

“Transforming a Cretan: *Titus* as a Case Study in Holiness”
Volume 31 Number 1

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September 16, 2002

INTRODUCTION

To tackle the subject of personal holiness causes me to feel like an automotive engineering professor consistently late for class because his car won't start. If the desire in presenting papers is to find someone who has mastered his subject, we have failed.

In fact, in this case, I suggested the topic, and agreed to do it, over a year ago, with the hope that with time I would be able to sort through the mass of Biblical material, and sort out the competing visions of sanctification that prevail in our day. My goal was to develop a consistent, balanced view of sanctification – and in the process, to make progress in the pursuit of holiness.

On the matter of holiness, I think I have been helped: I read several books as part of my morning worship, and contemplated carefully their suggestions. But on the matter of mediating the various positions on the process of sanctification, I have made very little progress.

I read Gundry's *Five Views on Sanctification* as one of those books; it was helpful to determine the parameters of the debate. But one of the contributors, the Wesleyan Deiter, made these comments in response to the Reformed camp's Hoekema:

I again rejoice in the similarity of biblical understanding that marks [these views] at so many points. When Hoekema outlines the means of sanctification through union with Christ, through the truth and through faith, with the result that 'sin no longer has the mastery over us', he speaks eloquently for all Bible-believing Christians, *regardless of the means to the end or the terms that are used to develop these teachings* [my italics].¹

Then he makes an observation that had already struck me by that point in the book:

This distinction [that is, whether or not we can be free from our wilful inclination to resist God] has always been at the heart of the conflict between Calvinist and Wesleyan views of sanctification. It is inherent in the varying understanding of God's relationship with humankind and the differences in the understanding of election, prevenient grace, and the freedom of the will. Very simply, one might say that the points at which different theologians stop along the line of tension spanning the gap between divine sovereignty and genuine human freedom, within parameters set by that sovereignty, mark the hairline distinctions that in their extended development seem to create such great divides between us.²

The fact is, that on several broad strokes, these five writers agree on much: they all have some form of sanctification directly linked to conversion – whether “positional” or “definitive”; they all recognize that union with Christ and the Spirit's operation is essential to the process; and they all recognize that the process is complete – truly complete – only in glory: for all the use of “entire sanctification” and “perfectionism” McQuilkin is right when he points out lack of definition makes the differences seem bigger than they are.³

The problems, then, in formulating the doctrine of sanctification – that is, once one leaves the vast areas of agreement – are at least 3:

¹*Five Views on Sanctification*, Stanley Gundry, ed.; ©1987 Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI., p.92

²*Ibid.* pp.93-94

³*Ibid.*p.53

1. Sanctification is not the real area of dispute. As the above quotations show, the Calvinist and the Wesleyan, and all the others, have fundamental differences about the nature of the man we are trying to sanctify; there are different understandings about the impact of the work of Christ and how the Spirit's presence is known. Certainly there are differences in understanding the process of sanctification regarding experience versus discipline, crisis versus working, but there are more fundamental issues that must be solved before differences regarding sanctification can be addressed.

2. Sanctification is a breeding ground for subjectivism. I know certain truths and certain actions that have had a profound impact on my consecration and pursuit of holiness. My baptism; when I first grasped the implications of the sovereignty of God; when my doubts of salvation finally fell before a study of Romans 5; when skirting with depression drove me to the Psalms – all of these things have been used of the Lord to change me, but none of them are normative for you.

3. Sanctification as a developed and clearly stated doctrine calls for balance. To no one's surprise, the Wesleyan wants to emphasize the word "perfect" in the New Testament. The Reformer wishes we would take the Law more seriously. The Pentecostal thinks the key lies in grasping the baptism and the fullness of the Spirit. The Keswick spokesman advocates a crisis decision to turn back to God, to believe, and so on. The fact is that there are several themes to maintain relating to sanctification. It is not to be over-simplified, or over-codified.

All of this goes some way to explaining the approach of this paper. In *Titus*, there is a specific situation addressed by Paul where the issue is the practice of Christian living. While many doctrines are referred to in the course of the discussion, the central matter is one of godliness – or lack thereof – in a Cretan society.

Immediately that strikes a chord in those whose concern is for godliness in their own lives even when the prevailing impression is of a nearly overwhelming rise in godlessness in society. However we might view the process of sanctification, is it enough to help struggling Christians stand against the tide?

Titus is a very short letter; it is delivered almost in outline form, with the expectation that Titus is able to "fill in the blanks". This very brevity is a strength: the aim is to discover the key principles and how they relate to each other, even if it is necessary to turn to others of Paul's letters to expand on the details.

I beg your indulgence to overlook the critical issues surrounding the Pastoral letters. In brief, the argument that these could not be First Century letters because of the developed nature of the church structure falters on the realization that Paul was establishing developed order on his first missionary journey (Ac.14:23). And the emphasis laid on the unusual language and themes is improper, given the fact that none of these words are out of the range of vocabulary Paul would have had. The fact that he writes briefly to a trusted co-worker – no doubt expecting the church to read over his shoulder, but still directed to Titus – about a challenging application of the Gospel is in my view sufficient to explain any language differences. So I accept the statements made on the face of the letter: Titus was on Crete at Paul's bidding to counter-act the early appearance of error that threatened to undo the young church before it was fully operating; error that was making itself felt in the conduct of the Cretan Christians.

So without further delay, let us turn to Paul's letter to Titus as a case study in holiness: what happens when Cretan meets Christ?

THE PROBLEM

The Basic Issue:

Consider the following contrasts in Titus 1 between what Paul wants to convey, and his view of the conditions on Crete:

Truth in accord with Godliness (1:1)	Unruly and vain talkers (1:10)
Hope of Eternal Life (1:2)	Reprobate (1:16)
God who cannot lie (1:2)	Deceivers who subvert whole houses (1:10)

From these contrasts, it is clear that if ever there was a case where people were not naturally inclined to the message of the Gospel, it was on Crete! It was not a promising territory for the Gospel: this is important for us, who easily grow discouraged in our time with its free-wheeling attitude to sin, and who begin to feel that with this raw material, we will never be able to grow a church worthy of the name!

The Causes and Irritants of the Problem:

1. Their natural condition (1:12-13)

Paul understands that Titus is going to face strong obstacles from some “national characteristics” rooted deeply in the Cretans’ mindset. Of course, the Gospel confronts all cultures: none of us have a personality that naturally fits the Gospel message. But in some places exposure to the Old Testament had laid some groundwork that apparently was absent from Crete.

2. Vain Talkers who exploit that natural condition (1:10-11)

The similarities between *Titus* and *1 Timothy* lead many to conclude that they are written in the same period. The difference seems to be that Titus is dealing with a relatively young church, whereas Timothy has a more experienced church in Ephesus that had been personally trained by the apostle, in a protracted ministry (at least for Paul). On Crete, the false teachers have arrived early on, even before the church was properly established.

More to the point is the ease with which the natural characteristics of the Cretans could be exploited by their fast talk. Hybrid Christianity usually finds a ready audience, because it talks our language – it removes the mystery and it removes the impossibility of the faith: it restores some deity to human beings. The version of Christianity proposed by the false teachers found a ready audience because it would not call for believers to be anything other than liars, evil beasts and slow bellies!

3. Past Habits that Reinforce the Natural Condition (3:3)

Paul makes the point that we are not mere prisoners of our culture, and theoretical sinners: we have practiced long and hard to get to the level of deceit, hatred and violence that we have achieved. Paul includes himself here.

For all this, Paul is not in despair. His advice to Titus is not, “get off the island” but “set them straight”. The Gospel is designed by God who knows what we were; it is designed for sinners like us. The problems must be addressed, but Paul is convinced they can be!

Our task, then, is to see the goal that Paul sets for the churches, and what resources and encouragements there are to overcome our natural disadvantages in order to be that pure and zealous people God purchased.

THE GOAL

The Basic Aim of the Gospel: “Truth According to Godliness” (1:1)

It is not uncommon for Paul to get to the point in his salutation! His calling as an apostle is for the benefit of God’s elect: both that they would come to faith, and that the implications of their acknowledgment of that truth would be accomplished. The truth they acknowledged in becoming a Christian *promotes* godliness – it is the inherent nature of that truth.⁴

The aim of God in the Gospel is to glorify His Name by changing sinners⁵; he intends that the full impact of the Gospel be seen and felt in each believer’s life. This aim is variously described as being conformed to the image of His Son (Rom.8:29), the “righteousness and holiness” of the image of God being clearly seen (Eph.4:24); or in an expression a little closer to *Titus*, “renewed in knowledge” (Col.3:10). When Paul described

⁴Compare Guthrie, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Pastoral Epistles*, p.194: “the noun *epignosis, knowledge* literally means ‘recognition’”; also Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary* on Titus 1:1: Paul’s apostleship is “in the interest of” this acknowledgment of the truth; that “accords with, promotes godliness”.

⁵Compare Isaiah 42:8; 45:22-25; 48:9-11 and so on.

the terrible Cretan condition above, it was that “in works they deny God” (1:16) as opposed to acknowledging the truth about Him. Our conduct can give lie to our profession of knowing God; the lessons we need to be “taught” (Titus 2:12) involve godliness, righteousness and sobriety – and the truth of the Gospel promotes that. The aim is not merely good words – that is, not just knowing what the truth is; the aim is a life of Christ-likeness, a life that reflects the priorities and ethics of the holy God!

In explaining this basic goal, there are four “purpose” statements that merit consideration in relation to truth and godliness.

1. To be “sound in the faith” (1:13-14)

An obvious “sub-goal” in this basic aim will be that they will know the truth well, and will not easily be distracted from it. Since truth promotes godliness, not a little of Titus’ work is to establish a solid grounding in the Christian faith. Of course, this is not merely objective: the very fact Paul calls it “the *faith*” implies that “soundness” includes a solid conviction that what you know is true. They must not only be accurate in, but dependent on the truth.

When Paul discusses the qualifications for elders in the church, he outlines a negative and a positive side: they are to be able to recognize and refute error, and they are to be able to recognize and convince of the truth (1:9). Being sound in the faith involves discernment: being able to see both what is erroneous, and why it is potentially dangerous. In the controversies in both Galatia and in Corinth (1 Cor.15), there seems to be an element in the church that was aware that the teaching contradicted the apostle – but was not convinced it was serious: so Paul’s strong language to show the far-reaching implications of their errors. It fits, then, that in Philippians 1:9-11 the prayer for discernment results in being filled with the fruits of righteousness: knowing the truth leads to the practice of godliness.

2. To “adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour” (2:10, as conclusion to 2:1-10): the practice of self control:

Paul once again links truth and godliness, but this time in the other direction: if it is true that acknowledging the truth promotes godliness, it is also true that godliness makes the truth look good. His second “sub-goal”, then, is that the truth would be suitably decked out in the lives of believers.

A few years’ ago, some of the ladies in my church introduced me to a chart that labelled certain natural skin tones and hair colours with the seasons: if you were a “winter” then you should wear certain colours to look your best. Wear a wrong colour, and one would appear washed out or sickly. Apparently my technique of aiming for “clean” was insufficient. So there are certain forms of conduct that show the Gospel in its best light.

On the negative side, making the Gospel attractive means doing nothing to cause others to despise the truth, as Paul warns in 2:5,8. The Gospel is glorious, and can do a great deal of work if I keep my grubby hands off it.

But Paul is being more positive than that: To make the Gospel attractive means to *illustrate* the truth: that is, to declare to unbelievers, “this is what I mean when I talk about trusting God”. For example, if a key element of the Gospel is to believe that this life is not all there is, but that eternal things matter, the aged saint does not throw off restraint: he is still looking forward to glory. If the Gospel teaches the sinner to humble himself before God, then it is a small step to Paul’s application in Titus 3:1 to be subject to rulers: it is a manner of life that highlights the rule and authority of God. If the Gospel teaches us to hope in the Lord, and to make our requests known to him, then obviously Paul must urge the slaves amongst the believers not to steal from their masters (2:10); if the Gospel reveals sin in its horrid reality, then it follows that the young men should want nothing to do with it (2:6).

But making the Gospel attractive also means to *commend* the truth to others: that is, to declare to unbelievers, “this is why it is good to trust Him”. John Reisinger, in a video lecture on witnessing, urges those who do not know how to smile not to witness: it contradicts our testimony that only the Gospel is able to provide life and freedom, joy and peace.

What exactly is Paul looking for? What is the nature of that godliness, that “Christ-likeness” that is promoted by truth and adorns the truth? Remember Paul is asking us to adorn the doctrine of “God our Saviour”: that is, he is not saying that we need to match the preconceptions that the world has about the church – he does not say that unbelievers will find the Gospel attractive: they have their own problems (for example, if we were to follow the world’s dictates, we would give to the needy but keep quiet about what we believe); he is calling us to live in such a way that the Gospel becomes known in the clearest light.

The paragraph in 2:1-10 shows us that there are differing specifics for different age categories or social places. This is common enough with the New Testament as a whole.⁶ Conduct that a 70-year old saint might display to adorn the Gospel will differ in some particulars from that of the

⁶Ephesians 5:22-6:4; Col.3:18-4:1; 1 Cor.7; 1 Peter 2:13-3:7

Christian high school student. Having a child opens up a new field of opportunity to display the truth.

But what is also notable is the basic similarity: “self-control” summarizes most of the instructions Paul gives. Being “sober”⁷ and “right-thinking”⁸ are key themes throughout the Pastoral letters: fully aware, because we have acknowledged the truth. The drunk driver is condemned because he drove a car under the influence; I may be perfectly sober but cause the same crash because I was writing potential sermon notes on the steering wheel. Once again, it is acknowledging and acting upon the truth that is desired.

3. To be careful to maintain good works (3:1,8; cf. 2:7, 14; 3:14)

Another “sub-goal” of this overall aim to have them prosper in the truth that promotes godliness is to see them maintain good works. This, also, is a prominent theme in *Titus*, as can be seen even from the frequency of reference to the topic. “Good works”, or the lack thereof, figures prominently in his description of the problem on Crete (see 1:16); and their presence figures prominently in the aim of Christ in saving us (2:14).

This emphasis on the practice of good works as the fruit of grace is not out of place in Paul’s letters – one of the most quoted passages on grace insists that we are newly created in Christ specifically to do good works (Eph.2:8-10)! Nor is Paul in any way out of step with the New Testament as a whole: we might assume that “bearing fruit” in John 15:8 to the glory of the Father is not too far different from the good works of Matthew 5:16; and of course there are James’ sharp and sometimes controversial assertions of the necessity of works in the claims of faith (James 2:14ff.).

But the point in *Titus* is not so much that good works are to be seen, but that good works will not happen unless we set ourselves to the task. We must be “reminded” of (3:1) and be committed to (3:14) these good works, because nothing in this world will help us! We might fail to do works at all – we might think it unnecessary or impossible for example; or we might fail to do those works that God ranks as good – our track record of knowing what pleases God is not that great: that is why it is the subject of Paul’s prayers as in Colossians 1:9-12.

⁷*nepho*, Titus 2:2, literally “not drunk”, but always used figuratively in NT.

⁸*sophron*, Titus 1:8; 2:2,5,6,12 -“in your right mind”, like the healed demoniac of Luke 8:35

What the specific good works are remains somewhat vague; what we do notice is that in this case at least there is emphasis on interpersonal dealings (3:1-3): the “kindness and love of God” revealed in the Gospel is to be reflected in our conduct. Of course, this is fitting if godliness is understood as Christlikeness, with gentleness and meekness being particularly highlighted in our Saviour.⁹

4. To inherit eternal life (1:2; cf. 2:13; 3:7)

Hope is such a significant aspect of holiness in Scripture generally and in Titus specifically that we will return to this theme in connection with both the motivation and the tools of holiness. But under the goal of holiness, it is appropriate to see Paul’s perspective of eternity. Christianity makes no sense to Paul as a philosophy if it is divorced from the resurrection (as in 1 Corinthians 15 for example). Hope becomes intensely practical in the areas of perseverance in this life and in setting our priorities.¹⁰

It is fitting, then, to acknowledge that this goal of truth promoting godliness is not merely because that adorns the Gospel in the present; it is truth that is grounded in eternity, and the apostle’s ministry is that all these believers will be “present and accounted for” in the ultimate roll call.

For the reality is that the deceit he fears on Crete is a deceit that leads to sin and death – there is always a strong and progressive link among these concepts.¹¹ But on the other hand, the godliness promoted by truth rests on the promise of eternal hope. God cannot lie; God has given us these promises: and therefore promote godliness by these truths.¹²

That the goal is related to eternal life keeps us from overestimating our progress so far. I can think so highly of myself by associating with lukewarm believers, or contrasting myself with an increasingly perverse and godless society. But the goal is eternal life – that is, the standard is what will be used in that day. On the other hand, I am not overwhelmed by my failures because the promise of eternal life is grounded in the God who cannot lie: the race is not over yet. I will refocus my eye on the goal, and with the certain promise in my ear, I will purify myself as He is pure.¹³

THE POWER TO BE HOLY

Introductory: contrast between human effort and “Good News”

It is inescapably obvious that the human condition could be better; it is not uncommon to find unbelieving voices unhappy with much human conduct. But apart from the Gospel, we lack the necessary categories to make any sense of this. Mere human attempts to solve the human problem fall short because they do not take account of the full reality.

<i>Human Attempts to Solve Problem of Sin</i>	<i>A Gospel Response</i>
<i>Deny the depth of sin:</i> a liberal answer: if we educate people enough they will see the wisdom of changing their ways	<i>Utter horror of sin – and the merit of judgment:</i> full force of God’s wrath well-deserved — but poured out on a God-appointed Substitute
<i>Deny the intensity of God’s Holiness – “it’s the thought that counts”!</i>	<i>God is a Consuming Fire:</i> but there is righteousness from God by faith – Ro.3:21ff; Ph.3:9
<i>Deny the depth of our inability:</i> the “balance scale” approach that insists I can by good unbreak the law	<i>Total Inability –</i> but Rom.8:3: what we could not do, God did in Christ

⁹See Matthew 11:28-30; 2 Corinthians 10:1

¹⁰Some of my favourite examples: Romans 8:18-25; 15:4, 13; 2 Cor.4:16-18 etc.

¹¹See Romans 1:18-24; James 1:14-16

¹²Compare the connection of life, godliness, knowledge, promises and progress in holiness in 2 Peter 1:3-4.

¹³1 John 3:1-3.

<i>Redefine what pleases God:</i> godliness made mostly external, ritualistic	<i>Pleased with Perfection:</i> as Pharisees learned, the Lord looks on the heart: Mt.5:17-20; 15:7-9 – but the resurrection shows a better way: 2 Cor.5:21 made sin for me
<i>Salvation entirely future:</i> goal is eternal life, uncertain until this life is done	<i>Hope of eternal life present possession:</i> note language of confidence: Eph.3:12; compare Titus 2:11-14

The point of this exercise in comparison is simply to show that the Gospel is not good news because of a denial of reality; it faces the problem squarely and honestly, but provides a solution that is gloriously effective. In addition, the “good news” is not good news if it does not account for our situation. If it only spelled out further duty, there would be no advance of the kind foreseen by Ezekiel that we would walk in God’s statutes, or that vision of Jeremiah where we will all know the Lord and have his law on our hearts. The Gospel is good news because it not merely informs us about the life that pleases God; it enables us to make progress in that life.

This is exactly the point at which the controversies in sanctification come into view. The concern is how the various aspects that all admit (even if others question their real commitment to the truths in question) fit together. What do we actually *do*? Where does the Spirit’s role fit? Is the emphasis on resting, exercising or experiencing?¹⁴

We come back to Paul’s letter to Titus: what is he to put in place in order to achieve the desired results? Where will the strength to obey come from?

1. The Power of Grace

a) *it is grace that teaches:* Titus 2:13-14; 3:4-7

The truth of the Gospel promotes godliness. It is fitting that in a short letter designed to see godly conduct replace Cretan habits there are two paragraphs revelling in grace. My tendency to promote godliness by harangues of duty seems somewhat out of place. In basic terms, there is a crying need for godliness because the grace of God has appeared (2:11).¹⁵

The fact that it is grace who is our teacher means we can never forget in this discussion of holiness the price that was paid to make it all possible. We are always being reminded that the invitation of Isaiah 55 to come and eat without money or price can only be given after Isaiah 53 – after a shocking and horrendous price had been paid for our comfort (40:1). The very presence of grace as our teacher makes us conscious of our hopeless condition outside of Christ: Paul reminds us of that in Titus 3:3 just before entering on his second statement of God’s kindness and

¹⁴These questions based on some helpful notes for evaluation in the class notes of Dr. A. Fountain.

¹⁵In a paper prepared on Titus 2:11-3:7 in a long-ago Greek class, I discovered strangely that all the commentators I checked favoured the translation “the grace of God has appeared that brings salvation to all men” – that is, that *pasin anthropois* modifies *soterios*, not *epephane* because this fits the word order more naturally, and “appeared” already includes the thought of “all men” (making its addition pointless) – but neither the KJV nor NIV did. If they are correct, it means “all men” in the sense of all the categories just listed in 2:1-10, not, obviously, that all are saved. See Hendriksen for example on 2:11. But for present purposes, it is not important: the issue is that Christian ethics always appeal to a theological foundation, as Guthrie notes (p.209).

love that appeared in Christ.

b) *grace teaches us*:

Grace teaches us – that is, nurtures and raises us.¹⁶ It is not class-room instruction approached with a “take it or leave it” attitude. It is going to get your attention and apply its truths!

Now clearly there is an element of personification here: we are being reminded of the impact of God’s grace in Christ through the Gospel that we have acknowledged. It means that God has taken a benevolent interest in me, and that my salvation has become his personal project. In this benevolence, God sees that my sin will do me no good, and sets before himself the goal of ridding my life of its presence and influence.

By saying “grace teaches us”, he is reminding us that salvation is a package deal – the very same grace that led to the forgiveness of your sins is going to lead to the eradication of them. The grace that saw you in bondage and set you free is going to make sure you stand fast in your freedom. A conversion with no discernible fruit is questionable because it runs so directly counter to God’s expressed purpose for saving.

¹⁶*paideuosa*: the discipline and nurture applied to children, as in Eph.6:4. Jerry Bridges devotes a chapter to this theme of “Disciplined by Grace” in *The Discipline of Grace* based on Titus 2:11-14. NavPress, Colorado Springs, 1994: pp.77-91.

But grace speaks of kindness. The purpose of my training, as hard as it may be, is my well-being. We who have received rebukes know that it is always more readily received when the one who is doing the rebuking has previously given proof of kindness and concern for us. That our school is located at the foot of the cross makes me a more attentive student – for on display at the front of the class is the love of God demonstrated towards sinners.¹⁷

2. The Power of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus: Titus 2:11-14

The curriculum of grace is centred squarely on the cross and resurrection of Jesus. Titus 2:14 gives the content of the lessons in 2:11-12. What is it in each believer that lies behind the rejection of godless ways on one hand and the life of godliness that is to prevail on the other? Why is Paul urging Titus to teach these things with authority, and press them upon the Cretans? It is because Christ gave himself for us: godliness has its roots in this great redemptive act.

We must take seriously the condition we were in before God saved us, and the radical nature of that salvation at the moment of conversion. John Murray wrote extensively on the subject of definitive sanctification, especially as spelled out in Romans 6.¹⁸ Paul there uses the language of death, speaking in one-time, past terms: “you died to sin”. There is a definitive break with sin, a deliverance from its enslaving power. At my conversion, I was taken by God for his own; I have changed kingdoms. These things are true of every believer: the old man is crucified (Ro.6:6); we are freed from sin (6:7); we are alive to God (6:10-11). The point is that all these statements come before the command of 6:12 to deal severely with sin.

On a much smaller scale, Paul makes that point here. To “deny ungodliness” can be understood of a one time, definitive break with sin¹⁹; and while the customary language of “in Christ” does not appear here, it is Christ who is at work to purify His people in giving himself for them, and in 3:4-7 it is “through Christ Jesus” that this takes place. This radical change teaches us to live soberly, righteously and godly *in this present age* – that is, right now. Even if it is not perfected until heaven, it is certainly the present concern of our Saviour, and the intended effect of His grace and kindness towards us.

Again, if we borrow from some of Paul’s other letters to expand on these phrases, we can think about that renunciation (Titus 2:12) in light of Ephesians 4:17-24. This text is instructive, because it puts our conversion in a similar context of the impact of acknowledging the truth. Our unsaved condition was marked by futile thinking and darkened understanding, caused by the ignorance of a hard heart. From that foundation of bad knowledge comes all kinds of evil practices.

So what changed? We “learned Christ” (Eph.4:20, KJV). We were taught by Him – we entered the school of grace. We learned that that old man is corrupt and deceitful – it needed to be cast aside. We learned instead to put on the new man/self that is created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

¹⁷Compare Hebrews 12 – the Father’s discipline is for our good, that we would partake of his holiness; also Romans 5:8: supreme display of grace and love.

¹⁸See both *NICNT: The Epistle to the Romans* on Romans 6, and *Collected Writings Vol.2*, chapters 21-22.

¹⁹The aorist participle *arnesamenoi*: “the decisiveness of this rupture with the past is brought out in the original by the word rendered *renounce*, which is the aorist participle indicating a once-for-all act.” — J.N.D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1981, p.245.

None of this is exhortation – Paul is not now saying that we must put off this old self; he is saying when we learned Christ that was the first lesson – the old man had to go. Grace taught us to renounce old lusts. These statements about what happened when we believed form the foundation for the exhortations that follow in Ephesians 4:25: now we have the “therefore”. Now there is a solid foundation – this change that has taken place in union with Christ and through the “new creation” – to act on the commands to tell the truth, to refuse to let anger control me, to stop stealing and clean up my mouth – in short, to become an imitator of God (5:1).²⁰

Clearing out the dead wood is just a means to an end, however: the positive goal is to “live soberly, righteously, and godly” in this present age. Bridges relates each of these terms to how live concerning ourselves, others and God, respectively.²¹ But there is little possibility of progress unless we begin at the cross in the school of grace.

3. The Power of the Washing of Regeneration: Titus 3:4-7; compare Romans 8:1-17; Gal.5:17ff.

The concluding point of chapter 2, that we are to be zealous for good works, spills over to a specific example: the relationship we are to have with this particularly wicked world. Grace does not teach in a vacuum, but in a terribly noisy environment. The nature of this world is to tempt us to rebel – for, after all, am I not wiser than my teachers because I heed God’s law? – and it implores me to hatred. And as we have seen, I was a full participant in this strange mixture of lust, pleasure, hatred and folly.

Paul presents a neat synopsis of the issues: we are to be ready for every good work, but have no history to support this. On what basis can we make this request and expect any level of compliance? He returns to the theme of grace before urging once again that good works abound (3:8).

Some of the same ground is covered again: it is the initiative of God, as motivated by his kindness and love – that is, His grace – that lies behind whatever changes have occurred. There is not the slightest hint that we called down this favour: until God’s kindness appeared, there was no hope.

Further, Paul presents the work of the Triune God: God’s kindness resulted in the regenerating work of the Spirit who was poured out through Jesus Christ: when we say that our salvation is God’s personal project, we mean that God has fully engaged all His power and resources in this work – that is, He is glorifying himself by saving sinners.

And there is a definitive break: “he saved us”. Our enslavement to these lusts and pleasures ended as the Almighty, Triune God moved to save.

What is added here concerns the work of the Spirit, which further enlightens the issue of power. At our conversion, we were made alive with Christ; our enslavement to sin was broken – we were taught to renounce it. But there is more: the Spirit is shed on us abundantly. The concept of a second blessing is not in this text; all these elements are related to that past act that saved us; the future comes into play in v.7 – what is going on now in order to apply all of this.

The importance of sanctification – that is, that it is not just an “extra credit” if you have time, but really plays no role in salvation – is seen in the language of purity and washing: the “washing” of 3:5 and the “purify” of 2:14 are related terms.²² It is likely that, as with John 3, there is a reference to the link between the Spirit’s cleansing work promised by Ezekiel (36:25-27) and the resulting new heart and new purpose to obey. The salvation God applied to us involves the regenerating work of the Spirit, to make us alive in Christ. Through this new birth, which may be roughly equivalent to the “new creation”, we are “possessors of powers previously unknown”.²³

If it is right to see regeneration as that change at conversion, the renewal is also that – but the term itself implies an on-going process. Having been initiated into this new life, we work out its implications throughout our being.²⁴

The presence of the Spirit, then, contributes to the teaching of grace to deny ungodliness and to live godly. Paul develops the negative side of this in Romans 8, where that bondage to the patterns of life and thought that do not please God (the “flesh”) has been ended by the Spirit. The rebellion against God is over: the root principle is the Spirit. The application of that is that through the Spirit’s power we put to death these deeds

²⁰This sense of Eph.4 is not universally accepted of course; the Col.3:9-10 passage is more clearly past: do not lie because you have already put off the old man. In fact, as Hoekema points out, Col.3:9-10 is a neat blend: you have put off; you have put on – but the new self *is being renewed!* See *Five Views*, p.79. See whole discussion of both texts, pp.78-82 where he summarizes Murray.

²¹See *Discipline of Grace*, p.85.

²²2:14 “purify”: *lutrosetai*; 3:5 “washing”: *loutrou*

²³So Guthrie, p.217.

²⁴This term “renewal” (*anakainosis*) is used in Rom.12:2 “renewing of your minds”. Compare also 1 Cor.6:11 for a link between washing, sanctification and justification with Christ and the Spirit.

of the body. Don't keep pictures of your old girl friend in your sock drawer now that you are married to someone else! Our *ability* to do this is again directly related to the Spirit's working: the Spirit that assures us we are children of God (8:14-17).

Although I am with the Spirit in this on-going battle, there are still attractions in this world for me. Thus the exhortations of Galatians 5 to be led by the Spirit, to walk in the Spirit. The grace of God teaches me that I have changed sides, and have great resources to fight in the battle. I must be alert and on guard.

4. The Motivating Power of Grace

Thus we have seen the reality of the power of grace to teach and renew. We have seen that this is really speaking about the unleashing of the resources of the Triune God for my salvation, and that my progress in holiness is rooted in the grace of God my Saviour.

My holiness is thus motivated by the recognition of these truths of grace. In fact, my holy life is my hymn of praise to the God who saved me, which is why love and obedience are linked.²⁵ This protects holiness from degenerating into self-interest, where I am just attempting to bribe God into blessing me; obedience based on love responding to grace keeps me from exalting myself; I have given up on motivational techniques that assume power is naturally within me. There is no room for a grudging duty in holiness: my aim is to live pleasing to God in everything.

The motivation that grace provides for my pursuit of holiness comes as I stare deeply into the face of Christ. Consider the great themes of this salvation: I am dealing with a God who knows well my inability, and has designed a salvation – or better, has sent a Saviour – that meets my needs exactly.

In fact, grace has led me into the presence of God. It is in beholding him that I make progress. So 2 Corinthians 3:18, changed as we see Christ's glory; or 7:1, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. David is rebuked by Nathan for his sin against Bathsheba and Uriah, and the theme of the rebuke is grace: David had been given so much, but his actions tarnished God's goodness, treating it as if it weren't enough. When we sin, we are calling into question the great work of redemption, as if it is not enough to be redeemed, made a child of God, given a glorious hope!. Yet this very theme of God's grace becomes David's song of repentance: God is full of lovingkindness and great mercy. Astonishingly, the very reason David's sin is so horrid is the same reason it is not hopeless!

In Titus 2:11-12 I deny ungodly lusts because God's provision of grace is all I need. He knows how to take care of his own; I will submit to living soberly, righteously and godly in this present world – all the while looking for more (v.13) because God's rich giving has only begun!

THE TOOLS OF HOLINESS

This is another area of debate in sanctification: while nearly everyone would agree that we participate in holiness, the form of that participation is much discussed. There must be complete dependence on God's grace through Christ by the Spirit that leads to statements like John 15:5 – that without Him we can do nothing. But does that mean that talk of laborious effort is all wrong? Is holiness primarily surrender?

But there is also the responsibility to "perfect holiness" (2 Cor.7:1) echoed in Paul's exhortations to Titus to maintain good works (Titus 3:1,8). We must work out our salvation (Ph.2:12), run the race (Heb.12:1) and make every effort (Heb.12:14). Does this mean if we work hard enough we will be holy?

Jerry Bridges compares dependence and discipline with the two wings of a jet, and asks if we would rather lose the right wing or the left wing in flight. We exercise our life, but always in dependence on the Spirit. This connection between discipline and grace is seen in the expression "grace teaches us", as we have seen in Titus 2:14.

What tools are we to employ in holiness? That is, what tools does God give us to use in the strength that God provides?

1. The Role of Truth (the teaching of the Gospel) in Holiness

This is one of the key points Paul makes in *Titus*: the truth promotes godliness. But the content of good teaching is the Gospel of the grace of God. Our "fall-back" position is a merit-based approach. We would rather barter with God than submit to Him. Grace reminds us constantly of the only basis of our standing, and protects against a love-less and slavish attitude of duty. We make progress in holiness as we gratefully worship the Lord.

For this reason, Paul includes these summaries of the Gospel of grace in this very short letter (2:11-14; 3:4-7)! This is not mere lip-service, trying to give a Christian veneer to common ethics. Christianity is radically different in its whole approach to holiness in that it refuses to be reduced

²⁵John 14:15,21,23

to a mere moral code. It is always rooted in Christ and salvation.

The pattern in Titus is commonly used by Paul. It might be profitable to examine the structure of Ephesians in this connection: what themes of grace are found in the first three chapters that lead naturally to the exhortation of 4:1? The emphasis on election and predestination prevents us from thinking this is our idea; the blood of Christ keeps us from thinking that sin is no big problem, or that salvation was cheap and easy to provide; an inheritance sealed by the Holy Spirit helps us understand that the power that is at work is God's power, and that it aims at God's glory. All these truths contribute to the exhortation to "walk worthy".

Good teaching must aim at godliness. While it is true that it is in the nature of Scripture to promote godliness, it is not necessarily in our nature to recognize it!

In order to promote godliness, the truths we teach should have a clear focus on the glory of the Lord Jesus – which is linked with the Spirit's work in 2 Corinthians 3:18. This is not just that seeing Christ drives our gratitude; it is that Christ is the very definition of the godliness we are working towards. We need to focus on Christ to know what the goal is, because this, too, is not innate knowledge.

It is helpful to make specific links between aspects of God's grace and our conduct. When Paul wants to encourage the Cretans to abandon *cruel* conduct like malice, slander and hatred (Titus 3:1-3), he specifically singles out God's *kindness* towards us; when in writing to the Ephesians he wants to encourage forgiveness, he reminds us of redemption (Eph.4:32). Be kind, because these acts of kindness have been directed towards you.

Good teaching is repeated. It has always amazed me that shampoo bottles require instructions, but on many bottles there they are in startling simplicity: "1. Apply. 2. Rinse. 3. Repeat." So the nature of Christian teaching: keep it coming, go over the ground again (2:15; 3:1).

2. Sound Church Structure

If the truth that promotes godliness is the first tool of holiness, Paul expects it to be used in the context of a church that works. Titus was left there to set things in order, so that godliness might be encouraged and maintained.

a) *The Elders*

This structure begins with elders who promote godliness. Elders that promote godliness first of all believe, teach and defend the Gospel that promotes godliness (Titus 1:9-11). The aim of the Christian teacher is not to be a doctrinal innovator, but a faithful believer: "as he has been taught" – that is, the Gospel. They are to exhort, pointing to Christ. They are to defend against the challenges of unbelief against that Gospel.

But elders that promote godliness are also to be examples of godliness (1:5-7; 2:7-8). The lists of qualifications for leaders in the church are just mature versions of the demands made on all believers. Although Titus 2 starts out as a list of instructions for Titus to teach others, by verse 7 he is part of the list of people being taught! If the church is to be sound in the faith (1:13-14), then the elders are to hold the faithful word; if the church is to adorn the doctrine (2:10), then the elders are to be blameless.²⁶

Finally, elders that promote godliness are devoted to the people and the goal of God for his people. The requirements of 1:8, loving hospitality and the good, imply that personal concern. While there are tough cases²⁷, the first inclination to come in to Crete and "clean house" is tempered by love and concern.²⁸

b) *The "Learners"*

If it is proper to have elders committed to believing and teaching the faith, it is necessary to have church members who are eager to benefit from that truth because they value godliness. While there may be much to learn, we should already be convinced of the necessity of the Word. Paul is urging sharp rebukes (1:13), and a recognized authority of the Gospel (2:15; compare 3:10-11). These are not easy times for the church, and much work must be done: the elders must be devoted to the truth, and the people must receive the Word gladly. When I sit under the preaching of the Word, I am already convinced of the value of godliness. I welcome the reminders and accept the goals: I am eager to adorn the Gospel.

There are those who love discussion and theological debate; that is not the same as being motivated to learn for the sake of godliness. It is not

²⁶In fact, compare the details of the list in Titus 1 for elders with the more general requirements for the church members in ch.2: sober in 1:8 repeated for all classes in ch.2; not given to wine in 1:7 repeated in 2:2 for the older women, and so on.

²⁷See Titus 3:9-11

²⁸The gentleness of the apostle towards his opponents is legendary: the whole of 2 Corinthians is a study in loving patience; see also the exhortations in the equally troubling Ephesus, given to Timothy: 2 Tim.2:23-26; 4:1-2.

just loving pet themes: it is submitting to the Word with a goal in mind – to be like Christ.

Elders and people must understand that this does not mean the people are beholden to the elders. They relate directly to Christ. All believers know the Lord by definition – it is the New Covenant reality.²⁹ If you are looking to the elder to provide you with mysteries you could not otherwise discover, you have missed the point.³⁰ But properly understood, your response to the Word is your response to Christ. If the ministry is faithful to the Word, do not look down on it because the preacher is young or otherwise flawed in your sight!

Because it is a message of grace, the form must be that of grace. Titus is to reject violent overseers (1:7) – it does not magnify grace. Christian leadership is not patterned after the world’s system, but after the Servant of the Lord.³¹ In fact, the church is an institution that cannot operate on business models; it must work on the basis of Gospel realities. The people must obey those who rule over them – but the elders are not allowed to enforce that with violence or overbearing attitudes! The Word is the only tool the elder has to enforce his authority.

3. Church Family Life

The Gospel of Christ demands that we acknowledge other believers. It is not an individualistic program, in spite of the fact that we must individually believe. The “one another” commands of the New Testament show that there is a mutual responsibility in the successful completion of the course on the part of every runner.³²

Paul applies this mutual concern and care to progress in godliness as he writes to Titus. When he wrote to Timothy, he set up a pattern of true “tradition” – that is, to “pass on” the teachings received to capable teachers.³³ In *Titus*, he broadens the base of teacher: especially in the case of the women, the older women are to pass on the teaching to the younger women. It is not necessary for each generation of believer to re-invent the application of the Gospel in their circumstance.

We are to urge one another along; we serve as visible reminders of God’s watchfulness. But there is an additional thought: already Paul has warned the church against hurting the testimony of the Gospel if they stumble; but so might they hurt other believers who are following them.

There are many practical issues: do we spend time with each other? The exhortation to assemble has a purpose – not just to be present, but to encourage as the day approaches. If we are to teach one another, are we teachable in this context? It is one thing to be willing to learn from an appointed and recognized elder, but will we learn from each other? Have we learned the difference between meddling and encouragement? Are we growing enough in our understanding to be able to teach one another?³⁴

4. Maintaining Good Works

The place of good works has already been considered under the heading of the goal of holiness: they are the nuts and bolts of holiness as it were. But it is important to note more fully the attitude expressed towards these works: language like “zealous” or “eager” to do good works (2:14) or “maintaining” or being “devoted to” good works (3:8) shows a whole-hearted diligence to performing these things.

My argument here is that diligence in good works offers some help in holiness. For one thing, if we do the works that God created us to do (Eph.2:10) our time will be limited to devote ourselves to pursuits of the flesh: the Christian life, properly lived, is not a life of leisure.

Being careful to maintain good works requires us to maintain ourselves in good condition. Consider an Olympic athlete: in many disciplines, their event lasts less than 2 minutes, and yet they have trained for years for those 2 minutes. They have made many choices – nights out given up, donut shops driven by – in order to reach that goal. They persevered when they were tired, spurred on by faithful coaches. So devote yourself to this: be eager to do what is good in the light of grace. Intense focus on proper goals becomes a tool to keep our focus off of improper ones.

5. The Role of Hope:

²⁹See Jeremiah 31:31-34.

³⁰Balance 1 John 2:20-21, 26-27 with Eph.4:11-12.

³¹Compare Jesus’ teaching in Mark 10:42-45 with Peter’s explanation in 1 Peter 5:1-4.

³²See Mark 10:42-45; John 13:34-35; Hebrews 3:12-13; 10:24-25

³³2 Timothy 2:1-2

³⁴Compare Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 5:11-12.

a) *Hope defines the priorities of holiness: 2:13*

Paul urges the believers to concentrate on the coming of Christ. I am spending my time now in godliness, righteousness and sobriety, but one eye is always looking ahead. This keeps my focus on that which is acceptable to Him. “Looking for” or “waiting” for that blessed hope in Scripture implies longing – not just an expectation that it will happen, but eagerly waiting, since it is a blessed, glorious hope. A child who eagerly wants to swim might sleep the night before his first lesson in his bathing suit so that he is ready. I am always trying on my heavenly garments of righteousness to see how they will look on my wedding day!

Because that day is my focus, the basic priorities of my life do not change with the passing of time. Of course, the arenas where I display that holiness may change, but if I am young, I am already looking for His appearing; if I am old, there is still the devotion to good works right now.

The anticipation of the blessed hope also implies that this isn't it: so much ungodliness is directly related to discontent with my lot in this life, and the irritations of others against me – so the slaves not to steal, and the people not to be malicious, envious or hateful (2:10; 3:2-3).

b) *Hope establishes the fear of God, which is itself a tool of holiness*

Paul does not here specifically mention the fear of God in its relation to holiness, as he does in 2 Corinthians 7:1, but there is always an implied warning in thinking about the return of Christ. It is of course a blessed hope, but it is also a giving of account. The very appearance of the risen Lord struck fear even into John!³⁵ In other words, we pursue holiness because we know that we will be called on to see the Lord.

c) *Hope enables us to develop a proper perspective on trial, itself a tool of holiness*

It is interesting that this reference to hope follows shortly after a reference to slaves: the desire to escape human bonds was real enough. And yet the slave's conduct is not to be driven by the circumstance of trial, but by the blessed hope. Already Paul had reminded Titus that this eternal life comes from the God who cannot lie (1:2), and will tell them of the inheritance (3:7). They are to make their choices on the basis of what is to come.

Keep in mind that it is a certain hope: I can afford to lose everything in this life.³⁶ It is an eternal hope. It is a blessed hope, which may enable me to look with some sympathy and concern on those who are my oppressors. And because it is rooted in grace, I am encouraged that all God's dealings with me are of grace if I am in Christ – even behind the frowning providence there is a smiling face.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

I am still not sure exactly how to piece together all these strands into a coherent doctrine, but at least this much is clear: when the apostle wishes to encourage holiness in the lives of the Cretans, he makes it clear that they need to be (i) raised with Christ – having first died with Him, of course; they need to be (ii) regenerated and renewed by the Holy Spirit; and they need to be (iii) reminded! They need to devote themselves to the task, because Christ gave Himself for them that they might be devoted to the task. In a Christ-centred, Spirit-empowered way, they are to live in a manner sharply distinct from their world, and adorn the Gospel of Christ. It seems to me that Paul grounds their sanctification in their conversion, but it is worked out right now. The promise of the Father, the purpose of the Son and the power of the Spirit are woven tightly together to ensure their success.

To that end, God has given us everything we need: the new life won and applied, the tools that are suited for the job, and the unshakeable promises that assure us no effort for the Lord is wasted.

³⁵See Romans 13:11-12; 14:12 on the matter of accountability. Reference to John on Patmos: Rev.1. Also see 1 Cor.3:10-13.

³⁶As Habakkuk, Hab.3:17-19.

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