



Cretan Amazing Grace

Titus 2:11-15

What's driving you?

Sometimes when people receive generosity from Christians, they often ask: Why do you do this? What is it that's driving you to share and give and serve? What's motivating you and pushing you? *Why do we do the good we do?* Listen to these words from Titus:

11For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. 12It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, 13while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, 14who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. 15These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you. (Titus 2:11-15 NIV)

“Why do the good we do?” is an important question and here is why: In the 1980s Nancy Reagan used her influence as 1st Lady in a campaign against drugs. Her slogan was: “Just say, ‘No!’” But in truth, No body just says, “No!” Everyone says, “No!” . . . because of something. So we need to know why; because if you do the right thing for the wrong reason; eventually, you’ll start doing the wrong thing!

Some people are driven by fear or guilt

A lot of Christmas giving is fear/guilt based. Columnist George Will wrote:

Christmas etiquette involves composing one's face to feign pleasure when unwrapping an unwelcome windfall -- say, a sweater of an appalling color and style. Price of the sweater: \$50. Value to recipient: \$0.”

In 1850, Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote:

There are worlds of money wasted, at this time of year, in getting things that nobody wants, and nobody cares for after they are got."

When it comes to spiritual matters, some say, “No!” out of fear that God will “get them.” We worry that we will never be able to please God; then our fear becomes anger as we begin to resent God. We’ve created this false image of God; we’ve made this idol and now we’re mad at it!

Others are driven by self-centered pride

In his book *The Prodigal God*, Timothy Keller offers the following story to illustrate self-centered giving:

Once upon a time there was a gardener who grew an enormous carrot. So he took it to his king and said, "My Lord, this is the greatest carrot I've ever grown or ever will grow. Therefore I want to present it to you as a token of my love and respect for you." The king was touched and discerned the man's heart, so as [the gardener] turned to go the king said, "Wait! You are clearly a good steward of the earth. I own a plot of land right next to yours. I want to give it to you freely as a gift so you can garden it all." And the gardener was amazed and delighted and went home rejoicing.

But there was a nobleman at the king's court who overheard all this. And he said, "My! If that is what you get for a carrot—what if you gave the king something better?" So the next day the nobleman came before the king and he was leading a handsome black stallion. He bowed low and said, "My lord, I breed horses and this is the greatest horse I have ever bred or ever will. Therefore I want to present it to you as a token of my love and respect for you." But the king discerned his heart and said thank you, and took the horse and merely dismissed him. The nobleman was perplexed. So the king said, "Let me explain. That gardener was giving me the carrot, but you were giving yourself the horse."¹

Titus says that if you let fear or pride drive the good you do, you will either be continually cowering before God; or arrogant before God. God wants to rescue us from the self-loathing and self-righteousness. He wants to rescue us from ourselves!

Grace is driving! Everyone else in the back seat!

Titus 2:11-15 say that God's grace teaches us to say, "No!"

God's grace drove the Christians on Crete to have spiritually healthy family relationships.

God's grace drove the older men to be respectable and self-controlled.

God's grace drove the older women to be reverent and to mentor the younger women toward purity in their godless Cretan culture.

God's grace drove the younger men to be self-controlled in everything.

God's grace drove the slaves to live in a way to adorn the Gospel.

And God's grace drove Titus to lead by example.

God's grace is what drives us to do the good we do. Grace is the engine under the hood of the car; the fuel that's in the car; the car itself and driver of the car. I like how someone put it to me on Thanksgiving Day. They asked me what I was preaching on Sunday. I told them the gist of the message. And they said, "**Grace is driving. Everyone else in the back seat!**"

Notice that it says, "*The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared*"—what does that mean? First of all it's historical, referring to the actual birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. Advent. The first coming of Christ. The Cretans taught the mythological story about Zeus; but Christianity is not myth. It is grounded in reality! In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul says that the things of first importance are based in fact: "*Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.*" Died (event). Buried (event). Raised (event). Appeared (event).

It's also personal; centered on a person! The Cretans believed that Zeus had once been a human who by his own effort morphed into this god-like status; a bottom-top approach. Cretan belief was earth-based.

¹ Timothy Keller, *The Prodigal God* (Dutton, 2008), pp. 60-61; submitted by Van Morris, Mount Washington, Kentucky.

The Cretans said that salvation appeared from down low. But Christianity taught that salvation appeared from on high; a heaven based, top-down approach; That God came to earth in a body. *"Behold the mystery of godliness is great: God appeared in a body!" (1 Timothy 3:16)*

And then thirdly, it's powerful! The Gospel is the power of the outside coming into your life. Christianity is not just a set of beliefs; a religious list of faith-statements. Christianity is a power.

"I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes." (Romans 1:16 NIV)

Christianity is not about help for your sagging identification; rather, it's about a new one! Jesus is not about assisting you with your agenda; he wants to show you His new agenda for the new life He has given you! Christ is no consultant; He's the King! Titus 2:12 says that this power teaches (literally, "trains," or "chastens," or "disciplines") us to say "No" to the world; and to say "Yes!" to God. So it's not a matter of us just trying harder on our own; to let Grace drive means that we follow wherever Grace leads. The conditioning and training experiences—some of which are educational; others vocational; still others, painful—Jesus gives are all for the purposes of refining us into the people He wants us to be. To purify for himself a people who are his very own, eager to do what is good!

Do you see what this is saying? Christians believe that one day—the Jesus who appeared in Bethlehem; will one day appear a second time—*"the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ."* And when he appears the second time—he will transform this world and our bodies and the heavens and the earth into the new heavens and the new earth and we will receive new bodies; and there will be no sin, no evil, no Satan—we will live the way we were designed to live.

Grace first appeared to bring the future into the present. Faith is "nothing less than the intrusion of the future coming into your present right now!"

So, let Grace drive! To be a Christian means you learn to say, "Lord, wherever you want, I'll go!" Grace gets to drive!

Only Grace knows the way home!

So let's go back to the question which recipients sometimes ask: Why do you do this? Why be good? We give. We share Christ. We serve. Why? Where do I get the motivation to obey God?

"Christian! The only thing that makes you differ from the vilest being that pollutes the earth, or from the darkest fiend that gnaws his chains in hell, is the free grace of God!" (Octavius Winslow, [Jesus, Full of Grace](#))

We do the good we do because there is nothing God can't ask of me. His grace is the only motivation that won't make you feel proud or superior/ or fearful and self-hating.

Grace is driving . . . stay in the back seat!

The message for us is more than just: *Grace is driving; get in the back seat!* It's this: *Grace is driving, stay in the back seat!* Just stay in the back seat . . . and let Jesus drive! And you know that thing that you can see from the back seat that's right in front of you? It's the thing that—you know—when Jesus is driving, he can lean the back of his head against. You know what I'm talking about? Do you what it's called? That's right. A headrest.

It's a headrest, not a steering wheel!