

In the May 2018 issue of Christianity Today magazine, Kim Phuc Phan Thi shares how a napalm attack in Vietnam scarred her body, but it also led her to Christ.

You have seen my picture a thousand times. I am nine years old, running along a puddled roadway, arms outstretched, naked, shrieking in pain and fear, the dark contour of a napalm cloud billowing in the distance. Those bombs have brought me immeasurable pain. The emotional and spiritual pain was even harder to endure.

As a child, she was raised in the religion of Cao Dai (pronounced cow-die). For years, she prayed to the gods of Cao Dai for healing and peace. But when her prayers went unanswered, it became clear that either they were nonexistent or did not care about her.

One day in 1982, in Saigon's central library she opened the New Testament. As she read through the Gospels, at least two themes became abundantly clear. The first was that although Cao Dai said there were many gods, Jesus made a straightforward claim: "I am the way you get to God; there is no other way but me" (John 14:6). Second, Jesus had suffered in defense of his claim. He had been mocked, tortured, and killed. Why would he endure these things, she wondered, if he were not God?

I had never been exposed to this side of Jesus—the wounded one, the one who bore scars. I came to believe that he really was who he said he was. And most important to me, he really would do all that he had promised in his Word. Perhaps he could help me make sense of my pain and at last come to terms with my scars.

My salvation experience happened on Christmas Eve. It was 1982, and I was attending a special worship service at a small church in Saigon. How desperately I needed peace, love, and joy. I had so much hatred in my heart. I wanted this Jesus. So, I made my way to the front of the sanctuary to say yes to Jesus Christ. I experienced

the kind of healing that can only come from God. I was finally at peace.

Nearly half a century has passed since I found myself running—frightened, naked, and in pain— down that road in Vietnam. I will never forget the horrors of that day. (But) my faith in Jesus has enabled me to forgive those who have hurt and scarred me. Today, I thank God for everything—even for that road. Especially for that road.

Kim Phuc Phan Thi was saved by God’s grace. The grace of God is the only thing that can saved anyone. The “grace of God” refers to His unmerited favor (no one can earn it by good works)... His goodness and kindness... His compassion and mercy... offer salvation as a free gift to anyone who will simply reach out and take it. ... This is what we mean by “grace.” We know it to be what saves you and I (as undeserving sinners.)

But right along with this glorious (and true) understanding of what grace is... there exists a lot of misunderstanding and abuse. ... [P A U S E] ...

Grace secures salvation for us... without our having to do works in order to earn it for ourselves. Works are annulled as a means for securing or maintaining God’s affection for us. Right...? Works do not earn God’s favor – grace brings it to us. Are you with me? Am I right? ... So good works are completely unnecessary in the Christian life! There is no reason to do them. ... Are you still with me...? (I hope not. **THAT** is *not* true!)

But this is the operational theology of so many believers today. *“I am saved by grace... which means there is no reason for me to do good works. Any suggestion (otherwise) would be ‘legalism’ which is NOT faith.”*

Wherever grace exists... there will always be those who abuse it. Grace — rightly perceived — compels good works and holiness. This is what our passage today teaches. ... **THIS** is the most ignored element of grace.

I don't know if you remember... but several weeks ago on a Sunday morning (before church) I had been reading Titus. (If I remember right) we had barely begun our sermon series in 1st Timothy (so we were not in this book yet.) But as I read Titus that morning... one of our verses of study for today LEPT from the page and struck me hard. ... I preached the sermon that I had planned in Timothy... but before I dismissed church for the day... I came back up and shared some of the insights from the Titus passage that God struck me with. (That passage – happened to be - our verses for today.) ... Specifically I spoke about “*living by the rule of grace*”... and this is what I want to say MORE about – today.

But there is also another essential part of grace that I want to show you... and how it purifies us and makes us holy. ... So let's get started.

Titus 2:11

(Now) this was not the verse that lept from the page at me a few weeks ago... but it provides some context for it. It was actually the next verse (verse 12.) ...We'll get to it in a moment.

Without grace – there is no salvation. Kim Phuc Phan Thi (who I spoke of... as we began... experienced it.) ... God's FREE grace is our deliverance and rescue from sin - and sin's eternal judgment! ... The offer of saving grace has been extended “*to all men*” (our verse tells us.) ... No nation... tongue... people... or person is excluded from God's saving work. Yet most of the human race will decline the salvation He offers — as

inconceivable *as that is!* There is a universal need. (Every man has sinned and deserves eternal damnation.) ...And God provided a universal remedy for all who will believe. But MANY reject this grace.

The fact that so many reject it... is mind-boggling ... but here is something even MORE unthinkable. Those who **do** accept God's gracious gift... **should** have hearts that are flooded with wonder. ... When we realize we have been rescued from the clutches of evil (against which we were completely helpless)... our resolution should be fanatical never to go back there. But often we don't have ANY resolve. We truly recognize the danger we USED TO BE IN... we know that we have been rescued from the horrors of evil living... but we do not desire and strive to be forever free of its clutches. (We keep going back into sin.) ... And here is why... .. We only allow grace to save us – but not to train us. ... [P A U S E] ...

If you don't see much Christian growth and maturity in your life (and churches are filled with people who are like this)... then I would suggest to you: "Here is the problem!" You are not allowing grace to train you. Grace is God's method for saving us and grace is God's method for... (verse 12)

Titus 2:12

Notice with me the prepositional phrase that ends this verse ("in the present age...") Grace affects our future (we are saved by it)... and it affects our present (we are sanctified/made Christlike by it.)

The best commentary for understanding Titus 2:12 is another verse of Scripture that I want to show you. Romans 15:7 throws a lot of light on our verse... so we can see what it is telling us. This is how grace trains us...

Romans 15:7 (ESV)

⁷ Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

How did Christ welcome every single one of us...? ... Did you first have to EARN His kind attention...? Does He continue to receive you... if you bring Him some kind of acceptable offering...? Did Jesus welcome you... because He noticed something of value about you that He wanted...? Of course NOT! If you think any of these things are true... then you are completely misunderstanding what grace is. (We were completely dead – unpleasing – putrid to Christ. Christ welcomed everyone of us by grace.)

Now try to imagine with me... how you receive others (including those who have hurt you in the past. ... Probably the last thing you want to do with such people is welcome them in your life. Am I right? ...But consider this: We hurt Jesus. ...We helped put Him on a cross and killed him. Your worst enemy has not done that to you...)

“Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you...” Once we see that He welcomed us (not because we deserve it) but as an UNDESERVED favor... we can begin to understand how grace is to train us. ... We ought to be the most welcoming people on planet earth! Nobody needs to earn our kind attention. No one needs to prove their worthiness... Nobody needs to be our type of person... and nobody needs to possess something we want. (LISTEN!) With grace training us... we can even welcome an UNREPENTANT enemy (someone who has deeply hurt us.)

Is there someone in your life through whom God wants to do some “grace-training”? *“Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you...”* **You** helped put Christ up on a cross! Renounce ungodliness and worldly

passions. (This includes anger and a desire for revenge.) Sure(!) what they did to you is horrible. But you have been saved by grace. ... Now God would have you to be trained by it! *“Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you...”*

Allowing grace to train us in this way will also produce self-control. Everything in us may scream to be unwelcoming to others... or to extract an apology from those who have hurt us (and we will be the judge of it's acceptability.) Inside of ourselves we demand whatever our concept of justice is. Living by the rule of grace that was shown to us... affects our self-control.

Titus 2:12 also says that grace is to train us to be “upright.” What is that? It means our relationships will be right with other people. ... (Well... yeah! Of course it does.) If we welcome others the way Christ welcomed us – our relationships with other people (including strangers) would be on positive...good... friendly terms. Relationships in our life would be upright.

Grace trains us in the present life – beyond just saving us. (Along this same line)... the next verse presents an essential part of grace that I want to spend a little time on. Opening your heart and mind to what I am about to reveal... will purify your heart and make you zealous for good works (exactly what verse 14 says grace does.)

Titus 2:13

I want to show you how connected a belief to Christ's return is - to grace. Once you see this connection... it cannot do otherwise... but draw you to purify your heart and make you zealous for good works... just like verse 14 announces it will do. (So we are going to take a little time on this.)

First... I think that it is important that we recognize something about what is recorded in the first four books of the New Testament (the Gospels – Matthew... Mark... Luke... and John.) **2/3** of all that we read in them... took place in a tiny little stretch of land... within the (already small) boundaries of Israel. The place was Galilee. Most of the Jews didn't live there – but nearly all of the disciples were from Galilee (all of them except Judas Iscariot.)

Galilee was very unique. It had its own vernacular from the rest of Israel... and it had its own distinct customs from the rest of Israel. Everything Jesus said **RELATED** to the culture that He was speaking to. When Jesus spoke... it was from His heart... to His listener's heart (Galilean listeners.) If you and I would like to get the full picture of what Christ was teaching them... we would do well to gain an understanding of Galilean culture... and why Jesus used the images and metaphors that He spoke.

Some of Galilee's customs got lost and buried over the centuries. This has made it almost impossible to grasp **all** of what Jesus' original listeners would have instantly understood and felt. ... But archeology (in the last 10 years) has made a discovery – that has not received very much media attention... and it relates to Jesus' second coming.

This discovery that I am about to tell you sends shivers up and down my spine. It all comes from documents that (once they had been pieced together)... reveal Galilee's unique procedure for a wedding. (And again) Jesus' original hearers would have known what I am about to tell you... having seen it many times. Weddings were the most important event to happen in any city of Israel... there would have been many times that Galileans would have seen Galilee's unique customs played out. And they

would have instantly recognized how their wedding customs perfectly align with the recorded Biblical prophecies... leading to the 2nd Coming of Christ.

(Look and see what they knew... and what they would have immediately understood. You and I may have thought that Jesus was merely speaking in riddles. No. The Galileans understood Him perfectly.) I am going to walk you through the (year-long) Galilean wedding process.

Once two families had decided that a son and daughter should be married... if the son agreed... then he would initiate the **betrothal** (or engagement) process.

When rumors that a betrothal was about to take place... everyone who could... ran to the main city gate to witness it. Everything of importance (especially if witnesses were needed) happened at the main city gate – where the city elders (and others) were. Elders ratified legal agreements (and a betrothal was a “new covenant” / a legal agreement.)

The first thing to happen was that the father of the groom read a written proposal before all the witnesses. It spelled out the terms that the two families had agreed upon for this marriage... such as dowry price and other matters. After that... the two families would exchange gifts – making sure that the bride received the most extravagant gift.

(Now is when it all becomes most interesting.) Everyone holds their breath for this next part. It was called the “cup of joy.”

The groom is handed a pitcher of wine. He pours some of it into a ceremonial cup (“the cup of joy”)... Then... holding it in both hands... very reverently... slowly... and respectfully... he offers it to the woman he wants to marry.

This is where it is so different from all the wedding customs throughout the Middle East. The bride has all the power to say “no.” She can refuse by pushing the cup away. If that happens... the wedding is off. ... So everyone holds their breath.

If she accepts... then the groom takes the cup of joy and drinks from it. The betrothal agreement has now been solidified. The New Covenant has been ratified. ... But hold on. There is a lot more! The groom (according to custom) then says THIS:

“You are now consecrated to me by the Laws of Moses – and I will not drink from this cup again... until I drink it anew with you in my father’s house.”

He then separates himself from his bride-to-be and will not be with her again until he is re-united to her at the wedding feast.

At the last supper... when Jesus did these same actions and spoke these same words... what do you think the disciples understood...? They were His bride and had established a New Covenant with Him. (Whether or not they understood everything fully... I don’t know.)... You see... Jesus was also declaring that He would be going away... but (one day in the future)... He will return and get them... and together share wine with them... in His father’s house... at the wedding feast. ... **[P A U S E]** ...

Now... the Galilean wedding customs reveals even MORE than what I’ve pointed out. The groom was busy with an important task which usually took about a year. The groom was to gather materials and build a room and furniture onto his father’s house for he and his bride to live in. He was to go and prepare a dwelling place for his bride... by adding on to his father’s house.

John 14:1-3 (ESV)

¹ *“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.*

² *In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.*

The bride also had about a year’s worth of work to do... to prepare for when the groom comes for her. She and her bridesmaids needed to gather material for making their wedding dresses. Amazon wasn’t around back then... and they were often at the mercy of traveling merchants to visit their village. The right one who had the right materials sometimes wouldn’t come around for months. Sometimes they had to travel to other cities looking for what they needed.

The bride and her maids HAD to be ready – no matter how long it took. Now... here is another amazing part: No one (not even the groom) knew the exact day or hour... of when the groom would be told to go and get his bride. This was only determined by the groom’s father.

Once the groom finished adding onto the house... he would have his father inspect it. If it passed inspection... the father would begin his own massive amount of work – preparing a SEVEN DAY feast for 50-100 people. Can you imagine the amount of work he had to do? So you can see (perhaps) why it was up to him to tell his son: “OK... NOW you can go get your bride...”

The bride would not know the day or hour. The son would not know the day or hour. But they had signs and could identify the season (knowing it was close.) So... as the time seemed near... the groom and his groomsmen would all sleep in the same room – every night. The bride and

her bridesmaids would also sleep in the same room – in their wedding clothes... with oil for their lamps... ready to be lit and trimmed.

Matthew 25:1-13 (ESV)

¹ *“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³ For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, ⁴ but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵ As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. ⁶ But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ ⁷ Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ ⁹ But the wise answered, saying, ‘Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.’ ¹⁰ And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. ¹¹ Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ ¹² But he answered, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ ¹³ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.*

1 Thessalonians 5:1-6 (ESV)

¹ *Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. ² For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³ While people are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. ⁴ But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. ⁵ For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. ⁶ So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.*

According to the Galilean custom it would ONLY be in the middle of the night (when the whole town slept) that the father of the groom would finally go to his son and wake he and his groomsmen up. *“Go get your bride and bring her back here!”*

The groom leaps to his feet and grabs a shofar (a ram's horn trumpet.) He goes outside and blasts the trumpet to wake up the whole village. Even the bride and her maids hear it and rise up quickly... knowing that they have about one hour.

(Meanwhile) the groom and his men serpentine through the street of the village and all the invited guests who respond to the trumpet call come out and parade with the groom to the bride's house. However many remain in their homes and don't get to enjoy the party.

When the parade finally comes near to the bride's house two men bring forth a litter. (A litter is a seat that is attached to a pair of long poles.) The bride comes out with her bridesmaids. She very modestly steps onto the litter and slowly lowers herself into the chair. The two men lift her off the ground and into the air. (Now get this...) The Galileans also had a name for this. They called this "Flying the bride to the father's house."

Can I ask you what you think this is a symbol of...? The son comes for his bride... and she is flown to his father's house to be with him forever...

Believer – you and I are going to be caught up in the air to be brought to Jesus' Father's house so that we will be with Him forever!

Don't tell **ME** that there is not going to be a rapture! Scripture directly tells us there will be... and then beautifully illustrates it. ... Sadly however there is a growing number of evangelical pastors who have given up on this hope. According to Lifeway Research... Barna Research... and the Pew Foundation... the number of Unbelieving evangelical pastors has grown in recent years and now stands at 25%. One in Four don't believe it anymore!

They are simply rejecting God's beautiful grace. What I have been describing here is God's grace in communicating the significant truth that Jesus is coming for His bride! And much of this grace comes through as a dire warning. Let me now finish the picture from a Galilean wedding.

After the bride is flown to the father's house... the wedding party who had enough oil in their lamps... and the guests who joined the parade in the middle of the night... all went inside the father's house. The doors were then closed. No one came in and no one went out for SEVEN days. Many were shut out. (SEVEN is also the number of years for the tribulation.)

I believe that the growing number of evangelicals who are giving up their hope for Christ's return **ARE** the five foolish virgins who did not keep enough oil in their lamps. You see... oil in the Bible... always represents God's Spirit. Many church people – and even many pastors know about the rapture. ... But knowing about it is not enough. It takes a God-authored faith inside of us.

Have you allowed God's grace inside of you to produce a love for Christ's appearing...? Are you growing more in love with Him... knowing that He is about ready to return...? Oh... yes... grace purifies us and makes us zealous for good works. Don't reject the grace of God's warning. You have preparation to do for the wedding feast!

Titus 2:14

He purchased us... to purify us... to possess us... literally "for Himself a people for His own a possession." ... What security is ours! Once we were Satan's - now we are the Son's. ... Once we were sin's - now we are the

Savior's. ... Once we were foreigners - now we are family. ... Now I belong to Jesus:

*Jesus my Lord will love me forever,
From Him no power of evil can sever.
He gave His life to ransom my soul,
Now I belong to Him.
Now I belong to Jesus.
Jesus belongs to me.
Not for the years of time alone,
But for eternity*

Titus 2:15

Speaking the truth will not always be popular... but it will always be necessary. It will require courage... conviction... and "Christ-confidence." Being trained by grace requires the same. ... **[P A U S E]** ...

Our passage today shows us that the grace of God is the foundation for godly living in the here and now. ... It is rooted in Christ's past work on the cross... **and** the promise of His future return. ... Grace is a free gift that was given to us... and grace is a gift that we are to (just as freely) give to others.

Prepare for the wedding feast!