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MIN 212 Methods of Interpretation II

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## What the Grace of God Teaches Us

### 1. Introduction

In Titus 2:11-14, Paul explains that a primary purpose for the grace of God is its work in transforming lives from corruption to godly living. The main verse for this study, Titus 2:12, states that purpose plainly: “teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age.”

This verse, Titus 2:12, is not a complete sentence, but it contains the key idea that the appearance of the grace of God (Titus 2:11) teaches us that we should “live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age,” which goes hand-in-hand with “denying ungodliness and worldly lusts.” It is interesting that these ideas are presented as an either-or alternative without a third, neutral choice.

### 2. Context

The overall context of Titus 2:11-14 fits within Paul’s main purpose for writing this letter to Titus. Titus 1:5 tells the reader that Titus was left in Crete to finish a mission that Paul and Titus worked on together, which involved setting “in order the things that are lacking” and appointing elders in all of the cities in Crete. While this is certainly an affirmation of Titus’ mission, the question remains as to whether or not restating the goal of the mission was the purpose of Paul’s letter.

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## 2.1 *The Purpose and Argument of the Letter to Titus*

Daniel Wallace states that Titus 1:5 is, indeed, the purpose of the letter: “[*T*]he purpose of his letter and the reason why he left Titus behind (1:5), viz., to straighten out unfinished business and to appoint elders (1:5).”<sup>2</sup> (The emphasized phrase was highlighted by this author.)

Wallace then outlines the argument of the book using Titus’ two-pronged mission:

The body of the letter will deal with these two issues in chiastic arrangement (appointment of elders in 1:6-9, setting things in order in 1:10–3:14). The relative lengths of these two sections ought not to be taken as an indication of their relative importance. Titus was to leave Crete soon (3:12), when other apostolic delegates arrived. But the elders had the task of continuing on in the ministry in Crete and could not come and go as they pleased (or as the apostle directed). Thus as much as this letter is directed to Titus, it was also very much for the elders of the church (as can be seen by the plural greeting in 3:15).<sup>3</sup>

This author agrees that the relative lengths of these sections of Titus indicate the focus of Paul’s concern, which is not the same as their relative importance, but it is proposed in this paper that the arrangement of the contents supports a different statement of Paul’s purpose in writing the letter. David Malick’s statement about the purpose of Paul’s letter to Titus is closer to the point:

Paul writes Titus as his representative in Crete to aid the churches in a prophylactic way against Jewish false teachers by appointing those in leadership who are able to manage God’s household well and stand against the false teachers, and by exhorting all believers

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<sup>2</sup> Wallace, Daniel B. “Titus: Introduction, Argument, and Outline.” *Bible.org*, bible.org/seriespage/17-titus-introduction-argument-and-outline.

<sup>3</sup> Wallace.

to excel in good works so that they might reach those outside of the church with the gospel.<sup>4</sup>

Malick includes the threat of Jewish false teachers in his statement and the fact that the leadership of the Cretan churches need to be able to address the false teachers, and he indirectly states that the church leadership needs to teach doctrine leading to good works. This author believes that the latter concern is forefront in Paul's thinking as he writes his letter to Titus. The purpose of the letter, therefore, can be stated thus: stewards of God *must* be blameless because 1) leaders teaching error cause deep disruption and leads to ungodly living; and, 2) teaching sound doctrine leads to godly living demonstrated in unimpeachable lives full of good works.

### *2.2 The Context of Titus 2:1-3:11 Supports This Argument Statement*

The section from Titus 2:1-3:11 is generally agreed to be the part of the letter in which Paul outlines instructions to be followed by church leadership in teaching various populations within the churches, linking those instructions to doctrine in 2:11-14.<sup>5</sup> The link to ethical instructions (2:1-10) is strongly indicated by Paul's use of the conjunction "for" in 2:11, which provides the doctrinal reason behind those instructions: "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men" (2:11). It is because the grace of God has appeared that teaching sound doctrine is to be done and will be evident in transformed lives.

As Wallace states,

The apostle then turns to the ethical instruction of the church (2:1-15). Paul again links godliness with doctrine (cf. 1:6-9), for he begins with the instructions "communicate the behavior that goes with sound teaching" (2:1, NET), but the thrust of his instruction is ethical standards for various groups (2:2-10). It is only at the end of these instructions

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<sup>4</sup> Malick, David. "An Argument Of The Book Of Titus" *Bible.org*, bible.org/article/argument-book-titus

<sup>5</sup> See both Wallace and Malick. Note that Wallace begins this section in 1:10.

that Paul relates them to doctrine: in 2:11-14 he reminds Titus of the Lord's imminent return as a motivation to do good right now.<sup>6</sup>

We see that Paul's instructions regarding the content of sound doctrine and its resulting effect on believers' lives is motivated by the grace of God and what the appearance of his grace teaches us: denying ungodliness and living in righteousness. This can be accomplished only if the leadership teaches sound doctrine supported by their personal example of godliness (2:1, 7, 8).

### *2.3 Titus 2:11-14 as it Relates to This Section and to Titus as a Whole*

Paul's letter to Titus tightly integrates 2:11-14 with the larger section of 2:1-3:11 by stating plainly that one of the purposes of God's grace in our lives is to teach us to deny ungodliness and to live righteously. The larger section of 2:1-3:11 spends much time conveying details about the content of sound doctrine and the essential truth that those preaching such doctrine must also live it. That is the core of Paul's purpose of writing the entire letter, as stated above: stewards of God *must* be blameless because 1) leaders teaching error causes deep disruption and leads to ungodly living; and, 2) teaching sound doctrine leads to godly living demonstrated in unimpeachable lives full of good works.

### *2.4 Titus 2:12 in Light of These Sections*

Since the purpose of Paul's letter to Titus is to explain the necessity of church leadership, whom he calls "stewards of God" (1:7), living exemplary lives and teaching sound doctrine, his statement about the grace of God is phrased in such a way as to provide clear motivation for fulfilling this high calling. Titus is facing false teachers whose corrupt doctrine is destroying families (1:11) and whose lives deny the grace of God (1:16). His mission is to complete the

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<sup>6</sup> Wallace.

work of restoring Cretan churches to health and to appoint leaders whose lives reflect the transforming grace of God (1:5-9). The reason behind Paul's instructions is that this is what the grace of God teaches us: deny ungodliness and live righteously. Paul's letter is tightly integrated around this theme, stated simply as this: God's grace transforms lives, and his grace can only be understood when truth is taught.

### 3. Interpretation

Understanding that the focus of this study is verse 12, it is important to include verse 11 in order to view its complete sentence. The paragraph, as stated above, is explaining why it is necessary both to teach and to live sound doctrine. Living an ungodly life is a denial of the grace of God (1:16), and teaching false doctrine is destructive (1:11), leading to untransformed lives (1:12). The paragraph reiterates these truths, extending the general instruction to teach sound doctrine to its application to different demographic groups: older men, older women, younger women, younger men, and slaves (2:1-10). The motivation is that God's grace teaches transformation, described as "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts," and living "soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age," (2:12), all the while watching for the return of the Lord (2:13). Titus 2:14 repeats the gist of 2:12, this time describing transformation as the purpose of Christ's sacrifice and our redemption: "who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works."

#### 3.1 *The Meaning of Titus 2:12*

The interpretation of Titus 2:12 revolves around two key terms that describe the content of what God's grace teaches us: *denial* and *living*. On the one hand, God's grace teaches us to deny the way of life (ungodliness) and motivations (worldly lusts) of our unredeemed lives. On

the other hand, God's grace teaches us to live soberly (with thoughtfulness), righteously (in conformity to God's standards), and godly (in conformity to God's character). In summary, we deny two aspects of our unregenerate life: ungodly standards and ungodly desires; and, we live with thoughtful attention to godly standards and godly character.

The word *deny* means to reject or forsake,<sup>7</sup> which is a deliberate act or decision. Denial cannot be done in a vacuum. In other words, there must be something present to consider before one makes the decision to reject or forsake it. Paul gives us the context of "this present age" in this verse, which has the connotation of the standards, norms, and generally accepted behaviors of the time. His earlier description of the typical Cretan was that they were "liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons" (1:12). Titus 2:12 tells us that God's grace teaches us to reject those traits and behaviors and, instead, live according to God's standards.

The word *live* is the general word for living, which has many expressions depending on context.<sup>8</sup> In Titus 2:12, Vine's uses the description "the course, conduct, and character of men" to express its meaning.<sup>9</sup> Blue Letter Bible uses the phrase "be among the living" in its "Outline of Biblical Usage" section.<sup>10</sup> As humorous as that may seem, it is an apt way of showing the dichotomy Paul is presenting between living in an unregenerate, ungodly manner in contrast to the regenerate, godly life of the believer. We are, indeed, "among the living" when we are in Christ as opposed to being in the state of unbelief.

In addition to the two key words discussed above, there is the word *teaches* itself. Since denial and living are the focus of what is taught, it is important to examine the word *teach* also.

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<sup>7</sup> *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* at "G720 - arneomai - Strong's Greek Lexicon (NKJV)." Blue Letter Bible. Web. 23 Mar, 2019.

<<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong's=G720&t=NKJV>>.

<sup>8</sup> *Vine's, Blue Letter Bible* at "G2198 - zaō - Strong's Greek Lexicon (NKJV)." Blue Letter Bible. Web. 23 Mar, 2019.

<sup>9</sup> *Vine's, Blue Letter Bible*

<sup>10</sup> *Vine's, Blue Letter Bible*

This is the word generally used for training children, which involved both instruction and correction.<sup>11</sup> As Vine's describes it, this is "a training gracious and firm; grace, which brings salvation, employs means to give us full possession of it; hence, "to chastise," this being part of the training."<sup>12</sup>

It needs to be noted that "teaching us," "denying," and "live soberly" are stated in a way that relates each action together such that the training, denying, and living happen in an on-going, interrelated way. As we are instructed, we learn to reject ungodliness and to embrace a godly lifestyle cyclically. The more of God's grace we learn, the more impact His instruction has on us for denying ungodliness and living righteously.

### *3.2 Summary of Titus 2:12 in Context*

The interpretation (meaning) of Titus 2:12 can be summarized as follows. The appearance of God's grace, accomplished in Christ (2:14), has given us instruction and training, information and correction, that leads to a life of rejecting ungodliness and living in conformity to His character. In view of Paul's broader context, this truth underscores his insistence that sound doctrine be preached, and that the preacher-teacher exemplify that teaching in his own life (2:7, 8, 15). To teach falsehood will not result in transformation, whereas teaching sound doctrine *must* lead to transformation in all demographics because that is a primary purpose of the grace of God.

## **4. Significance**

In light of the purpose of Paul's letter to Titus and the meaning of Titus 2:11, 12, the significance of what he is saying would have given strong motivation to Titus and to those following him (3:12). It is assumed that Titus was well aware of his mission in Crete (1:5), but it

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<sup>11</sup> "G3811 - paideuō - Strong's Greek Lexicon (NKJV)." Blue Letter Bible. Web. 23 Mar, 2019..

<sup>12</sup> *Vine's, Blue Letter Bible*

seems that the motivation for Paul to write this letter is the devastating effect false teachers were having on the churches there (1:10-16). The damage they were causing among believers was also causing damage to the testimony of the gospel itself, seen in the continuing, untransformed testimony of the Cretans (1:12), the contradictory life of the false teachers (1:16), and the need for instructions “not” to conduct themselves in certain ways (2:1-10). After giving these instructions, Paul then says, “*For* the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us...” (2:11). This is an explicit transition from *what* to *why*, giving us the reason behind his instructions.

#### *4.1 Significance to Titus and the Cretan Churches*

As Paul’s delegate to Crete, being entrusted with such a demanding mission, it is safe to assume that articulating the reason for the necessity of his instructions was not new information to Titus. For the sake of emphasizing the congruence between teaching sound doctrine and the purpose of the grace of God, this was an opportune time to elucidate that the kind of teaching that ought to be done in Crete was perfectly in line with what God’s grace is for and about. What brought us salvation did not simply deliver us from the penalty of sin, it brought us the means by which full transformation is accomplished. It remains God’s grace, active at the point of salvation (2:13, 14), continuing in the process of transformation through corrective instruction.

As Titus and others continued the work of teaching sound doctrine and establishing local leaders who were qualified to do the same, the highlighted motivation for doing so is that it is part of the work of God in our lives. It is part of the plan of redemption, expressed in practical living through an active, purposeful rejection of ungodliness and demonstrated conformity to the character of God.

For Cretans, this meant turning from the accepted norm of living to excess with greed and



corruption. The penetration of the Gospel was cross-generational, showing up in God's grace being exemplified in every relationship transformed into godly character.

#### *4.2 Significance to Today's Reader*

Bridging the gap from first century Crete to contemporary American norms is not difficult. Outward behavioral norms and accepted attitudes toward excess and corrupt relationships is unquestioned and even championed in current society. The message of the Gospel leading to transformation is a difficult struggle for many new believers. Facing similar challenges, especially in Crete in Paul's day, was addressed by focusing on teaching sound doctrine and how that teaching should be directed at godly living. Both go hand in hand: doctrine and behavior. For this particular study, the focus has been on the statement that provides the motivation for that sort of teaching and living: it is what the grace of God teaches.

It is important to stress what Paul stresses in Titus as far as teaching content goes, but the significance of the motivation for doing so adds weight to the message. God has given us his grace, expressed in the sacrifice of Christ ("gave Himself for us" – 2:14) for the purpose of redeeming us from godlessness *and* to "purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works" (2:14). The significance lies in the fact that the purpose of salvation reaches far beyond that initial point of justification, opening the door to lifelong transformation into the image of Christ.

### **5. Application**

A high-level overview of Titus includes an understanding of who Titus is as recipient of Paul's letter, the concerns to which Paul draws Titus' attention, and those reading this letter in a contemporary context. To bring the significance of the passage being examined into a practical form of application, each of these three levels of audience needs to be addressed.

### *5.1 Application to Titus and to the Modern Reader*

As mentioned in the section regarding the significance of Titus 2:12, Titus himself was being reminded of the motivating truth behind instructing those with leadership roles in the Cretan churches. As Titus pursued his mission on Crete, he needed to maintain a firm grasp on the fact that all he was commissioned to do related specifically to the transforming goal of the grace of God. In the same way, anyone involved in training others for ministry needs to keep firmly in focus the truth that equipping others for the work of ministry needs to be motivated by God's grace. It is in learning more of the person and purpose of God that we experience his transforming work in our lives. We learn and then teach sound doctrine because it draws us closer to understanding who God is and what he is doing through the provision of his grace. That, in turn, leads to our own transformation, which gives credibility to our own ministry (2:7, 8, 15). Our prayers in this work of ministry need to focus on asking God to make learning, training, and living the intended result of his grace in our lives.

### *5.2 Application to Church Leaders*

Whether anyone reading Titus is in a leadership position or not, understanding the purpose of God's grace in our lives should lead to earnest prayer for his or her own church leadership as well as the work of God's grace in his or her own life. The fact that the leadership in Crete had deteriorated to such a degree as described by Paul should motivate readers of Titus to uphold their leaders in their continuing transformation. Church leaders should heed the strong statements that as stewards of God they *must* be blameless, and they should embrace the fact that those requirements can be met only in learning and teaching sound doctrine, empowered by the work of God's grace in their lives and in the lives of the people they lead.

### *5.3 Application to Contemporary Readers*

As discussed above, contemporary readers need to actively safeguard their church leaders as well as their own walk with God by learning and responding to sound doctrine. Knowing that transformation from ungodly to godly living is a main purpose and provision of God's grace, we must actively pursue the two-fold actions Paul describes: denying ungodliness and living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age. May we submit ourselves to the instruction of his word and the work of his grace in our daily lives!

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