

Upright and Godly

Lesson for August 18, 2024

Unit III: Eternal Hope

Adult Topic: Zealous for Good Deeds

Scriptural Background: Titus 1:1-3; 2:11-15

Printed Text: Titus 1:1-3; 2:11-15

Key verse: “For the grace of God has appeared 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 of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,” (Titus 2:11-13, NIV)

In the Peanuts episode, “It’s the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown,” Linus is convinced that the Great Pumpkin will appear on the night before Halloween. He convinces Sally to join him for an all-night vigil, but the Great Pumpkin fails to appear. Charlie Brown consoles him: “Don’t take it too hard, Linus. I’ve done a lot of stupid things in my life, too.” Linus retorts, “What do you mean ‘stupid’ Just wait till next year, Charlie Brown. You’ll see!” Linus was convinced that his patience would bring great reward.

For believers in Paul’s era, the knowledge of Jesus Christ’s appearance on earth and the promise of the Lord’s return was motivation to change their worldly behavior. This was not imagination or childish fantasy. The Lord had promised to return—and that changed everything.

Today in the Word (n.d.)

Unifying Principle

Some people enjoy living recklessly, without regard for consequences. How does a thoughtful consideration of the future inform our actions in the present? Paul instructed Titus to lead others toward lives that were self-controlled, upright, and godly with a view toward the blessed hope of Christ’s return. (*Sunday School Commentary, 2023-2024*, Townsend Press, p. 446)

Key Terms

1. **Eternal** (1:2) – Without beginning or end of existence.
2. **Faith** (1:1) – Belief; the assent of the mind or understanding to the truth of what God has revealed. Simple belief of the scriptures, of the being and perfections of God, and of the existence, character and doctrines of Christ

3. **Grace** (2:11) – Favor; good will; kindness; disposition to oblige another; as a grant made as an act of grace.
4. **Knowledge** (1:1) – A clear and certain perception of that which exists, or of truth and fact; understanding; perception.
5. **Proclamation** (1:3) – Publication by authority; official notice given to the public. The declaration of any supreme magistrate publicly made known

Lesson Background

This is a letter written to a church leader named Titus, a Gentile convert of Paul (Titus 1:4). It appears Paul and Titus took a mission trip to Crete around AD 62–64. Paul later left, with Titus remaining on the island as a church leader. Titus was a prominent figure in the early church. He traveled with Paul from Antioch to Jerusalem for the Jerusalem Council (see Acts 15 and Galatians 2). Titus worked with Paul in Ephesus during his third missionary journey and may have delivered a letter to the Corinthian church from Paul (2 Corinthians 2:12–13). He also delivered 2 Corinthians (2 Corinthians 8:23) and was responsible for making arrangements for a financial offering for Paul in Corinth (2 Corinthians 8:6, 16–17).

Paul later sent this epistle to Titus—with Zenas and Apollos (Titus 3:13). It encourages Titus to select elders (church leaders) for local house churches (Titus 1:5–9), deal with offenders in the church (Titus 1:10–16), and gives directions regarding certain church practices (Titus 2:1–3:11).

Chapters 2–3 involve instructions to various Christians in Crete. These includes the proper behavior of Christians (Titus 2:1–10), submission to government (Titus 3:1), proper treatment of all people (Titus 3:2–8), and responses to false teachers (Titus 3:9–11).

The final verses (Titus 3:12–15) include personal messages and concluding comments to Titus. Paul instructed Titus to join him at Nicopolis, a Roman city on the west side of Greece (Titus 3:12), to assist Zenas and Apollos on their trip (Titus 3:13), and to encourage good works (Titus 3:14).

Lesson in Depth

I. Appoint Godly Leaders (Titus 1:1-3)

In writing his own name first, Paul followed the letter-writing customs of his day. First the writer was mentioned, and then the reader, and then a greeting was given.

From Titus 1:5 we learn that Paul and Titus worked together in Crete, spreading the gospel and establishing churches – but Paul had to leave. Titus stayed and worked among the congregations there. Since Titus was left behind to do a difficult work, Paul wanted to instruct and encourage him – and he did so with this letter.

Paul wrote this as two other Christian workers (*Zenas* and *Apollos*, mentioned in Titus 3:13) were about to go to Crete, so Paul sent this letter with them.

iv. This letter was written to Titus, but it was also written to the Christians on the island of Crete. Paul knew this letter would be publicly read among the churches on the island. So, in the structure of opening the letter, Paul took great care to tell the Christians of Crete *what* his credentials were, and *where* he stood on important issues. Paul didn't think like a politician who often responds to what the crowd wants and to what pleases the crowd.

Paul, a bondservant of God: Of all the titles Paul could use, he first chose “**bondservant of God.**” If Paul had a modern-day business card, that would be his title on the card.

Significantly, when Paul used the term **bondservant**, he chose the ancient Greek word *doulos*. This word not only designated a *low* slave (one Greek scholar called it “the most abject, servile term in use among the Greeks for a slave”), it was also the word for a slave by *choice*.

Paul was only a **bondservant** – yet he had a high place, because He was a **bondservant of God**. It is never a low thing to be a servant of a great God.

And an apostle of Jesus Christ: God gave Paul a special role to play among His servants. Paul's particular call and function was as a special messenger of God – **an apostle**. Paul knew his call and purpose among the body of Christ, and so should each Christian today also know for themselves.

According to the faith: Paul wasn't an apostle *because* of the faith of God's elect, but in harmony with **the faith** (in the sense of a specific, common body of doctrine) shared among **God's elect**.

God's elect are those whom He chose from before the foundation of the world to receive His salvation. We can identify **God's elect** because they respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ and live their lives after that gospel.

The acknowledgement of the truth: For Paul it wasn't enough to just *know* the faith, he also had to *acknowledge* it for what it really was.

Which accords with godliness: Paul stood in accord with godly living. All truth is God's truth; but not all truth is really relevant to **godliness**, which promotes “God-likeness”. Much of science or psychology may be true and admirable – but it won't save a soul from Hell. It is not **the truth which accords with godliness**.

In hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began,

Eternal life: This is the life of the Eternal God living within us. It is present now, but will be completed later.

Which God, who cannot lie, promised: This eternal life is not a *wish*, but a **hope**. In this sense, **hope** is an anticipation founded not on wishful thinking, but on a promise from the **God who cannot lie**.

But in due time manifested His word through preaching: Paul knew that **preaching** is the way that God's eternal work meets people today. **Preaching** is the way God's word is made evident (**manifested**).

But has in due time manifested His word: Christianity came into the world at a time when it was uniquely possible for its message to spread rapidly.

- There was a common language (Greek), which was the language of trade, business, and literature.
- There were virtually no frontiers because of the vast nature of the Roman Empire.
- Travel was comparatively easy. It was slow, but relatively safe because of the security that the Roman Empire brought to roads and sea routes.
- The world was largely at peace under the *pax Romana*.
- The world was uniquely conscious of its need for a messiah and savior. "There was never a time when the hearts of men were more open to receive the message of salvation which the Christian missionaries brought." (Barclay)

Which was committed to me: Paul knew the work of preaching was entrusted to him, but not to him only. Preaching is a work committed to all believers.

II. Prepare Godly Followers (Titus 2:11-15)

Prior to this division in the lesson, Titus 2:1–10 gives specific instructions for various groups within the church. Titus is commanded to teach each of these groups with authority. Paul includes directions tailored for older men, older women, younger men, and younger women. This part of the chapter emphasizes characteristics such as self-control, faithfulness, dignity, respect, godliness, and love. Older men and women are to mentor younger men and women, respectively. Paul also gives directions to servants, regarding submission to their masters. Titus is given instruction, as well, for the correct conduct of a leader. A major reason for right behavior is to leave critics no room to attack the Christian faith.

Titus 2:11–15 explains how the grace of God inspires Christians toward this right behavior and right thinking. The qualities which Paul describes earlier in the chapter must be grounded in the grace God gives to us. The previous Scriptures gave instructions for proper behavior of church members. Here, God's grace is shown as the foundation on which traits such as self-control, respect, and godliness are built. Paul also commands Titus to teach these ideas boldly, and with authority.

The grace of God that brings salvation: *Grace brings salvation.* You don't go out and "get" salvation; it comes to you and you have the opportunity to receive it.

Has appeared to all men: There is one gospel of grace for **all men**. God doesn't have a gospel of grace for some and a gospel of law or self-justification for others. **All men** find **salvation** by the **grace of God**. "No rank or class or type of mankind is outside the saving influence of God's grace." (White)

"There is a beauty and energy in the word *epiphaino, hath shined out*, that is rarely noted; it seems to be a metaphor taken from the *sun*. As by his rising in the east and *shining out*, he enlightens, *successively*, the whole world; so the Lord Jesus, who is called the *Sun of righteousness*, Malachi 4:2, arises on the whole human race with healing in his wings." (Clarke)

The light and warmth of the sun is for the whole earth; but it does not shine upon the earth all at the same time, nor in the same intensity from place to place.

Teaching us that: The ancient Greek word for **teaching** has in mind what a parent does for a child. It speaks of the entire training process: teaching, encouragement, correction, and discipline. Grace is a teacher in this sense.

"It teaches us declares that grace also operates in the lives of the saved. Grounded in God's nature, grace makes ethical demands of Christians consistent with his nature. 'Teaches' pictures grace, practically personified, as instructing the believer in the things in accord with sound doctrine." (Hiebert)

"He means that God's grace, should instruct us to order our lives aright. Some are quick to turn the preaching of God's mercy into an excuse for licentiousness, while carelessness keeps others from thinking about the renewal of their life. But the revelation of God's grace necessarily brings with it exhortations to a godly life." (Calvin)

ii. "Thus you see that grace has its own disciples. Are you a disciple of the grace of God? Did you ever come and submit yourself to it?" (Spurgeon)

Denying ungodliness and worldly lusts: Grace puts **ungodliness** and **worldly lusts** in our past. Now grace teaches us to renounce those things, not only to avoid them.

Denying: "This indicates the renunciation of the Devil, of the vanity of this world, and of all the sinful lusts of the flesh." (White)

ii. One may say that in a world where we are tempted to say "Yes" to every desire and feeling, that the reality of our faith can be demonstrated by what we say *no* to, by what we are willing to deny.

"The most difficult part of the training of young men is not to put the right thing into them, but to get the wrong thing out of them." (Spurgeon)

We should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age: Grace teaches us how to live **in the present age**. We must **live soberly** (self-controlled) in regard to ourselves. We must live **righteously** in regard to the people around us. And we must live **godly** (“to take God seriously”) in regard to our God.

“We are taught by that gentle schoolmistress, the Grace of God, to live – soberly, as regards our personal life; righteously, in relation to others; godly, in our attitude towards God.” (Meyer)

Taken together, we see that the fear of the legalist – that preaching grace produces Christians indifferent to obedience – is unfounded. *Grace teaches us obedience*. “Wherever the grace of God comes effectually, it makes the loose liver deny the desires of the flesh; it causes the man who lusted after gold to conquer his greediness; it brings the proud man away from his ambitions; it trains the idler to diligence, and it sobers the wanton mind which cared only for the frivolities of life. Not only do we leave these lusts, but we deny them.” (Spurgeon)

The phrase **godly in the present age** is also a subtle proof against the idea of purgatory or some place of cleansing in the life to come. “Not supposing that any thing will be purified in the world to come that is not cleansed in this.” (Clarke)

Looking for the blessed hope: Grace teaches us to expect and prepare for our **blessed hope**. That **hope** is not heaven or glory, but Jesus Himself, face to face, closer than ever.

Looking for indicates that Christians should live in active expectation of the return of Jesus. It should be precious for Christians to consider:

- He came the first time to save the soul of man; He will come a second time to resurrect the body.
- He came the first time to save the individual; He will come a second time to save society.
- He came the first time to a crucifixion; He will come a second time to a coronation.
- He came the first time to a tree; He will come a second time to a throne.
- He came the first time in humility; He will come a second time in glory.
- He came the first time and was judged by men; He will come a second time to judge all men.
- He came the first time and stood before Pilate; He will come a second time and Pilate will stand before Him.

Our great God: “This is the only place in the N.T. in which *megas* is applied to the true God, although it is a constant predicate of heathen gods and goddesses, *e.g.*, Acts 19:28.” (White)

“The discipline of grace, according to the apostle, has three results – denying, living, looking. You see the three words before you.” (Spurgeon)

Who gave Himself for us: Every word of this description of Jesus’ work is important. Jesus **gave**, which means it was voluntary. He gave **Himself**, which means Jesus gave all He could give. And He gave Himself **for us**, which means Jesus was given as a substitute for sinful man.

That He might redeem us: Redemption means “to be bought out of slavery by the paying of a ransom.” We are bought out of our slavery to sin, and purchased *for* His service.

From every lawless deed: “And we are, therefore, taught that the death of Jesus was intended, not for our forgiveness and justification merely, but for our sanctification, and our deliverance from the power of all our besetting sins.” (Meyer)

His own special people: “The word we have translated *special* (*periousios*) is interesting. It means *reserved for*; and it was specially used for that part of the spoils of a battle or a campaign which the king who had conquered set apart especially for himself.” (Barclay)

Zealous for good works: We are redeemed and purchased to live with zeal. This is zeal with knowledge, and zeal for righteousness in our own life before zeal for righteousness in the lives of others.

“As you know, Titus was a teacher of teachers. He had to set in order the things that were wanting, and to show other preachers how they were to preach... You see how much of the Epistle is taken up with the affairs of ordinary life, matters of holy practice; so let our preaching be, and let Christian people learn to receive joyfully such instruction.” (Spurgeon)

Speak these things: Titus, and every one of God’s messengers of grace are directed to speak, **exhort, and rebuke** – and to do it **with all authority**. God’s messengers are to remember that they are messengers from a King, holding the word that brings life and turns back hell.

Let no one despise you: If Titus spoke **with all authority**, he had to back it up with his life. Titus had to live so that no one would **despise** him or his message.

Lesson Summary

Titus 1:1-3 emphasize the importance of service, faith, godliness, hope, trust in God's promises, divine timing, and the crucial role of preaching in the Christian faith. Lessons from these verses include:

1. Servanthood and Apostleship:

- Paul identifies himself as a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ. This highlights the importance of humility and service in leadership roles. Leaders in the faith community should see themselves as servants first, dedicated to God's will.

2. Purpose of Ministry:

- The purpose of Paul's apostleship is to further the faith of God's elect and to enhance their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness. Ministry should focus on nurturing faith and promoting godly living among believers.

3. Hope of Eternal Life:

- Paul speaks of the hope of eternal life, which is a core promise of the Christian faith. This hope is a foundational aspect of Christian belief, providing motivation and comfort to believers.

4. God's Faithfulness:

- God, who does not lie, promised eternal life before the beginning of time. This underscores God's unwavering faithfulness and reliability. Believers can trust in God's promises because He is truthful and consistent.

5. Divine Timing:

- Paul mentions that the promise of eternal life has been brought to light at God's appointed season. This highlights the concept of divine timing—God's plans unfold according to His perfect schedule, not human expectations.

6. Role of Preaching:

- The message of eternal life is brought to light through preaching, which Paul has been entrusted with by God's command. Preaching and teaching are vital components of spreading the Christian message and fulfilling God's command.

7. God's Command and Calling:

- Paul emphasizes that his role as a preacher is by the command of God our Savior. This reinforces the idea that ministry is a divine calling, not a self-appointed position. It's a reminder that God equips and sends individuals to fulfill His purposes.

In Titus 2:11-15 Paul continues the lesson on godly living by inspiring Christians toward this right behavior and right thinking. The lessons in these verses are:

1. Universal Offer of Salvation:

- The grace of God offers salvation to all people. This emphasizes the inclusivity of the gospel and the universal availability of God's grace.

2. Transformation through Grace:

- God's grace teaches believers to reject ungodliness and worldly passions. This transformation leads to a lifestyle characterized by self-control, uprightness, and godliness, showing that grace is not just about forgiveness but also about empowerment to live rightly.

3. Living in the Present Age:

- Believers are called to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age. This indicates that Christian conduct is relevant and necessary in the current world, not just in anticipation of the future.

4. Hope in Christ's Return:

- Believers await the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of Jesus Christ. This expectation of Christ's return provides motivation and perspective, encouraging believers to live faithfully.

5. Redemption and Purification:

- Jesus Christ gave Himself to redeem believers from all wickedness and to purify them as His own special people. This underscores the purpose of Christ's sacrifice: to create a community of people dedicated to doing good.

6. Eagerness to Do Good:

- Believers are to be eager to do good works. This indicates that good deeds are a natural outflow of a transformed life and a purified heart.

7. Authority in Teaching:

- Titus is instructed to teach these truths with authority, to encourage and rebuke. This highlights the importance of sound teaching and the need for leaders to uphold and enforce doctrinal truth confidently.

8. Standing Firm in Leadership:

- Titus is advised not to let anyone despise him, which suggests the importance of standing firm in one's authority and calling, even in the face of opposition or disrespect.

In summary, these verses highlight the transformative power of God's grace, the importance of living godly lives in the present age, the anticipation of Christ's return, the purpose of Christ's redemptive work, the call to good deeds, and the need for authoritative and confident teaching in the Christian faith.