

August 18 Lesson 12 (NIV)

The Rules of Life

Devotional Reading: Psalm 37:27–40

Background Scripture: Titus 1:1–3; 2:11–15

Titus 1:1–3

¹ Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness—² in the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, ³ and which now at his appointed season he has brought to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior,

Titus 2:11–15

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. ¹² It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

¹⁵ These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you.

Key Text

The grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,—Titus 2:11–13

Hope in the Lord

Unit III: Eternal Hope

Lessons 10–13

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Struggle for Godliness
- B. Lesson Context
- I. **The Messenger (Titus 1:1–3)**
 - A. Servant and Apostle (v. 1)

B. Commanded by God (vv. 2–3)

II. The Message (Titus 2:11–15)

A. Grace Appeared (vv. 11–12)

Ever Learning

B. Hope Promised (vv. 13–14)

Waiting for Hope

C. Leader Encouraged (v. 15)

Conclusion

A. The Gift of Grace

B. Prayer

C. Thought to Remember

How to Say It

Cretans

Cree-tunz.

Crete

Creet.

Epimenides

Ep-ih-men-ih-deez.

Pharisee

Fair-ih-see.

Septuagint

Sep-too-ih-jent.

Titus

Ty-tus.

Introduction

A. Struggle for Godliness

A glance through the news would make it seem like the church is consistently plagued by ungodly behavior from both without and within. Recent scandals of greed, abuse, and misuse of power remind us that the church is not immune from ungodly behavior.

But the people of God have always struggled against ungodliness. The church has sought ways to live godly lives, even in an ungodly culture. This issue is as much an issue in the twenty-first century as it was in the first century.

B. Lesson Context

Paul's letter to Titus comes from a part of the New Testament called the Pastoral Epistles. Whereas Paul wrote other letters to specific groups of believers in particular locations (examples: Galatians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:1), the Pastoral Epistles were written to particular individuals: Timothy (1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2) and Titus. The latter was a church leader Paul designated "my true son in our common faith" (Titus 1:4).

The letter to Titus involved events that occurred after the conclusion of the book of Acts, but we have no exact knowledge of the sequence. By the time Paul wrote to Titus, the apostle had been released from his imprisonment in Rome and had found an occasion to visit the island of Crete. While visiting, Paul evangelized and started some churches. It is likely, however, that the gospel had already reached Crete many years earlier through unnamed believers (see Acts 2:11).

Crete was famous in antiquity as a source of culture and religion. The Cretan people, however, were not highly esteemed in the Roman world. In Titus 1:12, Paul quotes a native Cretan "prophet" who describes his own people as "always liars, evil brutes, [and] lazy gluttons." While Paul does not name this source, one possibility is the sixth-century BC writer Epimenides. This statement has been called the Cretan Paradox because if all Cretans are liars, and Epimenides was a Cretan, then was he lying when he made the statement?

Paul was accompanied on Crete by one of his most trusted associates, a Gentile believer named Titus (Galatians 2:3). The book of Acts does not mention Titus by name. Still, he figures prominently in the letters of Paul. In 2 Corinthians, Titus is named (in Greek) nine times (example: 2 Corinthians 8:23). Paul wrote his letter to Titus in about AD 65 after departing from the island. Paul had left Titus behind to correct a chaotic situation in the Cretan churches. Most importantly, Titus needed to place an eldership in each congregation (Titus 1:5).

The church in Crete was troubled by people who professed to know God but lived demonstrably different lives (see Titus 1:16). Such people had deceived others, disrupted the community (1:10–11), and brought needless controversy to the church (3:9–10).

Today's lesson reveals Paul's solution to this challenging situation. What the church in Crete needed was "sound doctrine" (Titus 1:9; 2:1) and training in godliness (see 1:1; 2:12). This is the nitty-gritty of helping believers mature into godly men and women. Paul wanted Titus to grow the church by grounding them in the truth of the gospel and encouraging lives of holiness.

I. The Messenger

(Titus 1:1–3)

A. Servant and Apostle (v. 1)

1a. Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ

An ancient letter typically began by naming its author and its intended recipients. Paul's other New Testament epistles reflect this tendency (examples: 1 Corinthians 1:1–2; 1 Timothy 1:1–2). In the first verses of this particular letter, *Paul* identified himself as its author and named his intended audience: Titus (Titus 1:4, not in our printed text).

In Romans 1:1 and Philippians 1:1, Paul identifies himself as a servant of Jesus Christ. But nowhere else in the New Testament does he identify himself as *a servant of God* (compare James 1:1). His self-description reflects his humility—a required attitude for a leader of Christ's church (see Matthew 20:26–28). Humility did not preclude him from leading the church. Instead, it was a prerequisite to being *an apostle of Jesus Christ*. Paul—a former Pharisee and persecutor of Christians—had been chosen to be Christ's messenger (see Acts 9:15). Through the letter's introduction, Paul demonstrated humility, affirmed his allegiance to God, and reminded Titus of his apostolic mission.

1b. to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness—

Paul's purpose in writing was to strengthen *God's elect* people. This designation is rooted in God's gracious and generous choice of a people to be his own (see Romans 8:29–33; Ephesians 1:4–14; 1 Peter 2:9–10). Paul's mission as an apostle was to strengthen the elect's *faith* so that they may better understand their salvation (see 2 Timothy 2:10).

Paul also wrote to mature their knowledge of *the truth* of their salvation through Christ Jesus. Doing so was part of his task as an apostle (compare 1 Timothy 2:3–7). When people understand and accept the truth of salvation, they will repent and live new lives rightly ordered by God's truth (see 2 Timothy 2:25).

Together, faith and knowledge produce *godliness*: behavior that follows God's standards revealed by Christ Jesus (see 1 Timothy 4:7–8; 6:3–4). Ten of the fifteen uses in the New Testament of the underlying Greek word translated *godliness* are found in the Pastoral Epistles. Its usage reveals that Paul considered it crucial for leaders of the church to develop godliness.

Some Cretans were known for their ungodly behavior (see Titus 1:10–13). Therefore, it was appropriate for Paul to address such behavior from the start of his letter. Paul expected that Titus would take on the mission of leading the church in Crete to maturity through the gospel message.

B. Commanded by God (vv. 2–3)

2. in the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time,

The word *hope* often implies wishful thinking, like, “I hope it doesn't rain tomorrow.” That is not how Paul uses the word in this verse. For Paul, *hope* is an assurance because the subject of this hope was Jesus Christ. Jesus is life, and he has life in himself (John 11:25; 1 John 5:20). God has promised that people can experience *eternal life* when they enter into a saving relationship with him (John 17:3).

This promise is sure because it comes from the all-perfect, all-powerful God. He is trustworthy and faithful and *does not lie* (see 1 Samuel 15:29; Hebrews 6:18). Further, it is rooted in God's eternal nature. He gives life and desires to be in a relationship with his creation. Even when sin and death

entered the world, God had prepared a way of salvation through Christ Jesus *before the beginning of time* (see 2 Timothy 1:9).

3. and which now at his appointed season he has brought to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior,

Though God's promise existed since before creation, only *at his appointed season* did he reveal Christ as the fulfillment of that promise (see Galatians 4:4–5). God's timing in this regard was perfect; Christ came to earth at just the right time and in just the right context (see Romans 5:6; 1 Timothy 2:6). Thus, Paul emphasizes that God is at work in human history to accomplish his plan and purpose.

The underlying Greek word translated *preaching* conveys the idea of both the act of proclaiming the good news and the content of that proclamation. Part of Paul's task as an apostle was to commit himself to *the command of God our Savior* to proclaim that salvation had come in and through Christ Jesus. *Through Paul's preaching*, he served as a herald, announcing the good news of salvation (compare Romans 16:25; 1 Corinthians 2:4; 2 Timothy 4:17).

In this verse, Paul unpacks the basis for his ministry as an apostle. He could claim apostleship because he had experienced a particular calling to proclaim holiness and grace. Elsewhere, the apostle further unpacks this authority in his letter his protégé, Timothy (2 Timothy 1:9–11).

II. The Message

(Titus 2:11–15)

The first half of Paul's letter addressed several needs that faced the church at Crete: godly leadership in the church (Titus 1:5–9), a rebuke of ungodly behavior (1:10–16), and sound doctrine that leads to godly behavior (2:1–10).

A. Grace Appeared (vv. 11–12)

11. For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people.

Having described how believers should live, Paul then explains the reason *for* that way of living: *the grace of God*. Such grace is a gift given to us by God for our justification and *salvation* (see 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:7). Grace is necessary for salvation because, without it, we are incapable of attaining salvation by our own merit. Grace is not deserved or earned. Instead, it is based exclusively on the love of God (see Ephesians 2:4–10).

The underlying Greek word for *appeared* shows up only four times in the New Testament, two of which are in the letter to Titus (here and in Titus 3:4; see lesson 13). The word carries the connotation of light appearing and shining in darkness (compare its usage in Luke 1:79 and Acts 27:20). The grace of God, revealed in Christ Jesus, has *appeared* to bring salvation to a sin-darkened world (see John 1:9; Colossians 1:13). The gift of grace is available to all people (see 1 Timothy 2:3–4), but not everyone will accept it. For those who do receive this gift, their lives will bear the fruit of godliness (see Ephesians 5:8–20).

12a. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions,

God’s grace has a formative effect on his people. Not only has this grace appeared for our salvation, but it has become our instructor as it *teaches us* the habits of righteousness and godly living.

The Cretans were not the only ungodly people. Outside of Christ, everyone stands condemned for their sins (Romans 3:23). When we accept the gift of grace, God gives us his Spirit to teach us. The Spirit bears the fruits of righteousness through us (see John 14:26; 15:5; Galatians 5:22–24).

God’s grace forms us to want to renounce personal and systemic sin. *Ungodliness* is a generic word for any evil behavior blatantly against God’s righteous nature (see Romans 1:18–23). *Worldly passions* are the selfish desires of the flesh (compare Galatians 5:16). Because God calls believers to a life of righteousness, we should deny any such behavior that opposes God or is inconsistent with his character.

12b. and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,

God’s grace instructs believers to replace ungodly behavior with righteous behavior. *Self-controlled* living suggests prudence regarding our passions and desires. Paul lists it as a standard for the believers in Crete (Titus 1:8; 2:2, 5–6), and it should be our standard as well. To live *upright and godly* summarizes the required attitudes and behaviors that conform to God’s standard. It is the opposite of “ungodliness” (2:12a, above). Righteousness is God’s standard, and he desires the same from his people (see 2 Timothy 2:22; compare Ephesians 6:14).

Paul frequently includes “virtue lists” in his writings (examples: Galatians 5:22–23; Ephesians 4:32; Philippians 4:8). This verse is the only such list that mentions all three of these attributes together. These three are not simply things to attain in future eternal life. Instead, we should seek to develop them *in this present age*—an age of darkness that opposes God and God’s people (see 2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 6:10–12).

B. Hope Promised (vv. 13–14)

13. while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,

Many unbelievers dread what the future may bring (see 1 Thessalonians 4:13). Believers, however, have a *blessed hope* of Christ’s return and eternal life in the presence of God (see 2:19; Titus 1:2, above; 2 Timothy 1:10). Even though we may experience trials and suffering on earth, we can take hope that God will be faithful to his promises and bring redemption and renewal to us and our world (see Romans 8:18–21; Philippians 3:20–21). This hope will be fulfilled at *the appearing of the glory* of Christ (see Matthew 16:27). At his return, we will experience glorious renewal and resurrection life.

God revealed his grace through the incarnation of Jesus (see 2 Corinthians 8:9; 1 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 2:9). This very same grace will again be on display at the return of our *great God and*

Savior, Jesus Christ. As a result, we are to have lives of holiness and godliness in eager anticipation (see Colossians 3:4–5; 1 John 2:28).

14. who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Believers eagerly await Christ's glorious return, and our hope is based on what he accomplished for us in his first coming to earth. God's grace was displayed when Jesus *gave himself for us* on the cross. In Jesus' giving of himself, he voluntarily did something that no one else could: rescue us from the grasp of sin and death and give us life (see Galatians 1:4; 2:20).

The purpose of Christ's self-giving was twofold. First, he came *to redeem us*. He did this by being the ransom that sin requires (Mark 10:45). The underlying Greek word for *redeem* is also used in the Septuagint to describe how God ransomed his people from their bondage (examples: Exodus 6:6; 15:13; 2 Samuel 7:23; Psalm 130:8). Christ's death on the cross paid the ransom for our sin and freed us from the bondage of our *wickedness* and ungodliness (Romans 6:22; 1 Timothy 2:6).

Second, the shedding of Christ's blood cleanses us from the impurity of our sins (see Hebrews 9:12–14; 1 John 1:7, 9). Our purification from sin leads to our sanctification into holiness and godly behavior (see 2 Corinthians 7:1).

The result of our redemption and purification is that we become identified as the people of God: *a people that are his very own* (compare 1 Peter 2:9). Christ's work has created an "elect" people (Titus 1:1, above)—redeemed and purified—as God's own.

As God's redeemed people, we wait for Christ's return and the resurrection of the body. In this season of waiting, we should become *eager to do good* works that result from God's grace (see Ephesians 2:8–10). These good works flow from our love (see Romans 12:9–21; 1 Corinthians 13) that results from a life filled with God's Spirit (see Galatians 5:13–26; Colossians 3:12–15).

C. Leader Encouraged (v. 15)

15. These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you.

Paul concludes this section of his letter by imploring Titus to action to encourage people to lead holy lives. First and foremost, Titus needed to address the problems at Crete. God had set Paul apart to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ (Acts 9:15; 26:15–18; Galatians 1:11–16). From this position of authority, Paul encouraged Titus to strengthen the faith of the believers.

Titus would *encourage* other believers to do good works indicative of their life in Christ. Encouragement and admonishment were aspects of Paul's mission (see Colossians 1:28), and so would be the mission of Titus.

This verse is the third time in this letter that Paul uses the underlying Greek word translated here as *rebuke* (see also Titus 1:9, 13). Ungodly behavior had abounded in Crete (see 1:12). Therefore, Titus would have to call it out and offer a correction for godliness (compare Galatians 6:1; Ephesians 5:11).

Titus could exhort and rebuke because of the *authority* that Paul had given him. There was a specific “chain of command” in this letter. Titus received authority from Paul, who had received his power as “a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ” (Titus 1:1, above). As Titus boldly and confidently proclaimed the gospel, he followed in the footsteps of Paul.

The command *do not let anyone despise you* is very similar to Paul’s command to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:12. Although there is no mention of Titus’s age, he was likely younger than Paul. Titus could have confidence that his words to the believers in Crete were authoritative and valuable for their growth in godliness.

Conclusion

A. The Gift of Grace

When we feel burdened by our failures and struggles, we can take hope because of the good news that the grace of God has arrived. It has come in Christ Jesus. Christ’s giving of himself has redeemed and purified us. Therefore, we have hope of eternal life—a hope anchored in God’s saving gift. God’s grace is a gift to humanity.

God’s gift teaches us to live godly lives and to seek Christlike behavior. We live in this manner as we wait for the blessed hope of the coming of Christ Jesus.

B. Prayer

God, our Savior, we thank you for the gift of grace that has appeared in your Son, Jesus Christ. Thank you for your gift of salvation and the hope that we have because of it. By the power of your Spirit, help us to live godly and pure lives. In the name of your Son, Jesus. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

We have a “blessed hope”!¹
