

JESUS DIED TO MAKE US SELF-CONTROLLED

A Sermon on Titus 2:1–15

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In 1:1 we are told that Paul wrote Titus “for the sake of the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness.” This, too, is why I proclaim these words today. I care about your faith and want you to embrace what God defines as true and right and beautiful. Paul also wrote Titus “in the hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began and at the proper time manifest in his word” (Tit 1:2). I preach today with your eternity in mind, knowing that without holiness “no one will see the Lord” (Heb 12:14).

We focus today on Tit 2:1–15. The passage has four parts:

1. The call to proclaim what accords with sound doctrine (2:1)
2. The content to proclaim for various ages, genders, and positions (2:2–10)
3. The reason to proclaim in relation to Christ’s saving work (2:11–14)
4. The reassertion of the call to insist on these things among the churches (2:15)

Let’s begin with the call and reassertion of the call that frame the whole.

The Call to Proclaim What Accords with Sound Doctrine (2:1, 15)

“But as for you [Titus], teach what accords with sound doctrine” (2:1). “Sound” expresses wholeness and health, and healthy doctrine is teaching that is free from spiritual error. It’s that which, as it says in 1:1, aligns with “the truth, which accords with godliness.” In 1:10–11, Paul says, “There are many who are insubordinate, empty-talkers and deceivers, ... [who] must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach.” In contrast to these false teachers, Titus must provide these same families with healthy teaching as revealed in God’s word. Indeed, according to 2:15, Titus must “declare these things” and “exhort and rebuke with all authority.” “No one” should disregard God’s word, so may God grant us ears to hear today.

The Content to Proclaim for Various Ages, Genders, and Positions (2:2–10)

Healthy teaching leads to healthy living that accords with godliness. Titus is to direct his teaching toward several groups in the churches. With clear distinctions between male and female roles, he addresses:

1. Older men (2:2)
2. Older women and through them younger women (2:3–4)
3. Younger men impacted by Titus's example (2:5–8)
4. Bond servants (2:9–10)

This morning, time does not permit us to consider Paul's instruction to bond-servants. Indeed, in his words to the various age groups, I have decided to focus on only a single quality, but it is the one characteristic he explicitly expects of all men and women, old and young. That characteristic is "self-control." Let's begin in 2:2 with the older men.

Older Men (2:2)

These are not necessarily the official elders in the church but are any males advanced in age. In addressing older men, Paul clarifies what younger men are to aspire for and what younger women will pray their husbands will become. We have older men in this room today, and I urge you to assess your life and character through these reminders of what "accords with godliness" (1:1).

We read, "Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness." While translations vary, we are targeting term three, which the ESV renders "self-control." This is not the same word listed at the end of the fruits of the Spirit in Gal 5:22–23. Whereas that term expresses restraint of emotions, impulses, and desires, this term relates to thinking wisely and living sensibly with moderation. The self-controlled person is prudent and thoughtful, avoiding extremes and always living in his means. Paul expects older men to have learned to discern what is best at given times and to live accordingly.

When returning home from a long day at work, the godly older man consciously considers what is needed when he walks in the door. You resist the temptation to simply sit if your wife needs help with supper or needs to talk or needs you to help the kids with homework. The self-controlled man is conscientious at work and handles his finances well, recognizing that responsible headship demands anticipating the future—not only retirement but the cost of replacing old vehicles or household tools. He, thus, does not automatically spend money but recognizes his stewardship. The older man should plan and purpose how to care for aging parents and aging children, and he should appreciate all the strengths and wisdom and skill that his wife brings to managing the household well. The self-controlled man is wise in his leading and sustained in his dependence. He guides his family in godliness and prioritizes without compromise

gathering for worship with the saints. He chooses to spend time with God, knowing that apart from Jesus he can accomplish nothing that will last. He is quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. His life bears witness to a sustained hope in God that allows him to be steady, even when life's storms come. Older men, I exhort you to be self-controlled in accordance with sound doctrine.

Older Women and through Them Younger Women (2:3–5)

In Christ's body, every member has a function, whether male or female. Titus is to urge the older women to be "reverent in behavior." There is a verbal link to what is in accord with or suitable with sound doctrine in 2:1. To be reverent in behavior is to align one's life with that which is fitting of a holy woman, endowed with a priestly calling of displaying God's greatness through word and deed.

After giving two specific sins that are not in accord with a holy lifestyle, Paul stresses that women reverent in behavior are those who "teach what is good and so train the young women" (2:3–4). I focus here because the verb translated "train" is related to the term "self-controlled." For an older woman to train a younger woman is to instill within her a pattern of wise-thought or sensibility that has first been enjoyed by the older woman. As Paul says elsewhere, "I desire ... that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control" (1 Tim 2:8–9). The older woman teaches what is "good" or "beautiful," not as a hypocrite but as one who can truly say, "Follow me as I follow Christ." The self-controlled wisdom that measures her decisions, her words, and her actions is now through her teaching an instrument of training as she expresses her own reverent behavior.

She is to train "the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled [there's our word], pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, so that the word of God may not be reviled." Failure to embrace God's definition of womanhood opens the door for outsiders to criticize God's Word, for you end up inaccurately bearing witness to what it means to follow God. And for the sake of this morning, that means older women and younger women alike are to pursue self-control.

Right after indicating his assumption that young women will be married and after stressing the need to love their families as the dominant sphere of their ministry, Paul calls young women to have self-control, being measured, balanced, and wise. How many are the responsibilities of godly women, old or young, and how much sensibility is needed to carry out her various tasks. Reflecting on the "excellent wife's" godliness through her lifetime, the sage in Prov 31 tells us that she worked hard with her hands and was diligent. She provided food for her family and served the needy. She multiplied income, spoke with wisdom, and taught

kindness. This is a humble, strong, wise, and skilled woman who used her talents and strengths for the good of the family and God's glory. And with such responsibilities and such a high calling, how vitally important is measured, healthy reason. Of such a self-controlled woman, the sage declares, "The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain" (v. 11). She is a woman who "fears the LORD" and is "to be praised" (v. 30). Coming back to Titus 2, so "that the word of God may not be reviled," I urge you, ladies, to let God define for you what is beautiful, what is good, and what is right. Pursue a life of self-control.

Younger Men Impacted by Titus's Example (2:6–8)

Finally, Titus must urge the younger men to pursue one thing—"self-control" (2:6). While this quality was one of many that Titus was to urge women and older men to pursue, for young men it is everything. Paul recognizes the challenge young men face in living sensibly with control of one's thoughts and actions, and he focuses all his attention here.

With Titus, I urge both college and seminary men to guard your minds, your eyes, your ears, your hands. Be measured and wise in what you watch, how you spend your money, and how you spend your time. When you are with others, be self-controlled in your speech, and when you are in private, live as if Jesus is with you, for he is. Do not suppress the truth, as if God will not take account of every deed and every thought. Be sensible, seeking to honor God in how you treat others, including young women. To be "self-controlled" here means to keep your head in the game, in your studies, in your job, and in your family. You have one charge: be self-controlled. Wisely control your passions, your spending patterns, your diet, your exercise, your devotion life, your tongue, your eyes, your thoughts. Prioritize what is good. Give time to God's Word, time to prayer, time to corporate worship, knowing that such things are right. Look for a godly wife who is seeking to fulfill God's call for young women, and do not compromise. And look for godly older men who can model biblical manhood for you, and seek their mentoring. You must control yourself in wisdom. This teaching accords with sound doctrine and is your pattern for godliness.

The Reason to Proclaim in Relation to Christ's Saving Work (2:11–14)

Why? Why must Titus urge things, and why must we seek self-control? Titus must urge men and women of all ages and social classes to pursue self-control and all the other virtues *because* ("for") "the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people" (2:11). In this passage God's saving grace appears (2:11), instructs (2:12), and gives hope (2:13), and all of this is by Jesus Christ (2:14).

God's Saving Grace Has Appeared (2:11)

“Grace” expresses a positive or favorable gift from God, and in 2:11 this grace bears a saving nature. This grace appeared in Christ’s first’s coming and is available to every believer today. As Paul says in 1:4: “Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.” Right now, you enjoy this saving grace.

God’s grace bears a saving quality for all people—that is, people of all sorts, regardless of age, gender, or class. For Paul, salvation has three tenses. “By grace you *have been saved*” (Eph 2:8)—past tense. This is the grace of justification, that Paul speaks of in 3:7: “so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” Yet the grace that justifies will also glorify, and we have hope of eternal life because salvation is not only past but future: “Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more *shall we be saved* by him from the wrath of God” (Rom 5:9). We have been saved from sin’s penalty, and we will be saved from sin’s presence.

Yet even now in the present time, those in Christ are being saved from sin’s power. Jesus’s blood purchased power not only to justify but also to sanctify. Paul says in 1 Cor 1:18, “The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are *being saved* it is the power of God.” God’s grace has appeared bringing salvation past, present, and future for you and me, and this reality should motivate us to battle for self-control, confident that the one who raised Jesus from the dead is able to give us victory by his grace. But how does he do it?

God's Saving Grace Trains Us to Live (2:12)

Notice next that God’s saving grace is active, “training us” to live in ways pleasing to God (2:12). If you are a Christian, you have the most able personal trainer in the world, and he will never leave you or stop working good for you. God sent his saving grace in Jesus not only to educate us on what is true (e.g., Acts 7:22; 22:3) but to guide and shape us for doing what is right (e.g., 1 Cor 11:32; 1 Tim 1:20; 2 Tim 2:25; Heb 12:10). By “training us,” God’s grace develops our skill and our practice of discipline that enables us to live responsibly and make appropriate decisions.

The main purpose of the training is that we might live in ways pleasing to God; “renouncing” is part of the necessary means toward this living. God’s grace, thus, trains us “so that, having renounced ungodliness and worldly passions, we might live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age” (Tit 2:12).

“Renouncing ungodliness and worldly passion.” “Renounce” is a strong verb. We see it in 1:16 where those who are unbelieving and defiled by things of the world “profess to know God, but they *deny* him by their works.” So, God says,

“They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.” Regardless of what you profess with your lips, do you deny God by your works? Are you renouncing him, or are you renouncing sin? Using the same word, Paul told Timothy, “If we *deny* [God], he will *deny* us” (2 Tim 2:12). Yet Paul is telling Titus, “God’s grace has appeared not only to forgive you but to make you faithful.”

There is no holiness without denial, so we must renounce “ungodliness and worldly passions.” Such qualities were part of the old man in Adam, who was crucified with Christ and is now dead (Rom 6:6; Eph 4:22; Col 3:9); don’t resuscitate him. “Ungodliness” refers to a failure by word or deed to properly revere, reflect, resemble, or represent God as those made in his image. “Worldly passions” are desires for things God forbids or that are unwise in your present context. As a believer, everywhere you go, you bear God’s name, so don’t bear it in vain. How easy it is to speak and act in ways that mispresent our professed allegiance to God. How easy for you or me to lust after impurity or crave unhealthy things. Yet we are to “renounce” such sins, and by doing this we are empowered to live in a new way.

Having denied a place for “ungodliness and worldly passion,” we now are empowered to live “self-controlled and upright and godly lives in the present age.” “Godly” refers to properly revering, reflecting, resembling, and representing God in word and deed. “Upright” refers to character, thought, or behavior that aligns with God’s definition of right-order, wherein he is at the top. By his grace shown in Christ, God is working to straighten our spiritual posture so that it aligns with his purpose; this is the life of uprightness. Yet the first quality of life that Paul stresses God’s grace is working to see in us is “self-control” or “sensibility.”

You may say, “My sin is too big, too besetting, too beastly; I can’t beat it.” How strong is your God? Does this text not declare that the reason Titus is to call both old and young, men and women to self-control is because God’s saving grace has appeared. The saving grace of God is here to train you to think and act wisely. His grace precedes your pursuit. The text does not say, “Be self-controlled so that God can be on your side.” No! It says that God is already one hundred percent on your side, and his saving grace that has declared you right is also here to train you in godliness and to make you self-controlled.

And with this grace, you can be the same person on a date as you are at church. By God’s grace, what you do on the internet can be just as pure as what you do in devotions. The way you talk to your parents can be as wholesome as the way you talk to your pastors. As Christians, God’s grace trains us so that, having said, “No,” to ungodliness and worldly passions, we are empowered to honor God with our purchases, our dress, our driving, our media engagement, and our

friendships. Whether studying or singing, jogging or blogging, texting or talking, God's grace helps us live. Don't renounce your God; don't renounce his grace.

And all this help comes to us in *this present age*. Paul is not talking about perfection overnight but a true progression in holiness over a lifetime. When we encounter God's grace in Christ, we gain a new direction away from sin toward God. Do not be like those who profess to know God in the light but who deny him in the night by their works. God's saving grace is great; you can fight for joy in God because he is for you, not against you. If you truly know God, you have the greatest saving force in the universe working for your holiness.

God's Saving Grace Supplies Hope (2:13)

Along with pardon and power, God's saving grace purchased promises, and these promises motivate our present pursuit of holiness. What we hope for tomorrow changes who we are today (2 Pet 1:4). If you remember Jesus's promise that the pure in heart will see God (Matt 5:8), and if you really want to see him, it will change what you look at on the internet or how you think about a purchase. God's promises are part of his means of grace to help us grow in godliness (2 Pet 1:4). This is why Paul adds that those living for God are "waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." The text refers to Jesus as "the great God," stressing his power and authority over all things. Yet he is also our Savior, emphasizing that his greatness is matched by his love. He is an able God who will save us completely when we behold him.

God's grace appeared once in Christ's first coming (verse 11), and this grace will appear again in the form of "glory." "Glory" is God's visible radiance, a light that makes shadows flee. One glimpse of Jesus Messiah's glory, in all its greatness and saving power, will finally and definitively transform us completely, leaving in us no residue of sin. "Beholding the glory of the Lord" (2 Cor 3:18), we shall be made like him, for we shall see him as he is (1 John 3:2). Brothers and sisters, hope in that day, and let it motivate you to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.

God's Saving Grace Comes Through Jesus (2:14)

Finally, consider Paul's synthesis of Jesus's saving work in 2:14. Our great God and Savior who will appear again did appear earlier, giving himself "for us." This was a willing sacrifice; he "gave himself" (John 10:18; cf. Gal 1:4; Eph 5:2, 25; 1 Tim 2:6). And he did so "for us." This is the language of substitution, by which Jesus willingly received God's wrath in our place so that you and I might enjoy life, freed from sin's penalty, sin's power, and ultimately, sin's presence. "For

our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21).

“Our great God and Savior, Jesus, Christ, ... gave himself for us” for two parallel purposes. First, he gave himself “to redeem us from all lawlessness.” At great cost, Jesus purchased our freedom. You and I are no longer slaves to sin. We have a more powerful master. Not only this, he gave himself “to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.” The presence of God’s grace in Christ does not make works unnecessary; God’s grace makes our works possible. Two reasons Jesus died and rose were that we would be freed to obey and that he might fully clean a people for himself who count following him as precious. Apart from God’s grace, we could have no victory; indeed, we would not even have a desire for change. But his grace has appeared, reshaping our will and our work for his good pleasure (Phil 2:12–13). Because our holiness is dependent on his grace, he gets the glory, and we get the benefit.

Conclusion

As Paul commands in 2:15, I have declared these things. I urge you, by the saving grace God supplies—past, present, and future, be self-controlled. Jesus died to make us self-controlled. Jesus died to save completely you and me for his own possession. Celebrate and walk in such grace today, waiting for his glory to appear in full.