

The Reason for Paul's Commandments

Pastor and author A.W. Tozer

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As most of you know, I am preaching a series of messages Sunday nights called The Angel Before Thee. And tonight, I want to talk about how to make your enemies work for you. I'd like to have you here and bring others here and learn, literally, this is not a trick sermon, this is literally true, and I shall develop it and show how it can be done, how I think I do it, make my enemies work for me. While they think they are getting me down, they're getting me up.

Then don't forget that next Sunday night, we'll continue with it, next Sunday morning I'll be present and then we'll introduce the president of the Alliance Churches in the Philippine Islands, Mr. D. Jesus. But in the evening, I'll resume my series.

And on Wednesday evening at 7.30 sharp, we teach for about 40 minutes on the Sermon on the Mount. The rest of the time is spent in prayer. We have fine discussions. It's a class, which of course the teacher always ends up by being right, but we do allow discussion. I enjoy it myself; I believe others do, Wednesday at 7.30.

Now, the words of our text. You know I am going slowly through the book of Titus. A tightly packed little book is filled with theological meat, as a boiled egg is filled with meat. In verse 11 of chapter 2, there is the little word "for." For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

Now, it would be a total impossibility for any man, I don't care who the man might be, to treat this all in one sermon and do it any justice at all. So, I am not going even to try. I am going to allow my thoughts to wander a bit around the word "for" there, for the grace of God.

Now, that little word "for" is very important. I don't go along with that type of Bible teacher that takes some unimportant verse, looks mysterious, and says, this is the key to the whole Bible. I have heard that so much that I have become immune to it. Immune to it would be a better word because I don't believe it.

Some expositors take that 117th, isn't it, Psalm, that shortest of all the Psalms, and they look very wise and say, undoubtedly this is the most important Psalm in the entire Bible. It says, O praise the Lord, all ye nations, praise him, all ye people, for his merciful kindness is great toward us, and the truth of the Lord endureth forever. Praise ye the Lord. And they want me to believe that that's the most important Psalm and that all the rest of the Psalms center around that.

Well, I believe in faith, and I also believe in skepticism. I think a good hearty dose of skepticism is the only way to treat some teachers. So, I don't want to fall into this trap and say that the most important word here is for, for it isn't by any means the most important, but for my purpose this morning, it's quite important in that I want to show you something here. This is, of course, a preposition, but theologically it's a conjunctive here. It's, it joins two great thoughts.

Now Paul had been saying above this, that aged men should be sober and brave and temperate and sound in faith and in love and in patience. And that older women should be, be as becometh holiness, not gossipers and not given to wine, teachers of good things. And that young women should be sober, love their husbands and their children, be discreet and chaste and good housekeepers and obedient to their husband. And that young men also ought to be sober and that Titus himself should show himself a pattern of good works, and that employees should be obedient to their masters and to please them and not steal from them and should be faithful to them. And that, that doctrine might be adorned.

Now that's what he had been saying. Now we say, Paul, wait a minute here. We don't believe in just being pushed into things. Uh, you want the older men to be grave and sober and righteous. You want the older women to be holy and good and pure and tight mouthed. You want the younger women to be good housekeepers, love their families and be an example to others. You want employees to work for their employers faithfully and well, and not be guilty of stealing little things here and there, but remember that stealing is wrong at any time. Now, why Paul, uh, this isn't the way the Romans taught, nor the way the Greeks taught.

This isn't the way the average American looks at things, Paul. Why, what can you say to us that will give us a reason for this? What's the reason that you want us to live like this? Paul said, well, this is the reason, this is the reason. And the word for gathers up all of that.

It means this which I have previously required of you. The reason for it is this, that the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, or for all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for the blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ.

When the Bible makes a statement or lays down a commandment without any reason being given, it is the immediate duty of all Christians to believe that statement and obey that commandment and wait to know why God made that, gave that commandment and made that statement. But it is very rare that God requires anything of His people that He doesn't either before or after explain why. God knows we're intelligent people and a Christian should be one of the most intelligent of all persons.

I have never accepted the implied creed that a Christian is one who, he's retarded. And the Lord comes along and puts him in a home for retarded children, that the church is a home for retarded children. I never have believed that. I still don't believe it. I well know that a wild intellect, uncontrolled and egocentric and filled with sin can be a very dangerous and terrible thing. I also know that a brilliant intellect filled with the Holy

Ghost can be a very wonderful thing as David and Isaiah and Paul and John and Augustine and Luther and Wesley have taught us.

So, I believe in the intelligence. I believe the Bible is an intelligent book. It goes beyond intelligence. And that is one of the glories of the Scripture and one of the glories of Christianity, that we go beyond intelligence. We never go contrary to it, but we often go beyond it. The prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New, heard and saw things which their intellects were never able to equate with anything else they knew or with anything taught by mortal man. They saw visions and dreamed dreams and looked into the face of the awesome God with a rainbow around His shoulders and they rose above the power of the mind to climb. But it was never anything they saw, never anything was contrary to good sound reasoning. It was above it, I repeat, but never contrary to it.

So, God has given us reasons for things and has said here, take this book and you'll know not only that you should be good, but why you should be. Not only that you should believe, but why you should believe. It was Anselm that said, we think because we believe, not in order that we might believe. In the believing man, faith is always first. And the believing man believes and then he can think as deeply and intensely and widely and imaginatively as he wants to do it because he has faith to start with. And he never goes beyond faith and never rises above faith. He rises above reason, but never above faith.

So, Paul gave us the reason here. He had been exhorting. Paul didn't do it that way usually. Usually in his epistles, Paul begins with heavy theology and lays the foundation down, good and solid, and then builds up on it exhortations and commandments and urgings that we're to do this and thus and this and live this way and go there and do this and we're to live in this way and that way in order or because these other things are true which were previously stated. Here Paul reverses himself and gives us first the commandments and then gives us the reason for.

Now he said, for the grace of God hath appeared to all men. I think it should read, for the grace of God hath appeared bringing salvation for all men. Now what does this mean? I find a very convenient and I believe helpful way of going about Bible study and Bible teaching to find out what a thing doesn't mean. If you can't know what a thing means, you can save yourself a lot of confusion by finding out what it doesn't mean. And some people not knowing what this doesn't mean, they have read into it meanings that it does not contain.

As a young Christian on attending a church over on Locust Street in Akron, Ohio, I used to pass by every Sunday, used to pass by a great expansive imposing looking church. It said Universalist Church. I don't know whether they've changed their name, I haven't seen a Universalist Church sign for years. But the Universalists weren't wholly bad. They believed in the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. They believed that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son. They believed that Jesus Christ, when he died, paid the price for all men. At least I think this is a fair statement of what they believed.

But they took verses like this in this chapter, the grace of God hath appeared bringing salvation to all men. And they said, well, that just means what it says, that God's grace is so vast and infinite and all comprehensive that it leaves nobody out and therefore everybody will be saved. They believed in universalism.

Now, I didn't intend to tell you this, but it fits in so beautifully that I must. A man said that he was a Universalist preacher, and he said he went into a neighborhood and decided that he wanted to establish a Universalist church. So, he went around finding if he could find, looking about, seeing if he could find any Universalists of the Universalist persuasion.

He finally ran on to a man and he said, yes, I'm a Universalist. Oh, he said, that's fine. Perhaps we can interest you. We want to establish a Universalist church. Well, he said, I think it's fair to tell you though that I'm not quite the kind of Universalist that you are. He said, you are a Universalist, and your creed is that everybody will be saved. Now, he said, I've lived in the world a long time and I have mingled with men, and I've mixed with them everywhere, all out over the world. I've watched them live. I've had them lie to me. I've been cheated and skinned and sold down river and deceived and betrayed. And he said, I've decided that I believe in the universal damnation of all men. He said, I'm that kind of a Universalist.

Quite a shock, I take it, to the brother who believed in the salvation of all men. But the Universalists and others believe in the universal salvation of all men, grounding it upon such passages as this.

Well, I say they're not wholly bad, but they're not certainly right about it because this doesn't mean it. You say, well, how do you know that it doesn't mean it? I know it for this reason, that the Bible is to be understood not by what this verse says, but by what this verse and this verse and this one and this one and this one says. And when you get a dozen of them to agree on something, then you have Bible dogmatics.

And when these dozens agree, and then you find one you can't understand, and if he doesn't agree with these plain ones, then you say, well, we'll put that aside as Gypsy Smith did with the bone when he was eating fish. You ask him what he did with the passage, he couldn't understand. He said, the same as when I'm eating fish, and I ran into a bone. He said, I just lay it on the side of the plate.

And so, when you find a passage that seems to contradict the plain teachings of 25 other verses, lay that on the side of the plate because you don't understand that. And always remember there'll be some blazing-eyed fanatic rushing in and telling you that because you don't know what that teaches, therefore he is now sent to enlighten you. And what he says it teaches is what 25 other passages deny.

So, I know this doesn't mean that all men are to be saved, that the grace of God has appeared to all men savingly, and that the grace of God is working actively in all men. I know better than that, for the man who wrote this said, not all men have faith, and said that evil men and seducers should wax worse and worse until the end came.

And then I know also that it doesn't mean that all men have heard of the grace of God. It's appearing. The grace of God which bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, and that would leave us with the false impression, if we don't watch it, that everybody in the whole world has heard of the grace of God. I wish that were so. I wish that everybody that lives everywhere from the youngest inhabitant of the jungle to the oldest man in London or Paris had heard of the grace of God, but it just isn't so.

And I might add that it is perhaps one of the great and serious crimes of all time that the church of our Lord Jesus Christ has failed so dismally to instruct the world that the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation for everybody that will take it. That we've had nearly 2,000 years to do it, and that we have succeeded not in doing it.

The revolution, the Bolshevistic revolution, came in 1917, and 31 years later, one-third of the earth's population are under the hammer and the sickle. They did in 31 years what the church has not been able to do. That is, they did for the devil in 31 years what the church has not been able to do for God in 2000.

Now, it doesn't mean that everybody's heard. If it meant everybody had heard, Christ would have been back long ago, and this terrible nightmare we call history would have ended, and Christ would now be reigning from the river to the ends of the earth, and every man would be sitting under his own vine and fig tree, and no man should be wicked nor sinful nor harmful all over the earth. From sunrise to sunup, and from sunup to sunrise, no evil would be anywhere about. So, it doesn't mean that.

What does it mean? It means that there has been a shining forth, epiphany, a shining forth. The word is used here for the shining forth of the sun, for the grace of God has appeared. This is the epiphany, the shining forth of the grace of God like the mighty sun in the heavens. It has shone forth around the person of Jesus Christ our Lord, shone forth in His love and pity and mercy, shone forth in His willingness to die for His enemies, shone forth. It was not a gleam of light, as some would say, but it was a shining forth, as the sun at ten o'clock on a June morning, shining forth in its glory all over the earth, wherever the clouds will withdraw and let the sun shine.

So, that's what it means. The grace of God has shone forth like the sun, and this grace brings salvation, and that salvation is for all men everywhere that will receive it. That's what this passage means. And the grace of God has appeared teaching us. I want to bear down a little on that. The grace of God has appeared teaching us.

Now, in what way can the grace of God teach anybody? The answer is that the word grace has at least two meanings, and two meanings here. It means an attribute of God, a quality in God, of love and mercy and kindness and goodwill that predisposes God always to be kind to those that don't deserve it, and to be good to those that deserve only judgment, and to pour out Himself and His love and even the blood of His son for the salvation of those that deserve nothing but hell. That is a quality in God, a characteristic of the heart of God.

Now, I am conscious that both when I use the word quality and characteristic that I am humanizing God because we can't rise to the elevation where we can talk about God in divine terms, we have to talk about Him in human terms. Actually, there's no such thing

as a quality in God or a characteristic in God. God's unitary being has about it a unicity, a oneness.

And anything we say about God is simply our minds attributing things to God, for God dwelleth in light that no man can approach unto. But this is an attribute, this grace, and of course this can't teach anybody anything. An attribute of God can't teach a man down in Grant Park on a park bench anything. An attribute in God can't teach a Doni in the Baliem Valley anything, or an Indian in Columbia. The grace of God as an objective thing, objective to us, outside of us, an external thing, cannot teach us anything. It can move God to act in our behalf, but as long as it's outside of us it can teach us nothing.

But the grace of God has another meaning too. The grace of God means a divine influence upon the heart. It means an inward enabling; it means an active moral force. Remember in 2 Corinthians 12, where Paul told us how he had been praying that the thorn might be, he might be delivered from the thorn in the flesh which caused him great distress. He said he prayed three times about it, and on the third time the Lord said, Paul, my strength is made perfect in weakness, for my grace is sufficient for thee. He didn't mean my attribute of grace which lies in me, in the great undulating infinite sea of the Godhead.

That would do Paul no good at that moment, but he said there's another kind of grace, another aspect of that grace, which is an active working force that enters the heart of a man and does things for him. He said my grace is sufficient for thee. My grace, my active grace, this influence, this moral power within your bosom can lift you above the thorn which you're trying to get rid of.

Paul caught it in a second. Paul was a spiritually intelligent man, and as soon as God said it, Paul added his own comment. He said, therefore, I will glory in my infirmities, that the power of God might rest upon me. And he knew the grace of God and the power of God were all one.

So, the grace of God is a teacher. It is a moral force. It gets inside the intelligence, gets inside the will, motivates the life, gets inside the heart and disturbs the emotions and excites them. So that's what it means, the grace of God that bringeth salvation, teaches us, teaches us.

Now, my brethren, it was a low moment in the orthodox church when the word grace lost its second meaning and was forced to take only the first one. It was a low moment, I say, an awful moment in the history of fundamentalism when the word grace lost its second meaning, that of a divine power working within us, and was forced to be satisfied with its first meaning, that of an attribute of God flowing out of kindness and love and mercy which sent God's Son to die for the lost.

So, the grace of God, for most people, remains in God. And it leaves the recipient of grace unchanged by grace. But do you notice that Paul taught that grace changed people? He said grace changed them. He said the grace of God has appeared teaching us, inwardly teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world. It was a very slick trick of the devil indeed when he disassociated the two meanings of the word grace.

And everybody goes out now teaching, grace, grace, grace that is greater than all my sin. Do I believe it? Oh, with everything in me, I believe it. Do I preach it? Well, you know I preach it. Do I believe in the grace of God? Nobody, nobody can sing with a worse voice and a happier heart, amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saves a wretch like me. Nobody, nobody can sing it worse, and nobody can love it more. The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.

And that grace in God, that's why we're here, brethren. I'd like to prove sometime that everything God ever did since the beginning of time, he did out of grace. I'd like to prove, and I believe I can show you, that everything God does is grace, that God never did anything by law, never did anything by law, all is by grace.

The Psalmist used to pray, have mercy upon me and hear my prayer, be gracious unto me and hear my prayer. He knew that God's willingness to hear prayer was God's grace in operation. The very stars and sun overhead are the grace of God in operation. Nobody deserves anything from God. If they could only get that. One time more see the sovereignty of God, that God owes nobody anything and gives everybody everything, and therefore we owe him every gratitude in all the world. And all is by grace.

When God made the heaven and the earth, it was by grace. When he laid the foundations thereof, it was by grace. When He girdled the earth with the firmament, it was by grace. And when He made man upon the earth and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, it was by grace. And everything that God has ever done has been out of the goodness of His heart.

But if the grace of God was only a principle of which causes God to operate, it could never get to me. But the grace of God is more than that. The grace of God enters human hearts and other hearts, I suppose.

I believe that the very angels in heaven are motivated by the workings of God's love and grace in their own hearts, although they never understand it quite as you and I will. The grace of God teaches us, enters our hearts and teaches us. But you know, the devil has, through false teachers and ignorant teachers and persons who will not think nor pray about things, disassociated the two meanings.

And we have only one meaning, and that's the one I've been talking about here now for a few minutes. The wonderful goodness of the heart of God, which gave us everything that we have, which gave us His Son to die, and gave us eternal life without money and without price, gave us mercy, gave us forgiveness, and gave us a place in heaven itself, all this by grace. And you can't overdo it.

You know, you can't sing too loudly or too often of the grace of God. But here's what you can do. You can misunderstand the meaning of it, and you can forget that it has its second meaning. The second meaning being, I repeat now for the third time, the divine influence upon the heart, the inward enabling, the active moral force working to teach us morality, spirituality, ethics, inward goodness. But anybody that talks the way I do now is attacked by these one-definition boys. They say he's a legalist, or they say he's seeking to be saved by works.

I read that passage once more, not by works of righteousness which we have done, according to His mercy He saved us. I read that, and I believe it. Or they say he's mixing law and grace. No. I've never mixed law and grace in my life consciously, and I don't think I'm doing it unconsciously.

You know, the habit is now to blame everything on the Schofield Bible. And I've said a few sharp things about some of the notes myself, but the Schofield Bible can't be blamed for this. The Schofield Bible's 100 percent right in its attitude toward grace. Let me read a note on 2 Peter 3:18. I don't know who wrote it, of course, one of the half-dozen editors.

But it says under the caption, Grace Imparted, here's what it says. It says, Grace is not only dispensationally a method of divine dealing in salvation, it is also the method of God in the believer's life and service. Having by grace brought the believer into the highest conceivable position, God ceaselessly works through grace to impart to and perfect him in corresponding graces. Perfectly right. The grace of God that set him as high as it's possible to set anything above the angels, ultimately, ceaselessly works in him to impart to and perfect him in corresponding graces.

Grace, therefore, it continues, stands connected with service, with Christian growth, and with giving. So don't let's blame the Schofield Bible for that one. The brethren have gone far beyond in separating grace from grace, the grace of God from the grace in man.

Oh, my friends, let's not be satisfied to keep all God's qualities in God. God wants some of His qualities to get into us. There are attributes of God which no man can share. For instance, His eternity, His self-sufficiency, His infinitude, His incomprehensibility. Those are attributes which belong to God, and God cannot share them with creatures. But there are other attributes that God can share with creatures, kindness, love, mercy, grace, goodness, wisdom.

Now I close, or rather just break it off here, and any preacher's presence will know this is no way to close a sermon. But I'm going to close it this way, that we have every Scriptural reason to believe that if grace has saved us, it has also changed us.

We have every scriptural reason to believe that if we are not changed by grace, we are not saved by grace. For the grace of God that bringeth salvation has appeared, teaching us, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts. We should live soberly and righteously and godly, and I shall show in a succeeding sermon that soberly and righteously and godly takes in the triangle of man's possible existence, God and man and self, and all the ethics of an Aristotle, or all the righteousness of a Moses. The holiness of a Paul can't take the man out of that triangle. He's there, but it's as big and vast as the heart of God.

So, remember it, that if you believe you're saved by grace, but there is not a corresponding working within your heart toward holiness and righteousness, I must in honesty tell you, you're probably deceived. For the grace of God, when it's received, when a man says, I accept salvation by the grace of God through Jesus Christ, God smiles and goes to work inside the man. If the man really receives God, He goes to work inside of him to produce the very graces that the New Testament is chock-full of.

And so, if a man says, technically, I am saved by the grace of God, and then goes his own way and isn't changed, I believe he is a deceived man and completely deluded and will be lost at last. We're saved by grace under good works. We're saved by grace, and the same grace by which we are saved now becomes an active force working within us to make us pure and good and righteous.

May God grant that we'll not miss this, that we'll not go so far out on a limb in our committal to the one meaning of the grace of God that we forget there are any other meanings. There is at least one other. Let's trust him. If He saved us by grace, let's trust Him to save us in grace, and that grace may operate through us to make us the kind of Christians that will adorn the doctrine of Jesus Christ.