

**May 23, 2010**  
**The Best of Titus**

Alright good morning. I'm glad you are back today. Take your Bibles and open them back up to the letter of Titus. If you are a guest today and I guess for those of you who are here every week, you need to know that today is not going to be what you have come to expect as our normal time in the Word together as we have studied through the book of Titus – but it is crucial for us.

As I told you at the very beginning of this study many many months ago, this is a condensed letter and when you mix it with the water of exegesis – of letting God speak through His Word – it begins to expand and expand and it's taken us months to go through this – to expose ourselves to the almost unending riches that are found here.

And yet like we saw last week in looking at the last 4 verses, **all that God has shown us and taught us and challenged us with in this letter is effective only when it is realized in OUR LIVES** – truth is only effective when it affects us enough to affect other people through us.

So before we finalize the blueprint of God's church that is the letter of Titus, this week I want us to see the tools God has given us to fulfill that blueprint: what you might call the 'greatest hits' or 'the best of' the book of Titus. These themes show up again and again in this letter but because we take such small portions of it as we go through it, we miss the impact of the whole. And if there are only three chapters, for God through Paul to repeat anything means we ignore it at our own peril. So keep your Bibles out – we'll be all over the book of Titus today as we look at 4 of what could be the main themes or tools God has shown us and how each one corrects a misconception we – you – may have in His church.

The first one we need to see together is a word we first really emphasized in our vision series last Fall but have found also emphasized through this study – and that is the interdependence of the people of God. The **misconception** that is rampant among those who claim to follow the Christian religion is that **the church is what I go to not what I AM as a part of these people**. And from the get-go, God challenges that in Titus.

Chapter 1 is all about God's plan for the leadership of God's church. And what we see in **verse 5** is that it is to be led by elders. In verse 5 Paul writes "*the reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town.*" And the fact that Titus is charged with appointing elders in these churches shows us that the leaders in God's church come from within the church – from among the people. And the qualifications that are described from **verses 5 through 9** show us that these elders are chosen from among the congregation because the congregation recognizes their faith, maturity, and integrity. And that recognition by their peers combined with their knowledge of the Word enables them to encourage and refute the people in their church family. **Everything in the process of church leadership is WOVEN together between elders and congregation**. But it isn't just the leadership.

As you go to **chapter 2, verses 2 through 10** gave us God's blueprint for life within the church family – and it is to be as the interdependent family. Older believers and younger believers – male and female – every stage and station of life – is directed to specific behaviors and responsibilities – it takes all of them to fulfill God's plan and design for His church. In fact what God showed us in this was how **God designed His church so that, in general, the younger believers are TAUGHT by the older believers and the older believers are SHARPENED by the younger**. And before you go putting yourself into a single specific category in that – those responsibilities are relative. For almost all of us, **there are people on BOTH SIDES of us spiritually who need us to be living in God's standards and expectations and roles for both of those categories**. And so what begins to unfold here is that we all bear some level of responsibility for those around us. We are interdependent by design.

In fact that comes out in **chapter 3** as well. Look back at **verse 10** remembering that though this letter is addressed to Titus, it was also an open letter through him to the churches and there is very little that is commanded uniquely to Titus in his role as Paul's delegate there. So when verse 10

says *“Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him”* we see the echo of Jesus’ command in the gospel of Matthew that this difficult act of confronting those in our church who are in error or in sin is a challenge for all of us. **Honest and loving though at times painfully blunt CONFRONTATION is one of the keys to the life of God’s family.** You need it and so do I.

And of course **the rest of chapter 3** we looked at last week as Paul reminds us of just some of those who are in ministry with him – Artemas, Zenas, Apollos, etc. – we find that **the ministry God has given us takes ALL of us doing our parts**, working together, encouraging each other, promoting each other **for the glory of God.**

See this interdependence is not some random idea I made up out of one verse or something. **The INTERDEPENDENCE of the people of God permeates God’s blueprint.** And if this truth is going to be true here – it has to be realized – practiced on purpose – in each of us. What does that mean? Let me ask you:

- Older believers – how are you making an impact for Jesus in the lives of younger believers around you? See this means there is no retirement in the Christian life. This issue is never was your life worthy of respect but is your life worthy of respect.
- Younger believers – are you allowing, even pursuing, a godly mentor to speak and train a respect worthy life into you or do you think you’ve got it covered on your own?
- All of us – are there people – friends – colleagues – family even – who we are letting flush areas of their lives because we are unwilling to love them enough to speak truth to them – to warn them – to confront them?
- All of us – are you using the gifts, talents, time, resources God has given you in any way to seize the opportunities for ministry right in front of you – to build His church – to matter for the Kingdom or are you holding down a pew and just soaking others’ service up?

So much of this interdependence is related to our character as the people of God – and that’s the heart of the next theme we’ve seen in Titus – the character of the people of God – the undeniable, intentional connection between truth and life, belief and behavior.

There are multitudes of church-goers – even people who claim to be Christians – who have successfully segmented their lives into the sacred and the secular. There is a piece of their mind, of their emotions, of their lifestyle and routine that has been connected to “church” so to speak, but the other areas of life have been carefully cordoned off that never the two shall meet. This **misconception that Christianity can be held SEPARATELY from living life – that what we say we believe must not inescapably affect all of our days** is completely shattered in God’s blueprint here in Titus.

From the very beginning – the first verse – Paul lays out this reality. Look at **chapter 1 verse 1**: *“Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God’s elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness.”* We have to get this in seriousness. Notice again here – as we saw all through the last half of Colossians – the inseparability of justification and sanctification – of salvation and godliness. There is an intimate connection between truth and godliness – Paul calls it the “truth that leads to godliness.”

Any knowledge of this truth – to know, to understand, to grasp, to believe truth will change us – will lead to godliness. In fact John MacArthur says it like this: “Any profession of the truth that does not lead an individual to live a godly life to one degree or another is a spurious profession.”

In other words just as blunt as all get out, don’t tell me you are saved if you have no desire to be sanctified – to grow in godliness – to be like Jesus. And don’t tell me you believe this truth if it is not progressively and persistently showing up in your life. And that’s what the elders are charged with confronting.

**Verse 1:9** says an elder *“must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.”* And in **1:16** God tells us how we see that truth opposed – check it out: *“They claim to know God, but by their actions*

*they deny him.” If our BEHAVIOR doesn’t reflect the gospel externally, the gospel hasn’t affected us internally.*

Keep going – look at the next verse – **chapter 2 verse 1**: *“You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine.”* That’s what chapter 2 is all about – not sound doctrine itself, but the kind of behavior that is expected as an out flow of believing sound doctrine – the life that fits with the truth because you can’t separate them. **Our salvation is not accomplished by our works, but it is PROVEN by them every day.** And the heart of this really comes out in the next few verses we’ll look at.

Start with **chapter 2 verse 12**: *“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.”* The grace that saves us is the grace that teaches us to live godly lives in this age.

Then in **verse 14** he says Jesus Christ *“gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.”* What defines us as the people who belong to Jesus – whom He has died to redeem – is that we are eager to do what is good.

Finally, **chapter 3 verse 8**: *“This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things...”*, - what things – go back to **verse 4**:

*“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.”*

Why does God tell us that we should stress these things? Now finish **verse 8**: *“so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good.”* **If you understand the doctrine of salvation by God’s sovereign grace, and believe that it is true in your experience, it will MOTIVATE you to spend your life doing what is good. By implication – if it does not, then what possible grounds could you have to claim that you have experienced it?**

But this theme in Titus leads us to and is inextricably connected to the third one – in fact the verses in which we see it overlap. Back in **chapter 2 verse 1** when Paul tells Titus to teach them to do what fits with – what comes from – believing sound doctrine – he then gives all kinds of specific examples of how that plays out and what it looks like – in many ways being summed up in his charge to Titus in **verse 7** when he says: *“In everything set them an example by doing what is good.”*

Again in **verse 14**, the proof of our belonging to Jesus is our eagerness to do what is good. In **verse 8 of chapter 3**, the result of our believing the truth of salvation is that we are careful to devote ourselves to doing what is good. Then move on to **verse 14 of chapter 3** where one more time Paul says it again: *“Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good.”*

Great – the theme of good works – good deeds – we get it – that’s nothing new – we ought to be good. But the **misconception** that poisons us is that **the good we should focus on is defined through COMPARISON to others or by our OWN decision rather than defined by the Word of God.** And that becomes really clear back in **chapter 1 verses 15-16**. Read that with me again. *“To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.”*

Here’s the example of people who are unfit for doing anything good. And yet these are the people – listen – these were people in the churches in Crete who were in many ways doing the things that were outwardly prescribed and even required by God’s Word in that day. How can that not be good? Look at what it says – they claim to know God but by their actions they deny him. They claimed to know God – in other words they claimed that God was their God. So how did their actions deny God if what they were doing was mostly from the Word itself? Because they were doing the parts they wanted to do rather than letting all of God’s Word guide their actions – they were all about

following the rules that elevated themselves – made them higher or greater in comparison to others. So by their actions they denied that God was their God by elevating themselves to God's position instead. But that's not all.

It also says they were unfit for doing anything good because they were corrupt in both mind and conscience. Why? Verse 15 equates being corrupt with not believing. It was a heart issue as well as an external issue. See the good works that give evidence of salvation – **the good works** that are spoken of all through this letter – **are good first of all because they are motivated from a heart of FAITH and LOVE for God.** No matter how brightly our actions may shine in the opinions of those around us, without a motive of faith and love for God, God does not call them good. And in that, **our definition of good works must flow from the totality of Scripture – what GOD desires – not just what we want to do or find convenient to do for Him.**

Doing the right things from the wrong heart...

Doing what I think is right but leaving undone the other things I know God and His truth expect and hoping God will be ok with that...

Doing the right things but also continuing in the wrong things and hoping God will take what He can get...

None of that accomplishes anything before God and none of that fits as the good works that are spoken of over and over again through this letter.

Why? Well that's the last theme we will look at today. And it is the one that all of these build to – in fact that the entire letter of Titus really can be boiled down to even as the blueprint for God's church. See just one of the **misconceptions** on these good works that is so damaging to the faith of Christians who hold it is that **our good works are all ABOUT US. Performing these good works somehow earns us standing with God – somehow balances out our sin – or somehow indebts God to us.** And none of that is true. In fact we just said the motivation that makes those works good and acceptable to God is a love for God – the source of those works is our belief in the truth, our knowing that we have already been accepted by God. Just going back to **chapter 2:14**, we are eager to do what is good because we are a people redeemed by Jesus and belonging to Him. But God has a bigger picture in mind. He has a purpose for our good works beyond our own personal evidence of salvation. And again – this theme is all through Titus.

Going back to chapter one in the requirements for elders in God's church – that they must be blameless in a nutshell. When you read **those verses 6 through 10** it is clear that elders are to meet those qualification that they might be respected and respectable both within the church and the community itself. But from here it gets much clearer than that implication.

In **chapter 3 verse 8** again God through Paul says to stress the truth of God so that we who believe it will have our faith guide our behavior so that we will live in the good works we just talked about – why? Verse 8: *“These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.”* Not just for ourselves. Not just for our church. But everyone. God has our works wired for the good of more than just us.

In **verse 14** when he says again that we must devote ourselves to doing what is good, the “so that” there that we talked about last week isn't about providing for our own daily needs, but the pressing needs of others – the opportunities to minister God's grace to others – that that is what makes our lives productive – or a better word was fruitful.

But where we're going with this theme really comes out in chapter 2. Remember, Paul is telling Titus the kinds of things to teach the believers in Crete to do and live in because these things fit and go with the truth – the doctrine – we say believe. And as he gives practical instruction for each stage and station in life, he gives us reasons why God wants us to live in these ways. Look at them with me in **chapter 2.**

**Verse 5** *“so that no one will malign the Word of God.”*

**Verse 8** *“so that those who oppose you will have nothing bad to say about you.”*

**Verse 10** *“so that in every way you make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.”*

Church do you see it? **The heart of God for us is an OUTWARD FOCUS.**

**Everything about how we treat one another as the church of God...**

**Everything about how what we believe impacts our lives...**

**Everything about the goodness of our actions...**

**Is to put the saving power of God on DISPLAY.** We are to live lives that reflect the effectiveness of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Church – capital C – as a whole – is on this planet in order to reach the lost. The church – little c – the local expression of the body of Christ – exists to equip God’s people for their God given task: that by character, by action, by intent we show a pagan society that God saves from sin and we do that through living saved lives.

This truth is so foundational to the entire book of Titus that if we had to sum up the whole letter with one verse – it would be **chapter 2 verse 10**: that we live to make the truth of God our Savior attractive in every way. And the fact that that verse in context is directed toward those who were slaves in no way diminishes it as the essence of responsibility for every believer within the church. In fact if nothing else, it gives it added weight – that such an outward focus was expected of those in the most difficult circumstances to obey it imaginable means we have no excuse. We live so the Word of God is not dishonored. We live so that the critics of God’s truth are silenced because they have nothing bad to say about us. **We live so that the gospel that says there is a God named Jesus who saves sinners from their sin is made visibly VERIFIABLE in our lives.**

Now we’re back where we started this morning and where we ended up last week. This truth is only effective when it is realized – when it comes to fruition – in the lives of real people – in your life and mine. True or not – the last year of study is worthless unless it affects you enough to effect others through you.

When we come to the end like this – the corporate becomes individual – and the question boils down to do you believe it or not? Either we take this as God’s Word or we don’t – either we trust Him or we don’t – either we decide to be His church by living these truths or we abdicate that title and can no longer expect His blessing because we don’t. And the “we” in all that is composed of each of us. So what are you going to decide?

**The PRESENCE of these themes in us will mark us as God’s people as we move forward together or their ABSENCE will be the beginning of our slide away from God’s purpose toward the irrelevancy of what passes for “church” in our culture.** Let me rephrase that – the presence of these themes in your lives will mark us as God’s people as we move forward together or the absence of these themes in your lives will move us away from God’s purposes till we are irrelevant as a “church” in this culture.

Interdependence as the family of God. Character – the connection between faith and life. Good works- as God defines them. Outward focus in all of those things. These are all integral to the steps of doing life in Christ together that defines who we are as Fairway Baptist Church – worship Jesus – learn Truth – build community – so you can reach your world.

As I pray today – you pray as well – and you respond to the Spirit’s prompting in you. **What needs to continue – what needs to change – what needs to start (in you) in order for YOUR LIFE to make the teaching about God our Savior attractive?**

Let’s pray.