

Trained by Grace
Text: Titus 2:11-12, 14

Introduction

Titus 2:11 says the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation for all people. God so loved the world, He gave us His son. God provides the way back to Himself through the flesh of his only Son. Truly this is unmerited favor. This is Good news; God's grace is poured out on us in and through Jesus.

Grace has *appeared*. This Greek word is where we get our English word *epiphany*, which means "a striking revelation." The Greek word used here is most frequently used in reference to the sun, as in Acts 27:20. Luke uses it metaphorically in Luke 1:78-79; "to give light," is the same word translated as "appeared" in Titus 2:11. To appear is to spread light. This is predicated on John 8:12 when Jesus said "I am the light of the world." So going back to Titus 2, Paul is telling us something else that God's grace does. The grace of God has dawned; it has lit up the world. The grace of God, in a sudden burst of illumination, has come onto the scene of human history like the sun at sunrise. Everything that follows proceeds from the context of seeing by Grace. Grace illuminates our lives so we see holiness and goodness the proper way and say yes to it. We are given illumination, wisdom and understanding by the grace of God.

At the beginning of verse 12, it continues the thought of 11 and begins with the word "training." If you read too quickly you miss who or what is doing the training. The same Grace that illuminates the world is training us when to say no to ungodliness, when to say yes to Godliness and thereby, how to fulfill the will of God in the present age.

Grace is Training Us

Titus 2:12. The word "train" in Greek is *padea* which is more than mere instruction or catechism. This same word is used in Ephesians 6:4 "Fathers...bring up your children in the discipline and *padea* of the Lord." *Padea* is not just education in the academic sense. It's enculturation. It's all consuming worldview training. It includes every area of life. Specifically, the *padea of the Lord* is a view of the world in which the Triune God is Lord of Heaven and Earth and all its necessary implications. Theologically, practically, culturally, ethically, aesthetically, relationally, economically, and so on. So God is raising all *His* children in the *Padea* of Himself, God is instructing us in how to live as His children in every area of life.

The same grace that brings salvation to us also trains us as believers. Our circumstances, the events of our lives, the trials and triumphs we experience are all aimed at cultivating spiritual growth and godly character. And the one guiding this process is God our Father. And unlike our children who mature and depart from our homes, we never mature beyond our need for our loving Father and His gracious instruction. God is using the events and circumstances of your life to mold you into a mature Christian. God knows how to shape you and is graciously doing so. We tend to equate training with rigid rules and performance standards. God equates it with firm loving care for our souls. Whatever is going on in your life is God's gracious way of training you in Holiness.

And how do you train yourself at anything? When we teach our kids to read we don't start with The Grapes of wrath. We start with phonograms and work up to words, then sentences and then give them Dr. Seuss. If you need to lift 100 pounds, you don't start at 100 pounds. You start with what you can manage and move up incrementally to larger burdens. Finances, responsibility, knowledge.

God trains us when to say no and when to say yes

Titus 2:12. God is transforming us into images and imitators of Him, to be like Him. When we are converted we still possess worldly desires - fleshly desires - visceral needs. We need fellowship, intimacy, food, drink, money and professional and recreational pursuits. In the midst of these realities there are a lot of vices that can capture our hearts.

God demands that we say no to some things but only because He wants us to say yes to other things. God says in Deuteronomy, "I set before you today life and death, so choose life." God wants us to say no to those things that dishonor Him, that harm others, things that are empty and fleeting. We are to say yes to things that honor Him, that benefit others and glorify God. God is not a Father who desires self-denial and self-torture for the sake of self-denial and self-torture. He wants us to say no to worldly, transitory pleasures and yes to eternal joy. God wants us to say no self-love and yes to neighbor-love in the context of God-love.

God hates fornication but relishes and blesses an active marriage bed. God hates waste, gluttony and slavery to the stomach but loves feasting, celebrating; delighting before Him with drink, song and exuberance. God is training us every day in what to say no to and what to say yes to. He's training us to be like Him. It's a difficult lesson to learn and requires a lot of repetition. We are not meant to say no to our desires and leave it at that. We aren't saying no so we can have more glorious bodies, bigger bank accounts or because we serve an ethic of don't touch, taste or look. Say no to your desires and yes to God's desire for you, which is ultimately to love your neighbor as yourself. Avoid evil so you can **do** good.

Go into the world and do good works

Titus 2:12-14. Good works don't produce salvation, salvation produces good works. God is actively renewing the world by His spirit and His body; the church. You and I. You are his hands and feet. You are the voice in His gospel proclamation; you are His sinews and tendons moving, working to build His kingdom of sacrifice, service and love in the world.

You are all on your way to heaven, but salvation isn't a golden ticket, it's also not like a retirement plan in which you slog through years of labor only to enjoy the Lord at some later date. Now if you look at verse 14, we are going to focus on the last three words.

Part of our purity, our cleansing, our sanctification is a renewal of appetites, desires and outlook. God doesn't just want laborers. He wants zealous laborers. Joy-filled laborers. Laborers who LOVE to labor. To be zealous is to be fanatical; to be passionate, eager, devoted, committed.

Admit you have neither the inclination nor the strength in yourself to do the very things you **need** to be shaped and molded in to redeemed zealots of Good works. That weakness is the path to true strength. To be prayer warriors and understand the deep mysteries of God and love others as Christ as loved you requires the complete surrender to Christ and to admit you can't do it alone. And admit it tomorrow morning and the next morning and the next morning. It's admitting you need the workout routine that leads to the first sit up that leads to 10 sit ups that leads to a six pack spiritual abs.

Grace surrounds you and will overcome you and shape you. Open your hearts. Be weak and you will be strong. Grace is illuminating your world. Those who have eyes to see, let them see. What do you need to say no to more often? What do you need to say yes to more often? Don't ask God to change your circumstances first, ask God to change your heart. Learn the lesson. Say yes to Christ, to Grace, to your training. Be humble and weak and you will grow in Godliness to be zealots for good works and glorify God in Heaven.