

A People for His Own Possession

A sermon on Titus 2:11-14

By Alex Chediak

Executive summary

In this season between justification and our future glorification with Christ, God's grace instructs us to progressively "put off" all that we once were when God reached down and saved us, and progressively "put on" the Lord Jesus Christ, so that our lives increasingly look like His. Titus 2:11-14 explains that transformation in God's people has been made possible (and inevitable) by the inbreaking of God's kingdom in the person and work of His Son, whose incarnation, death, and resurrection bring salvation from both the penalty and the power of sin. The confident expectation of Christ's return characterizes Christians and fills them with hope because the glory of His grace-communicating first appearance will pale in comparison to that of His second. Though we are His people now, we long for our redemption and purification to be fully consummated. Titus 2:11-14 thus grounds the practical instructions given in Titus 2:1-10.

Preaching Class

Pastor/Teacher: John Piper

Executive Pastoral Assistant: David Mathis

Assignment Due: December 21, 2006

Read Titus 2:1-15 in the ESV, and lead the congregation in a brief prayer.

Introduction

I imagine “grace” is a sweet word in your ear. We can sing “Amazing Grace” and rejoice that God could forgive debtors like us. Perhaps many of us would define grace as the receiving of something undeserved, or of not having to suffer a punishment that is deserved. And certainly this is an aspect of grace. The giving of a present to someone you know cannot reciprocate, for example, is a demonstration of grace.

But we probably are less accustomed to the idea of grace “teaching.” Perhaps we think that grace should simply give, without altering the condition of the recipient. We think of teaching as “hard” and grace as “easy.” Our passage today illustrates that God’s grace doesn’t stop at forgiveness and justification – as glorious as those realities are. It also transforms us progressively. When He saves us, he saves us *from* a condition of sin-saturated idolatry *to* a condition of God-centered holiness. The receiving of the Holy Spirit at the moment we are justified (counted righteous in Christ) is the guarantee that we will someday be perfectly without sin in His presence – gladly doing, thinking and feeling all that we should do, think and feel. If you are a Christian, you long for that day to come. If the idea of being forever free from sin means nothing to you, I pray God will work a miracle in your heart this morning.

In this season between justification and our future glorification with Christ, grace instructs us to progressively “put off” all that we once were when God reached down and saved us, and progressively “put on” the Lord Jesus Christ, so that our lives increasingly look like His—both without sinful practices *and* full of good works.

Context - Book of Titus

Titus 2:11-14 is in many ways the high point of this brief, 46-verse letter. So let me first take a moment to put our text into its context. Paul was a missionary and church planter, and he had a number of apprentices, like Timothy and Titus. The pastoral epistles (I & II Timothy and Titus) are letters that Paul writes to his apprentices, to encourage and help them in their work. Timothy and Titus were essentially pastors, in Ephesus and Crete respectively. Paul had left them there to complete the gospel work that had been started. Throughout the letter to Titus on Crete, Paul gives him three objectives (broadly speaking) to accomplish: (1) Silence and refute false teachers, lest they disturb the faith of Christians, particularly new converts; (2) Raise up qualified elders, who could lead other believers by both word and example; (3) Train the believers in godly living.

Chapter two deals primarily with this last objective: the training and instruction appropriate for believers in different stations of life (older men, older women, younger women, younger men, Titus himself, and slaves all being explicitly listed).

Two Motivations for Godly Living

There are two motivations for godly living that are emphasized in verses 1-10 that set the stage for the climax in verses 11-14. First, truth accords with godliness. In other words, godliness and truth “go together” – like a wedding and formal attire. You would not wear shorts and a T-shirt to a wedding, and you probably would not wear a three-piece suit to a baseball game. Certain things don’t go together. And other things do go together. Truth and godliness go together, because the grace of God appeared (Tit. 2:11, 13) not only to convict people of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8), but

also so that men and women thus convicted would repent and be saved from *both* the wages of sin (God's wrath) and their daily enslavement to sin. The Christian life is both Christ *for us* (our perfect, sin-bearing substitute before God, taking all our sins upon Himself so that the Father could impute Christ's righteous life to our account) and Christ *in us* (transforming us moment by moment so that our thoughts, deeds, and motivations are increasingly God-glorifying).

But there's a second motivation for godly living given in Titus 2. It is mentioned three times in the first ten verses: The impact of the behavior of Christians on a watching world. (1) In verses 4-5, young women are to love their husbands and children, while exhibiting purity, kindness, self-control and submissiveness "so that the word of God may not be reviled." (2) In verses 7-8, Titus is to be a good example so that "an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us." (3) In verses 9-10, slaves are to be submissive to their own masters in everything, well pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that "in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior."

Adorning the Grace of God

The word "adorn" is worth pondering. We are probably not accustomed to hearing the word "adornment" related to "doctrine." To adorn is to make something look beautiful. For example, a wealthy woman might considerably amplify her wardrobe with attractive, fashionable jewelry...and for what purpose? To make her look beautiful and to draw attention to herself. Of course, her jewelry is also attractive in its own right, but that's not the point. She means for herself to be the main article on display. The adornment (jewelry in this case) is intended to be secondary.

So it is striking that in verse 10 *we* are the adornment – and the doctrine of God our Savior is what is being put on display. Our lives of holy, faithful obedience and joy in God (beautiful as they are) are meant to draw attention to Him and to make Him look great, not us. His saving work of grace is the main article on display. Though the whole message could be dedicated to this theme, I'll press on with this one observation: The most beautiful Christian lives are the ones which point most clearly to the grace of God, and not to themselves, as if our value came from any intrinsic worth or accomplishment. God does not value us *because we are valuable*. On the contrary, *we have value because God values us, and has graciously set His affection upon us*. May others see much of Christ in our lives, forgetting the channel and giving Him all the praise.

The Grounding of Christian Motivation: The Grace of God Has Appeared!

So with that we come to verse 11, where Paul unpacks the foundational reason behind his preceding exhortations. The reason Titus is to exhort Cretan believers (and by extension, us) to live godly lives is that God's grace has appeared, bringing salvation to all kinds of people.

This statement of God's grace "appearing" is a reference to the incarnation of the God-man Jesus Christ. In John 1 we're told, "The law came through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." While there was grace in Moses' ministry, it paled in comparison to the grace that came in Jesus' ministry. The grace of the Mosaic economy was the fact that a perfect standard for righteousness was held up for God's people. And this was good because it showed us our sinfulness and how richly we deserved judgment. Jesus came to fulfill the law on our behalf, and to give us the Holy Spirit to enable us to walk in newness of life. The New covenant is better than the Old.

Next, this phrase, “bringing salvation to all people,” can be a source of confusion, but it doesn’t need to be. It cannot possibly mean that all people throughout planet earth, and throughout all of human history, are being saved. There are too many other passages that make it clear that not everyone will be saved. For example, Matthew 7:21 says “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” The short answer is to recognize that we often use the word “all” in such a way that we really mean “all kinds, without distinction.” If I say, “I test-drove all the cars on the lot” you know I more likely mean that I drove one of each model, not that I literally took hundreds of cars for a spin. The grace of God has brought salvation to all kinds of people without distinction. And the “all kinds” is explained by the context in verses 1-10—older men, older women, younger women, younger men, and slaves. The grace of God has appeared and is now saving all kinds of people.

How Grace Trains Us

When God’s grace brings salvation, what happens? Well, regardless of what kind of person we are (male, female, slave, free, young, old), the grace of God trains us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and (instead) to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age. How does this happen? What are the means by which our trainer, God’s grace, accomplishes these objectives? It happens by the proclamation and careful, attentive hearing of “sound doctrine.” The Greek word translated “doctrine” occurs twenty-one times in the New Testament, and sixteen of those times are in the pastoral epistles. Note how frequently Paul reminds Titus about the importance of teaching. In Tit. 1:9, we’re told an elder must be able to “give

instruction,” so that he can correct false teachers. In Tit. 2:1, Titus is to teach, showing integrity in his teaching (2:7), and in verse 15 he’s exhorted to declare these truths, to exhort others, and even to rebuke where appropriate. These are all “speaking” verbs. We can infer that a big part of Titus’ ministry included preaching and teaching.

Here in Titus 2:12, the word translated “training” is from the same stem as our English noun “pedagogue.” A pedagogue is essentially a personal tutor who is hired to be involved in the details of a child’s learning and development (perhaps in academic matters like reading, writing, and arithmetic). So grace, our tutor, trains us. A big part of this training is the receiving of instruction, but it also includes discipline (remember, the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives). I think the relationship between Titus 2:11-14 (the ground clause) and the preceding ten verses of practical instruction is similar to that of Philippians 2:12-13. There, it is “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” – in other words, live out Christian obedience – because or *for* – “it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” In other words, we work because God works. In Titus 2, it is *Titus, teach them, because God’s grace is at work, teaching them.* The means by which believers grow in the school of God’s grace is by paying careful attention to its teaching, and by receiving the corrective discipline that accompanies this teaching. What that means is if we’re told to “put off” certain behavior, we do it, and when we fail to do it perfectly, we receive the corrective discipline that God brings into our lives for our good.

The *Content* of the Training of God's Grace

So what does God's grace train us to do, and to not do? First of all, we're to say "no" to (or "renounce") ungodliness and worldly passions. The first term, ungodliness, has to do with a system of thought (a worldview) that has no place for God. It is the orientation with which we lived our lives before God called us to Himself. And a life oriented in this fashion is one controlled by "worldly passions" – the second thing we're called to renounce. So we're to say "no" not just to worldly passions (self-centeredness, instant-gratification seeking, idolatry) but *also* to the system of thought which gives rise to such living. Whereas God was formerly denied Lordship in our lives, now he must be given centrality. He must be allowed to be first in everything.

There is an application here for how we share the gospel today. Fifty years ago, non-Christians, at least in America, had a pretty good idea of what they were rejecting. An atheist was a "Christian atheist" in that he was disbelieving in the Christian God. Today, people can be religious – perhaps even call themselves Christians – and yet deny such concepts as sin, judgment, and the reliability of God's Word. So if we start with "you are a sinner in need of judgment," we may get a long, blank stare. They don't know what it means to be a sinner. Instead, we need to begin with who God *is* – the Creator and rightful Sovereign of the universe. Mankind can only be understood in relation to God – we are His creatures, and He has every right to tell us how to live. People cannot understand what sin is (and therefore they cannot understand what judgment and the cross are about) until they understand who God is. We need to first recognize that we were made for God, and that we aren't little gods in our own universe. God owns us.

Sinners need to first renounce their godless worldview that leads to a lifestyle characterized by worldly passions. And that's the work of God's grace.

Now, on the positive side, what does God's grace train us *to* do? It trains us to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives. These three traits – self-controlled, upright, and godly – refer to the three dimensions of every person's life: With respect to ourselves—and to our own passion, including those that are not expressly sinful—we are to possess self-control (a fruit of the Holy Spirit). Paul elsewhere said that all things may be lawful for him, but he would intentionally limit himself so as not to be mastered by anything (I Cor. 6:12). Perhaps you enjoy and regularly do something that is not wrong, and may have good effects, like exercise, or drinking a latte on the way to work. But the Holy Spirit reveals to you that the activity may be mastering you. You are cranky and irritable if you don't get to do it every day. You get angry with people or at circumstances that prevent you from doing it. A self-controlled person might begin to limit this particular activity so that it is not controlling him. As Christians, we should be growing in self-control.

With respect to our dealings with others, we are to be upright. Other words for upright include just, circumspect, and above reproach. Non-Christians should see blameless moral conduct in our lives, so that (to the extent that they actively oppose the gospel) they may be put to shame by the quality of our lives (Tit. 2:8). Joining in a bit of gossipy criticism of your boss with your co-workers, or accepting too much change in the checkout line, or speaking disrespectfully to your parents or spouse, does not make the grace of God look beautiful. Accepting unfair remarks without retaliation, being honest on your taxes, and speaking kindly to others does make God's grace look attractive. We

need to remember that even among those who are perishing, we bring the aroma of Christ (II Cor. 2:15). May God use it save them!

And lastly, with respect to the vertical component of our lives, we should be godly. All that we do should first be an offering to God and then a means of blessing to our neighbor. Our lives are to be oriented around Him, with every thought filtered through our love for Him, and every action and circumstance seen through His eyes.

Living in Two Great “In Between” States

With this next phrase “in the present age,” I want to step back and look at the verb tenses Paul has been using. God’s grace “appeared” (in the past, in Christ’s first Advent). God’s grace is presently “training” us. We who are being trained by grace have *already* renounced ungodliness (decisively, at the moment of our conversion, though we presently work out our salvation with fear and trembling). We are *now, in this present age*, to live in a self-controlled, upright and godly manner.

Why does Paul add “in this present age”? Isn’t that superfluous? After all, what other age could he be talking about? Look at verse 12 in the context of 11-13. In verse 11, the grace of God appeared (in the past). In verse 13, the glory of God will appear. In verse 11, it is the incarnation of Christ. In verse 13, it is the return of the glorified Christ (who – Paul is unambiguous – is God!). And we live our lives in between these two momentous events. Between the cross (the inbreaking of God’s kingdom) and the crown (the consummation of God’s kingdom).

And what other “in between” characterizes our life? We are both *saved (past tense)*, being *progressively* made holy, and *awaiting* the “blessed hope” of Christ’s

return, after which we will forever be free from the presence of sin! The sun has broken over the horizon, but we're not yet enjoying the glorious mid-day heat.

But we know it's coming. That's what verse 13 is about. Waiting for the return of Christ, which will mean his glory appearing in a way that will make even His (grace-communicating) incarnation pale in comparison. In the twinkling of an eye, Jesus will complete our sanctification and take us to be with Him forever.

What does waiting for Christ's return have to do with living a self-controlled, upright, and godly life? There are two ways to answer. First, beholding is becoming. If we meditate on the excellencies of Christ, and on the fact that His glorious perfections will one day be perfectly mirrored in our redeemed humanity, that causes us to be transformed from one degree of glory to another (II Cor. 3:18). Are you doing that? Is that the direction your heart looks as you get out of bed? When you do your daily Bible-reading, are you hungrily looking for His promises to cling to throughout the day? Do you ever take time to consider that salvation is closer for you now than when you first believed (Rom. 13:11)? Behold the glory of Christ, and remember that only what's done for Christ will last.

Secondly, we have the promise of I John 3:2-3: "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. *And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.*" Hoping in Christ goes hand-in-hand with a life that is increasingly being purified. Hoping in Christ causes faith to grow, and makes God appear more satisfying, and the allure of sin's pleasures more like the lie it always is.

Paul beautifully describes the work of Jesus in verse 14. He is the one who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness (note the negative), that he might purify for Himself a people for His own possession (that's the positive). And how do a "people for His own possession" live? They are zealous to do good works. So here again is that connection which pervades the book of Titus: sound doctrine accords with a godly lifestyle. God's grace doesn't just save us, it trains us—it transforms us. Belonging to God means being zealous to do good works ---not in any way *to earn* our salvation, but rather *because* we are saved. Obedience is the natural overflow of a life possessed by God.

Conclusion

When God reached down and saved us, He enrolled us in the school of grace. How are you doing in it? Are you meeting with the Teacher, and letting His word soak into you? Are you beholding Him in the beauty of the sunrise and chirping birds? Are you seeing His image in the lives of others, and thereby loving them more deeply? May He increase, and you decrease, so that you may adorn the beautiful doctrine of God our Savior. Let's pray.