

## Sermon notes - Titus 3:1-8

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The journey through this book has taken us many places. The book of Titus is a letter written by Paul to his son in ministry, Titus while he is on the island of Crete. The two had spent time planting churches and preaching Jesus. After their journey around the island, Paul has left, but Titus is returning, going from town to town, helping these churches get healthy and build a strong Gospel foundation. In real terms, we must remember that the church is made up of people, real people, in real life situations, living in real neighborhoods. They are trying to make a living, raise their kids, and live in their community. But their lives are different, because they have met Jesus, and He is changing their lives through the Gospel.

This letter has taken the reader to several places. Paul has discussed leadership in the church, doctrine, and living in community with other followers of Jesus. He just gave a clear and wonderful explanation of the Gospel, the good news that Jesus died in our place, providing repentance, salvation, and the hope of life eternal. But all of this is needed, because the core of God's plan involves transforming the lives of people through the Gospel, and sending them to the culture to live as followers of Jesus.

God is a sending God. Living within the perfect relationship of the Trinity, God sent His Son. Over thirty times in the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, & John), Jesus reminds us that He was sent by God. This was his mission. After His resurrection, Jesus made this statement to the Disciples, "As the Father sent me, even so, I am sending you (John 20:21)." At the very heart of His being, God is a missionary God. He is on a mission to save people, to rescue them from themselves, from their sin, from eternal separation from God in hell. He sent Jesus as part of this rescue mission, and God has sent His church to be a part of that same mission.

As Paul writes, he knows that there are Cretan people who have a new faith, who are now trying to figure out what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Their neighbors were probably pagans who worshiped the Greek and Roman pantheon of gods. They lived under a strong government who gave very good things to those who obeyed, but could also be swift to squash rebellion. And the Roman Emperor Nero had a bit of a thing against Christians, which eventually led to harsh persecution. How are these people to live and be the Gospel in this culture, in their towns and villages? This section speaks to that issue.

### Tendencies - Four ways people tend to integrate their faith in culture

Before getting to the text, let me share four different ways those who follow Jesus tend to integrate their faith with their life in the community. Three of them are dangerous, but the fourth represents what I believe is God's call.

1. **Compartmentalized faith** - Many people effectively separate different arenas of life, making sure these arenas do not mix. On Sunday, they are involved in the life of faith, and may even let this section of their lives extend to a small group at a different time. But like a set of drawers, when that part of life is over each week, that drawer is closed, and other drawers are opened. Those drawers may include job, living in neighborhood, sports teams, school, and even family. When people compartmentalize faith, they do not usually mind if others know that Christianity is part of life, as long as that part of life does not mix with or influence the other areas strongly.

2. **Combative faith** - This is a person who sees life as a war with the culture. Faith is seen as a hill on which to die, and those who do not agree with their view are the enemy. The goal in culture is to win the cultural wars. Other Christians, especially from these people's church are seen as fellow

soldiers, and neighbors can be viewed with skepticism. And if those neighbors are involved in behaviors that offend the moral ideals of the Christian, they are seen as the outright enemy. Usually, strong anger will be expressed toward those without Christ who are homosexual, living together, pro-choice, or have a Darwin bumper sticker on the car, because the culture must be protected from the views of these people.

**3. Communal faith** - Within the church, there have always been people who believe that followers of Jesus should retreat from the culture, in order to make sure it won't rub off. The monastic lifestyle in the Dark Ages created communities where people could remove themselves from the world around and live in a closed setting with other believers. In many churches, this is the approach taken in youth ministries, striving to provide a close-knit Christian community for teens that will protect them from the world, and will keep bad influences out.

**4. Commissioned faith** - In the New Testament, followers of Jesus are to live as normal people within the culture, with this difference, they are being changed by the Gospel. Commissioned people live as missionaries to the culture, meaning that they live as people sent by God to their job, neighborhood, family, sports teams... The Gospel grips people deeply, causing them to see themselves through the lense of grace, and leading them to have deep compassion on those around them, knowing that their need will only be met by the cross of Jesus.

#### Living as missionaries to the culture - relating to the authorities (Titus 3:1-2)

Realize that Paul did not put the chapter headings and verses in his original letter. There is a continual flow in thought between the previous verses and chapter 3. Paul has explained the Gospel clearly. He then tells Titus to declare the Gospel, exhorting, rebuking, and preaching with authority. As he does this, he is to, "Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work." The proclamation of the Gospel has an outcome. As people hear and experience the Gospel, it will lead to a different quality of life. That life is lived in a context, that of their community, culture, neighborhood, and job.

Paul tells Titus to remind them to "be submissive" to rulers and authorities. This is speaking to number 2 above, those who tended to combat. Any time there are people who become followers of Jesus, some will view the message of freedom in Christ as a summons to battle with the government and cultural authorities. The New Testament has several passages reminding followers of Jesus how they should relate to those in authority over them, and every time the charge is to live peacefully, submitting to the governing authorities, praying for their good (see Matthew 22:17-21, Romans 13:1-7, 1 Timothy 2:1-4, 1 Peter 2:13-17). The only exception is if the government asks followers of Jesus to do something that violates the clear will of God (see Daniel 3:1-30, Daniel 6:1-28). As we read these verses, we can be reactionary, telling Paul that he just does not understand our government. But be reminded that Paul is telling these people to submit to the same authorities as have imprisoned him at least three times and beaten him because of the Gospel

The question we must ask is, why? I believe God is calling Christians to find ways to live within the system, seeking to live the Gospel as a part of culture, rather than standing on the curb shouting at it as it goes by. Here are these people who are living in Crete under Roman rule. Paul reminds them to live under this authority, to be peaceful and obedient people, submitting to this authority. This will provide avenues to live as salt and light in that culture (see Matthew 5:13-16). Think about the analogy Jesus used, telling His followers that they were the salt of the earth. Salt only has value when it is spread out and integrated on food. Salt eaten alone is nasty. But pour it

so that it works its way throughout a bowl of popcorn, and the salt gives flavor to everything. Too often, the church of Jesus takes the image of a salt shaker full of salt yelling at a plate of food for being bland and tasteless. Paul tells Titus that he should remind these new Christians that they are to live as good citizens so that they have the opportunity to influence. This is the very definition of good works in this verse and verse 8.

### Living as missionaries in the culture - “good works”

What about the “good works”? To understand what Paul is getting at, we need to look at a few passages.

Matthew 5:16 (ESV)

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Hebrews 10:24-25 (ESV)

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

1 Timothy 6:17-18 (ESV)

As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share,

1 Peter 2:12 (ESV)

Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

2 Corinthians 9:8 (ESV)

And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that having all contentment in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

2 Timothy 2:21 (ESV)

Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (ESV)

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

Lots of verses here, all speaking of good works. When thinking of good works, you might think of helping an old lady across the street, recycling, or helping us set up sound equipment at church. While these things are very good, the good works here are so much more. In the New Testament, good works are the outcome of living Gospel-centered lives in the midst of a culture that does not believe in Jesus. Good works do not save. They are the outcome of the Gospel. This is why Paul tells Titus to insist on these things, so that “those who have believe in Jesus may be careful to devote themselves to good works.”

### Living as missionaries to the culture - relationships with those outside the faith (Titus 3:2)

\_\_\_\_\_ The Cretan Christians must figure out how the Gospel looks as they live in relationship to people around them. Those people may have been hostile to their faith, or neutral. How should these followers of Jesus relate to these people? Paul gives them four basic admonitions.

- Speak evil of no one - be careful not to slander or use combative words, especially words that are designed to attack the reputation of another person.
- Avoid quarreling - Too often, followers of Jesus go out looking for a fight. When conversation opportunities arise, take advantage of them. But don't be an instigator.
- Be gentle - The word literally means to be fair. I believe Paul is speaking to the fact that we ought to expect lost people to act like lost people.
- Show perfect courtesy to all people - This refers to maintaining a good balance between passion and peace. Hold the Gospel and defend the Scriptures with passion, but do it in a way that values others and maintains peacefulness.

### Living as missionaries to the culture – the motivation of the Gospel (Titus 3:3-7)

\_\_\_\_\_ In chapter 2, Paul gave one of the clearest pictures of what the Gospel is, the message of the substitutionary death of Jesus. In this passage, Paul gives one of the clearest pictures of what the Gospel does, bringing salvation and transformation to those whom He chooses.

First, Paul reminds every follower of Jesus about their past, who they were as a result of the Fall. At one time, every one of us fit all or at least most of the description in verse 3. Left to ourselves, we were running headlong to destruction, foolish in our understanding, rebellious, and enslaved to our pleasures and sin. Relationships were broken, and our hearts were hardened. The motivation to compassion for the follower of Jesus is to understand how deeply fallen they were, and how great and wonderful is the grace of God. Anytime I choose to look down on a person who does not know Jesus, it is a clear indication that I've forgotten the depth of my own failure and need, and the height of God's goodness, love, and grace.

Verse four begins with one of the greatest words in the Scriptures, "But." My absolute failure left me hopeless, "But." I've often said that one of these days I am going to do a series of sermons on the great "buts" of the Bible. When I could not, "But God". He took the initiative, He did everything, He appeared. Notice the word "appeared" in verse 4. It is the same word used in 2:11, "For the grace of God has appeared..." Paul is referring back to this passage, reminding Titus that the Gospel changes because Jesus came. And then he makes the declaration, "HE SAVED US, not because of works done by righteousness, but according to his own mercy." The rest of these verses explain what exactly this statement means, but the heart is this, when I was hopeless, depraved, and in desperate need, God saved me! I could write pages upon pages to explain the phrases in these verses, but that is the core reality. God sent Jesus, Jesus died for me, and God saved me. Not because of anything I did, but solely because of what Jesus did. All I could do is respond in faith and repent.

Living as a missionary in the culture means that I am continually aware of God's mercy and grace, and that I allow God to give me a deep passion to see others experience the same. I don't blame them for being apart from God, because I too once was there. Had it not been for the grace of God, and someone living and proclaiming the Gospel, I'd still be there.

The mission of the church is this, that we proclaim the Gospel and empower you to live as a missionary, as one sent by God to the spheres of life He has given to you. May God bless you as you live His mission.

