

99-03-07a

As we continue our worship this morning, if you'll turn with me and your Bibles to Titus chapter 3. Titus chapter 3 may not be immediately apparent what the connection would be between this chapter from a pastoral epistle from Paul to Titus. Our current study has us in Genesis chapter 19 where Lot is fleeing the burning cities of the plain. But this is actually quite closely linked to what we're going to see as we further our investigations this morning in Genesis 19.

This is well into the letter that Paul writes Titus and he is instructing Titus and exhorting him in terms of what should be presented to the church. What should be taught? What should the emphasis be? When you look at the letters to Timothy and Titus, they're relatively short when you compare them say to the 16 chapters of Romans and so forth. And yet this is where we find the emphasis.

One of the things I enjoyed about being an instructor at the artillery school, being an artilleryman and an enthusiast for artillery, it's one thing to go out and be in a firing battery and be able to facilitate that mission of delivering rounds on a target. And in a particular operation, a particular exercise or in some cases in actual combat to bring effective fires to bear on a target. That's a wonderful thing.

But you're one person in one firing battery influencing six or eight guns. Of course if you move up to battalion level then you get a little bit greater scope. But being an instructor at the artillery school, you can ingrain or at least attempt to ingrain the principles of gunnery and the principles of good artillery to dozens, perhaps hundreds of lieutenants and enlisted men who are going to go throughout the Army and Marine Corps and be the personnel of batteries and battalions all over the world.

And so you think if we can focus on the essentials and ingrain good basic principles in these individuals as they pass through the school on their way to their careers, you can multiply your effectiveness if you're a good artilleryman a hundredfold or a thousandfold or even more. So it's a strategic place to be when you are an instructor and it makes a difference what you emphasize. Here Paul is telling Titus, these are the essentials.

There are going to be many people who are going to be ministered to. And Paul, whether he knows it or not, in the writing of this letter to Titus, has ministered to countless millions of believers down through the centuries. And he tells us here, these are the essential things.

Remind them, Paul says in Titus 3.1, to be subject to rulers and authorities. Now you would think, here we're going to get the big emphasis of the Christian life. This is what should be pounded on from the pulpits of all the churches.

Of course they didn't have pulpits back then. These are the emphasis. What's the first

thing he says? Respect for authority.

To understand the framework that God has put into society, into civilization, and operate within it. This is one of the themes that we've seen in the past couple of chapters of Genesis and to which we will return. Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities.

To obey. To be ready for every good work. He doesn't say to perform every good work, does he? He says to be ready for every good work.

To speak evil of no one. To be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men. For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.

But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy, he saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior. So that, having been justified by his grace, we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly.

So that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men. It's getting harder and harder for me to just do a scripture reading and not just preach my way through it.

But you cannot help but observe in the first few verses of this section that the exhortation, the fundamentals, this emphasis that Paul communicates to Titus is inner transformation. We find here a great balance and a great statement of a relationship between who we are and what we do. This is a tension that we find in chapters 18 and 19 of Genesis in the contrast between God's visitation to Abraham and God's visitation to Lot.

And it's something we're going to explore more fully this morning. But you will notice the contrast also between what we read here and what we find in our present-day Christianity. All of us fall victim to a greater or lesser degree to the winds of doctrine that blow and to the climate that is established in the Christian community.

The Christian community always sounds like there's this vague thing out there, but we associate with believers. It's personal. We know believers.

We talk with believers. We hear them. We read their books.

We see their interviews. We come across magazine articles and so forth. And there's a climate when we think about our brethren in Christ and there's a generally accepted view of our life as believers.

Think about that climate and think about what Paul says here. How wide is the gulf between the modern-day emphasis in most of our Christianity on let's go out and make an impact on some other people. Let's go help them with their problems.

Look at the problems they've got. Look at those terrible problems. Let's go help them.

God is out there trying to rescue them. Let's go help him. And it's a constantly outward-looking focus, missing the previous requirement for inner transformation.

And it is both overtly and subtly stated throughout the Scriptures. You can see it here. What are we to be reminded of? What am I supposed to remind you of when we come to the banquet table of the Word of God? Subjection to the framework that God has established, the framework of authority.

We've just seen this in Colossians, the relationship between wives and husbands, between parents and children, between slaves and masters, employers and employees. Whatever the structure, and most of us are aware of the structure. We don't have near as much difficulty understanding it as we do functioning within it.

Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities. Remember who the rulers and authorities are, by the way, at this time. This is the Roman government, which is by right of conquest imposed itself on these people, whether they are Greeks or Hebrews, it doesn't matter.

They've all been conquered by Rome. To obey, to be obedient. Now this pretty well extinguishes the idea that civil disobedience is a means of implementing moral right.

And we have a lot of believers who are involved in this who condone it. The only time they start to try to draw a line is when they see some of their most extreme brethren shooting abortion doctors and bombing clinics and otherwise committing gross acts of wrong. But there are some believers who don't even really see much wrong with that.

They say, well, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life. Of course, there's a multitude of theological problems with that. But to obey, to be ready for every good work.

How are you ready for every good work? Is there any verse of scripture you can think of that talks about being fully equipped for every good work? All scripture is God-breathed and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, so that the man of God may become mature, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. To speak evil of no one. We probably don't spend enough time monitoring our conversation.

We don't just point the finger and say, evil, evil, evil. They showed, I didn't watch it, but they apparently had the movie on last night, The Scarlet Letter. I read the book, didn't

see the movie.

But you will recall that that novel, the point of it is the self-righteousness and the righteous indignation of people who, as the story progresses, are found to be far more corrupt than the woman they pin The Scarlet Letter on as an adulteress. And this is what we do to ourselves. We indict ourselves and we are not careful about how we speak about others in conversation.

And we don't just come out, we don't pin the big red A on someone. It's what we tell and how we tell it and the way we present people. Paul tells Titus, I want you to affirm these things constantly.

You know why these have to be affirmed constantly? Because we constantly forget. We constantly fail in these areas. And the things that have to be constantly affirmed are the ones that we need reminder of.

To speak evil of no one. Over in James it says, A man who can bridle his tongue has brought his entire body into subjection. Which is saying a lot.

To be peaceable. That is a small statement that carries a lot of baggage. Because to be peaceable a lot of times means absorbing wrongs.

Absorbing injustice. Long suffering. Temperance.

Self-control. The ability to control oneself and not rise up in reaction. But you will notice what is the common theme in all of these? These are works that God accomplishes in our soul through his word.

And this is our goal. This is our calling. And this is our mission.

And we constantly need to be reminded. Because everything else in the world is constantly heading us a different direction. We are encouraged.

And I think Satan is pleased. However much a hand he has in it. It delights him to see us forget the primary mission.

Which is God at work within us. And to distract us with getting our noses in everybody else's business. And looking at the faults of others.

You can't really speak evil of someone else unless you have been noticing their faults and failures. And musing about it in your mind. And shaking your head and tsk-tsk and so forth.

And it's easy for that to leak out in conversation. Because it's been internally milling about in our minds. Speak evil of no one.

To be peaceable. To be gentle. The Bible has a lot to say about soft answers and gentleness as a fruit of the spirit.

It isn't something that we come by naturally. In cases where we tend to want to respond with hostility. Showing humility to all men.

What is the situation where it is hardest to show humility? It's around somebody else who is not showing humility. If you think about when do you feel defensive? When do you feel the need to get drawn into one-upsmanship? Or to say, well, my problem is just as bad as yours. Or my situation is just as good as yours.

There's lots of areas I'll leave to your imagination about how that applies. But it's when we're around other people that we're most tempted to lose our perspective as being recipients of God's grace. And everything that we have, we have received from God.

The first reaction is defensiveness. And then the second reaction is loss of humility. We feel like we're disadvantaged.

We've been diminished somehow in someone's eyes. The first thing we want to do is try to build ourselves up. And that's not humility.

Humility is recognizing that it is God who has had compassion on us. And not to be drawn into that. We ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.

Once again, this is an inward condition. The kindness and love of God appeared. Now, here's where we get a great contrast.

Verse 5, one of the standard memory verses. Not by works of righteousness, which we have done, but according to his mercy, he saved us. But we don't often memorize the phrase at the end of verse 4. When the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, that kindness and love appeared not by works of righteousness, which we have done, but according to his mercy.

God didn't look down and say, wow, look at that righteous person down there. I think I'll go down and have mercy on them. So, in verse 4 and 5, Paul is saying, it's not our works of righteousness that qualify us for God's grace and God's compassion.

It's his mercy that saved us. And so, Paul seems to be diminishing and deemphasizing works of righteousness. He says, don't think your works of righteousness are what brought God's mercy to you.

It's God's compassion that saved you. But then, you get down to verse 8. He says, affirm these things constantly so that those who have believed in God will be careful to maintain good works. So, good works are an important part of our life.

Obedience is an important part of our life. Submission to authority. Gentleness.

Not speaking evil. These things are all obedience. And these are essential.

This is a part of our calling. But, Paul puts it in a wonderful perspective because this is not what sparks or brings to us the grace and the compassion of God. It's not by works of righteousness that we have done.

It's his mercy. So, it's the mercy of God that saves us. But that should be a motivation to us for good works.

If we have difficulty in these areas, what do you do if you say, boy, I've really got a hard time with speaking evil. I've really got a hard time with authority. I've really got a hard time with showing humility to all men.

I constantly find myself on the defensive and I get all out of whack. Or any of these other areas where we know we should be transformed and we're not. We say, it just seems like time goes on and I study the word of God and I don't seem to be making any improvement in this area.

I find myself not being gentle. I snap and get angry and hurt people with my mouth or whatever it may be. What is the solution? Well, the motivation for our life as believers, the thing that sparks our life of faith and our operation in love is hope.

You remember the triad of Christian virtues, faith, hope and love. Hope is the motivation. What does hope do? Hope puts our eyes on Christ, on his appearing, on the judgment, on our eternal future, on the fact that this life is preparation.

And on the fact that every day, every moment of our lives is evaluated and it's going to make a difference. It puts our eyes on God. As soon as we start looking at God, we recognize that it is his mercy that saved us.

We are not our own. We are bought with a price and we have to submit ourselves to that perspective. It is an act of submission.

We say, I'm not going to sit here and act like I'm the captain of my own ship and master of my own fate. We consciously have to say, I am here because of the grace of God. God saved me for a purpose and it's my responsibility to remember who I am and why I'm here.

It's not my righteousness. It's not my greatness. It's not my standing and my value as a person that got me to this place.

It's the mercy and the grace of God. As soon as we start thinking about the grace of God, you remember the great failure of the servant in Jesus' parable. The unmerciful servant, he had a debt to his master and the master forgave him.

No merit on his own. It was the mercy of the master. He forgave him this huge debt.

But there was another servant that owed him a paltry sum and he wouldn't forgive that servant. The master came back in wrath and said, you've not forgiven your little underling servant there. You are not forgiven.

He clapped him in the poor house until he should pay every penny. He forgot the grace of his master. He forgot the mercy of his master.

He wasn't touched by it. He wasn't motivated by it. That's our challenge.

When we look at God and are reminded of what God has done for us in grace, that gives us the motivation. That's a piece of the Word of God. There's power in that knowledge that will transform our inner landscape and our perspective and will give us the mercy and the love and the gentleness and all of these other things.

This is perspective. This is nature of soul. We can't create it within ourselves, but we can choose to be people who are being reformed in the image of our maker.

That's the decision we have to make. Sometimes we just want to try to remake ourselves. We say, I see this flaw in myself.

I see this failure in myself. I've got to do better. I've got to change that.

We need to focus on our Lord. We need to focus on the truth of the Word of God because that is what thoroughly equips us for these good works. That's what transforms us.

It washes us and renews us. That washing of regeneration, the renewing of the Holy Spirit. This is an ongoing process, but we have to be submissive to it.

It's the first element of submission to the plan and the purpose of God. Then in verse 7, having been justified. Once we see that we've been justified, not by anything we've done, but according to God's mercy, that establishes perspective.

Having been justified and keeping that awareness in the front of our minds, that creates humility, knowing that we had no merit. Now we can become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. That according to says there are conditions.

We are heirs according to promise. We are heirs according to the hope of eternal life. We can inherit if we pursue this calling and maintain this perspective.

It's a faithful saying. Paul says, I want you to affirm it constantly so that the ones who have believed in God and have received that mercy might be careful. This is a conditional.

If they keep this in their minds, if you keep it in front of them, this is what's going to give

them the possibility. This is a potential to be diligent, to maintain good works. The good works have already been defined up in the front, and it's not per se beneficial outward acts of kindness and compassion to others, although it can be expressed in that way.

It's our inner transformation. It's the fruit of the Spirit. That is good works, zealous of good works.

These things are good and profitable to men. The things that happened in the first part of this chapter in our souls are good and profitable to men. If you want to be good and profitable to others, be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

The first step is to focus on the grace of God. When we are unmerciful, when we are callous, when we are insensitive, when we work evil toward others, when we sin against each other, the first thing we have done is take our eyes off of God and off of his grace and on ourselves as recipients of his grace. This is the very first thing.

We lose our perspective. Paul says, Exhort and teach these things. Constantly affirm them.

In that light, as we turn now back to Genesis chapter 19, we're going to see a fascinating illustration of these principles in the Old Testament. As we resume in Genesis chapter 19, last time we saw the events that took place with the visit of the two messengers to Lot. The third and central figure in this party of three that comes to earth in incarnate form, capable of sitting, eating, walking, looking, does not go to Lot.

The other two do. We saw the details of this last time. There is no greater literature.

It should not surprise us, I guess, that the literary workings in the word of God are just extraordinary. You see the interplay in the story between the men of Sodom who are outside, totally controlled by their desires. They see these apparently attractive visitors and must have them.

Young and old, rich and poor, from every part of the city, they come and they clamor outside the door. Lot, as we're going to see this morning in the second half of this chapter, is equally victim to his feelings, his fears, his ideas, and even in the presence of direct communication from God. How many people have had direct divine visitation? What would you think? People have written songs about this, but I don't think it's really happened.

Into your yard, into your house, walks an incarnate divine messenger. An angel from God comes in and communicates the will of God and what is about to happen to you. I have often thought it's one thing to see the will of God and try to ascertain what one should do by studying the word of God, but wouldn't it be great sometimes when you're facing a dilemma or you're not real sure, you've got two or three choices and you feel like it's really critical, it's the turning point in your life, if God could just appear and say, this is

what you need to do.

And you think, oh, great. No doubt, no second guessing. Don't have to wonder if you misunderstood the promise or the verse or if nature is confusing you somehow and you haven't really made the right decision.

Here's God. Here's a messenger from God. Walks in and says, Sam, do this.

Oh, 100% certainty on the will of God. What a great thing. Well, Lot gets that and what does he do with it? Let's take a look.

Look at verse 12 of chapter 19 of Genesis. The men said to Lot, have you anyone else here? We've already seen that that son-in-law, you can just put a line through that. It crept up from a following verse.

Your sons, your daughters, whomever you have in the city. And sons here means his sons-in-law. These who marry his daughters, that's who they're talking about.

They are treated as already married even though they are actually engaged, these daughters of Lot. There are people who would argue with me, I believe that Lot has a total of two offspring in the city of Sodom. He has his two daughters.

And the reference to sons here is a reference to his prospective sons-in-law. But the principle is stated in verse 12. Your sons, your daughters, whomever you have in the city, take them out of this place.

And sons and daughters is a generic reference to your next generation kinfolks. This is the direct word of God. We've already seen Lot recognizes that these men are extraordinary.

He has treated them in an extraordinary manner. He has risked his life on their behalf in the first part of the chapter. Now they say, take them out of this place for we will destroy this place because the outcry against them has grown great before the face of the Lord.

If there was any doubt or any uncertainty as to where these men have come from or what their mission is, it has now been explicitly stated to Lot. Which, by the way, has not happened until this point. You remember the whole episode.

They come in. They want to stay in the square. He says, come to my house.

He feeds them a banquet. Clamor outside. Lot goes outside.

Slams the door behind him. Pleads with the crowd. They reject him and abuse him.

The men reach out, grab him, pull him inside and shut the door. The men outside are struck with a kind of blindness which makes it impossible for them to find what they are

looking for. They can see.

They can talk. They can mill about. They are not in shock that they are in total blindness and so forth.

They just can't find what they are looking for. It's an unusual word for blindness. That's what it means.

So, he's already seen this supernatural deliverance. These men now explicitly say, we're from God. We're here to destroy the city.

Get your people and tell them to get out. 100% certainty about the will of God. This is a direct communication.

What does Lot do with it? The Lord has sent us to destroy it. So, Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who had married his daughters, and he implements the first part of the instructions. He goes to his sons-in-law, who had married his daughters, or who were to marry his daughters actually, and said, get up.

Get out of this place, for the Lord will destroy this city. But to his sons-in-law, he seemed to be joking. A better translation would be, he was a figure of fun.

He made them laugh. They didn't think he was telling them a joke to be mirthful or humorous. They thought it was laughable.

He was so ridiculous that it was hysterically funny to them, that he had this idea. When the morning dawned, the angels urged Lot to hurry, saying, arise, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be consumed in the punishment of the city. He doesn't plead with his wife and he doesn't plead with his daughters, does he? They were in the house.

While he lingered, the men took hold of his hand, his wife's hand, the hands of his two daughters, the Lord being merciful to him. Remember Titus 3? They brought him out and set him outside the city. They took hold of their hands, the Lord being merciful to him, they brought him out and set him outside the city.

He really has very little choice here, does he? He doesn't act, they act on his behalf. It came to pass when they had brought them outside that he said, escape for your life, do not look behind you nor stay anywhere in the plain. Escape to the mountains, lest you be destroyed.

Lot said to them, please, no, my lords. Could not be any clearer. Could not be any more explicit or detailed.

And Lot says, no. Oh, no. Now think about this.

Somebody comes and says, somebody from God. Somebody you know is from God. You've always seen them work a miracle.

They say, the city of Dallas is about to be destroyed. There are nukes on the way from Russia coming overhead. God has dispensed them to obliterate the city of Dallas.

Take your wife and your daughters and get out of the town. No. It's just completely mystifying.

Why would Lot say this? What is his problem? We would love to have direct revelation from God. And we like to think if we had it, we would just act on it without hesitation. But here's Lot.

He's a believer. He gets direct revelation from God. And he says, no.

When's the last time we heard someone say no to God? It's in the previous chapter. When God said about this time next year, Sarah's going to have a son. Sarah's in the tent.

She laughs. God says, why does Sarah laugh? And she says, oh, no. I didn't laugh.

If God makes a statement, what are we doing saying no? And we saw in that instance that this is a strong reminder for us when we are convicted by the Holy Spirit in areas where we have failed and where we're not producing the good that we talked about in Titus 3, it's not time to say no. It's not time to get defensive and try to defend ourselves and make explanations and prevaricate and kind of wiggle around. But that's what Sarah does.

That's what Lot is doing here. The doom of the entire plane has just been stated from God, and Lot's wiggling. Lot's squirming.

Oh, no, no, no, no, no. That can't be right. No, I don't want that to happen.

I can't do that. Well, our problem is we don't understand that our revelation from God is just as clear. God has sent his messenger to us in the form of his word.

God has established his messenger within us in the person of the Holy Spirit who leads us into all truth, who makes these things understandable to us, who calls them to our minds. It is just as certain as if we had an incarnate messenger. And it's easy to look at Lot and say that's incomprehensible.

What is the matter with him? What we ought to do is look at ourselves and say, what is the matter with us? We have the word of prophecy made more sure, says in the New Testament. God, the Holy Spirit, God himself, not even a secondary messenger. This is the third person of the Trinity within us speaking, telling us, this is what we should do, this is what we should not do.

He takes the word of God and makes it real and understandable and applicable to us. And we often do the very same thing that Lot does. We say, no, no, no, no, a hundred different ways.

We wiggle and we squirm. Well, what are we after? What are we looking for? How ridiculous do we appear when we do that? We're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to see the outcome in Lot's life.

And we're going to see a couple of New Testament passages that refer back to this. And most importantly, we're going to see what the larger illustration of Lot's experience pictures for us in terms of principles from the word of God and things that ought to make a difference as we live from day to day. But let's pause here and take our break.