

## Doctrine Works: Just a Reminder

### Titus 3:1-8

One of the most profound life lessons that I learned came the summer in between my 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade year. It wasn't from some major life event, but it came as my interest in playing basketball was growing. I had always played and my dad was the varsity basketball coach at our school, but in 8<sup>th</sup> grade I hit a growth spurt and the way I shot the basketball needed to change. So, my dad and I watched different really good players shoot the ball, and we read articles about proper shooting technique and we talked to other coaches and had them watch me shoot and help me adjust certain aspects of my shot. All of that was important, but as I was struggling to change the way I played, there was one principle that my dad told me repeatedly that helped me make the change.

**Practice makes permanent.** He would tell me that as I would go out to shoot the ball. He would say, do it the right way in practice when you are by yourself and that will translate to the games. This was an important lesson for me because I needed to hear that practicing what I had been taught over and over again would bring change. And, I needed to be reminded of the change that would come.

This study of Titus has been challenging to me because I feel like I keep getting hit with the same principle repeatedly. It feels like my dad is reminding me that practice makes permanent. Paul is telling Titus how to minister to strengthen these churches and the major principle these believers need to hear is that intellectually knowing the right truths is not enough. It must translate into action. Your doctrine must work and it will if you rightly grasp the grace of God.

Our passage today is Titus 3:1-8 so open there and look at verse 1. The same principle of connecting orthodoxy and orthopraxy is at work, but this time it's focused more on the lifestyle we live in front of a watching world. Look back with me to a few verses in chapter 2. Verses 5, 8, and 10. Paul tells Titus that a lifestyle that fits with sound doctrine will shape outsiders perception of the gospel.

Here, in chapter 3 he expands on that idea and gives us the theology behind it. So, this morning we will receive **3 reminders for us to live out the gospel in our culture.**

#### **1. Our Faith has Social Responsibilities (vv. 1-2)**

As we look at these first couple of verses I want to draw your attention to a tension in the Bible. The Bible is filled with tensions. Not contradictions but tensions. Scripture gives us principles that at first glance seem to be in opposition to one another. For example, the Bible tells us that a good reputation is of more value than gold. But at the same time, we are not to be controlled by what people think of us. How can we be concerned to have a good reputation while at the same time not be concerned over what people think of us? The way forward is to pay those principles side by side and work through how we can live in such a way that we uphold both. That is part of the work of a putting on a lifestyle fitting for sound doctrine.

Another one of the major tensions in Scripture is that we are to be faithful witnesses in our culture without assimilating to our culture. That is a challenge because most Christians either withdraw or mimic. How do we witness faithfully while not conforming? I believe these verses help us navigate this biblical tension by focusing on two areas. Look at verse 1.

First, we are to be obedient to our civil authorities. Let's talk about government for a second here. Taxes are due this week, hopefully most of you have already filed. I won't say that I'm happy all the time to have to pay taxes, but I think the biblical perspective on government is that human governments are a gift of common grace to us. Listen to Romans 13:1-7. Notice in particular verse 3 where Paul gives us the purpose for God to ordain human authorities. You and I live in a shared space with other human beings. Our lives overlap in significant ways and God has instilled authority to hold back the tide of evil in men's hearts and to promote that which is good.

According to Titus 3:1 we are to respond to that governing authority with submissive obedience. But notice what else he says at the end of verse 1. I think Paul intends these good works to be broader in scope than societal, civil good works, but it certainly includes them. So, Paul is saying that a lifestyle that fits with sound doctrine obeys human authority, and, when possible, helps that human authority fulfill its God ordained purpose of promoting good and restraining evil.

But beyond being submissive to human authorities, sound doctrine shapes how we live among others socially. Look at verse 2.

As we live among others we are to treat other people as those made in the image of God, deserving our kindness and courtesy. Let's be honest here. This is becoming increasingly more difficult. Most of the media we consume comes to us from the perspective we already have and demonizes those who take a different view. People around our country are finding it more and more difficult to have honest, genuine conversations about tough issues. Instead, we treat others as hardly worthy of interaction and subhuman. I think this is an incredible opportunity for believers to model the attitudes given to us in verse 2.

The common reaction when you tell Christians to be kind is for people to respond, "yeah, but Jesus turned over tables!" Yes. But that doesn't give you permission to be a jerk. Paul sees no contradiction between straightforward truth telling and a gentle disposition. Look down at 3:9-11. The truth must be offensive, not us.

I think what Paul is saying here in verse 2 is that believers in Christ, who have been shaped by God's grace will be the easiest to get along with, most gentle, humble and gracious people in a particular society. And I think Paul would say that if you don't act as verse 2 describes, you have forgotten the gospel. And this brings us to our second reminder.

## **2. Our Beginning Was Bad (v. 3)**

When you get to verse 3 you see the word "for" at the beginning. Here comes the reason for the social lifestyle described in verses 1-2. Why? Look at verse 3.

It is good to be reminded of what life was like before Christ and what life would be like right now if not for the grace of God. As you get into the details of this list, it's not a pretty picture. Think of a person living these qualities out. Foolish.

You can access a lot of foolishness portrayed in videos online these days. I watched a video of a guy who tried to do a backflip off a soda machine onto a concrete floor. He didn't land it right and smashed his face into the floor. He was bleeding profusely and probably lost some teeth. That was dumb. But the video then cuts to him several months later, all healed up and back on the same soda machine. He's going to attempt this again to show everyone that he can do it. Well...he jumps...rotates wrong, again, and smashes his face on the concrete floor and comes up bleeding again. "What is wrong with you?" That is foolishness and that is life without Christ. But that was each one here. When you fuse together

someone who acts that foolishly with someone who is enslaved to their passions and base desires, who is hateful to others and often hated by others, this is not the way to win friends and influence people.

Here's the thing. Nothing about the person described here is easy to live with. It's not convenient to live out verse 2 to the fool described in verse 3. But the only way to put on the qualities of verse 2 is to know that you too were once the guy doing backflips off the soda machine.

Paul calls us to a life of empathy for others. One of the key qualities of Christian maturity is to be able to look at someone else and say, I would be him or her without the grace of God. And that grace is what we come to in our third reminder.

### **3. Our Gospel has Changed Us (vv. 4-8)**

Look at the start of verse 4. This is one of those magnificent contrasts in the Bible that call us to “look up” from our sinful past to what God has done. I want to read you verses 4-7 and then I want to show you how the glory of our salvation is displayed through the grammar of the passage. Let's read it.

This is all one sentence. You would get in trouble if you wrote a sentence like this in high school English class. The center of this sentence is at the beginning of verse 5. He saved us. Everything in verse 4 leads up to this and everything else in verses 5-7 flows from this. It's like the span that holds the bridge together.

Of course, we've seen this language before in verse 11 and Jesus is called our Savior in verse 13. The central idea here is to rescue from final destruction.

A few years ago, we were at a friend's pool during the summer, which apparently, we don't have in Michigan. Stella was 2 and the adults were talking on one end of the pool. She typically had a floaty on, but for some reason didn't at the moment. She stayed away from the pool but wandered around to the other side, and sure enough, she got too close, tripped and plunged into the pool. When she fell, I was already up and walking toward her, but still had quite a bit of distance to cover. Bethany said she has never seen me move so fast. I leapt into the water and hoisted little Stella up and onto the side of the pool before she even had time to suck in a breathe of water. For quite a while after that event we would hear Stella say from time to time, Daddy saved me.

In this passage all three members of the Trinity are involved in our rescue because this is who God is. He loves to rescue the drowning sinner. When I jumped into the pool I saved Stella by being a decent swimmer and having a fairly quick first step. By what method does God save? Paul is going to explain this salvation by answering three questions. **What? How? Why?**

Let's look at that first question. **What?** If you have ever been a teacher you know a very effective means of instruction is to answer a question by showing the negative and then explaining the positive. Paul shows us what does NOT lead to our salvation and what does. Look at verse 5.

Rescue does not come to us because we are worthy. God is not in the business of rescuing the noteworthy, the good, or the righteous. He says that salvation doesn't come by our works of righteousness and that is because none of us have any works of righteousness to make us deserve rescue. In fact, we have done the opposite. Listen to Romans 3:9-12. We have been so stained by sin that even our best attempts to do righteousness are tainted by self-love and disregard for God. It's like you have fallen into the pool with a full suit of iron armor on. You are quickly sinking to the bottom but when you try to move your arms and legs to swim back to the surface you find that the iron suit is rusted and doesn't allow movement. The only thing you can do on your own is sink further into the depths.

If this is our situation then what is the positive answer to the WHAT question? Look at the next line in verse 5. Now look back to verse 4. Goodness, loving kindness, and mercy. God does not act with mercy toward us because we deserve it. If you look at the language of verse 4 it reminds us of verse 2:11. These 3 descriptions, goodness, loving kindness and mercy are summed up in the word grace.

Saying that grace can only come to one who is undeserving is like saying that water is wet. God sees us in our pitiful, sinful condition and desires to show us mercy and grace. So HOW does he do it? Look at the rest of verse 5.

So, grace rescues us by the work of the Holy Spirit in us. But what does he do? You see several words here; washing, regeneration, renewal. All are works of the Holy Spirit and all describe the new birth. You were dead in your sins and you could not make yourself alive. But God, by His grace, made you alive by His Holy Spirit. At the new birth you are washed clean of your sins. They are gone. You are

renewed, given spiritual life. This is a decisive reality. Here's how one theologian described the new birth.

*"God effects a change which is radical and all-pervasive, a change which cannot be explained in terms of any combination, permutation, or accumulation of human resources, a change which is nothing less than a new creation by him who calls the things that be not as though they were, who spake and it was done, who commanded and it stood fast. This, in a word, is regeneration."* – John Murray

Listen to 2 Cor. 4:6. Paul compares our new birth to the first moment of creation. It's the creation of something where there was nothing. And of course, regeneration comes to us through the work of Jesus Christ. Look at verse 7. **So, the WHAT is God's grace, the HOW is through regeneration and the WHY is found in verse 7.**

Notice at the beginning of verse 7 before explaining the WHY, he gives us a summary of the salvation he has just explained in verses 4-6. We are justified by his grace. This is the same root word as the word righteousness in verse 5. So, we do not bring our own righteousness to the table in any way, but God, by His grace declares us righteous. We, who are not righteous, are declared righteous because of Jesus Christ. His righteous life is counted or imputed to us. And all of this comes to us so that we can be heirs.

Jesus Christ is the Son of God and when His righteousness is imputed or applied to your account, you are made a Son through Him. You receive His status and this means you get His inheritance. You have done nothing to earn this inheritance and it will not end up in probate court. You and I can place our full hope and confidence in the full benefits that await us because of the new life and adoption we have received through Jesus Christ.

So, this is the gospel that has changed us. But let's bring the car back into the garage and reconnect this gospel to our overall message this morning. We are looking at 3 admonitions to live out the gospel in our culture. The gospel is the message that saves us and changes us. This is the message that leads to a lifestyle of influence toward those around you. Look at verse 8.

Titus must become like an alarm clock set to the same time that insists that you take action and get up. As he does this I want you to see the important

connection between what you believe and what you do. Notice here that Paul does not say, don't worry about good theology so you can pursue good works. He insists that grasping good theology is necessary for good works. Sometimes we can make deep and purposeful theological thinking the enemy of righteous living. But this is not the biblical way. Paul tells Titus that teaching these truths is vital to living with good works. Failure to pursue good theology and try to live a righteous life is like trying to prepare a gourmet dinner without knowing the difference between salt and sugar.

But it's not enough to just know the difference between salt and sugar. You must use them to make a meal and we must be intentional about applying the truths of God's grace to our lives. Look at the middle of verse 8 again. It's not enough to just expect that learning the truths of the gospel will automatically change the way you live. You must intentionally, carefully, deliberately work these things out.

My hope is that today will be a reminder to you. A reminder of the incredible good news of the Gospel that reshapes our lives. And a reminder of the necessity of working out that gospel in good works to others in our church body and the world.