

“The Grace of God in Three Tenses” – Titus 2:11-14

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[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions, please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.welovethegospel.com.]

Take a Bible and meet me in Titus 2...

There are some places in life where you cannot afford to look in only one direction. Think about driving a car. If you only stare at the rearview mirror, you are going to crash into what is in front of you. If you only stare at the hood of the car, you will have no idea where the road is taking you. And if you only stare off into the horizon, you may miss the danger right in front of your bumper. To drive safely, you have to know what is behind you, what is around you, and what is ahead of you.

And in a much deeper way, the same is true of the Christian life. Some of us are living with our eyes fixed on the rearview mirror. We are haunted by the past—by sins we committed, failures we cannot undo, words we wish we could take back, years we feel we wasted, guilt that seems to follow us like a shadow. Others of us are overwhelmed by what is right in front of us. We are trying to live faithfully in the present age, trying to put sin to death, trying to be godly spouses, godly parents, godly church members, godly witnesses, but some days the Christian life feels less like victory and more like survival. And still others of us are anxious about the road ahead. We wonder what will happen to our families, our church, our nation, our bodies, our future. We look ahead and see uncertainty, weakness, suffering, death, and a world that seems to be getting darker rather than brighter.

So what does the Gospel say to people like us? Does it merely say, “Try harder”? Does it simply hand us a list of commands and say, “Do better”? Does it tell the guilty to forget the past, the weary to push through the present, and the anxious to make peace with an unknown future? No. Titus 2 gives us something infinitely better. Paul tells us that the grace of God has appeared. And that grace does not meet us in only one moment of life. Grace meets us in every tense of life. Grace reaches into our past to rescue us. Grace works in our present to reform us. And grace shine into our future to reassure us.

That is why this passage is so important. If we read the commands of Titus 2 without the grace of Titus 2, we will either become proud because we think we are succeeding or crushed because we know we are not. But Paul will not let us separate Christian living from Christian grace. He will not demand new fruit without first showing us the new root. Because the only power strong enough to change Cretans into saints, rebels into worshipers, and worldly people into a people zealous for good works is not guilt. It’s the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

So if you are burdened by the guilt of your past, there is grace for you in this text. If you are exhausted by the struggle of the present, there is grace for you in this text. If you are anxious about the uncertainty of the future, there is grace for you in this text.

But to see this, we have to do the most important thing and examine this text. If you are able, let me invite you to stand to your feet in recognition of the authority of God’s Word in our lives. Follow along as I read, beginning in verse 11, where we left off last Sunday...

“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.” (Titus 2:11-14)

This is God’s Word. You may be seated...

As I already hinted (and as the title of the sermon suggests), I would like for us to consider the grace of God in three tenses: past, present, and future. This aligns with how these verses unfold, so let’s begin, first, with...

The Past: Grace that Rescues Us (2:11)

To understand the beauty of the lifestyle Paul has been describing in the first ten verses of the chapter—where older men are sober-minded, younger women are loving their families, and even bondservants are adorning the doctrine of God—we have to look at the “theological fuel” that makes such a life possible. Paul begins verse 11 with that gloriously simple, but massively important conjunction: “*For*.” This is the hinge of the entire letter. If you miss the “*for*,” the instructions in Titus 2 become nothing more than a heavy, moralistic “to-do” list that will either lead you to crushing despair or hollow, self-righteous pride. Paul knows that you cannot demand a new fruit without first providing a new root. And that root is found in a historical event: “*the grace of God has appeared...*”

When Paul speaks of grace appearing, he uses the Greek word *epiphaneia*, from which we get our English word “epiphany.” The word refers to the “visible appearance or something or someone hitherto invisible.”¹ In the ancient world, this word was often used to describe the sudden arrival of an emperor to a city, or the dawning of the sun over a dark horizon. Think about that imagery. Before grace appeared, the world—along with our hearts—was in a state of spiritual “Crete.” We were, as Paul describes elsewhere, “*darkened in [our] understanding*” and “*alienated from the life of God*” (Eph 4:18). We weren’t just people who had made a few mistakes and needed a spiritual “tune up.” We were in the dark. But then, “*the Sun of Righteousness*” arose to dispel the darkness of our guilt, shame, and condemnation (Mal 4:2).² Grace didn’t just “whisper” or “suggest” itself. It “*appeared*.” It broke into time and space. It took on flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). This is a vital truth that reminds us that our salvation is not based on a subjective feeling or a private mystical experience, but on an objective, historical “epiphany” of God’s unmerited favor—God’s grace—in the person of Jesus Christ.

Notice how Paul characterizes this grace: It is grace that is “*bringing salvation*.” There is a profound, monergistic weight to that phrase. Grace did not come to *offer* salvation to those who were industrious enough to grab it. Grace came *bringing* it. Imagine a rescue medic dropping from a helicopter into a churning sea. He doesn’t hover twenty feet above the drowning man and shout, “If you can just swim up here, I have a harness for you!” No, he dives into the chaos, wraps the harness around the unconscious victim, and hauls him to safety. That is the “past tense” of grace. “*[W]hile we were still sinners, Christ died for us*” (Rom 5:8). He didn’t wait for Crete to clean up its act. He didn’t wait for these “*liars, evil beasts, [and] lazy gluttons*” to start attending synagogue or practicing Christian virtues (Titus 1:12). He brought the rescue to the ruins.

And, wonderfully, this salvation, Paul says, is for “*all people*” (2:11). Now, we know our Bibles well enough to know that Paul isn’t preaching universalism here—the idea that everyone is saved regardless of faith. Rather, in the context of chapter 2, he is preaching the radical inclusivity of the Gospel’s reach. Salvation in Christ is universally and freely offered to all peoples, tribes, and nations.³ Look at who he just addressed: the elderly, the youth, the slaves. In the Roman world, a bondservant was viewed by many as a living tool, a person of zero social consequence. But Paul says, “*the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation*” to *that* slave. It has appeared for *that* older man who thinks he’s too set in his ways to change. It has appeared for *that* younger woman overwhelmed by the demands on her time. Grace is the great equalizer. It doesn’t matter if you are a

high-ranking official in the Roman court or a common laborer on a Cretan farm; we all stand on the same level ground at the foot of the Cross, equally desperate for a rescue we could never afford or accomplish.

Furthermore, we must be careful never to turn grace into an abstract ethereal substance—like some kind of spiritual gasoline that God pumps into our tanks. For the Christian, grace is ultimately a person. To say, “*the grace of God has appeared*” is tantamount to saying “Jesus has appeared!” We cannot think of grace without thinking of Jesus. He is the embodiment of God’s favor. He’s the personification of God’s grace. When you look at the manger, you are seeing the grace of God in infancy. When you look at the Cross, you are seeing the grace of God in agony. When you look at the empty tomb, you are seeing the grace of God in victory. Our rescue in the past was not a transaction of paperwork in a heavenly courtroom. It was a bloody, costly, and personal intervention. Jesus Christ gave Himself for us “*to redeem us from all lawlessness*” (2:14).

Consider the “rescue” language here. Why do we need rescuing? Because we were captives. Paul tells us that the goal of this rescue was, again, to “*redeem us from all lawlessness*” (2:14). We weren’t just misguided. We were rebels against the King’s law. We were under the dominion of “*worldly passions*” (2:12) that promised us freedom but gave us a cage. And the tragedy of the human condition is that we often *love* our cages. We are like the prisoner who has been in the dungeon so long he has begun to decorate the walls. We need a grace that is strong enough to break the bars and kind enough to lead us out by the land.

This verse—verse 11—is a call to look back. Every time the enemy of your soul whispers that you are “too far gone,” or every time you feel the weight of your past failures as a parent, a spouse, or a worker, you must look back to the “appearing.” The rescue is a finished work. When Jesus cried out, “*It is finished*” (John 19:30), the “*bringing [of] salvation*,” that Paul speaks of here, was accomplished. You don’t need to wonder if God is “pro-you.” You don’t have to wonder if He is willing to save a “Cretan” like you. He has already proven His intent by the epiphany of His Son.

In our modern world, we are obsessed with “self-help” and “self-optimization.” We have a thousand podcasts and books telling us how to rescue ourselves from our anxiety, our debt, and our bad habits. But the Gospel is the “anti-self-help.” It tells us that our greatest problem is one we cannot solve, and our greatest need is one we cannot provide. We needed an outside intervention. We needed a rescue that was both fully God—to satisfy divine justice—and fully man—to represent us in our weakness. And Paul’s grand announcement is that this rescue has arrived. It is not “coming soon.” It has “*appeared*” (Titus 2:11).

So, as we prepare to move into how this grace trains us in the present, we must first rest in what it has done in the past. You cannot live the godly life of verse 12 until you have been saved by the grace of verse 11. Your sanctification will only every be as strong as your assurance of your justification. If you are trying to be a “Titus 2 man” or a “Titus 2 woman” in order to *earn* God’s favor, you will eventually burn out or blow up. But if you realize that you have already been rescued—that the King has already dived into the sea, wrapped His arms around you, brought your lifeless body to the shore, and revived you—then your life becomes an enduring “thank you” note to the One who appeared when you were most in the dark. The grace that rescues is the only foundation firm enough to build a life of holiness upon.

In light of this, let’s now consider...

The Present: Grace that Reforms Us (2:12)

If verse 11 is the decisive intervention—the moment the light of the Gospel broke into the darkness of our rebellion—then verse 12 describes the daily, steady process of learning to live as citizens of that light. It is the part of the Christian life we spend the most time in: the messy, ongoing “now.” Paul moves from the *event* of salvation to the *process* of sanctification, but he does something remarkable here that many people miss. He doesn’t switch drivers. He doesn’t say, “Grace gets you into the kingdom, but now your own grit and willpower

must keep you there.” No, the subject of the sentence remains the same. It is still “*the grace of God*” that is doing the heavy lifting. However, the work has shifted from the *rescue* of the sinner to the “*training*” of the saint. As David Murray has said, “We do not *train* our way to salvation,” we “*trust* our way to salvation,” but “once grace has saved us, it begins to train us.”⁴

The word Paul uses here, translated “*training*,” refers to systematic instruction, and even the discipline of a child. It is the root of our word “pedagogy,” which refers to the art or science of teaching. In other words, grace has enrolled us in a school. This is a massive paradigm shift for many of us. We often view grace as a “get out of jail free” card—something that settles our past but leaves us to fend for ourselves in the present. Or we view it as a soft, indulgent grandfather who overlooks our faults. But Paul presents grace as a rigorous, loving Tutor or Professor.⁵ Grace doesn’t just forgive our sins; it hates our sins because it knows what those sins do to us. Grace is not a license to sin; it is the only power that provides a liberation *from* sin. Grace “breaks the power of canceled sin,” as Charles Wesley put it in his famous hymn.⁶ It’s the “double cure” that “save[s] from wrath and makes me pure,” as Augustus Toplady put it in another well-known hymn.⁷ It delivers us from the penalty *and* power of sin. It rescues us *and* reforms us. It justifies *and* sanctifies. If you are not being trained by grace, you have likely not been rescued by it.

The curriculum of this “School of Grace” is both negative and positive. It begins with a firm, decisive “renouncing.” To renounce something is more than just trying to stop a bad habit. It is a formal declaration of abandonment. It is the language of a treaty. Grace trains us to look at “*ungodliness and worldly passions*” and say, “I no longer belong to you. You are no longer my master.” It’s a conscious act, not an unconscious outcome. “The Christian sees sin for what it is and begins rejecting sinful patterns that are offensive to the Lord.”⁸ And notice that Paul identifies the root before the fruit. “*Ungodliness*” is the inner state of living as if God does not exist, or at least as if He doesn’t matter.⁹ “*Worldly passions*” are the disordered desires that flow from that godlessness—the cravings for status, comfort, sexual immorality, and self-promotion that the culture of Crete (and the culture of today) celebrates.

How does grace train us to say “no” to these things? It doesn’t do it through a list of rules, but through a change of tastes. Think of it this way: how do you train a child to stop eating junk food? You can forbid it, which often just makes them want it more. Or you can give them a feast of high-quality, delicious, nourishing food until their palate changes—until the “junk” no longer satisfies. Grace shows us “*the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus*,” as Paul says in Philippians (Phil 3:8). When the heart is captivated by the beauty of Christ’s sacrifice and the glory of His character, the shiny trinkets of “*worldly passions*” begin to lose their luster. We “*renounce ungodliness*” not because we are afraid of some cosmic “slap on the wrist,” but because we have tasted something infinitely better. It’s the new life that grace is working in us that pushes out the old life. The Puritans called this the “power of new affections,” as Bryan Chapell explains:

“The Puritans taught this truth with the image of the live oak, a variety of trees whose leaves—though dead—stuck to their branches through the winter. What eventually forced the leaves from the tree was not the abuse of the cold or the beating of the wind, but the new life of springtime welling up within the branches and forcing out what was dead. In a similar way, though we are God’s people, there yet cling to us affections for evil that we must confess. These evil affections are replaced by an eagerness for good only as apprehension of Christ’s grace wells within us and ultimately drives out the old affections with the new life that is profound love for him.”¹⁰

But, listen, grace’s curriculum doesn’t stop at the “no” to those old affections. It moves to a vigorous, three-dimensional “yes.”¹¹ Paul tells us that grace trains us “*to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age*” (Titus 2:12). These three adverbs cover every direction of the human life. “*Self-controlled*” is the inward dimension. It is the mastery over our own impulses, tempers, and tongues. In a world that tells you to “follow your heart” and “express your truth,” grace teaches us to govern our hearts by the truth of God. It is the ability to say “no” to yourself so you can say “yes” to God.

“Upright” is the outward dimension. It refers to our integrity and justice in our dealings with others. This is where the “*bondservants*” of verse 9 and the “*older men*” of verse 2 see the rubber meet the road. To love uprightly is to be a person whose word can be trusted, who does not exploit the weak, and who seeks the flourishing of their neighbor. It is the Gospel worked out in our social ethics. If we claim to be rescued by grace but remain dishonest in our business or cruel in our speech, we are essentially calling grace a liar.

Finally, “*godly*” is the upward dimension. It is a life lived with a constant, conscious orientation toward God’s presence and pleasure. It is the “*fear of the Lord*” which “*is the beginning of wisdom*” (Prov 9:10). And Paul adds a crucial qualifier: we are to love this way “*in the present age*” (Titus 2:12). He is being realistic. He knows we aren’t in the new heavens and new earth yet. He knows we are living in “Crete”—a world that is broken, hostile, and distracting. Grace does not carry us away to a monastery or a sterile bubble. It trains us to be holy in the middle of the marketplace, in the middle of the difficult marriage, in the middle of the secular workplace.

Putting this all together, we see that “the aim of divine grace is to make us Christians who in every area of life—man-ward, self-ward, and God-ward—are well-pleasing to God.”¹² This is the doctrine of “sanctification” in all its glory. We must realize that the same power that raised Christ from the dead is the power that is currently at work in you, “*training*” you (cf. Rom 8:11). This means that growth in holiness is not a DIY project. It is a work of God. But it is a work that demands your participation. Grace is not opposed to *effort*; it is opposed to *earning*.¹³ We work hard at our “*training*”—we pray, we study the Word, we show up to corporate worship, we fellowship, we repent—not so God will love us, but because He already does.

When you fail—and you will fail—the School of Grace does not expel you. That is the beauty of this Tutor. If you were in the “School of Law,” a single failure would be grounds for dismissal. But in the School of Grace, your failures become part of the lesson, part of the curriculum. Grace uses your stumbles to teach you humility, to strip away your self-reliance, and to drive you back to the “*appearing*” of verse 11.

We must ask ourselves: What kind of student am I? Am I resisting the Tutor? Am I trying to “*renounce*” sin while still flirting with “*worldly passions*” on the side? Or am I submitting to the reformative power of the Spirit? Remember, the goal of this present-tense grace is to make you look like the One who rescued you. The grace that saves you is the grace that shapes you. If you have been bought by the blood of Christ, you are now under the tutelage of the Spirit. This “*present age*” is your classroom, and grace is your teacher. The lesson is simple, though it takes a lifetime to learn: Jesus is better than everything Crete—or this world—has to offer.

And it gets even better! There’s still a third dimension of God’s grace to consider...

The Future: Grace that Reassures Us (2:13-14)

If the past tense of grace is our foundation and the present tense of grace is our gymnasium for training, then the future tense of grace is our horizon. Paul knows that the human heart is not merely driven by what lies behind it or what surrounds it, but by what it anticipates. We are teleological creatures, which is to say, we live for an end. And here, in verses 13 and 14, Paul lifts our eyes from the dusty roads of Crete and the difficult “*training*” of the present age to the dawning of a day that will never end. He calls this “*our blessed hope*” (2:13).

In modern English, “*hope*” is often a flimsy word. We often use the word to express little more than a fond wish or a “maybe”—like a student hoping for a snow day to cancel school. However, biblical “*hope*” has more to do with certainty than aspiration. In contexts like this, it denotes what John MacArthur calls “a divinely promised certitude.”¹⁴ And so our waiting is “proactive, alert, and expectant” (cf. Matt 24-25; 2 Pet 3:12).¹⁵

In verse 11, grace “*appeared*” in humility, wrapped in swaddling cloths and eventually nailed to a Roman cross. But in verse 13, grace will appear in glory. The first epiphany was a rescue mission conducted in secret. The

second epiphany will be a coronation conducted before every eye in heaven and on earth. And for the believer, this is the ultimate reassurance.¹⁶ We do not look toward the future with a sense of dread or existential angst. We aren't wondering if the world will end in fire or ice, or alien invasion or an AI awakening. We aren't wondering if history is just a "sound and fury, signifying nothing," as Shakespeare famously put it in *Macbeth*. We know how the story ends. We are waiting for a Person.

In verse 13, Paul speaks of a new "*appearing*," a second "epiphany." But this time, it is not grace he personifies, but "*glory*," when he speaks of "*the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ*."¹⁷ For believers, this has to be one of the most stunning Christological declarations in the entire New Testament. Paul refers to Jesus as "*our great God and Savior*." Jesus is "*our great God*" who came to save.¹⁸ And our assurance of the future is grounded in the sovereign divinity of the One who is coming again. If He were merely a man, His return might be inspiring, but it wouldn't be "*our blessed hope*." But because He is "*our great God*," His return will mean the final defeat of death, the reversal of the curse, and the setting right of every wrong.

But Paul doesn't want us to just stare at the clouds. He immediately grounds this future hope in the logic of the Gospel by looking back once more at the price of our assurance. Why can we look forward to His "*glory*" without being consumed by it? Because, as verse 14 says, He "*gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness*."

This is the heart of substitutionary atonement. The "*great God*" did not just issue a decree of pardon from a distance. He "*gave himself*." He became our Substitute. He became the ransom price. The word "*redeem*" (*lutroō*) often carries the specific meaning of paying a price to liberate a slave. In the Roman world, if you wanted to free a slave, you had to pay the *lutron*—the ransom price, the price for their release. Paul is telling these Cretan believers, many of whom were literal slaves, that they had been bought out of a much more brutal servitude: the slavery of "*lawlessness*." "*Lawlessness*" is not just breaking rules. It is a state of being where the self is the center, where we are bent inward, and where we are captive to our own destructive whims.

Christ's death was not just an *example* of love. It was a *transaction* of liberation. He took our lawlessness upon Himself and gave us His righteousness. And the goal of this redemption is not just that we would be forgiven and then left to our own devices. The goal is that He would, according to verse 14, "*purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works*."

This is the future-oriented reassurance: We belong to Him. We are His "*own possession*." In the Old Testament, God called Israel His "*treasured possession*" (e.g., Exod 19:5; Deut 7:6; 14:2). Paul is now applying that high, covenantal language to the Church—to you and me. You are not your own. You were bought with a price. And because you are His possession, He will not lose you. The "*great God*" who began the work in verse 11 and is training you in verse 12 will certainly complete it in verse 13 (cf. Phil 1:6). Your perseverance is ultimately grounded in His preservation. He will not lose His treasured possession. I love the way Charles Spurgeon teased out this thought:

"Believers are Christ's own people, his choice and select portion. Saints are Christ's crown jewels, his box of diamonds; his very, very, very own. He carries his people as lambs in his bosom; he engraves their names on his heart. They are his inheritance to which he is the heir, and he values them more than all the universe beside."¹⁹

You are not just a "project" to Christ. You are His "*treasured possession*" purchased at the cost of His own life.

And this brings us to the practical "zeal" that Paul mentions. He says this purified people are to be "*zealous for good works*" (Titus 2:14). This is the bridge between our future hope and our present action. When you know that you are His "*treasured possession*," and when you know that a glorious "*appearing*" is on the horizon, it changes your energy level in the present. You don't do "*good works*" to *become* His possession. You do them because you *are* His possession.

A “zealot” is someone who is consumed by a cause, someone who doesn’t need to be nudged or guilt-tripped into action. Grace creates “zealots for goodness.” It makes the older man in the congregation zealous to mentor the younger. It makes the employee zealous to work with integrity even when the boss isn’t looking. It makes the sufferer zealous to trust God even in the midst of pain. Why? Because we are living in the light of the “*blessed hope*” (2:13).

Think of it like this: If you were told that a great King was coming to your town to reward his loyal subjects and restore the entire city, you wouldn’t just sit on your porch and wait. You would start cleaning the streets. You would start preparing the feast. You would live “today” in light of “that day.”

The reassurance of the future provides the stamina for the present. When the “*training*” of verse 12 gets hard—when saying “no” to “*worldly passions*” feels like a losing battle—the future tense of grace reminds us that the battle has a scheduled end date. We aren’t fighting *for* victory. We are fighting *from* a victory that is already won and is soon to be fully revealed.

For the person sitting in the sanctuary who feels weary, who feels like the “Cretan” parts of their heart are winning, verses 13 and 14 are a cup of cold water. You, believers, are a purified people in God’s eyes because of Christ’s gift. You are His treasure. And the glory that is coming is far greater than the “*present age*” that is fading.

This future-focused grace reassures us that our labor in the Lord is not in vain. Every act of self-control, every upright decision, and every godly impulse is a rehearsal for the kingdom to come. We are a people of the “Second Appearing.” We live with one eye on the Cross (the past), one eye on our character (the present), and both feet moving toward glory (the future). The grace that rescues us and is currently reforming us will, one day soon, finally and forever reassure us when we see Him face to face.

So we hopefully see that Titus 2 wraps up not so much with a “to-do” list, but with a “to-behold” vision. Behold the God who appeared in grace. Behold the God who is training you now. And behold the God who is coming in glory. That is the Gospel in three tenses. It is the only power strong enough to change “Cretans” into saints.

In View of God’s Grace

As you leave this place today and re-enter your own versions of “Crete”—where we face the pressures of the workplace, the brokenness of our communities, and the lingering “*worldly passions*” in our own hearts—do not go out thinking that your task is simply to try harder. If you leave today with a new set of moral resolutions but without a deeper gaze at the Lord Jesus, you have missed the “*for*” of verse 11 that serves as the hinge of the entire letter. You have missed the engine that powers the Christian life: the grace of God. Paul’s final word to us is not “try harder.” He didn’t take us to the mountain of law and say, “Climb.” He has taken us to the appearing of grace and said, “Behold!” As I said, Titus 2 is not finally a “to-do” list but a “to-behold” vision: grace appeared in Christ, grace trains us now, and grace will appear again in glory.

And that means, brothers and sisters, that the Christian life is not lived by staring at yourself. You will not overcome the guilt of your past by simply looking deeper into your past. You will not find strength for holiness in the present by looking deeper into yourself. And you will not find confidence for the future by looking deeper into this world. The Christian life is lived by looking to Christ.

Look back and see Him in grace.

The Son of God appeared—not because we had made ourselves lovely, but because He set His love on the unlovely. He came into our Crete, into our darkness, into our lawlessness, and He gave Himself for us. The

grace of God did not appear as a vague possibility. Grace appeared with a name, a face, a body, a cross, and an empty tomb. So if your past accuses you, look to Christ. If your conscience condemns you, look to Christ. If Satan whispers, “You are too far gone,” look to Christ. The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation.

Look around and see Him training you.

Grace is not finished with you. The same Christ who rescued you is reforming you. And yes, the training is painful at times. Saying “no” to ungodliness and worldly passions can feel like death, because in a real sense it is: death to the old self, death to old loves, death to old masters. But grace never takes anything from you except what would destroy you. And grace never calls you away from sin without calling you toward something better: a self-controlled life, an upright life, a godly life, a life that makes the doctrine of God our Savior beautiful in this present age.

And then look ahead and see Him in glory.

The One who appeared in humility will appear in majesty. The One who wore the crown of thorns will wear the crown of the universe. The One who stood condemned in our place will come to judge the living and the dead. And for everyone who belongs to Him, that day is not terror. It is our blessed hope. So take heart, weary Christian. The grace that found you will not fail you. The grace that forgave you will keep forming you. The grace that began the work will finish the work. You are not merely a religious project. You are His treasured possession, purchased by His blood, purified for His glory, and destined for His presence.

And if you are here today and you do not yet belong to Christ, then hear the good news: grace has appeared for sinners. Not for the cleaned-up. Not for the self-sufficient. Not for those who have already made themselves worthy. Grace has appeared for liars, rebels, gluttons, idolaters, hypocrites, failures, and sinners like us. Do not try to rescue yourself. Come to the Savior who gave Himself for you. Turn from your sin and trust in Him to save you. He alone can. And He would today, if you would believe.

Church, this is the grace of God in three tenses. Grace has appeared to rescue us. Grace is training us to reform us. Grace will appear again, so be reassured. And until that day when we see Jesus face to face, we do not live by guilt or guesswork. We live by grace—looking back to the grace that saved us, leaning on the grace that changes us, and longing for the glory that is coming with our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Let’s pray...

¹ John R. W. Stott, *Guard the Truth: The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, BST (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 192.

² “In the Anglican order of service for the year, in the Prayer Book, if you go to the order for Christmas Day, you will find that this reading from Titus chapter 2 is one of the readings for Christmas Day, and expressly on account of the fact that it is here that we have the fulfillment of what is anticipated all the way through the Old Testament—classically in a statement by Malachi, the final book of our Old Testament, where he anticipated a day, as he wrote, when ‘the sun of righteousness’ would ‘rise with healing in [his] wings.’ It’s a metaphor. It’s a picture. But it was anticipating a glory that had not been established in Israel, that wasn’t going to be enjoyed by them in the immediacy of God’s intervention in their lives, but it was pointing forward to a day that would come, when this ‘sun of righteousness’ would appear.” Alistair Begg, “Teaching that Accords with Sound Doctrine—Part Two,” accessed online at: <https://www.truthforlife.org/resources/sermon/teaching-accords-sound-doctrine-part-two/>.

³ See J. Ligon Duncan, “Adorning the Doctrine of God Our Savior in Every Respect,” accessed online at: <https://fpcjackson.org/resource-library/sermons/adorning-the-doctrine-of-god-our-savior-in-every-respect/>.

⁴ David Murray, *Timothy and Titus: Stories of Fear and Courage*, StoryChanger Devotional (Wheaton: Crossway, 2024), 197-198.

⁵ Sam Storms, *2 Timothy & Titus: A 40-Day Bible Study*, Planted in the Word (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2025), 162. Murray likens grace to a personal trainer in a gym: “Garce gets us enrolled in the gym for nothing, but then begins to get us into spiritual shape with a range of spiritual exercises.” Murray, 198.

⁶ I.e., “O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing” (1739).

⁷ I.e., “Rock of Ages” (1776).

⁸ Richard D. Phillips, “Titus,” in *2 Timothy & Titus*, REC (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2020), 220.

⁹ Jerry Bridges characterizes the godless mindset as one that “comprises disregarding God, ignoring Him, or not taking Him into account in one’s life.” Jerry Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 77.

¹⁰ Bryan Chapell, “Titus,” *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit*, PW (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2000), 350.

¹¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Titus*, MNTC (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996), 117.

¹² David Campbell, *Opening up Titus* (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2007), 78.

¹³ If I’m not mistaken, Dallas Willard first said this, but I cannot remember where I first encountered the statement. For a more detailed explanation of what I mean by this, see: <https://thirdmill.org/answers/answer.asp/file/50240>. Cf. 1 Cor 15:10; <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/grace-is-not-a-thing/>.

¹⁴ MacArthur, 119.

¹⁵ Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 529.

¹⁶ “Canon Hay Aitken suggested that the two comings of Christ are like ‘two windows ... in the School of Grace’. Through the western window a solemn light streams from Mt. Calvary. Through the eastern window shines the light of sunrising, the herald of a brighter day. ‘Thus the School of Grace is well lighted; but we cannot afford to do without the light from either West or East.’” Stott, 196.

¹⁷ MacArthur, 120.

¹⁸ Cf. John 20:28; Rom 9:5; Heb 1:8; 2 Pet 1:1; 1 John 5:20. Some have attempted to argue that perhaps there are two referenced in the expression “our great God and Savior,” namely, the Father (“our great God”) and the Son (“Savior”). But this is unconvincing for a number of reasons, some of which are explained by Philip Towner: “(1) ‘God and Savior’ was a title current in Hellenistic and Jewish religious discourse and usually denoted a single deity. As such, in Jewish writings it was used of YHWH, while elsewhere it was used to express the claims of Greek and Roman rulers (Ptolemy, Julius Caesar), or in connection with cults constructed around worship of one or more of the gods. Given the currency of the title, it seems anachronistic and unwarranted to divide the items between two persons. We have already seen the apologetic potential of this whole presentation of theology—in the Cretan and perhaps also wider Imperial arena—which makes the adaptation of a current title all the more fitting. The surrounding language—‘grace,’ ‘epiphany,’ ‘great,’ ‘bringing salvation,’ ‘hope’—is almost set vocabulary for the Imperial cult and numerous other local cults current at the time this letter was written. (2) To the evidence for unity from popular usage may be added the grammatical argument. In the Greek sentence, one definite article preceding ‘God’ governs the two nouns linked by the conjunction ‘and’ (namely, ‘God and Savior’), which ordinarily would signify, then, a reference to a single person. The likelihood that the two terms together formed a traditional appellation explains the anarthrous second noun. (3) The term ‘epiphany’ in the NT is mainly limited to Christ, and in these letters to coworkers, epiphany language is used in reference to both his past and future appearances (1 Tim 6:14; 2 Tim 4:1; 2 Tim 1:10; 4:8). Moreover, no NT writer mentions a future epiphany/parousia of the Father. This corroborates what the language has already strongly implied—namely, that “the blessed hope” is the future appearance of one person, Jesus Christ, who in his appearing is the fulfillment of Christian hope and the embodiment of the glory of God. In view of these three lines of evidence, the possibility that Paul is referring to the appearance of two persons (‘the epiphany of the glory of our great God and of our Savior Jesus Christ’) can be ruled out.” Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 756–757. See also, Stott, 194; Tim Chester, *Titus for You*, God’s Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2014), 74; Andreas J. Köstenberger, *1-2 Timothy & Titus*, EBTC (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2021), 339; On the syntax of the underlying Greek, see Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 276.

¹⁹ Charles Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 32:203.