

Growing In Sanctification

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Bible Text: Titus 3:1-3

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We're looking today at Titus Chapter 3. Titus 3 and we will be looking at verses 1 through 3, not just 1 and 2 but 1 through 3. I'll read and preach from the Modern English Version. Hear God's word again as it is read to you. "Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey them, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, not to be contentious, but gentle, showing all humility toward everyone. We also were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various desires and pleasures, living in evil and envy, filled with hatred and hating each other." The grass withers and the flower fades but the Word of our God stands forever.

And as we consider these three verses before us today, as we now press on to the finish line of a letter-- Paul's letter to Titus, brothers and sisters, let us be reminded to grow in our sanctification in relation to God's word and one another, remembering from whence we have come. Let us be reminded to grow in our sanctification in relation to God's word and one another, remembering from whence we have come. These three verses began with two very important words: "remind them." "Remind them." Those, brothers and sisters, should be to us two of the most beautiful words in our Christian experience. It points us to our first point today: the progressive sanctification. Progressive sanctification that each of us as God's children are experiencing. "Remind them"

See, just the verse before it began "Teach these things." That seems to insinuate this is something new, something different. How can I learn this? How can I understand this? How can I begin to grasp this? We see this in our education, a 100-level course versus a 300- or 400-level course. That 100-level course can be all the more intimidating because this is new, there's a totally new concept. You step back and look 300, 400 it's exponentially more difficult and complex but you've already been swimming in that pool, so swimming into the deep end and experiencing the deeper things of that subject is-- is nothing new. It's just more. Paul here is reminding us that we are to be reminded of what we have already heard. This is nothing new, we've heard this before. We're being told that-- that along the way God brings these things to minds. We're reminded again and again. I know that there are things in my life that I need reminded of. Emily could provide that list for you. And in my more fleshly moments I don't like to be reminded.

"I know, I know!" Have you ever done that? Your spouse begins to remind you or your parents remind you of something. "I know, I know!" And then you leave the house and what is undone? But that very thing that you knew. And then it creates that ever awkward conversation: "You know this morning when I brought this up?" But brothers and sisters we're not to walk in the flesh we're to walk in the Spirit. We're to delight in being reminded. "Why do I need to hear this one more time?" Because I know I need to hear it one more time. Remind us of these things.

We see this from the beginning. Deuteronomy 30 verses 1 and 2: "When all these things happen to you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you remember them among all the nations, where the Lord your God has driven you, then you must return to the Lord your God and obey His voice according to all that I am commanding you today, you and your children, with all your heart, and with all your soul." Brothers and sisters, what is the Christian life but being reminded? Having brought to remembrance the things that we have been taught and told. Like that old byline for that cereal: "Taste it again for the first time." We can forget. We can forget the goodness of the Lord's commands. We can forget the goodness of being confronted in our sin. We can forget the goodness that it is to have heard these things before and to be reminded of them. This word as it is used in Titus is used in the gospels in Luke 22. Remember Peter is ready to die for the Lord. "Show me the fight and I'll be there!" Right? Then Jesus says "Peter, listen, I know you don't believe Me right now but before Jerusalem wakes up in the morning you will have denied Me three times." Oh! Peter's offended. But what happens in the passion of the moment and the difficulty of the moment? Upon the third time of denying our Lord, even swearing to do so. Luke 22 tells us the Lord turned and looked at Peter. See the-- the rooster crowing was enough, but Jesus and Peter were in close enough proximity that Jesus turned and looked eyes with him. "Then Peter remembered".

See what happens? We get caught up in the moment, we get caught up in the pace, we get caught up in the schedule, we get caught up in so many things in this life and we forget what we have been told. And then these moments of confrontation come, whether it's Deuteronomy, whether it's Luke 22, even in Titus 3 there is this sense of our remembrance of our reminding creating this moment where we are confronted again. We come face to face again with the truth that we have been told. But in our sanctification-- And what is sanctification? The shorter catechism tells us: "Sanctification is the work of God's free grace whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God and are enabled more and more to die unto sin and live unto Christ." There is a progression, a more and more, and each time we are reminded our love should grow, our hatred of sin should grow, our love for Christ and all of his ways should grow. Brothers and sisters, we are being sanctified. We are being reminded again and again and again of all that Christ has taught us and ultimately of all that Christ has done for us, so that we might be saved. Which sanctification is part of that overall work. So we see here, progressive sanctification.

Secondly, we see proper submission. What is Titus to remind all of the members of First RP Crete? He's to remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey them. This is not the only time that Paul has had to remind Christians to do this. One commentator said: "Paul seems to always have to be reminding all of the churches to submit to earthly rulers." There must be something-- that's not what the commentator said that is my own thought here-- there must be something in our DNA that likes to rebel. That likes to come up with the reason why we don't need to be in subjection to earthly authority or to any authority. I-- I have spoken openly over the years against what I call autonomy by Presbyterianism. And that is men who I-- I've heard them say this I'm not making anything up: "I am Presbyterian, I'm Presbyterian! And I would be more than happy to submit to my brothers, if you were deserving of my submission to." I always take one step back in case the lightning hits. See what we have to-- what we come face to face with here is Paul is not saying this in a covenanted society. This is not an establishmentarian situation where the governor is a Christian and is taking seriously his role and upholding the law of God and acknowledging the church and giving her care and comfort. This is an outright pagan society with pagan rulers. Paul's reminding them: by subject to rulers and authorities, to obey them, to do what they say. Now obviously our ultimate allegiance is to Christ, He is our true King and so where the state requires us to sin we say "No, thank you, we will take whatever is behind door number two. Whatever you have for us, we will take that because we're not gonna sin against our

God." And yet it falls upon the Christian to be in proper submission to all earthly rulers and authorities. Proper submission.

Thirdly, we see prepared service. [Titus 3:1] "To be ready for every good work." And let me say, brothers and sisters, be ready. Be ready for good works. [Ephesians 2:8-10] "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, so that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, so that we should walk in them." You don't walk into your garage to grab your fishing pole and-- and hear your fishing pole weeping in the corner not knowing what its purpose is in life. You don't get in your car and start it up and put it in drive and have it sit there and say "I-- I just don't understand. I'm not feeling like myself today. I just don't know why I was created." No, you say to your fishing pole "Behold, your name is fishing pole. We will go fishing today." You say to your automobile "Behold, your name is automobile. We will automatically mobile down the road." This is why you were created. This is the very reason you were made. Brothers and sisters, why were you created and why were you recreated through the gospel? You were made for good works. You were made to obey your heavenly Father, to do all that He has commanded you explicitly and all the things that He has called you to implicitly in your life. And we obey with joy and we obey with sacrifice and we obey with love for God and all of those authorities above us. And we obey with love for neighbor, all of our equals and all of those whom we serve as an authority over. We are prepared for service.

In fact, this gets benedictional in Hebrews 13 where we read: [20-21] "Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the Great Shepherd of the sheep, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever." And all the Reformed Presbyterians said: "Amen." I don't know-- Thank you, good job. You are a Reformed Presbyterian. I don't know what some of these other folks are. Brothers and sisters, we are be-- we are to be prepared to serve. Ready to take up the tasks of good works that Christ has for us.

Fourthly, we see peaceful speech. [Titus 3:1-2] "Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey them, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, not to be contentious, but gentle, showing all humility toward everyone." We see the peaceful speech in which we are to participate. To "speak evil of," the word here is "blaspheme." "Blaspheme no one." That is a word that is taken on particularly God-word imagery and direction for us. Think of blasphemy, we think we don't blaspheme God! That's the natural thought, but here Paul is telling Titus to remind the Christians not to blaspheme one another. Not to speak evil of one another. Then the outflowing of that: not to be contentious. [Titus 3:2] "But gentle, showing all humility toward everyone." Our minds trip back to Psalm 34 [verses 11-14] "Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. Who is the man who desires life, and loves a long life in order to see good? Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. Turn away from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it." And that's what's quoted by the apostle Peter in 1 Peter 3: [verses 10-17] "For 'He who would love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit. Let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.' Who is he who will harm you if you follow that which is good? But even if you suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. 'Do not be afraid of their terror, do not be troubled.' But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts. Always be ready--" See there's that readiness again-- "Always be ready to give an answer to every man who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you, with gentleness and fear. Have a good conscience so that evildoers who speak evil of you and falsely accuse your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. For it is better, if it is the will of God, that you suffer for doing good than for doing evil."

Brothers and sisters, we are to keep our tongue from evil and our lips from deceit. Titus 3:2 has a sister verse in 2 Timothy, if you have the railroad tracks down the middle of your Bible you might see it cross referenced there. And that's 2 Timothy 3:3. And verses 1 through 5 of 2 Timothy 3 say: "Know this: In the last days perilous times will come. Men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, slanderers, unrestrained, fierce, despisers of those who are good, traitors, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God, having a form of godliness, but denying its power. Turn away from such people." This is the interesting thing about this text, as you-- as you read through verses 1 through 4 you begin to think: "Well, yes, that is exactly how the world is. That is exactly how those out there are." And yet verse 5 turns the mirror around on us, brothers and sisters, "Having the-- having a form of Godliness but denying its power." Brothers and sisters, 1 through 4 are not speaking of those outside in the world and the world's system and the world's ways doing all these things. It is speaking of people who are seeking to have a form of Godliness. Who are seeking to do the Lord's work in the world's way. They have a form of Godliness but they deny its power. And so they're forced to turn to worldly ways of power to exert authority and influence. "Turn away from such people" is Paul's admonition in 2 Timothy 3.

Now here's-- I'm putting some dots out here and let me draw the line here to connect the dots-- 2 Timothy 3 is tucked away as one of the proof texts in the series of questions and answers in the Larger Catechism on the Fifth Commandment. [Question 123] "What is the fifth commandment? The fifth commandment is 'Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.'" And-- and as a larger catechism expounds on that, it begins to ask a series of questions that unlocks the truths and the application of the fifth commandment for us. [Question 124] "Who are meant by father and mother in the fifth commandment? By father and mother, in the fifth commandment, are meant, not only natural parents, but all superiors in age and gifts; and especially such as, by God's ordinance, are over us in place of authority, whether in family, church, or commonwealth." [Question 125] "Why are superiors styled father and mother? [Superiors are styled father and mother,] both to teach them in all duties toward their inferiors, like natural parents, to express love and tenderness to them, according to their several relations; and to work inferiors to a greater willingness and cheerfulness in performing their duties to their superiors, as to their parents." So [Question 126] "What is the general scope of the fifth commandment? [The general scope of the fifth commandment is,] the performance of those duties which we mutually owe in our several relations, as inferiors, superiors, or equals."

And so it begins to break down the honor that inferiors owe to superiors; the sins of inferiors against their superiors; what is required of superiors toward inferiors; whether the sins of superiors; what are the duties of equals; what are the sins of equals; and then the reason it's annexed to the commandment. I would encourage you to go home and dust off your Larger Catechism and review those questions and answers because all of that is it-- is exactly what Paul is talking to Titus about throughout this letter but particularly in these last few sections that we have looked at. What this section really points to then is the reality of our sanctification in relation to the word of God and consequently to one another. And this points as a part for the whole because, yes, here Paul is focusing in on the Fifth Commandment in all of its truth and application for First RP of Crete, but he's doing that because this is an area in which they were struggling in sin. And so Paul is reminding them, reminding Titus to remind them, of the word of God that directly confronts the sin that they were walking in. This points to a broader reality: that our sanctification is tied directly to God's word. Sanctification isn't just some growth and some type of holiness somewhere somehow. It is tied directly to the word of God. And the word of God comes in and it purges us of our sin and then it winds up that would like a healing salve for us. Paul wasn't

reminding Titus to remind the Cretans of these things just because he thought it would be neat or because this was Paul's genius at work, this is the word of God being applied to the Cretan church in a very specific way. And in it they are to have peaceful speech. They're not to be-- to speak evil of anyone. They're not to be contentious, but they are to be gentle in showing all humility.

And why is that? That's because, fifthly, of the perspective similarity that we are to all have. See the third verse of Titus 3 is a transitional verse as you read through it. It can break away from the first two verses and it can break away for the verses that follow it. It's a-- it's a transitional, it-- it adds perspective to the first two verses and it adds a basis for the verses that follow and we'll see more of that next week as we flow down into the rest of this section. But what does he say here? Well, we're [Titus 3:2] "to speak evil of no one, not to be contentious, but gentle showing all humility toward everyone." And we can insert there a kind of a "Why? Why should we be like this?" And [Titus 3] verse 3 answers that: "We also were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various desires and pleasures, living in evil and envy, filled with hatred and hating each other." Brothers and sisters, as we grow in our sanctification in relation to God's word and one another we must remember from whence we have come. We must remember where we would be if it were not for the grace of God. Now I think Paul, under inspiration the Holy Spirit, touches on this not because it was necessarily a Cretan problem or a problem for Titus or just a problem for Paul, I think this is a universal issue throughout all manifestations of Christ's church. That we begin to live and walk in the grace of Christ as if we somehow deserve it. And, brothers and sisters, we are to look back on our sinful selves not to glory in that, in and of itself. Not to be prideful of all that we did, but to be humbled by it. To keep in perspective the greatness of our rebellion against our heavenly Father. That had we done but one of those works, we would have been infinitely deserving of eternal punishment in Hell. And, brothers and sisters, we are to look back on that sinful mess that we were, to be reminded that it is all and only of God's grace that we have been saved. That we have been granted faith. As our opening Psalm said, that we have been made to approach it. What a beautiful-- I love that Psalm! What a wonderful perspective for us. And that He could-- that He by His Holy Spirit could crawl into us and give us new hearts that we-- that we desire that. We want to be made to approach Him and we begin to understand all of the sinfulness that impedes our approachment of him.

We read this very similarly, we see this theme throughout Paul's writings, but we see this very similarly in Ephesians 2, the opening verses. We have focused on the last three throughout the last couple weeks. [Ephesians 2:1-7] "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the age of this world and according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among them we all also once lived in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and we were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and He raised us up and seated us together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." And then you know the rest: [Ephesians 2:8a] "For by grace you have been saved through faith." Brothers and sisters, when we are reminded to grow in our sanctification, we're reminded that it is a progressive sanctification. There's a point 'A' where we start and there's a point 'B' where we're going and we're somewhere in between. But we're reminded that we never could have even gotten on the path if it weren't for the grace of God. If it weren't for Him choosing us and saving us by grace. We were dead. "We were foolish", as he says in Titus [3:3], we were "disobedient, deceived, serving various desires and pleasures, living in evil and envy, filled with hatred and hating each other." What a glorious sign of God's sanctifying work when people move from hatred and hating each other to no longer blaspheming each other. "Not being contentious, but gentle, showing all humility toward everyone." And that, brothers and sisters, is but

one example of the myriad examples where we can say "I was this, but now I'm this. I was like that, but now I am like Christ." The glorious beauties of the grace of God. Brothers and sisters, let us be reminded to grow in our sanctification in relation to God's word and one another, remembering from whence we have come.

Stand with me as we pray.