

Grace-Shaped Mission (Tit. 2:11-14)

Introduction:

Cornerstone used to send short term missions teams to an orphanage in Mexico every summer for 10yrs. We did everything and took care of the kids so the staff could have some time off – we cleaned, painted, did some maintenance and construction work, fixed their vehicles, cooked & served the meals, washed all the dishes, played games and sport activities, had bible lessons and crafts with the kids, took them to watch movies and swimming pool, etc. Everything was grace-driven, done with no strings attached. But such mission is a pale reflection compared to the epiphany of God-in-Jesus.

We are continuing in this Advent series, ***Unwrapping Christmas***, and look at the significance of “Epiphany” [appearing of a deity] - a key theme in the three letters Paul wrote – and today we’ll dive into the topic God-in-the-flesh-appearing in Jesus¹ as a Grace-Shaped Mission.

Since we are spending most of our time on the topic of grace, let me provide a biblically compact and rich definition of grace – let’s read this out loud together:

¹ Cf. 1 Tim. 3:16, “Christ was revealed in a human body ...”

² See 2 Tim. 1:9-10; Rom. 5:6-10; Eph. 2:1-10; Col. 3:1-10. Cf. John M.G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, for a scholarly thorough, comprehensive, and penetrating treatment of grace.

Grace is God’s unmerited, extravagant outpouring of His self-giving, life-renewing, and community-transforming love, without any regard to the worth or worthiness of the individual recipient.²

Tit. 2:11-14 (NIV) is a succinct summary of the gospel of grace and considered to be “the heart of the epistle”³:

¹¹ For ***the grace of God has appeared*** [ἐπεφάνη (epephanē)] that offers salvation to all people. ¹² It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope—***the appearing*** [ἐπιφάνειαν (epiphaneian)] ***of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ***, ¹⁴ who 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.

We will focus on TWO engaging truths about grace:

1. Grace is personal and relational: Jesus Christ is the face of Grace.

“Grace” is not merely a value, an idea, a life-principle, a mindset; nor a word for a quick prayer before each meal;

³ E.F. Scott, *The Pastoral Epistles*, p. 167.

neither is it a synonym for a “better-ask-for-forgiveness-than-permission” posture; and hopefully it never becomes a Christian cliché or jargon, a license to do whatever we want, a guilt-laden or shame-induced triggered word that makes us feel better when we failed to live the life as God intended.

Grace = God-in-Jesus appearing in a human body to give himself to redeem the world [ἐπεφάνη (epephanē)/ἐπιφάνειαν (epiphaneian)] = Jesus’ earthly life, ministry, and future return.

Jesus is the Word who became flesh, full of grace and truth, making visible the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see.⁴

Grace is first and foremost a life-enriching relationship with Jesus Christ.

² Tim. 1:9 He has saved us and called us to a holy life—***not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time,***¹⁰ but it has now been revealed through ***the appearing [ἐπιφανείας (epiphaneias)] of our Savior, Christ Jesus ...***

This grace is personal because ...

we are in God’s mind before the beginning of time,
we matter to Him and valued by Him,
we are loved from eternity past to eternity future,
He initiated this relationship and took concrete, timely - historic and historical – self-sacrificing actions to give us a fresh start and reconnect with us when we can’t do anything to earn it, cf. Rom. 5:6-8;
and He has saved us with a purpose and a cause bigger than ourselves.

Now, turn to your neighbours to the right and left and say,

“Amazing grace: Jesus loves you and me!”

I wouldn’t be surprised that, in a crowd like this, some of you haven’t experienced this amazing grace, or feeling either you are not worthy or good enough to receive this grace and begin a personal relationship with Jesus.

If so, you are right at the place where you can be assured that you are in God’s mind even before the beginning of time, that, out of His initiative, He’s pursuing a relationship with you in and through Jesus – and the good news is that you can respond and receive this grace by faith.

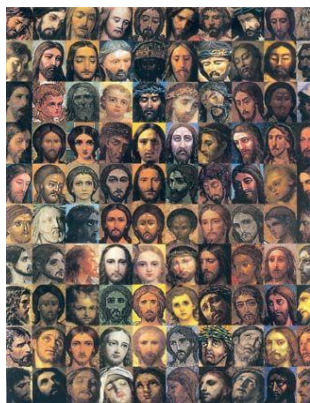
⁴ Cf. Jn. 1:14; 1Tim. 1:17; 6:16.

You can come and talk to me after the service or send me an email, Andrew@cornerstonechurch.ca.

But there's something deeper about this Jesus-grace-shaped-mission and its challenging implication is often skimmed over:

The grace of God ***has appeared*** [ἐπεφάνη (epēphanē)] that offers salvation to ***all*** in Tit. 2:11 is the kindness and ***love [of mankind, φιλανθρωπία (philanthrōpia)]*** of God our Savior appeared [ἐπεφάνη (epēphanē)] in Tit. 3:4.

This Jesus-grace breaks down walls of separation and crosses every boundary.



CHRISTENA CLEVELAND writes in her article, “Why Jesus’ Skin Color Matters”:

⁵ CHRISTENA CLEVELAND, Why Jesus’ Skin Color Matters, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/april/why-jesus-skin-color-matters.html>

⁶ For examples, see Matt. 9:11; Lk. 5:32; 19:5-7; Jn. 4:1-26; 1 Tim. 1:12-16.

“As a Jew, Jesus was an ethnic minority in the Roman Empire ... marginalized by Romans, Greeks, and other non-Jewish groups ...

As an infant, Jesus was a target of ruler-sanctioned infanticide, fled to Egypt as a refugee, and faced Roman tax collectors’ exploitation ...

When people who were on the outskirts gathered, Jesus was among them ... because he was one of them ... he was a victim of Rome-sanctioned violence ... Jesus was a refugee ... he was poor.

To Jesus, ministry meant knowing from the inside the pain of society’s most marginalized.”⁵

The Jesus who embodies truth and grace is a friend of saints and sinners, righteous and unrighteous, poor and rich, slaves and soldiers, politicians and prostitutes, rabbis and rebels, men and women, children and youth, etc.⁶

Gal. 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.⁷

⁷ See also: Col. 3:11 Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

Jesus' world is not monochromatic but multi-color; He doesn't just have one face but many faces!

This is most relevant in this loneliest pandemic era, in our increasingly polarizing world, a cancel culture, inundated with news of broken relationships, social conflict, and racial injustice.

The grounds are levelled at the foot of the cross: grace is offered to all because God is love - His love is for all mankind made in His image - there are race, class, or gender differences but no discrimination or partiality.

Cf. My encounter with young prostitutes in Vancouver Chinatown.

Jesus embraces the world and makes space to shape all together in God's love, ***without any regard to the worth or worthiness of the individual recipient!***

Let's turn to your neighbours and say:

"Amazing grace: Jesus makes space for you and me!"

That leads us to the second engaging truths about grace:

2. Grace is accepting and transforming: Jesus declares who and whose we are and directs how we live.

¹¹ For ***the grace of God has appeared*** [ἐπεφάνη (epephanē)] that offers salvation to all people. ¹² It ***teaches*** us ...

While God sees, loves, and accepts us as we are based on Jesus' life, teaching, powerful and symbolic deeds, death and resurrection, but because and by His grace, He does not leave us just as we are!

The purpose and goal of Jesus-grace-shaped mission is to empower us by His Spirit to live a God-remembering, God-centering, and God-honouring manner of life - it's a complete devotion to God and His will in heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Grace enables and equips God's people to become the best God-version of self.

The language of epiphany – personal appearing or powerful manifestation of a deity – is a direct reference to God's mighty deeds and miraculous deliverance of the enslaved Israelites from Egypt and subsequently in the military conquests of Canaan.⁸

⁸ 2 Sam. 7:23; 1 Chron. 17:21; and Josephus uses the noun to describe the parting of the Red Sea and God's theophanic manifestation in the cloud (*Ant.* 2.339; 3.310).

As redeemed/liberated people belonging to God, they are called out to follow God’s instructions for their protection and flourishing, even before they enter the Promise Land!

In the same way, we have here a clear identity marker - we are God’s rescued/delivered and purified people, specially chosen and treasured people,⁹ called to pledge our total allegiance in following the Jesus way with the enabling of His Spirit and thus becoming an epiphany in our neighbourhood, manifesting the power and glory of our God and Saviour.



Just like Libby who first sketched and then painted this from the original photo Zach took:

***We are being shaped along the same line as Jesus.*¹⁰**

God’s grace “teaches us” (παιδεύω) means Jesus is our pedagogue/teacher who instructs, educates, coaches, directs, trains and disciplines us to conform to His image so we *mature* and realize our *full potential*.

Negatively	Positively
<i>To say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions (v. 12).</i> ¹¹	<i>To live self-controlled, upright and godly lives (v. 12).</i>
<i>To redeem us from all wickedness (v. 14).</i>	<i>Eager to do what is good (v. 14)</i> ¹²

⁹ Cf. Ex. 19:5; Eze. 37.23

¹⁰ Rom. 8:29 - God knew what he was doing from the very beginning. He decided from the outset to shape the lives of those who love him along the same lines as the life of his Son. The Son stands first in the line of humanity he restored. We see the original and intended shape of our lives there in him. (MSG)

¹¹ “Godliness is more than Christian character. It covers the totality of the Christian life and provides the foundation upon which Christian character is built.” (Jerry Bridges, *The Practice of Godliness*, NavPress, 1983, p. 12).

¹² This is the proper response to God’s grace and to be fervent, enthusiastic, even fanatic for a cause, i.e., being instrument of light to the world, witnessing to surrounding peoples God’s sovereign and power in and through His people (Tit. 2:1-10; cf. Eph. 2:10ff.; 1 Pe. 2:9ff.).

Google has released their search trends list for 2022 and searchers are interested in searching for ways to change themselves and change the world around them.¹³

But, as St. Athanasius (A.D. 293-373) says,

You cannot put straight in others what is warped in yourself.

We don't have what we need inside ourselves to live as God intended. So God with His self-giving love and mercy comes to us in Jesus,

renews our spirits,

replaces our hearts of stone with hearts of flesh by the power of His Spirit,

and offers us everything we need for life and godliness, teaching us how to align our will with God's will.

A Christian is never in a state of completion but always in a process of becoming.

Martin Luther¹⁴

This present process of transformation is not an endless cycle; there's a culminating, end point – when those “who have longed for his future/second appearing [ἐπιφάνειαν (**epiphaneian**)]” to receive the “crown of righteousness” at the return of the righteous Judge and risen King to make all things new:¹⁵

¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing [ἐπιφάνειαν (epiphaneian)] of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ ...

Look at how these verses are structured in this pattern, **A – B – A1 – B1:**

v. 13 completes v. 11, capturing the first and second appearing of Jesus-grace; v. 13 drives the individual life-renewing and the community-transforming purpose and goals.

¹³

https://trends.google.com/trends/yis/2022/US/?utm_campaign=The&fbclid=IwAR1Drnar-qTsv2DiYi2_rhYNrZmHYley32Hmhmdm8LoyJiKNVUTtagUPNVw

¹⁴ The great Reformer, Martin Luther, teaches that every believer is “at the same time just and sinner” (Latin: *Simul Justus et Peccator*).

¹⁵ **2 Tim. 4:6** For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. Cf. 1 Tim. 6:14-15.

¹¹ For **the grace of God has appeared** [ἐπεφάνη (epēphanē)] **that offers salvation to all people.** [A]

¹² It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, [B]

¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope—**the appearing** [ἐπιφάνειαν (epiphaneian)] **of the glory of our great God and Savior.**

Jesus Christ. [A1]

¹⁴ who 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. [B1]

Our “waiting” is not passive, inactive, or complacent; the word means eagerly expecting, actively involved in preparing for action: this attitude of expectancy of the future appearing of Jesus determines the way we are living, impacting our daily practical choices, motivating us to intentionally practicing what we consider important moment by moment.

Our present grace-shaped life is a signpost of our hope of eternal life. Sometimes we let our past shape our future, but our present should be shaped by the future we have in Jesus.

Honor the past by remembering. Honor the present by acting. Honor your future by living it today.

Dan Rockwell

Maybe the most practical step for some of you is to find out where you need to grow in your discipleship journey by taking the self assessment of Cornerstone Discipleship Pathway

(<https://cornerstonechurch.ca/discipleshippathway/>) and use the resources relevant to you provided there.

Conclusion:

We learn about the two engaging truths about grace today:

Grace is personal and relational: Jesus Christ is the face of Grace.

Grace is accepting and transforming: Jesus declares who and whose we are and directs how we live.

Our life begins by grace, progresses in grace, and triumphs with grace.