

New Lenses for a New Kind of Leadership

Titus 1:1-4

Introduction: God created this world with intricate beauty designed to declare His glory and nature. He was not trying to hide Himself as the author, did not intend for us to be fuzzy on who was behind it, and left no doubt to who's handiwork and fingerprints were over everything. In fact, **Psalm 8** says that God's name is majestic in all the earth as He has set His glory above the heavens. When we look at nature all around us we are left with the undeniable truth that He is powerful and we are not. **Romans 1** tells that when we look at the created world and the things that are made, we should perceive clearly God's **eternal power and divine nature**, and we are without excuse. In my daughters 3rd grade class they are studying flowers to see the perfect and flawless design in the stems, petals, and leaves. We "found" a type of flower we had never seen before in our front yard, and my daughter was so excited to text a picture of it to her teacher and bring it to class, called a blue passion, with its unique design, color, and smell.

We were designed to see this beauty and handiwork and our only reasonable recourse would be to bow in loving worship and honor the Creator of it all. However, because we have been born with a sin nature, our ability to see God in all of this has been blurred. Sin is like having spiritual cataracts or having misshapen corneas: we see but we do not really see. We only see the reality that this blurry or misshapen sight can bring us. So we "see" creation around us, but we tend to see ourselves, or think that somehow what is there in front of us is all there is, and we begin to focus on the creation rather than the Creator, seeing the world through tunnel vision, blurred reality, or a 2D image that pales in comparison to the real thing.

This is what the gospel changes. The gospel is like *cataract*, *Lasik*, and *phototherapeutic keratectomy* all at once (the last one is a real thing...probably). The gospel not only gives sight to the blind (Luke 4:18), seeing our sin and God's glory for the first time, it also corrects our vision to see the world the way God intended. **The gospel gives us new lenses to see through**, recapturing the beauty in worship, the joy of God's sovereignty, and the resting in the majesty of Jesus Christ's work on the cross, the power of His resurrection, and the offer of reconciliation to God the Father.

This is our hope in our brief but packed study of the book of Titus. By God's grace, and because of it, we want to see the truth of God differently, freshly, and clearly so we can live fully. The truth of God is beautiful and when we embrace it, we can live with **radical reorientation**, can live distinctly from the world to ultimately offer those who do not know Christ something transformational that they have never seen or tasted before. The apostle Paul wrote this short letter to Titus, a young yet faithful disciple, on the island of Crete which was known for laziness, immorality, deceit, and drunkenness. It was here that churches were planted after Pentecost (see Acts 2:11 - Cretans heard the message and then returned to their home, evangelized, and planted churches). There was pressure outside from culture and false teaching within the church, which meant the task for a young pastor was overwhelming. Titus was to set things in order by appointing elders in every church, teach those in the church to live out the truth they knew, so that they could reach those around them. **Embrace grace, love godliness, and share Christ** would have been the mantra. Not complicated or new, this powerful course of action would set this church on a trajectory of effectiveness, worship, and joy.

New Lenses for a New Identity

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

Slave of God

If we wanted a clear example of someone who saw life with new lenses, we look no further than Paul, the greatest missionaries the world has known. But he started out blind to his own sin and deceit. He was well trained, had an impeccable upbringing, superior intellect, over the top passion, and all the

makings of the best the world could offer. Yet, he was ultimately a **self-trusting, self-confident, self-righteous** enemy of God. In fact, he took it on himself to snuff out the fledgling church that had grown out of Jesus' disciples teaching (a clear sign of self-righteousness is a *Savior Complex - I am the one that needs to fix/save the situation*). It was on the way to Damascus that Paul gained sight for the first time. **Acts 9** tells the story that as Saul (later Paul) was on his way to imprison Christians, Jesus knocked him to the ground and caused him to go **blind for 3 days**, asking him why he was persecuting. At the end of 3 days, Ananias came to him with this message:

*"Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain **your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.**" And immediately something like **scales fell from his eyes, and he regained sight.**" (Acts 9:17-18)*

The message Jesus gave him was simple: *you are my instrument to bring my name to the Gentiles, kings, and Israel, and you will suffer much for my name sake. **You will preach and suffer, then preach and suffer, followed by preaching and suffering.*** So when Paul declared himself to be a servant of God, he used the language of a **slave**, one who gives himself up wholly to the will of others. His life was over, a new life had come.

This is true of us as well. **"But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life."** (Rom. 6:22) We were "bought with a price, so we glorify God with it" (1 Cor. 6:20). We no longer live for ourselves but for Him who for our sake died and was raised. (2 Cor. 5:15). Our new identity in Christ is one of a slave, one who is owned, cared for, and possessed by Christ. This is ultimate freedom and joy for us as we know we are Christ's. The reality is that before Christ saved us we were slaves to our sin. Now we are free to be slaves of righteousness (Rom. 6:18), and we live for His glory, for His purposes, and His will. This foundationally and fundamentality changes the way we live and see the world, and can only happen when "the scales fall off our eyes."

Messenger of Jesus Christ

Paul was called specifically by Christ to be his messenger. An apostle was an official messenger for Christ who was given a specific message. This meant that he was an **ambassador**, one who did not have authority on his own but carried the authority of the one who sent him. What Paul received from Christ specifically, we have received generally. One of the marks of our new life and sight in Christ?

"Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us." (2 Cor. 5:20) Notice that this framed in terms of identity, of *who* we are. We are slaves and we are ambassadors. These are new lenses that help us see the world and our life differently. Any focus on the truth, doctrine, training, and the word are all connected to this identity. This means that the deeper we understand the truth of God the broader we'll be able to play out who we truly are in Christ. But what is that mission? That is what Paul speaks to next.

New Lenses for a New Mission

*for the sake of the **faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness***

For the sake of the elect

What drove Paul in his mission, and what assured him of success? It was the fact that he was working "for the sake of the faith of God's elect." Paul's new lens meant that he now understood that salvation rested with God alone. In fact, one of the key verses in all of Titus in 3:5, which says **"He saved us, not**

because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy." We are saved as a product of God's mercy, His choice, His love. This truth is as beautiful as it is misunderstood, since we rail against the idea that we are NOT IN CONTROL of our life or destiny. But when fully understood, this is reality is like fresh oxygen given to someone trapped in a cave of suffocating smoke.

What God's elect does NOT mean: God's elect does not mean that people do not need to respond to the message of the gospel nor does it demotivate those who bring the message (if it is up to God's election, what role do we play?). We respond by faith to the gospel message, since it is by grace through faith that we are saved (Eph. 2:8). But we often have a stunted view of our own sinfulness. Ephesians 2:1-3 says we were dead in our trespasses and sins, meaning we COULD not respond on our own to God, since dead men tell no tales. We were dead, and because of our sin we deserved death eternally, and without something supernaturally happening we would have stayed that way.

What God's elect does mean, and why its life giving: Paul worked on behalf of the God's elect, even though it was not his choice nor did he know who else that would be. He knew those who were believers in the church were elect, since the singular proof of election is saving faith, just as the proof of salvation is sanctification, and the proof of sanctification will be glorification. He also knew that evangelization would be effective because the message, though foolish and a stumbling block, would cut through the darkness to those God had chosen. In fact, the term *elect* or variations (chosen or predestined) are seen all through the New Testament (Romans 8:33, 16:13; Col. 3:12; 2 Tim. 2:10; Eph. 1:4-5; John 15:16; 1 Pet. 1:1-2), and the OT (Deut. 7:6-11). Why is this actually life giving?

Freeing - Paul does not focus on what someone "*must do*" to qualify as God's elect but rather the faith that characterizes those who are God's. We remember we are products of God's sovereign grace, not our own goodness or ability. We are products of God's love and mercy, meaning God loves us without qualifying that with something we have to do. This frees us to live, obey, and proclaim not in a mindset that is trying to earn something from God, but simply because we are infinitely loved.

Assuring - The order here matters. Godly conduct is a PRODUCT of faith given by God, NOT the basis of our salvation. That means that our goodness and obedience does not lead to a relationship with God, rather the relationship with God that gospel faith establishes **leads to righteous actions**. *God is not waiting to love us until we have gotten our lives straightened out. He loves us and demonstrates that love by grace and mercy, unaltered by anything we can do.*

Securing - If salvation was up to me, there would be no hope. If keeping my salvation was up to me, I'd fail every time. If I had to maintain righteousness on my own and God required perfect obedience to let me into heaven were up to me, I'd leap headlong into judgment every time. But the fact that we are saved as God's elect means that we are also secure in Him. **John 10:28-30 says**, "*I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one will snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.*" This means that our salvation is secured in the strength of the Father and work of the son, and no one can remove us from the safety of His hand, even our own sinfulness. What does that mean for those who claim belief and then act in faithlessness? Those who are saved WILL respond in faith which will endure, grow, and obey. A profession of faith without change is a false one, not driven by God's grace but a misunderstanding of it.

For the sake of truth driven godliness

"Grace is not opposed to effort, it is opposed to earning. Earning is an attitude. Effort is an action. Grace, you know, does not have to do with forgiveness of sins alone. (Dallas Willard)

God's elect by faith will come to grips with the truth, the reality of God and His glory. True repentance leads to a knowledge of the truth (2 Tim. 2:25), where there are some who are always learning but do not come to a knowledge of the truth (2 Tim. 3:7). Salvation brings a new appetite for truth, which inevitably leads to godliness, since we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, are given the Word, and have the mind of Christ (John 17:17; 1 Cor. 2:1).

This is what Paul made clear in **1 Cor. 15:10** - It was the grace of God extended to him that caused him to *work harder*, knowing it was not him that did the work, but the grace of God within him. Peter said that it was the craving for the spiritual milk of the word that caused him to grow in regards to salvation (**1 Pet. 2:1-3**).

This moves us beyond intentions. There are many who have good intentions, are nice, and seem like good people who know there is a God out there. Salvation is by grace alone, and that grace that produces salvation enlightens us to the truth, which leads us to godliness. If there is no truth, there will be no godliness. If there is not godliness, there is no truth.

This gives us a baseline of **self-evaluation** as well as **ministry evaluation**. Here's what I mean. If you believe today, you are a product of God's grace, love, and choice, which means we have all we need to bow ourselves in worship. This never gets old, is never boring, and drives the rest of our lives. But we are NOT motivated by past grace as much as future grace, that we wait expectantly for more grace, knowing that we can do nothing apart from God. Are you living out a life of worship and grace? Are you dependent on grace or are you doing life on your own? Have you grown stale in worship? One of the main reasons our kids think church and worship is boring is because their parents demonstrate that it is! Are you growing in the knowledge of God and because you know Him, you are growing in your hatred of sin and have a growing appetite for godliness?

In ministry, are we working hard to communicate the message of the gospel, being totally dependant on the grace of God for effectiveness? Do we trust God for the means of salvation or do we feel we have to add something to the mix to make it more palatable?

New Lenses for a New Message

in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began, and at the proper time manifested in His word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior

Hope in God's eternal & sovereign grace

What is the end goal of the preaching of the grace of God in the gospel? Eternal life. This life actually starts now (John 17:3), which is characterized by **knowing the only and true God and Jesus Christ whom He sent**. The goal of God's sovereign grace in salvation is that we would know God in Christ and do so forever. We are not just saved from punishment, we are saved TO knowing God, having a restored relationship with Him. This means that the God of the universe not only wanted that kind of relationship, He died to get it. Think about your hero, the person in this world that you emulate and respect, who moved mountains so that he/she could have a ongoing relationship with you. That is what God did in Jesus.

Paul's language here is like standing on a road and looking back to the left and looking forward to the right. To the left is eternity past, where we see God deciding, choosing, and electing by His sovereign grace and mercy those that He loves. He made promises to Himself that He would fulfill in Christ in order to offer us life in Him. As we look to the right, we see eternity, the space of time that will go on

and we will be His forever, serving, loving, and knowing Him every day without ever burning up a future day. What does this promise do for us?

- **God's sovereign grace is seen in eternity past and future, so we can trust it in the present** - How did Paul endure the suffering that came from his being a slave of Christ? He knew that God was working according to His grace and mercy. The new lens we have is that we can see all things through the lens of grace, knowing that God is not making mistakes. How do we deal with loss, cancer, or unexpected heart attacks? We trust that God is operating out of His sovereign grace, drawing in those He loves and refining them so that we will know, enjoy, and treasure Him above all things. This lens moves us from questioning God's goodness in hard times to resting ON HIM in those times, finding as the outcome His grace and peace.
- **We can experience the hope of eternal life now, not just the future** - Life in the here and now is going to be hard and stink. We should long for heaven NOT because it is easier, but because we get to see Jesus and worship the Father without the hindrance of our flesh and sin nature. But we experience life eternal NOW when we embrace the reality that we are called to know the truth, move toward godliness and embrace knowing Christ as our greatest value. This lens sees life not about us, but about Him, not about our comfort but about magnifying Him, not about our own excellence but about His glory.
- **The time to worship is now, not later** - This all means that the time to worship is now, not waiting until we get our act together or for everything to make sense. I was reminded by our staff this week that the time to worship was when we are doing and folding the laundry, not after it is all done. We are called to worship because of the hope given to us by the sovereign grace of God, promised before the world began and extending into eternity future. That means all of our life is a means of worship, seeking to yield to Christ's Lordship in every aspect of life, leaving nothing boxed in.

Entrusted with the preaching of the Word

Paul understood that since he was a product of grace, he now knew that it was NOT up to him to save people, but simply to play his role as a preacher of the message of the gospel. This is what he was entrusted with, a message that brought life but did not originate from him. Again, this was his assurance and joy, what kept him going through the suffering, pain, and persecution that he faced in his life of ministry.

New Lenses for a New Messenger

*To Titus, my true child in common faith,
Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior*

So he sends greetings to young Titus, a young man of common faith but who was NOT from a Jewish background at all (Gal. 2:1-5). Paul exhorted and encouraged him in **grace and peace**, even though the situation Titus found himself was anything but gracious or peaceful. Titus could operate out of grace and peace because these were gifts from the Lord, not products of circumstances. He could stand firm against false teachers, could help believers and evangelize unbelievers even though he may have felt inadequate, because He knew He was bringing the message of God's sovereign grace.

How is your vision? Are you seeing God clearly? Do you need surgery, or do you simply need to wipe your lenses clean? Our goal is that we would taste and **embrace the grace of God** in our life, whether things are working out right now or the heat is turned up, we want to **love godliness** and growing in obedience, yielding to Christ's Lordship in every crevice of life, and **share Christ** with all that we can. My

hope is that we grow together. This is why at the end of every service I want to stand and read this together, hoping that we will memorize the same Scripture, knitting our hearts and minds together:

"But when the goodness and lovingkindness of God our Savior appeared, 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..."

Titus 3:4-5