

Speak these words: Paul to Titus

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[0 : 00] It is, Bill's trying to orient us as to where we are, so I'll contribute to that just by reminding you that it is today, January the 10th, 2010.

Christmas, the big season comes and goes swiftly, doesn't it? We're back here again. It's good to be back here. And it was between Christmas Day and New Year that I was minding my own business, really, and Bill Chandler called.

He told me January the 10th needed a speaker, so here I am, apparently Jim, as in Dr. Packer, is in Dallas, I believe, he's on his way to there, some Anglican event, I'm sure.

And rather than let, I was thinking when Bill asked me, rather than let Christmas disappear, again that season that we generalize as Christmas, let it disappear, altogether we might just have a look at a passage, Titus 2, 11-15, chosen because in the prayer book, a reading for Christmas Day is for them, I believe, is from, is Titus 2, 11-15.

So this is sort of a last echo, if you will. I hope an important last echo of the Christmas season for us. Again, this passage was given for us, the prayer book compilers decided that this passage was appropriate for reading on Christmas Day.

[1 : 49] I think that's significant, I hope so. Christmas Day, Christmas season. So sacred and so hallowed is the time.

So sacred and so hallowed. You'll recognize words from early on in Hamlet. Shakespeare says that about the Christmas season.

So sacred, he says about it. So sacred and so hallowed. The stable where our Lord was born, you will know, was protected by angels.

I know that because Milton tells us so. Bright, harnessed angels. His great poem, On the Morning of Christ's Nativity, ends with these words.

Again, according to him from memory, you scholars will correct me after. But he does say, bright, harnessed angels, in order, serviceable.

[2 : 45] I love those lines, those words. Bright, harnessed angels, in order, serviceable. Milton ends his great poem. All of which, it seems to me, quoting Shakespeare and Milton.

You can quote hundreds of poets, good poets, mediocre poets, great poets. It's all part of the charm of the season. The charm of the Christmas time.

Charm, I'd like to suggest here, has a family resemblance. I want you to think about this. You can tell me after again if this is correct.

Charm, I like the word charm. Charm has a family resemblance to the word grace. I didn't look up the dictionary. I bet there's some linguistic, etymological connection between charm and grace.

I would think there is a connection. Grace, after all, I think we can say grace charms. Charm is grace. Charm is graceful. There's some connection.

[3 : 54] At Christmas again, guided by a prayer book sensibility, we hear these words. The grace, look up there. For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared, says the mighty apostle.

The grace, God that brings salvation hath appeared. So Paul writes about the middle of his letter to Titus, one of his missionary colleagues.

Our title announced today, as you will know, is Speak These Words, Paul to Titus. Down here in this passage, these, the last sentence, these, the second last sentence, these things speak.

Something about what Paul just says here, he wants Titus to very much know and to learn to speak them. These very words. If Paul was with us today, I always like this fantasy of a great, a great one who knew the Lord and was appointed to be one with authority, the authority of the Lord.

What if they were with us? If Paul was with us today in the flesh, we say, I think he might begin by greeting us as sisters and brothers in Christ.

[5 : 11] Wouldn't that be wonderful to be greeted by an apostle? And then he'd say something like this to us. It's bold of me to say this, but when you hear what I say, it's not bold at all.

He would say to us, the grace of God, which brings salvation, has appeared. That's what he says. You can see why this is appropriate for Christmas Day.

Prayer book compilers were smart guys. The grace of God, it brings salvation, it has appeared. And a charming word.

I love to just stop and ponder an apostle's word slowly. The grace of God that brings salvation, has appeared.

That is good news. The grace of God has appeared. So speaks the apostle. And as offspring, if you will, of his teachings, what Christians are, we are blessed in so believing these words of the apostle.

[6 : 17] So let's look at Paul to Titus today and at this particular passage therein. I hope it'll be a good last sort of Christmassy thing for us.

But it's also a rich gospel thing for all times in the Christian life. Before I continue, Paul was with us. He'd say, remember to pray.

Let me say a word of prayer. Lord, thank you for your presence here today amongst us. And may we attend to the word which you have given us, to read it, to mark it, to inwardly digest it, so that it may bring you glory and be of great benefit to us.

So you have given it to us. We ask this in the name of your word who appeared amongst us. Jesus Christ, amen. The grace of God that brings salvation hath appeared to all men, says the apostle, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lust, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

These things speak, Titus. These things speak. And exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you.

[7 : 55] Titus 2, 11 to 15. We just begin, I think obviously a good thing to do, is just to begin with an overview. It's a very short letter of Paul to Titus.

It's almost, so we'll have some sort of overall context for this as we just briefly unpack it. You could almost call it a note. You're familiar with Paul to Titus.

There it is. You can look at it and see it at a glance. It could almost be called a note because of its length. It's not at all lengthy. I suspect, this is hardly a deep speculation, and I didn't look up any commentaries here, but I take it, it probably functioned as a kind of door-opening, authority-conferring document for Titus as he visited congregations to which Paul sent him.

As you recall from this letter, it was congregations on the island of Crete in the Mediterranean. What Titus was doing was to do ministry. It was to, again, to Crete that Titus was being sent for an important ministry, especially, you'll recall from this letter, a ministry of appointing elders for, as we would call it in the Anacan tradition right now, who gets licensed to do things in the church.

So first, let's just begin by having a brief, again, an overview of this letter. I love the opening sentence. It's a bit long, this short letter, and a bit weighty, I think.

[9 : 32] Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, he writes to Titus, to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised ages ago and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by command of God our Savior.

And then, to Titus, my true child in a common faith, grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior. That's one sentence, apparently.

Paul does that sort of thing. A lot of connector words in Greek, apparently, that just keeps the sentence going. What? I think that, isn't that, how weighty that is.

Elect. He talks about preaching, how the great promises have been manifested in his word. It's just an amazing opening to a little note to Titus.

God's elect, they're mentioned here, they believe, God's elect believe truth, that's asserted here, not argued, but asserted here by the apostle.

[10 : 49] God's elect believe truth, and this truth accords, he says here, you recall, with godliness. This is a, this is the letter's theme, one of the letter's theme, mentioned here in Titus 2:11 as well.

The truth is manifested through preaching, Paul says here. I think that means it is made known in a lowly form, preaching's a lowly art, really, I'll say that, so that grace is exalted.

Just Paul, Paul often talks about, just, I'm not a great speaker, Paul used to say, but as he unfolded the gospel, the grace was exalted, not the form of its presentation.

So it's made known through preaching. Grace exalting that in that way. The elect believe. Of course, election is a hot topic, but I think it's often, it needs a basic, simple definition.

My favorite one would be one of my own. Which are, I think, I think the elect are those who are surprised that they believe. You ever felt surprised that you believe all this stuff?

[11 : 58] It's because God elected you to believe. He chose you to believe this stuff. If I may say, to use that little phrase, you should be surprised on occasion that you believe in God, the Trinity, and the Incarnation, and the Atonement, and the Second God.

But we've been elected to believe. It is not our own doing, our believing. It's a gift from God. Paul's a confident that on Crete, there are elect.

Paul then gives some general instructions, you'll recall from this letter, about leaders in the church. They are to be, I'm probably softening it a little bit, but I think Paul says to Titus, they are to be reasonably respectable folks.

Outsiders should be able to hold them in some regard. That's interesting. The public face of the church is to be of some concern. Titus is also charged with teaching issues, you'll recall from this letter.

Some are teaching air on Crete. And this is not to be ignored. It must be addressed. Entry requirement issues almost certainly were at work there.

[13 : 06] It's always an interesting issue in the church. How do you take your first step in? So circumcision was an issue. Is that necessary for entrance into the mystery of Jesus Christ, into his body?

And probably some form of antinomianism was being taught there. Putting aside of moral law in the name of freedom, that kind of thing, was probably at work on Crete.

Paul is telling Titus, that has to be confronted. In our passage, right at the end of our passage, up here, you'll notice that Paul says that you can, you have my authority to rebuke.

You can rebuke with all authority. It's in the name of the gospel itself, Titus, as I, an apostle, am appointed to preach it. He's already told Titus, you may assert these things.

The issue of circumcision has been dealt with, we know about that. And this antinomianism, this putting aside of moral law in the name of freedom in Christ, confront that, Titus, and have them put that aside.

[14 : 16] I think Paul is telling Titus, by talking about rebuke with all authority, and let no man despise you, he's saying to Titus very simply, well, do teach this, do this work, and when necessary again, invoke my authority.

Then as now, the apostolic word, therefore, is non-negotiable, and isn't that relevant for our battle today. You don't negotiate what the apostles teach.

You have no authority if you're a leader in the church to negotiate about it. That's you under its authority. You may not like it. Well, maybe find other work. But if you're going to be in that position, you teach this.

The apostolic teaching, not your clever theological ideas. An aside, by way of emphasis on that, no one, and I've talked about this before in this place, no one has written more forcefully on this.

Of course, many have written on this, I'm sure wonderfully, but Soren Kierkegaard, a famous name in Christian theological history, talked about this in his wonderful essay on the authority of an apostle, one of his most remarkable works, in which he says this so forcefully, not because of their brilliant arguments, he's speaking about the apostles, not because of their, even of their antiquity, not because tradition hallows them merely, not because you happen to agree with their insights, but because they are apostles, you submit to them.

[15 : 57] That's it. Period. You know? Oh, I love that insight of Paul in Romans. Or something he says in Galatians has always helped me. No, no, that's not it.

That's your insights. You submit to Paul, even when he's teaching things you don't like. He's an apostle. He has the authority of Jesus Christ.

You'll be judged by how you respond to what the apostles teach. One holy Catholic and apostolic church. Augustine said it so precisely.

I love, and Augustine got something right, it was wonderful. Augustine said, what scripture says, God says. What scripture says, God says.

That's it. That does not answer all questions, of course, that arise in the church's life. It's not meant to, but that is where we begin all questions.

[16 : 54] And that is a significant thing to get straight. There he is. End of aside. Teach. Teach these things.

Speak these things, Titus. Exhort. Rebuke with all authority. Let no one get on to other topics. Let no one despise you and say that's not relevant. Oh, it is. It's what an apostle says.

Just a bit more overview of Titus the letter. Paul comments on the local culture of Crete famously in this letter, doesn't he? Quoting a prophet and a slash a poet, Epimenides, I think he pronounced his name, speaking of charm, he says, all Cretans are liars.

Isn't that a lovely line? All Cretans are liars, he says. Paul is telling Titus something about the local culture where he's going to be doing ministry.

Paul agrees with this assertion by a prophet, poet, Epimenides. Giving rise, you will know, to the famous liar's paradox. Won't dwell on this too long, but again, in unfolding this letter.

[18 : 03] You know how the liar's paradox works. A Cretan says, an inhabitant of that island, says that all Cretans are liars. This, for some I know, is what gives philosophy a bad name, so we're not going to stay on this for long.

But again, you know how the liar's paradox works. If the statement is true, then it's false. But if it's false, then it's true. You got that? The paradox in principle, there's something important, I think there's something important at work here.

The paradox in principle states the unresolvable. I'm guessing here, but just maybe Paul is aware of the paradox issue in this prophet's words, which he decides to quote here in his letter to Titus.

And he means us to rejoice in the thought that grace, if you will, resolves the unresolvable. Paul may be that subtle.

I think maybe that's what's going on here. Why does he quote this outrageous thing from a Cretan prophet? Well, Paul can set up resonances in his writing sometimes and gets them at work in your mind.

[19 : 17] Paradox presents the apparently unresolvable intellectual conundrum, but grace resolves unresolvable things. In the paradox of Christ, this happens.

Christians shouldn't be wary of paradox, of ambiguity, because it's right at the center of our faith. Salvation reveals God as one, and yet as three.

He's three, and yet he's one. Christ is one word from God, but he's in two natures. Got that? That's at the center of our faith. There's kind of paradoxes, ambiguities.

God revels in them. He likes paradoxes. That's the way he teaches us. Reason does not make the world transparent. That's what the paradox may reveal to the philosopher.

They're not really interested in cretism, whether or not they're all liars, and how that makes their statements work. But they think that, well, reason apparently does not make the world transparent.

[20 : 20] It is apparently reason rooted in trust. Some philosophers happily conclude that. The summary of the whole letter is almost over this little note to Titus.

That's almost a linguistic paradox. I just said that the summary is almost over. A summary is an overview. So there you go. Paul thinks about and shares with Titus truths concerning sobering, about being sober and wise in our world.

Being sober and wise even about our world. here is a world lost and dark in its sinful rebellion. Do you recall near the end of this letter to Titus, Paul talks about, I always remember Harry talking about this one New Year's Eve.

He talks about in this world we hate and we are hated. He says to Titus, that's how life in this world is. But the grace of God, the goodness, the loving kindness of God our Savior has appeared.

As Paul draws to it, the close of this little note to Titus. These are sure words of the gospel, he tells Titus. Speak these words.

[21 : 36] At 3.7 in this little note, Paul uses his traditional language, justified by his grace, we inherit the hope of eternal life. There's kind of, again, an overview of how Titus unfolds.

It's authority issues, a weighty theological statement to begin it, and then near the end of it, Paul, again, repeats the gospel, but we're justified by his grace, we inherit the hope of eternal life.

In this short note, Paul says all of that to Titus. And then in the midst of all of this resides our little passage here, which we might now just take a few moments to unpack together.

This passage, looking up here at it, I think we can safely say it really comes in three parts. We could call it grace appearing, obviously, and then strangely, if you will, grace teaching, and then grace creating hope.

Again, how it begins, for the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared. Isn't that just, again, a lovely thing to say, just standing alone? We read the Bible as one book, don't we?

[22 : 54] We read it as a canon, and as such, we may listen to it all as we read each part. So the prologue to John's gospel says, you will recall, and the word became flesh, and lived among us, dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.

So our passage is like an amen, isn't it, to the prologue? The grace, says Paul, yes, amen, the grace has appeared. The grace has appeared.

And it was a word that lived among us. So Paul says that this grace teaches or trains.

The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us. Isn't that an interesting formulation here? Grace has appeared and grace teaches.

It is a grace which is articulate, God's grace. Grace is articulate. Paul says that here. Speech is lovely, or it may be.

[24 : 06] That's why we might not apologize for paying a little attention now and again to Shakespeare and Milton. They witness to how lovely language can be.

What does grace teach here? I know nothing new here that I'm teaching the saints, just looking at some obvious apostolic teaching. What does grace teach?

Paul does not say much here, does he? But what he does say is surely instructive. God's grace, this articulate grace, calling it, is to an end.

God's grace appearing has a purpose for us. If you will, it does not remain idle. You'll recall when I read the opening of this letter to Titus, Paul says just in passing that it accords with godliness.

It, grace, apparently, wonderfully, wants to transform people. Here I'm being a bit interpretive. Again, discussion time you can tell me if I've got this right or wrong.

[25 : 13] But I think Paul is saying here that grace wants to transform people, if you will, into its own likeness. Grace wants to make you a charming, graceful person into its own likeness.

Titus is to teach something called, we see here, doesn't he, something called godliness. God is gracious, gracious, and what does graciousness do?

Paul tells us here, who gave himself for us, who gave himself for us, two-thirds of the way down, these are not numbered here on the prayer book.

God is gracious and God gives himself. Worldly passions, these passions that Paul tells Titus to turn the Cretans away from.

Worldly passions are obviously selfish passions. Rather, says Paul to Titus, teach these Cretans, teach these liars, including that poet, Epimenides, rather, teach them to be zealous for good works.

[26 : 31] That would be news to the Cretan thing. Be self-controlled here, that Paul talks about with Titus. Be self-controlled means be in a state which is good for you and for others.

That's what it means to be self-controlled. Be in a state that's good for you and good for others. Again, Paul doesn't unfold this here, so we can just do a little bit of interpreting for ourselves.

I always find the Oxford philosopher Christian Richard Swinburne just so wonderful because he's so simple about ethical things, at least in some places in his writings.

He says somewhere, Richard Swinburne does, God expects human beings to be deeply responsible for one another. I think that's a wonderfully simple and good thing to say.

What he's just saying there, love your neighbor, means that God expects us to be responsible for one another. That's all. And it's reasonable for God to expect human beings to be responsible for one another.

[27 : 38] And that's what Paul wants Titus to teach early budding Christian communities on Crete about, that they're to be responsible for one another, they're to be godly, to give themselves away to one another, to live in a state which is self-controlled so that you can be good for other people.

Again, Paul is brief here in this, but his general meaning surely is clear enough. And he says to Titus again as he concludes this little passage, speak these things, these things speak, Titus.

Teach them that the grace of God which has appeared accords with godliness. It's articulate grace, it wants you to be a different kind of person than you usually are.

So grace is announced, grace teaches, just briefly Paul tells Titus about this basic ethical teaching we call it, about being godly, self-controlled, about being gracious to the other.

And then we hear in this passage quite beautifully, again briefly, that grace gives birth to hope, looking for our blessed hope, says Paul here, about being in this present one, looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.

[29 : 09] Again, there's weighty words in this passage. A blessed hope and a glorious appearing is before us, the appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.

You notice here, appearing repeats itself here. grace has appeared and apparently grace is due to appear again, Paul says here.

Wonderful little passage, tightly stated. Grace has appeared and grace is due to appear again. It is to be, Paul says here, without unfolding it.

It is to be a glorious appearing. I guess he thought, well, they know all about trumpets and angels and saints, so I won't unfold that now.

Because you saints, you do know all about the second coming. I'm not overly familiar with how it's going to be. But apparently there will be from other places in scripture, an archangel's trumpet and angels and saints and all of that.

[30 : 12] The world, the world, as in, as the Greeks called it, as in cosmos, they know the whole show, is somehow like and somehow unlike the life of you and me, it seems Paul believes and implies here.

You know, we began, I like to think about this. Do you ever ponder that we, each of us as individuals, we began in nothing? Where were you before you were born?

You know, Hume, the philosopher, the philosopher's on my mind these days. I don't know where I was before I was born, I was nowhere. We began in nothing, and then we become something, that's why we're here today, and then we appear to go back into nothing.

We just throw dirt on you, as Pascal says at the end of it all, it's over. So the world appeared from nothing, that's the Christian confession.

There was no world there for God to work with when he created it. The world just appeared from nothing because God commanded it to exist. But it ends with the creator's return, the person of his redeeming son, Jesus, and then the world will have apparently a new beginning.

[31 : 29] And then so will we. A new beginning. Jesus Christ will return and we will see him, the apostle here is saying.

He is appearing. He appears so that he may be seen. We will know him as the one, Paul says here, who came to redeem us and to make us pure, might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto himself a peculiar people.

There are echoes upon echoes here of Paul's worldview. Peculiar people echoes the story of God redeeming a people out of evil.

and I like to think that this idea of purify unto himself a peculiar people is a deep echo of the Beatitudes.

Blessed are the pure in heart, they shall see God. That's directly in front of us in another form here. Jesus said if you're pure, you'll see God.

[32 : 47] Jesus came to purify himself of people so that they'll see him when he returns. You'll see him as he is. The pure will see him as he is.

How the impure will see him, we don't know. You may see him as an enemy when he appears. They hate purity. He loved us and gave himself for us.

Paul says everywhere, doesn't it? It's one of his characteristic sayings. When he returns, you don't want to move on from this point. Without mentioning it, obviously we can't help but think about it.

When he returns, there is judgment. How is this? We just don't know, do we? The Eastern Church, I cite here David Bentley Hart, one of his books was reviewed in this place a couple months ago.

He teaches that, and he's echoing here the whole Eastern Church's understanding of judgment, which I think is very rich. They say that, well, it's love that returns.

[33 : 58] This glorious appearing is love returning. But love's refusal, early Greek fathers taught, love's refusal makes love a torment.

So those who reject the loving Lord will find his love a torment. torment. There's an irony. There is a paradox.

There's how the Eastern Church habitually understands the mystery of judgment when the Lord returns. They've rejected his love, so they find his love now a torment. That's hellfire.

There it is. But the church is to speak these words that there is a blessed hope there will be a glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ.

The statement of our Lord's divinity could be clearer there. But to Titus, Paul simply says, put this before the saints. Teach these things.

[35 : 03] Speak them. There it is. I think in these few verses, we have really the equivalent of a Pauline sermon outline.

Isn't it? It's so short that Paul is saying, he doesn't say these things speak for nothing in other translations, declare these things. Paul is saying here's an outline of what I want you to teach.

Here's a sermon outline. It is, again, in three parts. Are good sermons always in three parts? I don't know. The grace of God has appeared. There is the first certainty, if you will, of the sermon.

It is God's act. It is his, it is, do we dare to put it this way because this passage talks like this? This is God's zealous work for us.

We are to be zealous for good works because God has shown himself very zealous to do us good. He has appeared. His grace has appeared.

[36 : 11] That is God's zealous work for us. There is a certainty. The godliness of God is here displayed. We are to put aside ungodliness.

Well, what is godliness? Paul tells you. Godliness, God acts in grace to save you. The godliness of God is displayed in grace.

God lives. Here is a Trinitarian mystery for sure. The god, I'm going to make this my 2010 thought for the year.

This is, God lives by giving himself away in the Trinity itself, in his own life. God lives by giving himself away. The father gives himself away in the son.

The unity of their love gives way to the mystery of the spirit. The unfathomable paradox is God becoming the other for the other.

[37 : 10] Kierkegaard puts it like that. I love that. That's an unfathomable paradox. God loves the other so much that he'll become the other.

Paul says that he became sin that we might become his righteousness. righteousness. There is a giving of oneself away.

There is grace appearing. He became the other for the other so that we might become other than we are. You people are so nice.

Maybe you've done a lot of this already. But we all have to be zealous for good works. We have to be. You won't be that naturally, will you?

I'm not that naturally. Believe you me. Zealous for good works. That's the life of people who have seen the grace of God appearing. And they want to be godly too.

[38 : 07] And so they want to be zealous for giving themselves away. That's not too difficult, I guess. The middle term of the sermon will be last.

The third part of the sermon is another certainty. It is this blessed hope that Paul talks about here, right in the middle of this Titus 2 passage. Our hope is not grounded in ourselves.

And that's good news, isn't it? When someone tells you to be hopeful, you say, I can't. But the gospel says you can be hopeful because it's not your work. Our hope is not grounded in ourselves.

It is not an internal disposition that I happen to possess just now. An internal disposition. Hope is Jesus Christ, Paul is saying to Titus.

Tell the Cretans this. Jesus Christ, the grace of God appearing, is now your hope. That's your hope, what God has done for you. God has created our hope for us.

[39 : 06] So we can look, it's a strange construction, but it's beautiful, isn't it? We are looking for our hope. He's going to appear someday, waiting for our hope. Paul believes this and teaches it everywhere in his writings, doesn't he?

It is by the power of the Holy Spirit that we may abound in hope. You won't be able to do it by yourself. Your hope cannot be grounded in, it will falter and fail.

Life will get you down in one way or another. It is by the power, Romans 15, verse 13. It is by the power of the Holy Spirit that we may abound in hope.

So teaches the Apostle. So surrounded by these certainties, grace, the first certainty, and a perfect hope, the third certainty, the third part of this sermon outline, we are to live in the middle term, this middle earth, we might call it, where we live.

Grace teaches this. Grace accords with this, Paul says to Titus. We hear again in the letters introduction, don't we? This middle, connect with last year a bit here as I draw it to a close, this middle term of a three-part sermon.

[40 : 21] It is the source or the focal point of so much church and theological conundrum, isn't it? Jim Packer, he who goes to Dallas frequently, talked late last year in Learner's Exchange about Roman Catholic and Protestant dispute.

How does grace impart holiness? How do the two merge? How do we respond? How do we get this middle term of this three-part sermon right?

Is it an achievement of sorts? We Protestants tend to think that Rome does teach that and they say, no, we don't, you've got it wrong and we've been arguing about these things for about half a millennium now and I guess we're making progress but it's hard to see it sometimes.

Is it an achievement, our holiness? Is it a working out? An evangelical wants to say, no, it's the work and Luther, Kurt was talking about Martin Luther this morning wonderfully. Is it the working out of a new conferred status?

That's our Protestant belief. Or is it somehow both? These things are ongoing disputes. We've got to get the middle term of this into our lives somehow, the middle term of this sermon.

[41 : 34] It is, again, it appears to be an unresolvable issue like a paradox. B.B. Warfield, I don't know if you know that great name, he was a Princeton theologian of the last century.

He highlights the strangeness of these issues. For me, I think it's a delightful quote to know. He summarized the Reformation itself, the more broad issue of the Reformation.

He called it Augustine's Doctrine of Grace versus Augustine's Doctrine of the Church. That's what happened at the Reformation. Augustine did contain multitudes.

Philosophers, here's another interlude as we draw to a close. Philosophers on the brain these days, they're good for me. But I think this goes to the heart of me of understanding this middle term in this Titus 2, 11 to 15 passage, and maybe an echo of some of the things that Jim was so wonderfully talking about, and the evangelicals and Catholics together stuff.

Philosophers do talk about, this is a very understandable and a good thing to see, I think, but again, if you don't like this kind of thing, just tune out now. Philosophers talk about the conditions of ideal belief formation.

[42 : 46] We all form beliefs in our lives as we go through life. They try to say, well, what would be an ideal condition for really good, ideal belief formation?

Even including, say, the assumptions that we make about our faculties which are involved in belief formation. Again, if you don't like this kind of stuff, don't worry about it. belief formation happens through discursive reason, analytic reason.

We also have memory in our minds. We have our perception apparatus by which I think, I know you're out there today. You're outside my skin. You're out there in the real world.

We have, are these, is this perception apparatus that I have, is it reliable? Is it, may I rely upon it?

I have this capacity for idea, for intellection, conceptions form in my mind. Is all of this really geared to know truth? You know, is there really an ideally formed belief?

[43 : 47] There's so many questions here. There's so many difficulties. How do we form, how do we form our beliefs about holiness? This middle term that Paul talks about with Titus.

How do you form your beliefs about it? Well, see, this, if you put up with all that, I hope this is the good payoff. The answer captures the issue. You will, we form our beliefs about holiness by practicing holiness.

Ah, you got that? Paul says, grace has appeared. Now tell the cretins, those liars, that they have to learn to be holy, godly, sober. And the church is always battled with, well, God makes me holy and now I'm supposed to try and be holy.

What's the dynamic? Is it my own work? Is it a gift from God? Well, don't worry about it too much. Just practice it and your belief formation about it all will fall into place.

So practice holiness so that you can understand it. There's how belief formation happens in the Christian life. Catholics and Protestants can all agree on that.

[44 : 55] We'll have this argument all the time, but are you practicing it? Paul says to Titus, you tell those cretins they better practice this. Grace has appeared, a perfect hope will appear.

Now, be holy because you want to be pure when that pure Lord appears. Holiness is the condition of truth formation about these issues.

If you put it in a snappy formal way. Holiness is the condition of truth formation about holiness. There you go, end of a sign.

Paul's, there it is, Paul's sermon outline. His command to Titus is to speak these things. That at least tells us what we should be chiefly concerned about on January, as January the 10th has come, in the year of our Lord, 2010.

Paul says to Titus, there are three things to be concerned about. Grace, then holiness, and hope. There's a sermon outline. Titus, speak those things to those Cretans who are bad folks.

[46 : 07] They're sinners. You're going to meet them everywhere in the world, even in the church. Teach them grace, and teach them holiness, and teach them hope. There's a New Year's resolution to think about.

Titus went with that message to Crete, and we have it in front of us from an apostle today, Titus 2, 11 to 15. Grace, holiness, hope. There's what you can live by.

How beautiful, may I say, and good, and even charming it all is. Do you find it charming, the grace of God? Does it charm you enough that you want to be like it?

You know, I hope it charms me sufficiently that I'll try to be like it. Give myself away to others in godliness and sobriety of life, so that I can be good for others.

The grace of God has appeared. The grace of God teaches. It is known, it is indicated by the presence of a hope that endures.

[47 : 11] How's hope with you these days? You can sort of measure how your Christian life is getting on if you've got a solid hope. You really feel, God is good, and he's going to appear for me, his graceful, his graceful, lovely self.

It causes us to want to desire holiness of life. This passage clearly teaches holiness, which again is the condition of ideal belief about things like grace and hope.

All those conundrums that Christians have tussled with for a long time. A long time. We sometimes go to the Bible looking for deep and new and astonishing things, and I guess sometimes we find that in the Bible, but better we should seek, will you agree with me, better we should seek just to find the obvious.

And that's what I've been trying to do today. I'm just trying to look at Paul to Titus, reading for Christmas Day. He ends this little passage by a time to speak these things which brings up, this is the stuff, Titus, to get straight.

So I think it is a sermon outline, and clearly, I think clearly enough, the sermon outline is about, again, grace and holiness and hope. Teach these things, Titus.

[48 : 27] We want the church to always have this in front of us. There may in the future be people out in Vancouver who need to hear it too. Jesus Christ is God's grace, giving himself up for us, giving us a perfect hope, teaching us to become witnesses and more of grace and hope in holiness of life.

There it is. On Crete, they're all liars, apparently. Boy. But they may become, apparently, by God's grace, a sacred and hallowed people, perhaps even, I don't know, surrounded by bright, harnessed angels in order serviceable.

We do have angels that serve us, the Bible says. But we are to learn to speak these words. And in 2010, you couldn't do too much better than to learn to speak words, words about grace, words about holiness of life, and words about a perfect hope.

A perfect hope. What a blessed sermon outlined Paul gave to Titus. I bet he was good on Crete with this sermon. I bet he preached it everywhere and taught those liars the straight note.

All of them were liars. Wow. What a paradox. Can I close with prayer and then you can pop me with questions. Lord, we thank you for the gospel.

[49 : 58] We thank you that you've given it to us so clearly. That you've appeared in grace. You've given us the mystery of Jesus. You're teaching us to be holy.

And you're teaching us to live in the blessed hope. In this coming year, Lord, may we just live in these things to your glory. Again, to our great benefit. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. physically mand Idy. glossary of r Idy,■■ to enjoy them.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.

Thank you.

[51 : 41] He even taught me the Last Supper in person. The second person of the Trinity taught Paul. Paul is, what Paul teaches, God teaches.

That's what the Church believes. I guess the reason for my question is that I know of Anglicans and some other churches who are studying the writings of other disciples who have not been included in the canon.

Now, I haven't looked in any detail at these. I've read more about them than I have read them. Thomas being an example. What do we do with that?

Well, we tell them that... The authority of the apostles seems to be, you know, affirmed in what Paul says here.

But he hasn't given us a list of those people that are on and those people that are off. No, but... Oh, yeah. Well, we can... You say to them...

[52 : 38] You can go that route, sure. But the Church has said no to that route. The Church receives the Scriptures as we now have them and as they were affirmed to be at the first few ecumenical councils of the Church.

Well, I understand that. I believe it. But, I mean, by the end of the first century, all of the apostles were dead. You know? So the Church kind of puttsied on with a different kind of organization.

They weren't just sticking to what the apostles taught. They were sticking to what the Church, Holy Mother Church, also taught. Yeah, well, there's a...

Yes. And that was who said, or that was the organization that said, this is part of the canon. That is not. The big issue between Rome and Protestantism classically is David Webster, or John Webster's magnificent on this.

And it turns on something very simple. It seems subtle, but it's really... Did the Church recognize apostolic authority, or did it confer apostolic authority?

[53 : 52] We believe it recognized, not conferred. Tradition has no authority to confer. Tradition recognizes. The Church recognizes 27 books, New Testament, that's it.

Case closed. If you want to become a Gnostic, and read other early writings, by all means. But just remember, you're leaving the Holy Catholic faith when you do that.

That's what we say to those liberals who want to read Thomas. And for what it's worth, at a lesser level, at a less dogmatic level, with a capital D, you should...

Good luck to them. The Gnostic writings are so sexist, so superstitious, so crude. Thank goodness the Church said...

For centuries, the Church was in conversation with those people, and gave them lots of hearing, and said, obviously, this is not apostolic. My sheep hear my voice, Jesus said.

[54 : 56] And the Church hears his voice. It's not the Gospel of Thomas. It's not the Gnostics. Dear Jesus, how will Mary go to heaven?

She's a woman. Oh, don't worry. I'll turn her into a man, so that she can go to heaven. But this crude, unbiblical... It doesn't even jive with the mystery of creation, male and female.

It moves off into garish disconnection, say, with the faith of Israel. You know, on all sorts of levels, that it's not biblical. It doesn't jive with the prophets or with the Pentateuch.

It has crude, ancient prejudices in it. Thank goodness the Church just said, no, we won't have anything to do with that. Yeah, and some Anglican circles, you'll meet people who are high on Thomas and the Gospel of...

Thomas didn't write the Gospel of Thomas. No one knows who wrote the Gospel of Thomas. Any...

[55 : 56] Is that... Have I given you an answer? No, I think so. Do you think that... I don't know. Did anything I said about... Did anything I said about the authority of the Apostles seem overstated? No, well, not to me, because I think this is...

This is the faith that we know. Well, in the Creed, one holy Catholic. Not any Gnostics. I mean, up close and personal. Ever heard Michael Langham talk?

He's a Gnostic. He is a Gnostic. He is a Gnostic. He's a Gnostic. I thought he was a Gnostic. Well, he is a Gnostic. I don't think he'd deny that. He likes that kind of...

That's the spirituality that's... Is that where the word obnoxious comes from? It might, though.

Gnostic, as in gnosis in Greek, means knowledge. You're saved by esoteric knowledge. Secret, hidden... That's what the Gnostics taught. Not Catholic, not open and public teaching.

[57 : 02] They hated the word Catholic. We're not Catholics. We have esoteric knowledge to get you into heaven. Sir? I would personally say thanks for the talk.

I was talking to some guys earlier, and I think you gave half of the talk that I was hopefully going to give him here. We feel short and whatever that we've got.

So, this is great. I am curious, though, about the... As far as apostles go, Luther would be open to finding new letters and including them in the canon.

Or his understanding of Scripture seemed to allow for that. I could say the real first Corinthians were to be dug up somewhere. I'm curious if I could talk about that.

Well, I'm not really the one to ask. Well, I'd say all I can say is the church happily never took Luther up on his silly speculations there. Luther could say some really dumb things, as all Christian leaders do.

[58 : 10] The church has never taken up on it, have they? If someone said, let's add something to the New Testament, you would... First off, it would take centuries.

The church would have to call ecumenical councils that would be recognized by all the churches, Protestant, Orthodox, and Catholic. And for centuries, there'd be discussion about it, and I bet you'd never reach a conclusion.

You would... Who would have the authority to do that? You know, so I'm... Well, if... So when... I'm a little devil's advocate. No, I understand that, yeah.

If we were to say, though, that Scripture is self-authenticating, which I... I'm a solid and proud of it, but not that. I'm glad to hear that. Yes. Then if something were...

Something would self-authenticate, that Scripture would indeed say, I am Scripture. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean, it's all speculative in a sense. Yeah, it is. But I wonder if it doesn't have implications for the way that we think about our New Testament in Spain.

[59 : 08] I don't understand. Well, yeah. It goes... I mean, it goes back to the old issue between Rome and the Reformers, the magisterial Reform. How are we to understand Scripture and tradition?

Doesn't it? And Rome has a capital T tradition that has authority. We have a small T tradition that is a wonderful gift to the church, a conversation about the gospel, but it has no authority.

So it's about that issue, which we discussed until the cows come home. Do you think this is a sermon outline?

I think it is. The more I think about it, he's given Titus an authority document. Who is Titus coming to speak to us today? And Titus would say, I come from Paul.

And then he would have in his hand the outline of what he's supposed to teach to these cretins. I think it's a wonderful document in that sense. It preaches itself.

[60 : 15] It gives an outline for preaching. It gives Titus authority as it gives the church authority. So it echoes down to us today, doesn't it? This is what the apostle teaches us today.

I'm glad it's there for Christmas Day. I like it. It seems to be lovely. Magisterial in its beginning. The grace of God has appeared. What a thing to say on Christmas Day. In the stable, the baby is there.

There's God's grace. That's lovely, sir. I wonder if you, or if my understanding of what you said was that you maybe gloried a little bit too much in paradox.

And I doubt that God finds any paradoxes in reality. And I think that your suggestion that he delights in paradoxes, if that's what you said, is just that he decided to make us finite and that that's a good thing.

Because all that God does is good. But we've thought lots of things, paradoxes, over the course of history that we've found solutions to.

[61 : 29] And I wonder if these open, you spoke again, the esotericness, if that's the word, of the Gnostics. And I wonder if the way you phrased that might have left ultimately the possibility that God finds delight in being esoteric.

Yeah, yeah. Very good comments. Thank you, yeah. I mean, I can appeal to Scripture. I love those moments in Scripture in the wisdom literature of the Old Testament where we hear that God is subtle.

The Lord is subtle. That he hides a matter and he gives it to kings. I think we're all kings in this regard to seek it out. He likes to hide things.

You seek it out. So God can be subtle. And I think it's mostly... I don't have to get trapped by the word paradox, but God is sending us...

Think of me like this, God says. I am Trinity. I'm three and I'm one. My son Jesus. The church figure... Far enough to say one mysterious divine person, two natures.

[62 : 44] So God sends multi-signals on people put it. And he wants us to seek this out. Not to make it go away in a transparent reason, but to delight in it, in this mystery, this revealed mystery.

Does that help? Maybe I'm very much shaped by the Christian philosopher Nicholas Walterstor, who...

His intellectual hero, one of them is Thomas Reed, an 18th century epistemologist, a brilliant Scotsman. You don't know Scots, they're all smart. Who took on Hume and Descartes and Locke and said, you don't know what you're talking about.

We live... His conclusion is, he thought much about our perceptual apparatus that I was echoing you today and how it works and how we simply don't know how it works.

And God means us, Reed concluded, to know that we don't know. And that our intellectual life, this is Reed's brilliant conclusion, is based upon ungrounded trust.

[63 : 55] God created us to be trusting creatures. Ungrounded trust. We just... Our perceptions of the world work. We live in the world, we just have to deal with it this way.

Even though we can't look in upon ourselves and make it transparent. He even goes so far as to say, if God gave us another set of faculties so that we could understand the ones we currently have, the ones he gave us, he wouldn't...

We wouldn't be able to understand them. So we live in ungrounded trust. And it's a happy thing. His view of the world, Reed's view of the world, for those of you who are...

He anticipates Nietzsche brilliantly. But he's overcome Nietzsche already, this Christian philosophy. Yes, there's a tragic wisdom. Nietzsche's piety is tragic.

But no, it's better to live with the acknowledgement of ungrounded trust. We just... It works, our mind, in the world, but we don't know why or how. So that's the paradox that God has given us to live with.

[64 : 59] That's so I'm... I don't think Christians should be... I'm... Boy, that's a mouthful. I'm sorry. We shouldn't be afraid. Are we rationalists? Do we want to make the world transparent to our minds?

God has made it so that that cannot happen. Reed would believe. And the scriptures, he would say... He's a philosopher. He never refers to scripture, but he might say, by the way, the scriptures tell us this.

That he made us want to find answers. Yeah, but not to become rationalists. I'm not sure what you mean. Oh, my intellect is totally transparent to myself. No, it's not.

I don't know why it works, but it just does. It's ungrounded. So anyway, that's a mouthful. It's been said that, you know, we want to be our own bosses and one by nature.

You know, we can just want to say that we have a thing for leaving you doing what is wrong. But, one aspect of that is, of course, wanting to have everything that we can be able to understand everything with our minds.

[65 : 58] Yes, yes. And of course, how can finite minds understand the infinite? Yes. I mean, to say that God likes a paradox, I mean, if he likes to give us paradox because he knows it's good for us. Yes, yes. There's nothing, would you agree with this footnote?

There's nothing, God didn't create finite creatures and then go, gosh, I'm sorry, but you're stuck with your finiteness. No, it's your glory to be finite.

It's your glory to live in ungrounded trust. We're without excuse on the day of judgment. I had to live in trust all the time. I usually trusted a creator. But in unbelief, I tried to overcome that.

Unbelief is by its very nature contradictory of the very structure of ourselves, Reed would want to say. But anyway, that's another, I'll give you a book review someday on this Thomas Reed guy and then we'll really get confused together.

Oh, please. As always, Harvey, I appreciate the common sense and balance that you bring. Checks in the mail.

[67 : 03] And I think what hit me today was this phrase. Writing the first phrase there is the Trinity.

It's so obvious. The grace of God the Father that brings us salvation has appeared to all men this time, teaching us the Holy Spirit. And all the way through it, it kept coming up.

how he balanced everything. The past he has planned and provided the present, how we should live and in the future looking for the hope.

And the purpose is that we were saved from iniquity, that we live in the present holy lives and that in the future we are redeemed to be with him.

And these three just kept coming up. He kept saying them and I had a picture in my mind of a balance and I thought traditionally we look at a scale as two to be balanced but the middle is grounded in the present and that's what gives us hope.

[68 : 20] and that thought just kept coming up. Thank you very much for your comments on the present. Thank you. I took an hour and you did it in about 45 seconds.

Thank you for that. some of the mysteries too is that what they can say to argue we can figure everything out and put it all in a box in some face too. Yes. How are we going to defend ourselves against the argument that God is smaller than your imaginations as just a product of your imagination?

Yes. Yes. As a thought. Yes. Whereas if you could say it's no longer bigger it's something beyond us. Yes. Yes. Thank you. Thank you. That for me is the in Prince Caspian the Chronicle of Narnia and they capture this even in the movie that's why I remember it now.

The little Lucy gets reintroduced acquainted with Aslan Jesus and she says to him you've grown he seems a bigger lion and he says to her well as you get bigger I'll always get bigger.

You know we could God is an infinitude of endless glory. You can never capture that.

[69 : 45] It's good sir. Where is Jim Packer today? Where is really is he in Dallas? We go away rejoicing Bill? You're not answering.

Like the unit? Who? You tell me. You want to rejoice about it. Does this last line suggest that Moutla that Titus was young?

Speak things with authority let no one despise him. Was he young? I don't know how Titus was but I think he's young.

Thank you Bill. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.