



WHERE GRACE LEADS

THE COURSE OF SALVATION
IN JESUS CHRIST

BY JEFF HOPPER

It is vital that we see that grace and salvation are not abstract terms but tied up in the person who enacted and enacts them—in Christ.

A number of years ago, one of the courses I grew up playing received an infusion of funding and decided to put in cart paths for one of their projects. When you live where it doesn't rain too much, cart paths aren't a necessity except around tees and greens. So this was going to be an unusual project for our area, because they were planning to install one continuous path around the entire 18 holes. They had to wait to move one green before the project was fully complete a year later, but in the end they had what they wanted: an unbroken line of concrete from the first tee to the eighteenth green.

"Cart paths only" is a rare requirement in our desert climate, making stretches of this five-mile cart path rarely used, but who am I to judge? The aerial views of this concrete snake must be interesting to the average extraterrestrial spy, revealing a big looping road to, well, nowhere. Somewhere a cement contractor is smiling.

Road construction really is one of the marvels of human engineering. According to the Federal Highway Administration, the United States is paved with more than four million miles of roads. Depending on where they are built and how wide they are, these come at a cost of \$4 million to \$11 million per mile.

Those are the hard facts, but roads are often about dreams and adventures. They bring people together and carry them apart. They are the scenes of tragedies but also the muses of song. Roads, though lifeless, have a heartbeat. And even when the road before us is not literal, we let it take us away—on a journey, as is now so often said.

The apostle Paul, with no apparent cartographic intent, laid out a map for the Christ-changed life. It's a map for a trip. As with all trips, this one has a starting point, a destination, and a road that stretches out between them. We find this route in Paul's letter to Titus, a pastoral protégé.

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, 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. (Titus 2:11-14, ESV for all references)

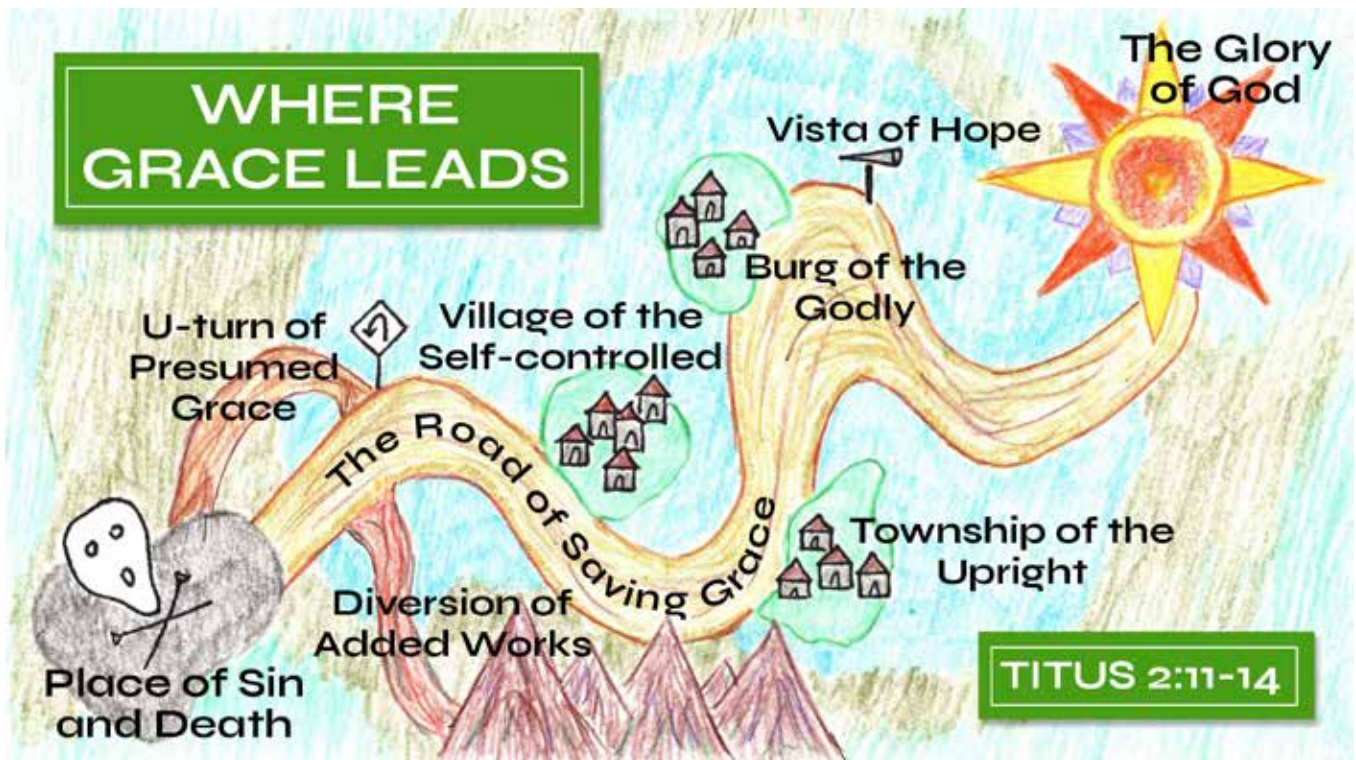
Now you may already be assembling this in your head, but let's look at the map I have in mind from this passage:

place where we think we have a very good of idea of how the world works and how we can survive in it. For some people, it is all about taking care of yourself. If I work hard and accomplish my goals and protect myself and my family, I'm going to succeed in this world. No need for God (ungodliness); lots of reason to pursue what makes me feel good (worldly passions). For other people, it's about making the world a better place for everyone. The highest values are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Together we can keep the world on an upward trajectory of improvement. Again, no need for God (ungodliness); lots of reason to pursue what will allow us to survive and thrive as a planet

in that cosmopolitan city:

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

We could take many detours and address all of these specific



THE BAD BEGINNING

We begin with where we started—in a place of ungodliness and worldly passions. It's a

and a people (worldly passions). Paul got very specific when he wrote to the Corinthians about this in his first letter to the church

sins, but I do not think that is at all what Paul intended. Overall, what Paul intended was to show that those who willfully

continue in sin—those he called “the unrighteous”—would not inherit the kingdom of God unless something supernatural happened to them. And indeed, something supernatural had happened to many individuals in the Corinthian church, for Paul said “such were some of you.” That’s how you lived when you were in sin. But then, Paul wrote, you were cleansed of that—washed. You were sanctified and justified. As he was saying to Titus, “Grace has appeared, bringing salvation.” There’s a way out of this town called sin, and that way is the salvation that comes from God’s grace.

It is important to emphasize why you should want out of this town, because nearly all of us are sentimental toward home, aren’t we? We’re comfortable here. Our friends are here, our favorite hangouts are here. And it can be so hard to move—it requires so much change. But I think Paul’s words to the Ephesians give us the boot we need: “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked” (Ephesians 2:1-2).

Living in a place of sin is living in a place of death. A graveyard. A haunted house. A morgue. You might say to your friends, “It doesn’t get any better than this. This is living!” But it’s not living because it has no life. Sin neither sows nor reaps anything of lasting value. When we live in a place of sin, our view is distorted, just as C.S. Lewis preached in “The Weight of Glory”:

We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with

drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

We think we know what the world is about and that it is offering us wonderful things. Let’s give it this: it’s offering us shiny things, attractive things, seductive things. But sooner or later you’ll come to find out, as the prodigal son did, that you’re eating slop.



THE ROAD AWAY

So we need something to take us away from all this, to carry us away from sin. And that something—the only something that can do this right through to our core—is the saving grace of God.

There are some definitions of grace with which you are probably familiar. The first is something of a backing into what grace is. It goes like this:

**MERCY IS NOT GETTING
WHAT YOU DESERVE**

**GRACE IS GETTING WHAT
YOU DON’T DESERVE**

That doesn’t really define what grace is, but it gives us a good indication that grace is some-

thing good. In terms of God’s universe, we might say that mercy is not being sent to hell for our sin, while grace is being allowed to enjoy eternity with the Lord in his new heaven and new earth.

But how is this possible? It’s possible because of another definition of grace you have heard, an acrostic:

**GOD’S
RICHES
AT
CHRIST’S
EXPENSE**

See, again we are getting something we do not deserve: God’s riches. But in order for us to get this, Jesus got something he did not deserve: death for sin he did not commit. A price was paid for our salvation. And the one who paid it was Jesus Christ. Does this seem elementary? Maybe. But it is vital that we see that grace and salvation are not abstract terms but tied up in the person who enacted and enacts them—in Christ. Theologian Mike Horton says:

In grace, God gives nothing less than himself. Grace, then, is not a third thing or substance mediating between God and sinners, but is Jesus Christ in redeeming action.

When it comes to grace and salvation, we are not dealing with ideas or concepts or substances. We are dealing with the eternal God of the universe, with Jesus the exalted Savior. Look, this is the streak of lightning that

flashes across Scripture from beginning to end:

The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life.

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." (Genesis 3:14-15)

Who is the offspring of the woman? It is Christ, the one who crushes the serpent's head—that is, the head of the one who drags us into sin. Christ is the promised one from nearly the very beginning. He is absolutely the promised one since the beginning of sin on earth. Now look back again:

"For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed

you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations..." (Deuteronomy 7:6-9)

Moses spoke from the Lord to the people of God. You have nothing to do with all this love God is showing you, he told them, outlining the system of grace not only for them but for us: "to a thousand generations." God's covenant is all about grace given to those who do not deserve it. Paul Zahl assessed it this way:

Grace is a love that has nothing to do with you, the beloved. It has everything and only to do with the lover. Grace is irrational in the sense that it has nothing to do with weights and measures. It has nothing to do with my intrinsic qualities or so-called "gifts" (whatever they may be). It reflects a decision on the part of the giver, the one who loves, in relation to the receiver, the one who is loved, that negates any qualifications the receiver may personally hold.... Grace is one-way love.

TWO DANGEROUS DIVERSIONS

You may have encountered a friend or loved one who rejects the Christian's doctrine of grace for the very reason that it "ne-

gates any qualifications the receiver may personally hold." This is the diversion of works. Add enough personal effort to what Christ has done and you'll be good to go for eternity. "Climb these mountains," they say, but these mountains present one false summit after another. You can never reach the top. The people who say you can want to contribute something to their salvation, and we tell them that they can't. Maybe that is to take something away from them, but we see it like this: it is to give everything to Jesus. He paid it all, so he should receive all the praise for it.

There is another error on the other side, and that is to presume upon grace, which Paul took up with the Romans:

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:1-4)

This is essentially to make a U-turn, heading back to the place of sin to indulge your flesh and its desires. The person who does this may be thinking, God forgave me before, he will forgive me again. While this may be true, it is like the speedster

saying to himself, “Now that I’ve got those points expunged from my record, I’m free to speed again.” But the laws haven’t changed for the speedster, neither will his “free” actions be free from endangering himself and others. When we presume upon God’s grace by willful sin, we are rejecting his ways and ignoring the consequences to our soul and the souls of others. “Do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience,” Paul asked the Romans, “not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?” (Romans 2:4). You see, grace is meant to lead us away from sin—for good—not back to it just because we can.



THE WAY AHEAD

So let’s get past the potential side trips that would lead us away from where grace is meant to take us—that is, from where Christ is wanting to take us—and look to where our course is pointed.

Let’s start with a general sense of this forward motion. First, we must get away from any thought that we can pull off the road and fill up with some kind of fuel that has little to do with God. James Strong wrote of grace that it is “especially the divine influence upon the heart, and its reflection in the life.” That last phrase is important. What grace does to us will be visible; it will be reflected in our life. It’s not mysterious or ethereal, any

more than Christ’s going to the cross was mysterious or ethereal. It was completely real, right down to the shed blood. And when God’s grace does its work in you, it will be visible. That’s where we can make our mistake. We see good stuff on the outside and we credit it to the person (or to ourselves!) on the inside. Nope. It’s God at work, by his grace. The Blue Letter Bible puts it like this: “...the merciful kindness by which God, exerting his holy influence upon souls, turns them to Christ...and kindles them to the exercise of the Christian virtues.” When grace takes us away from sin, something—probably many things—happen to us and you can see it happening, because the way we live our life changes.

Now what does that change look like? Paul chose three examples when writing to Titus. He said that saving grace trains us to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives. Let’s look at these one-by-one.

Self-controlled lives (On our map, The Village of the Self-Controlled). The Greek here is taken up by translators not only as “self-controlled,” but also as “sound mindedly,” “soberly,” “sensibly,” or “with wisdom.” The overriding sense is that people who are taking the road of grace are living with meaning and purpose. They are not easily side-tracked, spending time on incidental pursuits. It would be wrong to say these people are boring or intense or unable to relax. In fact, we know they do well to remember the purpose of sabbath rest, which

is given (and taken) for the very purpose of restoring ourselves for work, including the work of God. Self-controlled people understand that their spiritual lives should be balanced—there is a time for the zealous proclamation we call preaching or prophecy and a time for the quiet reflection we call meditation. It is those with sound, sober thinking who can discern when to do the one or the other.

How does grace provide for this? Mostly it brings us down from high thinking and aligns us away from false thinking. Consider Romans 12:3: “For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.” Grace moves our mind toward proper thinking, which precedes proper action.

Upright lives (The Township of the Upright). Here we come to the place of proper action. This time, the translators connect “upright” to “righteous,” “just,” and “moral.” While the road of our lives rarely looks straight, the road of righteousness does. Simply, we are to live as God would have us live. There is a sad episode in 2 Kings 13, where the people missed this—and thus missed the full outworking of God’s grace because of it. Jehoahaz was king of Israel in the divided kingdom, and the Scriptures say that because of his sinful leadership the Lord “gave them continually into the hand of Hazael king of Syria.” Then we read this:

Then Jehoahaz sought the favor of the LORD, and the LORD listened to him, for he saw the oppression of Israel, how the king of Syria oppressed them. (Therefore the LORD gave Israel a savior, so that they escaped from the hand of the Syrians, and the people of Israel lived in their homes as formerly. Nevertheless, they did not depart from the sins of the house of Jeroboam, which he made Israel to sin, but walked in them; and the Asherah also remained in Samaria.) (2 Kings 13:4-6)

What a shame! A savior is given to them and provides for their rescue, and they go on living as if nothing ever happened. They presumed on the grace of God when they knew the way of righteousness: tear down the idols, the Asherah poles, and worship God wholeheartedly. Upright people know differently. They learn the ways of God and live them out.

Because upright people do unto others as they would have others do unto them, they also show grace just as they have been shown it by Christ. The writer of Hebrews said, "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). If we can come to that throne of grace in our time of need, we can live uprightly by showing others how they can go there too.

Godly lives (The Burg of the Godly). Here the translators are

almost universally consistent, although a couple of translations sneak in "devout," another goes with "pious," and one more renders it "holy." Is this different than righteous? Perhaps not, other than to say that righteousness may emphasize the way we live before others, while godliness emphasizes the way we live before the Lord. Jesus said that we are not to "perform" our acts of righteousness to be noticed by others. So we go into the prayer closet, as they say. We spend time with the Lord that others do not see, studying, praying, meditating—all practices that help us live self-controlled, upright lives. Perhaps for the very reason that they are hidden, I cannot be encouraged enough to keep up these private practices of the faith. Maybe it's the same for you. One of the most important things we can do for one another as brothers and sisters is to encourage one another—exhort one another—in these practices.

So grace, rather than being a lonely concept, albeit a wonderful one, actually changes our lives. It's not like we step out of the place of death, putting our feet on this path called grace, only to plod along for the remaining years of our lives until we reach the place of God's glory. No. Along the way, the whole way, we are experiencing the changes that grace makes in us. Grace does not just lead us to some "final somewhere"—it shows us many, many things along the way. Mostly what it shows us is the work of Christ in our hearts and minds, and how his work becomes ours.



NEARING THE END

There is another thing God allows us to see and he does so through the gift of hope. Look at Titus 2:13: "...waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." There are rest stops in life, vistas, where we are meant to consider all that God has for us. When we serve a king as we do Christ, there will be duty—that is, obedience as those subservient to a superior. Of course, he is not just any superior; he is God Almighty, Lord of heaven and earth. So even our duty is accompanied by wonder and awe. But God does not expect us to live seven-day-a-week lives in the sense that we never stop and look around. His structure for our lives, as we saw earlier, includes sabbath. We are to rest. This can happen weekly, as it was originally established, but it can also happen more frequently, as during a quiet time, if you keep one of those diligently. Those of you who do know that this is a break into the fury of obligation. It gives you time to see God.

If you're an impatient person, or one who fills every gap in time, you may have to give special heed to Paul's words. He told Titus that God's people are waiting for our hope. There's a pause, even a stop, to this waiting. It's the only way most of us will ever get a good look at

the glory of God. In working, we keep our heads down—nose to the grindstone, that sort of thing; in waiting, we can actually look up, eyes forward. And what Paul says we will then see is the glory of our God and Savior. Of course, we won't see it in anything near its fullness today, but we will from the vista of hope see that it is coming, and be charged with joyful motivation in what we are doing. This hope and joy ignite our duty; we serve Christ with gladness as we are conveyed on the road of saving grace and look ahead from the vista of hope.

In the most direct sense, grace takes us from death to glory. But life is not direct. It comes with disturbance and interruptions. We fall into sin; the sin of others falls on us. U2's Bono is an imperfect theologian, but he did say this: "Grace defies reason and logic. Love interrupts, if you like, the consequences of your actions, which in my case is very good news indeed, because I've done a lot of stupid stuff." So grace is overlaid on our rough-edged lives.

Those rough edges don't come only from ourselves. People hate us and harm us. Jesus said we would face tribulation. You may be smarting from an old wound or a fresh one. Your road to glory may look like the most pot-holed, gravel-strewn, shoulderless, narrow-laned road you could ever imagine. But if Christ has come into your life—if you have come to know him to be the one "who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession," that

road is called grace. And you can run down that road as one "zealous for good works" and undeterred in your desire to see Christ and enter into his glory for eternity.

In Ephesians 2, we read with great familiarity:

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (vv. 8-9)

And then immediately this:

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (v. 10)

In the end, grace does not just sit us in a chair and say, "Wait here until Jesus returns." It leads us down an active road all the way to glory. Greg Laurie puts it this way: "The more we realize what Jesus did for us, it'll cause us to want to do more for him." Grace compels us. It ignites us. Often I have told older believers to "Grow till you go." But when I look at the road of saving grace, I think it's more like this: "Go till you go." Until you leave this earth, let grace inspire you and activate you to do true kingdom work. Not church busyness. Not good works to be seen by men. Not box checking. But self-controlled, upright, godly, hope-filled, Jesus-loving living. 🙏

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