

Establishing a Life Based on Sound Doctrine

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[0 : 0 0] Well, we're going to be looking at the passage that was read earlier in Titus chapter 2. So perhaps if you've closed your Bibles, you could open that up again, page 969 of the Pew Bibles.

And as we turn to God's Word, let us pray and ask his help. Heavenly Father, in your Word, Paul tells Titus to encourage and rebuke with all authority.

And Father, we pray that you would do that to us this morning. We pray that you would encourage and strengthen us where we are weak. And Father, we pray that you would rebuke us where we are airing.

Father, we pray that you would do it by the power of your Spirit and to the glory of your Son, in whose name we pray. Amen. Well, the beginning of the year is always a good time for self-examination.

I know that it's nearly the end of January, and if you're anything like me, then most of your New Year's resolutions have already gone out the window. But it's always a good time to look at our Christian lives.

[1 : 2 0] And the passage this morning calls us to examine the shape of our Christian lives. What is it that gives shape to your Christian life?

As Christians, we tend to swing from one extreme to another. On one side, we have legalism. We have Christian lives shaped by effort and rules.

And it's very easy to see obvious examples of this. So until recently, to give you an example, there were times in Scotland where on Sunday, swings were tied up to prevent children from playing on the Sabbath.

Or I know of another country where it is considered worldly to wear jeans, and so Christians don't wear jeans. Now, it's easy for us to spot those kind of extreme versions of legalism.

But at the same time, it's very easy for us to fall into the more subtle versions of that type of approach to the Christian life, that we approach God on the basis of our performance, that we measure our spiritual condition, by the consistency of our Bible reading and prayer, or our avoidance of certain types of sin.

[2 : 4 1] All too easily, these things can become the foundation of our Christian lives. And so to avoid this type of performance-based approach to Christianity, people swing to the other extreme of not legalism, but of license-based Christianity.

God will forgive me. It doesn't matter what I do. It's his job to forgive me. Not many of us would go to the extreme of kind of living a totally immoral, selfish life just because we feel that God will forgive us.

But we know our own hearts. And we know that there are sins that the Bible condemns, lust, envy, anger, greed, gossip, bitterness, so-called respectable sins, that we all too easily overlook and indulge in ourselves.

So what's the alternative between swinging between legalism on the one side and license on the other? Well, it's here in our passage. It is grace. Verse 12, The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all.

God's grace, his generosity, his free, unmerited favor, shown supremely in the person and work of his Son.

[4 : 03] If grace shapes our lives, then we can avoid these extremes. Now, our passage gives us two basic points about grace.

First of all, we'll see that we are saved by God's grace. Now, that's something that we might be very familiar with, the idea that we are saved by grace.

But we'll see that there is specific content to God's grace, that it's not some kind of vague, impersonal power, but it has specific content.

And secondly, we'll see that we are trained or taught by God's grace. It's there in verse 12. Grace trains us to renounce impiety and to live self-controlled lives.

It's an interesting thought, isn't it? Grace trains us in godliness. Grace trains us. Grace trains us.

[5 : 04] You know, we're saved by grace, not the good things that we do. But here, Paul puts them together. But he puts them together in an unusual way that we will try and unpack later.

Grace trains us in godliness. So can you see why it's so important that grace shapes our lives? Grace won't let us be legalists because grace saves us.

But grace won't let us be licentious because grace trains us in godliness. And this is really basic, fundamental Christian teaching.

Paul is writing this letter to Titus to encourage him to plant churches and appoint elders all across the island of Crete. And at the beginning of chapter 2, Paul tells Titus that he is to teach what is consistent with sound doctrine.

And here in these verses, he unpacks the content of this sound doctrine. And at the heart of it is grace. Grace. And so this is a great passage.

[6 : 11] If you're here this morning and you wouldn't call yourself a Christian or you're not sure if you're a Christian, this is a great passage that gets to the very heart of biblical Christianity.

And it shows us that grace is the basis. Grace is the shape. Grace is the power of the Christian life. And for those of us who are Christians, well, our temptation is often to look for the magic bullet, especially this time of year, the magic bullet that will help us to live a disciplined life, to live an authentically Christian life.

And so often we look at everywhere else apart from God's grace. Well, this passage reorientates us to grace. It calls us to have our lives shaped by God's grace.

So let's dive in. Two basic points. Firstly, grace trains us. And it trains us, verse 12, to renounce impiety and worldly passions.

This was something that would have been particularly relevant to the Christians in Crete. Living in this island, they were surrounded by a very ungodly society.

[7 : 20] Just glance over to chapter 1, verse 12. One of their prophets described the Cretans as liars, vicious brutes, and lazy gluttons.

I'm sure he would have been popular. But first century Cretan society wasn't particularly conducive to living a godly life. Christians on Crete were surrounded by a society that celebrated falsehood, that was brutal, that was lazy and obsessed with consumption.

Not a million miles away from most Western societies today. And even as Christians living in a society like this, it is very easy to be sucked in and to adopt, maybe not the extreme forms of our society's desires and passions, but a distilled version of it still.

But the grace of God teaches us to renounce this kind of worldliness, to stop living for ourselves, to stop living for pleasure. You see, there is a negative aspect of the Christian life.

There is a thou shalt not, if you like. But do you notice that it's not the law that teaches us to stop these things? It's grace. Grace trains us to renounce ungodliness.

[8 : 48] And that is important. The Christian's life, the Christian's motive for living in this way is not the same as the moralist or the legalist. The legalist behaves in a certain way so that they'll inherit eternal life.

But when we are trained by God's grace, we are responding to what he has already done. I'm reading with two of our kids. We're reading the kids' version of Oliver Twist.

And it's very striking when Oliver is rescued by Mr. Brownlow. And he comes into the house. He's been rescued from a life of wretchedness. And to see how he flourishes and how his life is changed.

That is what happens to us when we are rescued by grace. We live in a different way. The orphan who's been adopted into a family behaves in a certain way because they've been rescued.

It is the same with us. God's grace has rescued us, has saved us. And so we live accordingly. And Paul tells us that that will involve saying no to certain actions.

[10 : 00] But it's not just actions that are in view. He also talks about our desires, our worldly passions. You see, grace reaches to the very depth of our lives.

The Christian life is not a life of mere outward obedience. It is about inward transformation. That grace shapes us. It transforms us.

Even at the level of our desires. Think of Jesus' own teaching in Matthew's Gospel. That lustfully looking at someone is committing adultery with them in your heart.

That hating someone is murdering them in your heart. It is only the grace that has appeared in the Lord Jesus that is powerful enough to make that sort of change.

But the Christian life isn't just simply a negative. It's not just stopping sinful behavior or desires. It is starting to act in a godly way.

[11 : 03] Grace, verse 12, trains us in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly. The Christian lives in a different way in this present age.

Their life is to be marked by self-control. And again, when you think of Cretan society, you can see how relevant that would be. And actually, self-control appears throughout this letter.

Chapter 1, the elder is to be self-controlled. Chapter 2, older men are to be self-controlled. Chapter 2, again, women are to be self-controlled. Chapter 2, young women are to be self-controlled. In the context of Crete, where laziness and gluttony were marks of the general society, self-control was vital to mark the Christians out as distinct.

And verse 10, just before our passage, makes it clear that Christians are to behave this way so that they may be an ornament to Christian teaching, that they might picture the gospel, adorn the teaching of the gospel.

In other words, the church is meant to be the gospel's plausibility structure, that people can look at the church in the way that our lives are transformed and to see, well, actually, the gospel does work.

[12 : 21] So as we said, our society is unfortunately not a million miles away from first-century Cretan society. Our society is, it's fair to say, marked by a distinct lack of self-control in our drinking culture, gambling, pleasure-seeking, entertainment craving.

And as Christians, we are meant to be different. And as we live lives in a different way, as we renounce godlessness, as we embrace godliness, we make the gospel attractive.

We show that there is more to life than living for our desires, that we can live for someone else. But how, how does grace train us to do that?

Where is the power of the motivation to behave in this way, to renounce godlessness, to embrace godliness? Well, I think the third aspect of how grace teaches or trains us shows us that.

Verse 13, grace trains us while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

[13 : 29] See, part of the reason that people live for pleasure is that they believe that this world is all there is. I think of Paul's words to the Corinthians in chapter 15.

If the resurrection, if we are not going to be resurrected, if it's not true, then he says, well, we might as well just eat, drink, for tomorrow we die. If there's no future, if there's no hope, if this life is all there is, then we might as well get as much out of it as we can.

As our culture increasingly cuts itself loose from its Christian heritage, well, this kind of thinking will only increase. You might have come across those books that list the things that you need to do before you die.

Things like 101 countries to visit before you die, 101 golf courses to play before you die, that sort of thing. Well, the understanding of those books is that this life is finite, so you have to squeeze as much out of it as you can.

This kind of thinking is entirely orientated to living in the present. In contrast, the Christian is taught by grace that life is a life of waiting in hope.

[14 : 46] It is hopeful waiting. Now, hope in the Bible is something certain. It's something certain. It's not like I hope that Australia wins the next Ashes, because obviously that would be a pretty flimsy hope.

The Bible, in the Bible, hope is certain. And the Christian's hopeful waiting is directed to a person who is coming in glory.

The return of Jesus, the Bible tells us, is there will be a time when there will be no more tears or sickness or death. The Bible compares it to a marriage celebration or a feast, a time of wonderful joy.

And because as Christians we are orientated to the future in this way, well, we can live lives that reflect this orientation. We can live in a way that reflects the fact that this life is not all there is, that there is an eternity, that we don't need to seek our fulfillment playing the 101 must-play golf courses before you die, because we know that this life is not all there is.

Think of the week before a couple get married. Everything is orientated towards that day. The decisions they make, the time they spend, the joy they feel, the excitement, everything.

[16 : 01] Or think about the last week in the office before you go on an exotic overseas vacation to somewhere like, I don't know, Ireland. It's so much easier to work that week because you have the joy of an exciting holiday to motivate you.

You can get through the week because you're excited. Well, the Christian has the joy of Jesus' glorious return to motivate us. Grace teaches us and trains us to live a godly life because Jesus is returning.

But this isn't an automatic thing. It's not simply because you're a Christian you will automatically be motivated by Jesus' return. You see, waiting for something involves thinking about it.

If a man isn't bothered about marrying his fiancée, well, then the week before his wedding day will just be a week like any other. It won't be a week of expectation. If you aren't bothered about going to Ireland on holiday, though I don't know why you wouldn't be, but if you aren't bothered about going to Ireland on holiday, then that last week in work, it won't be that different from any other week.

Going on holiday will not motivate you. And so it is with a Christian. If we aren't bothered about Jesus coming back, well, then his return won't motivate us to live differently.

[17 : 15] Our orientation will still be to this world. We'll live for the now, and we'll really be indistinguishable from the society around us.

And so we need to mull on, to think about, to meditate on the return of Jesus. The British political reformer Lord Shaftesbury, in the 19th century, gave himself to social reform, particularly to ending child poverty.

For example, at that time, five-year-olds would go down the mines to work trapdoors in total darkness for 14 hours a day, six days a week.

Terrible, terrible conditions. But Shaftesbury gave himself, gave his life, really, to ending that type of poverty. He was a man who was committed to doing good, to ending suffering in this world.

And yet, here is a man who once stated that there were not two hours in the day where I do not think about the return of the Lord Jesus.

[18 : 21] I am absolutely sure the two were connected. Here is a man who was orientated to the great hope of the return of Jesus. And so here was a man who gave himself to doing good in this world.

Now, as I said, it's the middle of January. It's nearly the end of January. And most of our New Year's resolutions have probably gone out the window. But why not adopt this as a resolution and stick to it?

To daily remind yourself, to daily remind yourself of the return of the Lord Jesus. To daily orientate yourself to his glorious return.

At the start of each day, to spend a few moments consciously meditating on our eternal future, on the joy that waits before us.

So God's grace trains us. It trains us to renounce godlessness and worldly passions. It trains us to live self-controlled, godly lives.

[19 : 22] And it trains us to do these things by orientating us to the Lord Jesus who's coming back. But secondly, and more briefly, God's grace saves us.

It's not simply a life coach or a sergeant major that whip us into shape. No, the grace of God, verse 12, has appeared, bringing salvation to all.

See, these two aspects of grace, it saves us and trains us. But these two aspects are not sort of separate, as if they're just one thing and then another thing. They're actually connected. God's grace trains us because it saves us.

It trains us because it saves us. I think we see that most clearly in verse 14. The Lord Jesus, whom we are waiting for hopefully, is the same Lord Jesus who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people who are zealous for good deeds.

Now, can you see the pattern? Jesus has redeemed us. He has bought us. He has paid the price, not us. We don't earn our salvation from sin because Jesus has done it for us.

[20 : 37] By his sin-bearing death, he has redeemed us from sin. But he has done more than that. He has purified us. He has made us his own, a people who are zealous for good deeds.

I guess there are two ways that you can get people to do good. Firstly, you can threaten them. That's the basic approach of the law. Why do people not cheat on their taxes, drive at 200 kilometers an hour, and steal what they want from the shops?

Because they know that there's a good chance that they'll get caught, sentenced, and go to prison. But the grace of God motivates in a different way. The grace of God in the person of Jesus Christ has redeemed us from sin.

He has made us as a people for himself who are zealous to do the right thing because we are saved. Because we're saved by grace, we relate to the Lord in a different way.

We don't have to do good to liberate or redeem ourselves. Rather, because Jesus has redeemed us, we are free. And so we do good in response to what he has done for us.

[21 : 42] Like an orphan adopted into a loving family. Can you see how powerful God's grace is? It saves us. It trains us.

It trains us because it saves us. We are saved by grace, and so we live in response to that grace. If I was to ask you to think of a hymn with grace in the title, I imagine that 99% of you, you don't need to say it, but we'll be thinking amazing grace.

Probably the most famous hymn in the world. And the interesting thing about that hymn is how, especially in America, it's actually becoming increasingly popular in non-Christian circles.

But with this broader appeal, a number of changes to the hymn have started creeping in, and the most striking one, I think, is the second line. Amazing grace, I won't sing it, amazing grace, how sweet the sign that saved a wretch like me has been changed to amazing grace that say, how sweet the sign, that saved and strengthened me.

Okay? Grace is understood as something that just strengthens us. It's like a spiritual energy that overcomes the obstacles in life that stop us from living a fulfilled, peaceful life.

[23 : 00] In other words, the world has taken a hymn that celebrates God's gracious salvation of wretched sinners and turned it into a self-help jingle. But for the Bible, grace is something much, much more powerful.

The grace of God is not an impersonal spiritual energy that enables us to live a more self-fulfilled life. No, the grace of God has come into the world in the person of Jesus Christ to save us from our sins and to purify us so that we would be a people who are marked by a desire to do good.

The grace of God trains us because it saves us. It transforms us at the deepest levels of our being. The work of grace will not be complete until Jesus returns, but as we wait expectantly for that day, well, if our lives are increasingly shaped by grace, then the shape of our Christian lives will not testify to our moral strength or to our taking God for granted, but it will testify to God's glory that He is a God who forgives wretched sinners like you and me and transforms us into His likeness.

Let's pray. down. Tam. Has everything come with us through this because of you He will have the Lud Seite■ in the empire.