

What is your hope? That is to say where do you find encouragement? What motivates and drives you? What allows you to hold on and get through in challenging times? Why live as Christians? We know being a Christian brings no guarantee of material well-being. We are not immune from social, health, or wealth challenges. We have issues like anyone else. So given a culture increasingly antagonistic why do you do it?

Last week P. Andrew taught from the ethical exhortation in the first 10 verses of Titus 2. Paul addresses men and women, old and young, servants and masters. In short the household, the basic building block of society. It is interesting to work through the letter given the Cretan context. In spite of the grave issues in morality in the Cretan culture Paul focuses first upon the church and its order, its teaching, and its character and conduct. Finally, by verse 10 there is the allusion to external ministry: “...*showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour.*” What an incredible statement. We know Paul isn't saying the gospel is lacking. He is always protecting and proclaiming the simple gospel of Christ crucified for our sins. We think of adorning as dressing ourselves up to “improve” ourselves and draw attention. But there is evidently some way in which our behaviour can draw attention to the gospel in an appropriate way. Not because we are special, but because the gospel in us and through us is attractive.

In today's text comes the basis for these ethical instructions. The motive and power for right living and our ultimate hope.

***<sup>11</sup> For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, <sup>12</sup> training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, <sup>13</sup> waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, <sup>14</sup> 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.*

*<sup>15</sup> Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you.*

God's grace is what takes centre stage.

### **1) God's Grace Appears**

Let's consider the nature of God's grace. Simplest definition is that God's grace is his unmerited favour (it is more than this as we will see). Lets take a bit of time for thinking about this more deeply. The basis of this unmerited favour is the gracious character and disposition of God. One theologian describes God's grace as self-motivated. There is no motive for God's grace but himself. We have things external to us that motivate our gracious actions. Frequently, people tell us to let them know of needs in the church or with our mission partners so that they may give. Not that this is wrong, but this does emphasize how different God is from us. God's settled, eternal, disposition toward us is one of pure love and devotion. His movement of grace toward us is not because of our needs or our performance; it simply accords with his heart and purposes for us. He is Grace, and therefore grace flows from him as an eternal activity. It is who he is, always delighting in the sustaining grace he gives to his creation.

Paul tells us the "grace of God has appeared". Although it is true to say God's grace is on display in many different ways, this is not merely the evidence of God's graciousness (like a much needed overnight rain last night). It is God himself that is on display. There are two "appearings" in this text: "the grace of God has appeared" in v11 and v13 we are waiting for the appearing of "the

glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ.” Jesus first coming and his second coming. In the person of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, God’s grace is perfectly made manifest. This idea that the life of Jesus Christ is the appearance of the very grace of God rests upon the other belief that Jesus Christ has a unique relation to the God the Father whose love He manifests.

The gospel of John begins with a description of the appearing of God’s grace. He writes, “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. And so we no longer grope about in the dark trying to find God. Paul, whilst ministering in Athens said: “I was passing through and observing the objects of your worship and I even found an altar on which was inscribed: ‘To an unknown God’. What you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you”. We don’t have to read between the lines of human history to find God; we don’t have to read nature’s tea leaves to discern God, and we certainly don’t need to look within our own meagre human hearts, hopes, or fears to find some human construction of God. We look back to historic fact – the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. This is our God! God incarnate. The Grace of God has appeared!

What does God’s Grace Do?

## **2) God’s Grace Saves**

*“For the grace of God has appeared, **bringing salvation for all people**”*

Note: Paul is not advancing “universal salvation”. There is a difference between the “bringing of salvation *to* all” and the reception of salvation *by* all. It does speak to the potential of the salvation grace of God. Christians are called to go into all the world and proclaim the good news of God’s saving grace, and

whosoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. This speaks to the limitless potential of God's wonderful grace. Besides being limitless in potential, it is itself without limit. The fact that I need God's grace so desperately, and regularly, leaves no less grace for you or anyone else. It is also limitless in its application and power. Paul writes of this to the Romans:

*“where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

There is no sin for which grace is not also deeper still!

I also wonder if Paul is speaking from the rightful sense of Christian humility that comes, I believe, upon every heart truly touched by God's grace. Paul called himself, “the chief of all sinners.” I don't believe this is Paul exaggerating for poetic effect, but merely the reflections of a man with a tender conscience, full of the reality of his frailties and faults, but also full of the reality of God's forgiveness, steadfast love, and acceptance. And so, Paul says to himself, ‘if God's grace is sufficient for me, it is sufficient for all’. Like the hymn “Jesus, the name high over all:

Oh, that the world might taste and see,  
The riches of His grace!  
The arms of love that compass me,  
Would all mankind embrace.

Are we marked by this kind of humility? Do we have the mercies of God's grace ever before us such that we are motivated to see others as objects of God's grace?

This humility is a necessary consequence of truly embracing God's grace. If there is one fundamental difference in the Christian faith – a single word even to summarize it, I think I would choose grace.

The fundamental question in our lives is how humans get right with God. We all know no one is perfect, so how can we stand ultimately before a perfect, holy God. In a way, most of the world's religions are trying to answer this question. Some try to answer it by denying the reality of sin and evil. But this is completely incoherent with the life we observe and live. Knowing it to be false it can do nothing but numb the heart, leaving the reality of our state before God undealt with. The balance deal with it, generally, by acknowledging sin and either doing sufficient good works to balance the scales of justice in their favour before God, or simply believing that because God is love he is obliged to be gracious toward them (turns a blind eye toward sin). This creates in all other religions a system of works, things to do, in order to receive God's favour. In short, some kind of self-justification, and this always ends in either despair or pride. Despair as you realize you cannot keep even your own laws let alone God's, or pride because of the self-satisfaction you feel in all of your religious efforts and duties. The Christian doctrine of grace tells us that we cannot make ourselves right with God, and so God has done it for us. God's grace is not turning a blind eye to sin as if it doesn't exist. God's grace in salvation rooted in what we see in V14, saying of Jesus: "he gave himself for us." God must punish sin because he is righteous and just.

This is really hard for prideful humans. We love earning things, to be able to say "I did that", including most importantly earning God's grace.

Martin Luther quote:

"If God were willing to sell His grace, we would accept it more quickly and gladly than when He offers it for nothing."

The grace of God has appeared, and the grace of God brings salvation.

### **3) God's Grace Trains**

*For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,<sup>12</sup> training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age*

It is difficult in one word to capture in English what Paul is saying. Some translations say teaches. Training is better, but probably still short of how all encompassing this is. It is really closer to speaking of the sanctifying work of Word and Spirit working by God's varied means of grace in our lives. It is instruction, but also correction. We see directly from the text that there is a negative component and a positive component. This grace of God trains us to renounce but it also trains us to live. We renounce (reject/deny) ungodliness (the opposite of the frequent exhortation toward godliness) and worldly passions (desires centred in the world's system). We are to give these things up because, Paul writes, Christ has given himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness. This echoes other teachings of Paul affirming that the Christian life involves putting on and putting off. Turn toward God and turn away from sin. Submit to God, resist the devil. None of this is done in our own strength or for our own glory. Jesus, the personification and perfect expression of grace, is the master teacher. He does what no natural teacher can do. He abides with and in us. This is why Paul could say: *"I am crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me."* John wrote that the Spirit guides (trains us toward) us into all truth. Peter wrote that: "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness". We are not left to

our own devices! The purpose of this training is in the positive instruction: “*to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.*”

This is the design of this appearance of grace, the revelation of the grace of God in Christ. The reason behind its appearing, its saving, its training, is that we would live self-controlled (what we owe ourselves), upright (what we owe others), godly lives (what we owe God) in this present age.

How precious are we to God, how critical is our character and conduct, that he brings the fullness of his grace to bear upon our lives to bring about this transformed life. The sun doesn't consider it demeaning to shine upon my tiny 8x12 vegetable garden to bring life and harvest, it is what it is made to do. Our lives, in the grand scheme of things, can seem as insignificant as my tiny box vegetable garden, but God cares infinitely about the daily grace of Christ needed to grow you in him.

Jesus gave himself for you to redeem you and to purify you for himself, for his *own possession*, zealous for good works! This is the wonderful irony of the Christian life. Though we are not created *by* good works we are created *for* good works. To often we neglect this as evangelical protestants.

Our lives ought to be like the mirror of a reflecting telescope. The astronomer does not look directly up into the sky when he studies the stars, but down into the mirror on which their reflection is found. As Christians we are like the mirror; on earth we are the image-bearers of God – what an amazing privilege! The doctrines of Christianity, when they are only in words, are less appealing than the same truths when they are on display in a life.

The appearing of grace ultimately leads to the glory of his re-appearing. In between we are called to wait, but not passively. The impact upon us of Christ's self-giving; his appearing, saving, and training grace is the production of a joyful, confident hope. This is how we wait, in joyful, confidence; a new people of God set apart and zealous for good works. This is how we "adorn" the gospel of Jesus for the glory of God and the benefit of our community.