

GRACE AND CHRISTIAN LIVING

Nowadays when we have elections, we hear much discussion about integrity and family values from the candidates. Many realize that an unrestrained, "do anything you want" lifestyle leads to ruin. As Christians, we are called to witness to the benefits of having accepted Jesus as Lord of our lives. Usually, we think about telling someone about these benefits; however, *what we do* is just as important as *what we say*. If what we do and what we say are not in alignment, then others will tend to believe the message of *what we do* and discount *what we say*. When the two line up, they reinforce each other and our witness becomes a powerful force.

We all use role models as part of learning life skills. It is sobering to think that we also serve as a role model for someone else. You may be thinking, "No one is paying any attention to me, so it really doesn't matter what I do." Every person who sees you, records your behavior in their data bank and they subconsciously (if not consciously) are being programmed regarding what a person such as yourself does. We are examples whether we want to be or not. We cannot avoid being an influence on other people. Knowing this should motivate us to be good models in Christian living. We get the pattern for such living from the word of God.

Much good advice about Christian living and the importance of being a right role model for others is found in the letter of Paul to Titus.

You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine. Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance. Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God. Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us. Titus 2:1-8

We cannot separate our belief and our

behavior. We WILL behave according to the beliefs that we have incorporated into our lives. It is possible to have beliefs in our "minds" (that is, we give *mental* consent to the validity of the idea) but these beliefs not find their way into our *hearts* (that is, we have not incorporated or adopted them as our own).

Paul realized the importance of our *actions* in the influence we have on others. Being an example (or as KJV renders it "pattern of good work") speaks to the influence we have on others. People who make clothes cut up pieces of fabric into the right shapes that are then sewed together to make the garment. In commercial operations, many pieces are cut at a time and the cutting is controlled by a "pattern." Not only is it important that the cutter follow the pattern, it is especially important that the pattern be right. One bad role model can have a devastating effect on many others; however, the reverse is also true that one good role model can have a positive effect on many others. More mature Christians can teach younger people by the example of their lives that validates the message they speak.

Paul did not neglect the importance of *what we say*. Our doctrine needs to be pure. Others should realize that we are serious about God's word and that we really do believe it. It is possible to teach the truth and instill doubt in others at the same time. For example, if we teach that Jesus taught us to "turn the other cheek and go the second mile" and then comment that this is just an ideal that will not really work, then the lack of sincerity will negate the effectiveness of the truth on those who hear. It is important also that *what we teach* be based on a firm foundation of the word of God and not just our speculation of what the meaning might be.

The expectation and requirement that we be a good example is a quite heavy burden. However, it is not something that we have to bear alone. Our entire spiritual journey has not been something we have accomplished or deserved. We first experienced the Mercy of God in that He held back His righteous judgement (the soul that sins shall die). Next, He extended His Love to us by paying the penalty for sin by the death of His Son on the Cross. God's has now given His Grace to us in His indwelling presence within us. This provides the power over sin in our lives. The

motivation and ability for righteous living **is** the grace of God.

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope--the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, 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. Titus 2:11-14

It is God's unmerited favor (grace) that **brings** us salvation. Notice that the salvation of which Paul writes is happening in the present tense; it is ongoing. God's grace enables and sustains us by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The evidence of that grace is in the person of God's Son. He died as the payment for our sin and now He lives in us to free us from the power of sin. Now that we are free from the penalty and power of sin, we are also free to reach our full potential as children of God. God Himself is working in us to bring it about: "that **He** might redeem us and that **He** might purify us." We are in the process of becoming purified and set apart (holy) and being zealous of good works. We already have these by faith and the process we call sanctification is where we bring what we have by faith into the reality of our daily lives. God teaches us by many means (His word, the example of others, circumstances we encounter, etc.) that we must deny and turn away from ungodliness and the attractions of the world. He teaches us that though we are still in the world that we must live soberly (disciplined in our behavior), righteously (above reproach) and godly (in accordance with the character of God).

Some may ask, "Why?" The answer lies in the hope of every Christian expressed so well by Paul: "the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ." Paul wrote about two "appearings" of Jesus. The first was in His Grace. The second will be in His Glory. His Grace is at work to transform us so that we can participate in His Glory!

Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men. Titus 3:1,2

Special responsibility rests on Christians who are in positions of authority. Pastors and teachers, for example, need to take initiative to remind people of their Christian responsibilities in the community, in their jobs and in their families. Some obvious things that we need to be reminded of from time to time are to obey the law, be prepared to do the right things, to refrain from speaking ill of other people, to not be pushy but gentle and to be restrained in our relationships to others. Sometime we lose patience with people who consistently do the wrong things.

At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone. Titus 3:3-8

One reason to be tolerant of others and to approach them in kindness rather than harshly is that at one time, before we became a Christian, we were as they are. Some people express it this way, "There, but for the grace of God, go I." It was the kindness (mercy) and love of God that drew us to Him so that we could be saved; but it is His grace (in the person of Jesus Christ) that empowers us for gracious living. We need to show that same type of kindness and love toward others even before they are saved. Paul reminds us that God did not save us because we were doing the right things or were good. It is not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy.

Now that we are regenerated in our spirits by the Spirit of God, our lives are in the process of being renewed day by day. As we progress in this renewal, we must be careful to be about the work that God wants done in this world. Paul said we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Eph 2:10)