

“The Rules of Life”

Devotional Reading: Psalm 37:27-40 **Background Scripture:** Titus 1:1-3; 2:11-15

Titus 1:1–3 (NIV)

¹ Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness—² in the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, ³ and which now at his appointed season he has brought to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior,

Titus 2:11–15 (NIV)

¹¹ 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, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, 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.

¹⁵ These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you.

LESSON AIMS

- **Learning Fact:** To emphasize the truth of the gospel and to encourage lives of holiness.
- **Biblical Principle:** To understand that good works flow from a life filled with God’s Spirit.
- **Daily Application:** To seek ways to live godly lives, even in an ungodly culture.

INTRODUCTION

Struggle for Godliness

A glance through the news would make it seem like the church is consistently plagued by ungodly behavior from both without and within. Recent scandals of greed, abuse, and misuse of power remind us that the church is not immune from ungodly behavior.

But the people of God have always struggled against ungodliness. The church has sought ways to live godly lives, even in an ungodly culture. This issue is as much an issue in the twenty-first century as it was in the first century.

LESSON CONTEXT

Paul’s letter to Titus comes from a part of the New Testament called the Pastoral Epistles. Whereas Paul wrote other letters to specific groups of believers in particular locations (examples: Galatians 1:1, 1 Thessalonians 1:1), the Pastoral Epistles were written to particular individuals: Timothy (1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2) and Titus. The latter was a church leader Paul designated “my true son in our common faith” (Titus 1:4).

The letter to Titus involved events that occurred after the conclusion of the book of Acts. By the time Paul wrote to Titus, the apostle had been released from his imprisonment in Rome. Paul had found an occasion to visit the island of Crete. While visiting, Paul evangelized and started some churches. However, Paul left some unfinished things to straighten out in the churches (see Titus 1:5).

Paul’s chief aim in writing to Titus was to authenticate the work of Titus on Crete. Titus was Paul’s representative there. He would undoubtedly encounter opposition to his leadership there since he was not a native. Paul’s epistle to him would add authority to his presence.

In addition, Paul found it necessary to advise Titus of specific instructions which he was to convey to the churches of Crete, the Mediterranean island. The believers of Crete had banded together to worship and pray but had not been organized into proper local assemblies. They had no indigenous leadership. Thus, Titus was to instruct them in the basic

structure of authority in the local church. He would appoint elders in various churches and dictate the qualification of those in leadership positions (see Titus 1:5-9).

Paul knew this was necessary because the church in Crete was troubled by people who professed to know God but lived demonstrably different lives (see Titus 1:16). Such people had deceived others, disrupted the community (1:10–11), and brought needless controversy to the church (3:9–10).

The current lesson reveals Paul’s solution to this challenging situation. What the church in Crete needed was “sound doctrine” (Titus 1:9; 2:1) and training in godliness (see 1:1; 2:12). This is the nitty-gritty of helping believers mature into godly men and women. Paul wanted Titus to grow the church by grounding them in the truth of the gospel and encouraging lives of holiness.

The Messenger: Titus 1:1–3

The common way to begin a letter in Paul’s day was with an identification of author by name and title. Paul did not vary from this form. Paul identifies himself as a “servant” of God. Here Paul doesn’t see himself just as a worker (servant), but one who gives himself wholly to another’s will. This was Paul’s view of himself in relationship to God and ought to be that of every Christian. His self-description reflects his humility—a required attitude for a leader of Christ’s church (see Matthew 20:26–28). Paul was chosen of *Jesus Christ* to be an apostle. What a humble and high position he held at the same time. He was an apostle “to further” the faith, of *God’s elect* and revealed truth (to strengthen God’s people). The church had to try those who “say they are apostles” (see Revelation 2:2). Paul could stand the test.

Through the letter’s introduction, Paul demonstrated humility, affirmed his allegiance to God, and reminded Titus of his apostolic mission. With regards to *godliness* (verse 1b of today’s lesson), some Cretans were known for their ungodly behavior (see Titus 1:10–13). Therefore, it was appropriate for Paul to address such behavior from the start of his letter. Paul expected that Titus would take on the mission of leading the church in Crete to maturity through the gospel message.

1. How did the Apostle Paul characterize himself in the opening of his letter to Titus? (Titus 1:1)

Paul says that God’s plan of salvation was not an afterthought (also see 1 John 1:1-4).

For Paul, *hope* is an assurance because the subject of this hope was Jesus Christ. Jesus is life, and He has life in himself (John 11:25; 1 John 5:20). God has promised that people can experience *eternal life* when they enter into a saving relationship with Him (John 17:3).

This promise is sure because it comes from the all-perfect, all-powerful God. He is trustworthy and faithful and *does not lie* (see 1 Samuel 15:29; Hebrews 6:18). Further, it is rooted in God’s eternal nature. He gives life and desires to be in a relationship with His creation. Even when sin and death entered the world, God had prepared a way of salvation through Christ Jesus *before the beginning of time* (see 2 Timothy 1:9).

2. What did Paul say about God’s promise of eternal life? (Titus 1:2)

God reveals His message through “preaching.” The underlying Greek word translated *preaching* conveys the idea of both the act of proclaiming the good news and the content of that proclamation. Part of Paul’s task as an apostle was to commit himself according to *the command of God our Savior* to proclaim that salvation had come in and through Christ Jesus. Paul related everything in his ministry to the Word of God. His calling and his preaching depended on faith in Christ. He wanted Titus to grasp this fact and to make the Word of God a priority in his ministry (see verse 4, not in today’s lesson). Throughout all three of the Pastoral Epistles there is also an emphasis on teaching the Word of God. Local churches ought to be “Bible schools” where the Word of God is taught systematically and in a practical way.

3. How did God manifest His Word? (Titus 1:3)

What Do You Think?

In what ways has the preaching of the gospel in your local church deepened your love for God?

Digging Deeper

How will you increase your exposure to God's Word and its teaching in your daily life?

The Message: Titus 2:11–15

The first half of Paul's letter addressed several needs that faced the church at Crete: godly leadership in the church (Titus 1:5–9), a rebuke of ungodly behavior (1:10–16), and sound doctrine that leads to godly behavior (2:1–10). Now in this second section of the letter (2:11–15), Paul explains the reason *for* that way of living.

Having described how believers should live, Paul now explains the reason for that way of living: *the grace of God*. Such grace is a gift given to us by God for our justification and *salvation* (see 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:7). Grace is necessary for salvation because, without it, we are incapable of attaining salvation by our own merit. Grace is not deserved or earned. Instead, it is based exclusively on the love of God (see Ephesians 2:4–10).

The underlying Greek word for *appeared* shows up only four times in the New Testament, two of which are in the letter to Titus (here and in Titus 3:4). The word carries the connotation of light appearing and shining in darkness (compare its usage in Luke 1:79 and Acts 27:20). The grace of God, revealed in Christ Jesus, has *appeared* to bring salvation to a sin-darkened world (see John 1:9; Colossians 1:13). The gift of grace is available to all people (see 1 Timothy 2:3–4), but not everyone will accept it. For those who do receive this gift, their lives will bear the fruit of godliness (see Ephesians 5:8–20).

Again, the emphasis is on *grace* – God's lavish favor on undeserving sinners...God's grace had to bring salvation to lost mankind. This salvation was not discovered by sinners; it appeared to them via the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God in His grace sent His Son to redeem those in the bondage of sin."

4. Why did Paul say was the basis of obedience to God? (Titus 2:11)

What Do You Think?

How will you share the message of God's grace and salvation with someone this upcoming week?

Digging Deeper

How will you tailor your communication of that message to have maximum appeal and persuasiveness (perhaps share your own story)?

Our initial response to God's grace must be *to say "No" to ungodliness*. God's grace has a formative effect on His people. Not only has this grace appeared for our salvation, but it has become our instructor, and by the power of the Holy Spirit *teaches us* the habits of righteousness and godly living (see John 14:26).

While in the world the believer is not of the world and our desires are not to be set on this world system and its values. Rather, we should *live self-controlled*. The same word in different forms is in verses 2, 4, 5, 6 of this chapter. *Upright*, or in simple terms, just do right no matter what others may do! *Godly* means in a godly manner, not "holier than thou" but with true piety (virtue). "In this present age." The gospel is not a pie in the sky, but it is for the here and now, and it teaches how to really live and not just to exist, as the world does.

5. What should be our initial response to God's grace? (Titus 2:12)

What Do You Think?

In what ways are you attentive to the voice of the Holy Spirit to lead you into godliness?

Digging Deeper

What person from the Bible, or Christian mentor, do you see as a godly role model for you in this regard?

Many unbelievers dread what the future may bring (see 1 Thessalonians 4:13). Believers, however, have a *blessed hope* of Christ's return and eternal life in the presence of God (see 2:19; Titus 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:10). Even though we may experience trials and suffering on earth, we can take hope that God will be faithful to His promises and bring redemption and renewal to us (see Romans 8:18–21; Philippians 3:20–21). This hope will be fulfilled at *the appearing of the glory* of Christ (see Matthew 16:27). At His return, we will experience glorious renewal and resurrection life! This one true hope is an expectation of the believer seeing Jesus as He is and being like Him (1 John 3:2). How the heart of the believer longs for that day (2 Timothy 4:8).

This very same grace will again be on display at the return of our *great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ*. As a result, we are to have lives of holiness and godliness in eager anticipation (see Colossians 3:4–5; 1 John 2:28).

6. What hope is in store for God's people? (Titus 2:13)

What Do You Think?

How would you respond to someone who says that the return of Jesus Christ is inconsequential for a believer?

Digging Deeper

How do Matthew 24:14; 25:31–46; 1 Corinthians 1:4–9; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 4:15–18; and Hebrews 10:24–25 inform your response?

Believers eagerly await Christ's glorious return, and our hope is based on what He accomplished for us in His first coming to earth. God's grace was displayed when Jesus *gave himself for us* on the cross. In Jesus' giving of himself, He voluntarily did something that no one else could: rescue us from the grasp of sin and death and give us life (see Galatians 1:4; 2:20).

As God's redeemed people, we wait for Christ's return and the resurrection of the body. In this season of waiting, we should become *eager* to do *good* works that result from God's grace (see Ephesians 2:8–10). These good works flow from our love (see Romans 12:9–21; 1 Corinthians 13) that results from a life filled with God's Spirit (see Galatians 5:13–26; Colossians 3:12–15).

7. What was the purpose of Christ's self-giving? (Titus 2:14)

What Do You Think?

How will you live differently in light of the knowledge of your redemption and purification?

Digging Deeper

How will you make time to do the good works that result from this status?

Paul concludes this section of his letter by imploring Titus to take action to encourage people to lead holy lives. First and foremost, Titus needed to address the problems at Crete. God had set Paul apart to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ (Acts 9:15; 26:15–18; Galatians 1:11–16). From this position of authority, Paul encouraged Titus to strengthen the faith of the believers.

Titus would *encourage* other believers to do good works indicative of their life in Christ. Encouragement was an aspect of Paul's mission (see Colossians 1:28), and so would be the mission of Titus.

Verse 15 is the third time in this letter that Paul uses the underlying Greek word translated here as *rebuke* (see also Titus 1:9, 13). Ungodly behavior had abounded in Crete (see 1:12). Therefore, Titus would have to call it out and offer a correction for godliness (compare Galatians 6:1; Ephesians 5:11).

Titus could exhort and rebuke because of the *authority* that Paul had given him. There was a specific “chain of command” in this letter. Titus received authority from Paul, who had received his power as “a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ” (Titus 1:1). As Titus boldly and confidently proclaimed the gospel, he followed in the footsteps of Paul.

The command *do not let anyone despise you* is very similar to Paul’s command to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:12. Although there is no mention of Titus’s age, he was likely younger than Paul. Titus could have confidence that his words to the believers in Crete were authoritative and valuable for their growth in godliness.

8. What did Paul urge Titus to do? (Titus 2:15)

CONCLUSION

The Gift of Grace

When we feel burdened by our failures and struggles, we can take hope because of the good news that the grace of God has arrived. It has come in Christ Jesus. Christ’s giving of Himself has redeemed and purified us. Therefore, we have hope of eternal life—a hope anchored in God’s saving gift. God’s grace is a gift to humanity.

God’s gift teaches us to live godly lives and to seek Christlike behavior. We live in this manner as we wait for the blessed hope of the coming of Christ Jesus!

PRAYER

God, our Savior, we thank You for the gift of grace that has appeared in Your Son, Jesus Christ. Thank You for Your gift of salvation and the hope that we have because of it. By the power of Your Spirit, help us to live godly and pure lives. In the name of Your Son, Jesus. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

We have a “blessed hope!”

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

Next week’s lesson is “**The Washing of Regeneration,**” where Paul continues to explain how to be attentive to the Holy Spirit, as well as how to distinguish between profitable and unprofitable conversations. Study Titus 3:3-11.