

Trained By God

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[0 : 0 0] ...arrived. But now they barely knew how to wrap a little shawl around this fragile little person, let alone how to shape its life God's way. What should they do? How should they act as God's people towards this child? Elsewhere, it's Monday morning. Mildred enjoyed church last night. Today she's off to work as a merchant banker in New York. Daily she deals with millions upon millions of dollars. Some of her Christian friends have problems with her job. They wonder if she can really be a Christian and work in such an ungodly business. Mildred herself has some questions about some aspects of what she does. Some of the decisions she'll face today will have very significant ramifications. And she wonders if her faith should have any interaction with what she does and how she does it. She's not sure. But what she is sure of is that this day will be full of decisions.

Now Michael, he's just gone off to the letterbox and sorted through the mail. One of the envelopes that he found is handwritten and it bears no postage stamp. Michael's stomach churns over. Handwritten letters with no stamps generally come from church members. Tentatively he opens the letter. It is as he expected. It is full of vitriol and bitterness at his ministry even though it is couched in language that tries to cover it up. The letter will remain in Michael's emotions for weeks. He'll get it out time and time again and talk about it with his wife and he will inevitably act on it some way or the other. But what should he do? How should he act? As Christians our situations may be different from these three but the questions we ask will invariably be the same.

With every day we're confronted with them. What shall I do today? Who shall I be? How should I act? It's those questions that lie behind the passage that we're going to have a look at today.

[1 : 5 7] And as we do I want to focus particularly on verses 11 to 14 of Titus chapter 2. Very important to have your Bibles open. Titus 2 11 to 14. Let's see what God has to say to us through his word today. Now the first thing I want you to notice about Titus 2 11 to 14 is that it uses a term appear twice. Can you see it there? It's in verse 11 and it's there again in verse 13. And what Paul is doing in using this word is to tell us that as Christians we live between two great appearings. Appearing one is God's great past act of grace in Christ. Verse 11.

And this great act of grace in the past Christ brought salvation. And verse 14 tells us how he did it. In this first great appearing he did the most surprising, unexpected and undeserved thing.

He gave himself for us. In other words he took our sins upon himself and he died in our place. He gave himself for us. Now Paul then goes on to explain that he gave himself for us with a specific purpose in mind. Can you see it? Verse 14.

Jesus gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself of people that are his very own eager to do what is good. So there is the content and the impact of the first appearing of Jesus. Jesus acting gracious love and he gave himself for us. And he did this so that he might buy us back from the wicked ways that we were living. And he did it to purify us for a more righteous way of living. So that's appearing number one. Now have a look at appearing number two.

It is God's great future act of glory in Christ. Verse 13. Verse 13 tells us of the great and blessed hope of all Christians. That is the appearing of Christ in glory at the end of time.

[4 : 0 0] In Matthew 16 verse 27 Christ himself prophesied that very day. He spoke of a day when the son of man would come in the glory of his father with his angels. And in the new testament this second appearing of Christ is associated with all sorts of things such as vindication. That's principally what it's associated with. But also with judgment with the perfection of the salvation he won for us on the cross. And this is the thing that we Christians hope for. This is what we wait for.

We wait you see for the time when Christ is revealed for who he is and is seen for who he is. We wait for the time when he's revealed and we are seen to belong to him. We wait for that time when Christ is revealed and the world is judged. We wait for the time when Christ is revealed and we are indicated. We wait for the time when Christ is revealed and our salvation is consummated.

We wait for Christ. That is who we are. We are waiting people. We wait for the world to see that he is indeed our great God and Savior. I want you to understand what Paul is saying here. You see his point is that we Christians are shaped by two great appearances. God's coming in Christ in the past and God's coming in Christ in the future. We're shaped by two great truths. God's past act of grace and God's future glory. Coming in glory. And those between those two great acts or sorry those two great acts those two great truths shape our life in the present. Take careful note of this point you see. Have a look at verse 12. And notice the words at the end of it. Did you notice the words present age? You see Paul's point is clear. God's past act of grace in Christ and God's future act of glory in Christ have a purpose. And that purpose is that our lives and the way we live should be changed in this present age. Now look at verses 11 and 12. God's past act of grace in Christ trains us we're told to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled upright and godly lives in the present age. God's future act of glory in

Christ reminds us that God's purpose in redeeming us was to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. Now when you think about it that makes a lot of sense of the whole chapter that we read. Look back to verse 1 and ask yourself this question. Why should older men such as me be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love and in steadfastness? Well verses 11 and 13 say it's because the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to all people including me and all other older men. And verse 12 says that because we hope for the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour who redeemed us for a holy life. Now look at verse 3 and ask yourself why should older women be reverent in behaviour not slanderers or slaves to much wine? Why should they focus on training the young women to love their husbands and children and be self-controlled, pure, work at home, kind and submissive to their husbands? Well verse 11 and 13 tell us that it's because the grace of God appeared bringing salvation to all people including them, all the women. And verse 12 says because they hope for the appearing of the glory of their great God and Saviour who redeemed them for a holy life. And what about verse 6? Have a look at that. Why should the young men here be self-controlled models of good works, showing integrity, dignity and sound speech in their teaching? Well verses 11 and 13 say because the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to all people including the young men. And verse 12 says because they're hoping for the appearing of the glory of their great God and Saviour who redeemed them for a holy life. And we don't have any here but imagine we did. Why should slaves be subject to their own masters? Being well-pleasing and everything. Not argumentative, not pilfering, but majoring on showing all good faith. Why? Well you've guessed it.

Verses 11 and 13 says because the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to all people including those slaves. And verse 12 says because those slaves hope for the appearing of the glory of the great God and Saviour who redeemed them for a holy life. You see the point being made is very clear when you look at it this way, isn't it?

[8 : 43] For Paul, doctrine, that is teaching, and ethics, that is Christian practice, are bound together. God's great act of grace and God's great act of glory are designed to train us together. They're designed to produce results in our daily lives. And that's the point of this passage. And that is the point of verse 10. See verse 10? Our manner of life is to make attractive the teaching of our God and Saviour.

Our life is to make attractive our doctrine. It's to illustrate our doctrine. It's to vindicate our doctrine. It's like we are a walking expression of the teaching we have received about what God has done in the past and what He will do in the future.

It doesn't matter whether you're a parent wondering what to do with a newborn child, or whether you're a New York banker trying to work out how to act ethically, or a minister picking up some letter from the mailbox.

No, if you're a Christian, then you are a person who has been bought by Christ. You have been purchased by the death of God's own Son. And God's wish for you is that you are purified for Himself and that you're zealous for good works.

[9 : 58] You see, if we're Christians, we can no longer live as we used to live. We can no longer live in wickedness as we did when we were not Christians. We've now got to say an active no to ungodliness, putting aside worldly passions.

The teaching that we've taken on board must be made attractive by our decisions and our lives. It must be decorated with our actions. As a person who believes that Jesus has appeared in grace, you must be gracious as well.

As a person who believes that God will appear again in glory, you must live as one who will be fit to meet Him there and live with Him in glory. Now, friends, the idea that philosophy or religion has nothing to do with morality is very common in our contemporary world.

But God is very clear about this point in the Bible here. It is not enough to have right knowledge in terms of right facts. In Bible language, you see, you don't actually know something until that knowledge is reflected in your actions.

To know someone or to know something is to express that knowledge. Then you can say, I truly know it. And yet we Christians have been sucked into the Greek lie that says that it's enough to know something cognitively.

[11 : 22] It's enough to know that God has come into the world and saved us. It's enough to know that Christ will come again to judge us. It's enough to know that one day we'll face our maker and on that day we'll be forgiven.

But it's not enough. You see, God's saving had a purpose. We can see that in these verses. And that purpose is to make us what we were not before. To change us.

To deliver us from what enslaved us before. To change our actions from actions that displease God to actions that please Him. You see, we were redeemed from wickedness to be a people for God's own possession.

Purified and eager for good works. Good works are the trademarks that we've understood the truths of God rightly. Good works are the trademarks of good doctrine.

Good doctrine is only good doctrine if it results in changed conduct. If someone tells you that their teaching is Christian. And yet allows you to get away with not changing your decisions or your actions.

[12 : 27] Then their teaching is not Christian. Because Christian teaching tells you actions must be changed. However, there's another great mistake that Christians have made throughout history.

And that is in particular vogue today. And it's this. The mistake is to say that what matters is godliness. Not doctrine. Such thinking says that God's interested in my actions.

Not in how I think about Him. But that misses the whole point of this passage, doesn't it? Look at what it says. Paul says that the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people. Then it goes on to say that this appearing, this act of grace, trains us to renounce ungodliness.

The Greek word for training here is rich in meaning. It means to educate in culture and behavior. It means to learn how to live rightly and properly in the social world you live in.

It means to educate people as to how to be God's people in God's world. How to be truly human in God's way, in God's world. In other words, God's great act of grace expressed in the appearing of Jesus Christ is the very same means God uses to tell us how to act in the world.

[13 : 38] God's great action in Jesus is therefore not a saving tool. Not only a saving tool, but a teaching tool. When we look at what God has done in saving us, we are to be taught. But it teaches us how to behave.

And you can see all of this, can't you? Think about it for a moment. How would you react to an enemy if you hadn't been a Christian and experienced how God had acted toward you when you were his enemy?

If you hadn't been a Christian, you'd look around the world and you'll see that most of the world hates its enemies. And so you will too.

But if you're a Christian, then the grace of God has appeared in Christ and it teaches you to love your enemies and do good to those who hate you. Because God did that to you. You were his enemy and he loved you.

The grace of God would instruct you and train you to be godly. Please understand what I'm saying. The more you know about God, the more you will know about how to act in a godly manner. And that's where our parents with the new child need to start, isn't it?

[14 : 45] Okay? And that's where Mildred, the merchant baker, needs to start as well. And that's where Michael, the minister, needs to start as well.

They need to get their doctrine in shape and then make sure that this doctrine is immediately practiced. After all, the purpose in getting doctrine right is so that it might issue in godly actions. So I'll give you a little practical example. The Michael is me. I received the letter when I was very early on in a parish in Shenton Park in Western Australia.

Because I knew how God had acted toward me, I didn't get riled, I didn't get annoyed. I took the letter and I took it to the person who'd sent it to me and I sat down with them over a cup of coffee and talked about it.

Why? Because God had been merciful to me and acted rightly toward me. I ought to act rightly toward my brother or sister in Christ. And with that in mind, I want to ask you some searching questions today.

[15 : 48] You see, as I observe the church today, I observe the things that I observe I don't really like terribly much often. And those things are often found amongst churches like us, that is, evangelical, Bible-believing churches.

That is, these things are found in churches that claim to represent true doctrine and to urge true conduct. And the area I think we fall short is in the very last words of this passage.

Can you see it there? Verse 14. In the very last words, we are told that Christ gave himself to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession.

And notice the last words. Who are zealous for good works. Who are zealous for good works. And what we often see is people who confess Christ.

Who claim to have loved his appearing. Who claim to be looking forward to the day when he will come again for a second appearing. However, whose lives are far from being godly.

[16 : 49] And even if they are superficial godly, they are too comfortable as Christians. And their attitudes to God and the purposes of God is far from being zealous. You see, I see it in myself.

I see it in my peers. And I see it among those I have watched and trained in ministry. The telltale signs of not being zealous are multiple. They are such things as the narrowing of the gap between the lifestyle of God's people and the people of the world around them.

The Christians are often no longer morally distinguishable from their neighbours. Two, the falling aside of previously made vows and promises about what life and ministry would be for you.

As you end up going on through your life. A slackness in Bible reading, in prayer, in church attending and in study. A willingness to let the world rather than the Christian doctrine shape what's appropriate for you.

An increasing sleepiness, coldness and lethargy about the things of God. And an indifference when they are not all that they could be. Or just, oh well, you know, they could be better. Or decision making that has more to do with self than with God and his will.

[18 : 08] Or a justification about why ministry should not be engaged in or delay as into when it could be engaged in. And a clothing of such justifications in endlessly seemingly godly rationalisations.

Such as, well, after I bought the house, when we finished the degree, after the kids and so on. A lack of being willing to talk and think about sacrifice for the cause of the gospel. And the cause of people coming to know Christ.

In the 1950s, there was one book that many very keen Christians read. It was a book called Sacrifice. But I think sacrifice amongst Christians is a dirty word these days.

But it is at the core of the gospel. But where else do we see it? Well, in an absence of passion for the spiritual state of others. Whether they be those who you mix with at work. Or in your neighbourhood.

Or in your city. A reluctance of preachers to say hard words to their congregations is another place you see it. Or a lack of excitement about being a Christian. About hearing the word of God with God's people.

[19 : 10] About living and proclaiming the word of God in God's world. A satisfaction with continuing to practice secret sins. It is zeal that is missing, I think.

It is as though the heart has been cut out of our faith. We have lost our first love, our devotion, our passion, our eagerness. We have become middle-aged and flabby.

Yet most of you here are not anywhere near being middle-aged. But if I am right about this passage, then it is clear that it can only be because we have forgotten from whence we have come. We have forgotten that once we were enemies of God. Every one of us here who is now Christian once was not Christian and was an enemy of God.

We were once without God and without hope in the world. We were once outside of God's mercy. And in order to regain our zeal, I think we need to return to the foot of the cross.

[20 : 14] To see there our lostness and the greatness of our need. And to feed on the grace that is available to us in Christ. To soak up what it is that Christ has done for us.

And then to walk back into the world with passion, zeal and eagerness. All too ready to say an emphatic no to ungodliness and worldly passions.

And all too ready to give ourselves wholeheartedly to him who gave himself so wholeheartedly for us. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the grace of God that appeared.

Giving salvation or bringing salvation to all. We thank you for the appearing of Christ that is yet to come. And Father, we pray that you'd be at work in us by your spirit.

So that when that day comes, we'll be known as people who had zeal for you and your purposes in your world. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.