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South Africa

THE GRACE OF GOD TRAINS US TO LIVE GODLY LIVES

Titus 2:1–15 (key 2:11-12)

“For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age”

Yesterday we learned about what kind of lives we ought to live as believers. We also learnt about the Holiness of our God. Today’s passage is about the necessary ingredient to live a holy and godly life. What do we need in order to live a holy and godly life? Because our world has been influenced by self-indulgence, self-help programmes for good morals. More concerning is that even as Christians we find ourselves unable to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions. What can we do as believers to live godly and self-controlled lives without being legalistic? In this chapter the apostle Paul exhorts Titus to - discharge his office with respect to all sorts of persons, of every age, sex and condition. He exhorts him in general to insist in his public ministry on sound doctrine so that they grasp the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness. That it is the Grace of God that trains us to live Godly lives. It is my prayer that through this passage God’s grace may be revealed all the more. Amen!

Look at verse 1, “You, however, must teach what is appropriate to sound doctrine.” Titus was not to deviate from teachings of sound doctrine. It was urgent that he speak out because of rising false teaching in the churches of Crete. He wanted Titus to fully understand his responsibility because without holding everything accountable will ruin the nature of the gospel. He urged him to teach what is appropriate to sound doctrine. In verse 1b, “appropriate to sound doctrine” is literally “behaviour that goes with sound teaching”. Titus was to teach practical living that accorded with sound doctrine. His congregation was to live out their Christian experience according to biblical truth. Making the bible the only authoritative book for Christian living. Pure doctrine will produce strong Christians who will influence their community and overcome all kinds of deceptions.

From verses 2-4, Firstly, Paul exhorts Titus on how to instruct old men in the church to yield to sound doctrine. Look at verse 2, “Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance.” Generally, this could refer to men who are at least 40 years and older. Men are regarded as the heads of the family and have influence over other people as well as the congregation as a whole. And there are certain characteristics of maturity in older men that must align with what the bible teaches. So they should be good examples morally, ethically and spiritually. They should not be a burden, but a blessing. That the aged men be sober; not thinking that the decays of nature will justify any excess; but seeking comfort from nearer communion with God, not from any undue indulgence. Mature believers have a wider platform to share what God has done in their lives since they have spent a long time walking with the Lord (Ps 71:17). If they want to lead honourable lives in their older age, they must uphold biblical norms. They are to reject the recklessness, instability, and impetuosity characteristic of immature believers.

Secondly, Pauls exhorts Titus to teach older women and young men in verses 3-5, the older women are to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. The aim is to

live a godly life which requires old women to take seriously their actions which should be consistent with their faith. This means to practice the presence of God and to allow the sense of his presence to permeate their whole lives. In Cretan society, it was common for women to gossip about their neighbours or become alcoholics, behaviours that were inappropriate for mature, pious women. As we know, women have a great gift of talking with each other. When several godly women get together and discuss a problem, they can uncover much of what is hidden and get to the truth of a matter. It wasn’t Titus duty to instruct the young women rather the old women were to do this because they could better serve as examples of God’s ideals for young women. Older women were to challenge young women to cultivate judgement about certain things and help them to love their husbands and children above their careers. This teaching can be contrary to world point of view which teach that women they should consider their careers and dreams as first priority instead of making a home. Older women must live with reverence in order to support this teaching and make it easier for younger women to understand.

Thirdly from verses 6, Paul focuses Titus on young men, look at verse 6-8, “Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. 7 In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness 8 and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us”. Young men need to be sober-minded. Young men need to understand the principle of self-restrained because youth is rife with pleasure and foolishness-related temptations. Therefore, a sober-minded person has a common sense perspective on life, which makes it easier for godly attributes to manifest in their lives. Titus was instructed by Paul to make setting a good example for young men in Crete his top concern. He must live up to the values he instils in young men. Our redemption and God’s grace lead to these good actions, which are made visible to the outside world. In his teaching of God’s word, Titus was expected to uphold both formal and substantive integrity. Additionally, he must be serious in teaching the Bible and demonstrate sound, discourse that cannot be criticised. Speech in this context refers to both public and private discourse. So that his remarks cannot belittle our God. Ephe 4:29 says, “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen” (Ephe 4:29). The purpose of sound speech is to discredit opponents of Christianity and help build the body of believers to live godly and holy lives. Therefore, Paul urged Titus to live his life in a way that would prevent any legitimate challenge to his integrity. Amen!

From verses 9-10, deals with issues of the relationship between slaves and their masters. A major portion of the congregation in the first century was made up of slaves; today’s employees might be compared to them. Because many of them had previously held leadership positions in the conquered nations, slaves in the first century were frequently educated and accomplished in a variety of fields. The conditions of slaves varied greatly, from extreme destitution to high positions of control. How could they respect the truth of God? They must submit to their masters. Being obedient entails being submissive. They were held to a very high standard of excellence in carrying out their duties in the Lord’s name. Giving our boss a different opinion is perfectly acceptable in our society, but the goal here is to avoid conflict or cause blockage. Even if they get low or no pay, Christian slaves were not to steal or embezzle from their lord. But to show that they can be fully trusted. They had to show that they could be completely trusted. To make the message about God our Saviour appealing, they had to

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be obedient and trustworthy to their masters. The thought that God would save us from our sins should be attractive to those who do not know Christ. Amen!

Let us all read verse 11-12, "For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. 12 It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age." However, what is the basis for all the godly behaviour? The basis for godly behaviour is revealed in verses 11–15, it is God's Grace. We learn how to live a Christian life through grace. What is this grace? Look at verse 11 again, it says, this grace has appeared and offers salvation for all people. We are sinners and there is nothing in us and in this world that can save us from a life of sin to a life of godliness. However, God's grace offers salvation not to select people, but to all people. Now then, the basis of sound doctrine must be God's grace, not human effort, which so easily breeds legalism. By bringing Jesus into the world for the first time, God offers salvation to everyone (11).

Paul's use of the phrase "to all people" does not imply that all people are saved, but rather that salvation is available to all nations and peoples, regardless of gender, height, rank, caste, or skin colour. It also does not exclude great sinners. Paul, previously Saul, persecuted Christians, but God showed pity on him and on all of us. This means that in this context, grace refers to Jesus' grace that offers salvation from a life of sin to a life of godliness. God's grace that gives salvation means that man is saved not by his own efforts, but by God's love and mercy. Only by God's grace can we truly live sensibly, holy and godly lives. Not only do we receive salvation through God's grace to live transformed lives. God's grace is also a great teacher. Let us all read verse 12 once again, "It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age." In this context, the word "teaches" actually means "trains." We typically consider God's grace as the forgiveness of sins extended to those who are undeserving. It is something we freely accept and simply enjoy. This is correct. However, there is a risk of abusing this grace by failing to appreciate God's intention in bestowing it on us. God's grace is greater and more powerful than we realize. God's grace is an active power that moulds us into godly people. Amen!

This grace is centered on Jesus' task of redeeming men from wickedness, purifying men from the filthiness of sin, and equipping men to do what is good. God's grace teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and earthly desires. In many ways, the Bible encourages us to put our sinful nature to death. Romans 6:13 says, "Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but offer yourself to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as instrument of righteousness". This is all possible because of God's grace. God's grace is like a mentor who continuously helps us to say no to ungodliness and earthly desires, so we may live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age. This also means that, living a godly and holy life is a result of God's grace in our lives. It is a fruit born out of having experienced God's grace in our hearts. Without God's grace it is impossible to produce holiness and a godly life.

In 2017, when I was a first-year student at NUL. My main goal was to keep using education to better my life. In my adolescence, I never imagined myself to be a believer because I used to be critical of those who did, making them

feel horrible about themselves. But once I got to college, I realized that the things I was running away from were actually university students' lifestyles. I wanted to conform to these ideals because I felt adrift. I realized at that moment that I was unable to do it on my own. Thirst for God's things and to dwell among believers appeared with greater desires. Greater desires to live among believers and to be thirsty for God's things became apparent. Before our first semester examinations, which were at the end of 2017, I met shepherdess Sarah on campus with my friend Hlompho. She invited us to a bible study, which somehow we accepted. We studied Ezra 10 and was deeply moved by Ezra 10:10-11 which reads, "Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, "You have been unfaithful; you have married foreign women, adding to Israel's guilt. 11 Now honor a the Lord, the God of your ancestors, and do his will. **Separate yourselves from the peoples around you and from your foreign wives.**" Verse 11 really struck deep in my heart, I felt the lord tell me to separate myself from the people around me. I came to the realization that I was a sinner in dire need of Christ. I had a very stony heart and was not willing to accept or be moved by anything associated with my cultural beliefs which I learned from my parents, especially those of ancestral worship. However, God's grace worked within me and changed me. I could separate myself, firstly by confessing my sin and second accepting Jesus Christ as my lord and saviour. God's kindness and affection for me in Christ Jesus were both abundantly bestowed upon me. I can now really say it was by God's grace that I even agreed to study the Bible. The desire and willingness to live a godly life began to develop at that point, marking the beginning of the Christian journey and the transformation of my life.

When I was a third-year student at NUL 2019, I was among the most outstanding students in statistics modules. Most people came to me for aid all the time, and I always offered it without hesitation. One of the risky aspects was that some girls sought help with the intention of approaching me. But God was able to help me see and escape from that scenario because there is scripture that always comes to mind anytime the devil tries to offer something that he thought I would buy, from Roman 12:2, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is –his good, pleasing and perfect will". This verse is really God's revealed grace to me. His grace assisted me to live self-controlled, upright, and godly life. Otherwise, I'm not sure where I'd be without God's grace. And there were three people with whom I used to talk about schoolwork; they became disturbed by the manner I was doing things because limiting such possibilities was unusual for a student university. They assumed I would do the same because of the other Christian university students who live parallel lives. Because of the grace of God, I was able to devote myself to God, His holy spirit in me assisted me in overcoming such temptations. I was able to have an impact on the lives of my friends around me, and some changed and dedicated their lives to God as a result. One of them after graduating in 2021 got married to a church lady dedicated to God. And he was giving me his testimony this year. Amen!

In conclusion, this passage teaches us about God's grace. That firstly, we have received salvation a transformed life because of God's grace. Secondly, God's grace teaches us to say no to ungodliness and live upright godly lives. Our Lord Jesus is will return one day, when Christ returns, we anticipate seeing the splendour of Christ revealed. I pray that when Jesus comes we may not be ashamed to see him, but rather His grace may have trained us to be mature in holiness and godliness. Amen!