

Training For Christ-likeness

Titus 2:11-15

Sept. 26, 2021

The Christian life is a rigorous one.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warns, “**For the gate is *narrow* and the way is *hard* that leads to life, and those who find it are *few*” (Mt. 7:14).**

Jesus cautions those who think that following Him is an easy thing, saying, “**If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me**” (Mk. 8:34).

We hear this and some of us begin to imagine that being a Christian is the spiritual equivalent to being a *Navy Seal*.

We imagine that we will need to “dig deep”, summon our inner super-hero, and train ourselves to keep pace with Christ and His ways.

But that’s *not* how we are called to follow.

The way to Christ-likeness is not through self-exertion as much as it is through submission.

We become Christ-like, not through disciplined self-sufficiency, but through persistent subjection.

Normally I would lead you verse-by-verse through a passage like this, but since verse 11 through 14 is a single sentence it will be more helpful if we re-read the entire sentence before breaking it down into smaller parts...

“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works” (2:11-14).

The word “**appeared**” in the Greek is the word, “**epiphaino**”—from which we get the word “epiphany”.

Epiphaino is a very particular word, occurring nowhere else in the New Testament beyond the two occurrences in this passage.

With the word, *epiphaino*, Paul is referring to the arrival, or the “**appearance**”, of Jesus Christ.

And so, in this instance, the word “**grace**” is being personified.

This is helpful to note because Paul immediately transitions from *grace appearing* to talking about *what grace does*.

It is easier to understand *what grace does* when we realize that Paul is referring here to Jesus.

What then, does grace do?

First of all, Paul says, “**grace...(brings) salvation for all people**” (2:11).

Now, this does not mean that every person who has ever lived receives salvation.

Both the particular words that are used, and the wider context of the New Testament, lead us to understand that Paul is referring to *all kinds—or all classes—*of people.

In other words, Paul is saying that *salvation isn't just for Israel*, but for persons of every nation.

He is saying that salvation is not reserved for some elite class of persons, but salvation includes persons from every socio-economic station.

It is also important that we properly understand Paul's reference to **“salvation”**.

Many people, when they talk about salvation, are referring primarily to a particular moment when a person enters into a relationship with Jesus by faith.

Salvation includes that, but it is so much more than that.

Salvation is a process that begins in *eternity* with God's election.

Salvation involves the work of Christ in human history, and the application of that work as an individual is regenerated, justified, sanctified, and finally, glorified.

Grace, personified in Jesus, has ushered in salvation for every class of person.

To what end?

For what purpose are people saved?

An answer is given at the end of the sentence:

“to purify for Himself a people for His own possession who are zealous for good works” (2:14).

So often, salvation is framed in terms of what we are saved *from*.

We often talk about being saved from judgment, and wrath, and hell.

It is important that we look beyond what we are saved *from*, and are reminded of what we are being saved *for*.

Grace has appeared, Christ has come, **“to purify for Himself a people for His own possession who are zealous for good works”** (2:14).

I wish that this purification were instantaneous.

I wish that I became perfectly Christ-like the moment I put my faith in Jesus.

But, in the wisdom of God, our progress in purity is gradual and our growth in zeal is incremental.

Paul describes the means to advancing in this process using the word **“training”** (2:12).

We are in “**training**” to “**renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives**” (2:12).

Again, most of us hear the word “**training**” and we imagine that the key to progress in the Christian life is found in “trying harder”.

Indeed, discipline is needed in the Christian life.

Effort is required.

And yet, it is important that we realize that *we are not training ourselves*.

We do not go to the spiritual gym, as it were, on our own.

Paul does not tell Titus to train himself, he says, “**the grace of God has appeared**” and is “**training us**”.

You see—it’s not so much that we are training ourselves to be holy as it is Christ training us to be like Him.

The salvation we receive by faith is designed to bring about a gradual, but radical, transformation in our life.

Jesus Christ is working **“to purify for Himself a people for His own possession who are zealous for good works”** (2:14).

We see this also in Paul’s letter to the Romans, chapter 8, verse 29:

“For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.”

Foreknown.

Predestined.

To what end?

To be conformed to Christ.

To be a purified people for God our Father.

The circumstances of our lives are designed and managed by God to achieve this outcome.

The training is rigorous.

The way is hard.

Christians in the 21st Century are far too surprised by suffering and hardship.

It's as though many have come to Christ with the belief that Jesus will make our life easier and more comfortable.

It is a great error to think this.

C.S. Lewis, in his book *Mere Christianity*, notes how persons often imagine that the purpose of Christ redeeming us is to take our messy life and to turn it into a quaint little cottage.

We imagine that God's purpose for our life is to construct this beautiful, tidy, little cottage (of a life) that is peacefully nestled in the woods.

But eventually...we discover that there are hammers and chisels everywhere.

We see the hammers and chisels are working on us every which way, and our life isn't very quiet.

Pieces are being knocked off and new pieces are being added on.

It turns out that God is not turning our life into a peaceful little cottage, but He is blowing things up, as it were...

C.S. Lewis frames it well:

“You thought you were being made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself” (Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 175).

Indeed, God is building a mansion that is pure and fit for the Holy Spirit.

Have you ever read the latter chapters of the Book of Exodus and marveled at the detail God requires for the tabernacle of His dwelling?

But it makes sense, doesn't it?

If the tabernacle is representative of God's dwelling, you would expect its construction to be particular—and peculiar from other structures.

Why then, would we ever imagine that God would redeem us without ever renovating us?

Jesus may “save you as you are”, but let me assure you that He will certainly not leave you as you are.

How could we ever expect to host God the Holy Spirit and remain as we were?

Too often, the notion of our being a temple of the Holy Spirit is leveraged to urge Christians away from things like smoking, drinking, and eating too many Doritos.

And while we ought not to overindulge in these ways, there is something far more pressing before us.

We who host the indwelling Holy Spirit by faith ought to be holy!

Jesus Christ is training us for *holiness*.

He is training us to become more like Him.

He is purifying us to be a people of His possession.

If we look at verse 13 we are reminded that this is a preparatory work.

We are **“waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing (*epiphaino*) of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ”**.

Two thousand years ago, grace appeared in the person of Christ, and salvation has been set before every people group on earth.

Paul reminds us here...

Jesus will be appearing again.

Jesus is coming back.

Jesus will return in glory.

Many of us, however, are greatly distracted.

We love to build our little life-cottages, don't we?

We want our life cottage to be as tidy and comfortable as possible.

And it's painful when important relationships become fractured.

It's disappointing when we experience vocational and financial setbacks.

It's frustrating when our physical health is compromised.

And it's agonizing to watch those we love struggle with hard circumstances.

Our peaceful little life-cottage is disrupted by such things.

We need reminding...

This is not our home.

And the more we fixate on building our peaceful life-cottage, the more likely God is going to knock a few boards loose...

Or maybe He levels the structure completely.

We are being trained and prepared to be a mansion of God's design.

You don't have to train yourself.

Jesus will train you and conform you to His image.

Your submission to Jesus is more vital than your exertion.

Don't be alarmed when the boards come flying off your peaceful little life cottage.

Don't resist the hammer, or shun the chisel.

You are being renovated and prepared for something better.

You are being made like Jesus...

And one day, you will be with Jesus in all His glory. Amen.