

"Living Right-side Up Between Christ's Two Advents"

Titus 2:11–14

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I am one of the shepherding pastors here at Briarwood and my family and I love this church. We are now in our fourth year here and are grateful to minister here. You will understand shortly in this study why I have titled this study “Living Right-side Up Between Christ’s Two Advents.” I just saw my first black Friday in July commercial on the TV last week. It’s like Christmas in July but I shouldn’t be surprised because my lovely wife likes to listen to Christmas music year-round. It’s one of the reasons why I love her dearly because she is always smiling and rejoicing.

So, what does Advent mean? It means arriving, coming or appearing and we’ll see this in our text for this study. The Messiah, our Savior, came lowly, in poverty, veiled in flesh as a helpless Babe in a manger. Paul in this Titus text tells us ‘for the grace of God has appeared’ – Christ’s first Advent. As we look at Christ’s first Advent at Christmas Paul will tell us about a second Advent that we look forward in hope to His eventual return. It will be when He returns to set everything right that is broken in the world. I want to start this study by reading Titus 2 and some of Titus 3 to help give us some context here.

Titus 2:1–15, 3:1–3 says [1] *But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine.* [2] *Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness.* [3] *Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good,* [4] *and so train the young women to love their husbands and children,* [5] *to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.* [6] *Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled.* [7] *Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity,* [8] *and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us.* [9] *Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative,* [10] *not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.*

[11] *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,* [12] *training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,* [13] *waiting for our 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 lawlessness and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession who are zealous for good works.*

[15] *Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you.*

[3:1] *Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work,* [2] *to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.* [3] *For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.*

This is the Word of our Lord. Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, open our eyes and hearts to behold wonderful riches from Your Word for we ask this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

I'd like to start by telling you what is going on with the church as Paul left Titus on the island of Crete to preach the Gospel. The fledgling house churches are under attack by the influences of corrupt leaders. It is why Paul charges Titus, his true child in the faith, in Titus 1:5 which says [5] *This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you*— Paul then gives qualifications for those elders in Titus 1:6–9, whose way of life was to be different from the Cretan way of living.

Paul even goes on to quote from one of their own in Titus 1:12 which says [12] *One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons."* This quote was probably from Epimenides of Crete, a 6th Century BC philosopher. The Cretan leaders had overlaid the belief about the God of Israel with their own beliefs about their Greek gods creating a pluralistic religion. They were obsessed with mixing Jewish myths with human laws and commands, instead of following Jesus. While they claimed to know the one true God (Titus 1:16), their works proved otherwise. They were detestable, unfit, disobedient and denied the God of truth by their works. Instead of living right side up in the world they were living upside down.

Pilots sometimes experience what is known as spatial disorientation. A pilot will occasionally fly into a cloudbank, fog, bad weather, or at night and they lose their visual stimuli to orient themselves to their outside surroundings. Without the normal visual cues, their brains can actually tell them that what they are actually doing is fine, when in all actuality they may be completely inverted or maybe even losing altitude. To battle this phenomenon, it is wiser thought to trust their instruments, because they are called to instrument flight rules when they have these non-visual clues. Yet if not trusting their instruments their brains continue this delusion of normalcy that their minds created during this spatial disorientation, thinking that what is right side up is actually upside down. They disregard their training and trust the distorted physical cues that their brain is continuing to feed them. The pilot becomes so completely, irreversibly convinced that they are right and the instruments are incorrect that they illogically choose to follow their own fallible instincts, instead of the evidence which is on their instruments. It can and does often lead tragically to their death. This was one of the main causes of JFK Jr.'s fatal plane crash in 1999.

In Paul's letter to Titus for the Cretan church and the culture around them, Paul is addressing what I would call spiritual disorientation or better yet we would call it sin. What they deem is right side up living is actually upside down and we see the effects of that in church on the island of Crete. We also see it today effecting the culture around us. Paul calls Titus and to the believers at Crete to this right side up living in the light of the Gospel. This is described in Titus 2:1–10 and Titus 3:1–2.

Paul tells us that right side up living flows from sound doctrine – the teaching of the Gospel found in Titus 2:11–14. It's the Gospel of grace that is the source of our godliness and godly living. We are called to live right side up between Christ's two Advents or in the Reformed faith we call it – living between the already and the not yet of Christ's return. Here is the question for this study – does the fact that Christ appears in history (at Christmas) and the fact that He will return again, effect the way you live today?

Our struggle to live right side up is often times because what we value the most and what motivates us is really upside down. The grace of God teaches us in Christ and trains us through His Word to live right side up. As we are changed by the Gospel of grace we more and more value what Christ values and are motivated by what motivates Him.

So, in this study I want to give you three points. First, there is a changed motivation to living right side up lives. Secondly, there are changed values to living right side up, which looks like how we adorn the grace of the Gospel and godly living and how we make the Gospel attractive to non-Christians. Thirdly, is really a challenge to four types of people who might be reading this today.

The first one I want to deal with is the changed motivation to living right side up lives. Paul is saying that grace is the motivation for change and how we are enabled to live right side up lives. Paul bookends this in Titus 2:1 and 11. Titus 2:1 says *[1] But as for you (Titus), teach what accords with sound (healthy) doctrine.* Then Paul begins with the conjunction ‘for’ in Titus 2:11 which is probably even better translated ‘You see all of what I just said... *the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people.* Then in Titus 2:11–14 we see God’s grace in the past (vs. 11 and 14), we see God’s grace operating in the present (vs. 12 – training us to renounce in the present tense) and we see His future grace (vs. 13 as we wait for our Blessed Hope – the appearing of our Lord and Savior at His second Advent).

Grace is God’s unmerited favor – getting something we don’t deserve. It is what changes our motivation to live right side up. The grace of God brings salvation. Salvation is a result of something God does and has done. It is something that He alone makes possible through Christ. Jesus came into the world to save sinners. What will His Name be called? Matthew 1:21 says *[21] She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”* Through His atoning death on a cross He redeems us and sets us free from the power of sin and reconciles us to God (Titus 2:14).

Paul tells us here that His salvation is offered to all people in His grace. So by God’s grace, goodness and lovingkindness appears in Christ. It’s by grace that we receive God’s mercy – what we get instead of God’s judgment which is what we deserve. It is by God’s grace that the Holy Spirit regenerates us and calls us to Himself. It’s by grace that we are justified and made right before God. It’s by grace we are given faith to believe in the Gospel. It’s by grace that we are adopted as His sons and daughters. It’s by grace we progress in our sanctification, being made more and more like Jesus. Our motivation and values are changed. He changes them by digging deeper and deeper into our hearts. He changes what drives us towards sin and turns us away from it. He gives us the power by His Spirit to keep killing sin in our life.

It’s by grace we are set apart for good works that Paul talks about on and on in Titus. We put the Gospel into practice in our walk, work and witness. It’s by grace that we say ‘no’ to a corrupt way of life and ‘yes’ to following Christ in godly living. It’s by grace, Paul says, that we become a new kind of people – Kingdom citizens of King Jesus, who are set apart as chosen people for His own possession (Titus 2:14), who are zealous for His good works. It’s all of God’s grace, by God’s grace, in God’s grace and through God’s grace alone that our motivation is changed to live lives that are right side up for the Gospel in a world that is so upside down. The question concerning this first point is, have you been changed by God’s grace?

Secondly, this grace leads us to changed values, living right side up lives as a result in Christ. We adorn the grace of the Gospel in godly living. In Titus 2:10 Paul calls us to adorn the doctrine of God our Savior. Adorn is to make it beautiful, to literally put it on as we live it out to the world around us. While, the grace of the Gospel saves us and changes our motivation, are

sinful hearts are still drawn to foolishness, disobedience, being led astray, slaves to worldly passions and treasures, driven by malice, envious of others and living like those hated by others who in turn hate the same (Titus 3:3). The battle with sin still wages in our hearts. As the hymn goes, 'prone to wander Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love.' We are drawn to the sinful nature, putting on the deeds of the flesh and that's why Paul wants Titus to teach and train the saints in the house churches how to live right side up between Christ's two Advents.

Their pursuit in living in ungodliness, following their worldly passions, fueled by lawless vices, has led them down a path of corrupt living. Titus 1:10–16 gives us a picture what that looks like for it says [10] *For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. [11] They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. [12] One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." [13] This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, [14] not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth. [15] To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. [16] They profess to know God, but they deny Him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.*

Paul paints a different picture of an ideal, Cretan Christian household, living up right lives solely devoted to Jesus and calls them to adorn the grace of God and godly living. It's a picture for us today for we adorn it in our values, our character, putting on godly virtues. There are five different groups that Paul addresses here which is why I wanted to read this text in its context. Paul also addresses Titus in this text. It's not an exhaustive list but Paul's point is that all of us can apply these virtues in our life, including those in Crete and those in the church today in terms of living this out.

Paul doesn't list an age or stage in life here but I think we can figure out where we would all fit into what he is telling us. Paul calls older men to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, love and steadfastness. He calls us to a clear-headed, disciplined, self-controlled healthy faith. He is a man who is driven by his love for others. He perseveres in the faith. Loyalty, dignity, restraints are traits here. He earns the respect of others. That is a portrait that Paul is painting here.

Now I have some questions for you to think about. So for us older men, does your walk equal your talk. Is your faith such that it earns the respect of others? Does sacrificial love drive your relationships, in the home and at work? If not, then what needs to change?

Paul says to older women, to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good and so train younger women to love their husbands and children. Meaning they live a right side up self-controlled life that lives humbly, respects others and doesn't look to idols of the heart to control them. They teach and discipline/disciple younger women of what it means to live wisely in their faith and to show good judgment in their relationships.

Here are some questions for the ladies. Does your talk and walk show forth love to others? Are there idols that control your heart? Have relationships with others been such that you struggle with envy, malice, harsh speech or thoughts towards others? To older men and women, are you adorning self-control and living out your Christian faith by disciplining younger men and women?

Paul calls young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, submissive to their own husbands that the Word of God may not be

reviled. When married, it's a life that leads in love to their husband and children. It shows restraint, walks in purity, exhibits kindness, respects their husband and takes primary care for the home. Submission here is in the context of a husband's sacrificial love for his wife as Christ showed His sacrificial love to His bride, the church (Ephesians 5:22–33). Here is a question for young women, whether you are married or not. Does your character inside and outside the home exemplify God's Word?

To young men, Paul simply says to be self-controlled. To Titus, who was probably a young man, he says show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works and in your teaching show integrity, dignity and sound speech that cannot be condemned. For young men it is about restraint in your young faith. It is living measured, orderly lives. It is modeling a life that is pleasing to God.

Young men, does your walk and life model self-control? Does your word model truth, respect and is it worthy of one's approval? Do your words and deeds flow out of the truth and from the truth of God's Word? For young men and young women, my challenge to you today in the culture that we live in is, has your life turned from the self-controlled pursuits of a sound faith or a godly marriage if you're married, training up your children, a commitment to your job, loving your neighbor or is it being controlled by the worldly passions, pleasures and idols of the heart? That is what the culture is presenting to all of us but in particular to young men and women in the faith, more and more, to follow your passions, pleasures and idols of your heart. The world wants you to pursue those instead of godliness and self-control. Are you looking to be mentored by older men and older women to help you learn what it means to walk in godliness? Perhaps there is some tread worn off your tires so to speak, show me what that looks like and what I need to be prepared for.

Then the servants and slaves, because there was equity in Christ and there is level ground at the foot of the cross. Paul addresses them in Titus 2:9–10 which says *[9] Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, [10] not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.*

For Christians in context today, we are all servants and slaves of Christ, are we not? So, in our places of work, the question for us is, are we honoring and respectful to our bosses, a team player not taking from the company? What is our motivation for getting up in the morning? Is our job just a means to an end or is a place to actively live out the Gospel?

Notice in all these groups, right side up living is ground in the beauty and grace of the Gospel for it is grace that changes our values, character and virtues so that we can adorn what it means to live godly lives and reflect the beauty of the Gospel of grace to those around us. It is why we need the means of grace, the Word, sacraments, prayer, our community, our Sunday school communities and the Lord's Day worship. Paul is actually painting a picture in the church actually what discipleship should look like in our lives as we are being disciplined and discipling one another, here in this text.

The missionary Harold St. John wrote: 'In a noble palace in the city of Venice, I once saw a magnificent ceiling beautifully painted, but the chamber was so lofty that the visitor could only see a confused vision of gorgeous colors. In the center of the room stood a table inlaid with a horizontal mirror so skillfully placed that as one gazed into it, the picture above was reflected in its full beauty of form and hue.' Right side up living means we adorn and reflect the beauty of the Gospel of grace in our walk, work and witness so that others can see Jesus clearly.

In changed values, we're called to make the Gospel attractive to non-believers. Many of

the Christian house churches were living in this corrupt Cretan leadership. We see how bad it was in Titus 1:11 which says *[11] They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach.* Whole families are in disarray, shambles and their lives don't reflect a picture of a family devoted to Jesus. We see this in our culture today – whole families in disarray because their lives don't adorn Jesus, because the message about Jesus was shunned. Their neighbors now had good reason to speak badly about the Christian faith. They weren't attracted to Jesus because the Cretan Christians walk didn't match their talk. The lack of a Christian faith shown by the worldly lifestyles of these house churches wasn't attractive or compelling enough to others to want to follow Jesus.

How about in our homes today, where we live, work and play? Do they reflect a household of hobbies devoted to Jesus attracting others to the beauty of the Gospel? Paul is calling on all believers to adorn the doctrine of God in such a way that it's attractive to non-Christians around us. One of my professors said in seminary 'please don't hear what I'm not saying.' I'm not saying we need to make the Gospel attractive by watering it down or dumbing it down. Paul is telling us in the text that we need to both learn the Gospel which is orthodoxy, right teaching, right learning, but we also need to live out the Gospel which is orthopraxy, living by our walk, our witness. When we adorn the grace of the Gospel it means we make it beautiful by devoting ourselves to our zeal, our eagerness, our enthusiasm to live by and for Christ through our good works as Paul says in Titus 2:14.

Ephesians 2:8–10 says *[8] For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast. [10] For we are His workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.***

As a jeweler polishes up a diamond ring, it then gets laid out on a black cloth so that the beauty of that diamond can really be seen. In many ways, that is what we are called to do as Christians when we adorn the Gospel of God and make it attractive to non-believers. We are to be that black cloth to those around us so that they can see in us Jesus for that is what is going to draw them. We are to agents of transformation in our communities with the redemptive power of the Gospel in the public square.

It is about wise living. That means we participate wisely in the culture around us as we embrace what is good but we graciously reject what is corrupt in the culture. We don't wage a culture war or conform to the culture around us like the Christians in Crete were doing and what is like what is going on in our culture today and in many of our churches today – conforming to the culture. The Christian message has to be lived out in the public eye so that by the power of the Holy Spirit it becomes compelling to the culture around us, turning the value system of today upside down and showing the culture what it looks like to be totally devoted to a different God, the One true and living God, Jesus Christ, in the flesh. That's the fruit of living right side up that will draw people in to the Gospel.

Paul talks about good works 24 times in his pastoral writings and uses good 20 times as an adjective, especially with work and six times in Titus alone Paul uses 'good works.' These good works are not for reward that is Paul's reason for doing them or what we should pursue by doing them. Good works are not the basis for our salvation. We see this in Titus 3:4–7 which says *[4] But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, [5] He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, [6] whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, [7] so that being justified by His grace we might become*

heirs according to the hope of eternal life. God's heart is for the lost and His salvation is available for all people so He calls us to good works in a broken world to show forth the beauty of the Good News of the Gospel.

Leonard Cohen, a singer-songwriter, poet and novelist, died in 2016 and wrote the famous song *Hallelujah*, which is in one of the Shrek movies. One of his friends later wrote about him, 'Leonard was above all in his music, his poems and in his tone of life the lyrical advocate of the finite and the flawed. He was possessed by a lasting sensation of brokenness. He was broken, love was broken, the world is broken.' In Cohen's song *Anthem* there is a part that says;

*There is a crack, a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in*

Think of all the cracks of brokenness in people's lives around us today because of sin, but God wants to use us to shine the light of the Gospel into those cracks and that's the beauty of what He has called us to. We do this through our lives lived right side up before an upside down and broken world.

In closing I want to give you a challenge and a charge that include the four types of people that might be reading this today as you think about what motivate you and what you value in life. To the conscious skeptic or the questioner of the Christian faith, the truth of the matter is, is that Christ is returning and with His return His gracious work of salvation will come to an end. At His second Advent He comes to judge the world and at that time there will be no second chance. The question for you, is do you want to chance that His return is tomorrow? Also, aren't you tired of living upside down in your life? Come to Christ today. Put your faith and trust in Him as your Savior. Say 'yes' to Jesus today and tell Him you want to live right side up in this world. I would love to talk personally with you about that decision so you can reach me at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200 and ask for me.

To the nominal Christian whose commitment to the Christian faith is a mile wide and an inch deep, the question for you, is what are you resting on for your salvation? Are you trusting in your good works to save you? Do you really understand the Good News of the Gospel and what Jesus has done for you through His grace? Ground yourself in the Word of God. Ask others who are more mature in the faith to walk with you and help you grow in grace so you can see and understand what it means to walk and follow Jesus.

Thirdly, to the divided Christian who is living upside down in their loyalties and priorities, who or what are your idols? Who or what has your heart other than Jesus? Repent this day and turn to Jesus. Look to the means of grace – His Word, the sacraments, prayer, community, the Lord's Day worship. That is where you are going to find means and what it looks like to live right side up for and in Christ.

Finally, to the mature and committed Christian, make Titus 2:11–14 your prayer. None of us have arrived for we have a long way to go. As the Robert Frost poem goes; 'miles to go (maybe) before I sleep,' we don't know when that time comes. But make it your prayer that by God's grace and for His glory you too would persevere to live a self-controlled, upright and godly life in this present age as we wait for the appearing of the Blessed Hope, the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

As certain as King Jesus' first Advent was in history He will come again and we can be sure of it, but contrasting with His first appearing, this next one will be visible for all to see. Jesus will come again in the flesh – glorious and grand – revealed from heaven and with His mighty angels. Revelation 1:7 says [7] *Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will*

see Him, even those who pierced Him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of Him. Even so. Amen. This second Advent brings with it what we wait for in hope – a renewed heaven and earth, where righteousness reigns forever and sin, suffering, sorrow and sickness will be no more. We will live with Jesus forever bearing His image completely and perfectly. That hope alone should shape what we live for today and the way we live.

So as we look back to Christ's first Advent – the Savior born in a manger who would go to a cross to die for our sins – we would also look forward to His second Advent that we would live in this present age with the hope of the future to come and the already and the not yet. So, follow King Jesus for what it means to truly live a right side up life. Look to Him, learn how to live it between His two Advents. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank You for these dear saints. Lord, I pray for us that we indeed would learn what it means more and more to live right side up between Your two Advents, Lord Jesus. Give us strength by Your Spirit. Teach us more and more and by Your grace and we pray all this in Christ's Name, Amen.