

## THE CHURCH: WHO? WHAT? WHY? HOW?- Calvary Church Values-2

Oct. 22, 2017 – Pastor Randy

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*"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)*

Titus 2:11-14 is one long sentence with "the grace of God" serving as it's subject. That means the verbs that follow – bringing and training- describe actions that are caused by or attributed to the subject. The grace of God brings something to us and trains us to become something. The "grace of God" which has appeared is the good news of Jesus. Better yet, the grace of God is Jesus. Jesus is "The Gift" that brings us salvation. He has brought us the offer of forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God. Jesus is also "The Gift" that trains us how to live in light of our salvation. Grace trains us to say "no" to sin and to say "yes" to God. This grace of God is an expression of God's unconditional, extravagant love for us. It is favor we did not deserve and we have not earned. God grace grants us the favor of acceptance and transformation.

Paul elaborated on this grace of God in Titus 3:4-6 when he wrote,

*"But when the **goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 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, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that **being justified by his grace** we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."***

This grace of God that brought us salvation according to 2:11 is described here as the goodness of God, the loving kindness of God, and the mercy of God. God's grace is his love for us, expressed through His goodness, kindness, and mercy to us. God's grace leads to being justified and regenerated. Grace offers

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us acceptance and transformation. Grace welcomes us into God's arms AND transforms us by His presence; the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Grace matters and growth matters. Today I am going to review two more of Calvary Church's core values with you. Our values are intended to serve as indicators of the cultural climate of our church. We value treating people with grace and developing people to become all that God wants them to be

### Grace Oriented

*"We champion God's unconditional love and gracious forgiveness through Jesus Christ. We believe in motivating people through love and gratitude toward God rather than through guilt or shame."*

In other words, grace is a greater motivator than guilt. I once had a lady in my church tell me, "Pastor Randy, did you know you can catch more bees with honey than vinegar." She said this in response to the way I addressed her and her husband for their recent absence from church services. My scolding tone was indicative of the response one would expect from a truancy officer than a caring shepherd. My approach was due to an immaturity and insecurity on my part. I felt I needed to make people do what they were supposed to do. My concern over their absence was not really motivated by a concern for their spiritual health and growth as much as it was motivated by my concern over church attendance.

In Matt. 23 Jesus give us some good insight into what a grace-less person looks like.

*"The teachers of religious law and the Pharisees are the official interpreters of the law of Moses. So practice and obey whatever they tell you, but don't follow their example. For they don't practice what they teach. They crush people with unbearable religious demands and never lift a finger to ease the burden."*

**1. Grace-less, religious people place greater demands on others than they do on themselves.**

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2. Grace-less, religious people are good at demanding that others live right, but poor at helping others live right.

3. Grace-less, religious people build fences around the kingdom rather than bridges into it. They created man-made rules as fences to protect God's law from being broken. Their fences, instead of protecting God's honor only served to shut people out of the kingdom (See Luke 11:52)

*"What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens, but you ignore the more important aspects of the law—justice, mercy, and faith. You should tithe, yes, but do not neglect the more important things.*

4. Grace-less people major on the minors and minor on the majors.

*"What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs—beautiful on the outside but filled on the inside with dead people's bones and all sorts of impurity. Outwardly you look like righteous people, but inwardly your hearts are filled with hypocrisy and lawlessness.*

5. Grace-less, people are concerned with looking holy, not being holy.

### People Developing

*We seek to help people grow spiritually and learn how to be a committed disciple of Jesus. Our goal is total life transformation!*

People developing means we will not be satisfied with the status quo in our lives. A couple of weeks ago I shared with you a vision for Calvary Church where God's people are growing deep and wide; where the church matures and multiplies. To say we value spiritual development means that the spiritual maturity of the members of our church is important. Maturity matters. Holiness matters. Repentance matters. Conforming to the image of Christ matters. Sin is not ok. Dishonoring God is not ok. Dishonoring my brother or sister is no ok. My wife discourages kids when accepting an apology not to say, "It's okay", but instead to say, "I accept your apology and I

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forgive you". I think she is very wise, and I don't say that just because she is my wife. Forgiveness should not entail minimizing the sin, evil, or injustice that was committed. What makes the grace of God so amazing is that it is expressed by His willingness to forgive us in spite of how awful our sin was and is. Grace does not minimize the severity of our sin, it magnifies the love of God in the face of sin.

Spiritual maturity develops best in the context of trusting relationships. This is why our discipleship strategy is to incorporate as many people as possible into small groups that provide people with the instruction they need based on their level of understanding and the relationships they need to be encouraged, supported, and held accountable. These small groups help God's people to not only learn to know God and live according to His will, but they also provide opportunities for people to develop as leaders. The greater number of small groups we have the more leaders we will need. In addition to multiplying the number of groups that are meeting to learn together, we also want to create groups where people serve together. A couple of weeks ago I spoke about our vision to become a church where each one contributes faithfully to the growth of the church. To develop people involves helping them to discover how God wants to deploy them in service that contributes to the growth of the church, and then to facilitate that deployment.

These two values are often viewed as in opposition to each other. Not only are these two values - placing importance on the spiritual development of God's children as well as extending grace to people who fall short – not antithetical or in opposition to one another, they support one another. We can, and need to, hold both of these values tightly together for the good of God's people. Although Christ loves people as they are and calls people as they are, it is also true that he loves us too much to leave us that way. Grace matters and growth matters.

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Jesus life provides a model for how to combination of these two values: He was simultaneously focused on grace and growth. There are many of examples from Jesus life we could turn to, but for now we will look at two.

The first story is Jesus encounter with Zaccheus. Zach lived in the city of Jericho during Jesus' day. Jericho was situated along a major trade route in the most fertile part of Judea. As a result, it was a prosperous city. It is not surprising to read that Zach was rich. After all, he was a chief tax-collector in a wealthy city where there would naturally be considerable tax income. However, the tax-collectors of Jesus time were known for abusing the system and cheating people by collecting more than was owed. Zach was rich, but he was a bit richer than he ought to have been. On His way to Jerusalem, Jesus passed through Jericho and as usual a crowd had gathered around Him. Zach, who was a rather short guy, wanted to see Jesus but he couldn't due to the crowd. Apparently, what Zach had heard about Jesus made him so curious that he ran ahead of the crowd and climbed up into a tree to get a look. As Jesus passed by He looked up and said, "Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house." We don't know the details of the conversation that ensued between Jesus and Zach but what does become clear is that Jesus' visit to Zach's house left Zach a changed man. He repaid - even more than was required by law - those he cheated and began giving to the poor. His encounter with Jesus turned him from a selfish taker into a generous giver.

But what precipitated this repentance and transformation of Zach's character was an encounter with grace. We must not miss the significance of Jesus request to visit Zach's home. Going to Zach's house was a clear indicator that Jesus loved Zach. Jesus didn't reach out to Zach because he was interested in his tithe. Going to a person's house indicated a level of acceptance of the person. Jesus did what no other religious leader would have done. Zach had a reputation, rightfully earned, of being evil. Zach wasn't worthy of Jesus

setting foot in his house; at least not until he cleaned up his act first. But that wasn't Jesus attitude. Jesus didn't say, "I'll come to your house once you stop cheating people." Jesus' love and grace motivated Him to initiate contact with Zach while he was still in his sinful condition. But Jesus pursuit of a relationship did not leave Zach the same man as he was before. Jesus didn't call Zach to condemn him, he did however call him to convert him.

In John chapter 8 we read of Jesus' encounter with a woman who was caught committing the sin of adultery by some graceless people. Although she was guilty as charged, these graceless people did not confront her to redeem her but to exploit her wrongdoing in order to ruin Jesus. They put Jesus on the spot, asking him to make a judgement as to whether or not she should be put to death for her sin as the law of Moses prescribed. They knew that if Jesus answered "no" they would have a reason for accusing him of not upholding the Mosaic law, thus discrediting Jesus claims to be the Son of God. They knew Jesus would never authorize them to put her to death. Jesus wise response has become one of the most recognizable wisdom sayings in human history. He said, "Let him who has no sin cast the first stone." Jesus bent down and wrote something in the dirt with his finger while those who were trying to exploit this woman walked away quietly, silenced and disarmed by Jesus response. Jesus got up, looked at the woman and said, "Where are your accusers, didn't anyone condemn you? She responded with great respect and admiration, "No Lord". Jesus then looked at her and said, "Neither do I. Go and sin no more."

Jesus extended mercy and forgiveness, coupled with a call to repent. We don't know what this woman did in response, but clearly Jesus was concerned both with showing grace and mercy as well as with life transformation. Jesus' words carried with them a clear expectation that this encounter with the grace of Jesus would lead to a transformed life.

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A grace-culture facilitates spiritual growth by creating an environment where sin and weakness can be honestly confessed. A graceless, guilt-and-shame culture hinders spiritual growth because it shames people into hiding their sin. In a graceless church people learn how to look holy. In a grace-filled church people learn how to be holy! Grace-less churches focus on building fences. Grace-filled churches focus on building tables. Grace-less churches are great at creating rules. Grace-filled churches are great at creating relationships. Grace-less churches specialize in identifying people's sin and weaknesses. Grace-filled churches specialize in helping people overcome their sin and weaknesses. Grace-less churches make it their goal to not become like the world. Grace-filled churches make it their goal to help the world come to Christ.

### **A Grace-oriented, people developing church:**

1. Gives people time to learn rather than expects immediate understanding.
2. Accepts spiritual growth as a process rather demanding immediate perfection.
3. Confronts sin, but always for redemptive purposes.
4. Want sinners to experience forgiveness rather than judgment.
5. Is more mission-minded than tradition-minded.