

Coordinates for Christian Living

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[0 : 0 0] Well, we're going to be focusing particularly on verses 11 to 14 if you're following along, but reference to the whole of Titus and especially that chapter two. Well, 2021 has begun in earnest. You may feel, though, like 2020 just went by in a blur.

It doesn't feel that that long ago that we were talking last year as we entered into the first lockdown. And we were we were talking, at least in St. Andrews, about 2020 vision and all kinds of things like that.

But one year later, in a second lockdown, it does feel like déjà vu and time is standing still. You know, that feeling when you walk into a room and then you're standing there for a bit and you wonder why on earth you came in there, what you came to get.

And we've had days and weeks and months like that, a year like that in some ways. At times, I'm sure it's if you feel anything like me, it's felt like you've just stepped off a playground roundabout.

I know for many of you, COVID is only just part of that. Now more than ever, it feels like life is just spinning around and people are asking, how on earth do we live from one day to the next?

[1 : 1 2] The answer is that we need to get our bearings. In the past and the future to align ourselves in the present. And it might be that your next horizon was just get through Christmas, but now that lockdown's continued.

Or maybe your just aim is now to just get through lockdown or even just get through today. For most of us, the future landmark we're aiming for is the end of COVID.

However, COVID will end and then we still need another point in the future after that. As Christians, we need to get our bearings right. Because the Bible calls us to live transformed lives of godliness.

As we see this morning, as we see in those verses we just read. But to do that, we are given better coordinates to navigate by than just the end of lockdown or the end of COVID.

See, Paul writes to Titus in Crete. And Crete was a pretty crazy place. Paul's desire was that the churches in Crete were families of people who were transformed by the gospel.

[2 : 2 4] We saw that just as we were reading through verses 1 to 10. That language to the older men and women and younger men and women. We saw that fully godly and mature older men and women are to be examples and teachers to the younger.

Young men and women are to be self-controlled among other things. You could scan through those verses and see what an inspiring picture it really is of what our churches should look like.

And Paul sends Titus with a mission to clean up Crete. And he posts him this letter that we're looking at to tell him how to do it. And what's Paul's three-step plan?

Well, you can read through Titus and you'll see. It's the gospel. The gospel. The gospel. You'll see that again and again he encourages Titus to teach sound doctrine.

And equip people with the sound doctrine of the gospel. Why? Because God's word does God's transforming work.

[3 : 28] And in verse 11 to 14, which is our focus, we're told how the gospel does that. You see, the gospel helps us to get our bearings by situating us on the timeline of God's redemptive plan.

We get our coordinates for Christian living from the gospel. The first and second comings of Christ into the world. So to live godly lives, training and waiting in the present age, that's what verse 12 is talking about.

Well, to do that, we need to look back, verse 11, to the grace of God appearing. And look forward, verse 13, to the glory of God that will appear. Those are the two coordinates for Christian living.

And Paul's aim is that by deliberately orienting ourselves by those, God will help us to navigate through this present age.

It will be that which trains us for godliness and makes us awaiting people, that family that we saw in verses 1 to 10. So we've got two coordinates and two implications that we're looking at today.

[4 : 40] You may find that helpful if you're taking notes or following along that way. First coordinate, the grace of God has appeared. So if you look at verse 11, Paul writes, for the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people.

That's our first coordinate for the Christian life. Our first coordinate is looking back at the grace of God revealed in Christ. Grace is that free and undeserved favour of God.

The grace didn't just come into existence when the Son of God came into the world. God has always been compassionate and gracious. We thought about that in the psalm that we read, that we sung together.

We gave thanks for that as we prayed. Grace became visible, particularly if it came into technicolour, in the coming of Jesus Christ. In his humble birth, in his compassionate life, but most of all in his saving death.

Grace is so central to the person and work of Christ that you notice in verse 11, Paul doesn't just say Christ appeared. He can say grace appeared.

[5 : 52] Grace appeared that offers salvation to all people. Grace is most clearly seen in salvation. Look down with me at verse 14.

He says, for in salvation, our God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, gives us the gift we least deserve. Christ gave his life for us. Paul tells Titus in verse 15, that's something that we as Christians need to hear again and again.

We need to hear that message of grace. And so in verse 14, he expands on what God's gracious saving work looks like. Just look at it with me.

Christ Jesus, verse 14, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself. A people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Jesus redeems and purifies us. Let's look about those words more closely. First, Paul says Jesus redeems us from wickedness.

[6 : 57] In other words, he sets us free from the living under the power of sin. Redeemed or ransomed is that language of setting someone free from slavery.

Redemption was most vividly pictured in the Old Testament, where the people of Israel were rescued from slavery in Egypt by God. But that was just a trailer for Jesus's greater redemptive work.

Redemption this time, not from physical slavery, but from bondage to the power of sin. That blind captivity in a life that characterizes itself by rebellion against God, against his law.

But Jesus redeems us. He sets us free to belong not to sin, but to belong to God. And his work goes even further than that. He reverses the corrupting effect of sin on our lives.

Paul writes that he purifies us. The Old Testament prophets like Ezekiel looked forward to one day when God would clean us and give us new hearts and desires.

[8 : 07] Well, Jesus does this. Imagine for me for a second, just to picture this. You've bought a house and you're cleaning all the rubbish out of the attic from the last owner.

You're putting it all into a skip and in that rubbish you find a bowl. It's nothing special. It's a bit rusty, to be honest. It's tarnished. It's filled with dirt and cobwebs and maybe a few cigarette ends.

But it doesn't. And it's not like you even need another bowl. You've got plenty of salad bowls. Bowls to get your soup out of that kind of thing. But you still decide to pluck it out of the rubbish. You pour off the dirt.

You wash it clean and then you set away, chipping away at the rust, getting your emery paper and rubbing that along, rubbing off the corrosion. And then you polish it until it gleams.

And you place it in your dining room table and fill it with fresh fruit, giving it pride of place. That's just a little picture of what God does for us. When he redeems us, he plucks us out of the rubbish.

[9 : 11] He doesn't just leave us there, rusting in the back of the shed. He purifies us. He purifies our minds, our hearts, our deepest desires. He washes them clean from sin.

He chips away at the corrosion of sin in our lives. And he polishes us until we gleam like his son. And then he fills us with his own perfect desires.

And it's all of grace. You see, we were no more attractive than a rusty bowl. But God and God has no more need of us than we might need another salad bowl. But he is a God of grace.

And he sets his love on us. He saves us. He redeems us. He purifies us. So that, verse 14, we might be his very own. We might be his precious possession.

Exodus was a trailer of it. The Old Testament prophets looked forward to it. And grace has appeared in Jesus Christ who accomplishes it all.

[10 : 17] And so Paul says to Titus, quite understandably in verse 15, that these are the things that you should teach. He reminded the people of God's grace in redeeming and purifying them to be his own precious possession.

We might not use the word wickedness much, but it was the perfect way to describe the people of Crete. Crete had a reputation. You might say earlier on in chapter one, verse 12, Paul quotes a prophet, a poet from Crete, who says that Christians are always liars, evil beasts and lazy gluttons.

The Christians were well known through the Roman Empire as our lazy and horrible bunch. And so Paul says, look back to what you once were.

Remember your pre-Christian lives when you were slaves to sin, where try as you might, you couldn't get rid of that reputation. You couldn't stop your life matching your evil reputation.

But now see the grace of God that has appeared. Look at how Christ has set you free from the power of sin, how he purified you and is transforming you and transforming your lives to be his church.

[11 : 36] I mean, just glance over Paul's description of what Christian elders should be like in verses five to nine of chapter one. Just look at how the church family should live in verses one to one to ten of chapter two.

Only the grace of God appearing can make people like that. Paul tells Titus to declare these things to the Cretians. And we, too, need to be reminded of this again and again, of God's redeeming grace.

We need to be reminded of what of it in our own lives and the lives of our Christian brothers and sisters. Some of you might say that your pre-Christian lives were ones of wickedness that would have made you right at home in Crete.

But then God's grace appeared and it's wonderful when we get to hear such testimonies of God's grace at work. But you don't have to be a murderer turned preacher in order to see God's grace.

Many of you were saved in what the well-being in what the world might have thought of quite moral and upright person. The Apostle Paul's pre-Christian life had been one of strict devotion to God's law.

[12 : 50] But describing himself in Titus, in chapter three, verse three, Paul can say, At one time, we too, he's including himself, were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures.

We lived in malice, envy, being hated and hating one another. Like Paul, you'll be able to remember and to testify how you too were enslaved to sin.

How you were ensnared by passions and pleasures that promised life but only gave disappointment. Until God's grace appeared. All of us, including those of you like me who can't remember a time where you weren't following Jesus, we'll all be able to see the fingerprints of God's grace on our lives.

We'll still know the enticing and gripping power of sin. We'll be able to speak of certain sins that we were once addicted to. Sins that we might still battle.

But we know the power of God's grace. We know that were it not for God's grace appearing, we would have been captured and killed long ago by those sins.

[14 : 08] All of us will be able to testify to God's purifying work in our lives. The sins we once hated or once, since we once loved, we now hate.

The status, the pleasure, the success is whatever it was that we once chased after are losing their appeal. Thanks to God's grace. And instead, he's been growing a love for his people in our heart.

A love to listen to him. A love to read his word, to know him more. We know that that cannot come from ourselves.

It can only have come from him. If you're listening to this and you haven't accepted God's offer of salvation, do you see why it's such an amazing gift?

Do you see what you're missing out on? May I encourage you to accept the gift of life that Jesus offers? Can I encourage you to talk about this with a Christian you might know, whether it's a friend or family member?

[15 : 11] To open up a gospel account and see Jesus for yourself. See him walking and talking. See him die as he gives his life as an offering for you.

To give you an opportunity to turn back to God. That's how much he loves you. That's his grace appearing in salvation. If you accept his offer of salvation, you too can be clean and pure and belong to him.

Brothers and sisters, look back at how God's grace has appeared in salvation. In your life. In the lives of those around you.

Rejoice. Give thanks. Second, we're going to think about how God's glory will appear. It's the second corner in the future.

And don't worry, this is a much shorter point because we've already done a lot of the heavy lifting. Verse 13, Paul writes that we wait for the blessed hope. The appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

[16 : 18] Our second coordinate, looking forward to the glorious return of Christ. When Jesus first appeared, the apostle John could say, we have seen his glory. For Jesus revealed his divine glory in the miraculous signs.

And ultimately, that pinnacle of his glory and his death on the cross and resurrection. But at the time, he allowed his glory to be veiled. So much that people didn't even suspect he was God when they killed him.

However, when Jesus next appears, he will appear in glory. He will be no longer veiled when Christ comes again. That's why the apostle John can write, behold, he is coming and every eye will see him.

Jesus will not return as a helpless babe, but as the victorious divine king. As our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. And Paul says to Titus, our Savior's return is our hope.

It's a certain hope. Something that can't be destroyed by a pandemic. Something that can't be delayed by a snowstorm or by a government announcement at the 12th hour.

[17 : 29] It's a blessed hope. Elsewhere in the letter, in verse 2 of chapter 1 or later on in chapter 3, the language of this hope talks about the hope of eternal life.

And Paul is now tying that eternal life to the hope of Christ's return. Because his return is the moment we long for. Because in the glorious return of Christ, that will bring the age of sin to an end.

It will usher in the age of eternal life where sin and its effects will be no more. His return is the blessed hope of every believer seeking to live godliness in a life of godliness in this present age.

Because when Christ returns, he will perfect the work that he has begun in my life, in your life as well. And we know that while we have been redeemed from sin, we still feel it trying to enslave us.

We see that while our desires have changed, the purifying process is not yet complete. When Christ returns, it is our blessed hope.

[18 : 37] Because he will bring to completion, to perfection, what he started. Perfect redemption, where we'll never again know the presence or pull of sin.

Perfect purification, where we will love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. Where we'll be able to rejoice as his goodness surges through us.

As his perfection fills up and overflows in us with joy. Christ's return is our blessed hope. So Paul says to Titus, look forward to it.

Exhort the church to look forward to it. Creations then, us now to look ahead, to fix our eyes on what Christ brings. Just think of that sin that you've fought for years and years.

The tendrils of temptation that reach out to grab you whenever. And that you have to keep hacking away as you seek to keep following Christ. They will all be gone.

[19 : 41] Think of that area of godliness that you really want to grow in. Maybe it's self-control or gentleness. That will reach full maturity. When Christ, our glorious saviour, appears.

It's like we sing in Come Thou Fount. Oh, that day when freed from sinning. I shall see thy lovely face. Full arrayed in blood-washed linen.

How I'll sing thy sovereign grace. Come, my Lord, no longer tarry. I bring thy promises to pass. For I know thy power will keep me till I'm home with thee at last.

The grace of God has appeared. The glory of God will appear. Those are our two coordinates for Christian living. The great advent of God in the world.

And those two things shape how we live in the present age. Paul's aim for Titus, for the churches in Crete and for us, is that we live transformed lives of godliness in this present age.

[20 : 47] And I want just briefly for the rest of our time to look at how the gospel coordinates that we've seen of Christ's two comings actually transform our church life in the present age.

So we've seen two coordinates, now two implications. In verse 12, we're told that the grace of God teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in the present age.

Notice it doesn't say that we're doing the training. God's grace is training us and teaching us. A 19th century pastor, Canon Hay Aitken, wrote a book entitled *The School of Grace* about this very passage.

He says, if I can just read it out, grace not only saves, but it undertakes in our training and teaching. So all Christians become learners in the school of grace.

Grace teaches us two main lessons. First, negatively, to say no. It teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions. I just think that's such a helpful phrase.

[22 : 02] When we teach kids, we teach them what things to say no to, what things to say yes to. And here, God's word is doing that. Training us like children, that when the temptation of sin comes, that we say, no, I'm not having anything to do with that.

And instead, grace teaches us positively to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives. Well, how does grace teach us?

Aitken goes on. He says, grace bases all of her teaching upon the great facts in which her first grand revelation was made and finds all her teaching power in those mighty memories.

If that sounds a bit confusing. Excuse me. He's basically saying that grace teaches us godliness in the present by reminding us of how it has transformed us in the past.

So grace reminds us of how Christ has redeemed us from sin. It reminds us, remember, sin has no power over you. You can say no. It reminds us that Christ has purified us and he is purifying us.

[23 : 14] And that one day we will be completely perfect, perfected in eternal life. We then need to let grace train us. We need to deliberately orient ourselves between Christ's comings.

We need to look back and look forward. We need to be determined to live in light of yesterday and for tomorrow. You see, there's no shortcut to that happening.

The way that that happens is by placing ourselves in that redemptive timeline, timeline of God. We do that as we come to God's word again and again, as we come to the gospel.

Every day you see the compass of our hearts wants to drift further and further away from true north. It needs to be aligned. It needs to be aligned instead with the desires and values of the gospel, re-round like a clock, one of those old clocks.

You see, Titus needed to preach the gospel. And we, like the Cretans, need to hear the gospel. Because it's when we hear it that God readjusts the compass of our hearts.

[24 : 24] It's through the Bible's story of redemption that the horizons of grace and glory are placed again in front of us.

That we're reminded of where we stand in God's story of salvation. That happens as we read the Bible in our homes, as flatmates or families.

There's good reasons to read your Bible every day. It's not just tradition. We do it because the magnetic attraction of the world so easily sets us off course.

I was just watching a film on Netflix last night and I found myself agreeing with what the Bible says is wrong just because of the power of that story. The power of the story that this world would project.

And I had to check myself because our hearts will so easily drift off course. Grace tutors us as we sit under the preaching of God's word on a Sunday, as we meditate on it throughout the week.

[25 : 27] Grace tunes our hearts as we sing God's praises, as we sing scripture. Grace lifts our eyes to our saviour as we pray for one another from God's word.

Grace trains us as we speak the gospel into one another's lives and situations. Did you notice that everything I've talked about has a corporate element? Because the school of grace is a whole church thing.

As well as elders giving sound instructions. Did you notice in the bit we read in chapter two? In verses one to ten that it's a call to teach and train one another.

The school of grace is in session where we come along. Aside either of us. Each other. As we exhort one another to keep fighting sin.

To remind ourselves of how Christ has freed us from its grasp. As we encourage one another to more godliness by telling each other and thanking God together for the purifying work of Christ.

[26 : 30] Most importantly, as we give hope to a brother or sister after they sin. Remember that. That when we stumble and fall, we need someone to come alongside us and say, Christ has died.

He has died on your behalf. You can look forward to the blessed and certain hope when you'll be freed from sin. He has secured eternal life for you if you're trusting in him. Let's enroll to train together in that school of grace.

Another quote from Canon Aiken. He says, The two comings of Christ are like two windows in the school of grace. Through the western window, a solemn light streams from Mount Calvary.

And through the eastern window shines the light of sun rising. The herald of a brighter day. It is waiting for that brighter day of Christ's return that I really want to just touch on as we conclude our time together.

It's our second implication, but in reality, this is just a closing few words. Verse 13. We're told that we're waiting for our blessed hope.

[27 : 38] And the more I've been thinking about this, the more I've been persuaded that that waiting that Paul is talking about is just another aspect of the training. Jesus encourages his disciples to wait for their master's return by diligently going about his business.

In 2 Peter, we read that people are to live their lives of holiness and godliness, waiting and hastening for the coming day of Christ's return. We wait by training in the school of grace.

However, we still need to use the word waiting because it reminds us that we don't train for the present, but for the future. Our future of eternal life, where Christ is one of our, where Christ banishes our worldly passions, where godliness will shine from our lives.

Since that is where we're going, that's what we need to train for. An Olympic swimmer doesn't train for Tokyo 2020, or what's now 2021, by training in shot put or in sprinting necessarily.

We train by, he trains for that event by practicing his event. And in the same way, we don't train for heaven with worldly passions now.

[28 : 58] But we might say that we invest our time in a triathlon of self-controlled, upright and godly lives. We train for the future by, future of godliness with Christ by living like that in the present.

We want to close our time then. The grace of God has appeared in Christ. It shines from the cross. And the glory of God is appearing.

It shines a light of hope on the horizon. So let us set our course by those twin lights, training and awaiting in God's grace.

Until our great God and saviour, Jesus Christ comes to gather us home to himself. Will you pray with me? Heavenly Father, thank you that the grace of God has appeared in Christ.

Teaching us to renounce all ungodliness and worldly passions. To wait for Christ's return. Oh Lord, we do thank you for your word that you have given us.

[30 : 04] We thank you for the reminders of what Christ has done and what he will do. We need that constant realignment by your word. Lord, please help us to meditate on this word throughout the week.

Please, Lord, guard people's hearts. Guard their souls from drifting away from that true magnetic north pointing at you. May people guard one another.

May people keep pointing each other to Christ. Be with your people in Bonacordi, pray. Grow them into a godly congregation. Long to speak of Christ and point one another to him.

Thank you that you are the great shepherd of the sheep. Thank you that you are the one who is with your people. Pray that you will be doing this work by your spirit. Thank you for Jesus Christ and it's in his name we pray.

Amen.