

Amazing Grace to a Killer (Titus 2-3)

A little over a month ago in Charleston, SC, Dylann Roof entered a historic black AME church during their mid-week Bible study and prayer time. An hour later, witnesses say he pulled out a gun and while making supremacist racist statements, he shot and killed 9 in the worst shooting and hate crime in a church on American soil in modern memory. Islamic terrorist militants in other countries do kill in churches in the name of religion but now a 21st century killing in an American church took place in the name of racism. In January year my wife and I were in the Charleston area where I officiated a wedding literally just 3 miles from the church where that horrific shooting took place only 5 months later. The church's 200th anniversary will be next year, it's a historic black church in historic downtown and I think we drove right through that neighborhood, maybe saw it, or walked around near to it.

I've been thinking about this news in focus of God's grace for awhile ever since I came across it on SermonAudio news page and followed the stories. A 6/18 Huffington Post link: 'Black Gun Violence Victim Writes Moving Message On Dylann Roof's Facebook Page...A black man who [previously] survived being shot eight times ... had a powerful message for Charleston shooting suspect Dylann...Roof -- and he left it on Roof's Facebook page... [hours after shooting] "I don't look at you with the eyes of hatred, or judge you by your appearance or race, but I look at you as a human being that made a horrible decision to take...lives..." [so right after the crime Marcus] Stanley, a musician, wrote on Roof's page..."If you're still out there and you have your phone with you ... Give your heart to Jesus and confess your sins ... He is the only one that can save your soul and forgive you for the terrible act you have done. I love you Dylann ... even in the midst of the darkness and pain you've caused, but more importantly, HE loves you.'¹

The post then urged Dylann to pray for forgiveness, first by acknowledging his sin and being willing to turn from it, confessing Jesus as Lord (he then quoted Romans 10:9). The black musician then spoke of unlimited grace to save from sin, grace that 'always leads to repentance' and that transforms us to live for the glory and honor of Christ who died for sinners to give us life. You don't often read words like that in Huffington Post or in the NY Times, or USA Today, but all of them and others in the aftermath of that shooting recorded words of truly amazing grace and love offered to the racist killer that same weekend in court by families of the slain victims. It stunned the media and even our president seemed visibly deeply affected by that grace. I shared some of the story at family camp and I want to expand on Titus 2-3

I want to come back to that courtroom later and the words of grace and love spoken there to the murderer of their loved ones, but the words by Marcus Stanley are very relevant to our times and a very eloquent intro to our text:

Titus 2:11 *For the **grace of God has appeared**, bringing salvation for all people,¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works [skip to **3:3**] ... For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in **malice** and envy, hated by others and **hating one another**.⁴ But when the goodness and **loving kindness** of God our Savior appeared,⁵ he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own **mercy**, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,⁶ whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,⁷ so that being justified by his **grace** we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life ...¹⁵ All who are with me send greetings to you. Greet those who **love us in the faith**. **Grace** be with you all.*

[1:4 begins with 'grace to you' – grace is central from start to finish]

We've been doing a series Sunday nights on the love chapter, 1 Cor 13, and I'll be concluding that study next month after tonight's message and another message from Jerry next time on love in John 21. For tonight, I want to take some time to consider how love and grace can look in real life, in our real world where prejudice and hate is still more real than we like to think about. If there are people you struggle to love or like or live with, God's grace that helped family members of the SC massacre to forgive and love is grace that can help you get over whatever offense you have against others. In a world where evil appears so greatly, Titus 3:4 tells us of a greater goodness of God that appeared. The NASB says '*His love for mankind appeared...*' or other translations say '*the love of God our Savior toward man appeared...*'

Titus 2:11 says God's grace has appeared to all men bringing salvation, and in Titus 3:4 it's God's *love* that's appeared to all men from God the Savior. God's love and grace are connected. They're 2 sides of the same coin that has appeared. Love is patient and kind, and His loving-kindness is for all mankind. It's love and grace offered to the human race, even those who hate or kill on the basis of race. It's not just *God's* love and grace, it's at work in God's *people* who are saved and changed to be gracious to and love sinners.

Notice in 3:15 this letter ends with love and grace. The love of God came to us in v. 4, and v. 15 describes Christians as those who love others in the faith and it ends with Christians expressing that *grace to you*, to each other. Grace and love are twins, not identical, but closely related by Jesus' blood. Tonight we'll fill out our study of love with its twin joined at the hip, grace. Tonight we'll look at grace's explanation, its illustration, and its application

[its illustration in SC, 4 applications for us, but first: grace's explanation]

Grace in v. 7 is explained as unmerited favor to sinners. It's undeserved, but more than that, it actually gives the opposite of what our sin deserves. It's the flip-side of mercy in v. 5, mercy is *not* getting what we deserve, grace is getting what we *don't* deserve, receiving the *opposite* of what we've earned or should receive for what we've done. Grace is not based on our works, as v. 5 says, it's only possible because of God's work for us and in us in Christ

GRACE=God's Riches At Christ's Expense. That's right here in this text, we're saved by grace in v. 7, which is defined in context of v. 6 as poured on us richly, if you have the ESV or NASB, or others say 'abundantly' or 'generously.' God's riches are graciously lavished on us at Christ's expense based on the infinite cost paid at the cross, the expense of Jesus' own blood. Another acronym I like to use to define grace by the letters G.R.A.C.E. is: God Redeeming Adopted Children Eternally. v. 3 pictures what I needed to be rescued from, that's what I was stuck in, but v. 7 pictures grace's adoption. The language of v. 7 is of a judge declaring a criminal to be pardoned and to be a precious loved child and heir, and the end of v. 7 says this is eternal life

v. 7 says we're justified by grace, that's a legal and court term. Despite our criminal record against God, God has declared us righteous based on Jesus paying the penalty for us, justice being served on Jesus on the cross, and Jesus giving us His righteousness as a gift of grace alone in exchange! It's not just the verdict of God as the Judge to declare a guilty one as not guilty.

It's actually God's declaration that He sees us in Christ as righteous, just as He sees Christ! To be justified isn't only God seeing me 'just as if I'd never sinned,' it's also God seeing me 'just as if I'd lived the righteous life Jesus lived'! God treated Jesus on the cross as if He lived my sinful life so He can treat me as if I lived His righteous life. But grace is even more amazing than that here in v. 8: not only does He not send us to hell, and not only does He let us live in His kingdom, He adopts then gives us the privileged position. The judge actually steps out from behind the bench to take us as His child. It's not just avoiding a judge's execution, it's receiving a Father's embrace!

In Titus 2:11 the grace of God that brings salvation is available to all men. In Titus 2:12 this grace teaches us to repent of sin, to renounce it, to say no to it. Grace for a Christian isn't passive or just in the past tense, it's active power for the present as it instructs us to deny sin and self. We're not saved by works, but true grace *works* in those who are saved. It works in v. 14 to purify us as God's possession. The end of v. 14 says this redeeming grace should make us '*zealous for good works.*' Those who have been saved by grace are to have a zeal for works, a passion for good works. Grace should never make us passive about works; it should make us passionate for good works. The grace that redeems from sin in v. 14 releases us to good works.

The grace of God in Titus 2:11 is available to all people, in all stages of life

- 2:11 is saving grace in the past tense, based on Christ's work in His first appearance on earth that's offered to all of humanity
- v. 12 is transforming grace in the present tense and present age
- v. 13 is future grace, the hope of Christ's 2nd appearance in glory
- v. 14-15 combines the past, present, and future in application

In some ways, it's much like the lyrics of Amazing Grace, salvation grace in the past tense has appeared: 'How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed.' It continues in the present through many dangers, toils and snares, bringing safe thus far. It's also a future grace that will lead us home. That's the explanation of grace, but I want to come back to an illustration of grace from that story in SC and then talk about applications of grace for us.

Many of you know John Newton who wrote that song was a slave-trader of black Africans, a self-described infidel and wretch till amazing grace saved him and opened his blind eyes to now see. The SC African ME church was founded 9 years after Newton's death, which was the same year of Britain's Slave Trade Act that Newton's friend William Wilberforce campaigned for, to abolish the Atlantic slave trade in Britain. At the time slavery in America was alive and well and would be many more years in SC and the South. At the funeral for the pastor of that church killed last month, the history of the church was rehearsed as 'a church built by blacks seeking liberty, burned to the ground because its founder sought to end slavery, only to rise up again ...laws banning all-black church gatherings [didn't stop them] ... Martin Luther King preached from its pulpit, and marches began from its steps'

The eulogy was given by the President of the U.S. who did a rare thing for a President of any generation, he sang Amazing Grace as part of his speech.

The President said the ‘killer could not see the grace surrounding Reverend Pinckney and that Bible study group — the light of love that shone as they opened the church doors and invited a stranger to join in their prayer circle. The alleged killer could have never anticipated the way the families of the fallen would respond when they saw him in court — in the midst of unspeakable grief, with words of forgiveness. He couldn’t imagine that.... Blinded by hatred, he failed to comprehend ... the power of God’s grace ... The grace that Reverend Pinckney would preach about in his sermons ... grace is not earned. Grace is not merited. It’s not something we deserve. Rather, grace is the free and benevolent favor of God — as manifested in the salvation of sinners ...’² [and he sang the 1st stanza of Amazing Grace]

You haven’t heard me quote our President very much, but he got that right, and he and our nation need grace, and even those very words going forth on national media I think is illustration of Titus 2:11 grace appearing to all men

But I think the clearest illustration of grace from people who clearly knew grace and extended grace in the courtroom. One article said: ‘Even the most cynical atheist had to have been in awe as the family members of the murdered faithful rose one after another in the Charleston courtroom and proved the power of their own faith in the face of crushing loss. “I forgive you,” Nadine Collier said through tears to the accused killer of her mother ... Roof has reportedly told police that the group was so welcoming and manifestly decent that he nearly decided to abandon his murderous plan ... Roof seems to have understood in his moments of indecision that these warmly devout people of the Bible study group [challenged] the lie of his racism. He may have sensed that the faith filling their lives might also fill his own...[a young man] Tywanza Sanders is said to have told him, “You don’t have to do this.” Roof is said to have replied as if he were also trying to convince himself ... He was a champion of the white race about to start a race war ... His next words were the language of white supremacists. ... Sanders could have sought to flee. He instead placed himself between the gun and his aunt. He was killed and now his mother stood in the court, addressing the killer [of her son and asked God’s mercy upon him. The last family member to speak in the courtroom said she was struggling with her anger over her murdered loved one, but said] “We have no room for hating, so we have to forgive,” she told Roof. “I pray to God for your soul.” [the reporter concludes]...Even atheists had to see divinity in these families built by love. God was there in that courtroom if He has ever been anywhere.’³ Titus 2:11 says grace is available to all, even atheists, politicians, murderers

This isn't universal salvation, but grace is *available* universally to all who believe. *All* in the context of v. 9-10 includes slaves, masters, or in v. 1-8, *all* includes young and old, men and women, every stage of life, and *all* includes the Cretans of chapter 1, whether liars, lazy beasts, or legalists, or also in chapter 1 it includes difficult people in churches who are debaters or disrupters. Grace is even offered to them if they repent, it's appeared to *all*.

The *all* in v. 11 doesn't mean all are saved or will be. God's grace appeared but is actualized only by faith. In context of v. 1-10, God's grace saves all *types* of men, economically, ethnically, etc., within the human race. There's no tribe, tongue or type of person that God's grace is not for. Scripture talks about a *common grace* that is clearly visible to all (in Romans 1 creation is exhibit A on this), but that's different than saving grace, which happens at the moment of repentant faith. Saving grace is available to all in the gospel, and is to be offered to all by us, that's the general call or free offer, but it only becomes effectual or actual salvation when there's regenerating grace by the Holy Spirit who opens eyes to the fullness of grace. In some sense it's appeared to all, but only eyes of faith see it and receive its full benefits

The appearance of grace in this context isn't just the common grace we see in creation. The ultimate appearance of this grace was when Jesus appeared on earth, as Jn 1 says He '*became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, full of grace...*' and it goes on to say '*grace...came through Jesus Christ,*' '*grace upon grace.*' Jesus didn't physically appear to all people on the planet, but His grace did appear to all types of people in His ministry for 3 years, and He also promised future grace after His resurrection, ascension.

Acts 2 says on the day of Pentecost, all men, people of every nation of their world around Israel were there, and it even mentions people from Crete, the very island Titus was ministering on. The all/every language in Acts 2 isn't saying every person on the planet was there in Jerusalem, or every people group (it lists 14 known people groups from N. Africa to E. Europe to the Arab world in the middle east). But it specifically mentions Cretans in Acts, which is the island Titus was on and people Titus is ministering to (1:5, 12), a people known by their own writers as beasts and lazy, but grace is for all.

So when Titus 2:11 says God's grace appeared, it's referring to God's grace in Christ, beginning in His life on earth, later expanding in the book of Acts as Christ's salvation is brought to all, from Jerusalem to the end of the earth including Cretans and Californians. What about those who kill Christians?

The apostle writing this letter had once been a killer of Christians but while on his way to arrest and execute Christians on the road to Damascus, grace appeared to him and arrested him, putting an end to his old life, giving new life. Does 'all men/all people' in v. 11 include people like that SC shooter?

I watched his bail bond hearing in SC online, and I saw grace appear to him. Dylan Roof, charged with mass murder, stood in his striped jump suit while family members of the victims had an opportunity to speak to him. And the first to speak, the daughter of one, spoke in tears of her hurt but then offered forgiveness to the killer and God's mercy on this one who'd killed her mom

Anthony Thompson said on behalf of his murdered wife: '...we would like you to take this opportunity to repent. Repent. Confess. Give your life to...Christ, so that He can change it. And change your ways, no matter what happens to you, you'll be ok. Do that, and you'll be better off than what you are right now.' The next lady, Felicia Sanders, whose son was killed, said with great emotion: 'We welcomed you Wednesday night in our Bible study with open arms. You have killed some of the most beautiful people that I know. Every fiber in my body hurts, and I will never be the same...as we said in Bible study "we enjoyed you." But may God have mercy on you.'

Granddaughter of Pastor Simmons, who died at age 74 at the hands of hate, said despite Dylan's hate, 'This is proof, everyone's plea for your soul that *they* lived in love and their legacies will live in love, so hate won't win.' It's on YouTube, most of those words even appeared in Wall Street Journal. That's only possible by the grace of One who while He was murdered said, '*Father forgive them.*' It's a vivid example of God's grace appearing to all.

If God's grace has appeared to us and brought salvation to us, then we must apply this grace in our lives. We must respond by showing grace to all, by making it appear, making it visible, we're to bring grace and salvation to all as Isaiah says how beautiful it is as one brings good news, brings salvation.

1st application: Gospel Grace to Unbelievers

The same Paul says in Col 4:3 pray '*that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned;*⁴ *that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak.*⁵ *Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity.*⁶ *Let your speech always be **with grace**, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.*

Every person, all people need grace, and we need the way we speak to them to always be with grace. Like you season food with salt before you put it in your mouth, Paul says you need to also season what comes out your mouth with grace. Be the salt of the world, sprinkling grace on what you say to it. Like seasoning food before serving guests, before you serve words to others think of that image: ‘have I seasoned this? Is it ready to serve up? Do I need to sprinkle some more grace on this before I pass this on, or a side of love?’

2. Grace in Ministry to Believers

The same Paul in Eph 3 says *‘the stewardship of God’s grace...was given to me for you...I was made a minister, according to the gift of God’s grace... To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach...’* God’s grace is a stewardship we’re to pass on using our gifts to minister His grace.

3. Grace in Parenting

Pr 1:8-9 says a parent’s instruction can be a graceful wreath to a son’s head. Pr 11:16: ‘a gracious woman gets honor.’ Pr 31 woman has it on her tongue. 1 Thess 2 also speaks of a gracious encouraging father to children. Jesus said ‘be merciful as your father is merciful.’ Be sure to ‘give them grace.’

4. Grace in Everyday Speech

It was said of Jesus in Lk 4 ‘gracious words’ were falling from His lips. Eph 4:29 says our speech must edify, be necessary, and *give grace* to our hearer. If the families of those victims of that horrific hate crime in SC could speak graciously to the white supremacist who wickedly murdered their loved one then we can speak graciously to someone we wouldn’t naturally and forgive lesser hurts. If grace can save Saul of Tarsus to write Titus 2:11 it can any.

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me!

I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.

Twas grace that taught my hearts to fear and grace my fears relieved ...

Through many dangers, toils, and snares I have already come

Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far and grace will lead me home

It’s all of grace all the way, wretch-saving, lost-finding, sight-giving, heart-teaching, fear-instilling, fear-relieving, safe-keeping, danger-protecting, home-leading, praise-inspiring grace for 10,000 years and beyond we will sing in amazed praise of grace that appeared, bringing salvation to all men!

¹ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/06/18/shooting-dylann-roof-facebook_n_7614398.html

² <http://www.nytimes.com/video/us/100000003767801/obama-delivers-eulogy-in-charleston.html>

³ <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/06/20/charleston-shooting-families-proved-grace-wins-out-over-hate.html>