
For the Devoting of Ourselves to Good Works...

Titus 3:1-15

Introduction Today we will be finishing our study of Titus – it has been a bit of a whirlwind so I commend further study of this book to you. There is much more to be gleaned than what we have considered over the past month. We'll do things in a bit of reverse today – we are going to start with four general applications that pertain especially to the church taken from the whole of our study on Titus. Then we'll consider chapter 3 of Titus under the following headings: The Church in the World, The Doctrine in the Church, The Divisive in the Doctrine, and the Extraordinary in the Ordinary. [Pray]

Review

Major Lessons from the Letter to Titus for the Church

1. The Church is to be characterized by order. The Apostles, in the Bible, specify the guidelines that describe the nature and character of this order. There is no *other* authoritative source by which the Church may be ordered. The purpose of the church is to bring God and his son, Jesus Christ, all glory. There is no higher purpose for which the church should strive. (Groups of believers are not “self-organizing” entities).
2. Elders (also called pastors, shepherds, bishops, and overseers) are the God-ordained human leadership for churches. Leaders must be qualified according to *biblical* criteria. Leaders are to be, at least, about the business of building and protecting the church: giving instruction in sound doctrine and rebuking those in the church who contradict it. There is no Scriptural allowance for groups of believers self-designating as a church while consciously rejecting the idea of biblical leadership. (Groups of believers are not to be “leaderless” entities).
3. The Church is to be built through the teaching of sound doctrine, according to Scripture, so that such doctrine becomes such a part of the public and private life of the church that the hearts and actions of believers are indelibly shaped by it. Christ himself is the fulfillment and epitome of all sound doctrine. The Church will deal biblically with those who persist in the contradiction or corruption of sound doctrine. There are no other programs, techniques, practices, models, methods, or means other than the Word, by which the Church may be built. (For groups of believers, “innovation” is *not* a core value when it comes to building the church).
4. The practical daily living of the Church *must* be characterized by continual growth toward becoming who the Bible tells us we are in Christ -in our relations

among ourselves as well as our relations with unbelievers and society at large . This is a normative pattern by which a) believers give evidence of their conversion; b) the doctrine of God our Savior is made beautiful to the believer and the on looking world; and c) the gospel, doctrine, and glory of God and His Son Jesus Christ is protected and defended from defamation. (A church is no church which professes one thing and does another.)

The Church in the World (vv. 1-2)

If last week was about how the church was to order and conduct itself in its daily affairs according to its natural divisions (older men, younger men, older women, younger women, and slaves), and therefore an internal focus, then this week is about how the church is to order and conduct itself with respects to the world, and therefore an external focus. If you've been reading through Titus in the past several weeks, you will have likely noticed that there is somewhat of a pattern contained in chapters 2 and 3. In chapter 2: 1) admonition to teach sound doctrine, 2) instructions on living soundly, 3) doctrinal reasons (how/why) for living soundly, and 4) admonition to teach sound doctrine. If we allow chapter 2 verse 15 to also serve for the introduction to chapter 3, the patterns begins again: (see above). If nothing else, this pattern exhibits the clear intention of Paul that there be no division in the believers mind between doctrine and doing. There is no such thing as a well-learned believer who behaves poorly, belief and behavior must go together. And so, a description of this doctrine-induced behavior is taken up again in vv. 1-2 of chapter 3.

The believer in relation to government (v.1)

Paul does not call the believer to live as if the government does not exist, is irrelevant, or is somehow below him, we can not live aloof to the social structure we live in. Romans 13 clarifies and magnifies by telling us that those in authority are placed by God and that they function as an extension of God's authority. Therefore, we are to be aware of the laws that govern us so that we may be obedient (in everything but sin): in everything from traffic signs to tax paying. And, we are to be "ready for every good work," that is, socially responsible behavior that betters the community for all, demonstrating that Christianity is a constructive force in society: in everything from littering to being involved in public life. We noted this last week but it bears repeating, Paul is not calling the church to withdraw or overthrow society, but rather to live IN it in the manner that only a believer would. We are being transformed from the inside out, not the outside in.

The believer in relation to the world (v.2)

There is a sense in which we can see the Christian's response to government as simply a special case of how he or she is to live in respects to the world; for the qualities Paul calls the believer to in verse 2 should be exhibited to those in authority as well. Paul gives two negative and two positive qualities [ESV]. Believers should use neither their mouths (slander) or bodies (quarreling & fighting) to insult, harm, lie about, or in general do evil even to those who offend or injure us. Rather, we are to be gentle, not stubbornly insisting on our own rights or retaliating, evil for evil (comment).

Our relationship with the world is to be marked by “perfect courtesy” which is also interpreted as humility or meekness. And this is to ALL men, including those who are hostile and evil toward us, “[This] is a difficult test of Christian character but one that effectively proves the genuineness of Christian profession.”¹

The Doctrine in the Church (vv. 3-7)

Oh boy! Paul better have some really good reason for calling me to live like this – it makes my skin crawl just listening to this let alone doing it! The reality is that many of us have grown up on a steady diet of “if you’re going to fight, throw the first punch” and “walk softly but carry a big stick” or “sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me (or you).” We are conditioned to watch out for ourselves first. From our extended consideration of the Cretan culture two weeks ago, we *know* that Cretan believers were coming out of a culture that was very similar (1:12). But Paul calls the church to an entirely different way that offends our earthly senses. In verse 3 we set off down a path of divine logic that will test our adherence to biblical truths and our willingness to see the world as God does.

Understanding who we were (v.3)

Verse 3 opens with the word “For” immediately connecting us with the instructions given in verses 1-2. What is the rationale for behaving christianly in a world that regularly challenges authority, continually speaks evil, and is prone to quarrel? Part of the answer is in remembering who we were: I must often say to myself, “Oh high and mighty believer so puffed up in your moment of righteous indignation, do you not remember that that you were made of the same stuff as he or she whom you scorn? Even in your “new life” you often stumble and fail, playing the fool, smirking at God.”

Paul describes our condition prior to Christ, what we once were. In brief, all unbelievers intellects are darkened to the spiritual realities, therefore, not comprehending God’s will they sin against him. In their sin they wander and are led away and enslaved to all sorts idols which capture their compulsion to worship. They are driven by desires, wants, needs, passions that sit on the thrones of their hearts. As a result, the inward idolatry inevitably produces outward behavior which is marked by ill-will towards others and the bitterness and envy fostered by disillusionment. Such become haters of the world because it has only embittered them, and of course, family and friends hate them back for their hatefulness.

Understanding who we are and how we became so (vv. 4-8)

God our Savior appeared (v. 4)

Immediately in verse 4 we are introduced to a contrast – and this is the point of the linking language between verses 3 and 4: “we ourselves were once... (v.3)” > “but when...(v.4)”. This language is meant to draw our attention to **change**.

¹ Heibert in Gaebelien, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*

Change is the lens through which the glory of the transformation from the old man to the new man is magnified. Magnifying this transformation we see the unparalleled redemptive reality, that is, with the *appearing* of Christ tangible evidence was given that God's promises, which are manifestations of his character, *were* fulfilled, *are being* fulfilled and *will be* fulfilled. Can you see it? (it's the "manifesting" in 1:2-3, the "appearing" in 2:11-12, 2:13, and now again in 3:4-5).

And he saved us (v. 5a, 7)

And he saved us! What a remarkable three word proclamation in verse 5! But saved us *from what?* From the complete darkness of our own depravity – our foolishness, disobedience, stray wandering, enslavement to passions and pleasures, malice, envy, and hate (3:3), our status as liars, evil beasts, and lazy gluttons (2:12). For these things we owe a great and desperate price to the holy, wrathful, judge Himself, God, for mocking his words and stealing his glory. God *will* eternally punish all sinners, he will cast them into the darkness of a fiery furnace where there is only, ever, and always weeping and gnashing of teeth (Mt 13:41ff). Beloved, we must be saved from God himself!

But how can this rescue be? Which of us has not flagrantly, willfully, and stridently sinned in the face of a holy and all knowing God? Which of us does not deserve his crushing punishment? Which of us would be so self-deceived as to claim that God should save me because of my perfect righteousness before him? Or of ANY righteousness before him? We cannot *do* righteousness before God when we are DEAD in our sins (Eph 2). In fact, we cannot even seek him (Rom 3).

In knowing the dark reality of our own souls is exactly where we must be to understand what Paul means when he tells us that God saved us through Christ not because of our own merits (indeed our self-perceived "merits" have won us only condemnation), but because of his mercy, his goodness, and his loving-kindness, his grace. Everything about our salvation, our condemnation, our rescue and our transformation flows from the character and nature of our merciful, holy, and glorious God as manifested by his son, our redeemer, Jesus Christ. *Without Christ, all hope is lost.*

Christ in bearing in his own body the crushing punishment due us, AND in living perfectly as a man before God through the incarnation, has made it possible for God to declare those that are his as "righteous," forgiven of sin and in possession of an (alien) perfection before God that is not there own.

As applied through the work of the Holy Spirit (v. 5b)

These new spiritual realities are applied to the believer not through water baptism, as some would interpret the latter portion of verse 5, but through the Holy Spirit at the point of conversion. Via the Spirit we are washed from the filth and death of our own sin and brought to life as a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). In Genesis 2 we have generation as God created man and woman, in Genesis 3 we see degeneration as Adam, the representative of the human race, dies a spiritual death when

the relationship between him and God is broken by his own sin. Then in salvation, as effected through the cross-work of Christ, we are re-generated by the Spirit. We are given spiritual life, restored to relationship with God through Christ, our mediator.

But the work does not stop there, our regeneration is accompanied by renewal, an ‘already but not yet’ reality that speaks to the ongoing work of transformation (Rom 12:1-2) in our hearts as the desires and habits of the flesh are put off and the fruits of the Spirit are put on (Gal 5). The Spirit has not been given sparingly, all believers have all that they need for true regeneration and renewal. This rich “pouring out” also has an objective reference point in history, just as our salvation is grounded in Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection, which is an objective historical fact, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on believers commenced with Pentecost in Jerusalem as recorded in Acts 2.

According to the hope of eternal life promised before ages began (vv.7-8)

Briefly then, Paul at the end of verse 7 grounds all of this salvific matter in our sovereign God’s eternal purposes in redemptive history. Verses 4-7 do not represent a new dispensation or intention of God. His plan has always been about redeeming a people unto himself, that is, establishing heirs. Just as he promised heirs to Abraham to whom he would be God and from whom all the nations would be blessed (Genesis 12, 15, 17), God continues to be about the work of establishing his people. And this is according to the “hope of eternal life” which Paul told us at the opening of the letter, in verses 2 and 3 of chapter 1, “which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began, and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching...[of Paul and the other apostles].” The deep and divine truths of verses 4-7 are simply the outworkings of a plan put into motion by a spectacularly sovereign and kind God governing over all of history, all of reality, so that through his promises fulfilled in Christ, we might be his people, and he might be our God. (David ponders, 2 Sam 7:18ff)

In verse 8 [read] we are prompted to remember how important the truths of the gospel are. These are trustworthy words *first* because they are spoken by God through Paul (2 Peter 1:21), and secondarily as their power is confirmed by the body living out the reality of transformed lives. One commentator² sums up the import of this comment by Paul in three concise statements: 1) The Christian life is a life of active performance, concentration of the mind is combined with effort (“careful to devote”. 2) As it is performed, this life will have visible results (see “good deeds” at 2:1-10, 3:1-2, 3:14). 3) Thirdly, the living out of this life will benefit *everyone*. “People” here is almost certainly inclusive of unbelievers. So there is the practical benefit of good deeds (excellence), but there is also the profit that the unbeliever may experience from being exposed to lives that are transformed by the gospel, mainly Christian witness.

² Towner, P.H. (1994). The IVP New Testament Commentary Series: 1-2 Timothy & Titus. IVP.

In sum, Paul presents a clear picture to us verses 1-8. Your obedience in the world believer (vv. 1-2) is grounded in a knowledge of who you were in your sin (v. 3) and now, who you *have become* in light of the objective reality of Christ's incarnation and work on your behalf (vv. 4-7), as applied by the Spirit so verifying the reality of your conversion (vv. 5, 6, 8) and all this according to the promises God gave before the ages began (vv. 7, 1:2-3). **This** is to be the *day to day* understanding of your spiritual reality, which in the words of one Christian songwriter "is more real than the air you breath."³

The Divisive in the Doctrine (vv. 9-11)

Paul's transition to the practical answering of those who were spreading false doctrine in the Cretan church is almost seamless. After dwelling on the great gospel truths and establishing their importance for Christian living, it seems quite natural to say, "Don't get too tangled up in arguments about teaching which contradicts sound doctrine (genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law), as these arguments have limited value as compared to the preaching (comment over) (1:1), instructing (1:9), teaching (2:1,7), declaring (2:15), reminding (3:1), and insisting (3:8) of/on sound doctrine and living! While it is necessary to defend the faith from false teachers and their teaching, we should keep in mind several things, 1) it is the Word (sound doctrine) that builds the church, not man-made arguments against unsound doctrine, although these have their place; 2) arguments against unsound doctrine must be made with the Word in hand; and 3) as elders, arguing against unsound doctrine must not become the lion's share of our ministry to our people.

To those who are divisive in the church, like the false teachers of chapter 1, shepherds responsible for protecting the flock (1:9-16) are to **go to them**, that is, *we cannot let the matter go on*, and warn them **in love** by pleading, urging, convincing, and persuading them with the Word, with the end goal of repentance and restoration (1:13, 1 Tim 1:3-7). However, to be clear, we are not arguing on *their* turf, so to say. These are not to be endless arguments about theological minutiae. Both the subject and the nature of the discussion are dictated by the Word, not by the errant individual. If they refuse us and are unable to hear, after a period of time we are to go to them again with the same intent. If they refuse again, they have shown themselves willfully and flagrantly disobedient, and self-deceived. In their intentional sin and rebellion, they condemn themselves. I believe the final action, "[having] nothing to do with them" points us to the process of church discipline as described in Matthew 18 and elsewhere.

I want to briefly balance this last thought by being clear that the genuinely doubting, questioning, or wondering believer is not in mind here. The picture of the divisive person we are given in verse 10, is expanded on in chapter 1, verses 10-16. In other words, the person, in most cases, is openly propagating their unsound doctrine to others in the church, is doing so for wrong motivations, and by their actions are causing disunity and strife in the church.

³ Rich Mullins. What Susan Said, *The World as Best as I can Remember It, Volume 2*.

The Ordinary in the Extraordinary (v. 12-15)

What we see in verses 12-15 is simply that God chooses to work through the ordinary “goings on” of everyday life. Although the church *is* supernaturally empowered, it is through the everyday, stir the oatmeal, details of life that God’s plan for the church is worked out. The Bible does not describe the church as being *primarily* characterized by mega-conferences (promise keepers), mega-music concerts (creation festival), mega-personalities (Billy Graham), mega-ministries (willow creek), mega-publishing industries (zondervan), innovation (cell group ministry), paradigm shifts (the church in a postmodern world), sound bites or interviews on major media outlets (MacArthur on Larry King Live), books which sell 25 million copies (the purpose driven life), worldwide or global ministries (samaritan’s purse), political position statements (federal marriage amendment), national revolutions (the Sandinistas in Central America), or blockbuster movies (DaVinci Code, The Passion) (comment).

While many of these things *may* be good and helpful (and undoubtedly some are not) and play a role in a believer’s life as he or she is about kingdom work, they do not represent the daily reality of the church at large, as the apostles describe it. The letter to Titus describes the daily reality: The establishing of church leadership, instructing in sound doctrine, refuting those who oppose sound doctrine, living among each other in a manner that adorns the gospel (roles for older men, younger men, older women, younger women, slaves), living in the world in a manner demonstrates an understanding of the grace and mercy we have been shown, and it is the daily conversations and activities that make all of this happen. Here is an extended paraphrase of how Paul closes this letter (v.12ff), the extraordinary inseparably mixed in with the ordinary:

“When Artie and Tychicus get there, try hard, Titus, to come see me at Nicopolis, which is where I think I’m gonna stay for the winter. Make sure you take good care of Zenas and Apollos, roll out the red carpet and be sure that all their needs are met. And, I know I’ve said it a lot in this letter, but if we believe what God has told us, then by grace our lives will be full of good works – make sure your church people there in Crete get that. Helping Zenas and Apollos will be a good start for them as they grow in this art of doing good deeds. From there, their commitment to good works should grow into identifying and helping those with real and pressing needs throughout all the churches in Crete. It should become a normal part of church life that people are behaving in a way that shows that they live and serve for the sake of the church – because the church *is* the institution God has established to give him glory, both among believers and unbelievers. Well, everyone here says hello. Say hello to everyone there who showed us so much love while we were setting up churches among the believers. And Titus, may God enable you and all the churches in Crete, to be everything I have written about in this letter.

It is in the daily decisions, choices, activities, thoughts, and conversations that Paul is calling us to live out our identity as the church. It is also in these that God will train us by grace to live in accord with sound doctrine. And it is in living in accord with this sound doctrine that we will come to know ever more deeply the beauty and profoundness of this “grace that has appeared,” that is, our Lord and blessed Savior Jesus Christ. And as we grow, we become beacons which shine ever brighter to a world that is spiritually dead and wasting away – we become ever more that which we are, the body of Christ.