

Utterly Lost in Sin

By Don Green

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Titus 3:3

Preached on: Sunday, November 17, 2013

Truth Community Church

4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road

Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

I'd invite you to turn Titus chapter 3. That's where we've come to in our exposition of God's Word. It's so good to see so many of you out on a rainy morning, but for those of you that are with us week by week, you know that we have been going practically, literally, one verse by one verse Sunday by Sunday. And there's a reason for that. What is in this passage of Scripture is so condensed, and it's so full of things that we need to know and appropriate, and we need to keep it down, as it were. We need to be able to retain all of these things. To rush through these would be to miss and to lose out on so much of what we need to live in this fallen world. And what we have in front of us today is certainly no different as we come to verse three of chapter three.

What we saw last week was we saw Paul giving us, we saw the Bible telling us, to malign no one, to be peaceable Christians, and to show every consideration for all men. That we should have a peaceable, quiet disposition to the sinful world around us. And that is certainly contrary to our natural impulses. It is contrary to that which we're stimulated to do by multi-faceted forces, both Christian and non-Christian, in our lives. This is a call to a demeanor that is, frankly, very foreign to the world at large, and it is increasingly foreign to the Christian church in particular. And that grieves my heart as a pastor to know that the church is becoming more known for its politics than it is for its love for the lost.

Now, as we come to chapter three, the apostle Paul writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit gives us a brilliant understanding of why it is impossible for us to be any other way. He shows us why we should be that way, and that's what we're going to start to introduce here today in this message. Go to chapter three verse one. We'll read the first two verses for context, although we're not going to comment on them any further. Paul says, speaking to Titus and telling him how he is to instruct the people of God, he says,

"Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men."

Why Paul? Why should we live that way? Verse three.

"For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another."

We'll stop there for now. Paul here is emphasizing the effect of God's kindness in our lives and showing why it must impact the way that we interact with the unsaved world around us. He goes on and particularly talks about that kindness in verses four through eight. But before he gets to that, he emphasizes what we were like before we ourselves were Christians.

If someone were to ask the question in light of the past two messages, "Why should we be submissive to civil authority? Why should we be kind and gracious toward unsaved people?" The answer is that we were once as lost as they are now. When Paul says, "We also once were foolish ourselves," it is an emphatic "we." He is saying, "We, we ourselves were just like them," and therefore, as we look on them, we see a picture of what we used to be. And if God has been gracious and kind to us and delivered us from that, then we ourselves should show a similar kind of grace that we have already received.

There's a sense in which the Christian lives in two different worlds. In the one sense, in the true spiritual realm we belong to Christ, and we belong to His kingdom. We live under the lordship of our gracious Lord Jesus Christ. We've been bought out of the slavery of sin, and we now live as people free from the condemnation of the law with the glorious hope and future ahead of us. And when we gather together as believers on Sunday morning, we get a little foretaste of what heaven is going to be like. It was a perfect passage of Scripture that Andrew chose to read earlier taking us into heaven, as it were, before we came to the message here today. We live in that realm of spiritual blessing that is permanent and eternal on our lives, and we have our foot firmly planted in that kingdom. But at the same time, we are living that life out now. We haven't yet received the fullness of our inheritance. We're still living it out in the midst of a world that is in rebellion that is against God and there is going to be inevitable tension as a result of that.

Well, how are we to think about that? How are we to approach it? How can we successfully live as Spirit-filled Christians filled with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and gentleness, and self-control? How can we live like that in the midst of such utter provocations by a sinful and rebellious world around us? Well, listen: Paul here today is going to take us back into the past, back into our life before Christ, and remind us of what we used to be like. As he does that, he not only shows us what we used to be like, he shows us what all of the world is like now, what all of unsaved humanity, collectively and individually, is like and the picture that he paints here is one of darkness. It's one of sorrow. It's one of sin. It's one of rebellion. It's one of enslavement. And we have to take the time to take this in carefully. We of all people need this to settle deeply into our hearts and so we're not going to rush through and try to cover a half dozen verses just because that is what they tell you in seminary to do. We need to understand this to live as people of God. I'm telling you this is a very, very important verse for us to become the kind of people that God wants us to be.

Now, it's very common for those of us that have been around the Bible for any length of time, almost every one of you could quickly quote Romans 3:23 which says, "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." That's a summary statement of the condition of humanity and of what we used to be like. And the fact is that we still sin, even as believers and as believers we still fall short of God's glory. That is a wonderful verse for us to have anchored in our minds. Yet, what we're going to see here from Titus 3:3 is that that's a summary statement. It's one thing to say that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Watch this, we're about to pivot into something really important here: it's another thing to explain in detail what that means and what that looks like. It's one thing to say that someone has cancer, it's another thing to go through what the symptoms of that are and what the effects on the body of that is going to be. To say you have cancer is somewhat a sterile statement until you start to understand the ravages that it takes on the body. Well, when we say that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, what we need to do is go a step further which doesn't always happen. We need to go a step further and describe the ravages that that has on the sinful soul. We need to understand what it was that we were delivered from if we're going to take salvation seriously. We need to understand in detail what it is that is animating all of our unsaved circle of influence, the world that is around us. This is the only way that we're going to understand what we were delivered from and why the world is as it is today. This is individual. This is collective. And it's very important for us to deal with it carefully.

We're going to see six characteristics of unsaved humanity here from this verse. We're seeing six characteristics of what you and I used to be like as unbelievers. For those of you who are not in Christ, what God is about to do, for those of you that are not Christians, what He is about to do is He is about to take a spiritual scalpel and just slice you down the middle and open up what you are for everyone to see. It would be good for you if you are not a Christian to listen to this carefully and realize how accurately Scripture diagnoses the state of your soul, so that you would learn to run to this wonderful Christ that we have been singing about all morning. So that you would flee from sin in order to come to true salvation.

What does Paul have to say? What were we like? What are unsaved men like today? Look at verse three with me. I'll read it once more, and then we'll go through and we'll kind of unpack it phrase by phrase. Paul says, "For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another." You have to appreciate the humility of the apostle Paul that he includes himself in that statement. I mean, he's the apostle. There is on earth no higher authority than him at the time that he wrote this. He was the apostle. He was the direct representative of Christ, and yet he says, "I and you used to be like this." And Paul was always eager, willing, to describe that about himself. Over in 1 Timothy, you don't need to turn there, but he said, "I formerly was a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and a violent aggressor. I was hostile to the church of Christ." And so as Paul writes here in chapter three verse three, he's giving a bit of autobiography about his own spiritual life. In Romans chapter seven, he talks about how he was deceived by coveting of every kind,

inside and outside. He was a wicked man, even though he conformed to the outward requirements of the Judaism of the first century. He knew that he was sinful. He was mindful of it, and it determined the way that he thought about the Gospel. It determined the way that he preached. It determined the way in which he viewed sinners around him. And so what we're about to see, speaking to you as Christians, is an explanation of your life before Christ and what it is that you're delivered from and this passage, perhaps like no other that I have ever taught on, and I haven't taught on all of the Bible by any means, but perhaps like no other verse of Scripture that comes immediately to my mind, explains the world that we see today in the twenty first century.

Let's take a look at it. There are six characteristics of the unsaved man that we're going to see here. Number one, the first characteristic for you to see is that sinners, referring to unsaved people, sinners are foolish. They're foolish people. That's what Paul says. "We also once were foolish." What does that mean? Well, Scripture says in Psalm 14, Psalm 53 that, "The fool has said in his heart that there is no God." In this context, what Paul is saying is that sinners are blind to spiritual truth. They are hostile to God. They are hostile to His law. They do not understand spiritual truth, and they suppress the truth that they do see around them. Their minds are black. They do not understand. They're incapable of understanding, and when a little bit of light comes in they shut the shades, and they close it out so that it cannot expose the things that are in them and around them. They are hostile to the very nature of a holy God. They're foolish.

Turn over to Romans 1, a passage that we've referred to in passing over many times. They're foolish. And by the way, just to keep the context in mind as you're turning there, we're saying this, as hard as it is for people to put this together in their minds, we're saying this in a spirit of gentleness and kindness. We're not unkind by speaking the truth about what men apart from Christ are like, any more than a doctor who gives you an accurate physical diagnosis is being unkind so that he can tell you how you can get better. Romans 1:18. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." They hold it down. Their conscience wants the floor to speak, and they deny the microphone to their conscience so that it cannot speak to their mind. They suppress it. Verse 19, "Because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse."

Stop right there. Understand that the darkness in which sinners live, the darkness of their minds is a culpable darkness. In one sense they are victims of sin, but they are also active participants in it. They are active participants in suppressing the truth. They are active participants in pulling the shades so that the light won't get in. They're culpable. They are without excuse, and that was you and me too before Christ.

Verse 21. "For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations," and here it is, "and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of

the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures." Sinners are foolish. They are hostile to the Word of God both written in the Scriptures; they are hostile to the Word of God as He is revealed in our Lord Jesus Christ. And that was what you and I were like, foolish, blind, darkened.

And for those of you that are here and that you're not in Christ, one of the ways in which your foolishness manifests itself, let's just be really clear, and direct, and specific here: one of the ways in which your foolishness manifests itself is your hostility to the Scriptures, your unwillingness to receive it, your unwillingness to read it. You have no interest in it. Well, that is foolish! If the God of creation has spoken in His Word, why would we as a creature close our minds to it, and reject it, and be hostile to it, and want nothing to do with it? Why would we take it, as it were, and fling it across the room to get it as far away from our minds as we possibly could? Why would we do that? A good and gracious God has spoken, and you want no part of it? Please. Let's just be honest. Let's be scriptural in our assessment about it: that is foolish. That is culpable foolishness.

You're guilty when you're like that, and that, beloved, Paul is making the point that you and I were both like that before we were saved. That's exactly what we were like. I remember literally doing what I just described, taking a Bible and flinging it across the room, because I wanted nothing to do with it. They're foolish. They're blind. Here's a question then: how will a blind man ever see truth? Point number two this morning: sinners are disobedient. They are disobedient. Look at verse three. We'll just kind of take this word by word and try not to miss anything. Paul says, "We also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient." Sinners are predisposed, they are hardwired toward rebellion. We don't need any lesson in that other than than being parents and realizing that as soon as infants grow up to a capacity where they're able to actually express themselves, they are manifesting rebellion at one stage or another. None of you as parents taught your children to disobey except, perhaps, through your own personal example. But you didn't sit them down and instruct them, "Here is how to be disobedient." It just came naturally out of their heart. It is because that's the way they are from birth. And then as life goes on, and as they mature, that disobedience and rebellion simply becomes more sophisticated in its expression. That's all.

Sinners are disposed toward rebellion. They want independence. It's why people hate civil authority. It's why teachers have trouble controlling their classrooms. It's why parents have trouble with their children being hostile toward them and smart mouthed toward them. It's because there's so much rebellion and disobedience imbedded in the human heart. That's why. They want independence. They do not want Christ to reign over them.

Now, let's think carefully here. Let's be perceptive in the way that we think about this. This sinful disobedience, this rebellion of sin, manifests itself in different ways. It's not that every sinner is just outwardly hostile and shaking his fist at everybody that's around him. Do you remember the story of the prodigal son? Of course you do. From Luke chapter 15. You had the flagrant rebel in that story who demanded his inheritance, and

went out, and spent it in lascivious living, and was openly hostile to his father. Demanding his inheritance, and in essence, saying, "I'd rather that you were dead." That's a pretty outward manifestation of rebellion. Well look, the other son in that story who doesn't get quite as much attention because it's not as dramatic, he was equally sinful. But rather than being outwardly rebellious, his was a simmering resentment. He wasn't content to live under the father's authority. He didn't rejoice when his prodigal brother came back. It all came out, and he said, "Look! Why am I not treated right?" Two extremes with everything in between in the course of humanity: one outwardly rebellious, one inwardly resentful. Both of them had in their spiritual DNA rebellion hardwired into them. There wasn't a real love for their father. And for those of you who, those young people of you in your teens, pre-teen years, let's not pretend that mere outward compliance is a mark of a pure heart if in your heart there is internal resentment against the Word of God, the authority of your parents, the things that your teachers ask you to do. If there is inward resentment in that, that's a spirit of disobedience, and you can't paint over that. You can't fix moldy walls by just putting a new coat of paint on it. Many children who grew up in Christian homes will testify to that after the fact.

How many of us have heard testimonies of genuine Christian adults saying, "I looked like a good kid on the outside, but on the inside it was completely different." Well, that's rebellion. That's the Spirit of God slicing it open and laying it open for us to see. Good behavior is not necessarily a mark of the lack of a spirit of disobedience. The resentment, the hostility toward parents, the smart mouth, all of those things are simply an expression of what Paul says sin is like.

We asked the question: how will a blind man see the truth in light of this disobedience? How will a rebel ever submit to Christ? How will someone that is through and through a rebel and resentful toward authority, how will a rebel ever come to submit himself to Christ? We're starting to talk about things that are impossible.

Point number three. Sinners are foolish. Sinners are disobedient. Point number three, sinners are deceived. They're deceived. Look at verse three with me. It just kinds of adds, it kind of builds on one another, doesn't it? "For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived." I won't ask for a show of hands here, because I don't like to do that in public. I think it's a cheap stunt. But I do ask the question for you to respond to personally in your own heart, in your own self-understanding. It's so good to see so many of you here today. How many of you thought that you were Christians before you actually were converted? How many of you would say, said, "I'm a Christian," and came to find out later that that wasn't true, that you were not really born again? Part of the reason that you could say that is because you were locked into spiritual deception. You were self-deceived, and you had plenty of people, both secular and spiritual, reaffirming you in your self-deception. You claimed to be a Christian, and yet you had no regard for the Word of God. You claimed to be a Christian, but you prayed only when you wanted something, not out of a sincere response of gratitude and giving glory to God. You just wanted God to give you what you wanted. It was all entirely self-centered.

You know why I can speak with such specificity about that, right? I'm being autobiographical here. But what was true of me was true of you too. Sinners are the dupes of false teachers. And not only are they self-deceived, they want teachers as Paul says, "They accumulate teachers according to their own desires, teachers that will scratch their itching ears." No shortage of men who want to cash in on your deception. And so we're the dupes of false teachers. Sinners live in the realm of spiritual deception. Here is the essence of deception: they think that the truth is one thing when actually, in reality, it is something completely different. You thought that you were a Christian, but you were not. You thought, maybe you didn't think about it in terms of being a Christian, but you thought, "I'm on my way to heaven, because I'm a pretty good person. I keep the rules. I'm not as bad as I could be. I'm better than So-and-so." All of that which permeates the way society thinks spiritually, if they think spiritually at all, is just a mark of the utter dark black deception that has descended upon our human race since the fall of Adam. Organized religion teaches them that they can obtain heaven through their own good conduct. Public education teaches them self-esteem. People think that God is less holy than He really is, and they think that they are more righteous than they really are, and somewhere in the middle they meet up and meet the standard. That's all such a profound deception. Oh beloved, do you understand that there is no way humanly possible to make people see that? If your mind is so given over to deception, how do you ever get the truth into it? Are they just supposed to turn on a light switch, twist their ear, and suddenly their brain starts to think right? It doesn't work that way. How will a blind man see the truth? How will a rebel submit to Christ? How will a thoroughly deceived man recognize truth when he sees it?

Fourthly, sinners are enslaved. Sinners are enslaved. Look at verse three with me again. This is kind of fun, in one sense, just to go through this verse word by word is what I mean by that, not fun that we're talking about such dark things and dark topics. But what's enjoyable about it, let's put it this way, I want you to understand why I said that, what's enjoyable about it is to come to the Scriptures and find something that finally tells us the truth. That's a joy. That's a privilege. That's a good thing. To be able to finally drink some pure water instead of from the polluted streams that are offered to us day by day, moment by moment, and anywhere else that we look.

"For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived," here it is, "enslaved to various lusts and pleasures." The Bible describes unsaved people, unsaved men and women, unsaved boys and girls, as being under the power of internal forces and internal desires that they can't control that impel them to think, and act, and speak in ways that are simply wrong and yet, here they are unable to free themselves from it. Sinners are controlled by their desires. Why is it that you think that it is so easy for men to be drawn into online immorality? Why is that they just go to that and stay there? Why is it? Why is it, especially in speaking of what is particularly true in northern Kentucky, why is it that men, and women, and young people are so easily brought in to have their first shot of heroin just because it's free, and then watch their lives just self-destruct right in front of them? Why is that? It's because they are slaves to wicked desires. They want that which is sinful. They want that which is illegal. They want that which will submit their body to chemical abuse. Sinful desires own them. It directs them into wickedness, even if it

destroys their lives. It's entirely the wrong question when somebody is trapped in sin to say, "What were you thinking?" It's not rational. That's the point! If people were thinking rationally, they would avoid all of this stuff, because it's all well known to be so self-destructive. Why do they do it anyway? It's obvious. It's because they're not controlled by good, clear thinking. They're controlled by wicked desires that make them want sin and to pursue after it. They think it's freedom. In reality, it is slavery. Their innermost man is owned by something bigger, stronger, and more wicked than they.

Now let's make something clear at this point: the lusts that enslave men are of various kinds. What controlled you in your unsaved state is different than what controlled me in my unsaved state probably. The sinful desires, the anger, the resentment, all of those things that were at work in your heart might be different than what was true of the person sitting next to you. Here is the really important point if this is going to humble us like Scripture intends it to do. Here is what we must understand. Here is why we should be humble when we see people enslaved in sin that does not particularly tempt us. You, perhaps, have not committed their sins. You, perhaps, have not been into the substance stuff and all of the other things. You haven't done that. That doesn't give you any room for pride, because you're not thinking about it right. If we're thinking about it rightly, if we're seeing ourselves in light of the Word of God, if we're seeing ourselves vertically before a holy God instead of comparing ourselves to men, we'll think about it this way. "Yeah, you know what? I haven't committed his sins. You know what else? There is another side to that equation. He hasn't committed mine."

That sinner that you're so quick to condemn because of their profligate lifestyle, if they were given voice to speak, they might very well say, "Yeah, but you know what? I don't malign people. I'm not proud of what I've done in life. I'm not unkind like you are." You see, we have to see it this way. This may be one of the most important things that I've said throughout the course of the book of Titus is that we have to see we were all under the condemnation of sin. That umbrella is so comprehensive it covers us all so much, individually and collectively, that there is no getting out from under it. The fact that someone is under a different portion of the umbrella of sin than you were doesn't make you better than them. It just means that you're proud even of the way that your sin manifests itself. Isn't that a terrible thing to think about? We should be oh so conscious of our own sin before God, like Paul said, "We ourselves once were like this," that it completely humbles the way that we view others that are still in sin. You can know that you are starting to grasp this when you find your critical spirit strangely restrained, subdued, by a conscious simultaneous recognition, "I'm a sinner too." When you find yourself understanding and believing that truly there but for the grace of God go I, we must think that way, because sinners are enslaved, and we once were slaves too of desires that mastered us instead of vice versa.

So we ask another question: how can a slave make himself free? How can a blind man see the truth? How can a deceived man find the truth? How can the rebel become obedient? How can a slave become free? All of these things start to weigh upon us as we start to think through the true condition of lost humanity. More and more you should start thinking if you're a Christian, as you start to follow the logic of what Paul is saying here,

it should start increasingly dawning on you, "There was nothing that I could have done to get out from under that domination of sin. I didn't save myself. I did not deliver myself from my own sin." Because the answers to these questions are obvious.

Point number five. We've said that sinners are foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved. Fifthly, sinners live wickedly. Look at verse three again. "For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy." This describes a lifestyle of wickedness and jealousy. I won't spend a lot of time trying to expound on this further. Let's just put it this way: wickedness wishes evil upon people. That's wicked. That's wicked to wish evil and calamity on other people. "I hope he dies. I hope he gets what he's got coming to him." Envy resents the good that they have. "Why does he have that, and I don't? I want that." I know we don't talk that way, and what Scripture is doing is it's drilling down to that hidden part of the sinner's heart that only they really see, and that they would never give voice to because it's still somewhat socially unacceptable, but it's the mark of a sinful heart. Wickedness and jealousy. Their disposition at root is selfish. It's why they so easily curse the other driver in traffic. They resent someone else's success, and they try to demean it or diminish it. "Oh, he's not so good. Who does he think he is? Why is he there and not me?" Wickedness. Envious.

We ask another question: how can a wicked man become righteous? How can he be righteous when this is woven through every fiber of his heart, this sinful disobedience, rebellion, deception, enslavement, how can he ever get free from that? How can a man that is in chains, sealed in a casket buried six feet under, ever get out from that condition? He can't. It's impossible for man to relieve himself from that kind of physical entrapment. Brothers and sisters in Christ, we were worse off than that in our hearts. We were so enslaved, so deceived.

Final point here, number six. Final for delineating these characteristics of unsaved men. There's two separate words, but I'm going to join them, because they're so parallel to each other. Let's look at verse three one more time. "For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another." There is a reciprocal hostility in human relationships. Why is the divorce rate so high? Why is mass murder so common? Why does cage fighting appeal to the masses to the extent that they will spend forty, fifty, a hundred dollars on Pay-per-view just to watch open hostility expressed man on man? Why would they do that? What kind of right thinking rational person would embrace that? Why is bloodshed such an easy way to make a movie that will make millions and millions of dollars? Why? It's because that's what they're comfortable with. It's because it's what they love. People can't get along, because they hate each other. That's why!

Beloved, please let's not make the mistake of thinking that somehow there's a segment, the segment that we're in is different from the segment that we oppose. This hostility, this hatred is true of democrats. It's true of republicans. It's true of Jews. It's true of Arabs. It's true of whites. It's true of blacks. It's true of everybody. This is the condition of humanity. And so we must, if we're going to be biblical Christians, we must separate ourselves from

that proud, sinful thinking that says, "My group is at least a little bit better than theirs." No! Paul says, "We were all like this!" The human race is ruined, and you and I are individually part of it. Cross someone's path, say an unkind word to them, and watch the venom come out. You know that's true. This is how unbelievers relate to one another. If you want to see another example of it, you sometimes you just have such an abundance of illustrations that it's an embarrassment of riches in one sense. Go to the comment section of any mildly controversial internet article and watch the venom spew because they love to speak to each other that way.

Well, look, that's a symptom of something worse. It's that sinners are hateful, and they hate one another. And you and I were just like that. These conditions, the foolishness, the disobedience, the deception, the enslavement, the wickedness, the hatred, it's all morally culpable. How does a man of hate find the God of love? He doesn't. He doesn't. He cannot do that. What Scripture says is true. When Scripture gets into the details of what sinful men are like, what you and I used to be like, it makes it obvious that there is nothing that a man can do to deliver himself from that condition. "Not only can he not, he would not if he could," Jesus said. He said, "They refuse to come to the light, because they love the darkness and stay away lest their evil deeds be exposed." We are all crushed under the conviction of this, every one of us.

Now, if you're a Christian here today, we're making a little pivot now, we're getting into the light after having been so much in the diagnosis of the darkness, if you're a Christian here today it can only mean one thing. It can't mean anything else. It can't mean that you were smarter than the next guy, because you were deceived too. It can't be that you were more inclined to a God of love, because you were hateful too. It can't be that you were more free from sinful desires, because, well, we know that's not true. Let's not even go there. It can't be that you were so righteous, because there is none righteous, no not one. It can't be that you were just so loving and gracious that God just had to have you. That's not true! And so how is it then that you find yourself in the realm of grace today as a Christian? It's because a gracious God, seeing nothing of merit in you, but from His own free kindness and mercy, delighted to show kindness to you that you did not deserve.

You could not have done it on your own. That is the point of what Paul says in verse four. Look at it with me. Here we were wrapped up in the diagnosis of verse three. This is what we once were, but now by utter contrast, verse four, "But." "But," by contrast, "But," despite your sinfulness, something else outside intervened. What was that? Verse four. In your sin and degradation the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared. He saved us. Oh, sweet blessed words to the ear of a Christian! He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness. That could never be true. Because of what he just said in verse three, no one will ever claim to be in heaven because of anything that they had done in righteousness. That can't be it. He saved us, not by what we did, but according to His mercy.

We'll look at these verses more next week. "By the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of

eternal life." Do you see the attributes of God on full display? We've got these black curtains in back now. Anything that was white on them would jump out by contrast. In contrast to the black backdrop of your soul, the mercy of God shines forth by the great contrast of it. In contrast to all of your sin in verse three, your salvation has put the kindness, the love, the mercy, the grace of God on full display. Nothing else could explain it. If you're a Christian today, it's not based on anything that you've done or anything that you were. It's because outside of you, it pleased God to show mercy to you in your undeserving condition. We were formally lost and degenerate ourselves, but now we've been saved. Some of the world God hasn't saved them yet, and so they're lost, and they're degenerate, and they fit the profile that Paul was giving us here in verse three. God showed kindness to us. It's incomprehensible.

Now, beloved, here's Paul whole point in saying everything that he said. Remember how this verse three started out. Look at the start of verse three. It says, "For." He's connecting what we've been looking at today with what he said earlier. What's the bridge? What's the connection? He says, "Be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men." Here's the bridge, because let me remind you of what you used to be like before the grace of God showered down upon your soul. You see, a biblical understanding of what you used to be completely changes the way you view yourself and the way you view the world around you. And in closing I'm going to do these rapid fire staccato like. I'm going to give you six impacts that all of this should have. It's going to take us five minutes maybe to say to them, and it's going to take us the rest of our lives to implement them the way that we should.

What should we be like when we remember the grace of God poured down vertically upon us as we look out among men around us, an unsaved world lost, hostile, rejecting everything that we hold dear, seeking to suppress it and flaunting more and more their own depravity for everyone to see. How should we think and respond? What kind of people should we be? First of all, we should be humbled. We should be humbled. Profoundly humbled. Remember your past and pour contempt on any remaining remnants of present pride that's in your soul. Beloved, it's true. There but for the grace of God, there you go. The world that you are prone and tempted to hate, and condemn, and judge is where you'd be. You'd be one of them but for this mercy that God has shown to you.

Secondly, we should be humbled, secondly we should be grateful. We have been delivered from that ugly condition and spared of the eternal consequences that it deserved. "I am so glad that I am not the man that I used to be. I'm so glad that Christ changed me, made me a new creature, because I hate that old Don Green. I hate him with all of my heart. I'm so grateful," and so should you, if you're a Christian, that you're not what you used to be.

Thirdly, we should be realistic. We should be realistic. If this is what the mass of unsaved humanity is like, then we know in advance that we're going to see foolishness, and hatred, and anger, and wickedness about us all the days of our lives. We're going to see manifestations of that, sometimes from unexpected places but this is the environment in which we live. Of course, we're going to see the products of the environment; be realistic

about it. Unsaved men are not going to support your biblical morality. They're going to be hostile toward it. Okay, let's be realistic about that and not get so bent out of shape when the expected thing happens. We're going to be realistic about it. We don't approve of it. We don't like it, but we're not going to wonder why they don't see it our way. They don't see it our way, because their mind belongs to a completely different realm. They couldn't see it our way if they wanted too.

Fourthly, we should be compassionate. If you believe the biblical teaching about sin, what you were like, what they are like, it will make you compassionate and evangelistic toward the lost. We're humbled. We're grateful. We're realistic. We're compassionate. We can see the situation clearly. We understand what's going on there. We see that they're deceived, enslaved dupes and in danger of eternal judgment. Christian, brother and sister in Christ, that should well up somewhere in your heart a sense of compassion. This is horrible. This is horrible. An eternal soul is on the brink of eternal destruction, and they won't even listen to that which will deliver them. Can't you find some compassion in your heart for that awful condition that was once the mark of you? Oh, we should be compassionate. We should have emotions of mercy in our heart that reflect the mercy that we've previously received.

We should be prayerful, number five. Humbled, grateful, realistic, compassion, prayerful. This is really where it drives you too, these last two points. If what the Bible says is true, that men are so horribly deceived, and enslaved, and disobedient as we have been describing here this morning, and it is true. That's what the Bible says. It can't be false. It's in God's Word. God is true. He can't lie. This is reality. If that's true, then that should make us prayerful. Beloved, I appreciate the role that government has in many ways. The Bible says that government is a restraint on evil, but understand this: we cannot legislate sin out of existence. We can't educate people out of their sin. We can't intimidate people out of their sin. We can't undo the damage that sin has done to the human heart. That is outside the purview of our power and so instead of looking to the weapons of flesh, in a spiritual battle we look to a spiritual solution to a spiritual problem, and we say, "O God who gave me salvation, won't you have mercy on a few more? In fact, God, it would be a really good idea if you showed this kind of mercy to millions more." Be prayerful. They need a work of God in their hearts. Nothing else will help them.

Finally, we should teach God's Word, because only God's Word reveals these things. Only God's Word is the instrument of regeneration, of bringing new life to a dead heart. It's why we do what we do here. God uses His words to work in the hearts of sinners and save them. We must teach them. We must pray for them, whether they listen or not, because it's what Christ has called us to do, "Go and make disciples." It's what we want to do as the natural response of a redeemed heart that says, "O God, if you would just use me as an instrument of a little bit more mercy to some people that are in my circle of influence, then my life would be well lived."

You, beloved, were utterly lost in sin. They, beloved, are still utterly lost in sin. The teaching of sin makes us grateful for the Gospel and gentle toward men. Let's pray together.

Father, we can only say that we are humbled under Your Word. We're grateful. We're realistic. We want to be compassionate, and we want to be prayerful. We want to teach Your Word. Father, embed these things so deeply in our hearts that it would transform our character, our appreciation for the Gospel would be exponentially deepened, and our gentleness, and our kindness toward the lost would be transformed. When we see that sinner in front of us, Lord, we're seeing a picture of what we used to be. If we're not like that anymore, it's because you've been gracious to us. Help us to remember that, that we would become instruments of grace, not merely vessels who have received it. We pray in Christ's name, Amen.

You have been listening to Pastor Don Green from Truth Community Church. For more information about our ministry including Pastor Don's blog and our location and service times, please visit us at truthcommunitychurch.com. You will also find Don's sermon library where you can download free messages on many biblical passages and topics. This message is copyrighted by Don Green. All rights reserved.