

Our Motivation for Morality

SCOTT HOEZEE

Theologians and philosophers have long been debating a key question: Can we be good without God? I mean, if there is not God, then what is the foundation for morality? How can we know right from wrong if there is no God? If God exists, then God is the straight line against which we figure out what counts as crooked. Take God out of the picture, and maybe there is no way to know. Well, whatever the philosophical ins and outs of all that, the New Testament is very sure we need God to be good; indeed, we need Jesus to be good; and today on *Groundwork*, we will explore how the epiphany of Christ is the starting point for all our living. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, this is now the third and final program in a short series we have been doing on light. We often associate it especially with Advent and Christmas, and then especially with what comes right after Advent and Christmas, which is Epiphany...kind of a season of light...we think of the star that appeared to the Magi, and so forth; John's Gospel that Jesus was the light of life that had come into the world—the light shines in the darkness. In the second program, we also reflected on how Jesus calls us to be the light of the world; and now, in this program, we are going to sort of see how the epiphany...which means revelation or unveiling...how the epiphany of Jesus and his grace transforms all our living.

DAVE BAST

Right; and we are going to look at an interesting passage, which doesn't technically have the word *light* in it...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

But it does have the word *epiphany* in Greek, and that can also be translated, as you said, *revelation*, but it can also be translated as *appearing* or *appearance*. Jesus showed up in the world at Christmas...we celebrate that...he showed up as a baby, but he showed up a little bit later as an adult, and in fact, we have that mysterious gap of his youth and early adulthood, which is not described in the Bible because it kind of just cuts to the chase of the really important stuff. It was Jesus' adult ministry leading up to and climaxing in the cross and the resurrection that was his purpose for appearing. So, we are going to look at the book of Titus, which is one of the Pastoral Epistles.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Specifically, we will spend most of this program in Titus 2. Pastoral epistles are 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus; and we call them the Pastoral Epistles because they are letters written by Paul to Timothy and Titus, who were pastors.

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

They were doing the work of pastoring, so these are pastoral epistles, as Paul is trying to help them be better pastors.

DAVE BAST

So, not written to churches, in other words...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Like the rest of Paul's letters.

SCOTT HOEZEE

This is written to people who are ministering in a church. Timothy was in Ephesus, which was a difficult city in which to minister; Titus was on the island of Crete; and as Paul makes clear, reading between the lines in this relatively short letter to Titus, Titus had kind of a high hill to climb, because the residents of Crete apparently had a notorious reputation in the ancient world.

DAVE BAST

Yes; in fact, it was proverbial. We won't read anything from Titus Chapter 1, where Paul makes reference to these Cretans, but he does say, among other things, all Cretans are liars; and it seems like he is quoting a common saying in the Greek world. So, the people of Crete did not have, needless to say, the best of reputations; and Titus did not have it easy there trying to minister among them as a pastor...not just as an evangelist, sharing the Gospel, but now, what comes after, when you try to build up the Church, and you try to encourage Christians in the life of discipleship—of following Jesus—that is a pastor's role, really; and as you said, Scott, it wasn't easy in Crete.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; Paul calls them liars; he also says they are lazy brutes and they are gluttons. These people are not going to be very easy to turn toward the Gospel. It is not going to be easy to get them to lead lives that are Christ-like, which is probably why all throughout this letter, Paul keeps coming back to the number one thing Titus has to preach and teach: Self-control. Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit, and the word Paul uses throughout Titus...in Greek it is called *sóphoneó*, but what it literally means is to be in your right mind—to be in your right mind, which I suppose means that the way the people of Crete *usually* lived was somewhat out of their minds...

DAVE BAST

Yes, a little crazy; but you know, that is interesting, though, Scott, because when I hear the word self-control, I immediately think of will and willpower...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

But, the background of the word in the original...in the New Testament...has to do with our mind and our thinking, not so much our will. So, maybe we should think of thought power, not just willpower, when we think of self-control.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, and I think, as we mentioned on the self-control episode in our fruit of the Spirit series, some of us can remember our parents or our mothers, you know, when we were children and we did something foolish, saying: Are you out of your ever-loving mind?? Have you taken leave of your senses, my mother used to say when my brother or I did something foolish. So, Paul is saying: Look, God created you with a right mind to live fruitfully and delightfully in his creation. Go back to that; and also, by the way, Titus, you have to teach sound doctrine...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He keeps coming back to that, but how in the world is Titus going to do that with these lazy, feckless, lying people? Well, there is an answer that comes in Titus 2.

DAVE BAST

Right; where Paul begins by, as you say, urging these different groups...he identifies them: Young men, young women, older people, matrons, and the like; and again, he encourages them to pursue sound doctrine, which is literally *hygienic* doctrine or healthy doctrine. So again, this is not just a head trip, but understanding the truth and pursuing the truth of the Christian faith is a healthy thing, and it leads to health; and then he says this...the key passage that we want to focus on, beginning in Titus 2:11:
For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. ¹²It teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled... (there it is) ...self-controlled, upright, and Godly lives in this present age; ¹³while we wait for the blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and savior, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴who 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. ¹⁵These, then, are the things you should teach; encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is Titus 2:11-15; and we will get more into this in the next part of the program, Dave; but again, in verse 11, when he says: For the grace of God has *appeared*, that is the Greek word from which we get epiphany; it is an epiphany—a revelation—and then again in verse 13, when he says: We are waiting for the *appearing* of the glory when Jesus comes again, as we would say that also is an epiphany. It is something that is going to be revealed to us; and according to Paul here, apparently the revelation...the epiphany of grace in Jesus has a lot to do with how we are going to live as disciples; and so, in just a moment, we are going to wonder how and why it is that the appearance of God's grace in Jesus makes us different kinds of people. So, stay tuned.
Segment 2

DAVE BAST

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and we are concluding a three-part series on light, and particularly the light of Epiphany—the light of the revelation—or the appearing of Christ in our world, which is something we often think about right after Christmas, but anytime of the year, as well; and we just said, Dave, that Titus was a pastor on the island of Crete, and he had a high hill to climb because the Cretans were notoriously immoral and lazy, and prone to lying. They were not people who were going to be easily instructed to straighten up and fly right, but Paul says there is hope, Titus. There is hope. How can you turn these people around? Well, you don't even have to do it, because we have seen the appearing of the grace—of the epiphany of the grace—of God has come, and that, he says, will teach us to say no to ungodliness and wicked ways.

DAVE BAST

Yes; so, just again, to repeat exactly the verse...verse 11, with which we began: For the grace of God has appeared... What he is really saying is Jesus appeared. The grace of God is as a phrase, a synonym, for Jesus. He is the one who has appeared...who has epiphanied...he offers salvation to all people; and this grace, he goes on to say, teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions; which is really kind of interesting. Just say no, we might put it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And your just putting it that way, Dave, probably set off some echoes in some of those listening to this program, because they will remember that in the 1980s, when Ronald Reagan was president, his wife Nancy made it as her...you know, first ladies usually have signature programs, and Nancy Reagan's signature program was a very noble one. It was to fight drugs: Cocaine, heroin, marijuana; it was an anti-drug campaign—noble campaign—and she had a tagline for her anti-drug campaign: Just say no. Just say no. Somebody offers you cocaine at a party, just say no. You feel tempted to shoot up some...just say no. It was the right thing to say, but critics at the time, also said: That's a little simple. It is memorable, but if you are an addict, or if you are getting tremendous peer pressure from other people to take drugs, just saying no isn't so easy. You are going to need some help...you are going to need some outside help...and so, here in Titus 2 Paul says that the epiphany of grace teaches us to say no, but Paul isn't saying: Ach, just say no...

DAVE BAST

Just say no...yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Just use your own willpower and say no...no; he is saying we need that epiphany of grace to activate our no.

DAVE BAST

Yes; I mean, think about it. What we are supposed to say no to is...he describes is as ungodliness and worldly passions...which is kind of a strong way of saying sin...just say no to sin, right? Yes, like you are on a diet...just say no to food; who needs a diet, you know? You see that doughnut or that piece of pie or that chocolate brownie? Just say no; and we all know that doesn't work.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I don't want to say no.

DAVE BAST

If our willpower were strong enough to just say no, we wouldn't need the grace of God to appear to give us power. So, what Paul says here, it is very important to pay attention to it carefully. He doesn't say just say no; he says grace teaches us to say no.

SCOTT HOEZEE

God is in the driver's seat. Grace is in the driver's seat. That is the message of the New Testament, recovered particularly by the Reformation 500 years ago: It is all grace—it is all God—it is all what God is up to, and who *God* is. So, if it were up to our willpower to say no to all sin, I don't think it would probably work, but if it is up to God to activate us and put his Holy Spirit into us, now we think maybe I've got a shot...that I can resist temptation in God's power.

DAVE BAST

And it is important, too, I think, to note that grace does teach us to say no. I mean, the first thing...when you think of grace maybe you are tempted to think of grace as this just lavish, unconditional love of God...that is exactly what it is...unconditional, lavish, undeserved, unearned, and wow, that just opens everything up. Grace teaches me to say yes to everything and everyone; and Paul says no, there are limits, too. The first

thing grace teaches us is to turn away from sin...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

To say no to ungodliness—the passions of the world—the desires, all that stuff, so that we can turn and say yes to him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; because grace doesn't just wipe the slate clean and forgive you; it changes you; it transforms you. Paul makes that clear, Jesus makes it clear. All through the New Testament, you are a new person; and one of the things you are motivated to do is to say thank you to God, to turn your entire life into one giant thank-you card...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

To God, because, what did Paul say about this Jesus? So, you are right, Dave. The grace of God appeared: That is shorthand for Jesus; and then, in verse 14: Who gave himself for us to redeem people who are eager to do what is good...he gave himself for us. You know, in all of life, Dave, we understand kind of how gratitude works, right? So, if you go to Starbucks with a friend and you are short on money, and he gives you \$5.00 to buy a cup of coffee, then says: Don't worry about paying me back. Well, yes; you are kind of grateful: Hey, thanks. But if you need a kidney to live, and your friend donates a kidney, well, now words aren't going to be enough...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You will never be done feeling grateful to this person. You will never be done wanting to do nice things for him, or anything he asks, I am there. Well, Jesus gave his entire...he didn't give us a kidney, he gave us his entire self...he gave himself for us, so our lives are now transformed into a giant act of gratitude.

DAVE BAST

Yes, absolutely; and it is more than just words. You know, there is a Christian song that says: How can I say thanks for the things you've done for me; you know, speaking about Jesus. Well, it is a good question, and it is not enough just to sing...it is not enough just to say thanks. One of the insights of our faith is that our whole life can become this giant thank-you note, as you say.

In our tradition, we have this document called the Heidelberg Catechism, which has the Ten Commandments in it, and it has a whole section teaching about the meaning of the Ten Commandments, and it puts it in the last part, which is titled: Gratitude. So, the reason we want to love our neighbor as our self, as well as we love God...the reason we want to not murder, but positively help, and not lie, but tell the truth, is because we are showing our gratitude to God; and so, Paul says here, after he says grace teaches us to say no, it teaches us to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age; and I love that idea that lives that are godly and upright and self-controlled are beautiful lives—they are attractive lives, as we talked in our last program—about being the light of the world and the salt of the earth. We want to draw people to God by our own good works, so that they give thanks to him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And indeed, it is all God who activates it. The appearance of the grace was totally unwarranted. It is interesting in this Titus 2 passage, Dave, how kind of passive we are. Look at all the action is from God's

side. Salvation is offered to us. We are taught to say no. Jesus redeems us from all wickedness. Jesus purifies us from sin and evil. God and Jesus are the subject of all the verbs here, and we are the receiver of what they give us; and that is a good thing, because that is the only thing that will, you know, get us unstuck from bad patterns of living...the very bad patterns of the people on the island of Crete were having; but as we now conclude this program and this series, we will get practical, and sort of say: What does all this say for us in our everyday lives? So, we will do that in just a moment.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where today we are looking at Titus Chapter 2, a famous couple of verses from the middle of that chapter that tell us that grace has appeared in Jesus, and it transforms our lives, it teaches us to say no, and it actually gives us the power to begin to live lives that are a great outpouring of gratitude to God...sort of a giant thank you to God for what he has done for us in Christ.

SCOTT HOEZEE

All of it stemming from the epiphany—the revelation—of God’s grace in Christ; and we just said, too, Dave, that grace not only purifies, not only forgives, grace does not just wipe the slate clean, grace changes you. So, we have been in Titus 2, but now let’s go to another passage that kind of frames up how we will conclude this program and this three-part series...2 Corinthians 5; Paul writes:

¹⁶So, from now on, we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer... (and now, this verse, verse 17) Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, then the new creation has come; the old has gone, the new is here; ^{18a}all of this is from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ...

DAVE BAST

Yes; a new creation...I wonder, do we see ourselves that way? Do we see fellow Christians that way? I mean, do you...I don’t know about you, Scott, but I find myself regarding most people from a worldly point of view, you know? I look out the car window at the person who won’t move when the light turns green, and I don’t look at them as a potential new creation in Christ, I look at them as: Ew, get out of my way!

SCOTT HOEZEE

We don’t even view ourselves this way. You know, you are at the grocery store, you’re paying your taxes, you are grabbing lunch with a friend at Panera, how often do even we tumble to say: Oh, that’s right; I am a new creation; I have union with Christ; I am one flesh with Jesus; wow, I am a whole new...because, you know, I kind of look like everybody around me. Most of the time, I feel like some of the people around me: I get tired at work, I have a bad day or whatever; you stub your toe. It is not easy to remember that you are a new creation, and yet, so much of the New Testament...particularly in Paul, but really, all of the New Testament...is sort of one long reminder: Remember who you are...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Because it will change how you act.

DAVE BAST

You know, there is a famous verse in Galatians, where Paul says: ^{2:20a}I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me... He is getting at that same idea that I have union with Christ. That is a gift of God’s grace to me through faith, and I am a new creation. I am not the old me. The old me has died, or it ought to die, and I need to see myself in this new way. It is a gift of what we might call a sanctified or a holy imagination.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; I spoke at a conference in Canada recently, where the title of the conference...it was a preaching conference...was called the *Faithful Imagination*; and it was a call for preachers to help people with their imaginations. Now, often when we use that word we think imagination means conjuring up the imaginary, right? So, I am sitting at home watching baseball, or the World Series, and I could imagine myself as hitting a home run and being a professional athlete, but I'm not; or you know, you are having a bad day at work, and you could just imagine how nice it would be to be on a tropical beach somewhere; so, sometimes imagination means the imaginary: We think about what is not real...

DAVE BAST

Yes, exactly.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But the Christian imagination that you were talking about, Dave, is how we imagine the world to be what it already is. I imagine myself to be what I already am—a new creation. It is a way to, sometimes we say, construe the world—how do you look at it? So, we don't imagine what is not real, we imagine what is already real, but that we cannot see with our eyes.

DAVE BAST

Yes, exactly; which is something, incidentally, the book of Revelation does. It helps us to see the unseen reality of God in control...God on the throne...and Christ reigning and coming. Remember, we are talking about how grace transforms us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; the epiphany, yes.

DAVE BAST

How it teaches us to say no; how it teaches us to live a different kind of life that gives glory to God and gives light to people around us. Try to see that reality that is, that we know by faith, but we cannot see with our physical sight.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Dave, you and I are preachers by trade; and so here is something important for us preachers to remember: You know, too often we think we can order people into behaving, or we can scare them into behaving, we can wag a bony finger in their face and kind of order them to fly right; or...kind of in the Reformed tradition...sometimes we induce guilt in people to motivate them. None of that motivates obedient living. The theologian Paul Ricoeur said something interesting once: Obedience follows imagination; and what he meant by that is when you can do what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5...when you can imagine that: I am a new creation...now you are motivated to obey God's law and follow Jesus' ways, because you see who you are. So, be who you are: That is one of Paul's number one messages. You are baptized, you have union with Christ, act like it.

DAVE BAST

Yes; be what you are. That is a characteristic New Testament note, and it involves not being what you used to be—that is part of it, too. Recognize what part of you has died, the old part of you that was, you know, worshipping yourself, and all caught up in yourself; and instead, think of yourself as being in Christ, and live from that reality in every relationship; and try to see people with the eyes of Jesus.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You know, the Titus 2 passage we have been looking at, Dave, does remind us that we live between two epiphanies—the epiphany of God's grace as it appeared in Christ, but we are still waiting for him to epiphany

again...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And in this in-between time, we lose sight of it sometimes; we are going to struggle a little bit; we try to live in the light, but it gets a little dark; but the epiphany of God's grace in the first place tells us God will forgive...God will continue to work on you; he will continue to renew you; he will continue to let you walk in the light of his epiphany as he brings *you*...yourself already a part of the New Testament....to that new creation he has prepared for us.

DAVE BAST

Thanks be to God; and thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Dave Bast with Scott Hoezee, and we hope you will join us again next time as we continue to dig deeply into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives.

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