

Doctrine Works: How to Live in the Middle

Titus 2:11-15

We have at least two engaged couples regularly attending WBC at the moment and a few others connected through family members here. Engagement is a time of life unlike anything else. **It's a period where you are living in between.** You have a ring, a promise, and you have a date coming, but there's much to do in the meantime.

Bethany and I were engaged in early May of 2004 and married in October of the same year, so she had around 5 months to plan a wedding and I completely shocked and surprised her with the ring. She thought that we would get engaged in the fall or maybe even winter.

But when I asked her to marry me, everything about her summer of 2004 changed. There were new responsibilities, hopes, fears, and tasks to accomplish. Both the moment of receiving the ring and the date coming on the calendar loomed large. We were living in the middle of those two moments.

This morning, I want us all to readjust our understanding of the time period we are living in as the time in between. We are living in the middle. Open to Titus 2:12 and look at the end of that verse. This title, "the present age", doesn't just mean the current period of time. Paul uses this to indicate that we are looking back to something which previously happened and we are looking forward to something that will happen. There's a beginning and an ending and both shape our lives in the present. What are these two moments? They are both described using the word appear. Look at verse 11. And now look down to verse 13.

So, Paul is making a theological or doctrinal point here that the time in which we live is shaped by Christ's first and second appearing. Why is he making this doctrinal point here?

Well, a few weeks ago we studied Titus 2:1-10. Paul gives the theme of that section in verse 1. So, the rest of this section gives us the lifestyle that is fitting for sound doctrine for different groups of people. Now look at the beginning of verse 11. The first word is "for" and that's because verses 11-15 are the explanation of the doctrine that supports this lifestyle. And that doctrine is based on these two appearances of Jesus Christ. With that in mind, we are going to see **2 reasons to**

put on a lifestyle that fits with sound doctrine while living in the present age.

And each of these reasons will have an appropriate result in our lives.

1. Christ's First Appearing Brought Grace (vv. 11-12)

This first appearing is described as the arrival of God's grace. And really this entire passage of doctrine and our response to that doctrine is permeated by God's grace. So, we need to slow down for a minute and think carefully about God's grace. Grace is a common word and we hear and read about it often. We know God is gracious, but what does that mean?

There's a tendency to treat grace as something sentimental. We tend to think that God is gracious in the same way that a really nice teacher is gracious. That teacher may let us put off turning in an assignment or may give everyone in the class a piece of candy just because he or she is nice.

To properly understand God's grace, we have to come to grips with two realities. First, grace is God's response to sin. God is good and that goodness is expressed in grace. So, if Adam and Eve had not sinned, we would know God is good from his creation of the world, but we would not fully and clearly see that goodness worked out as grace. Grace is God's goodness demonstrated to sinful people.

Second, the way in which we receive God's grace is always tied to blood sacrifices and atonement for sin. God doesn't just wink at sin and overlook it. He shows us grace, but his grace comes to us through atonement and sacrifice. Think about what happened to Adam and Eve immediately following their sin. They tried to clothe themselves with leaves, but God graciously covered their nakedness and shame in His presence with a more complete garment. The skin of an animal.

Think about how God's grace comes to Israel in the OT. They are graciously invited into God's presence, but only by means of sacrifices. And this is definitively and fully realized in the first coming of Jesus Christ and that is why Paul calls the entire incarnation the appearing of the grace of God. Listen to how one author described grace:

"It is because the world is not as it should be that God is gracious. It is because after the fall we are in rebellion against him because of our sinful nature that he acts in the face of the rebellion. It is because we have chosen death that he sends his Son to die in our place. Grace is both divine attitude and divine action, and

grace reveals the tragic circumstances into which the human race has fallen."- Carl Trueman

And it's through God's grace to people in desperate need of salvation that salvation comes. Look at the rest of verse 11.

Now, Paul is not saying that all people will be saved. In fact, to understand what he means by all people think back to the various groups we saw in verses 1-10. Older men, older women, younger men and women and bond-servants. God's grace is demonstrated to people from every walk of life through the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

But God's grace through Jesus Christ does not stop with pulling us from the rushing water. It goes on to teach us how to live appropriately in the present age. This is the result. We are trained for life in this age. Look at verse 12.

We don't often think of God's grace as something that teaches or trains us for a particular lifestyle. So, we need to ponder how exactly grace trains us.

For those formerly enslaved to sin, grace becomes the defining reality. If you grew up a slave and were liberated into freedom, freedom would become your identity. You are a free man or woman. The grace that brings about our salvation shapes everything in life because without it, we are still enslaved. Israel was to remember the Exodus every year on the Passover because this is what made them a nation. In fact, notice how the 10 commandments in Exodus 20 begin. Israel must obey these commands precisely because of God's liberating grace in their experience.

Notice that grace trains us to renounce certain ways of living and develop others. Look back at verse 12. This is an ongoing practice, not something that only happens at the moment of salvation. We are to daily renounce ungodliness and worldly passions. Ungodliness is a life lived as if God isn't true. It would be a life lived without a recognition of how much depends on God's grace. We are also to denounce passions or desires that characterize worldly people. Worldly live life with a vision or ideal of the good life in mind. So, their passions or desires aim their thoughts and actions toward that vision. We are to renounce those passions which forget and neglect God and his grace.

Instead, we are to allow God's grace to train us in 3 areas. First, self-control. This is the same quality described so often in verses 1-10 and it's focused on my own integrity and character. Second, upright. This has the idea of just dealings with others and is focused on interpersonal relationships. Third, godly. Grace teaches us to love as if God is very real and very involved in our lives. That is what godliness means.

So, grace teaches us to develop personal character and virtue, to live appropriately with others, and to live rightly related to God's Lordship.

God's grace demonstrated in Jesus Christ is the great reality of the present age. Living as if God's grace isn't true is a little like trying to make sense of life while denying gravity. Grasping the reality of gravity makes sense of every moment of my human experience and denying it would require a newly constructed view of the world that doesn't accord with reality. God's grace teaches us that everything we have is a gift and we are sinners in desperate need of that gift. Embracing that reality trains us to live well in this present age.

Looking back to Christ's first appearance motivates us to live in a way that fits with sound doctrine. But looking ahead to the end of this present age also shapes our lives.

2. Christ's Second Appearing Solidifies Hope (vv. 13-15)

Christ's first appearing brought us grace while his second will bring glory. Look at verse 13.

Paul describes the same event in two ways here. The second coming of Christ is a blessed hope and it will be the arrival of the glory of Jesus Christ, who is God. It is blessed because the arrival of the glory of Jesus Christ will bring so many things together. We discussed this on Easter but our fate is tied to Christ's in such a way that our resurrection to a glorified body is tied to His return in glory. Listen to how these different elements of eschatology are brought together in 1 Thess. 4:13-18.

1 Thessalonians 4:17 tells us that when this happens we will always be with the Lord, and Titus 2:13 tells us that when this appearing happens we will see the glory of the Lord. God's glory is the brightness of His character and attributes on display. All that God is in His holiness, grace, justice, righteousness, power, and love will be manifest and we will be with Him to enjoy who He is forever. This is

something to hope in and long for. This is grace and so we wait for this with hope in this present age.

And it's this hope in our Savior that shapes life this week. Notice in verse 13 that Paul has called Jesus our Savior again. We already saw in verse 11 that the grace that brings salvation doesn't stop with pulling us out of the mud and it's the same here. This Savior doesn't only liberate us. He frees us by the sacrifice of Himself in order to see us formed in Christlikeness. Look at verse 14.

I want you to notice the way our salvation is described here. At the beginning of verse 14 Paul says that we are redeemed. This is language that reminds us of Israel's exodus from Egypt out of slavery. Listen to Exodus 6:6. The Exodus becomes the prototype of deliverance and redemption in the Bible.

But it doesn't stop there. Notice that God redeems us in order to cleanse and purify, or make holy, a people for Himself. Literally this means a chosen people or a special people. Listen to Exodus 19:1-6 and Deut. 7:6. Israel was chosen by God to be special and unique and this uniqueness showed itself in the standards of holiness given to the people. In other words, the way to demonstrate and show the world that you are God's special possession is by living a holy and distinct life. They were to avoid idolatry and obey God's laws. But the pattern in the language here mirrors the salvation brought to Israel and the subsequent calls for holiness required of Israel in the OT.

God's mission in the world is to redeem people from a life given to lawlessness and ungodliness. To liberate them from slavery to sin. To call them as His own special people who will dwell with Him and be known by their relationship to Him. Then to continue to purify these people and ultimately to make them ambassadors for him. Look at the end of verse 14.

This little phrase at the end here means they are to be zealots for good works. I'm sure you have heard about the political zealots in the Bible. They were Jews who were so passionate about Israel's claim to the land and God's promises that they would go to any means to disrupt Rome's authority in Israel. Our passion doesn't lead us toward violence and disruption, but toward doing good.

And Titus is supposed to beat this drum over and over again. Look at verse 15.

Now, I'm wrestling with the implications of this for my own life. What does it mean to do good works? What does Paul expect of Titus and the Cretans? Is my life structured in such a way that I can do good to others? How far does this go?

I don't know all the answers, but I'm telling you that Paul thinks doing "good works" is a pretty big deal for Christians. In fact, Paul seems to think that the grace of God expressed through our salvation in Christ demands good works of us. Listen to how often this comes up in this little book of Titus.

1:16 – The false teachers are unfit for any good work because they don't know God. The implication: knowing God means doing good works.

2:7 – Titus is to be a model of good works.

2:14 – we just read.

3:1 – We'll talk about this next week.

3:8 – The consistent explanation of the gospel will lead people to perform good works.

3:14 – A general call to good works.

Of course, these are not legalistic calls for us to do good works or suffer the wrath of God. These are commands based on the reality of God's grace. It is fitting for us to live in this way. God's grace, rightly understood, actually teaches and trains us to be those who are eager and enthusiastic to do good to others.

So, let me ask you this morning. Are you aware that you are living in the middle? You are in between Christ's first coming and His second. Are you aware of the impact that should have on your daily life? Do you consistently look back to God's grace and forward to his glory? Do these theological realities shape your hunger and desire to renounce the world and embrace a lifestyle of good works for God's honor?

I hope this has been a fresh reminder of God's grace to sinful people. We are in need of it and it's available in copious amounts. Let's pray.