

A People for His Own Possession

Introduction

Good morning brothers, and sisters. We are continuing a series, and we have had about a three or four month pause. I am not sure how long, but we will do a little bit of reviewing. The question we have had before us comes out of Titus: Why has the grace of God appeared to us?

Let us read some verses that we have been focusing on to consider this. Titus 2:11-13 says, “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the very present age, looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus; who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.”

Let us pray.:

Lord, we are thankful for the very life that You have given to us. Our brother shared this morning the richness of that life that we were able to remember around that table. Lord, it is a life that is of such an, “other” nature. But we are thankful for Your willingness, Lord, to come and lay Your life down, that we might have life and have it abundantly. And Lord, in the abundance of Your life, you have given us Your word, and You have given us Your Holy Spirit. We want to return this morning and offer ourselves to You; that as we declare that You are Lord and head over this time You would have great freedom to work amongst us. Work in our hearts, work in our lives, Lord, that You would increase, and we would decrease. May you get what you are after in Your people in these last days. In Your wonderful, precious name. Amen.

The Comprehensiveness of Grace

As we look at these verses out of Titus, we see, as we have touched on the comprehensiveness of them, how they really capture the very essence of the fullness of the gospel, of how the Lord has redeemed us. He came, the very personification of grace in our Lord Jesus Christ; bringing us salvation, and not just to some, but to all men. He loved the world so much, He died for all men, for all mankind. And after He has saved us, it does not stop there, praise God!

He begins this instructing process, this discipling process of conforming us into His image; where the ungodliness and worldly desires that we are so innately born with are dealt with through the transforming work of the cross and the Holy Spirit. Because He desires not only a godly people in the future, but He is after godly ones in this present age. That is what He is looking for. And He has not only given us that Spirit of teaching us and discipling us, but He has given us a living hope that we are looking for that blessed hope of our Lord's appearing. There is a comprehensiveness here.

We are ever grateful that in this brief little book of Titus, the very essence and heart of the whole gospel has been captured in a few verses. Verse 14 even captures the essence of the other three verses. When He said, "Who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and purifying for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." Praise God! We see what He is doing, and He always has an end in view, which is a people for His own possession. A special treasure is what He has made us, and it speaks of that. We are very thankful how, as the grace of God has appeared, it did not stop there, but it continues to work in us. In the first time we shared, we focused more on the aspect of the grace of God that has appeared. Then the second time we shared on Christ in us, and what a precious testimony that is.

Salvation of the Soul

We are continuing today looking at the salvation of the soul. We are thankful how God has done such a glorious work, and He is continuing to do that work. Now many of the things we have shared and many of the things we will be sharing today, there is a blessing in that, that we are somewhat familiar with. But in that familiarity, that is good because we have heard this, and it can be refreshing. But there is also a bad side to familiarity because we think we know it. That was what happened in Laodicea. We sure do not desire to end up like that.

We want the Lord to continue to teach us, to refresh us, to bring things back to mind. You know, Peter in his Epistle said, "I do not mind telling you this again." As I get older, I am thankful for ones that tell me things over and over again. I hope I do not repeat things too often and tell the same story twice. But we are thankful how the Lord never tires of repeating Himself over and over again.

As we talk about this amazing grace, we see the testimony of that grace in the dear brethren in Crete. When the Lord first wrote of them in that first chapter to Titus, verse 16 says they are, "worthless for any good deed." When we think about it, that is how we start. Before we know the Lord, that is who we are. We might think we are worth something, but from His perspective, we are worthless for any good deed. But praise God, as the grace of God works in them, we see how He does a wonderful transforming work of creating these ones in Crete, zealous for good works. Not just doing good works, but zealous for good works. What a wonderful transformation! What a miracle this is! He desires to do the same in us.

As we speak of this wonderful salvation, as many have shared, there are really three tenses to salvation. We see the past, and we remembered that at the table. The separation from the penalty of death, the penalty of sin. Justification, we have been saved, praise God for that. What a wonderful thing.

Now we are in this present tense of separation from the power of sin over us. That is generally referred to as sanctification. In this work that God is doing today, we are being saved from the power of sin because He has defeated it. We are working out this process, and we will be touching on that today. But praise God, there is also a future tense. There

is that wonderful separation even from the presence of sin, that glorification that we have in Him.

It is a full, complete, tremendous, transforming work that He has done. Our brother shared on transformation last week, so you are getting a little bit of an overlap from last week and this week. We did not have any idea we were both sharing on transformation. He mentioned about transforming the mind. The Lord has orchestrated these messages in such a way that we will just yield to what He wants to do.

Christ in Us, the Hope of Glory

We have asked the question in the past: how are we transformed? There are three keys, and as we have mentioned before, it is Christ in us. Also, it is through the cross and the Holy Spirit. Christ in us is that wonderful objective truth that we have. As we look at the cross and the Holy Spirit today, even though I am separating them as three things, they are very much interrelated. They work together; they are not independent of each other. There is one work that they are doing, and they are so interrelated within this wonderful work that it is bringing us into the experiential knowledge of what we have in Christ. It is not just that objective truth of Christ in us, but the experiential knowledge of His life being lived out and expressed through us, preparing us in this day and time for His glorious return.

When we looked at Christ in us, we had a couple of key verses there. Colossians 1:27 says, "To whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." What a wonderful foundational truth, as we said, "Christ in us." It is really one of the secrets. It is the key, the very foundation we have within this Christian life. Praise God!

We have remembered the price that was paid for Christ to be in us. It was free to us, but it cost Him His very life. What a precious gift we have received. Also, there was the verse out of Colossians 3:3-4, "For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory."

Christ, Who Is Our Life

We started this morning remembering how the Lord has given us such an abundant life. We have this Zoe life, this abundant life within us. As we said, it is to live godly in this present age. It is not just to be recipients of a life in a passive way, but in a very active way, allowing that life now to be lived out within us. Because His life is the very life within us that prepares us, that transforms us for His glorious return.

And when we look at this life, we have used this word, Zoe, at times; It is an altogether other life, it is a divine life, it is not natural. We are born with a natural life. But this life is something so utter; it is an uncreated life. We are created beings. This Zoe life of God, of our Lord Jesus Christ is uncreated. You cannot even measure the extent of this life.

The focus upon His life is that it is a quality, not so much quantity. Now we think of quantity in the sense of eternal. We naturally measure things. But no, when He is speaking of eternal life, He is speaking of a quality there. There is a life that He is bringing us into, that He wants us to share. Whenever we share and touch on this life, it is so interesting because the more you touch on the life of Christ, the more you see you do not know much about it. You enter in, you touch a little bit, and you say, "Wow, look at this part of Christ." But then you say, "Oh, there is so much more!" It is like we are on the edges of His ways, touching the hem of His garments.

Praise God, as we are following Him and giving ourselves to Him, He desires to continually, daily, show us more and more of Himself in real, very practical ways in our lives. So, as we think about this matter of when we are born again, it is a very foundational issue. You know, when we are born again, our body stays the same. Our soul is basically the same. But what happens when we become Christians is that our spirit, which was dead or asleep, is born again or quickened by the power of His life in us; His life comes and dwells in our spirit.

Our spirit, which was, some people say dead, some people say asleep, was suddenly quickened, it was made alive and alert. It starts to wake up, it starts to become active because the spirit is really that center of communion, center of fellowship with our Lord. Just from a review point of view, we know that our spirit has three parts: the conscious, the intuition, and communion. Those used to be under the control of our self; but now the desire is to become under the control of the Holy Spirit.

That is another way we can look at salvation. Phase one is when our spirit is born again. There is that justification when we are born again, when we are saved, that spirit is born again. That is the past. Now in the present age, our soul is being saved. Our soul is going through that process of coming under the dominion of the spirit instead of the dominion of the flesh and our self-life.

Phase three is when the body, that future transformation that will occur, and the removal of the presence of sin, coming into all that He works, and wants to do for that new body. As you age and get a few aches and pains and go through some surgeries and various things, you are looking more and more for that new body. You youngsters have no idea how much some of us are yearning for a new body that will just go through victoriously. We are ever grateful for all the ways the Lord keeps these mortal bodies, but it causes us to yearn more and more for that future body. Oh, praise God!

Transformation Through Christ

He starts working with us through that cross and the Holy Spirit within us. We are thankful that we have Christ, our life. But does it really impact us? That is why I have always appreciated this quote by Tozer: "If truth, the truth Christ in us, does not impact our lives, what value is it? It simply puffs us up. But it is vital to allow Christ in us to make the objective truth a spiritual reality in our lives." That is the goal. Spiritual reality is Christ in us being lived out.

I appreciated also a quote from Oswald Chambers who said, "The one marvelous secret of a holy life lies not in imitating Jesus, but in allowing the perfections of Jesus to manifest themselves in my mortal flesh." Sanctification is Christ in you. It is not the phrase, "What would Jesus do?" It is not a mental thing of saying, "Okay, what would Jesus do?" It is not imitating Him, but allowing His life within us to come out and be expressed through these bodies in our daily lives.

Brother Lenny Amato shared about the transforming of the mind, and how when your mind gets transformed, it impacts your whole way of seeing things, doing things, what you are involved with. It manifests outwardly; it is not just an inward thing that occurs, but it affects you, body, soul, and spirit. Praise God for that!

I am doing a little bit of reviewing and adding new things, so it is a mixture here. But the way I have decided to express transformation is: the process of transferring control or influence of our natural spirit from its previous master - which was our soul, our flesh - to its new master - His life, that Zoe life, Christ or the Holy Spirit in us.

Some people today wonder, "Is it Christ working in us? or is it the Holy Spirit in us?" Well, you can debate it, but do not get hung up on that. It is one life. Christ has one life and the Holy Spirit is the same life. So, whether you call it the Holy Spirit working in us, or you call it Christ in us, it is the same God working. They have one life together and one end in view together. You can use Christ in us, you can use Holy Spirit in us, and He is still doing the same thing with the same purpose in the same life. Do not get hung up on the words. We just want to press through focusing on the issue of life, His life together. But in our old life before we were saved our self-life was in control of us. But praise God, as we yield to Him, that spirit begins to get an ascendancy, and the self-life loses control.

As you look at us, this tripartite being, the body as we know it, relates to the external world. We have the senses of seeing, hearing, feeling, tasting, smelling, all of that. And the soul, we are saying, is our personality and it is controlled before we are saved by the flesh. "I want this." And then praise God when we are saved, born again, our spirit is made alive.

Say 'No' To Our Flesh, Say 'Yes' To Him

Now, in the past, the soul is a lot like the Book of Judges, everybody was doing what was right in their own eyes. "You do what you want to do; I want to do this; I want to do that." And sadly, when we become Christians, if we do not continue to offer ourselves to Him by the mercies of God (that was shared last week), we will continue to live under the dominion of our soul and it will do what it wants to do.

But we see, Lord, that You want something else. We want to say 'no' to our flesh that says, "I want to." And we want to surrender so that we come into a place of You doing what You want to do. This is where the great transformation work comes in. The control of the soul, and the spirit born again has a strengthening and comes through in power. It is a lifelong process.

When we are saved, we are justified just like that. The salvation of the soul is a lifelong process, continuing as long as we are here upon earth. "He must increase," as John the Baptist said, and "we must decrease." I think most of us will testify in life, it has its ups and downs. Sometimes He is increasing, sometimes we are increasing; there is a battle that goes on.

But as we say 'no' to our self-life, 'no' to the flesh, and 'yes' to Him, which is the cross, it slowly increases His control over our soul. The Spirit is gaining an ascendancy over our soul, and He gets more and more control. We have said this is a lifelong process; it is also a lifelong battle. We have a continual battle between the lust of the flesh and the desires of the spirit, and this is the civil war that is going on within us. There is the temptation on one side, the grace of God and the power of God on the other side. And we struggle with those, and again it is a life long struggle that we go through. Sometimes we think that when we get more mature, we will not have this struggle. No, it is a lifelong battle. But hopefully as His life increases within us, we come more and more under His control. But it is important to realize that this is a battle for life. Paul even warns us of this great battle in Galatians 5:17: "For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit," they are never friends. "And the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other." Just to be very clear here. They are opposed to each other; they hate each other, they want to destroy each other. They are opposed to each other to keep you from doing the things you want to do. It sounds like Romans, doesn't it? But there is this constant civil war, this battle going on within us.

The Danger of Self-Reliance

However, there is one danger that we can face, but in this we are thankful that He has won the victory. We have the victorious side, the victorious life living within us, but there is one danger. As we go along and begin to grow in the Lord, we have a few victories and get a little maturity, we can subtly, consciously or unconsciously, think that we are becoming better persons, that the flesh is not that strong. "I can do this; I can do that." And we become a little more dependent on our self. But we are kidding ourselves when we think we are a strong enough Christian that we can handle this.

I am going to divert a little bit here, away from the glorious hymns that we normally sing, to bring up an old Johnny Cash song. Most of you, if you know Johnny Cash, you know that he had a tough life. He wrestled, and we could say that he had a lot of demons in his life that he wrestled with. He was a Christian, but he wrestled with drugs, with alcohol, and various things in life. But he tried to keep pressing on, and he would go forward, but then he would fall back.

The Beast In Me

There was one song that he called, "The Beast in Me." Now, I have no idea if he knew anything about the true beast in him, but it really hit me as I was talking about this process that we go through. One of the little verses says, "God help me with the beast in me.

Sometimes it tries to kid me that it is just a teddy bear and even somehow manages to vanish in the air. And that is when I must be most beware of the beast in me."

If the self in us cannot win directly, it starts to calm down, and lets you feel like you are winning: "Oh, look, what a great Christian you are," and it backs off. You begin to feel fairly good about yourself, but you are not aware. However, the song is saying to us, "at that moment you think you are gaining this victory, that is the moment you need to be most aware of the beast in us." Each and every one of us has the beast in me, and we have all seen it. Maybe some of us have not seen the fullness of the beast in one another. But in our private lives, in married lives, you know of the beast in one another. It is there, but praise God, He has the victory! So be aware, be on the alert for that.

One of the things we shared last time was how this process of transformation starts. And it starts with a desire. You see the Lord, and you begin to have this desire. There is this familiar verse out of Luke 9:23 that says, "And He was saying to them all, if anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow Me."

Desire is a free will response; therefore, by the mercies of God, offer yourselves. You have this desire; and it is a heartfelt response, and a daily work also, daily denying ourselves. And it is progressive, as we have mentioned, it is a progressive work of the Cross and the Holy Spirit.

The Cross Precedes Pentecost

As we start to talk about the cross and the Holy Spirit, there is one underlying basic principle that we need to always keep in perspective; because if we do not, we can become unbalanced. The basic truth or principle is that Calvary always precedes Pentecost. The cross comes before the anointing and enabling of the Holy Spirit. Because if you only look at the cross, and many focus just on the cross, it is death. If you do not know the empowering of the Holy Spirit, which brings life out of death, then there is no life. But that is why He came to bring life out of death. However, if you just look at self, or look at the cross working in us, there is no life there.

We know ones that focus so much on death: "Oh, I have to die to self, got to die to the world, do this and that." And they are missing the fullness of the reality of the table. Also, if you just look at the Pentecostal side, if you just look at the Holy Spirit side, there is life; you have life when you were born again, but you have never denied yourself, and all you have is a manifestation of yourself. Pentecost without the cross you have licentiousness. That is probably an extreme way to express it, but that is what it is going to lead to. You have self-exaltation. Again, as in Judges; everybody is doing what is right in their own eyes. We need to see the working together of the cross and the Holy Spirit, that is a great necessity.

As you go through the whole New Testament, that is how it works together in their lives, and how it is working in our lives, and desires to work in our lives. How does the transforming work of the cross and the Holy Spirit start? How does it start working in our lives?

Well, it is not that complicated. By us yielding to Him, we grant permission for the cross and the Holy Spirit to start transforming us. The Lord is the perfect southern gentleman. He never forces Himself upon us. He will only go as far working in each one of us as we allow Him to go. When we say, "Lord, I want to fully surrender," He starts working. If we are honest, sometimes He is working in some areas that we are not quite ready for Him to work in. And He will back off. He does not push, He might convict. But if we say, "I am not ready for that yet, Lord, not ready for you to deal with my love of baseball, not ready for you to deal with this aspect of my work life," He will back off.

We might not be that blunt and aware of the way we say that. We probably would not actually say that to Him, but our heart and our actions are speaking louder than words when granting Him permission to work within us. But as we say no to ourselves and yes to Him, we are giving Him permission.

That is what Romans 12:1-2 is doing. By the mercies of God, we are offering ourselves as a living sacrifice and that is granting Him permission for that wonderful life to start working within us to do this marvelous transforming work. Praise God for that. It is a free will response captured by love, and we respond to that.

Spiritual Awakening

Earlier we mentioned how when the Lord comes into our life, our spirit is born again. I want to look a little more at the spirit. Our spirit was born again because the spirit is the very center of where God communicates with us. The Holy Spirit is now working within our spirit to quicken, to awaken it, to strengthen it and make it more aware of what is going on.

Our spirit has been asleep, dormant, for the rest of our lifetime. But He desires that place of fellowship there. The Spirit brings fellowship, intuition, conscience; He brings us into a place of unhindered fellowship with the Lord.

It talks in 1 Corinthians about how we are born again, and we are brought into the fellowship of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Father. We are brought into the fullness of this precious fellowship. It is amazing! That verse in and of itself is one of the most powerful things that has occurred in our Christian life that we see dimly; we do not fully understand.

But when we were born again, we were brought into the fellowship with the Godhead, the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit. So, as They are sharing, we are not outside looking in. We are fellowshipping with Them. That is what opens the avenue; it opens the door. For as They are sharing with us personally and working with us, we can have unhindered relationships with Them. Praise God!

At times, because of sin in our lives, our actions, we sin, and it can hinder this fellowship. But as soon as we confess our sins and are forgiven by the blood of the Lamb, it opens again that open heaven; there is nothing between us. There is a hymn, "Nothing Between," and it is a beautiful testimony.

We might think there is something between us and the Lord. I do not like using feeling, but if we are not sensing something within our spirit, maybe it is an indication that there is some sin in our life. Maybe there is something going on that is hindering this fellowship, and we can offer ourselves too Him.

“Lord, search me,” like David said: “Search me; try me, see what is it, Lord, that is hindering this?” And it might be the enemy. It might be that He does not want us to rely so much on feelings and sensing, and by faith believe we have this fellowship. There are many ways He works that way, but praise God, we have this.

Also, our intuition is suddenly quickened and awakened to start to hear His voice, to hear His leading. Suddenly you have this sensing, “I am supposed to do this. I am not supposed to do that.” Well, where did that come from? Before you used to love to do those things and suddenly you do not want to do those things.

I know I had shared this before, but I used to play a lot of softball for the company, on different teams. And there came a point where I started having this sensing within me, “Mac, you need to lay that down.” And I wrestled with the Lord for six or seven months, trying to outwit Him and outsmart Him. And of course, you know who won.

But praise God, it started with just an intuition, some little sensing I had. “I want you to go this way, Mac.” And first we think it is going to be horrible. “Oh, if I have to give all of this up, it is going to be oh, so terrible.” But then after you give it up, I am not saying immediately you do not miss it because it took me a little while. I laid it down a couple of months, a little while I wrestled, but then I was free of it and that was behind me. Rear view mirror. Let us keep going ahead, praise God.

Awareness of Conscience

Also, He works in our conscience. It brings us into a consciousness awareness of the contrast between two kingdoms. What is of Him and what is not of Him. Things that maybe did not bother us in the past, suddenly you say, “What? That is pretty bad.”

I was in the Navy six years, so you can imagine my language. But suddenly, your language starts to change. You just notice it and praise God. This is where, as we come back to looking at that conscience, fellowship, intuition; as we yield to Him, our spirit starts to strengthen, and it starts to exercise control.

Renewing Our Minds

As our brother said last week, about our mind being renewed, our will suddenly starts to have this desire for His will. Our emotions are not just caring about ourselves, but there is a love that is captured by Him. In a way they are brought under the dominion of the Spirit.

You know, it is one of the great contrasts between religion and Christianity. Religion tries to change you from the outside in. You start changing the way you do it outwardly,

start changing the actions in your body, and then you will become a better person. Religion does that. Some Christianity says, “start, stop doing this or that.” And that is legalism.

It starts on the outside, tries to work inside, it does not work. But the true life of Christ, true Christianity, starts on the inside. You see the actions in your body are manifested. That is why I like that quote from Oswald Chambers that I mentioned, “It is Jesus, manifest in our mortal flesh,” praise God. That is what we are looking for.

That is what we desire, that as we see in Him, there would be that transforming work and there would be a strengthening work within us. We can become stronger and stronger. As we have a spirit within us, His Holy Spirit, His life within us, we desire that it has more of a dominion in us.

How do we come into that strengthening of our spirit? That is just the phrase I am using. There are two overall basic ways.

Being in His Word

One way is being in His Word. Now, everybody knows that, everybody agrees with that, but very few of us really obey that and desire that. As we have that desire to be in His Word, not just reading it, I am talking about far more than just a morning devotional. I am talking about a real reading of His Word, meditating upon His Word, and listening. What is His Word? What is it saying to us?

There is a fellowship, it is having fellowship with the Lord as we are reading His Word. As we are reading, we have our spirit engaged during the reading of the Word so that we are having communion, we are being conscious of things, and having our intuition active. “Oh, maybe that is this. Maybe it is that.” It is engaging and exercising our spirit so that it can be strengthened.

Spending Time with Him

It is through spending time with Him; daily walking with Him, worship, prayer, fellowship in life. When we talk about daily life, sometimes we can think, “Well, daily life, okay, so that means once a day I have to do this.” It is good when we have morning devotions, yes. But daily really means the spirit of it is continual.

I like to mention Brother Lawrence's book, “Practicing His Presence.” Now that book can drive you crazy too. But there is a principle behind that book that is very good. Be careful if you pick it up, okay? Because if you start to think, “I am going to imitate him,” you miss the point of the whole book. If you try to imitate Brother Lawrence, you miss the whole book.

There is a spirit behind what he is saying to practice His presence. As you are going to work, as you are at home, as you are at the grocery store; there is a being conscious, an awareness of His presence. That is all he is trying to communicate to us.

As we want our spirits to be strengthened, it is strengthened simply by the grace of God, learning to say “no” to this and “yes” to that; “no” to ourselves, “yes” to Him.

One of my favorite things in business is doing consulting work. And I will be talking with clients, and they will say, "This is really a complicated issue." Most issues really are not complicated. It is just you make the solution complicated.

The Strength of Conscience

In our Christian life, we go through some experiences. I know John helps people with finances, and I have helped people with finances. People say, "Oh, my financial situation is so complicated." No, it is not. There is a "no" and a "yes." No and yes answers a lot of our situations in life; saying "no" to that new car and "yes" to this used car because that is all you can afford. We get complicated on things. But there is a simplicity in Christ. Even when we talk about transformation, we can make this complicated. There is a simplicity: we yield to Him, and we are saying "no" to ourselves and "yes" to Him.

He will present us with various circumstances and situations that ask the question, "Do I have a strong spirit?" We will just look at the conscience here. Is my conscience strong or weak?

It is kind of interesting about the conscience because a strong conscience is a sensitive conscience. Now, usually when you think of something sensitive, you think of weakness. But the stronger your conscience is in Him, the more sensitive it is to the things of Him in contrast with the things of the world. It is more aware of the contrast between the two kingdoms, between light and darkness, and you become more and more aware of it.

This is how He wants to work with us. He gives us daily life things to be aware of. When we are at work and we know what the rules are at work about using cell phones. Maybe your company has a cell phone policy. No personal use except during lunchtime. Or maybe your lunch hour is 45 minutes. Or maybe you are not supposed to use your computer for personal things at work.

But you also know they do not enforce those rules. So, what does your conscience say? "Oh, well, I can do this." But no. As our conscience gets more sensitive, it is the little things in life that really work within us. It is those little things of saying, "No, I do not care if everybody else in the office is doing it. I do not care if they enforce the rules or not. The rules, this is what I agreed to when I came to work here. This is what I need to do."

One of my favorite phrases in life is also one of the worldliest phrases I use. "It is easier to ask forgiveness than permission." You start to do something, your conscience says, "Ah, maybe you should do this or that." And you say, "Well, I can go ahead and do it. Then I will ask forgiveness." That is abusing the grace of God.

Sensitivity of Conscience

But we see how our conscience, He wants it to become so sensitive. Like that dove that is pictured in the scripture, it lights upon us as we go along. We can kid ourselves into thinking we are strong Christians, and it will not affect us.

I was talking with a brother about various situations. How in this world it is so challenging as a believer if you are watching a movie, or you are watching something on the Internet, or you are streaming, or whatever device you are using, and suddenly they defame the Lord's name. They come right out with all the expletives, and it is defaming His name.

What do you do? You say, "Ah, I am a strong Christian, that will not affect me." No, that shows you are weak. Your conscience is weak because they have just defamed the name of the very person that loved us and died for us. And we are going to sit there and just take that.

Practical Situations

What if they said that about your wife? What if they said that about your child? Would you do nothing? Now I realize if you are walking down the street and somebody says something, you are not going to go jump on everybody. I am talking about situations where you have a choice, an option, the control to get up and walk out, to turn it off, to say no to your friend.

I am talking about practical situations. Do you just sit there and let that go by? Are we willing to say, "no, I am not going to put up with that?" Even if it is a girlfriend that you are trying to court and win over, you know you might lose her if you say no to that. She said, "Ah, you are such a prude. I do not want to be with you." But what is important? Is our conscience quickened enough to be able to say no to that? I am not going to put up with it.

In this world it is tragic how much our Lord's name is defamed. And we can become so dull to it that when "GD" goes by, we just let it fly on and continue watching the movie. That is personal conviction.

There are things that we need to have our conscience awakened to. It is the same thing with the pornography that is out in this world today. You can almost get so used to seeing pornography. Again, you say, "I am such a strong Christian, it is not going to affect me." No, it impacts you. It impacts our spirit. It impacts our life.

I think the thing that troubles me is when we think, "I am such a strong Christian, this is not going to impact me." Oh, this is where we are talking about exercising our spirit. I know Stephen Kaung has a book on the Gymnasium of Christ; but there is an exercising of saying no - no and yes are the two basic exercises in the Christian life. No to self, no to the world, yes to Christ and all of that.

Young People and Peer Pressure

Young people, as you find yourself in school, at parties and other situations; and this could be to anybody, sometimes you get invited to places. And you know there is suddenly within you, there is an intuition that says, "I am not sure I should go there, but I want to go there because I will be accepted. Ah, so and so is going to be there. I want to go there because then I will be in with this crowd." Are we willing to say no to that?

We can kid ourselves about it. "I can go to that party. Yes, there will be drugs, there will be this or that. But I am a strong Christian, it will not affect me. I will be a testimony to them. I will go out drinking with them tonight and share the gospel."

Do you even hear what you are saying? We see in this evil age that we are living in, there is a great, great contrast between the spirit of the Lord within us and the spirit of this world.

Yet we can allow a gray area to come in and somehow we rationalize and make them acceptable. But Christ worked in these ones in Crete, they were no good, they were worthless. But they allowed Christ to work in them to make them zealous for good deeds.

He did that work through the awakening of their spirit and the exercising of it. Let us not think we stand, lest we fall. Because, praise God, His grace gives us that ability to say no and yes.

Example of Transformation: The Life of Paul

I was thinking as far as an example of how this works in someone's life, I would like to use the life of Paul. Thankfully most of us have some general knowledge of Paul's life, have a general familiarity with it.

I am not going to go into a lot of the details, but want to touch some areas of his life and use a couple of verses within each area to see how the Lord worked for the salvation of the soul within Paul. How God did this transforming work, not just saving him, but the more he saw of the Lord, the more he was transformed into His image.

A lot of times when we speak of Paul's life, we speak of two verses -there are a few more, but I have left out the ones in between - that summarize his life. At the beginning he says, "I am the least of the apostles, not fit to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God."

At the end, his testimony is, "It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost of all." This contrast between being the least of the apostles - we say, "That is very humble, Paul, you are the least of them," okay - and now he is the chief of sinners.

That is a great downward work that God did in his life of Christ increasing and Paul decreasing. Opposite worlds, different ways. The way of the flesh, that self-exaltation. But praise God, Paul was captured. He surrendered to the Lord.

There are many keys to Paul's life, but there were three that stood out to me. This is not to be an exhaustive list at all, but just for the time today. As you look at Paul's life, he had that intimate relationship with the Lord. He had an insatiable desire for the Lord. And he knew the infallibility of the Lord.

Coming to know Christ in such a way started that transforming work, that intimate relationship transformed his emotions. That insatiable desire created within him a desire to do His will, not my will. He knew the infallibility of the Lord that brought his mind into

a place of peace, rest. Whatever the situation was, Paul knew that God was infallible, and He was going to handle it. And he could rest in that.

Intimate Relationship with the Lord

He testifies, "I have learned to be content." Praise God. He went through that learning, that training process of the Holy Spirit and the Cross working in him. So, as we look at Paul's emotions transformed, in II Corinthians 5:14, Paul testifies how he was controlled, He was constrained by the love of Christ. This controlled his heart, this controlled who he was.

He made this statement that he is no longer living for himself, but for Him who loved and died for him. Praise God. This is a holy passion for the Lord. This is an example and a picture of first love. When God captured Paul's heart, he came into this spirit and essence of first love.

He said, "I am not living for myself anymore. I am living for the One who loved me, living for the One who died for me." Praise God for that. That is bringing his emotions under the Spirit's control.

Paul was never emotionless, but with all that he had going on, he allowed the Lord to meet him in all those varied situations. Philippians is really where Paul testifies to how the Lord worked within him.

We see Paul's testimony in Philippians 3:7-8. I picked out a couple of the key phrases here. Before this, Paul has testified to who he was. Paul had that great Greek education. He was a Roman citizen. He was a Hebrew of Hebrews. He was a Pharisee of Pharisees. Paul had the whole world in front of him; he was a powerful man. (At that point he was still Saul, but I get confused when I try to use Saul and Paul. So, I am going to always call him Paul.)

Friday night we were studying in Acts 5 with Gamaliel. Paul was one of his students and probably could have even succeeded him, being one of the most prominent Jews. He could have followed in the Greek culture and become very prominent there. He had the whole world before him.

Yet on that road to Damascus, he was knocked off his high horse and he came to meet Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. Everything changed. His perspective in life changed. When Paul says, "Whatever was gain to me, I count as loss," it is almost immeasurable, the gain that Paul had in his natural life before he met the Lord.

He had gained so much from the Greeks, the Romans, the Jews. He had gained so much. He was so rich in so many ways; but he counted it as loss. Even beyond, he says, "I count all things as loss." Everything before I knew the Lord, that is all loss. And not just loss, but it is rubbish. It is just trash in comparison to the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord.

Praise God. What a beautiful picture of first love. His emotions were not governed by himself, but the One who first loved him. That is what Paul was brought under. He allowed the Lord to do it. And it was progressive throughout his life. It was not instantaneous, but as Paul continued daily, he says, "I die daily." And that means he is surrendering himself daily, continually, in that spirit, to allow the Holy Spirit to work.

He did not die just on Sunday and come to the meeting, thank the Lord for dying for him, and worship the Lord. No, he died daily in life.

As you read some of his epistles, they talk about how he gave to certain ones not only the word of God, but he gave his life. "I gave our lives for you." They saw Christ in him being lived out and it impacted ones.

He is not led by his emotions anymore. He is led by the love of Christ controlling him, "Go here, do not go there. Let Me reevaluate the things that are important to you." We experience it. I know in marriage, when you get married the things that were important to you before, they take second place. And there is a love that hits us, and it reevaluates the priorities in life because you are in love with that one. Christ loved us and we allow Him to reevaluate within us, priorities in life, that our emotions can be truly governed by Him.

The Insatiable Desire Within Him

Also, his will was transformed. Paul has this wonderful testimony again in Philippians. "For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." Out of this relationship, this intimate relationship, came this insatiable desire for Christ. He said, "For me to live is Him and to die is gain."

He did not care where he was serving, he did not care how he served. He was even forgetting all the success that he had. As we look at Philippians, if you look back at Philippians 3:12-14, the phrase I picked out, "Forgetting what lies behind, I press on."

Now, what is he forgetting here? He is forgetting those three missionary journeys when he went around sharing the Gospel; churches being birthed out of the word of God; all those epistles that he had written under the anointing and enabling of the Holy Spirit. He did not rest on that. He did not say, "Look at my pedigree here. Look at my laurels. I am resting on that."

No, he said, "I am not satisfied with knowing the Lord. My will, I am saying no to that, and I am pressing on. Forget these things, I am pressing on to know Him more and more; to lay hold of that for which I was laid hold of."

He knew God had him for a purpose, He has each one of us for a purpose. Paul is saying, "Do not be content with this. Press on to know Him more and more."

You know, it is interesting when we come to "contentment." I mentioned before how Paul testifies in Philippians, "I have learned to be content in all situations." But that is in

chapter four. In chapter three, he says, "I am pressing on." You do not see him being very contented.

Paul was never content with knowing the Lord. He always knew there was so much more. But he was content with the circumstances of life in the world. He said, "Those things do not matter. I am content whether I am abounding, whether I am being abased, whether I am up, down, in hunger, whatever. I am content because of Him."

But Paul was pressing on. He knew there was a goal, that prize of the upward calling, Christ Jesus. He was captured and he was allowing the Lord to do this.

I cannot imagine Paul, the man, before he was saved. All that he did and all that he went through, I cannot imagine the strength of his will. You do not get to where Paul was in the world, in his Jewish history and everything else, without that strength of the will. Think of him, even after the disciples were before the Sanhedrin, testifying, and Paul heard them; he still went out and he was persecuting. He was a driven man. But God came in and transformed that will.

Sometimes we say, "Oh, they are so strong willed." Yes, and we are, every one of us is strong willed. But God is greater and stronger. He can transform the weakest emotions, He can transform the strongest will, bringing them under the dominion of His life. That is how we live godly in this present age. That soul being transformed and His life being manifest in us.

Paul's will was transformed. He was also encouraging others. He was encouraging those in Thessalonica to excel still more. He praised them: You love the Lord, you love one another, but do not be content with that. Press on to know Him more and more, abound with that more and more.

We are thankful for Paul, his ministry for others is so precious. If you go back and consider all of Paul's companions, it is an interesting study. Have you ever gone through and counted all the different ones that Paul mentioned in his letters? Different lives that he mentioned and companions who walked with him. Whenever he mentions these ones that are walking with him, he is so gracious; encouraging them to press on more and more.

The Reality of the Infallibility of Christ

Finally, we see how the Lord worked within Paul to transform his mind. Our brother shared last week, through the transforming of his mind, Paul saw the infallibility of Christ. To me, this comes out in II Corinthians.

Many call II Corinthians Paul's autobiography. There is a phrase he uses numerous times about the sufficiency of Christ. Some translations have it as the adequacy of Christ. Sufficient sounds so much stronger than adequate. The all sufficiency of Christ, the infallibility of Christ in whatever situation he was in, whether he was abounding or whether he was in suffering. I appreciated that.

In Acts 28, remember when Paul had been arrested and they were taking him to Rome, and he is on this ship. There is this huge storm and the ship gets shipwrecked and they end up on this island called Malta.

The people welcome them, and they start building a fire because they are all soaking wet from the Mediterranean. When they are building this fire, what happens to Paul? This viper comes out and grabs him on the arm. What do the people say? "Huh? This guy must be a murderer, a destroyer. There is something wrong with this guy."

But then Paul just shakes it off. They are waiting for him to swell up and die, but he does not. So, they flip around. Instead of calling him a murderer, they say, "Oh, you are a god. You are a great god."

So, he is abounding in the praise of man. They welcome him. But it did not impact Paul. You do not see him going up and down. He was not fearful when the snake bit him. Talk about your emotions being under the control of the spirit when a snake is in your hand, biting you. I think most of us would probably get a little emotional. The Lord created emotions too, do not take that too far.

But we see when they call him a murderer, he did not try to correct them. They called him a god and he just sloughed that off. He did not listen to the praises of man, and they treated him so well. The last little verse in that section, when they left, says they provided everything they needed. He was content. He was content whether he did not have anything or the abundance of everything being provided.

But through this process of life, we know from various readings, Paul suffered many things physically; whether it was in prison and beatings and stoning, or shipwrecks and hunger and cold. With everything he went through, he learned the all sufficiency, the infallibility of Christ to carry him through. But also, in the emotional situations of life, he talks about having the sentence of death upon him, how he was perplexed, how he was depressed. He was waiting to hear about how things were in Corinth. He also says he had conflicts without and conflicts within. Yet, despite those varied emotions, through that he saw the all sufficiency, the infallibility of Christ meeting him.

The Final Testimony of Paul

In his final testimony in II Timothy, Paul testifies that he had fought that good fight, he finished the course, he kept the faith. In the future there is laid up for me that crown of righteousness, that one that the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to all those who love His appearing. Praise God

Paul had a confidence not in himself. We sang that little chorus, "It was not I, but Christ in me." That was Paul's testimony, "Not I, but Christ in me." That is how he could say this testimony here. He was not boasting of himself, he was boasting of Christ in him.

Even further on in that letter, one of his final testimonies is the infallibility of the Lord, the all sufficiency is always there. He said, "At my first defense, no one supported me. Everyone deserted me."

Look at the mercy here, the graciousness, the way the Lord has worked in his heart, "May it not be counted against them." That is the grace of God working in the fruit of a life, the life of Christ being seen in a person, "May it not be counted against them."

But, "the Lord stood with me and strengthened me and allowed me to continue to declare His glorious gospel." Everybody can desert us, but the Lord stood with him. He knew that infallibility of the Lord and we are going to need that in these last days.

This is why it is so vital for the Lord to reveal His infallibility to each one of us, through coming into that intimate relationship with Him and that insatiable desire for Him, that we could really be strengthened in Him, the power of His life.

To me, they build on each other. Because the intimate relationship creates more of a desire. The greater desire we have for Him, it opens us more and more to see the all sufficiency, the infallibility.

I say infallibility because I had to get the alliteration there, the three "I's." So, if you want to use all sufficiency, that is okay too. But we see how they come out the more we know Him.

We see that it is a continual cycle. He learned the infallibility of the Lord in certain areas. And as he continued, his intimate relationship would grow deeper and deeper and he would have a greater desire to learn more of that infallibility, learning more of that intimate relationship. So, there is a continual growing and knowing Him in a fuller, wonderful way.

Conclusion

We are thankful that in the days in which we are living, the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to all men. Do we really know the fullness, the greatness, the majesty, the all-sufficient salvation that we have been brought into? Brothers and sisters, in Hebrews it is called, "so great a salvation."

Even that is limiting in the Word. Every week as we remember Him at the table, we try to find words to express the greatness, the magnitude, the fullness, the absolute completeness, of this great salvation that we have been brought into.

He has not only saved us, but He has also made us His special treasure because He has that purpose for us. The Lord desires that we would be that testimony for Him in this present age, in the midst of the darkness. Would it be that the light would shine brighter and brighter, even though the darkness does not comprehend it.

The light of Christ shone in that world at that point in time, but they did not comprehend it. So may we not let our lights get dull just because people are not comprehending it. We still need to allow the light of His life to come out from us, to be shining brighter and brighter as we allow this wonderful transforming work to be worked out in each and every one of us.

Because in Him He has made, as Peter says, every provision for life and godliness. We would be those that keep pressing on, not only in this age, but looking forward to the age to come. In the age that we are living in now, God is simply doing a preparatory work. He is transforming us. He is preparing us for a great and glorious future work of ruling and reigning with Him.

We experience that somewhat now. We are thankful for the victory He gives us over things in our life. We are thankful for the comfort He gives us as we go through certain tragedies. We are thankful for the fellowship we have with Him, with one another. There are so many blessings that we have in Him, but there is so much more.

There is a Man in the glory that is for us, and He is desiring for that life to be lived out through us. We are thankful we have Christ in us, that hope of glory. So, like Paul, may we offer ourselves to Him in a continual way. By the mercies of God, responding to that grace, responding to His love, may we come into a greater intimate relationship with Him, really allowing Him to do a transforming work within us. And out of that intimate relationship would we have a greater insatiable desire for Christ.

We were talking at dinner last night how some can have such an insatiable desire to know everything that is going on in the world, and everything in politics, and can spend hours trying to dig into this and dig into that; and yet maybe a half hour with the Lord every day. It is an adjusting of priorities, an adjusting of life, an adjusting of perspective. What is important? As we have that intimate relationship, it creates within us a desire. And praise God, in His wonderful faithfulness, as we see this, as we hunger after that desire for Him, we learn of Him and His all sufficiency, the infallibility. There is such an insecurity among so many believers in this day and time because of shaking and things that are going on, and so many pressures. Would that we come into a greater knowing of the security, the infallibility, the all sufficiency of knowing Christ Jesus as our Lord, that He who began a good work in each one of us, He will complete it in that day.

So may the Lord really be working in us that we could be prepared vessels fit for our Master's use and allow the grace of God that has appeared to all men to do the great work that He is desiring to do within us. Thank the Lord for the treasure, Christ in us. Thank the Lord for all He did on the cross. Thank the Lord for the gift of the Holy Spirit that sealed us in Him. May They have great freedom to work in each of our lives, preparing us for whatever is ahead.

Let us pray.

Lord, we do come to You. As we see how You worked in the life of one like Paul, who was so against You, Lord, we offer ourselves to You. Whether we were as strong as Paul, we are still these frail human vessels in great need of You to do a work within us. We are thankful, Lord, that You never give up on us. We are thankful for Your longsuffering love. Lord, we want our hearts, our lives, to be willing. We are thankful Lord; You do not force us to do things. You do not want us to be robots going about doing this and that. But You are wanting us to express Your life in very living ways; Your life lived out through us.

Lord, we simply say that we are thankful that the grace of God has appeared to each of us in our Lord Jesus Christ. We want to be those that are allowing You to disciple us and to train us and to work within our hearts and lives in this day and time. That we would be prepared for the living hope we have set before us in You and all that You are desiring to do throughout all eternity. In Your precious name. Amen.

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