

Sanctification: The Forgotten Part of the Gospel

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Sanctification

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Bible Text: Titus 2:11-14

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I want you to notice in your text this morning and you'll need this before you throughout, that the first verse of the section here, verse 11, begins with the word "For," and the reason why the verse begins with the word "For" is because it's connected with what Paul has been saying previously and what Paul has been saying previously, he's been talking with Titus or he's been giving instruction to Titus as a young pastor and he's been urging him to teach the Cretan Christians, that is those who are living on the Island of Crete, to live lives that are consistent with the Gospel. I want you to notice back in verse 1 of chapter 2 here that Paul says to Titus, "teach what accords with," or what goes along with, what is consistent with, "sound doctrine." Then he goes into specific behavioral traits in this section between verse 1 and our section and he shows how the lives of various individual Christians, certain kinds of characteristics that should be found in our lives. If we are old men, certain traits should be found in our lives. If we are older women, we should look a certain way in our character. Younger women, younger men and then even slaves towards their masters. He says all of this, again, so that, as he says here at the end of verse 10, "in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior." Then comes this word "For," or it's the word "because." "Titus," in essence Paul is saying, "Titus, you urge this kind of behavior and Christian people you should be living this way because the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people."

Now, in a word, what Paul is communicating here in this section is really the grand scope of the Gospel, the largeness and the grand scope of salvation. In other words, what Paul is trying to get across here is that salvation is a matter that concerns much more than merely people not going to hell after they die. In this passage, Paul is urging us to live in a certain way because the Gospel is what it is and he speaks of at least three ways in which the Gospel is much bigger than we sometimes acknowledge and realize that it is and the first issue of grandeur, really, that Paul is wanting to bring forth is the universal scope of the Gospel. The universal scope of salvation.

I just noted a second ago and you see here that Paul has given instructions for men and women, for old and young and for slaves and free people and I want you to look back at verse 12 of chapter 1 for a minute. Earlier there, Paul had made some harsh comments about the Cretans. Imagine me getting a letter from somebody and he's urging me in my pastoral work here in Colorado Springs and he says that people in Colorado Springs are

always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons. That's Paul's description of the Cretans, the people that make up the church that Titus is pastoring here and notice that Paul says that one of their own prophets has said this about them and he adds in verse 13, the first part of it, A. there, "This testimony is true." It's not just that one of their own has said this, Paul's saying, "And it is true." But even though this is Paul's point in our section, even though this is the case, even though we might find ourselves lazy, dishonest, evil, we are still to live lives, if we are Christians, we are still to live lives that adorn the doctrine of God because the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people.

You see, in that all-encompassing "all people," Paul leaves nobody out of the equation. Nobody is left outside of that equation. It doesn't matter who you are. It doesn't matter your station in life. It doesn't matter how bad you are. God's grace has come in the person of Jesus Christ and therefore salvation is a reality for every single type of person out there and so whether you live on the island of Crete and you come from a people who are notoriously dishonest and evil and lazy, or whether you are a man or a woman, whether you are a young person or an old person, whether you are a slave or whether you are free, grace has appeared for people just like you so nobody is left out of this, the grand scope, the universal scope of salvation.

As will become more clear as we proceed on here this morning through this passage, we need to hear the emphasis on grace and salvation. Paul does not assume that people can live in accord with sound doctrine by just doing it. Paul's point is not, is not, "Okay, now that you are a Christian it is time for you to change your behavior." Paul is telling Titus that he can urge Christians of all types and of all backgrounds to now live godly lives because of the grace of God, because the grace of God has brought salvation to them. In other words, what Paul is saying is that what was impossible before, what we could not do, what we have the inability in ourselves to do as far as living certain ways and having certain characteristics about our lives, what is impossible for us is now possible because of God's grace and because he has brought it in the salvation that is in Jesus Christ and therefore what we are getting at here and what you need to come to grasp this morning is that salvation is about much more than what happens after you die. It's about much more than some kind of insurance policy that has secured where you're going to be after you die. The scope of salvation, as Paul is making comment here, the scope of salvation includes every kind of person and it involves their lives not just after they die but in the here and now.

That then brings us to consider, really, the second thing I want us to see this morning from this passage and that is the past, present and future aspects of the Gospel. The past, present and future aspects of the Gospel. Notice that Paul says here that "the grace of God has appeared" in the past. It has appeared in the past and then he says that it is "training us to live godly lives" in the present age and that we are to do so as we are "waiting for our future blessed hope." Again, that is to say that salvation comprehends far more than merely what happens after you die. Salvation is about a lot more than simply not going to hell when you die.

I think one of the main reasons why the Christian church in America and I've been reading recently statistics and I pretty much distrust statistics so I don't necessarily quote them all the time, but even if they're partly right, they are revealing. You read the statistics about morality among Americans, both those who profess to be evangelical "born again believers" and the rest of the world, and I think one of the main reasons why the church is largely indistinguishable from the world today in its behavior and morality is because we have largely truncated the message of the Gospel. We don't even preach the fullness of what salvation includes for sinners. We simply preach and the Gospel tends to go out on one level and we say, "Come to Jesus and you do not have to go to hell when you die," and that's the preaching of the Gospel largely found in American Christianity but in communicating here this grand scope of the Gospel and why Christians should live sober and righteous and godly lives today, Paul is trying to say that you need to realize that salvation has a past, a present and a future aspect to it and, Christian, you need to be thinking about that. The full ramifications of your salvation in Christ.

Let's consider first the past. I want you to see here that Paul says God's grace has appeared bringing salvation for all people and this is clearly referring to the coming of Christ as the epitome of God's grace and its manifestation in this world. And if you doubt that or you don't know how we say that, Paul makes it absolutely clear that that's what he's speaking about and he's speaking about the coming of Christ when he elaborates on the work in verse 14 and notice that there. He says that he "gave himself for us," this is Jesus, "to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession." You see, Paul is saying that something objective and historical has happened. When Jesus Christ lived and died and rose again from the dead, that event, the event of the appearing of Jesus Christ and all that happened when he first came, that was the great and definitive manifestation of the grace of God in this world.

Look forward to chapter 3, the section I read this morning in our call to worship. Look at verses 4 and 5 because, in a word, what Paul is saying here, what he means when he says in verse 14 of our passage, "he gave himself to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession," he's saying here, "When the goodness and lovingkindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us," past tense. He saved us. That is it. We were saved by that past work of Jesus Christ. By way of the life and death and the resurrection of Christ, we have been saved and we need to realize that everything then in the present and everything in the future is based upon the final finished work of Christ in the past. Maybe another way of saying this is: you can't get any more saved than you already are because your salvation, your saved status is based upon the finished work that has already been accepted and received by God.

But that past work of salvation is not the end of the story for the Christian life. Yes, it has secured you positionally in a state of salvation which can never be lost but it also now has a vital and a major impact on your life in the present and that's what we turn to next here. Paul says here that the grace that was manifested in the past, he says that it is still active and effectual in the present. I don't know what your translation says but here in the ESV it uses this word "training," and the word "training" here is in the present tense and in the active voice and, frankly, you don't need to know a lot about Greek grammar to hear if it's

in the present tense and in the active voice. It must mean that it's presently active. It's not that it merely has done something in the past. It's not that God's grace has merely done something back then but that it is presently at work now in this present age and so we might ask: what is its present activity now? What is God graciously doing right now? Well, what Paul focuses on is a twofold activity and he says here first that God's grace or the Gospel, it presently trains us and I'll use Paul's terms from another passage, it trains us to put off certain actions and characteristics and, secondly, God's grace trains us to put on certain characteristics. Thus we see that there is both a positive and a negative work that is presently going on with us.

Let's look at these just briefly for a minute. First, Paul says here we are being "trained to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions." In a word, what that means is that we are learning from the Gospel. We are learning from Jesus Christ to put away behavior that is inconsistent with the character of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. We're learning from him to be like him and the first part of that is that negative putting away characteristics and activity that is inconsistent with who he is.

We're going to consider in a moment here what Paul says in verse 14 and that is that we have been redeemed by him. To be redeemed means that you have been bought back or that you have been purchased and that means that we are no longer our own. We have been bought, we have been purchased with a price and therefore what's going on in the Gospel and what's going on in our present Christian lives is that we are being trained to now be who we are. We are now his people and we are now being trained to live lives that show forth that fact and we need to recognize that since we're not starting neutral, in other words, everybody is conceived and born in sin and born with that corruption, we have to recognize that it is not starting in a neutral position that we're being taught by this grace to first renounce our former way of life. It's not that we just start living good, living godly lives, we have to put off a former behavior, a former way of life. And that former way of life cannot only be described as just simply ungodly, in other words, inconsistent with the character of God, but since ungodliness is in accord with the way that this fallen world lives, in other words, this world is at enmity with God, this world lives inconsistent with its Creator and since that's the case, this former way of life can also be described as worldliness. We're being called here to put off the way that the world lives, the passions and pursuits of this world. You see, what we need to recognize here, again, is that at one time before salvation had come to us, we were slaves to sin and we were in bondage of the ways of the world. That's the natural way that we live. You don't even have a choice in it at all. You simply come out of slave to sin and you're in bondage to the ways of the world but what Paul is saying here is that God's grace has delivered us from our former captivity and that it has set us free now to live not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. That's one of the things that God's grace has accomplished and is presently accomplishing among us.

So not only is there training to put off old ways of life but Paul is addressing here there is training to put on new ways of life. We are no longer to live according to the world's ways and against God's character but there's a positive here. You're not done simply by not being like the world. He says in the present age you are to live like those who are

actually heading towards an eternal rest in the very presence of God and that means then that your lives in the here-and-now should be characterized by or should look like those who are actually going to heaven. Some of those characteristics would be described as self-control, righteous, godly.

Well, this then really brings us to the final time aspect of the Gospel and that is the future. You see, in a word and we went over this last Lord's day evening in our study of the Westminster Confession so for those of you who weren't here, this word might sound big and scary but it's a pretty simple word once you know what it means but Paul is calling us to live what we might call eschatologically. Eschatology is the study of end-times issues; things that pertain to the future; things that will happen in the final state and Paul is calling us to live eschatologically. What I mean by this is that life in the present, how we live today right now in 2009 is to be lived in conscious awareness and in the hope of what is coming in the future. You cannot live like we have no idea what's going to happen in the future. I don't know what's going to happen tomorrow. I don't know what's going to happen, let's say, with my children's careers or anything like that. I haven't been given that kind of insight into the future but I have been given insight into the ultimate aim and the ultimate consummation of what will happen with my salvation and what God's plan is for his people.

So not only did God's grace appear in the past, you need to see here that Paul says that there is another appearing that's going to happen in the future. Look at what he says there in verse 13, "live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." In other words, there was an appearing in the past and there is going to be another appearing in the future and what we need to recognize here is that in Paul's mind and in Paul's understanding of the Gospel, the future and the past are inseparably tied together. The very one who will appear in the future is the same one who appeared in the past. Our future hope is upon the one who already appeared and who has already given himself for us and therefore our lives are to be consciously characterized by a terminology and a structure I brought up last Lord's day when we were thinking about prayer: they are to be characterized by a conscious realization that we live between the now and the not yet. That there is something that Jesus has done for us already but there is still a present work going on that is not yet complete.

So we live consciously recognizing that we have already been redeemed but then in the present we are being transformed and then in the future, that work of transformation will come to completion when he returns. Those are the past and the present and the future aspects of the Gospel but before we leave this point and just the survey of these time aspects of the Gospel, you need to see that they are all part of a single cloth. That is to say, those who have been saved by that past work of Jesus Christ, those who have been saved by that past work of Jesus Christ, his life, his death, his resurrection, are being presently trained in righteousness. If you have been saved by that past work, then you are presently being trained in righteousness and you need to see that the present work of training in righteousness does not happen without the past salvation and the past salvation is not claimable without the present work. Furthermore, only those who are presently

being trained, those who the Spirit is enabling them to put off and put on, only those will participate in that final completion of the work of grace. The final completion of that work of grace is not based upon the present work of putting on and putting off, it's part of the package that those three parts are part of and this is, really, entirely a package deal. Salvation is entirely a package deal. If you have one of them, you have them all but you need to see that this is also a very revealing connection. If you do not have one of them, then you do not have any of them and that means that no one can legitimately claim to be saved in the past and on their way to heaven if the present active work of grace is not going on in their life today.

This then brings us finally to the double purpose of the Gospel. The grandeur of the Gospel is lost among us because we have not given consideration to its double purpose. As I mentioned when we were beginning this morning, so much of today's preaching is focused inordinately upon the fact that salvation delivers us from the penalty of sin but hardly any preaching announces that salvation delivers us also from the power of it as well and when we do not preach both parts of the Gospel, when we don't preach this double purpose or double benefit of the Gospel, we end up truncating the Gospel message and, frankly, we hamstring the Christian life. But there is a double purpose to salvation and Paul makes that clear here in verse 14. Notice, speaking of Jesus, Paul says here in verse 14, "he 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." Now, we never want to diminish either aspect of the Gospel benefit and neither does Paul and so he begins first with redemption here. Jesus gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness. What is lawlessness? Well, sin is lawlessness. And what is the wages of sin? Well, the wages of sin is death and therefore what Paul is saying in this very succinct statement is that Jesus purchased us back from having been on death row. Jesus has redeemed us. He has bought us back from being on death row at the cost of his own life. You see, he died the death that we deserve because of our sin and because of his death we are no longer subject to that penalty. We're totally free because we have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus and yes, that means that you do not have to go to hell when you die and that means that we have right now in our possession the gift of eternal life. It means that we will be in heaven with Jesus after we die and we'll spend eternity with the rest of the saints in glory.

All of that glorious truth is there but Paul shows here that all of that positional truth is inseparably tied to the progressive work that God is presently doing through the Gospel in our lives today and that present ongoing work of the Gospel is the work of purification. This is not a New Testament concept. There was in the Old Testament in the temple and in the tabernacle before it, there was both an altar and a laver: there was blood for atonement and there was water for cleansing. In the New Testament when Christ died, both blood and water flowed from his side and the Gospel includes the work of redemption by the blood of Christ and it includes the purification by washing with the water of the word and, frankly, that is the forgotten part of the Gospel, the washing part, the purification, the sanctification.

Now, when I contend that this is the forgotten part of the Gospel, I am meaning two things by this. First of all, I mean that we do not think much about purification, sanctification and holiness. We think far too little about that in our lives so that's the first thing I mean when I say it's the forgotten part of the Gospel. But secondly, what I am meaning by this is that even when we do think about sanctification and purification and holiness, we do not understand them to be a Gospel work that God does. We don't understand that to be part of the Gospel and accomplished by the grace of God alone. You see, we seem to be clear on the fact that Jesus redeems us. Oh yes, Jesus redeems us and he does that on his own. That is an act of his free grace and none of us, I think, would contest the fact that Jesus redeems us but I think we are less clear on the fact that he is also the one who is in the process of purifying us. Another way of saying this is that we sometimes think that the Gospel is about justification but sanctification comes by way of my works. Justification is Christ's work, sanctification is my work.

Now, we're going to be looking at this matter in subsequent messages but for now we need to see that what Paul is saying here and you need to hold on tight to it. If you don't have a full understanding at this moment, that's okay but you need to see that Paul says that Jesus gave himself for us not only to redeem us but to purify us for himself. We are no more sanctified by our own works and we no more sanctify ourselves than we justify ourselves. The work of holiness is a work of God's grace and until we learn the Gospel way of sanctification, you will never progress in it. God will never bless means he did not ordain and God never adds his blessing to mere sincerity. His blessing is upon his Savior and his salvation and you need to recognize that your justification as well as your sanctification is in Jesus Christ alone.

Now, we haven't yet and we will not this morning discuss how this all works out, the how of sanctification, "How does it come about in our lives then if it's not us doing it?" but what I'm pleading for this morning is that it become a firm and a clear conviction in your mind, in your heart, that growth in grace, that progress in sanctification, that this general purification from the stain and the pollution of sin in our lives, that is something that Jesus Christ brings about, not you. So if you have been trying to rid yourself from sin and from its stain and if you have struggled with a besetting sin, I can tell you this morning there is a Savior for that. Not merely from its penalty but also from sin's power and I want you to hear this morning as we conclude, that not only is this clearly stated in our confessional standards but it's the clear and consistent teaching of the word of God.

Our Shorter Catechism question 35 says: what is sanctification? Sanctification is the work of God's free grace. Now, what makes that so impressive is question 34 which came right before it that asked: what is justification, I'm sorry it was adoption. Right before it, 33 and 34: what is justification? Justification is an act of God's free grace. The only difference is that we understand sanctification to be an ongoing work of God's free grace. What does free grace mean? It means you don't contribute to it. It is entirely a gift that is given to you in Jesus Christ. 1 Thessalonians 5:23, "Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely." Who is sanctifying you completely? The God of peace himself. Hebrews 13:21, the God of peace "equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ." Ephesians 5,

listen to how Paul describes the Gospel work of Jesus Christ, "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish."

Brothers and sisters, you need to see that the Gospel is much better than it is sometimes preached. There are glories there that we rarely look at and there are things that Christ has accomplished for us that we continue to carry the burden for and think that we have to do. Again, too often when we think of salvation and the work of Jesus Christ, it is always consumed with not going to hell after we die but this passage along with the rest of the New Testament, it's clear that it involves and it includes more than only freedom from sin, the penalty of it, I should say, it includes freedom from the power of it as well and its stain. And in the Gospel there is an announcement that God is not just going to say, "Oh, you're forgiven," but he's going to wash you and he's going to take away that guilt and that stain of sin, that burden that you've been bearing in your life as well. He will wash you anew. You see, ultimately God is saving sinners so that he can make a people for his own possession. As it says here in the final words of verse 14, his desire for you in this present age, salvation is designed to accomplish something in this present age and that is that he would have a people now that are zealous for good works because of his work in us.

Let's pray together.