

April 18, 2010

Titus 3:8

Alright good morning. Welcome back. As always – take out your Bibles with me and let's go back to Titus chapter 3. We have been looking at verses 3-7 for so many weeks now and the intro has been the same for so many of those weeks, that I thought I'd let you hit the high points today. When I am talking about the purpose of the letter of Titus, it is a compact blueprint from God for what? – Establishing His church. And in that blueprint, chapter 3 of Titus is telling about God's plan for the church's response to what? – The world around us. And yet for several weeks we have been studying this amazing set of verses in the middle of chapter 3 that are all about the doctrines of what? – Salvation. Good job. Well this morning we are moving past verses 3-7. Kind of. We are going to look at verse 8 – but verse 8 is going to throw us back at everything else a little bit. So – with your Bibles open to Titus 3, if I were to mention the 80/20 rule, how many of you would know what I'm talking about?

Probably a lot of us. It is the idea that in the local church 80% of the work gets done by 20% of the people. In other words 80% of the people attend church services without getting involved in any form of actual service. I haven't validated those numbers here – but I know that here like other churches there are many who attend without ever getting involved in ministry. We don't have a waiting list for Sunday school teachers or nursery workers or LINK facilitators and hosts – and we aren't unique in that situation.

But why is that? There could be multiple causes – for one thing life is busy. Other things easily crowd out serving the Lord. But we all have the same number of hours in a week, so it really boils down to priorities. Serving the Lord is just not a priority for many that attend church services. And so we come back to the question, why? Why aren't God's people motivated to serve Him?

No one can judge our hearts – we each need to examine our own – but I do know that there are many who are just cultural Christians. For them, going to church once in a while is a nice thing to do – it makes them feel good. They would claim to believe in Jesus as Savior but He is not really their Lord. They do not let Christ control their use of time or money. He is pretty much compartmentalized into a drawer of their lives and they pull Him out when they feel the need. Other things dominate life and serving Jesus is just not a priority.

If I have kind of just described you, then the Word today would say you need to examine if you are truly saved. Jesus doesn't save us so that we can relegate Him to a corner of our lives to be pulled out in emergencies. He is Lord – and He demands total allegiance in every area of your life. He won't take a back seat to your career or your family or your hobbies or whatever. So you need to ask yourself honestly, is Jesus my Lord? And if He is not, you need to ask if He is truly your Savior – have you really trusted in His blood to save you from the wrath of God – have you repented of your sins – is He really your hope of heaven?

Or it may be that you have been saved by faith in Christ but you've drifted into a complacency or carelessness in your relationship with Him. And you need to remember and think about what God has done for your soul so that you will be both useful and fruitful in your relationship with Christ. In other words, remembering God's abundant grace in saving us is the key for motivation to serve Him. That's what Paul is saying in Titus 3:8. Let's look at it together.

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.

Remember that Paul's overall concern in this chapter is the church's response to a pagan world. You may have wondered the past several weeks as we've looked at the doctrines of salvation how all that fits with the blueprint chapter 3 is supposed to be about. That's what we're going to see today. How do we as the people of God gain a platform to tell this world about God's great love as seen at the cross of Jesus Christ? And the answer we just read is that we – as those who have trusted in God – must be devoted to doing what is good.

And in order for that to be the case, Paul tells Titus here in verse 8, that he – Titus – has got to stress “these things” – these things that make up what Paul calls a “trustworthy saying.” Well what’s he talking about? Everything we’ve been studying since verse 3.

In order for us to be DEVOTED to doing what is good – in order for us to be diligent in making ourselves worthy of being heard in relationship to the world around us – we have got to REMEMBER all that God’s been saying in Titus 3:3-7. And that starts by remembering our own former condition. That’s what **verse 3** was about, remember?

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.

That verse describes Paul and every other Christian before God saved us. Maybe you’re thinking “I wasn’t like that – I grew up in church – I was a pretty good person.” If that’s true, like we talked about several weeks ago, it is only because of outward circumstances that restrained your sin. But if God saved you, He opened your eyes at one point to see that the sins of verse 3 are lurking just below the surface in your heart. As **Romans 3:10-12** told us: *“There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.”*

You were not the first exception to those verses! But some people don’t like an emphasis on our sin. They want to just be positive – they know they are forgiven of their sins and they just want to focus on God’s love and not think about the depth of sin from which He rescued them. But listen – if you do that, you will not appreciate God’s love and grace. God’s grace in saving you was not a matter of His taking a basically good person and giving you a little moral guidance. That’s why we looked at the doctrine of total depravity. **Salvation is a radical INTERVENTION that required the infinite, holy God to send His own Son to be the substitute for sinners.** You will never understand or appreciate God’s amazing grace until you see that you were completely dead in sin before He intervened in your life. **Salvation is NEEDED because we were dead in sin and total depravity.**

And intervening is exactly what He did. And Paul tells us why He did and tells Titus to keep telling us why He did. When God saves us, it is totally because of His kindness, love, and mercy and not at all because of our works. In verse 3 – man is active in sin. In verse 4, God is active in salvation – changing what man could not change. Remember **verse 4 and 5**?

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.

Our salvation was not due to anything good in us. Salvation is not a joint effort, where God does His part and we add our part. It is all from God, and not at all from us. God did not love us because we were worth loving, but rather because He is love. He did not save us because He foresaw that we would believe in Him. That would make us, not God, the cause of our salvation. Apart from His sovereign intervention, none of us would have believed, because we were dead in our sins. He had to take the initiative. Salvation is totally of the Lord.

In fact, note the activity of all three persons of the Trinity. The Father took the loving initiative in our salvation, the Son provided His perfect life and sacrificial death to secure our salvation, and the Holy Spirit made it effective and applied all of that to us personally. Thus **salvation is not BECAUSE of anything we do or don’t do but comes from God’s kindness, love, and mercy that were made manifest in the incarnation of Jesus Christ** – God in human flesh in a perfect human life on a human sinner’s cross coming out alive from a human grave victorious over sin and death. **Salvation is because of the great LOVE of God.**

And Paul tells Titus – stress these things – if they are ever going to be devoted to good works they need to know what they were like and why God intervened. And they need to know how what God did reaches them. Remember the rest of **verse 5 through verse 7**?

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.

We need to know that God saves us through the washing of rebirth – regeneration – God raising us from spiritual death to life – that we were born again. And we were as active in being born again about as much as we were in being born the first time. In other words, God is active and we are passive. He is the source of our life.

And He is the reason when we are given life, we can stand before Him. That was verse 7 – justified by His grace. Not only does God regenerate us – give us life – He justifies us – declares us righteous. That’s the doctrine of imputation. Jesus bears our sins so we can be declared not guilty, forgiven in justice, but we are also clothed in Christ’s perfection so that we can be declared righteous, accepted in perfection. **To save us, God raises us from spiritual death to LIFE; our sins imputed to Jesus in death and His life to us in righteousness. Salvation is through regeneration by the Holy Spirit and justification by God’s GRACE.**

And we need to know – if we are going to be devoted to good deeds – that salvation that is real is a salvation that goes on. Back in **verse 5** remember – He saved us not only by the regeneration or rebirth by the Holy Spirit, but by the renewal of the Holy Spirit. That having been declared holy in our status, God sets out to make us holy in our standing. **Colossians 3:9-10** tells us that we have taken off the old self and put on the new one – new life – and that it is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. **Romans 12:1-2** tells us we are to present our bodies – our natural lives – as living holy pleasing sacrifices in worship – that we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. That’s what sanctification is all about as a part of salvation. **Philippians 2:12-13** shows the partnership we have with God in it: *“continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”*

While God creates the new nature by the power of the Spirit, we must WALK in the Spirit and be transformed through God’s Word in order to experience this ongoing renewal. Salvation CONTINUES through sanctification.

And then finally, Paul says we need to remember – we need to know – not only the need, the why, the method, the continuation, but the inevitable result of salvation. And that’s what we saw last week at the end of **verse 7** – that God does all of that so that:

We might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

Hope is a certainty for the saved – it represents the truth that we do not experience all that is ours in this life, the BEST is yet to come. Salvation RESULTS in glorification forever in the presence of God.

Why does Paul go into this incredible discourse on salvation? These doctrines of God’s grace in our salvation are the motivation for how we live our lives. Paul in verse 8 echoes how he ended chapter 2 – telling Titus that he must stress these truths, these doctrines, so that:

those who trust in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good.

It shows us that **sound doctrine is not for useless speculation nor just preacher education – it is for practical APPLICATION.**

If you understand the doctrine of salvation by God’s sovereign grace, it will MOTIVATE you to spend your life doing what is good. By implication – if it does not, then you do not understand it which means you may not have EXPERIENCED it.

But when we see the connection between understanding these truths and living devoted to doing what is good, that phrasing might raise questions. What does it mean to be good?

After all, people have very different ideas as to what constitutes good behavior and good living. People who have a great deal in common can disagree about what it means to be good. This morning I want simply to point out to you something that is obvious enough in our study of Titus, but may be

something that we have not carefully considered, something that we have not reflected upon. I'm talking about the list of virtues and of behaviors that, together, make up the good Christian life. This is, of course, what we always find in the Bible and the New Testament in particular. For example, there are Ten Commandments – not one. And whenever Paul describes the Christian life he does so at length and in respect to many things at the same time. **The CHRISTIAN life is composed of conduct toward God, toward one's neighbor, and toward oneself. It is many behaviors at once; all at the same time.** People have tried to simplify the description by saying that it is all simply love – but, the fact is, that is not the way the Christian life is described in Holy Scripture. We want it to be one thing or, at most, a few, but it is not. It is many things at the same time. And **it is in the combination of behaviors that we find the distinctive GOODNESS of the Christian life.**

In fact in just these few chapters of Titus, the two common Greek words for “good” occur in some form ten times and, in each case, as a summation of a Christian way of life.

So, what is true goodness and how is it known? The first thing to be said is that much of what Paul commends to us here is not controversial. Only a few people would say that self-control is a bad thing, or that slander is a good thing. Most people think that consideration of other people is good and that egotistical pride is bad.

But there is a distinctively Christian definition of the good, of good living and good conduct. There may be overlap with other ethical teaching in the world, but finally the Bible's definition is unique.

And Paul does not give a definition here. He is telling Titus to remind the Christians on the island of Crete of what he had already taught them. So there was no need to say everything. He tells them instead, over and again, to be good and do good. But the “good” that Paul is after is unique precisely because of the combination of ethical duties the Bible requires and the definition that qualifies them as good. Remember from when we looked at verse 5 that **the supreme motive required of everything that is good is the LOVE of God.** An act that outwardly conforms to God's Word but comes from a heart alienated from God, is not judged by God as a good deed. So **good works are not good unless they are done in the love of God and in IMITATION of Christ.**

And though the idea of goodness itself is not controversial in many of these ways, the combination of virtues is another thing altogether. To combine sexual purity with kindness in this modern culture; to combine willing obedience to the government with an absolute and uncompromised loyalty to the living and true God; to combine strict and conscientious truth telling with a genuine love for other people; to combine a saying No to malice toward others and saying Yes to love; it is in this fullness of goodness, in this life of comprehensive virtue that a distinctly Christian goodness is found.

We can't ever forget this! Being kind from time to time is not what Paul means by devoting oneself to being good. Not slandering someone is not what Paul means by doing whatever is good. You cannot live a Christian life piecemeal. It is in the wholeness of goodness, in goodness practiced in many directions at the same time, in this goodness that is attitude and speech and behavior all at once that we find the goodness of which Paul speaks. It was that goodness that Christ practiced in his life and by which he left us an example that we should follow in his steps.

As Dr. Robert Rayburn pointed out, “If we are comfortable in our Christian living, it is a certainty that our view of the Christian life is too small; we are thinking of and caring for too few things; we are thinking the whole thing too easy.”

That is why we must have Christ and the Holy Spirit at work in us and on our behalf. To be good in so many ways at once is beyond the ability of any frail and fallen human being. We can hardly keep in focus all the things required of us that we should live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age (like we were told in chapter 2 verse 12). There is a sense in which the Christian will be

gasping for air, sucking wind, as long as he lives in this world for all the straining his mind, heart, and will must do to present himself pure and holy before God (like we are told in Romans 12).

Or, to put it another way, the Christian life is like a golf swing: many different things must be done properly at the same time, or the swing goes wrong and the ball goes astray. That's why I'm no good at golf. I concentrate on one thing – say the grip, and then my stance goes wrong and whoosh. I focus on the stance and my backswing goes wrong and whoosh. I focus on the backswing and my head goes wrong and whoosh. And five other things that cause my golf ball to head off into the woods. No, the Christian life is not easy partially because you have to do so many things at the same time.

That's what **Philippians 3:14 -16** is talking about when Paul describes how he presses on toward the goal for which he has been called heavenward and in doing so he says we must continue to live up to what we have already attained. **As God teaches us in sanctification, we don't stop doing or being good in one way in order to focus on another – we BUILD on and ADD to, not remove and replace.**

Is it possible that you and I set our sights too low? We content ourselves with one virtue or another, when we ought to be seeking a dozen at the same time. Listen - **If we do not feel that without Christ we can do NOTHING, and if we are not always, almost in desperation, looking to him for the grace and help to enable us to live a truly godly life, it is almost certainly because we have a view of the Christian life that is altogether too SIMPLE, too easy.** We have made it a few things, when it is really many things.

It is a life lived carefully devoted to doing what is good. Why? The end of verse 8 says *“because these things are excellent and profitable for everyone.”* And there we see not only the connection between our belief and our behavior but between our behavior and our relationship to the world around us.

Our lifestyles when they are good as defined and directed by God's Word are often the platform that opens the door so that we can REACH OUR WORLD. Our lives enable us to tell lost people about the kindness and love and mercy of a God who came to live and die in their place that they might be given life – be declared righteous – be given eternity in Jesus Christ by believing what we know to be true. **That's the blueprint for our relationship with the world around us. And that's why we must KNOW – we can never lose sight of the wonder of the cross and the power of the sovereign GRACE of God – we must talk about and we must never forget what God has done for us.**

Have you? Would you describe your life as devoted to doing what is good – God's good – the Word's good? Have you – like so many of us have and do – let the doctrines of salvation become old hat, taken for granted, or anything less than absolutely awe-inspiring?

That's why we celebrate the Lord's Supper – to remind us corporately of who we are as the family of God and how we came to be that way and what we are to be about. As we come to the table today, let it be with a renewed remembrance – a solemn but celebratory remembrance of the grace and love of God by which we are saved.

If you understand the truths of salvation we touched on again today, if you believe in the atoning death of Jesus Christ – if you have accepted His righteousness by faith in Him alone to save you from the wrath of God – then take this bread and cup in thankful and personal commitment to live devoted to what is good. And continue to worship together knowing oh how much He loves you.

Celebration of Communion...