

The secret to being like our good God

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[0 : 0 0] Now, being good is a concern not only for Christians. All communities, all religions, all states, nations have established laws in the hope that their members, their people will be good people and society will flourish.

Now, laws are good but limited in that they may be able to constrain external behaviour but they are never able to change people from the inside, never be able to change our hearts.

A rule may force me to contribute monthly to a welfare fund but it will not make me generous. A good law may constrain me from murdering my enemy but it will not make me forgive him or love him.

We need something more than law to change the human heart. Now, we have heard over the last few Sundays, Paul stressed in his letter to Titus on the necessity for Christians to live a good life. Now, Paul is greatly concerned for the believers in Crete to be transformed so that they no longer remain indistinguishable from the rest of Cretan society which had a bad reputation of being liars, evil, lazy and greedy.

[1 : 3 0] Now, in Titus 1-10, which we heard last week, Paul describes the good life. The good life that he wants Titus to teach the believers to aspire to.

We recognise that these are actually characteristic traits that are applicable for us even in our time. As Christians in 2023, we want to live godly and good lives that are appropriate to sound doctrine. We want to protect the credibility of the Gospel and to make the Gospel attractive. And then you hear these instructions, Be temperate, be self-controlled, be sober, be pure, be kind, submit, and you go, Okay, I want to be self-controlled and pure.

Then, for the first few times, you are able, by your own willpower, to refrain from clicking on that website that titillates your sexual desire.

But your hunger for it soon builds up, and eventually you give in. Then, after a few days of grovelling, it happens again. Now, trying harder is not helping you to change your inner self.

[2 : 5 7] Having good intentions is not good enough. Dwelling on what you want to change just discourages you. And you finally say, I can't do it.

Help. If that is you, there's good news. You really can change, but you cannot do it on your own. And Paul will unveil the secret to the good life in his passage today.

Let's pray. Lord, may your grace be with us today, teaching us through your word. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight and bring you glory.

In Jesus' name we pray. Yes. When you want people to live a good life, we need to tell them what the good life looks like.

Now, Paul has done that. But leaving them with just those goals will set them up for failure. He starts the next verse, verse 11, with one word, for, meaning, because.

[4 : 1 4] Hey guys, this is why I have given you these goals of good living. And here is why you can actually do it. That's what Paul is going to tell us.

He doesn't go on to give them more laws, like the Cretan teachers of the circumcision group. You can't live the Christian life by law. He did not say, okay, now you just get on with it, you try harder, just do it.

Don't be lazy, ah. If you are good, God will love you and bless you. If you are not, God will punish you. He doesn't do that. Instead, see what he does.

He points them back to their God and Saviour, Jesus Christ. He points them back to the Gospel. He shows them that they are good, he shows them what their good God has already done for them.

He said, you started your Christian life by grace. You will also live it by grace, not by law. He is fully convinced that what brings change, what energizes the good life, is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

[5 : 35] Actually, he has already said that back in Titus 1.1, when he started his letter to Titus. He wrote there, this is the truth that will, and it is the truth that leads to holiness.

When we have a profound encounter with the Gospel, we will change to be good. And as we continue in the Gospel, we continue to be good. And that's what we will do this morning. We will do as the Holy Spirit instructed through Paul's letter. Because I trust all of us here want to live the good life. We will plunge into the Gospel all over again, and meet the Saviour who loves us. Now, verse 1 to verse 14, it's four verses, but it's actually one sentence. In the Greek, it is just one long sentence that says so much.

First notice, there are two appearances. Two appearings. Verse 11 and verse 13.

[6 : 45] The first appearing took place in the past. In verse 11, the grace of God has appeared. And in verse 13, there's a second appearing that takes place in the future.

The appearing of the glory. And between the two appearings is this present age that we are living in. First look, let's look to the past.

Now, for the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. Verse 11. Now, this grace is God's unmerited favour that brings blessing and joy. unmerited means we don't deserve it, we cannot earn it. Now, God has always been gracious, has seen in His dealings with sinful men, especially sinful Israel.

But this time is more special. At the revealing of the gospel of Jesus Christ, His grace appears in its fullest manifestation, offering salvation through Jesus Christ to all people.

[7 : 58] It is like, you know, even though He was gracious, it was like hidden, it was like not very clear, but when Jesus came, we just see His grace so clearly.

This salvation cannot be paid for earned by human effort or performance. It is totally unmerited. And through no reason of our own or on our part, He pours out this favour on mankind.

Now, the whole of the human race stood condemned before God because of sin and are rushing head on to a godless future in hell.

But the eternal God, who is beyond time and space, set in motion a rescue plan even before He created the universe. Now, His plan culminated in the appearing of His Son, Jesus, on earth.

John the Baptist saw Him and proclaimed, Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. We are so defiled by our sin that sin infuses every part of us.

[9 : 16] it blemishes every area, making us rightly the objects of wrath. Jesus took away our sin by becoming the substitute, the atoning sacrifice, taking the punishment for all our sins, past, present and future.

He accomplished this when He suffered and died for us on the cross. And verse 14 says, He purified us. He made us clean from defiling sin.

And then He wrapped us up with His own righteousness. He made us forgiven, pure, and righteous before Him forever. But, not only did He atone for us on the cross, when He died on the cross, He also redeemed us.

In verse 14, it says, He gave Himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness. What does that mean? Now, in the past, this is the language of the slave market.

To redeem is to free a person from slavery by paying a ransom, usually money. What does it say here?

[10 : 38] We were slaves to wickedness. Now, wickedness or sin was our master. We were shackled by the chains of sin.

Now, Jesus paid the ransom to set us free from this slave master. He redeemed us free from wickedness. He broke the chains that bound us to sin.

Jesus said in the Gospels, the Son of Man came to give His life as a ransom for many. And Peter wrote, it is not by perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty life that had handed down to you by your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

The ransom price was the precious blood of Christ, the life of the great God and Saviour Himself. Because the ransom was paid, wickedness does not own you anymore.

It has no more power over you. Since power has been broken, your chains are broken, grace says, you are free.

[12 : 00] You are free. On that day, our future destiny changed forever. His grace granted us freedom from condemnation.

God has no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Instead of hell, heaven has opened its gates to those who by grace accepted His offer of salvation by believing and trusting in Jesus. And it is purely by grace we contribute nothing. John the Apostle's summary statement is this. God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believed in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Now this grace appeared 2,000 years ago in history. But in a very real sense, even today, this grace is present at every preaching of the gospel and still offers salvation to all who hear.

When Paul writes that salvation is offered to all people, he is not saying that all people will be saved, as some elitch. Now this idea of universalism, that every human being will eventually be saved, is a romantic idea but false belief.

[13 : 33] It's a heresy. Rather, it is very clear that only those who accepted the offer of the gospel by believing in Jesus is saved.

So all people in this verse means all kinds of people without distinction. This salvation is offered to the Jew, to the Greek, to the Romans, to the Cretans, to the Ibans, to the Bidayus, to the Orang Ulus, to the Chinese, to the Malays, to the Indians, to tax collectors, Pharisees, prostitutes, men, women, children, slaves, free.

All categories of people, none excluded. Now, there is the second appearing of verse 13. The first appearing was an act of grace.

He came in humility to save. Now the second appearing is the appearing of glory. One day in an indeterminate future, Christ will return.

It could be even today. His return will be an act of glory. We shall see his glory finally revealed to the world.

[14 : 53] On that day, every knee must bow because he returns as king and judge. that day is a great day of anticipation for those who have been saved by the first appearance.

Finally, finally we will meet our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ and behold his glory in all his magnificence.

will be in his personal presence forever. We will experience the final redemption from our sinful nature when sin's presence is removed completely, marking the long-awaited end of our spiritual warfare with sin.

we will finally be perfected in Christ and we will finally see the new heaven and the new earth where sin and its effects are no more.

And that is what we have been waiting for since the day we were saved by Christ. It is our blessed hope, a happy hope.

[16 : 10] and this certainty of his return motivates us as we live this Christian life, as we strive in this sinful world.

However, the appearance of Jesus in his glory is not a happy event for all people. It will be a time of judgment for the world, for its sin.

It will not be a happy ending for those who have not accepted the offer of salvation in their lifetime. The appearing of Jesus, first in grace, ensures that his future appearance in glory will not be a threat to his people.

If you are not a Christian and you are here, the Redeemer's blood will be of no benefit to you unless you respond to his offer of salvation.

If you feel that you have been trapped in the unending misery of sin and you have had enough, do talk to your neighbors sitting around you.

[17 : 21] They can counsel you or direct you to someone who can. Don't leave without taking this opportunity to change your life. And if you are online, do contact us.

grace first appeared to us in the preaching of the gospel. We are waiting for the final consummation of our salvation and the future appearance of Jesus in glory.

And we are living our Christian life now in the present age. But this present age is still marked by the presence of sin. Jesus, however, does not leave people in the moral condition he found them. Remember his words to the woman? Go and sin no more. Think of the changed life of Zacchaeus and Paul himself. Verse 14 tells us we are a new people with a new identity.

Christ's people, Jesus' people. Redemption meant a change of ownership. We are no more people belonging to wickedness but to the Lord.

[18 : 36] Verse 14 says he purified for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. It's a package deal. Being eager to do good is built into the DNA of a Christian, like it or not.

It has been built in. We do not do good to become Christ's people. I say that again.

We do not do good to become Christ's people. Rather, we are eager to do good because we are already Christ's people. A status that is eternally secure.

Now, being Christ's people makes us his disciples, his students. and he tells his disciples to follow him, to learn to be like him.

Only one person has ever lived the good life perfectly, Jesus. Jesus lived the perfect, blameless, self-giving life.

[19 : 46] Though he was tempted in every way like us, he did not sin. His was the perfect, self-controlled, upright and godly life of verse 12.

Now, the grace of God that first gave us salvation, that made us into Christ's own people, now teaches us to live as Christians in this present age.

Verse 12 tells us that grace teaches us. Just as God saved us by grace, God the Holy Spirit changes us by grace.

And grace teaches like a parent nurturing a child through encouragement, through instructions, through discipline, to be imitators of Christ.

It teaches us to say no to godliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives, as we live out the salvation that is already ours.

[20 : 54] Now, the triad of virtue of self-control, upright and godly, covers all the relationships of a person. Now, self-control is a personal virtue.

Uprightness is a virtue as we relate to other people, we relate to them in an upright manner. And godly is the way we relate to God himself.

Look at Jesus. He was overflowing with self-control as he defeated Satan and his temptations, as he related to people around him, both friends and foe.

He related uprightly to everyone he met, always loving, patient, gentle, merciful, faithful, selfless, forgiving, transforming.

In relation to God the Father, he was totally obedient, honoring, reverent, and dependent. And grace is teaching us to live like him.

[22 : 02] But we are certainly not like him now, nor will we ever be on this side of heaven. Perfection is not for us yet. praise God.

Learning to be an imitator of Jesus is a lifelong process, and we will never stop learning until the return of Jesus in glory.

Nevertheless, we are to make progress. Not making progress at all is not a Christian option. some of us a little faster, some a little slower.

Now, once we were not able to say no to godliness at all, not able to say no to worldly passions because we were not free from wickedness, we were chained under it.

The good life was not even a possibility. We could pretend with our outward behaviour, but inside we could not change. once we loved sin, we enjoyed it.

[23 : 11] We didn't want to be good. We couldn't free ourselves, nor had the desire to do so. But grace broke through in Jesus Christ and shattered the chains of sin that bound us.

Grace proclaimed, you have been redeemed, you are free, your chains are broken, sin has no more power over you.

You are free, you are free, free to say no to sin and yes to the good life. The good life is now a real possibility.

But you have to want it and submit to the teaching of grace. Grace doesn't say no for you. grace teaches you to say no.

You are the one who needs to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions. Grace tells you, go ahead, renounce sin. It has no more hold on you.

[24 : 21] You are free to be good. You now have the freedom to turn from idols to worship the living God, from false religion to worship God rightly.

Once you ignored Him, now you have a new desire to respond to His love, a new heart to seek Him. If you catch your rising temper in time, grace reminds you that you don't have to let it blow out in a rage.

Pray for help and look at the situation calmly. when you feel the desire to cut someone down with a snide and kuro remark, grace reminds you, be kind and gentle, be self-controlled.

You pray for strength and you hold your tongue. At an office celebration where free alcohol is free-flowing, grace reminds you of the need to be sober and gives you the power to exercise self-control so that you do not exceed your limit.

When you feel the urge to view obscene photos or videos, grace reminds you of the chains broken by love and urges you to say no.

[25 : 42] When a promise is made to transfer money discreetly into your account, if only you would grant a favourable outcome in a business proposal, grace gives you the boldness and ability to say no and even to report the bribery.

Over time, you will find the leo and the promise of worldly passions less attractive and its power over you weakening.

Instead, walking the way of Jesus becomes more attractive, satisfying, joyful, and easier. Slowly, the virtues of godliness will establish itself in your character, making you more loving, more joyful, more at peace with God, yourself and the people around you.

in your dealings with others and yourself, you become more patient, more kind, more gentle, learning slowly to look out for the good of others, to be generous, hospitable, being temperate, and careful in speech.

If you are a Christian, who you are now should be different from who you were before you were one. who you are ten years after you became a Christian should exhibit more godliness than when you first started.

[27 : 21] John Newton, the former slave trader who wrote the beloved hymn Amazing Grace, also wrote these words, I am not what I ought to be.

I am not what I want to be. I am not what I hope to be in another world. But still, I am not what I once used to be.

And by the grace of God, I am who I am today. Did you catch that? Let me repeat it, yeah? I am not what I ought to be.

I am not what I want to be. I am not what I hope to be in another world. But still, I am not what I once used to be.

And by God's grace, I am what I am today. The gospel tells us that Jesus has already lived the perfectly good life on your behalf.

[28 : 29] When God looks at us in Christ, he sees the blameless life of Jesus on us. It is ours spiritually, but it has yet to find its full expression in our daily living.

In fact, every day, instead of finding our lives closer to perfection, we understand a little bit more and more each day how holy is the holiness of God and how even more sinful we really are and how far we really have fallen short of his glory.

But praise God! Rejoice when that happens because we realise how much we really need his forgiveness, his grace and his love.

We will gain an increasing appreciation of the beauty of the gospel and of the amazing grace of God that saves us still, which transforms us still, and of the gracious Saviour who loves us and forgives us still.

You know, we are a loved people. The fact that Jesus was willing to give of himself to redeem us while we were helpless when we were still his enemies showed his self-giving love and his grace towards us.

[30 : 02] Verse 14 further reinforces this. We are a people that are his very own. Now, the Greek here carries the sense of a chosen people, a treasured people, highly valued.

He did not have to choose us, but he did. He chose you, and you, and you, before the creation of the world, the Bible tells us.

He holds us fast like valued treasure. He delights in you. He loves you so. The author Brandon Manning tells of the story of an Irish priest who, on a walking tour of a rural parish, saw an old peasant kneeling by the side of the road, praying, impressed, the priest said to the man, you must be very close to God.

The peasant looks up from his prayer, thinks for a moment, and then he smiles. Yeah, yes, he is very fond of me.

Arrogant? No, simply believing the Bible. He is very fond of me. This self-living love of Jesus moves my heart.

[31 : 32] He gave himself for me, and it stirs me to love him. And I might add, with whatever feeble love I have compared to his, and it moves me to serve him.

Now, Tim Chester expressed this so well in his chapter on this passage, that I will just quote what he wrote. Why do I serve my wife?

Not because I must. I do not have to win her love. She has already given herself to me. I serve my wife because I love her, and my love for her is fed by her love for me.

Why do I serve my Saviour? Not because I must. I do not have to win his love. He has already given himself for me.

I serve my Saviour because I love him, and my love for him is fed by his love for me. We love because he first loved us.

[32 : 40] We love because he first loved us, and that moves us to love him, to serve him, and to live the good life in him.

So let us remind ourselves what Paul said that will make people good. He just points people back to the gospel. If people are gripped by the gospel, they will change.

Grace will energize them in a good life. If we want to change, if we want people around us to change, we need to hear the gospel, we need to speak the gospel to one another, and we need to apply the gospel in our lives.

Here is a quote from Dan Autran from his book Deeper. The gospel is not a hotel to pass through, but a home to live in.

It is not only a gateway into the Christian life, but the pathway of the Christian life. not jumper cables to get the Christian life started, but an engine to keep the Christian life going.

[33 : 58] Titus 2 verse 1 and verse 15 book ends this section of the letter to Titus. And you notice the same instruction, you must teach.

In verse 1, Paul tells Titus, you must teach what is appropriate to sound doctrine. He goes on to instruct Titus to teach the Christians about what the good life looks like.

Then he tells them how they will change. He is to point them back to sound doctrine and to the grace of God found in the gospel. Then in verse 15 he says, these then are the things you should teach.

Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you. To those struggling to live a good life, encourage them with the gospel.

To those who think that grace means they don't need to bother about godly behavior, they can just do whatever they want because God will forgive them, rebuke with the gospel. and do so with full authority.

[35 : 06] Don't be intimidated. Don't be paisae. Don't cover in fear. And while this verse is primarily for Buster Bryan's application, it is actually an instruction for all of us.

We too are to speak the gospel to one another, instruct one another, encourage or rebuke if necessary. so that we keep growing in godliness together.

Titus had the authority of Paul to back him. We get our authority from the word of God preserved for us in the Bible. Titus is told, don't let people despise you.

In verse 7, Paul told him to set an example by doing what is good. His teaching must show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech.

So, for all who teach, their action must match up with their words and their teaching must be in accordance to sound doctrine without both, they risk being despised.

[36 : 17] God, when I was younger, knowing that one day I would see Jesus face to face, these questions would trouble me.

Have I done enough for God? Am I good enough for God to accept me? God to have you ever asked these kinds of questions?

As I grew in faith, I realised that these are actually wrong questions. They come from a legalistic mindset. Now, the Gospel has set me free from these questions.

It is not my righteousness that counts. It is not what I have accomplished that counts. I can never be good enough on this side of heaven.

When I meet him, it will be his righteousness over me that matters. The judge I face is none other than my Saviour who loved me and gave himself for me.

[37 : 24] I rest secure in him. Nonetheless, I pray by his grace, I will never stop being a student of the good life all my days in this present age.

That is our duty as Christians. As I end the sermon today, I will not end it with a plea for you to go out and eagerly do what is good, which you should though.

I will not tell you, just do better, try harder, just do it. That will not spur good works. Rather, taking the cue from this passage, I hope that you would have understood the gospel a little better.

The gospel that sets you free from condemnation and freedom from slavery to sin. The gospel that made you a treasured possession, loved by Jesus, and that you in turn have been nudged to love Jesus more.

That you understand even more the amazing grace of our God. I hope you will speak and teach the gospel to yourself, to me, and to one another regularly.

[38 : 42] May we then know the good life more and more as you eagerly wait for the glorious return of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

and let God's people say, Amen.