

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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The Christian Life in Difficult Times: Titus 2:11-3:5

Our opening section today is about the bountiful grace of God. In brief, Christian blessing comes to us, not because we deserve it, but because of the free, unmerited favour of God. Free to us, that is. There is indeed a cost, a mighty cost, a tremendous cost, borne in full by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Consider that extremely apt acrostic of the word grace. G-R-A-C-E. God's Riches At Christ's Expense. G-R-A-C-E. Grace! Marvellous!

In the first three verses of today's scripture, we have three readily identifiable aspects of that grace. Verse 11 tells us about a past manifestation of the grace of God. Verse 12 tells us about a present manifestation of the grace of God. Verse 13 tells us about a future manifestation of the grace of God. Let us think about each of these aspects, past, present and future, in some detail, in the order in which they come.

First of all, then, there has already been, in this world, a clear manifestation of the grace of God. As verse 11 says, 'the grace of God **has** appeared'. When did it happen? And in what form? Supremely, pre-eminently, in the Person of the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, when He lived in this world, almost 2,000 years ago now. We do get occasional glimpses in the four Gospels of His infancy and boyhood. But, largely speaking, it was particularly in those dramatic last three and a half years of His life upon earth that the grace of God was made known in a public way in Him. In Him, personally, the grace of God has indeed appeared, here in this world, in which we ourselves live.

Many scriptures remind us that while God, through Christ, created all things, the race of mankind as a whole has a special place in the heart of God. As we read in Proverbs 8:31, 'His delights were with the sons of men'. As far back as Genesis 1:26 we read, 'And God said, Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion' over all created things on earth, on behalf of God.

An exact rendering of verse 11 could well be, 'The grace of God, which bringeth salvation within the reach of all men, has appeared'. That is, because the Lord Jesus came into the world, salvation has been made available to all men. All men will not be saved. But, salvation is presented freely to all who are willing to receive it by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 12 takes us a step further. What does it say? It tells us that grace teaches us, that is, us Christians. The grace of God will never teach the vital truths of Christianity to all men. They don't have the spiritual capacity to take it in. But, we Christians are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and can receive and understand what is taught by Him. And what does the grace of God teach us? Listen to what the text says! 'Having denied ungodliness and worldly lusts'. That is the first part! It is put to the credit of us Christians that we have been so affected by the grace of God which has been extended towards us that we have drawn a line under the life we used to live before we became Christians. We have said plainly, "That part of my life is finished, once and for all. I'm not going back to that kind of life, ever again." That is what might be called the negative effect of becoming Christians, believers on the Lord Jesus Christ. There are things we used to do that we do no longer, nor indeed wish to do.

There is also a very definite positive side. There are things we do now that we had neither the desire nor the power to live out before. As the verse says, 'we live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world'. To live soberly is to live a life of balanced self-control, having a right estimation of ourselves. To live righteously is to live a life in which we act rightly towards other people. To live godly is to live a life in which we are right in our attitude towards the Lord Himself. Not surprisingly, teaching as important as this comes out in other scriptures also. For instance, in Romans 12 we read, 'Let no man think more highly of himself than he ought to think, but to think soberly.' In Romans 13, we read, 'Owe no man anything, but to love one another ... Let us walk honestly, that is, righteously.' Then, in Romans 14, we have, 'None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. Whether we live, we live unto the Lord, and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.' Surely, this is a very good expansion of the phrase 'live godly' in Titus 2:12.

'Living godly' is not always easy, of course. Indeed, it rarely is! As we read in 2 Timothy 3:12, 'all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution'.

So then, as to the past, grace has taught us that salvation has become available by the coming of Christ into the world. As to the present, grace communicates to us the desire, the incentive and the power to live in the right attitude in every part of our lives, selfward, manward, and Godward. What about the future?

The Bible is quite plain. Christ is coming again. Overall, the Second Coming of Christ is such a vital matter that it is referred to hundreds of times in the Bible. To take one clear example, 'Once in the end of the age hath (Christ) appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself ... and to them that look for Him shall He appear the second time, apart from sin, unto salvation'. (Hebrews 9:26 to 28) There we have it! Jesus will never ever again have to suffer for our sins. He did that, entirely effectively, the first time He came, in lowly grace. No! No! When He comes again, He will come in power and great glory, to put down His enemies, and to introduce the kingdom of righteousness about which so many of the Old Testament prophets speak. For instance, in Isaiah 32:1 we read, 'Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness'. Then, again, in the New Testament, in Acts 17:31, for instance, we are told, 'God has appointed a day in which He will rule the world in righteousness by that man Whom He has ordained, whereof He has given assurance unto all men, in that He has raised Him from the dead.'

Firstly, though, He is coming to take to be with Himself all who have committed themselves to Him by confessing His precious Name as the only Saviour. Christ, personally, will come down from heaven, into the air, and abstract, from the world, those whom He calls His own, those who have believed upon His precious Name. Time does not permit detailed development of that precious truth just now, but please do read John 14:1 to 3, and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, as soon as your circumstances allow. For the moment, let us at least notice that 'The Rapture' of the believer, to be forever with the Lord, is almost certainly implied in the lovely term we have in verse 13, 'that blessed hope'.

Secondly, He is coming again that the glory of God might be manifested in Him. As we have seen, at His first coming, beginning as a Babe at Bethlehem, it was the grace of God that was made known. When He comes again, it will be the glory of God that will be made known, that is, publicly displayed. Colossians 3:4 says, 'When Christ, Who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.'

What sort of Person is being spoken of here? There is no doubt; none at all. He is our great God and Saviour! This is not two Persons, but One. He is, in Person, the Great God. He has ever been that. But, having come into the world, He is now also the Saviour. How did He achieve that? Listen to verse 14. 'He gave Himself for us.' For what purpose? 'To redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people (that is a unique people), zealous of good works.' Who is this glorious Person? What is His Name? Again, it is not left to our imagination. We don't have to work it out for ourselves. 'Jesus Christ', and no other!

Another major point to look for, in scriptures about the Second Coming of Christ, is this. When it is The Rapture in view, Christ coming for His own, to take them to be with Himself, it is entirely a matter of privilege. He is coming for His own, because He loves us, and wants us to be with Him, and like Him, for evermore. Nothing we can do or say can affect that, or prevent it. It will be entirely His doing. Wonderful blessing! Wonderful privilege! Likewise, references to His Appearing in glory are related to our responsibility, as in our scripture today. Living soberly, righteously, and godly are aspects of our responsible life and service which are regulated by our awareness that when Christ comes again, in power and great glory, everything will be seen as it really is, in its true colours. The knowledge of this has, and is intended to have, a salutary effect on us, while we wait for Him to come.

In passing, it is always worth noticing, indeed emphasising, that wherever the Bible gives you a list of blessing, or blessings, somewhere in the immediate context you will find a reference to the price that must be paid to secure the blessing. Here it is given in the words we have briefly thought about, 'He gave Himself for us'. What a wealth of heart-moving spiritual substance is given in those wonderful words! 'He gave Himself'. When you get the opportunity, have another look at the six occasions in the New Testament where these words are used about the Lord Jesus, 'He gave Himself'. But, for the moment, let us underline the fact that, in verse 14, Paul outlines the cost and the object of this mighty work that the Lord Jesus completed at the Cross.

Verse 15, in round terms, has Paul saying to Titus, "These things are important, even vital. Keep repeating them, again and again. Don't be afraid of repetition of important principles." He might well have rounded off what he said by the good advice, "Don't be afraid of repetition, but beware of recitation." There is, of course, a vast difference between necessary repetition and mere recitation in a parrot-like fashion.

In general, then, this is the tack Paul takes here with the younger man Titus. "Titus", he says, 'there will be many people who won't want to hear what you will need to say to them. You make sure that your lifestyle is consistent with what you preach, so that trouble makers won't be able to pick holes in what you say to them.' When Paul says here, "Let no man despise thee", he is certainly not saying, "Titus, just ignore what anybody says. Just get on with what you intend to do. Pay no attention to what anybody thinks or says." Not at all! Just the opposite, in fact. "Titus", he is saying, "don't give anyone the excuse to ignore what you say because of the way you live your life. You make sure

that no-one can point the finger at anything you do or say as an excuse for turning away the sharp edge of the word of God that is coming to them through you.”

Moving on to chapter 3, the beginning of the chapter might be summed up like this. Verses 1 and 2 indicate the common characteristics, naturally speaking, of the people of Crete, where Titus was working. Bearing in mind that it is always easy to criticise other people, Paul then brings the lesson closer to home. Verse 3 reminds us of what we Christians ourselves used to be like. Verse 4 tells us about the kindness and philanthropy of God which produced such a radical change in us. This word philanthropy, by the way, meaning love to man, confirms that God has taken man, as such, into special relationship with Himself. Then verse 5 reminds us that, if we are truly saved, we have been saved by the mercy of God, not as a result of anything we ourselves have done, or ever could do. We know instinctively that a change has taken place in us. As we so happily sing,

*‘Things are different now
Something’s happened to me,
Since I gave my heart to Jesus.’*

Paul gives here a very compact little thesis on how God has done that. Once and for all we have been given a completely new nature by what the text says is the washing of regeneration. The Holy Spirit has wrought in us a once and for all cleaning up that brings us into a new life. The cleansing agent He has used to do this is the word of God, the Bible itself. Furthermore, we have been brought into a completely new moral state, before God, called here the renewing of the Holy Ghost. Again, this is an irrevocable, irreversible work of the Holy Ghost.

Verse 6 goes further. Not only have we been given a new nature, and granted a new moral state in which the new life can thrive. We have been given also a new power to enable us to live that new life day by day to the glory of God. That new power is a Person, the Holy Spirit Himself, Who now indwells each believer on the Lord Jesus Christ, so that he or she might glorify God in his or her life on earth in a way that they had no natural power to do.

Another contrast follows. In verse 7, we are reminded of the value of the work of Christ for us. Not only has He cleared us as to the past; in the good of that mighty work He has fitted us for the future, for eternity, so that we are fully assured as to eternal life. This leads on to verse 8, which draws attention to our works, which are intended to be a confirmation that His work in us has been effective. Our works will never earn salvation for us or for anybody else. But once we are saved, the way we live and act demonstrate the effect of the grace of God in us. Good works are the outcome of salvation; they cannot achieve it.

In the rest of the chapter, Paul winds up his letter with some very practical reminders. Verse 9. Don’t haggle over unnecessary details. Verses 10 and 11. As an exception, we are told how to deal with matters if an individual causes difficulty by pressing his own individual views, even going as far as building up a school of opinion around him. A fair summary of verses 12-14 is to say, “If you possibly can, help. If you can’t, don’t hinder.” Many of us, naturally speaking, have a tendency to laziness. A Christian should be consistently diligent in all he does.

As was his usual practice, Paul rounds off his letter by including some personal words of greeting to mutual friends. Isn’t it nice, when you write to someone you have met, while away from home, to ask them to pass on your most sincere greetings to others you met while you were with them?

This happy balance between belief and behaviour is a special mark of true Christianity. Let us ensure that such a balance is evident in our lives. Others might then be attracted to the Lord Jesus Christ, Who ‘gave Himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous unto good works’. God grant that it might be so. Amen.

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