An Exegetical and Theological Analysis of the Grace of God in Titus 2:11–15

Bala Lafa Turgong

Abstract

This study offers an exegetical and theological analysis of Titus 2:11–15 with particular attention to the nature, scope, and function of the grace of God. Engaging the Greek text and key scholarly perspectives, the paper argues that divine grace in this pericope is both universal in its salvific offer and transformative in its ethical demands. The phrase "the grace of God has appeared" is interpreted as a reference to the historical manifestation of salvation in Jesus Christ, extending to all humanity without implying universal salvation. The study further demonstrates that grace functions pedagogically, instructing believers to renounce ungodliness and worldly desires while cultivating self-control, righteousness, and godliness in the present age. It also highlights the eschatological dimension of grace, which orients believers toward the blessed hope and the glorious appearing of Jesus Christ. Additionally, the paper examines the Christological significance of Titus 2:13, arguing for the identification of Jesus Christ as "our great God and Savior" based on grammatical and contextual considerations. Ultimately, the study concludes that grace not only initiates salvation but also sustains ethical transformation and eschatological expectation in the life of the believer.

Keywords: Grace of God, Salvation, Christology, Exegesis, Christian Ethics.

Introduction

The concept of "grace" has caused some theologians to puzzle over the years and led them to develop divergent theories on the nature and functions of grace. Paul in his corpus preached extensively on the concept of "the grace of God." In Pastoral Epistles, and especially in Titus, he relates the grace of God which is divine to its salvific value to all humanity. Some think that "the grace of God" is targeted at some selected few who may or may not have made conscious decision to accept it. This is what the Calvinists call "special" or "electing grace." This view refers to the grace that is "only given to the elect" and "cannot ultimately be resisted."[483] While, another school of thought views the salvific grace as what affects all mankind. The question therefore is, how should the concept of grace be understood and what are its functions as Paul discusses the subject matter in Titus 2?

Text[484] and Translation[485]

> **11** *Epephanē gar hē charis tou theou soterios pasin anthrōpois* ***12*** *paideuousa hemas, hina arnēsamenoi tēn asebeian kai tas kosmikas epithumias sōphronōs kai dikaiōs kai eusebōs zēsōmen en nun aiōni (Dat Loc of Time),* ***13*** *prosdechomevoi tēn makarian elpida kai epiphaneian tēs doxēs tou megalou theou kai*

1. William W. Combs, "Does the Bible Teach Preveniet Grace?" *DBSJ* 10 (2005), 3–4.
2. Greek text is taken from USB5.
3. Author's own translation.

sōtēros hēmōn Iēsou Christou, ***14*** *hos edōken heauton huper hēmōv (Adv Gen of Advantage) hina lutrōsētai hēmas apo pasēs anomias (Abl of Separation) kai katharisē heautō laon periousion, zēlōtēn kalōn ergōn.* ***15*** *Tauta lalei kai parakalei kai elegche meta pasēs epitagēs (Gen of Att Circumstance); mēdeis sou periphroneitō.*

11 For the grace of God has appeared (bringing) salvation to all people **12** instructing us, that after denying ungodliness and worldly desires, we might live sensible, and upright and godly in the present age, **13** waiting for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, **14** who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from every lawlessness and purify for himself a chosen people, zealous of good works. **15** These things speak and encourage and convict with every authority; let no one disregard you.

Exegetical Comment

George Knight thinks that Paul in this passage speaks of the saving grace that teaches believers "to say no to sin and live truly Christian lives here and now (v. 12), while at the same time … look expectantly for the hope and glory of the second coming of 'our Savior Jesus Christ' (v. 13)" who gave himself for the sins of the world and who above all else desires his people to be pure and zealous for every good work (v. 14). Paul directs Titus to teach these things

and "seek authoritatively to bring about an obedient response (v. 15)."[486]

In the opinion of Gustaf W. Henriksson, "The universal rendering of this grace to 'all humans' suggests a general historical event accessible to humanity, rather than a religious narrative."[487] In a similar vein, Combs thinks that the phrase *Epephanē gar hē charis tou theou* is generally understood to allude to Christ's historical advent as a means of salvation.[488] This view holds that the "grace is given to all people and that it can be resisted."[489] The appearance of the grace in this context can also be seen to mean the appearance of Christ (Titus 3:4–7).[490] The idea of *pasin anthrōpois* ["to all people"] without doubt refers to the different groups of people mentioned in the preceding verses including slaves to "emphasize the universal offer of the gospel"[491] that all irrespective of gender, nationality, and status stand to benefit from the gift of

God. Combs observes that the idea of grace "'bringing salvation to all men' does not, of course, mean universal salvation, but the universal provision and offer of the gospel, a common theme for Paul in the Pastorals" (1 Tim 2:3–4; 4:10).[492] He further argues that there is nothing in the context of Titus 2:11 that will warrant a conclusion that the atoning grace "has somehow counteracted the

4. George W. Knight, III. *The Pastoral Epistles: The New International Greek Testament Commentary*, eds. I Horward Marshall and W. Ward Gasque (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 318.

5. Gustaf W. Henriksson, "Grace in Action: Exploring the Intersection of Soteriology and Ethics in the Letter to Titus," *SJT* 73 (2020), 331–32.

6. Combs, 13.

7. Combs, 4.

8. Henriksson, 332.

9. Combs, 14.

10. Combs, 14.

effects of Adam's sin and enabled all men to believe."[493] The grace is given to perform some functions in the lives of Christians.

The grace of God primarily teaches two things as outlined in the pericope. Samuel Ngewa states that the teaching of the grace "combines education and discipline."[494] Mainly the grace teaches people to deny vices and to pursue virtues. Fundamentally, it teaches people to say no to ungodliness and worldly desires; that is, anything that is contrary to the will and desire of God for his people (Rom 1:18; 1 Tim 1:9–10). Ungodliness is "the opposite of godliness." Godliness is a term that signifies "everything that pleases God and conforms to his character."[495] Ngewa maintains that the word *epithumias* translated "desire" or "'passion' is morally neutral" which may either be referring to anything good or bad. But for the fact that it is described in this context as "worldly" it opposes "heavenly desires" and is "limited to the present world and characteristics of it."[496] This means that Christians are to say "No" to any desire that causes them to focus on the worldly materials at the expense of focusing on God, the Father. This kind of desire is negative and sinful which could include but not limited to sexual desires.[497]

On the other hand, the grace teaches how to live sensibly, and upright, and godly in the present age (Titus 2:12b). The NIV translates *dikaiōs* as "self-controlled;" a word that

11. Combs, 14
12. Samuel M. Ngewa, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: Africa Bible Commentary Series* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 384.
13. Ngewa, 384.
14. Ngewa, 384.
15. Ngewa, 384–85.

"involves self-mastery in all matters of life."[498] Those who live upright lives are those who have right relationship with God and with man. Godliness involves acknowledging God in all ramifications with the awareness that the world is meaningless without God. Ngewa asserts that these qualities are "three fundamental human relationships: 'self-controlled' [or sensibly] focuses on how we relate to ourselves; 'uprightness' focuses on how we relate to other people; and 'godliness' focuses on our relationship to God."[499] He is quick to add that even though one may not be certain that this is what Paul had in mind when he was writing this list, but for sure this list conforms to the teaching of Jesus that believers are to love God first, love other people and exercise self-control in a manner that pleases God (Matt 22:37–39; Mark 12:30–31; Luke 10:27–28).[500]

Living sensibly, upright, and godly prepares a Christian adequately as he waits for "the blessed hope and appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (v. 13). The grace teaches Christians to live in constant expectation of the second coming of Christ. A glorious moment that no one can afford to miss it (Rom 8:18–19; Jas 1:12; 1 Thess 4:13–17). A valuable phrase that attracts attention in v. 13 is *epiphaneian tēs doxēs tou megalou theou kai sōtēros hēmōn Iēsou Christou*," which is translated, "appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." Some scholars think that the phrase refers to the two persons of the Godhead (God and Jesus) especially considering *kai* that serves as a conjunction connecting *tou megalou theou* together with *sōtēros hēmōn*

16. Ngewa, 385.

17. Ngewa, 385.

18. Ngewa, 385–86.

Iēsou Christou. For instance, J. Christopher Edwards has argued in his paper entitled, "The Christology of Titus 2:13 and 1 Tim 2:5" that "given all the similarities [of Titus 2:13] with 1 Timothy, it is very likely that the same author would similarly wish *theou* and *Iēsou Christou* to be distinguished as two persons." To say otherwise, it would mean that "the same author has a fundamentally different Christology in Titus 2:13 and 1 Tim 2:5," in which in Edwards opinion is "very unlikely."[501]

On the contrary, some scholars have argued that the definite article *tou* ties *theou* and *sōtēros* together, making them one entity. This follows the grammatical construction which considers both *theou* and *sōtēros* as insinuating "the same person." Daniel Wallace points out the Granville Sharp's Rule which states;

> When the copulative *kai* connects two nouns of the same case, [viz. nouns (either substantive or adjective, or participles) of personal description, respecting office, dignity, affinity, or connection, and attributes, properties, or qualities, good or ill], if the article *ho*, or any of its cases, precedes the first of the said nouns or participles, and is not repeated before the second noun or participle, the latter always relates to the same person that is expressed or described by the first noun or participle: i.e. it denotes a farther description of the first-named person ….[502]

---

19. J. Christopher Edwards, "The Christology of Titus 2:13 and 1 Timothy 2:5," *TynBul* 62 (2011), 147.

20. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 271.

Smith and Song explain this rule to mean, "If there is a construction with *(a) article + (b) noun + (c) kai + (d) noun*, both nouns always refer to the same person, provided that neither noun is

impersonal, plural or a proper name. These three requirements are crucial. … When the three conditions are met, the two substantives always refer to the same person."[503] Wallace also adds that some have alleged that *theou* as used in the text "is a proper name and, hence, that Sharp's rule cannot apply to the constructions in which it is employed. But it has been argued by some scholars "that *theou* is not a proper name in Greek."[504]

In the same vein, Ezra Abbot argues, "It is impossible … to understand *theou* and *sōtēros* otherwise than of one person."[505] He argues further, "*epiphaneia* is a term especially and particularly applied to the Son and never to the Father."[506] Kevin Smith and Authur Song opine that besides this text the word *epiphaneia* occurs five times in the New Testament out of which four occurrences are in the Pastoral Epistles and "all denote an appearance of Christ" (2 Thess 2:8; 1 Tim 6:14; 2 Tim 4:1, 8).[507] In like manner, Denny Petrillo seems to agree with this view when he holds that the Greek terms *tou megalou theou kai sōtēros hēmōn Iēsou Christou* "refer to Jesus." He argues, "It is unquestionable that Paul is here referring to Jesus

21. Kevin Smith and Authur Song, "Some Christological Implications in Titus 2:13," *Neot* 40 (2006), 290.
22. Wallace, 276.
23. Ezra Abbot, "On the Construction of Titus ii.13," *JSBLE* 1 (1881), 3.
24. Abbot, 4.
25. Smith and Song, 285–86.

as the great God."[508] Jesus has been referred to as God in the Scriptures (John 1:1, 18; 20:28; Rom 9:5; 1 John 5:20 and many other places in Revelation). Similarly, Smith and Song allude, "Titus 2:13 is one of the New Testament most important proof texts for the deity of Jesus Christ."[509] They further argue that Paul did not only call "Jesus Christ our great God and Saviour; but also depicts the second coming of Christ as the occasion for his veiled divinity to be revealed."[510] They affirm that the evidence in favor of "*theou kai sōtēros* referring to one person is overwhelming." Therefore, the expression, "our great God and Saviour" should be understood as "referring to only one person, Jesus Christ." The name "Jesus Christ" stands in apposition to *theou kai sōtēros*.[511]

Verse 14 states that Jesus "gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from every lawless [deed] and purify for himself a special people, zealous of good works." This echoes the biblical teaching that all people stood condemned before God and on their own could not chart a way out from sin but Jesus voluntary offered himself on behalf of the condemned mankind in order to save them. He stood as a substitute to carry the penalty that is meant for man. Knight asserts that the *hina* clause indicates a purpose or "result of Jesus' giving himself." Firstly, to "redeem us from every iniquity;" this carries the idea of setting one free, and secondly, to purify for himself a

26. Denny Petrillo, *Commentary on 1, 2 Timothy & Titus* (Abilene: Quality, 1998), 183.

27. Smith and Song, 284.

28. Smith and Song, 284.

29. Smith and Song, 291.

special people for his own possession zealous for good works.[512]

Paul uses hapax legomenon "*zēlōtēn*," the word that never appears anywhere in the Pastoral Epistles. Therefore, *zēlōtēn kalōn ergōn*, describes "one who is eager or enthusiastic" for good works.[513] It is Christ's desire that his followers excel in all good works (1 Tim 5:10, 25; 6:18). Paul has always been an advocate of "good works" (1 Cor 3:13–14; 2 Cor 9:8; Eph 2:10; Col 1:10; 2 Thess 2:17). Performing good works is "the proper response" to the grace of God.[514]

In v. 15, Paul uses three present active imperative verbs; *lalei*, *parakalei* and *elegche* to instruct Titus to speak, encourage, and convict respectively with every authority what befits "sound doctrine." This suggests that "'these things' are to be communicated continually."[515] Paul urges Titus to speak the word with boldness, exhorting and convincing the Cretans with all authority of the word. Whenever the word of God is spoken, it must then be spoken with authority since Jesus has delegated that authority to his disciples (Matt 28:18–20).

Conclusion

This is a great pericope on the grace of God in the New Testament. It can be observed that Titus 2:11–15, teaches that the grace is available for all people. It teaches the

30. Petrillo, 183.

31. Benjamin J. Lappenga, "'Zealots for Good Works': The Polemical Repercussions of the Word *zēlōtēs* in Titus 2:14," *CBQ* 17 (2013), 704, 707. Also see Knight, 330.

32. Knight, 330.

33. Knight, 330.

believers to deny all forms of ungodliness and to pursue all things that make for godliness. It brings about present and future hope for the Christians. It produces the righteous living in the present. It also prepares the Christians for the coming of the righteous One. Hence, the grace impacts the present and the future lives of Christians. In essence, the pericope teaches that the grace of God has appeared. It is available to all. It is demonstrated in Christ, and it is connected to the future hope of Christians.

Sources

Abbot, Ezra. "On the Construction of Titus ii.13." *JSBLE* 1 (1881): 3–19.

Combs, William W. "Does the Bible Teach Prevenient Grace?" *DBSJ* 10 (2005): 3–18.

Edwards, J. Christopher. "The Christology of Titus 2:13 and 1 Timothy 2:5." *TynBul* 62 (2011): 141–47.

Henriksson, Gustaf W. "Grace in Action: Exploring the Intersection of Soteriology and Ethics in the Letter to Titus." *SJT* 73 (2020): 330–39.

Knight, III, George W. *The Pastoral Epistles: The New International Greek Testament Commentary*. Edited by I. Horward Marshall & W. Ward Gasque. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992.

Lappenga, Benjamin J. "'Zealots for Good Works': The Polemical Repercussions of the Word *zēlōtēs* in Titus 2:14." *CBQ* 17 (2013): 704–718.

Ngewa, Samuel M. *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: Africa Bible Commentary Series*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009.

Petrillo, Denny. *Commentary on 1, 2 Timothy & Titus*. Abilene: Quality, 1998.

Smith, Kevin and Authur Song. "Some Christological Implications in Titus 2:13." *Neot* 40 (2006): 284–94.

Wallace, Daniel B. *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996.