Eternity Daily Bible Study No. 270

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TITUS 2:11-16

11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, 12 teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, 14 who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works.

15 Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you.

The emphasis on applied Christianity continues – Paul says that reason Christ has come is: "that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works." Simply put – to change us from bad guys to good guys. You can't live a lawless life and say you are in conformity with the gospel.

Paul says that grace teaches us to be holy. "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, 12 TEACHING us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age," Grace does not allow loose living. The purpose of grace is holiness. Grace gives stumbling sinners the time, the strength and the opportunity to increase in holiness. Grace is God instructing us to stop sinning, to deny ungodly lusts and to live a godly life "in the present (evil) age".

Thus grace is NOT a "get out of jail free" card without any moral requirements. Grace comes through faith and is closely associated with repentance. We don't merit grace, we don't earn it by repenting, in fact grace leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4) but repenting is required as a fruit of grace. When the work of grace in the human heart is complete we will find a well-instructed disciple, holy in all his or her ways, and without any love of sin. In other words grace makes us like Jesus – that is holy - and any gospel that claims that grace removes the need for holy living is a false gospel.

You cannot read the above verses without sensing Paul's incredible single-minded focus. Christlikeness is everything. It permeates all of Paul's prayers, all his epistles, all the groaning of his apostolic heart. in these verses the Christian is to be holy in their attitude to the past, the present and the future. Firstly they are to be holy in what they put behind them – "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts"; Next the Christian is to be holy in their present daily lifestyle – "we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age"; and thirdly we are to be holy in our future hope – "looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ," (Now that would make a good three-pointer for Sunday morning!)

We cannot let verse 13 slip by without comment: "our great God and Savior Jesus Christ". It is literally rendered "the great God and Savior of us Jesus Christ." A statement as plain as any that Jesus Christ is indeed God. Jesus is not just a nice Jewish man in a beard and sandals, He is "the great God" – and through Him all things were made that were made. (Colossians 1:15-20, John

1:1-14) We need to remember that Jesus is God and God is like Jesus, and God the Father is perfectly revealed in Him (Hebrews 1:1-3). Thus, contrary to rumor, God is not a grumpy old guy with a beard on a throne with the nice Jesus as the good-guy side-kick. Jesus is God - and God is as nice as Jesus -and loves us.

Verse 11 could start a few theological hares running "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men." Does this mean that all are saved and thus give ground for universalism? Probably it just means that the grace of God has appeared to Gentiles as well as to Jews. The grace of God is no longer confined to a particular tribe, ethnic group or nationality. Before the cross all mankind knew God's general grace – in sending His rain on the just and the unjust – but only the Jews had any access to His saving grace. But since Christ heaven has been open to all and His special saving grace has been open to every person on earth. The saving grace of God is now available to all men and women though all do not take hold of it. This saving grace is of course mediated through the Savior, which the next verses make quite clear is Jesus Christ alone.

Paul seems to put a dampener on the view of Spirit-filled Christians as "happy hippies" by insisting that "we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age" - which sounds very serious stuff indeed. Paul is insisting on the presence of definite moral fiber in the Christian believer. Christianity is not a justification for irresponsible living or for slack moral boundaries. There is to be a cutting away of the world and an ardent adoption of godliness.

We are to be a pure people – for God's aim is to "purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works." Like the TV reality show The Apprentice where Donald Trump whittles own 16 young people, testing them to find a business leader, God tests and re-tests, forges and batters us and puts us through the fire so we can become pure and special. God wants a certain kind of Christian – one that is "zealous for good works", not just zealous for blessings! Being zealous for good works means, in Jesus words, someone that "seeks first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33) and who thinks constantly about how to do God's will in the real world.

Good works do not earn us our place in Heaven; rather they are the outcome of Heaven in us. If Heaven dwells in you, then you will zealous for good works. When the grace of God that brings salvation does its works in us, and makes us a new creation, then that new nature will be eager to do the will of God.

Ephesians 2:8-10: For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Lastly we see the proper exercise of apostolic authority: "Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you." Godliness is to be firmly insisted on, not just mildly recommended. Titus was to speak with the same force that Jesus would use when insisting on holy living – no more and no less. Authority is good when it is used to enforce God's rules, it goes badly wrong when it is used to enforce personal whims. Those of us in ministry are not to quail before the critics and the liberals. We are not to let anyone despise us - even the "high and mighty". We can safely insist that our churches forsake worldliness – because the Scriptures tell us to insist on that. God's word is never put to a vote and wins no popularity contest. His standards are simply true and required.

[PS: Please pray for Minda and I was we have moved from Manila to Los Angeles and this settling in period has been complicated.]

Blessings,

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