

## Salvation and Transformation Titus 2:11-15

This series is about transformation – putting off our sinful habits and old way of life, and becoming more like Christ – and how important that is in making an impact for Christ on the people around us who don't know him yet. Transformation and being different than the people around us can be hard, especially if we're convinced deep down that it really isn't necessary, and that's the issue we're coming back to this week.

This is the second half of a message that I started last week, so I want to recap where we've been in order to lead into where we're going this morning. Last week we looked into a false teaching on the island of Crete that was causing problems for the new churches and new believers. Paul described the false teachers in the second half of Titus 1 and from that and other comments he makes we can see that these false teachers were believing and teaching a form of Antinomianism. "Antinomian" means "opposed to law." And the way I described it last week from the Reformation Study Bible was that it denied that God's law in Scripture should directly control the Christian's life. In other words, Christians don't have to obey biblical commands when it comes to their conduct. That's antinomianism.

As absurd as that may sound, there are multiple ways that people come to that conclusion and then proceed to live as if their behavior and obedience to God's Word doesn't really matter when it comes to salvation. They can live how they want and still be saved. The way this was being taught on Crete appears to be a form of early Gnosticism, which was a common false teaching in that part of the world at that time. I pointed out last week from the Reformation Study Bible that *"The Gnostics taught that salvation was for the soul only, making bodily behavior irrelevant both to God's interest and to the soul's health. The conclusion was that one may behave riotously and it will not matter."*

The false teachers on Crete appeared to be thinking that way and in their version of Gnosticism that was also mixed with Judaism, they were teaching that as long as people were devoted to Jewish myths and certain commands of false teachers they would be saved, and their bodily behavior didn't matter. You could live like every other Cretan beast and still be saved. That was the false teaching that Paul was writing to Titus about which is why he also told Titus that he must teach what accords with sound doctrine – that behavior does matter, that the new believers

should conduct themselves very differently than the unbelievers around them no matter what situation they were in. That's what he writes about in the beginning of chapter 2.

Today we're going to see the rest of what Paul writes that's related to this false teaching. We're going to see him tell Titus why it was so important for the Cretan Christians to behave in a godly manner and the way he does that is to describe the gospel, only he does it in a way to show how godly behavior or sanctification is embedded in it. So that's what we'll look at today.

Before we dig into that I want to talk about why this is relevant to our lives today. I brought up last week that even today within Evangelical churches like ours, there can be a similar attitude that denies the need to walk in obedience to Scripture, and it goes something like this: *"The Bible teaches us that people are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, and apart from works. Therefore, it is necessary for me to have faith in Jesus in order to be saved, but it is not necessary that I obey the biblical commands about my behavior. Those commands are part of sanctification (or Christian growth) and part of rewards in heaven, but not salvation. As long as we believe in Jesus we will be saved, even if we live a carnal/sinful lifestyle."* So they believe that salvation and sanctification (or Christian growth) can be separate in the Christian life and that you can be saved even if there is no sanctification.

So as we see what Paul writes to confront the antinomianism on Crete, we'll also see how it confronts this antinomianism in Evangelical churches today. In the verses leading up to what we're going to study, Paul was giving Titus several instructions on what he was to teach the new believers about the kind of behavior they should have. He addressed older men and women, young women, young men, and even bondservants. They were to be different than the rest of the people in their society who were known as "liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." It wasn't ok for Cretan Christians to behave that way anymore. There must be transformation. There must be sanctification. And now he writes about why that was so important.

Read Titus 2:11-15.

*For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, <sup>12</sup> training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, <sup>13</sup> waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, <sup>14</sup> who gave himself for us*

*to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.*

<sup>15</sup> *Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you.*

The reason Paul gives for why transformation and godly behavior is so important is that it's embedded in the gospel. What Paul does here is explains the gospel, but he does it in a way that shows that sanctification is very much a part of it and of God's plan of salvation. It's not separate from it like the false teachers were saying. There is no gospel without sanctification. And there is no salvation without transformation. In other words, our behavior and obedience to God's commands is a necessary part of the gospel and salvation. Let's see how Paul explains it.

He begins by saying that "the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people" and he doesn't go into any details about God's grace or salvation like he normally does, but we know from many of his other writings that he's talking about many things: the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, he's talking about the subsequent outpouring of the Holy Spirit that began at Pentecost, and the ministry of the Apostles and early disciples to spread the gospel and plant churches. These are all ways that God's grace has appeared, bringing salvation for all people – meaning it's available to all – Jew and Gentile alike.

But Paul tells none of those details in this passage. Instead he puts the focus on something else because of the false teaching going on, and that is that God's grace appeared not only bringing salvation, but also training us to renounce our evil ways and live upright and obedient lives instead. So the emphasis is on our sanctification and transformation as we wait for Christ to return. That's what God is doing in us throughout our lives here on earth. And if we reject that and say it doesn't matter, like the false teachers were doing, we are believing and practicing a false gospel. It's certainly not the gospel that Paul believed. Paul believed that sanctification was inseparable from salvation.

You see that reiterated in his description of Jesus' death on the cross in verse 14. Paul says Jesus "*gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.*" Jesus didn't give himself for us so that we would just pray a prayer, or get baptized and confirmed, and then go on living a wicked and rebellious life! That's not what salvation is in a true believer's life. Paul says Jesus gave himself for us to

set us free from a lifestyle of sin and wickedness. He gave himself to purify us for himself. He gave himself so that he would have a people who are zealous for good works. He's preparing us for his second coming and when he gets here he isn't looking for a bride who's given him empty lip service while living in open rebellion! He's looking for a bride who's been sanctified, cleansed by the washing of water with the word, full of splendor, and without spot or wrinkle or any such thing (Eph. 5:26-27).

When Jesus saves us, he not only gives us a pardon and forgiveness for our sins, he also gives us everything we need for sanctification and transformation to happen in our lives. He gives us a new heart when we believe – a heart that is grieved by sin and wants to please him. He gives us his Spirit to dwell in our hearts, to convict us of sin and empower us to obey him by faith. He adopts us into his family so we can get encouragement and support. These are part of our salvation – gifts of his grace that accompany it. The source for these is Jesus Christ and he doesn't withhold any of them when we are saved. Therefore sanctification is embedded in salvation – it is the outworking of it.

The book of 1 John is full of this kind of teaching, probably because John was confronting some form of antinomianism. Listen to what he says in 1 John 3:6-9: *"No one who abides in him (Jesus) keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. <sup>7</sup> Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. <sup>8</sup> Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. <sup>9</sup> No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God."*

When we are born again, we are changed from within – Jesus gives us everything we need for transformation to happen in our lives. Therefore sanctification is not separate from salvation. That's the gospel as Paul understood it, and that's what the believers on Crete needed to hear so that they would walk in obedience. The false teachers were wrong. Godly behavior is part of salvation, and if it's not there, salvation isn't either. This isn't saying that a believer has to earn their salvation by godly behavior – that's another false teaching that Paul had to confront in many churches. It's saying that godly behavior will be the fruit, or the outworking of our salvation. It's also not saying that our godly behavior will be perfect. Our sin is deeply rooted in our nature and there will need to be repentance and sanctification throughout our lives here on earth. So there won't

be perfection, but there will be growth and the fruit of the Holy Spirit. There will be signs of life – signs that you have a new heart and that God’s seed abides in you.

So as we turn the attention to ourselves... I’m sure you can see that Paul’s confrontation of the false teaching on Crete also confronts the false teaching of today and the faulty idea that our behavior doesn’t matter when it comes to salvation. It does matter. Sanctification and salvation are not separate realities in the Christian’s life. Therefore, we need to guard against false belief that our obedience to Christ doesn’t really matter as long as we believe.

Other passages in the Bible make this just as clear.

- 1 John 1:5-6 says: *“This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. <sup>6</sup> If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.”*
- 1 John 2:3-6 says, *“And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. <sup>4</sup> Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, <sup>5</sup> but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: <sup>6</sup> whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.”*
- James 2:14-17: *“What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? <sup>15</sup> If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, <sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? <sup>17</sup> So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”*
- Cf. Romans 6; Heb. 10:26-31

What is the Holy Spirit speaking to your heart today? Do these things confirm what you believe and how you have been living your life? Or can you see that you’ve been caught up in the mentality that sin isn’t that big of a deal as long as you believe? Let the Word of God dive deep into your heart today and give you a renewed passion to turn from your sins and pursue holiness in your life.