

Series: *Titus: The Gospel for Godly Living*
Lesson: *A Summary: The Gospel & Good Works*
Text: Titus 3:8-15 (L7)
Date: Sunday, January 1, 2011

Colonial Hills
ABF
Baptist Church

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Key



= Teacher Information



= Discussion Starter

INTRODUCTION

Before we jump into our final lesson in Titus, let's consider a brief review of the book:

- 1:1-4 – *Our Mission Statement* – Since we are God's slaves and sent-ones, we should give ourselves to the proclamation of God's message so that people are motivated by hope to know God's truth which will establish them in faith and godliness.
- 1:5-9 – *The Uncommon Man: A Divine Standard for Pastoral Qualification* – The pastor is called to lead the church in its mission, having exemplary character of integrity, focusing on his home first of all, and prioritizing the teaching of truth.
- 1:10-16 – *Dealing with Deceivers* – The importance of truth for the local congregation is again highlighted by looking at those who seek to lead the congregation away from the truth. These false teachers deceive others, are devoid of truth, and thus deceive themselves.
- 2:1-10 – *Godly Garments* – Unlike deceivers, genuine believers will live a life that fits their profession—older men with maturity, older women with consistency, younger women with love, and younger men by example. Such godly garments are vital to the glory of God and the evangelism of the lost.
- 2:11-15 – *Gospel-Made Garments* – Godliness is hand-and-glove with the gospel, for saving grace is also sanctifying grace. So, we are motivated and enabled to live godly when we preach to ourselves daily the fourfold aspects of God's saving work—God saves us from sin's penalty, power, presence, and purpose.
- 3:1-8 – *Give Them Graciousness* – Living out the truth means living godly, gospel-made lives in a spirit of graciousness. Since we are living proof of the effectiveness of grace, living out God's grace in gracious lives towards others may also be beneficial.

In the concluding paragraphs of this little letter to Titus, Paul now summarizes the heart of his message. We'll consider this summary using three main injunctions to the local church.

THE CHURCH SHOULD AFFIRM SOME THINGS (v. 8).

We quickly passed over Titus 2:15 in our previous studies, but now we return to the point of that verse in Titus 3:8. Notice the parallel between those two passages:

	Titus 2:1-15	Titus 3:1-8
Instruction about godly living	vv. 2-10	vv. 1-2
Instruction about the gospel	vv. 11-14	vv. 3-7
Charge to authoritatively teach these things	v. 15	v. 8

In Titus 2:15, Paul charged Titus, “These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.” Now, he reiterates that with, “This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly” (3:8). The words “affirm constantly” in Titus 3:8 could be translated “insist” (cf. ESV, NET) or “stress” (NIV). Clearly, there were some issues that Paul definitely wanted Titus to major on in his pastoral ministry. Notice the progression of thought in verse 8:

- (1) *Gospel* – This “saying” (i.e., the rehearsal of the gospel in vv. 4-7) is “faithful” or trustworthy, reliable, dependable.
- (2) *Teaching* – Because the gospel is both true and trustworthy, it should be insisted upon in our teaching and preaching ministry.
- (3) *Salvation* – This true gospel message provokes one’s “faith” or trust in God (cf. 2:11-14; 3:3-7).
- (4) *Good Works* – The gospel truths also compel and empower us to “be careful to maintain” or to be devoted to doing “good works” (cf. 2:2-10; 3:1-2).
- (5) *Evangelism* – These works are “good and profitable” in that they give evidence to the power and truth of the gospel and its message of a saving God (cf. 2:5, 8, 10).

To summarize, Paul gives Titus both a doctrinal and a practical priority in his pastoral ministry.

1. *In our teaching, we should affirm the gospel.*

Paul’s doctrinal priority was to “affirm constantly” or insist or stress or emphasize the gospel (i.e., the “saying” of vv. 4-7). The glorious reality of what “God our Savior” has done as outlined in 2:11-14 and 3:3-7 was not done in a corner (cf. Acts 26:26) and was “of first importance” to Paul (I Corinthians 15:3). The gospel message is a trustworthy, reliable, authentic summary of what God has really done—it is a “faithful saying” (cf. I

Timothy 1:15; 4:9-11; II Timothy 2:11-13).¹ This message alone is “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes” (Romans 1:16), for the “righteousness of God” that it offers to those who believe is able to transplant them from darkness (v. 3) to light (v. 7) and transform them from godlessness (v. 3) into goodness (v. 8; cf. 2:14).

Not only does Paul tell Titus what to teach—the gospel—but he also informs him about how he should teach the gospel. To summarize Paul’s admonitions in 2:15 and 3:8, Titus should proclaim the gospel with clarity, certainty, and authority, even when he was misunderstood or disdained. As Paul summarizes his letter to Titus, he reminds the church that it should be gospel-saturated and Christ-intoxicated in its message.

2. *In our living, we should affirm good works.*

As we already saw in chapter 2, such gospel-centeredness cannot be divorced from a good and gracious lifestyle. Such a lifestyle is exactly what the power of Christ is working to accomplish in us as we submit in faith and obedience. Therefore, we ought to cooperate with grace by “being careful to maintain” good works. This phrase translates two Greek words, the first word (*phrontizo*) stressing one’s mental commitment to do good, and the second word (*proistemi*) highlighting one’s active engagement in such activities. Therefore, believers should thoughtfully prepare and plan to engage in good works and then actively initiate such help. Such a purpose should be a guiding focus in life. It is a healthy focus, for it is “good and profitable unto men”—“for the believers themselves and, even more significantly as far as the emphasis of this passage is concerned, for the unsaved sinners around them who are drawn to Christ by the exemplary lives of those He has graciously transformed.”² Cf. I Timothy 4:8 and II Timothy 3:16 for the two other New Testament occurrences of the Greek word “profitable.”

Application: This is what every church should affirm. Those that claim the gracious power of Christ to deliver them from sin’s penalty, must also cooperate with His gracious ability to rescue them from sin’s power. Such cooperation is evident in both a personal and corporate insistence on godly, gospel-made, gracious living. See, your grasp on the gospel is revealed in your goodness of life, and such goodness is, in turn, evidence that you have been grasped by Christ.³ As Alistair Begg states, “Grace is the doctrinal indicative,

¹ In the Greek, “faithful/trustworthy” is put first in the sentence to communicate emphasis. In other words, “Truly, this gospel message is legitimate. You can count on this!”

² MacArthur, John. *Titus*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1996. P. 156.

³ If you are having a hard time with the “good works” part—you are either unmotivated to do good or you are unable to do good—rewind to the “gospel” part. You must be preaching gospel truth to yourself on a daily and hourly basis to enable such living. Otherwise, the reality that we ourselves cannot accomplish the good works of Titus 3:8 becomes all too apparent, and

which provides the foundation for the *goodness* which is the moral imperative. Without grace, the call to goodness is pure externalism.”⁴ Without goodness, grace is emptied of its power and purpose.⁵

So, insist on knowing the gospel of Christ richly and passionately, then agree with its transformative power by committing and devoting yourself to the recreating work that Christ has started in your life. For yourself, your family, and your fellow disciples at church, insist on godly, gospel-empowered, gracious living.⁶ This is “good and profitable,” because it accomplishes the very plan of God, as He is glorified, His people are transformed, and the lost are rescued.

Transition: As Paul concludes his short letter to his spiritual son, Titus, he does so by impressing some concluding responsibilities upon the Cretan churches. He first told them to affirm the teaching of the gospel and the living out of it in good works. Secondly, he warns them to avoid some things.

our lives never make the kingdom-impact God intended. So, you cannot “devote” yourself to the good works of Titus 3:8 summarized in 2:2-10 and 3:1-2? Right...that’s the point. You cannot...that’s why you were separated from God and needed a Savior. You are opposed to those “good works” in your very nature because of sin (Titus 3:3). However, Christ, by redeeming and justifying you through His own sacrifice (2:14; 3:7) has made you a fundamentally new person (2:14; 3:7), able now to walk in those good works that God has ordained for His creation (cf. Ephesians 2:10). Even now, “on our best day, we are unprofitable servants” (cf. Luke 17:10; Begg, see info in footnote 4); nonetheless, grace enables us to “do good.” So, maybe the gospel hasn’t sunk in yet, or maybe hasn’t even been applied yet, and that’s why you are still “living unto yourself” (II Corinthians 5:14-15). See, your grasp on the gospel is revealed in your goodness of life, and such goodness is, in turn, evidence that you have been grasped by Christ. So, on the one hand, good works are the evidence of the gospel-believed and are part-and-parcel with the salvation Christ is accomplishing within you; on the other hand, we should actively engage in good works as expressions of appropriate gratitude and worship toward “God our Savior.”

⁴ “Everyone Matters,” a sermon by Alistair Begg on Titus 3:12-15, preached on October 11, 2009. Available here: <http://bit.ly/vRCtqe>.

⁵ We could summarize everything we’ve learned to far about the believer’s behavior with the following outline:

- Who believers are = godly
- What believers do = good works
- How believers live = graciously
- Why believers live this way = the gospel

⁶ By way of personal application, it may be helpful now to review some of the “good works” of Titus 2:2-10 and 3:1-2. More will be said about the nature of good works in our third point, when we look at vv. 13-14. Notably, good works are primarily others-directed.

THE CHURCH SHOULD AVOID SOME THINGS (vv. 9-11).

Verses 9-11 are set in direct contrast to verse 8, as is evidenced by the word, “but.” Notice the contrasts between these two parts:

Verse 8	Verses 9-11
Believers should “affirm” this.	Believers should “avoid” this.
These people “have believed in God.”	These people are “twisted by sin” (NET).
These people are characterized by good works.	These people are characterized by divisive words.
These people stand on the truth.	These people wrestle with questions.
These people practice what is “good and profitable [<i>ophelimos</i>].”	These people practice what is “unprofitable [<i>an-opheles</i>] and vain.”

Those described in verses 9-11 were also the topic of Paul’s writing in Titus 1. MacArthur summarizes:

Titus faced a large (“many,” 1:10) and formidable group of leaders in the Cretan churches who were deluding believers about central truths of the gospel. The most influential and dangerous were Jewish legalists, “those of the circumcision” (v. 10), who promoted “Jewish myths and commandments of men” (v. 14). They were not even honest false teachers, because their primary motive was not to instruct, even in falsehood, but rather to earn “sordid gain.” Nevertheless, they were causing great damage to the cause of Christ and were to be refuted (v. 9), silenced (v. 11), and reproved (v. 13). They professed “to know God,” Paul explained, “but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient, and worthless for any good deed” (v. 16).⁷

Paul again makes it clear how these people and issues ought to be approached.

1. *We should avoid distractions (v. 9).*

The word “avoid” could be translated “to turn away from.” What we are to turn away from are those issues that distract us from the priority of the gospel and good works of verse 8. Why we are to turn away from those things is because unlike the “good and profitable” nature of the gospel and godliness, these distractions are “unprofitable and vain”—that is, they are un-beneficial and useless because they ignore biblical truth. Elsewhere in the New Testament, such false teaching “unsettles the soul (Acts 15:24), shipwrecks faith (1 Tim. 1:19), leads to blasphemy (v. 20) and to the ruin of the hearers (2 Tim. 2:14), produces ungodliness (v. 16), and spreads ‘like gangrene’ (v. 17).”⁸

⁷ MacArthur, p. 159.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

Specifically, we should turn away from “foolish questions” (or speculations, debates, arguments; controversies—NET, NASB, ESV, NIV; disputes—NKJV). Paul warns against this distraction in I Timothy 1:3-6; 4:7; 6:3-5; and II Timothy 2:23; 4:4; Titus 1:14. MacArthur explains:

[These are] futile arguments about matters of philosophy, or even theology, that are based on human reason and imagination rather than God’s Word....False teachers in the church invariably distort and contradict Scripture, replacing it with novel insights, ideas, and notions that confuse and mislead God’s people and undercut their trust in God’s revealed truth. The danger of false doctrine is made all the worse because, appealing to the natural man, it finds ready acceptance among unbelievers and even among worldly, self-centered Christians who are poorly grounded in the Word.⁹

The “genealogies” that are to be shunned are “the many fanciful and allegorical interpretations of such genealogies [i.e. the many OT and NT genealogies] that had fascinated many Jews for centuries.”¹⁰ Contentions refer to “all kinds of self-centered rivalry and contentiousness about the truth,”¹¹ and “strivings about the Law” refer to discussions about the Mosaic Law (cf. Galatians 6:12-13; I Timothy 1:6-7; Acts 15). Cf. Matthew 15:6; Colossians 2:16-23.

These peripheral and purposeless distractions should be avoided by devoted disciples of Christ. In their place, the faithful believer is wise to heed Paul’s counsel to Timothy: “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the Word of Truth. But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness...[and will] spread like gangrene” (II Timothy 2:15-17).

What do we do, though, when those in our midst fail to ignore such distractions, but instead propagate false teaching?

2. We should address divisive people (vv. 10-11).

The word “heretick” refers to a division-maker, one who is factious because he holds to the distractions of verse 9 against the truth of God’s Word (v. 8). He is insubordinate and belligerent, a law unto himself, unwilling to submit himself to spiritual leadership and biblical authority. Such a distracting and divisive person cannot be tolerated or ignored. As one would muzzle a dog in order to protect against its dangerous bite, so these individuals must be silenced (Titus 1:11). According to verse 10,

these divisive individuals should be warned one or two times. The word “warn” carries the idea of counseling, instructing, and admonishing against a improper course of action, and reminds us that we should never abuse, malign, or threaten these false teachers. The goal is restoration—to instruct them concerning the truth so that they “may be sound in the faith” (Titus 1:13).

If those warnings are stubbornly unheeded, then the divisive individual should be “rejected.” MacArthur explains, “Once a false teacher is exposed, he is to be rejected by the church and given no platform to spread his spiritually cancerous and destructive falsehoods. He is not to be debated but denounced and expelled (cf. 2 Cor. 6:14–18).”¹² Romans 16:17-18 reiterates, “Keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting” (NASB). Cf. II Thessalonians 3:14-15, but balance it with II Timothy 2:25.

According to verse 11, if a false teacher fails to repent, “the stubbornness of the [divisive] man is evidence of a perverted mind.”¹³ Their divisive exterior (mouth) simply betrays a perverted interior (heart)—cf. Luke 6:45. These distracting and divisive professors have been turned aside from what is true and morally proper (i.e., the meaning of “subverted” or perverted) and are themselves aware (i.e., “being condemned of himself”) of their ongoing sinfulness. Such a status is also apparent (i.e., “knowing”) to the genuine believer who is grounded in the truth and is affirming the importance of the gospel and good works. Thus, division-makers should be “watched out for” (Romans 16:17), warned (Titus 3:10), and, if unrepentant, rejected (v. 10).

Application: Complementing the church’s affirmation of the gospel in doctrine and godly good works in living is its rejection of distracting and divisive people and issues. The need for discernment and distinction has already been emphasized by Paul, in both our fellowship (1:10-16) and lifestyle (2:2-10; 3:1-2). And in harmony with his emphasis on truth throughout this little epistle, Paul has little patience with abberent emphases. Paul’s teaching in vv. 8-11 agree with a common maxim: “The main things are the plain things, and the plain things are the main things.”

⁹ Ibid., pp. 160-161.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 161.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 162.

¹² Ibid., p. 161.

¹³ Guthrie, Donald quoted in “Debates and Divisions,” a sermon by Alistair Begg on Titus 3:8-11, preached on October 10, 2009. Available here: <http://bit.ly/tQn5W>.

God has made His work in Christ so apparent, it's grievous when we miss it personally or corporately. It's tragic when we fail to learn its lessons and live complementary lives of godliness and goodness, when those characteristics are the very emphases of God's revelation. It's unfortunate when we stress our own personal convictions and preferences at the devaluation of the mission and purposes of God. Our lives in Christ are not a mystery; we simply complicate them when we fail to "keep the main thing the main thing." Alistair Begg summarizes the problem,

"How many churches have ceased to be a power in evangelizing and edifying because their pastor [or people] got distracted...became a trouble shooter...became a debater... became somebody who decided that his great calling in life was to correct all the ills that were going on all around on the periphery of the battle, and in seeking to address all these minor skirmishes, he lost sight of giving to the people what they most need, namely the clear, sound, helpful, lucid instruction of the Scriptures."¹⁴

May our homes and our church always be known as places where Christ is prioritized, obeyed, and followed. May truth be exalted, may godly good works be pursued, and may God's mission be completely engaged in.

Transition: In his concluding summary, Paul compels the church to affirm the gospel and good works as their primary focus in life and ministry—this is, after all, His mission to the church (cf. Titus 1:1-4). The church should also avoid those controversies and divisions that would undermine its focus and minimize its gospel-impact. Finally, in his closing statements, Paul implies that the local church should be active with people, because when it comes to local church ministry, people matter.



What are some divisive distractions that we should avoid emphasizing and being defined by in our local church? *Legalistic standardizing, external traditions rooted in poor biblical exposition, theological minutiae, extra-biblical issues, harebrained interpretations of passages, personal opinions and positions especially when held pugnaciously or oppressively, personal opinion or positions, private interpretations, overemphasis on political involvement, debating with false teachers, infatuation with non-biblical authors, etc.*

THE CHURCH SHOULD BE ACTIVE WITH PEOPLE (vv. 12-15).

According to verses 12-15 and many other New Testament passages, Paul surrounded himself with other passionate believers. In this passage, many are suggested (v. 15) and four are named (vv. 12-13). Of those four named believers, we know much about two of them (Tychicus—Acts 20:4; Ephesians 6:21; Colossians 4:7; II Timothy 4:12; Apollos—Acts 18:24-19:1; I Corinthians 1-4; 16:12) and nothing about the other two (Artemas and Zenas), except what can be inferred from this passage (i.e., Artemas was apparently a gentile, based on his name; Zenas was a civil lawyer; based on their company, it seems that both of them were well-respected and held some leadership roles). People mattered to Paul, whether or not they were well-known. They are known to their King, and they are on the King's business, and so Paul loved to actively engage with them.

Considering the three commands of Paul to Titus in these verses, we learn three ways in which we should be actively engaged with one another.

1. Partnership (vv. 12-13a)

Paul asks Timothy to come join him. While Paul is often considered a "super-Christian," the New Testament records Paul to be very much of a team-player who surrounded himself with the companionship of other believers. This verse and many others like it throughout his epistles demonstrate the human side of Paul, that he loved his friends.

Let us consider some of the details to Paul's first command for Titus to come join him.

- *How?* Paul asked Titus to "be diligent" in his coming. The idea of this Greek word is one of diligence or haste, expediting and being zealous for a particular thing. Paul really wanted his dear son Titus to join him.
- *When?* Paul wanted Titus to join him only after Artemas or Tychicus had repaced him in the immature ministry in Crete. Paul wouldn't risk, even for a small time, the church there being leaderless and vulnerable.
- *Where?* Paul told Titus to join him in Nicopolis, "the city of victory," on the northwest coast of Macedonia above Achaia (i.e., modern day Greece). We speculate that this may have been where Titus' ministry to the bordering area of Dalmatia was launched (cf. II Timothy 4:10).
- *Why?* Paul gives no clear reason for this meeting, except that he wanted to spend the winter in Nicopolis, and he wanted Titus to join him. Simply put, people mattered to Paul, and he loved Titus and wanted to spend time with him. Paul loved the companionship of God's people, especially fellow laborers in ministry.

Application: Who needs you to come to them? Who needs your friendship, companionship, partnership?

¹⁴ "Danger, Keep Out," a sermon by Alistair Begg on Titus 3:9-11, preached on May 24, 1992. Available here: <http://bit.ly/rU7Le3>.

2. *Ministry (vv. 13-14)*

Zenas and Apollos were apparently preparing for some kind of ministry trip, and Paul now urges Titus to “diligently” (same word as in v. 12) help them on their way, so “that nothing be wanting [or lacking] unto them.” Paul burdens the church with the responsibility to provide for her people to the smallest detail, especially, in this case, for her ministers. Such provision is not the responsibility of the Titus’ alone, although they may lead in this respect; verse 14 makes it clear that God would have the whole local church community commit themselves to intra-church ministry—one meeting the needs of another, all meeting the needs of the body.

Notice the progression of ministry growth in verse 14.

- *Education* (head) – Paul uses an imperative in verse 14: “Our people must also learn...” (NASB). Titus should initiate the ministry to Zenas and Apollos, not only so that they will not be lacking anything, but also so that the folks in the local church could have an opportunity for some “in the field training.” After all, they have been burdened by Paul with the necessity of good works; now, they are commanded to translate those imperatives into application. Thus, ministry is not a feeling- or convenience-driven behavior; it is a learned behavior.
- *Devotion* (heart) – The Cretans were to “learn to maintain good works.” The word “maintain” could be translated “be devoted to” or “engage in” or “take care to.” Paul was concerned that their hearts be engaged with the head and their hands, causing them to serve as unto the Lord and because of the ministry of Christ filling them with responsive gratitude.
- *Provision* (hand) – The result of educated devotion would be provision. The “necessary uses” or “pressing needs” (NASB) would be met. This idea is counter-cultural in a society of entitlement. The New Testament rather teaches a community-consciousness, that good works for the benefit of others should characterize and define us (cf. I Timothy 5:8-11). Indeed, even the most unknown servants (like Artemas and Zenas) can find God-ordained fulfillment in a life of simple ministry, for I Thessalonians 4:10-12 teaches, “But we urge you, brethren...to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you, so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need.”
- *Solution* – The solution to a “unprofitable and vain [useless]” life (v. 9) is discovered in the fruitfulness of good works that minister to others (v. 8). The fruit Christ promised would be borne in His disciples (John 15:16) is the product of faithful ministry.

Application: Are you doing all you can to help your fellow believers? Are you holding back? Do you feel entitled? Are you bearing fruit? What is your attitude like?

3. *Affection (v. 15)*

Those who were with Paul sent their greetings across the many miles to Titus and his church family, because of the common “love in the faith” that they enjoyed. They were a family, separated by long distances but adopted and joined in Christ. This affection is encouraging and motivating, giving color to life and transcending all other loves. And it is this affection one for another that establishes our unity in mission and further markets the saving ability of God (John 13:35).

Application: Do you love others? Are you kindly intended towards others? Do you have an empathy and an affection for believers in other places of the world? Are you isolated and grim?

CONCLUSION

To summarize Paul’s burden in his letter to Titus using these final couple of paragraphs, our local church should affirm truth and the expressions of it in godly good works; we should avoid distractions and divisions that demonstrate a devaluation of gospel-ministry; and we should actively partner with, minister to, and love others in our assembly.

Paul’s final statement is, “Grace be with you all.” Paul apparently anticipated that his letter would be shared with the entire church on Crete. Therefore, he concludes with his favorite benediction, and one which would enable his readers to fulfill the high calling and mission of God written about in the first three chapters. The only way that we will be able to accomplish God’s mission, stand steadfast in truth, and live the godly, gospel-made, gracious lifestyle of genuine belief is if God gives us His grace. Any accomplishment whatsoever is only by His grace. So, let’s not just squeak by, let’s not just try in our own self-effort, only to experience mediocre success. Let us daily look to the One who was full of “grace and truth” (John 1:14) to shower us with the same so that God’s mission in this world will not fail with us. Delve into the gospel and let that grace overflow from your heart into godly living and good deeds toward others. In this way, God’s saving ability will be magnified through you, and you will be fruitful in God’s mission.