

THE BLESSED HOPE

Sentinel 12:2 Spring 1996

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The “blessed hope” is the Christian’s happy expectation of the Lord’s imminent return. This truth has been a major theme of fundamentalism since its inception. Indeed, it helped launch the movement by means of popular Bible conferences, such as those conducted at Niagara, Ontario in the late 1800s. This hope refers, of course, to the rapture of the Church. Some professing Christians have been mistakenly caught up with the blessed hope to the neglect of their temporal responsibilities, so heavenly-minded they are of no earthly good. But the blessed hope Paul mentions in the book of Titus is set in the context of an admonition to right moral conduct here and now. In fact, the coming of Christ is an incentive for such conduct.

After being released from his first imprisonment, Paul came to Crete to begin a ministry there. He left Titus in an iniquitous place to continue the work. Crete, fourth largest island in the Mediterranean, is located just south of the Aegean Sea. The place was so morally corrupt that the wickedness of its people was proverbial, according to 1:12. It is interesting that Titus was sent to some really hard places to minister: Corinth, noted for its carnality, and now Crete, notorious for its dishonest brutes and lazy gluttons. Titus needed encouragement! So, it was not too long after he left him there that Paul wrote to challenge him as his son in the faith and apostolic representative. He told him to complete the work they had started by appointing elders in the cities (1:5), and instructing Christian families to live godly in this ungodly environment.

Notice the contrast Paul draws in the latter part of chapter 1 and the beginning of chapter 2. He says, while evil men are deceiving the people for dishonest gain, claiming to know God but are really detestable, disobedient rebels, *you*, Titus, must set a good example by rebuking them sharply. On the other hand, offset this false teaching by instructing Christians how to live godly in this present age.

Paul advises Titus to continually apply sound instruction to the various family members in the churches: older and younger men and women and household slaves. It is interesting that a responsibility which appears to be necessary for all these groups of Christians is *sober-mindedness* (vv. 2, 3, 4, 6). The idea is *sensible* conduct. The emphasis is on the mind because this is where right living begins, with a disposition to do right. Beginning with v. 11, Paul is very clear to point out that right conduct must be founded on right doctrine. In other words, *sensible conduct is based on sound doctrine*, specifically, the doctrine of gracious redemption.

Salvation by the grace of God came at the first appearance (epiphany) of Christ, who provided a potentially unlimited atonement. That same saving grace has now become in reality our foremost pedagogue. God’s grace in redemption instructs us and incites us to live godly or according to God’s righteous standard. Grounded in God’s nature, His grace makes ethical demands of Christians consistent with His nature. And His grace bestowed on us in salvation makes it possible for us to say *no* to ungodliness and to renounce worldly desires. God’s grace in salvation has set us free from enslavement to lusts (3:3) by redeeming us from lawlessness (v. 14) and sanctifying unto Himself a people of His own possession. His grace has made it possible for us to think righteous thoughts and do righteous things: to live sensibly, and no longer foolishly.

The Scripture is telling us that the Teacher called Grace enables us to think right (the inward disposition of soberness) and to act right (the outward behavior of godliness) and further motivates us by the upward view of the second epiphany—the blessed hope. The context makes

it clear that the blessed hope and the appearing are one and the same. We could say: the blessed hope *of* the second coming. For Christians, this is the rapture of the church, as Paul describes it in 1 Thessalonians 4. This return will be blessed or happy for at least two reasons: (1) It will be a vindication of godly conduct, a time of reward for the faithful (cf. Rev 22:12). Furthermore, it is a happy event in that (2) it is glorious. This is because Christ, the Son of God, will come for us. Following a Greek grammatical principle of correspondence, we may claim that “our great God” and “Savior, Jesus Christ” are one in this verse. None other than God Himself is coming for us! That is only proper. Christ is coming for what rightfully belongs to God. The event will be attended by a great shout of victory, with the voice of an archangel, and the loud blast of the heavenly trumpet. And so shall we ever be with the Lord.

The phrase “looking for” in Titus 2:13 carries the idea of eager anticipation. We find the same idea in Jude 21, where the author uses the word as a motivation for Christians to keep themselves in the love of God while “awaiting anxiously” the mercy of Christ unto eternal life. The word means not only waiting, but watching for the Lord’s return. 1 John 3:3 calls it a purifying hope; 1 Thessalonians 4:18 calls it a comforting hope. Here, it is a blessed or happy hope.

Have you noticed that little children who are ashamed tend to look down? They are not eagerly anticipating their parents’ return. I remember when, as children, my brother and I were wrestling and knocked a hole in our bedroom wall; we definitely were not excited about Mother and Dad’s return! But I also remember those times when, after school, I did the dishes, knowing Mother would be home imminently from work. I knew I better do them for that was the job she had assigned to me, but I also knew that she would reward my work. That was a happy time. I was looking for her return.

God has brought us to various places of service. As we undertake the righteous duties before us, let us remember the basis for them: our full and free redemption in our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. This grace of redemption teaches us to have an inward view—to live sensibly; an outward view—to live righteously and godly; and an upward view—to look for the blessed hope. As our Lord stated in the parable of Luke 12, “Be like men who are waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding feast, so that they may immediately open the door to him when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master shall find on the alert when he comes... You too, be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (vv. 36–40).

Titus was to set in order what was left unfinished when he and Paul first came. And so Christ will complete His gracious ministry of redemption He began 2,000 years ago when He gathers us up one glorious day. In the meantime, let us occupy until He comes; let us “be obedient,...ready for every good deed,...[let us] malign no one, be uncontentious, gentle, showing every consideration for all men...” (Titus 3:1–2), realizing the incentive for such living is the “blessed hope.”