

GOD'S PEOPLE SHOULD BE CAREFUL TO DO GOOD

Titus 3:1-15

Key Verse: 3:8

“This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.”

In chapter 1, Paul instructed Titus to raise qualified leaders in the church. Their character should be godly, and they must hold firmly to the trustworthy message of the gospel. In chapter 2, Paul gave Titus specific teachings for the various groups of people in the church. And he again emphasized that the grace of God is the root of doing good. The grace of God not only justifies us through the forgiveness of sins, it also sanctifies; it is the power of God that enables godly living. In chapter 3, Paul develops the theme of doing good, this time in relation to living in the world. God's people do not live in isolation from the world. Though we are not of this world, we have been sent to the world as a witness. Jesus prayed for his disciples: **“My prayer is not that you take them out of the world...As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world”** (Jn 17:15,18). In order to be effective witnesses in the world, God's people should be careful to do good in it. So let's learn the importance of doing good in the world.

First, remind God's people how to behave in public life (1-2). Paul began with the words, **“Remind the people....”** This means to help them bring to mind what they already knew, but had forgotten. Apparently, they were very forgetful people. We are the same. This is why we need to be reminded of what God wants us to do as citizens of this world. We tend to like new teachings; hearing what we already know bores us. But from God's point of view, it is more urgent to practice what we already know than to learn new things. One of the great American evangelists, Charles Finney, once preached on John 3:16 for many nights in succession. Finally a church member asked, “Why do you keep giving us the same message again and again?” Finney answered, “When you really repent and accept it, I will stop.” We need to be reminded of what God wants us to do until our behavior changes and we practice what we know.

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Of what should we be reminded? First, Paul mentioned in verse 1a, **“to be subject to rulers and authorities, and to be obedient.”** The authorities that exist have been established by God (Ro 13:1b). As such, government reflects God’s authority. So God’s people should obey the authorities out of reverence for God. However, if government authority coerces disobedience to God and his commands, it invalidates itself.

Why did Paul first exhort people to submission and obedience? The historian Polybius tells us that the Cretans were constantly involved in “insurrections, murders and internecine wars.”¹ According to Wikipedia, the Mafia Code of Silence in regard to criminal activity had its origins in ancient Crete. Generally, people despised authority and did not cooperate. That is why Paul said, “There are many rebellious people” (1:10), and “Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons” (1:12). In such an environment, God’s people were called to live differently. It is the same for us in Chicago. Even though we are surrounded by rebellious people, we should not be overcome by the rebellious spirit but practice obedience to authorities with proper respect. This can be reflected in the way we carry out our duty as citizens: by paying taxes, serving on jury duty, observing traffic rules, showing respect for those in authority, and so on. Once, as I turned left on a yellow light, I was caught by a policeman. He asked me why I did that. I said, “I am sorry. I am a pastor and am running late to a Bible study. Please forgive me.” Then he cancelled the ticket and let me go, asking, “Please pray for me.”

Submission to authorities and obedience is just the beginning. Paul goes on in verse 1b, **“...to be ready to do whatever is good.”** Opportunities to do good in our society arise from time to time, such as when a disaster strikes. To many people, these seem burdensome, so they try to ignore them. But Christians should recognize the opportunity and do good, so revealing the love of God in a practical way. After Hurricane Katrina struck in 2005, Christian churches across America sent relief workers and goods, while the government agency FEMA did little or nothing in the beginning. This glorified God and spoke well of the Christian faith. These days there is a great need in the Philippines. We should not miss this opportunity to do good.

¹ Kelly, J.N.D., *The Pastoral Epistles*, Black’s New Testament Commentaries (A. and C. Black, 1963).

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Paul said in verse 2a, “...**to slander no one.**” Slander is to assassinate people’s character and ruin their reputations. This is the work of the devil. God’s people should not be involved in the slander of anyone at any time, including by e-mail or social media. Paul also said in verse 2b, “...**to be peaceable and considerate....**” The word “**peaceable**” is translated from a Greek word which actually means to avoid quarrels. God’s people should not be argumentative, or fight with others, either verbally or in deed. Rather, God’s people should be considerate of others (2c). Instead of insisting on our own ideas, we should stand in the shoes of others and try to understand them. God’s people should always be gentle toward everyone (2d). Here “gentle” means excellent in manners and polite, and it stems from humility. This gentleness should be practiced everywhere with everyone, not only toward those who are kind, but also toward those who are not. Paul’s words in verses 1-2, such as “**obedient, peaceable, considerate, gentle**” should characterize our public life. Then Christ’s name will be honored through us. How can we practice these virtues?

Second, remember what God has done for us (3-8a). To truly understand what God has done for us, we need to remember who we were. Verse 3 says, “**At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.**” Paul intentionally used the pronoun “we,” including himself. Even though we knew God, we neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him. We claimed to be wise, but we were fools who exchanged the glory of the immortal God for idols (Ro 1:21-22). As Tim Keller said, we worshiped the modern counterfeit gods of money, sex and power. This is why we did foolish and stupid things. We were disobedient, resentful, rebellious, and vengeful. We deceived others and were deceived by others. There was no trust, only suspicion. So we were always stressed out and suffered from anxiety attacks. We were enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. Though the things we did were harmful to us, we could not stop doing them because we were slaves. We lived in malice and envy. We wanted harm to befall others; if they succeeded, we lost our appetites. Someone said, “It is not enough for me to succeed, all of my enemies must fail.” Hatred marked our interactions. There was no mercy or understanding, only wounding and being wounded.

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When we remember this former way of life, we realize that we lived in hell. We don’t want to remember this terrible way of life. But we have to remember it in order to really appreciate the grace of God. Paul himself often spoke of his own wretchedness in relation to the grace of God. He said in 1 Timothy 1:13-14, **“Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly....”** I would say, “I was once a slave of selfishness, pride and lust—a cause of harm and grief to others—but the grace of our Lord....”

Verses 4-7 compose one long sentence in the Greek. Let’s read these verses: **“But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.”** This sentence hinges on the phrase, **“he saved us.”** It is the fullest statement of salvation in the New Testament. Here we can find some of the aspects of salvation—its source, grounds, means, and goal. The source of our salvation is God himself. While we were enslaved and helpless, unable to save ourselves, God showed his kindness and love to us. In his kindness, God forbore all of our sins, waiting patiently for our repentance (Ro 2:4). In his love, he sacrificed his one and only Son for us. Romans 5:8 says, **“But God demonstrated his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”** God’s kindness and love were not merely feelings in God’s heart, but were revealed by the fact that Jesus Christ appeared in history. We can be sure of God’s love based on the fact that Jesus came into the world. Sometimes we doubt God’s love based on our situation or feelings. But when we consider that God gave his one and only Son to save us, we realize that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Jesus Christ has appeared not only historically, but also personally to each of his people. The Risen Christ appeared to Paul and he was changed. In the same way, when the Risen Christ appeared to each of us we were saved. He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. If we were saved because of our righteous acts, what would happen? We would become proud and boast that we earned our salvation. But when we remember that we were saved by God’s mercy and grace, we recognize

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that our salvation is the gift of God and that all glory goes to God. We can be thankful always, in all circumstances.

Verses 5b-6 tell us the means by which God saved us: **“He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior....”** The **“washing of rebirth”** refers to the work of the Holy Spirit to create new life within us. Not only does the Holy Spirit enable us to be born again, but he also renews us day by day in the image of Christ. The Holy Spirit not only justifies us, but also sanctifies us. God pours out the Holy Spirit generously through Jesus Christ on those who believe. God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit are all involved in our salvation.

In this passage we can find a contrast between our past life and our new life in Christ. We were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. Simply speaking, we lived by our sinful desires. As time passed, we were degenerating in character and bearing shameful fruit. The final outcome was death and condemnation. When we look back on our past lives, we are full of regret because of wounds and sins that stained our souls, which nothing could erase. So we say, “If I could live my life over again, I would not live like this.” However, since Jesus saved us we have received a new life. When we were born again, God’s seed of life was planted in our hearts and began to grow. The Holy Spirit dwells in us and helps us to grow and bear good fruit. 2 Corinthians 4:16b says, **“Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.”** Psalm 103:5 says, **“...your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.”** We do not live looking backward, but we are pressing on the upward way. Then we can sing, “I’m pressing on the upward way; New heights I’m gaining every day. Still praying as I’m onward bound, ‘Lord plant my feet on higher ground.’ Lord, lift me up and let me stand, By faith, on heaven’s table land. A higher plane than I have found—Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.”

What is our goal of salvation? Verse 7 says, **“...so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.”** As wonderful as God’s grace of salvation is while we live in the present age, this is not our ultimate hope or the goal of our salvation. God’s goal for us is to inherit eternal life and to live forever with him in his kingdom as his heirs. 2 Timothy 2:11-12a say, **“Here is a trustworthy saying: If we die**

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with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him.” If our goal was limited to this world, we would have no real hope. But God made us his heirs to share eternal life in the kingdom of God. There, our Lord Jesus will wipe every tear from our eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain (Rev 21:4). Rather, the kingdom of God is full of life and light; it is full of grace and love; it is full of joy and peace. This is our goal of salvation. Paul's words in verses 4-7 are a trustworthy saying (8a). When we accept this trustworthy saying deeply in our hearts, we have a living hope in the kingdom of God. We are not attached to this world. We are free to love and serve God sacrificially.

Third, live productive lives (8b-15). After reminding us of the grace of salvation, Paul went on to teach us how to live in this world practically. Verse 8b says, **“And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good.”** Paul repeats here that doing what is good is the evidence of healthy gospel faith. If we claim to have faith in Christ but do not do good, we cannot prove that we have real faith. Real faith produces the fruit of doing good. There is a tendency for us to study a lot and practice little like mere academics. This makes us strange creatures, as though we have the head of an alligator and the body of a small sparrow. Of course, it is good to know many things. But as much as we know, we should also practice. It is not enough to talk about doing good; we must do good. We need to balance our words with good deeds. “Being careful” implies watching for the opportunity. Then, when the opportunity comes, we should eagerly embrace it. Doing good out of faith in Christ results in good for everyone; there is no bad side effect (8c). It reveals the beauty and goodness of Christ and attracts people to Jesus who saves.

In verse 9 Paul urges God's people **to avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless.** In verse 10 he says to **warn a divisive person once, and then a second time, and after that to have nothing to do with them.** In verse 11 he assures us that the **motive of such people is warped and sinful and that they are self-condemned.** God really wants his people to be united, not divided. We should build up God's church, not tear it down with division.

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In verses 12-13 Paul makes some personal requests of Titus and God's people in Crete. He really wanted Titus to come to him at Nicopolis and winter together with him. Paul asked help for Zenas the lawyer and Apollos, and provision for their needs. It was a practical way for the Cretans to share in the mission of world evangelism.

In verse 14 Paul reiterates the theme message of his letter: **“Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing good, in order to provide for urgent needs and not live unproductive lives.”** Paul emphasizes that Christian life should be productive and profitable (8). Why? This is the result of doing good. Doing good requires sacrifice of our time, energy and money. But it brings a profit to God and to others. Often, we don't see the fruit of doing good right away. So we can feel that it is too costly and a losing business. We become weary and tired of doing good. But doing good is not a losing business. It builds up our character in the image of Christ. It spreads good seed which will eventually bring forth a harvest. Psalm 112:9 says, **“They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor, their righteousness endures forever; their horn will be lifted high in honor.”** Galatians 6:9-10 say, **“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”**

Paul concluded, **“Everyone with me sends you greetings. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all”** (15). Let's remember what kind of people we were and what God has done for us. Let's learn to devote ourselves to doing what is good for the glory of God.