doesn't stop there. He gave Himself to purify us, to cleanse us, to set us apart. Why do we work so hard on teaching Christians to live set-apart lives? Because we are set apart, and we're not just set apart for no purpose. We're set apart for the purpose of belonging to Jesus Himself, which gives us hope as we look at the church, because these people don't belong to us. They belong to Jesus,

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and of course Jesus is going to accomplish the work He wants to in them. And the work He wants to accomplish in them is that they would be a people who are zealous, eager for doing good. In other words, Jesus came and died that His people might be truly and thoroughly changed, set free, purified, zealous for good works. Do you believe it? Because the truth is it's not always easy to believe when you're just looking at people and their problems. And sometimes as you go out there to help people, you get so discouraged that you wonder, "Man, can people like this ever change?" Apart from Christ, no. That's why we take them to the Gospel, because we look back and we see the grace of God appeared for all kinds of people. And if they're in Christ, can they change if they're a Christian? I'm going to be straight with you. Even then sometimes that's hard to believe.

Really what I'm saying is as you're looking at people, maybe even yourself, and you're wondering, "Can this kind of person change?" that's a serious moment for you. That's a serious moment for us as a church, because look, if we don't believe that, if we don't believe that God can change people, we don't believe the Gospel, and really we have no reason to exist as a church. It's not uncompassionate for us to believe that, to be committed to that. There's nothing more compassionate than believing that God can do what He says. I think one of the most unloving and uncompassionate things a person could ever possibly say would be to say a person is just who he is and there's nothing He can do about it, because that says you have to be all your worst desires. You have a desire that's going to harm you, that's going to hurt your family, you are that desire. It isn't a choice and it isn't sin. It's something you even through God's power can do nothing about. I know. I'm so glad that by God's grace I don't have to be all my bad desires that I've ever had, and that when I speak to a person who struggles with a sinful desire, while I don't want to minimize how strong that desire might be, I can say that God is greater and God is stronger than that desire, and that through Christ they can experience victory in their life over sin, because yes, nature is strong. We all know that, but Christ is stronger. If you're a Christian, you have been changed by the grace of God. If you are a Christian, you will be changed by the grace of God. And if you're a Christian, by the grace of God you can change.

Let's pray...

Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your word, and we thank You for the way it purifies our minds, and cleanses our minds, and helps us to think straight the way You want us to think. And Lord, we pray that we would be confident about what You have done, what You are doing, and what You will do through Jesus Christ.

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And may we honor You by getting in there and helping each other change, and by working even on changing ourselves as well. We pray this in Your Name and for Your glory, Amen.

“Hope for Change”

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