

Church Matters
Studies in Paul's letter to Titus
Grace, our Teacher!
Titus 2:1-15
November 6th 2022
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The only teacher I remember from school days was Mr Jordan, my physics teacher. And I remember him because his teaching was easy to understand. Good teachers are not only comprehensible; they anticipate how their audience will respond. "If I say this, John will have this question," "If I say that, Jane will wonder about this issue - I'd better say something that will help them and add this statement," and so on.

Paul, a skilled teacher, does that in Titus chapter 2, verses 11-15, the verses before us today. He's just given some pretty straight up and down instructions, older men should be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled and sound in faith, love and endurance. Older sisters should be reverent in the way they live, they must not be slanderers or addicted to too much wine but to be those who teach what is good. Younger sisters should learn how to love their children and husbands, should be self-controlled and pure, busy at home, be kind and subject to their husbands. And the one thing young men need to work on in every area of life is self-mastery!

Expert teacher Paul anticipates two responses his young assistant, pastor Titus might receive when he preaches those commanding words.

The first is the "Who are you to give me such instructions" objection which Paul answers in verse 15. "Titus you're a *man*, who are you to command we sisters?" Or, Titus, "You are a *young man*, who are you to exhort us older people?" Paul, anticipates some backchat and says, verse 15, "These then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you." Don't back down, don't smooth the rough edges, God has given you authority, in fact "all authority" to say these things. And Titus, if you sense that someone is looking down on you because you are young, don't let it get to you, and don't apologise, "Do not let anyone despise you."

The other objection good teacher Paul anticipates is "But *how* can I change?" "I can see what the Lord wants me to do, I want to change, but how does that happen in

practice and what can I do?” “I’m an older man, how can I be more level-headed? I’m an older sister, how can I stop drinking so much, I’m a younger sister, how can I be more submissive to my husband, I’m a younger man, how can I exercise more self-controlled right across the board?”

Paul anticipates this second objection and writes, “The grace of God teaches us to say no ungodliness and worldly passions.” (verse 12). In other words, God’s grace will help you, empower you, and motivate you to change.

Sanctification

What Paul is talking about here is the big Bible word, sanctification. Let’s zoom out for a moment and think about sanctification. Sanctification comes from the Latin words “sanctus”, which means holy and “facio” which means to make. Sanctification means “make holy.” Sanctification is the divine process of taking someone from where they were the moment they believed and over the years making them more and more like Jesus. Sanctification lasts a lifetime, we never arrive at perfection in this life, but the trajectory, the pathway is always upwards and onwards. Sanctification is something God is automatically doing in our lives, in the background, by the power of his Holy Spirit, who is the sanctifier. And the Spirit always does his purifying work, through the Word, through the Scriptures, “Sanctify them by the truth; Your word is truth.” (John 17:17) As we read the Bible and hear it preached, something mysterious happens to us: God is purifying us through his Word.

So sanctification is something God is secretly and wonderfully doing in a believer’s life. We can’t become holy in our own strength any more than a chimney sweep can clean himself with his own dirty brushes!

I was reading a book written by a doctor recently, who makes a rather embarrassing admission for someone in his profession, “As a psychiatrist, I know well, how hard it can be to help people make modest changes in their lives, often requiring weeks, months or years of intensive work...” (After, page 251)

People on their own, find it almost impossible to change, but the good news for followers of Jesus is that we are not on our own, God is at work within us, day by day, week by week, year by year!

But, to bring us back to Titus chapter 2, sanctification is also a process we are called to participate in! So it's perfectly right to ask "How can I be more self-controlled, more temperate, more submissive, less prone to abuse alcohol" and so on.

The US military are working on exoskeleton suits which, I quote, "could add to soldiers' natural strength, letting troops lift seemingly impossible loads and dart across the battlefield at incredible speed." (Insider) The soldier himself has to run, lift, or whatever, but when he acts he discovers this extra superhuman power assisting him.

Sanctification is this kind of a partnership – we work and God works! As we prayerfully and seriously act to become more like Jesus, to obey him - even when it is hard to do so—we discover his power working through us, enabling us to do far more than we could do, own!

An older Christian lady who came up to me after preaching in her church one Sunday all excited to tell me that God had taken away her desire for cigarettes! She had come to the conviction that they were harming her, she had tried many times in the past to give up, but as she prayed and worked at kicking the habit God performed the miracle in her! She described it to me like this, "God plucked out the desire for cigarettes out of me, as you would pluck a weed out of a garden." She prayed and she worked and the Holy Spirit pulled out the weed one day, in his time.

This is the big difference between self-improvement and sanctification. In self-improvement you are completely on your own, in sanctification God is powerfully at work within you! There's a wikihow article, "How to change yourself completely."

First, figure out what your best life looks like. Second, make a list of the habits and behaviours that are holding you back. Third, describe what your best life looks like. Step four Make big changes! Invest in yourself, change your environment, use positive self-talk, try something new. And so it goes on and on! (I found it exhausting just reading it! Weighed down by one impossible rule after another!)

What's the problem with step 4—and with every New Year Resolution? You're on your own! But, by God's grace when a Christian wants to "Make big changes," God is at work within them both to will and to do, according to his good purpose" (Philippians 2:13)

Are you and I actively involved in sanctification? Are we prayerfully and actively saying no to old sinful thoughts and words and attitudes and patterns of behaviour, and are we prayerfully and actively saying yes to new godly thoughts and new attitudes of forgiveness and love, new ways of speaking new habits of behaviour? When was the last time you said to yourself, “This must stop, or that must start?” (Sanctification is both positive and negative—there are new things to start doing as well as old things to put to one side).

Paul’s stop list, in verse 12 is ungodliness and worldly passions, which could well be a summary of Galatians 5:19-21, “The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.”

And his start list is, again verse 22, be self-controlled, upright, godly lives. Once again that could be a summary of Galatians 5:22-23, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

What areas of your life need sanctifying? Have you begun to lift the heavy load, knowing that as you obey, the Holy Spirit will empower you?

The aid to sanctification Paul shares with his Christian friends on the island of Crete, and with us, is this: allow grace to be your teacher, in your journey to be more like Christ, be motivated by grace. There is so much to be said about sanctification, but this is what the Holy Spirit would have each of us take away this morning, “Let Grace be your teacher.”

“For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who 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.”

Allow grace to teach you to live this new life! What is grace? Remember the story of the prodigal son? Boy rebels against dad, leaves home, taking half of his dad’s wealth. He hits the town and squanders the money on wild living? Runs out of money and loses friends. Gets so low, has to take a job feeding pigs—about as low as a

Jewish by could descend. Decides to return home and ask dad for a job as a servant, he's not worthy to be called a son anymore. How does the dad react to this wasteful rebellious son? Because how the older father responds, is the *essence of grace*. Well! Dad's been scanning the horizon every day hoping and yearning for his undeserving lost boy to come home:

“While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate!

What grace! And that is how God has treated us, ramped up a million! We have rebelled against him, squandered the good gifts he has given us, we deserve his judgement, but what has he done? He welcomes us back into his family, forgives our sins through his Son and lavishes us with every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus! “Grace is God giving his very best, to people who deserve it the least.”

As we work out our salvation, as we put off our old life and put on the new life, let God’s Grace be your teacher.

1. Let past grace be your teacher!

Remember what Jesus saved you from, “Jesus Christ 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.” (verse 14)

How can I continue in the sins that Jesus had to pay for on the cross? How can I not seek to live a life that pleases Jesus who gave up so much for me? Let past grace teach you to be holy!

2. Let present grace be your teacher

The same grace God showed to us through Jesus Christ on the cross, he shows us today. I remember hearing a sermon called “Why am I such a failure!?” The preacher

was talking about the sins that so easily entangle us. We so easily mess up. How does God treat us when we fail? If we confess our sins he forgives us and welcomes us back! So when we fail we need to confess our sin, turn from it, get back on our horse and keep on going!

3. Let future grace teach us

Past grace reminds us that we have been totally forgiven, present grace tells us that God will forgive our sins as we sincerely journey toward greater obedience, and future grace reminds us of the battle will soon be over: “We wait for the blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ.” One day, very soon, Jesus will return, and at that moment, in the words of Graham Kendrick,

*There'll be crowns for the conquerors and white robes to wear,
There will be no more sorrow or pain.
And the battles of earth shall be lost in the sight
Of the glorious Lamb that was slain.*

So when the battle seems to go on and on, remember that it will soon be over when Jesus returns to take his people home! And there we will experience the fullness of grace!

The Lord is “purifying for himself—sanctifying for himself—a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good,” verse 14. And he calls each one of us to be actively engaged in that refining work. How can we do that you ask? Well, with one great motive in our hearts and minds—we have been saved by grace, we are being kept by grace, and one day we will spend eternity with Christ in heaven, by God’s amazing and abundant grace to us.