

Connecting Grace in Christian Living – Titus 2:11-15

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Introduction

For those of us who have children, you surely remember the impact on the lives of you and your spouse. When that new baby appeared on the scene, everything changed!

There is a crisis in Crete. The churches lack elders and are not in order. Troublemakers are on the scene and must be confronted. Much teaching and correction needs to be made among the believers.

Paul's letter to Titus is urgent and direct. So far, He has told Titus to put the church in order, silence the false teachers, and teach the saints the things of God – all in the midst of a crooked culture.

Now In 2:11-15, Paul shifts back to doctrine. He gives the “why” for what He has already taught and for what he will teach over the remainder of the letter.

Why should Titus put in order the churches in Crete? And why should the believers there order their lives according to Christian doctrine? Paul gives the answer in 2:11-15..the grace of God has appeared and everything has changed:

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, ¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, ¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you.

The Grace of God (2:11-14)

He writes in verse 11, “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people”.

Appearing (2:11a)

Grace involves mercifully not receiving what we do deserve and at the same time, receiving favor for what we do not deserve. We are familiar with the concept since we live in the age of grace. Even if you have not received Jesus Christ through the gospel, you are likely a recipient of it. Christianity has had a profound effect upon the world over the last 2,000 years.

But grace was a foreign concept to the Gentile world at that time. The world was full of darkness – cold, harsh, pointless – so the saying “get all you can, while you can” ruled the day. People were cut off from God, life was futile and pointless. Fear ruled and especially a fearful foreboding of death. But then something changed. The prophesy of Isaiah 9:2-5 had come to pass, “*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.*”

God's grace appeared in the person of Jesus Christ. The world heard John the Baptist cry out, "Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand" and then "Behold..."

This sin crazed and weary world of darkness desperately needed and still needs the God of grace to appear in human hearts. God's grace brings freedom, joy, and hope. But as we will see, it also commands change in those who believe. They are compelled to holiness.

Bringing Salvation (2:11b)

Note the first thing God's grace does is bring salvation for all people – all people groups, that is. The grace of God in salvation has been brought not only to the Jew but now to the Gentiles in Crete and going out all over the world. As the psalmist writes in Psalm 67:1-3:

*May God be gracious to us and bless us
and make his face to shine upon us, Selah
2 that your way may be known on earth,
your saving power among all nations.
3 Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you!*

Now "all people" does not refer to every person being saved since that would contradict the Scriptures (1 Tim 2:4-6) as well as our own observations of the many people around us who reject Christ.

Salvation from God's wrath is what all peoples need. And the salvation brought by God's grace is sufficient for all peoples. The concept of a god (although mythical) coming to rescue an individual, a group of people, or city would have been understood by the people of Paul's time. However, the reach of God's grace is far larger and extends to all peoples...not to mention it is real.

And to all the world, the grace of God calls people to repent. Paul told the people in Athens in Acts 17:30:

³⁰ *The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.*

Training (2:12-13)

God's grace also trains in verses 12-13:

¹² *training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, ¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ*

The grace of God trains or instructs those who receive it. Training implies that our inward motivations and outward behaviors are not fit for the grace of God and we need the application of truth informed by God's Word to change us. Change was needed in those who received salvation from God...the Cretans had their things; 1:12 told us they were liars, evil beasts, and gluttons (quite a resume) and we have our things. Yes, there is much training to do in our lives.

To Renounce Ungodliness

The first part of our training is to say "No". We are to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions. Renounce is a strong term. If you are old enough to remember the Cold War, you probably heard this

term from time-to-time when a Soviet citizen would periodically defect to the US and renounce their citizenship. Renounce means to deny, to do away with, refuse to follow or recognize any further.

Ungodliness refers to outward behavior. It is misconduct and displays an irreverent attitude towards God. Even worse, it is living as if God does not exist – no dependence on God. Behavior and speech are out of control. Ungodliness must be done away with in view of the grace of God. Worldly passions (or sinful pleasures in the NLT) refers to what drives us on the inside (again, it is negative). Such passions involves lust and its multitude of objects and a hungering after the things of this world and its system. It involves cravings for all sorts of things plus anger, hatred, selfish ambitions... all leading to expressions of ungodliness. Worldly passions must be renounced.

Remember the words of 1 John 2:15-17

15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life[a]—is not from the Father but is from the world. 17 And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

And also 1 Peter 4:2:

Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God.

In the life of a Christian, “to renounce” or say “No” is an initial event but also an ongoing activity. It is a settled and determined stance to never go back to the old things before we received Christ – to not go back to the old danger – to resolve to remain free from those things forever.

Now keep in mind, that such training is the work of God’s grace appearing and not what saves us..remember the definition of grace. Paul, on the road to Damascus, met the Lord Jesus Christ. His takeaway from that experience was not to try harder to satisfy God but rather to understand his unholiness before God. The same was true for Isaiah when he saw the Lord high and lifted up in Isaiah 6. Both were utterly lost in the wonder of God’s grace and were more than motivated to never go back to go back to the old. The same must be true for every Christian; renounce the old.

To Live Godly

God’s grace also teaches us to say “Yes”. Verse 12 tells us God’s grace is training us to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives. We are to move toward these positive elements.

Self-controlled involves our own being – we possess all of sorts of sinful impulses in our heart. They are to be wisely constrained, held back. Learn to deny these things. Paul says in effect, get your person under control – have a soberness about you.

Uprightness speaks to our dealings and conduct with other people. We are to live righteously before them; treating them justly and rightly, putting them first. As people who have received grace, we in turn, treat all people with grace.

The third element, godliness, is critical. If we stop at adopting self-control and uprightiness, we might deceive ourselves into thinking that the Christian involves only following some specific rules or standard

of outward behavior. Godliness involves our relationship with God. Godliness is devotion to God and manifests itself in total dependence on Him for all things. Godliness aligns our entire being to Him. As a result, our life is then honoring to God.

So when are we supposed to renounce the ungodly life and live the godly life. Well, right now – “*in the present age*”. People living under grace cannot say there are no standards for godliness. We have every obligation to godliness and holiness our entire life or until Christ returns. In fact, living under the law of Christ has a far higher standard than the Mosaic Law. The Cretans were to live godly in their age 2,000 years ago and we are to do in our lives today. They were called to be self-controlled, upright, and godly in their carnal culture and we are to do the same in a similar culture.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers,[a] by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.[b] 2 Do not be conformed to this world,[c] but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect - Romans 12:1-2

Waiting for the Blessed Hope

Verse 13 gives us another product of our grace training:

¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ

God’s grace trains into us a life posture of waiting. Waiting is in short supply in our world today since our world has no hope. However, waiting develops in God’s people over time. This life is hard; suffering occurs at every turn...things do not go as they ought. There are the struggles of our heart (inward desires and the world’s temptations drawing them out) which war against our souls. As we say “No” to ourselves and the world and to say “Yes” to the things of God, we suffer. Such suffering and training shows us in practice how far we fall short of the life of Christ. It also shows us the vanity of this fleeting world with its passing pleasures. This steadily fosters in us a waiting with hope for something far better.

The word “waiting” here brings with it a sense of eagerness – an eager waiting. It is the “stand on tiptoes” type of waiting described in Romans 8:19-25 as we join with creation looking for something far better. We wait for “*our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies*” when in practice there will no longer be a contradiction or conflict; the Spirit of God living in fallen bodies. Yes, we wait in hope.

*For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?
Romans 8:24*

*For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. Galatians 5:5
because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, Colossians 1:5*

Grace training, which can be hard work, will produce fruit if we are serious. This idea of “well, I am saved, now I can do anything” rejects the grace of God. Sadly, this occurs among so many who name the name of Christ.

And what exactly are we waiting for? Paul tells us in verse 13 it is *the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ*. You see the grace of God will appear a second time. The term “grace of God” is not an abstract phrase – it is personal – it is Jesus Christ. He appeared the first time bringing

salvation to all peoples and training us to say “No” to the world and “Yes” to Him, and to give us an eager anticipation of His coming again – this time in the clouds. Such a hope is certain. Do you believe this? It will be glorious to those who are waiting and a blessing beyond our ability to comprehend today. He is our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ! He will deliver us once and for all from our sin nature – the new creation will be new in practice.

Other aspects of Christ’s 2nd coming; there will be a resurrection of those who died in Christ, a reunion of the faithful living and dead, and eternal life with Christ – He will be present with us forever (1 Thess 4:13-18)

Since He is God, Jesus is able to deliver these future grace blessings – the things for which we eagerly wait in hope. What a wonderful day His return will be.

Now at this point, it is easy to conclude that this generally describes you. However, let’s think more upon this saying “No” to the world and “Yes” to God. Without sliding into legalism or license, we need to look more carefully. The Scriptures tell us God sees all things and we operate always before the face of God.

Like the Cretans, we live in a world where virtually anything goes. The mantra is “if it feels good, do it.” And the world’s pull is strong. So how are you doing with entertainment (TV, movies, music, the internet)? Standards of decency are sliding all the time. It is easy to let biblical standards gradually slide in our hearts as well and for a long time not realize how far we have slid. Have we lost the ability to discern when to say “No”. Have we become dull and desensitized to ungodliness and worldly passions? Perhaps you hide behind justifications like, “I watch or listen because I enjoy the artistic talent, the good voice or musical arrangement, the creative script..” ...the list goes on. But is this true? Or is this simply a guise to satisfy our lusts? ¹

Entertainment is not the only arena where we can compromise? What about the habits and appetites we develop in day-to-day life? What drives you and even consumes you? There are compromises in work and business, the young person pressured to do drugs or be promiscuous, and the mom told that her role in the family is not a priority for her.² So we tell ourselves, “the rest of the world is doing it and besides, it is not the worst desire we could have”...so the story goes. Saying “No” costs us too much.

And are we still willing to say “Yes” to the things of God? It is easy to move only so far towards God and stop there in order to reserve a few precious areas of sin and worldliness. The result is to live straddling between two worlds.

This is not to disregard Christian liberty. We have much freedom in Christ and as long as we live wisely, we are on safe ground. But are we misusing our liberty as an excuse to indulge ourselves in worldly desires? And if so, what about the impact of our choices on our brothers and sisters?

And could our compromises be dampening our eagerness for Christ’s return?

Recall the words of 2 Peter 3:11:

¹ R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapel, *1-2 Timothy and Titus To Guard the Deposit (Illinois, Crossway,2012)*

² Ibid.,

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness

Compelled by Christ's Work (2:14)

So in this present age, we are to live as godly people distinct from this world and to wait in hope for Christ's return. And until then, we are motivated by His sacrificial work and His purposes in completing it. Verse 14 tells us:

¹⁴ 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.

Sacrificing

First, we see Christ's sacrifice in that He gave Himself for us. To us, who *were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another (Titus 3:3)*, He gave the ultimate sacrifice (His death) in our place as a gift. It cost Him everything; not only His life but alienation from God the Father for a time. He walked the dry and dusty roads of this earth and died on a rugged cross while never sinning. 1 Peter 2:24 says:

He himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed.

Redeeming

He gave Himself to redeem us from every kind of sin. Redeem means to release upon the receipt of a ransom. He freed us from the sin of an ungodly life that characterized us before we received the gospel and from the guilt associated with it. He ransomed many, not with money, but with His precious blood.

Purifying

He gave Himself to purify us. In the Father's eyes, we have been cleansed by faith. This is our position in Christ. Now by the ministry of the Word and the Holy Spirit we are being changed in practice.

Producing a People of His Own

Having paid a terrible price, He is producing a people who love and serve Him – a people who imitate Him. His people are precious to Him – a treasured possession. Malachi 3:17 foretold:

¹⁷ "They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. ¹⁸ Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him.

As part of His treasured possession, we can approach and walk confidently with Him.

Preparing His People for Good Works

He gave Himself to prepare us to do sacrificial good works in all shapes and forms for all the people He has placed in our lives especially those who are believers in Christ. God's gracious attitude toward us expressed in Christ leads us to imitate Him in good works. We take every opportunity to shower grace upon others as Christ has done for us. We help and love them with our deeds and kind, encouraging

words. And yes, even when they do not deserve it. We overlook faults and weaknesses, suffering long with them. Is it because we are superior to them? No! We are simply expressing the same grace God has shown us.

How are you doing in this area? Perhaps at one time you were zealous for doing good works. But now your fervor has cooled. The people whom you served were ungrateful and now you have become indifferent losing your zeal. But rethink. Look at Christ our Savior who endured far more rejection than we will ever face. He still went to the cross, bled, and died. Romans 5:8 says, *“but God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*

“Jesus gave it all” the hymn says. Can we not do the same in our lives? Can we not be imitators of His grace?

Showing grace to others through good works also has a built in benefit towards our training in grace. Being preoccupied with acts of grace pushes out the temptations of sin and the ungodliness that remains in our lives. There is now no time for it. Ungodliness is pushed off the stage of our lives – there is not enough room.

The Puritans gave the example of trees in the fall and winter. What really dislodges the old, dead leaves they would say, is not the cold or the wind, but rather the new life of spring coursing through its branches and forcing out the old.³

Such is true as we renounce the old and take on the new life of Christ. This new life is filled with grace filled good works which leave little or no room for the old. Good works are mentioned often in Titus. This must be the pre-occupation of the Christian.

Declare with Authority (2:15)

Paul then closes this text in verse 15 with a command to Titus:

¹⁵ Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you.

“Declare these things Titus”, says Paul. “This is the “why” of the practical commands I have given you. Encourage and correct them in the matters of grace. Do this constantly, clearly, and with certainty. Make sure they (and you) live lives consistent with the grace of God. And do so with the authority that has been given to you from God. Let no one disregard or despise you in this teaching. As some say, let no one think around you. Get their attention on God’s grace and their responsibility and hold it. It is urgent and is of utmost importance, for the grace of God in Jesus Christ has appeared.”

This was the charge given Titus and the elders at Crete. The same is true for myself and for my fellow elders at the Chapel. May we never cease to declare these things.

Reflect and Respond

- Thank God His grace has appeared in our Savior Jesus Christ

³ Hughes and Chapel,

- Grace demands us to say “no” to ungodliness and “yes” to godliness
- Do you grasp such demands on your life?
- Are you learning to wait with a growing eagerness for the return of Jesus?
- Have you lost your zeal for good works?
- The price paid by Christ was great – ought not He expect our obedience?
- Never hold back from declaring these things – they are the truth
- Examine and watch your heart and life carefully – may your walk adorn the grace of God today and until our God and Savior Jesus Christ appears again

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