

Titus 1:1-4

Growing in the gospel produces godliness for the fame of Christ.

Not all that long ago I learned a lesson in growing citrus. Maybe you are familiar, or maybe you will learn for the first time. But it happened like this.

While watering our trees, we have two kumquats and a lemon tree. On one of the kumquats we noticed a quickly growing new shoot. "Wow, that tree is shooting up!" But there was something off about this branch. It blended into the tree but on closer inspection its stalk had a different shape and the leaves were clustered differently than the rest of the tree.

With some quick google searching we realized it was rootstock. Most citrus is grafted onto a different root system... and if a stock grows from below the graft line, it is not the fruit tree. It is an imposter. And left alone it will take over the tree and produce bitter fruit.

So I quickly ripped the stock off of the tree and remain a vigilant observer of our trees for more.

I have come to realize that like rootstock in citrus trees, there are things in our lives that might try to keep up appearances, look like the real thing, that are determined to take over and ruin fruitfulness and health in us.

Why Titus? I am not as godly as I had hoped I would be!

A letter that helps tend the orchard, to see clearly, and grow right.

This is a short pastoral letter from the apostle Paul to a partner in ministry that has a word for the church on cultivating kingdom reality in the midst of an environment that champions the opposite.

Picture an urban garden - a fertile patch of green and life amongst concrete and steel. Out of place, but beautiful. That is what the church is supposed to be like.

Titus reminds us of this. I need the reminder.

Context - Mid 60's AD between Paul's first imprisonment and a second imprisonment before his execution. We don't know the location of the writing, and despite recent concerns that someone other than Paul wrote it - the church has always maintained that these are the words of the apostle to a pastor he trained and mentored and intentionally left on Crete to establish the church.

Titus, true child in a common faith, gentile, gospel minister, young. While Paul uses ink and paper urging Titus to lead his people deeper into the gospel - he knows it is not for his eyes alone.

Like a nosy thirteen-year-old always over your shoulder reading what's on your screen, the church hears this letter and when they see the exhortations in action they know they are credible, not just the random idea of their pastor.

Likewise, we overhear, intently glancing over the shoulder of Titus to hear what the Spirit would say to us as the church today.

Growing in the gospel produces godliness for the fame of Christ.

Building on this image of cultivating or garden life, the Gospel is the ground, We are meant to grow in it, and Grace is our food.

The Gospel is the ground

Follow the image - good soil, teeming with life, for followers of Jesus it is where we reside, exist.

Titus 1:1 "Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness," (ESV)

The elect, those in Christ. For the sake of their faith, to further their faith and the knowledge of the truth.

As we will see the difficulties in Crete meet their match in this truth.

“The church in Crete was plagued by two problems: licentiousness and legalism (1:10–16). Licentiousness is reckless, godless, rule-free living. Legalism is dutiful, strict, dry living. The first takes advantage of the grace of God, the latter seeks to earn it. Though very different in their expressions, Paul shows that licentiousness and legalism grow from the same root: hope in the flesh for personal fulfillment. The licentious person feeds on the lusts of the flesh; the legalist feeds on pride in his flesh. Both paths result in spiritual fatigue, strife, sin, and eventually, hatred of God.

Paul shows that the answer to both licentiousness and legalism is the gospel. The gospel alone gives the security, love, and joy that the human heart craves. The gospel frees us from captivity to the lusts of the flesh and the need to exalt ourselves above others, as the absolute approval of the only One whose opinion really matters has been given to us as a gift in Christ. He is all we need for everlasting joy.”

It is this truth that stands above other ways - especially the false teaching that will be challenged later in the letter.

Truth here is the gospel. We see it from Paul in his other pastoral letters.

1 Timothy 2:1–6 “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, [2] for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. [3] This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, [4] who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. [5] For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, [6] who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.” (ESV)

Paul is writing for the sake of their faith, he labors to see people saved and the way to rescue is the truth of Jesus. (Gospel)

Not trust in self, not rejection of God, but recognition of our need and his provision.

We live grounded in hope of eternal life, which God promised before the beginning of time, that has been revealed at the proper time as it was preached.

At the proper time” God “manifested” what he had planned from eternity past: what God purposed in eternity through Christ he brought to pass in history through Christ.

Anchored in the promise of God, chosen, given life, rescued.

We don’t move out of this soil. This is where all of life is now for those in Jesus.

That from his finished work on the cross we receive righteousness welcoming us into God’s presence.

And we are meant to grow in it.

We Grow in it

“For the sake of your faith and knowledge of the truth... to further the faith of God’s people...”

Two aspects of growing here we want to notice.

First it is going deeper in the gospel itself. An increase of knowledge of the truth, seeing more of it, the fullness of it.

Many of us first encountered the gospel as an exit ticket. A way to heaven after life was over. Get all of your livin’ out of your system then believe in Jesus and you would have fire insurance.

Because of that we might wonder, isn’t the gospel just for the lost? Isn’t it milk and shouldn’t we move onto the meat of works?

Isn’t the gospel just elementary teachings we mature out of?

Consider **Hebrews 6:1-2** “let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, [2] and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.” (ESV)

This comes after the author laments that the Hebrews should be teachers by now but they are in need of being taught. But it is not a graduating from the gospel that has to occur it is going further in.

“the “elementary teachings” in Hebrews 6 refer to the types and shadows of the old covenant, about which Hebrews says quite a bit (e.g., 8:5; 10:1; see also Col. 2:17). So the exhortation here is not about leaving the gospel behind but leaving the shadows behind to walk in the light of Christ. And further, the admonition is to grow up in the gospel beyond initial repentance and individual salvation. It’s about following the signposts into the land of destination. It’s a call to maturity that is gospel-driven, not post-gospel or even gospel-latent.” JCW

What Paul exhorts here and in all of his letters, is going deeper into that which is of primary importance. The cross of Christ, the news of his victory over death.

The gospel is like an iceberg. Above the water we see sin and forgiveness, but it’s larger than that. Below the water line we see all of it.

Creation, fall, redemption, renewal, restoration.

Recognize our worth as image-bearers, redeemed by the blood of Christ, transformed in him and used by him to bring life where we are. With hope for restoration of all things as a return to the garden. All of it given to us in Jesus.

“Our “common faith”—the recognition that all are in need of a Savior—removes any rationale for judgmentalism and any basis for pride. The need for comparison and competition dies in the recognition that Christ provides our only measure of glory before God. The necessity of Christ’s pardon of us all prompts forgiveness, understanding, and love in the Christian community.” Bryan Chapell

Growing in our knowledge of this truth, increases our faith, humbles us, and propels us towards others in need of rescue.

Like a diamond, we notice all of its facets.

But the other aspect of growth here is fruitfulness.

Growth in the gospel leads to godliness - accords with godliness. Sanctification, transformation. Knowledge of the gospel should inevitably lead to godliness, and godliness should be the natural outworking of an embrace of the gospel.

“Paul tells us what that truth does. It leads to ‘godliness’. Unlike the false teaching which promoted ungodliness, Paul’s teaching of the truth as an apostle promoted God-centered living.” David Campbell

False teachers will say you have to embrace ceremonial law to be redeemed or gain mystical wisdom to be spiritual; change precedes rescue. The gospel says change comes when you are rooted in it; change is the produce of rescue.

Ephesians 2:8–10 “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast. [10] For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (ESV)

“We are saved for obedience, not by it.”

Augustine: “For grace is given not because we have done good works, but in order that we may have power to do them.”

Hear this, if you are in Christ, you will be changed. He will accomplish in you transformation into his likeness, it is promised.

“Grasping this doctrine (i.e., that grace compels godliness) provides a necessary key to understanding much of the instruction that follows throughout this epistle.” BC

Titus will include descriptions of what godliness looks like in the life of believers as we see over the next few weeks. And it may look different in each of us.

- Increasing distaste for sin, leading to repentance
- Increasing desire for the way of Jesus
- Seeing with clearer eyes the idols that attempt to grow in prominence in us
- Change of attitudes, dreams, hopes, and priorities to match those of Jesus
- Becoming more like him, more than kindness, love of neighbors and enemies, sacrificial living, giving yourself away for his renown

I want there to be more godliness in me. To be more like Christ. To smell more like Jesus.

And the way there is growing in the biome of the gospel. The life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus for us. His Spirit dwelling in us calling us to life and godliness.

He gives us what we need, we lean into it and expect fruit from it. Peter concurs.

2 Peter 1:3–8 “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, [4] by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. [5] For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, [6] and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, [7] and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. [8] For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (ESV)

We are meant to grow, in the gospel, and in godliness. And our food for this growth, the sustenance that gets us there is His grace for us.

Grace is our food

I was going to call it our fertilizer but that's not the image I prefer!

The gospel brought to light by the preaching entrusted to Paul... and in that preaching he is always on about grace. Unmerited favor. It's the best word to describe what we experience in relationship with Jesus.

It's more than just part of his introduction to this letter but what is needed to keep living. “Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.”

Covering of sin, forgiveness, a hand pulling us up when we fail for the thousandth time. The light that leads us home.

It is what marks the community growing in faith and knowledge of the truth - receiving it from Christ and extending it to others.

This grace keeps us. In it we know nothing can separate us from the love of God. In it we know that even our foolishness won't bar us, when we are unfaithful he remains faithful.

Like Miracle Gro in the garden, producing abundant fruit for all to see.

“Paul shows that the gospel presents a fundamentally different approach toward God than the false teachers do, one based on hope in God's grace and not on human accomplishments. Grace produces an entirely different kind of fruit in the lives of believers.”

Starkly different from the world. As a garden, a place of refuge, to find refreshment, and life.

“Godliness does not qualify us for faith, but Christian faith properly understood is lived. The grace that true faith receives stimulates a desire for godliness in believers, and this is no less true of their leaders. Thus the grace of Scripture never slights sin, never excuses laxity, never abandons the separated life, but always seeks the greater glory of the Savior.” BC

Growing in the gospel produces godliness for the fame of Christ.

This is what kingdom cultivation is all about.

We have nothing else to offer - the words of life that declare Jesus as the gracious King who gives himself so that you can know God, live as you were meant to experiencing grace and peace for his glory and your good.

Be rooted - Come to Jesus in repentance, turning from self, and the idols you have trusted that were imposters. Receive forgiveness in his name. Know that he has you.

Commit to grow - never move beyond the gospel but grow deeper still in it. Cling to the grace of Christ and he holds you.

Watch fruit blossom - As it accords with knowledge of the truth, it is promises. Ask, seek, and see it.

In a world full now of imposters, the church has the unique calling to be different, planted in truth, flourishing, hopeful. Seure in the grace and peace of Christ.

May it be so in us.