

THANK GOD HE SAVED US FROM SIN

John 1:10-13, Colossians 3:15-17, **Titus 3:3, our text today**, and I Timothy 4: 1-5
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Communion and communication with God, begins best with our thankfulness. Even communion and communication with each other as husband and wife begins best and continues best when we speak to each other with thankfulness to God and to each other for each other. Paul wrote in Colossians 3: 16 which Pastor Larry read this morning, “Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” Sometimes as we walk with Jesus, we forget that part of the preservation of His eternal Word is by the example and conviction of Christians who obey Him whose lives bear out the truth of His Word. People see through our life and example of thanksgiving to God that He has eternally preserved His written Word as they see thanksgiving lived out in our daily lives. When we don’t cherish God’s Word and hide it in our hearts with thankfulness, there is a visible disconnect between our testimony by word of mouth, and our sad testimony, refusing to thankfully live. There is no way around the fact that thankfulness to God and to each other is what reveals to the lost world around us that Jesus truly does save. It is easy to become grumpy, hard to live with, ready to accuse, and unwilling to be thankful. Yet, despite the way we live our lives, we cannot, and we will never keep God from showering us with reasons to thank Him. All our efforts to muffle the goodness of God are as futile as trying to keep the sun from rising. God will preserve His Word. His testimony of everlasting lovingkindness is true, even if we oppose His will, His way, and deny His Word.

In 1829, Alexander Duff, a Scottish missionary packed 800 choice volumes of Christian commentaries and books on the ship, “Lady Holland” and the ship set sail for India. Alexander Duff, thankful for his own salvation, was answering God’s call to missions, and in thanksgiving to God, going to India with the Gospel of Christ. The ship encountered bad weather, wrecked, and all of Alexander’s priceless books were lost at sea, as well as everything else of value on the ship. The disheartened survivors stood safely on the shores of India, looking back at the sea they had somehow thankfully been saved from. They were hoping to find some part of their belongings that might be salvaged. Nothing seemed to show up. Then, out at sea, one small object could be seen, and with every wave, it was washing ever closer to the shore. Soon, it came bobbing up on the waves, and it sloshed up onto the shore. Amazingly, it was Alexander Duff’s precious Bible. He made it to India with the only book necessary to lead the lost to Christ, the Word of God.

That incident was no accident, but a God incident that spurred Alexander Duff to plunge into learning the native language and to start leading many to Jesus. The retrieval of his Bible is a wonderful symbol of the way God’s Word has survived all the storms of hate and antagonism raised against it throughout the ages ever since the fall of man in the Garden of Eden. God’s Word is His supernatural Word. It is God’s message to man. As Lewis Sperry Chafer used to say, “The Bible is not

a book a man could write if he could, because it condemns him, or would write if he would, because it surpasses him.” Today, on Thanksgiving Sunday, God has placed on my heart a text from Titus 3: 3, that is probably not being preached in many churches for Thanksgiving Sunday. The context of this one verse is telling us about people whom Titus led to Jesus who were struggling in obeying authority. They wanted their own way. Paul told Titus to tell them in Titus 3:1-2. “Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.” Then Paul jumped in the water to let Titus know and to let the new Christians on the island of Crete know who he once was and what all of us were like before Jesus came into our lives. What Paul said, in Titus 3: 3 is the text God wants me to preach today, as it explains what each of us are like without Jesus. Paul wrote, “For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.” Wow! Maybe this doesn’t sound to you like a Thanksgiving Sunday message, but it is! This is Paul’s description of what we all were like before we were saved

The Cretan believers were being told what we need to hear ourselves, all of us on this Thanksgiving Sunday. In essence, Paul was saying, “Remember your depravity, for we all once were foolish ourselves. Now that you are believers, born again, don’t go back and live in sin and shame, like you once did.” What is the motivating factor for surrendering our rights to the Lord? What is our motivation to keep on believing that God answers prayer and then trusting in God’s sovereignty, His purposes, His plans, and living free from revenge, submitting to the authorities God has placed over us? In essence, today, our one verse text answers in part the question, “Why must I surrender my rights—my rights to speak angrily, or to speak evil of others? Why must I obey those whom God has placed over me in government, on the job, in God’s church, and in our home? Why? And the answer we are going to examine today on Thanksgiving Sunday is Titus 3:3, is “Remember your depravity.”

Depravity is a big four-dollar theological word that Webster defines as “deteriorated morality, corrupt, perverse, immoral practices.” Webster defines the English word “deprave” as “to make bad or worse, or to impair the good qualities in something. Paul is saying to us all today, “Before you speak evil of each other, before you disobey authority God has placed in your life, before you criticize, accuse, or judge others, take a good long look at who you are today, and who you used to be. Beloved, be honest! Take a good look at who you sometimes yet struggle with returning to be, even since you’ve been saved.” When unsaved people or brothers and sisters mistreat you or take advantage of you, or when those you love are engaged in immorality, pornography, or other acts of lustful passion, do you criticize or disdain them, or do you show empathy to them? Do you cry over their sin, and do you show them mercy? Why? or why not? Beloved, on this Thanksgiving Sunday, I call us all to remember our own depravity. We all were once foolish ourselves. That’s me and that’s you. On this Thanksgiving Sunday, I want us to reflect on what truly is gone when we come to Jesus, not when we come

to church? What happens when we receive Jesus and give our lives to Him? What should we be thankful for as truly born-again Christians today? Here are seven outstanding reasons to be truly thankful today on Thanksgiving Sunday.

WE USED TO BE FOOLISH OURSELVES. (I.) The word Paul used here that is translated “foolish” is the Greek word **anoetos**. It means senseless, without understanding, unintelligent of the things of God, unwise, unable to govern one’s lusts, and sensual. What a realization this is to make. None of us are better than our heathen neighbors. Our Christian goodness should never make us proud; it ought to make us grateful, supremely grateful. We who once were senseless and unable to govern our lusts, how can we regard with contempt and arrogant condemnation the heathen in their pagan lives? George Whitfield one day saw a criminal on the way to the gallows to be hung. He said, “There but for the grace of God, go I.” This condition of sinners is that by nature, we are actually unable to discern the things of the Spirit. Beloved, be thankful, for this is the picture of who we used to be.

Have you ever read the testimony of Steve Camp, as he spoke about who he used to be before he was saved. He wrote, “I was born in a wonderful Christian family and raised in a very religious town—Wheaton, Illinois. But even with that evangelical pedigree, I had known a more hellish iniquity than any prostitute that ever walked the evening boulevards. I had a worse sin issue than any heroine-addict ever dreamed of having. I was more trapped in sin than any alcoholic could imagine. What was my transgression against the Lord? I was full of self-righteous religious pride! It’s the worst sort of all sins, isn’t it? It’s the cocaine of the church; we sell, snort it, and call it normal Christianity. It took a profound work of God’s grace to save this wretched man; religion numbed my sin-sick soul to the wrathful conditions I was truly in. Don’t minimize this. There are millions of people in churches all over America in the same state I was in. They are what Matthew Mead calls, “the almost Christian.” They come to church, but they have never really come to Christ. They love religious things, but they have never denied themselves, and taken up their cross to follow Jesus. They’ve given Sunday to God, but Monday through Saturday is “their” time. “Almost Christians.” Are any of us still being foolish and proudly playing church without becoming Jesus’ disciple?

WE USED TO BE DISOBEDIENT. (II.) This disobedience refers to both human and divine authority. Those who are disobedient learned it in the home with parents whom they disobeyed. This is the picture of those who defy not only parents, but the laws of the land, and the dictates of the voice of conscience. Without Christ, we want the controls for ourselves, and we refuse to obey. **Beloved, we need to examine ourselves. II Corinthians 13:5 is where Paul posed** the proposition: “Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?” Part of the examination ought to reveal a new person that we have become. Paul said in II Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold new things have come.” Did we used to be disobedient or are we still rebellious, stubborn, and disobedient? Paul used a very strong Greek word for disobedient. It

is **apeithos**. It means literally, to be unpersuadable, unwilling to be persuaded, entreated and spurning belief. It means to kick faith out, to reject with disdain the truth, and to treat following Jesus with contempt. That's who we used to be, or is that still some of us here today? It isn't a happy Thanksgiving Sunday if we are still disobedient.

WE USED TO BE LED ASTRAY, DECEIVED. (III.) The word here is **planao**. This Greek word means to cause to roam from safety, truth, or virtue. It means to seduce, or to wander out of the right way. It means to lead into error. One of the titles of the Devil is the Deceiver who leads us astray. Isaiah the prophet wrote in Isa. 53:6, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—everyone—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him (that's Jesus) the iniquity of us all." We used to easily be talked into wandering far from the truth. In our old lives, we lived in a world of unreality, imagining that license or our excuses for sinning meant our liberty. It is true that in this state of mind, we often consider ourselves to be free, though we have become slaves. Some of the people who claim to be the freest, are people enslaved to drugs, to porn, to bitterness, to pride, to grudges, to demanding control, and to alcohol. They think they are free when they are totally enslaved.

WE USED TO BE SLAVES TO VARIOUS PASSIONS AND PLEASURES. (IV.) Are we truly thankful that these strong evil desires that used to dominate our lives and conduct have been nailed to the Cross? The long and the short is that many of us in this sanctuary once were gluttons, drunkards, hoarders, spendthrifts, sports worshippers, lazy sluggards, those who sadistically take pleasure in causing others' pain, and those who vainly have been concerned about what we wear, always trying to wear the latest in style. All these enslavements become obsessive-compulsive drives before we come to Jesus. They are drives we never learned to control. They are drives that dictate our will and our pleasures, blinding our minds to what will result. Our future as slaves to lust and passions found us floating down a spiritual Niagara to the falls. Praise God, we used to be enslaved... The Greek word for enslaved is **doulos**. It means to serve or be a slave. Is this who we used to be or is it who we yet are and still now are? Can you thank God this is behind you?

WE USED TO BE PASSING OUR DAYS IN MALICE AND ENVY. (V.) This kind of living used to be a leading with our life of malice and envy. This word malice means badness, perversity, wickedness, and evil mindedness. The Greek word for malice is **kakia**. It means depravity, malignity and mostly, to have enmity towards another person—bitterness, a grudge, an umbrage, resentment, or bearing an offense. It means to want to cause harm or to inflict injury on another person, to seek to get someone out of our lives. It can mean defaming the character of another person with false accusations. The heart of the word **kakia** is ill-will that is harbored in the heart, and this can go on for years and years. The Bible declares in I John 4:20, "If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen." The other word twin word with malice here is envy. The Greek word is **phthonos**. It means to look against or to look upon with ill will. It means ill will to the worst power. It means jealousy, spite, and the despair and displeasure that

comes when we find out the advantage certain people have over us. Envy is known as the first-born sin of hell. Envy hates to see another have something we don't have. Does this sound like who you are or who you used to be? It's Thanksgiving Sunday if this malice and envy is in your rear-view mirror.

WE USED TO BE HATED BY OTHERS, LITERALLY HATEFUL. (VI.)

This Greek word **stugnetos** means odious, detestable, offensive, disgusting, and repulsive. This is the man, woman, boy or girl who hates God. This is the only time this Greek word is found in the New Testament. It is the heart of the unconverted sinner, who actively rejects Christ and salvation. Even we as believers can reject the work and the word of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and guess what happens? We are **stugnetos**, hateful, returning to our old ways. I am so thankful we don't have to walk in that old hateful spirit we used to have—hating God and hating our brother, attributing evil motives to each other. We used to be like that! Oh beloved, don't go back to the old broken cistern that holds no water. Col. 2:6 tells us, "As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him." If you choose to walk in a hateful attitude, it will ride you like a too heavy rider on a horse—and it will ride you angrily until death. Shed the old hateful rider called hatefulness. By the power of the Holy Spirit, buck him off in the name of Jesus.

WE USED TO HATE ONE ANOTHER. (VII.) The natural result of being hateful is to hate one another. The natural result of hatefulness is that when detestable hateful people in all our gruesomeness are somehow forced to live and work or to try to worship with each other, it is gruesome business. When we have to meet each other and force a smile, to keep up our image, or when if looks could kill, we get that look from another or we give out that look. Then if looks could kill someone would be dead. May this not once be known among any of us as those naming the name of Jesus. Beloved, love others as Christ has loved you, and remember, I John 4:20, as I quote it one more time, "If anyone says, "I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen." Thank God, we used to be hateful, and we hated others, but now, praise God, we are not. Since we used to be in this condition, let's not be too hard on those folks who are still in this condition as unbelievers, or lingering in this condition as a carnal believer. Let's strive to win them to repentance, and faith in Jesus. One to seven—who we used to be! What a day this Thanksgiving Sunday is to thank Jesus. Paul said in II Cor. 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature or creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." May this be so in all our lives. I love you all. Amen.