

Say no to sin \* Titus 2:11-14

June 19, 2022 \* Langford Community Church \* Graham Gladstone

I have to admit to you that I'm cheating a bit here this morning. In the last few weeks we've been looking at Great Prayers that develop the themes of the Lord's prayer – give us this day our daily bread, forgive us our trespasses; that means that today, we need to think about praying 'lead us not into temptation.'

But here's the thing – I couldn't find an extended prayer in the Bible praying against temptation. There are lots of passages<sup>i</sup> that talk about temptation but not so many prayers. So what we're going to do this morning is look at one of those passages together and see what it teaches us about how to pray when we're feeling tempted.

The passage that I want to unpack with you is a little known passage in a little known book. You know how Paul had a protégé named Timothy that he wrote letters to? Paul also had a protégé named Titus and he wrote HIM a letter too and it's tucked in right behind the letters that Paul wrote to Timothy in your Bible. So join me there, Titus 2, and we'll see what it says and then think about how it can help us to pray when we are tempted to do something that contrary to God's good will.

Titus 2, starting in verse 11 -

11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.

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 glorious appearing 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 (Tit 2:11-14 NIV).

Paul presents for us here a very interesting way of looking at history. Did you notice the word he repeats in verses 11 and 13?

The grace of God... *appeared* to all men... teaching us to say 'no' while we wait... for the glorious '*appearing*' of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

In Paul's mind, all of history, all of our lives are defined by two major events. The first one has already happened – Jesus came and died to forgive our sin and to restore us to God. Paul captures that whole series of events when He says 'the grace of God appeared bringing the offer to salvation to all people' – that was the first big event. The second one is yet to come – Jesus will return and when He comes back, we will be with Him forever. There's the two appearances and we're living in the in-between. We're living between the first coming and the second. The question is, how are we going to live?

There are all sorts of appealing things out there and a lot of people who would say that anything and everything is totally fine, just as long as you don't hurt anybody, but that's not true from God's point of view. From God's point of view, there are things that we can do that are objectively good and there are things we can do that are objectively evil, and God sent His one and only Son to deliver us from the muck of sin. Grace appeared, bringing salvation to all who believe.

But here's the thing. Grace isn't just about salvation. Grace is also power. We talk about grace quite often as God's power for salvation. Freely given, undeserved: grace is the gift of blessing that God gives to His people because He is good. But, grace is not just salvation, grace is also power.

Look again at verse 11 – 'For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.' Ok, that we're familiar with. We are sinners saved by grace not because of what we've done but because of what Jesus did on the Cross. That is the grace that brings salvation.

But Paul takes it a step further and says 'it teaches us to say 'no' to ungodliness and worldly passions, to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.' Grace is not just salvation; grace is the power to live in light of that salvation.

Paul actually pictures grace as a teacher here – verse 12 – it trains us – grace teaches us empowers us and there are essentially two courses in the School of Grace – History 101 and Contemporary Issues.

Here's what I mean. History 101 – Paul says 'Grace teaches us to say 'no' to ungodliness and worldly passions.' In verse 14, it says 'Jesus gave Himself to redeem us from all lawlessness.'

Here's the history. Before we knew Jesus, we were all about ungodliness and worldly passions. We were all about selfish living that cared nothing for God. We were all about giving into temptation because we weren't willing to acknowledge that God's good law had any kind of authority over us. We thought we were doing great, doing what was right in our own eyes, but in reality, we were dead in trespasses and sins, doing what was evil in God's eyes.

And we know from other passages in Scripture that that is a dead-end street. That's a road to destruction.

And God, in His grace, reached in to turn us around and give us a new outlook on life. Verse 14, Jesus 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. Jesus came to take sinners and turn them into saints. That's history 101 at the School of Grace, what's already happened.

Contemporary Issues 101, the way we live in light of it, well, that's verse 12 – 'grace teaches us to say 'no' to that old way of life;' we used to do whatever we felt like, but now that Jesus has delivered us from sin, He empowers us to turn our backs on the godlessness and lustful desires of our past. Grace says 'that's who you were, but that's not who you are now.' So say 'no' to that old way of living and instead, live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, pure in heart in every way and eager to do what is good, eager to do what is right.

Grace doesn't just save us, it empowers us to live out that salvation. Grace empowers us to live in a way that is honouring to God, as we await His return at the second coming. That's the hope that we are living for – verse 2:13 – our blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ. Jesus came once to save us; when we trust Him and live in light of that, we look forward to our ultimate salvation, when He comes again.

Grace teaches us to say to 'no' to sinful desires and empowers us to live in good and God-honouring ways.

What does mean when we face temptation?

Well, it means that we have the capacity to say 'no' to sin and 'yes' to Him!

When temptation comes our way, we have the salvation, motivation and power we need to stand against it and to instead live for Jesus.

To put it a different way - When facing temptation, remind yourself that you've been saved from sin and ask for help to live for Him.

Let's just unpack that a piece at a time.

When facing temptation... ok, look, I struggled with this as I thought about you all and how to address this. There are probably some people who will hear this thinking 'I'm appalled that you would think I struggle with temptation.' And there are others who will say 'I don't face temptation because God has no right to tell me what's out of bounds.' And then there are others, probably the most spiritually sensitive among us, who will say 'I am all too aware of temptation in my life, whether it be overindulgence in food or drink or lust, or giving in to envy or anger or greed.' Temptation isn't just the big flashy stuff like pride and porn and drunkenness; we are tempted every time that we consider doing something that God has said is wrong.

I suspect that if we're honest with ourselves, we know when we are tempted, when that little warning light goes off in our conscience to say 'hold on, is that really the right thing to do?' Jesus Himself faced temptation; Jesus Himself taught us to pray against it. The reality is that we all face the temptation to put our own sinful desires before the good and perfect plans of God. We are all tempted to ignore God and do what's right in our own eyes.

The question is, how are you going to respond when that temptation strikes?

Paul here in Titus tells us first to remind ourselves that we've been delivered from sin.

If you have turned from sin to trust in Jesus, then you have been delivered from sin and freed from its power. Verse 14 – Jesus redeemed you from all wickedness. He purified you from the inside out. You have been set free from worldly passions so that you can live a good, God-honouring life. When we face temptation, we need to remind ourselves of that; that we're not who we used to be and we don't have to go back there.

How many of you grew up on a farm that had big puddles of water that froze over in the winter? We had a few places where the drainage wasn't great and my sister loved to go out and skate on those temporary ice ponds. Me on the other hand, I liked to go out and see how big a whole I could put in the ice with my boot. Boys, right?

Well, I remember one cold winter day, my sister out skating, my brother was there too and I was happily chipping away at the ice when my boot broke through the ice and went straight into the mud below. And then I tried to pull up my foot and guess what happened? I got stuck. And the more I attempted to get myself out, the more I got stuck. And so finally my sister ran up to the house to get my mom and out she came and reached down and pulled me up out of the muck and got out my boot and I was free. Moms are great.

Now suppose, that I went right back to the hole and stuck myself back in it. Does that make any sense? Is that reasonable in light of what my mom did? No, of course not.

But that's what happens when we as Christians go back to the sinful ways that we used to live. We were stuck in the mud of sin; Jesus reached in and pulled us up out of the muck and we are free – we don't need to go back there.

And Jesus didn't 'just' reach in and pull us out of the muck – Paul says – verse 14 – 'Jesus GAVE Himself, Jesus LAID DOWN HIS LIFE to deliver us from that muck – so to go back to it is a huge insult to the One saved us. We are free. We are saved from sin! We are brand new creations, empowered by God Himself to live upright, self-controlled and perfect lives.

When we face temptation, we need to remind ourselves of that reality: that we are saved from sin and that sin no longer has any hold on us. It doesn't make any sense to go back into the muck and so when we face temptation, we remind ourselves that we've already been saved from sin.

And then we ask for help to live for Him. We ask for help to be the purified, holy, eager to do good people that Jesus has saved us to be. He didn't just save us for kicks; according to verse 14, He saved us for the express purpose that we would be His very own people, eager to do what is good. And so when we face temptation, we pray for the power to resist it and the wisdom to avoid it.

We pray for the power to resist it – We pray that we would see through the glittering façade of sin to see how corrupt and wrong it really is. We pray that God would give us strength to stand against it. 1 Corinthians 10:13, Paul says - 13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. (1Co 10:13 NIV). So we pray for the power to stand, escape it, resist it.

And we pray for the wisdom to avoid it. There's this story about a guy coming back from the doctor to see a friend of his. The one guy says 'The doctor says I broke my arm in two places;' the other guy says 'maybe you should stop going to those two places.'

It's funny, right, but it's true. If you know that there are places or things or situations that are going to tempt you, don't go there. Make alternate arrangements. Jesus has redeemed you from all wickedness and purified you to be His very own; don't willingly go into compromising circumstances. And when temptation comes out of the blue, ask Him to help you to live out your salvation, just as He already saved you.

When faced with temptation, remind yourself that you've been saved from sin and ask for help to live for Him.

Let me conclude here with a final observation. Temptation is not in and of itself sin. Jesus was tempted and yet He was sinless, so temptation is not itself sin. But it is an invitation to sin.

I mean, just think of your heart as a house with a door and temptation is just outside knocking. It's not sin unless you let it in. So don't leave the door open to let it creep in, and when it comes knocking, say 'yes' to Jesus and 'no' to sin.

Let's pray.

Jesus, thank You for your grace that brings salvation to all who will receive it...

11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.

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 glorious appearing 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.

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<sup>i</sup> You can find a very helpful list here: <https://activechristianity.org/29-bible-verses-to-empower-you-to-resist-temptation>