

# God's Message to Us in Titus

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## Introduction

Today in our sermon series in which I am preaching on every book of the Bible, we come to the epistle of Paul to Titus.

- Remember that an epistle is another name for a letter.
  - Our New Testament Scriptures contain many such letters.
  - Those who wrote these letters were carried along by the Holy Spirit so that, although they wrote in their own style, the words that came forth are fully God-breathed, and together with the rest of the Scriptures, give us a complete and infallible record of God's will for what we are to believe and how we are to live before God.
    - Even the emphasis and the historical details are all right.
    - We are to receive all of it as the very word of God—His gracious authoritative message to us for life and godliness.

Paul wrote this letter to Titus at the same time he wrote First Timothy, when he was on his fourth missionary journey between his two Roman imprisonments... between AD 62 and AD 64.

- His occasion for writing to Titus can be seen in verse 5 where he says: **“For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you—”**
  - He and Titus (and probably others) had preached the gospel at Crete, which was an island similar in shape to PEI and just a little larger.
    - And Titus had been left to finish establishing the churches, in particular making sure that each congregation has elders to oversee them.
  - And of course as Titus did this work, he would also be doing a lot of preaching and pastoral ministry, among the presbyters and the congregations.
    - So this letter has a lot of instruction about how best to minister to these people.
    - As they were typically an irreverent people who did not respect authority and were not known for integrity or good works, Paul emphasises throughout this letter that the gospel, when it is rightly received, always produces good works.

As we are looking at how each book in the Bible applies to us in this series, our focus will be on this central message in this letter to Titus...

- We will look at *how the grace of God in the gospel brings forth godliness that is seen in good works.*
- This is surely a message that is very much needed for us today.

So let's get started:

## I. See first of all how Paul stresses from the start that believing the gospel produces godliness.

A. In the very first verse he speaks of **“the truth which accords with godliness.”**

1. Here, following the conventional form of letter-writing in his day, he identifies himself...
  - in this case **an apostle of Jesus Christ...**

- but then he weaves in this description of his apostleship, that it is **according to the faith of God's elect and the acknowledgement of the truth which accords with godliness.**
2. The idea here is that truth goes with a religious life (with godliness).
    - We are to emphasise truth and godliness together.
      - In the gospel, we must never suppose that we are saved by works, but neither should we ever suppose that we may be saved without them.
    - Ours is truth that accords with or goes together with good works.
      - Where the truth is, there good works will be.
- Paul makes it clear from the first verse that he is the apostle of no other faith but a faith that produces a godly life.
- B. Paul is very clear in verse 10-16, *faith that does not produce godliness is a false faith.*
1. There were those professing Christ at Crete who were teaching a false faith in Christ that was appealing to the populace at Crete.
    - Apparently, there were a lot of these false teachers because in 1:10, Paul says:
      - Titus 1:10-12: **For there are many insubordinate** [that means they don't respect or obey authority], **both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision** [ungodly people lean on rituals in place of godliness—and the circumcision party, of course, wanted to continue in the Old Testament ceremonies], <sup>11</sup> **whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain** [their motive was to get rich]. <sup>12</sup> **One of them, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons."**
      - That is quite a statement! And Paul affirms that it is true...in verse 13 he says: **This testimony is true.**
  2. So he instructs Titus to rebuke them so that they will be sound in the faith.
    - Verse 13 (continued): **Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, <sup>14</sup> not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth.**
      - These men are not godly because they are wrong about the truth.
      - They have turned from it.
      - They have rituals instead of the gospel that saves sinners.
  3. Paul sums up these false teachers as those who profess faith with their mouths but deny faith by their works.
    - Look at verse 16: **They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.**

TRANS> So Paul, being mindful that he is writing to a man he has left to establish the church in a place full of insubordinate ritualistic professing Christians, directs Titus about the kind of men that are needed to serve as overseers of these people.

## II. From Paul's directives to Titus, we learn about the importance of selecting godly elders to serve as overseers in the church today.

- A. Paul makes it clear that a church is not yet organised until it has elders.
1. Consider his words to Titus in verse 5: **For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you—**

- a. Something is lacking and things are not in order until elders are in place in every congregation.
    - In Acts 14, we have Paul and Barnabas, even on their first missionary journey, returning to all the places they had preached to ordain elders.
      - Their normal pattern was to preach in all the synagogues that Jesus the Messiah had come.
      - Ordinarily, this caused a division in the synagogue resulting in the exclusion of those who believed.
        - Usually, some of the God-fearing Greeks who were friends of the synagogue were some of the first to believe.
    - But as Paul and his ministry companions were often persecuted and driven away by the unbelieving Jews before elders were put in place among those who had believed,
      - they made it a practice to return (or, as with Titus here) to leave one of their team behind to organise the congregation with suitable elders to serve as overseers or bishops.
      - And we see from Paul's words to Titus that he did not consider his work to be complete until elders were appointed in each place.
        - We have documentation of at least twenty cities in Crete at this time, so Titus had a big task before him.
  - But perhaps what Paul asks Titus to do seems impossible!
  - b. How could he possibly train up so many elders in so many places?
    - Remember that Paul and his ministry companions were not preaching the good news that Jesus had come primarily to pagans.
      - They were preaching to those in the synagogues.
      - Some of them were godly, mature Old Testament saints who were waiting for the Messiah to come, and when they heard that He had, they believed.
        - Some of them would have already been elders in the synagogue who were thoroughly versed in the Old Testament.
        - And some of the Greeks, upon believing, would also have had a full understanding of God's word.
          - Such men were suitable to serve as elders among those who believed the gospel in every place.
      - Add to this that some of them were given the gift of prophecy and teaching and you can see that Titus' work was that of organising these churches with suitable elders to serve as overseers, both ruling and teaching elders.
2. From Paul's instructions to Titus here, we may draw two applications.
    - a. First, that elders appointed as overseers are essential to the organisation of a church.
    - b. Second, that every believer should be in a congregation that is overseen by a plurality of elders.
      - Hebrews 13:17 reminds us that every believer is commanded to obey those who have the rule over them.
      - Those who refuse to join a church do not have elders to watch over them... something is lacking in their lives that needs to "be set in order."

B. Paul describes the kind of men that are needed to be proper overseers—and this applies just as much to us as it did to them.

1. This is laid out for us in Titus 1:6-9:
  - In verse 6, he says they must be men who are blameless in family life.
  - In verses 7-8, he says they must be men who are blameless in their conduct.
  - And in verse 9, he says they must be men who hold to sound doctrine and are able to correct those who are in error.
2. Men like this are needed today to serve as pastors and rulers in the church.
  - We need to pray for the Lord to give us such men in all the churches within our Presbytery and in the church as a whole.
  - They must be men who not only profess the truth, but also live the truth.
    - Not like those in v. 16 who profess to know God but who deny Him in works.

TRANS> And that brings us to chapter 2:1-10.

### III. Here we learn what it looks like for different sorts of persons to live in a way that agrees with (rather than in a way that denies) sound doctrine.

- In Titus 2:1, he opens this section by telling Titus to “**speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine.**”

A. Paul speaks of five different categories of persons and how each is to live before God.

1. He includes the older men, the younger men, the older women, the younger women, and the slaves.
  - These, of course, are not rigid, formal categories.
  - In some of his other letters, he addresses husbands, wives, children, elders, rich people, masters, the unmarried, widows...
    - We have seen specific classes of persons addressed over and over as we have gone through the Bible.
2. There are variations in our calling as Christians.
  - While we are all called to believe on the Lord Jesus and to obey the Ten Commandments, our duties will be different according to our situation.
    - Obviously, a child does not have the same responsibilities as his parents, nor does a husband have that same responsibilities that a wife has.
  - You can see how Paul calls the men to be sober and temperate because men are often the ones given to excess...
    - And the older women at Crete were called to avoid slander, which is often a problem with them, but also to avoid excess in wine.
    - Instead of becoming gossips, they are to be busy teaching the younger women to love and obey their husbands to look after their children.
      - That is often an area where young women will struggle—so Paul tells them to be discreet and chaste—controlling their passions.
  - And notice how the young men are called to good works.
    - Young men are often self-indulgent instead of ministering to others.
    - And to them he mentions sound speech—they are so often very careless about filthy talk and cursing which are strictly not in keeping with the gospel.

➤ So you see how faithful Christian teaching calls each classification of persons to their particular duties.

B. But notice that there is also a common thread that runs through all five groups... a thread that pertains especially to the people of Crete.

1. Almost all of them are called to be sober and reverent, and three of the five are expressly called to obey those who have authority over them.
  - a. We have already seen that a lack of reverence and obedience was a problem that characterised the people of Crete and that this was found in the church.
    - Problems in a culture tend to find their way into the church by teachers who want to draw disciples after them.
    - They know that a lot of people in the church will be attracted to teaching that appeals to the things that rub the general population wrong.
  - b. Paul addresses sobriety, reverence and respect for authority in particular because these were problems at Crete.
2. This teaches us that we need to address problems that are peculiar to us today.
  - a. While we ministers will want to keep quiet about things that are contrary to our society, we must rather emphasise them all the more—
    - not in an obnoxious way, and not even to the people who are outside, but to those in the church who are so easily attracted by them.
    - We are to emphasise the gospel to those who are outside.
      - They need to be reconciled to God before we try to persuade them about obeying authority or about the sinfulness of abortion and sex outside of marriage.
    - Paul's concern is not that outsiders are living like unbelievers, but that there were those in the church who were living like unbelievers.
  - b. But it is not just ministers that have a responsibility here.
    - As members of the church who belong to Christ,
      - it is for you to be diligent to find out what is pleasing to the Lord, and then gladly submitting yourself to a church where the elders are upholding things that are proper to sound doctrine.
    - You should be very eager to please the Lord who redeemed you,
      - especially in those areas where His calling stands contrary to our own society because that is where you need the most help and encouragement.

TRANS> And that brings us the next very wonderful heart-warming teaching that we find in Titus...

#### **IV. In Titus 2:11 – 3:8, Paul shows us how the gospel of grace changes our lives.**

- A. Three times in this passage he speaks of something *appearing* to us that changes us.
- The word Paul uses is the Greek word from which we get our word epiphany.
    - It speaks of something that appears, of something that is brought to light.
    - In Greek, the root word can be used as either a noun or a verb.
    - Let's look at the three things that he speaks of appearing.
1. First, in verse 11, he says that **the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.**
    - Indeed it has!

- The **grace of God that brings salvation** did not appear until Jesus Christ came.
    - But boy did it ever come then!
    - God had promised that He would save His people by a Son that would be born of a woman,
      - but that grace that brings salvation was only seen in the shadows of the Old Testament types and ceremonies.
  - It was not until the fullness of time, when Son of God came from heaven that we saw that, as Paul puts it in verse 13-14, **our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ—gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed.**
    - To *redeem* means *to release on the receipt of a ransom.*
    - For us to be pardoned, there had to be an official punishment to show how wicked it was for us to sin against God our Maker.
      - Justice demands death that lands us into the Lake of Fire for ever.
        - It vindicates the honour of God by testifying to how unacceptable it was for us to reject Him as our God...
      - But God Almighty also decreed that the punishment of His only Son for our sins would also be sufficient to show how great our sin was.
        - It is shocking that He would even think of doing such a thing for those whose very need to have it done comes from their wretchedness and sin.
    - Yet, the grace of God that brings salvation appeared when **our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ... gave Himself for us that He might redeem us.**
      - If ever God's grace has appeared, it appeared in providing such a ransom for the forgiveness of sinners like us.
2. The word *appear* occurs the second time in verse 13 where it refers to the second coming of Jesus... referred to as **the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ.**
- Paul had taught all Christians to live in hope of this great coming day when Christ returns and all who have loved the truth (both those that have died and those that are yet alive) will be gathered to Him to be with Him forever in His righteous kingdom.
  - Paul says that we are looking for that blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, that second epiphany.
3. The third occurrence of the word *appear* is in chapter 3, verse 4 where it is described as **the kindness and the love of God our Saviour toward man** that has appeared.
- This time, it is not the giving of Christ to atone for our sins that is meant, but the outpouring of the Holy Spirit who changes us.
    - This great **kindness and mercy of God** is explained in verse 3:5-6 where it says: **“not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup> whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior...”**
  - Do you understand?

- This is the pouring out the Spirit upon each Christian so that we are born again and renewed—
  - It happens to each of us in our personal history so that we will trust in Christ and begin to live in obedience to Him.
- So here are
- the appearance of grace that redeems us,
  - the coming appearance of Christ to gather us,
  - and the appearance of God’s kindness and love that causes us to be renewed by His Spirit.
- B. Paul speaks of how each of these appearances produce good works in us... we who believe.
1. He is showing us here that where true faith is, there will also be good works.
    - Those at Crete who professed to know God but denied Him in works showed that their profession was false.
  2. Look at the effect that each appearing has on us if we believe.
    - a. First (2:11), the grace of God that brings salvation that has appeared to all men—
      - All men have seen it, but it **teaches us** (believers), **that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age.**
      - Grace teaches us this when we truly come to Christ, because we come as those who realise that we need His sacrifice on the cross to atone for our sins.
        - If sin requires an atonement like that, we should turn from it to serve God.
          - When we realise that our dear Saviour has actually given Himself to redeem us as a ransom, bearing our punishment, there is no way that we can continue in sin.
          - We are compelled to renounce the thing that caused Him to suffer so.
    - b. Second, the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour described in verse 13 that we are yet looking forward to also compels us to deny ungodliness and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age.
      - His coming reinforces the fact that He redeemed us for the very purpose that we might be godly...
        - His objective in redeeming us was never to take away the punishment of our sin so that we could go on living in sin as before...
        - It was rather so that as those forgiven, we could live with Him in His Father’s house forever when He appears for us at the end of the age.
      - Verse 14 explains that He who comes is He **who gave Himself for us that He might redeem us and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.**
        - His purpose was to make selfish people like us zealous to do good works...
        - Not like the false Christians at Crete who continued in ungodliness and worldly lusts...

- But a purified people who are restored to life under God's authority and grace, a people who are zealous about loving one another as Christ our coming redeemer has loved us.
  - He wanted to form a family for God of sons and daughters who love Him and live for Him.
- c. And then there is the third appearing mentioned in chapter 3—
- It speaks, as we saw already, of how the pouring out of the Spirit upon us actually washes us so that we live for God.
    - Here is the power of God at work in us that enables us to live for Him.
  - It did not begin with us doing good works—it began with God our Savior in His kindness giving us the Holy Spirit.
    - Look at verse 4-7: **But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, <sup>5</sup> not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup> whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup> that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.**
    - If God had waited for us to come, He would still be waiting, but instead of waiting, He washed us with the Holy Spirit, giving us a heart after God.
3. The result of all of this is that believers will do good works and therefore ought to be continually instructed to do good works.
- a. Paul sums up this section in verse 8 by saying: **“This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.”**
- Believers want to please God, but they need to be reminded and constantly instructed to do so.
    - The grace of God in salvation, in our expectation of His coming, and in the washing of the Holy Spirit, has certainly changed us,
      - but indwelling sin means that until Jesus returns and we are perfected, we need to be constantly reminded.
      - That is what Titus was to do then and what we are to do now.
- b. You see how Paul reminds us in 3:1-3 that we are, in ourselves, no different than those who do not believe.
- It is not our job to call them out for their sins so much as it is to do good to them that we might lead them to our Saviour.
    - We should stand out in our society as those who obey authority and do good works, not at those who criticise unbelievers for acting like unbelievers.
  - Listen to how in 3:1-3, Titus is instructed to remind believers of this: **“Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, <sup>2</sup> to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men. <sup>3</sup> For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.”**



- c. But those who profess to know Christ and do not serve Him—these are not to be tolerated as members of the church and especially not as teachers!
  - In 3:9-11 Paul says of them: **“But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless. <sup>10</sup> Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, <sup>11</sup> knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.”**
  - Rather than teaching the way of godliness, they are into genealogies and observance of ritual law—that is what their religion consists in.
  - We are not to regard them as Christians if they will not repent.

**Conclusion:**

So you see how throughout this letter, Paul is showing Titus that those who truly believe the gospel will break free of the insubordination and ungodliness of the society of Crete and do good works.

- Those who profess to know Christ but deny Him in works are to be rejected.
  - They do not know Christ.
  - Those who believe should be careful to maintain good works—and so to stand out in their society for Christ.

Even in his closing comments about sending people here and there, Paul adds in verse 14 one more exhortation to the good works...

- **“And let our *people* also learn to maintain good works, to *meet* urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful.”**
- And then he closes with the words **“Grace be with you all,”** for as we saw, it is grace that will bring forth good works.
  - How can we not serve when we have a Saviour who gave Himself for us that He might redeem us to do good works, and who in His kindness poured out His Spirit on us to wash us so that we might?