

Saved for good works

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[0 : 0 0] Titus 2, starting at verse 15. Declare these things. Exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you.

Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient and to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarrelling, to be gentle and to show perfect courtesy towards all people.

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us. Not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, being justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works.

[1 : 3 5] These things are excellent and profitable for people, but avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless.

As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful, he is self-condemned.

When I send Artemis or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. Do your best to speed Zenos the lawyer and Apollos on their way.

See that they lack nothing. And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need and not be unfruitful.

All who are with me send greetings to you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all. Lizzie, thanks so much.

[2 : 4 5] Do keep that open. Page 1201 in the Church Bibles. There's a space on the back of the server sheets to take notes. If you'd like to do so, shall I lead us in prayer as we prepare to look at these verses together.

We thank you so much, our Father, that as we learn at the beginning of Titus, you have, through the Apostle Paul, revealed the knowledge of the truth which leads to godliness.

And so we pray this morning that as we look at the end of this letter to Titus, that you would help us to understand that truth more deeply, and then as a result to be transformed by it and to lead godly lives.

And we ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, we were praying a few moments ago for the government, and you don't need me to tell you that it's not been a good week for politicians.

Their reputation has perhaps sunk to a new low with this week's newspaper stories. But one thing that politicians are very good at is saying the same things over and over again.

[3 : 50] So an interviewer asks an MP a straightforward question, but instead of answering it, they very often use this as an opportunity to get across what they want to say, often repeating a barrage of statistics, either to prove how well the country is being governed, or how awful the government is.

It can be rather trying as a listener. But at the same time, it does mean that we hear their message. If someone says something over and over again, we remember it and realise it's important.

And Paul seems to adopt that kind of approach in his letter to Titus. You see, in one sense, he could have finished his letter after chapter 2. After all, he's now reminded Titus of the job he'd been given to do in Crete and outlined how the gospel will advance there in a worldly culture.

Let me remind ourselves of what we've seen in the letter so far and the little manual that it gives us for gospel growth. So Titus is to appoint elders, stage 1, who will then teach Paul's gospel and refute error, stage 2, which will in turn lead Christians to live godly lives, stage 3, thus making the gospel attractive to unbelievers, stage 4.

Titus is to teach Paul's gospel because Paul's gospel teaches, teaches us to live godly lives. That could perhaps be a useful summary of the message of Titus.

[5 : 25] Just look with me at the end of chapter 2. In verses 13 and 14, which we looked at last week, Paul reminds Titus of the gospel of grace. And in verse 15, Titus is told, declare these things.

In other words, he's to teach people about the grace of God that brings salvation. That's the message he's to declare. But why is he to do that?

Well, verse 12, because that gospel message, that grace of God, teaches or trains us to renounce ungodliness. It's the gospel that changes lives.

Titus is to teach Paul's gospel because Paul's gospel teaches. That seems to be the message of chapters 1 and 2. And Paul could perhaps have ended his letter there.

But like a good politician, he writes a whole other chapter to make sure his readers really have got the point. And so in chapter 3, which we're looking at this morning, he reinforces what he's said so far by essentially repeating his message.

[6 : 36] And we're going to look at three particular things that Paul reminds Titus of once again in this final chapter. So first of all, here's our first heading. Paul reminds Titus of what the people are to do.

Paul reminds Titus of what the people are to do. Have a look at verse 1 again. He tells Titus, remind them, that's God's people, to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarrelling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy towards all people.

He's really restating a summary of what he said in the first half of chapter 2. Titus is to teach what accords with sound doctrine. He's to remind people to live godly lives, lives which will commend the gospel.

Although commending the gospel isn't mentioned explicitly here, that seems to be the motivation once again. Because honouring ruling authorities, going out of our way proactively to do good, and being peaceable and courteous are all things others will notice.

And which will make the Christian faith attractive. Whereas disobeying authorities, or being quarrelsome for example, would bring the gospel into disrepute.

[8 : 04] The same point is also implicit I think, in the closing greetings that come at the end of the chapter. As with his opening greetings, Paul's closing greetings often give us little summaries of the purpose or key themes of his letters.

Look at verse 13 for example. Do your best to speed Zenos, the lawyer, and Apollos on their way. See that they lack nothing.

Why would Titus and the church in Crete do that? Well it was a chance to put into practice exactly what Paul has been talking about in this letter. Verse 14.

Again, it's all about not living in a way which will malign the word, about living lives that commend the gospel.

We're to do good works, as verse 14 puts it, in order to live fruitful lives, so the gospel won't be brought into disrepute. In fact, as I think we've noticed previously, this encouragement to live good lives has been a major theme of Titus.

[9 : 17] So chapter 1, verse 8, have a look. Near the beginning of the letter, chapter 1, verse 8, we're told an elder must be a lover of good. Chapter 1, verse 16, in contrast, false teachers were told are unfit for any good work.

Chapter 2, verse 3, the older women are to teach what is good. Verse 7, Titus is to be a model of good works. Verse 14, Jesus redeemed us from all lawlessness so that we might be zealous for good works.

Chapter 3, verse 1, Titus is to remind the people to be ready for every good work. verse 8, verse 8, speaks of those who've believed in God being careful to devote themselves to good works.

And here we have it again in verse 14 with the command again to devote ourselves to good works. You know how a stick of rock has the same piece of writing engraved all the way through.

Well, the message engraved throughout Titus is the need for Christians to do what is good. We're to devote ourselves to be committed to doing good.

[10 : 34] That's what should mark us out as Christians. We're not saved by good works. We'll see that Paul says that today. But we are saved for them in order to adorn the gospel and glorify God.

Martin Luther once remarks that we're saved by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone. True faith should always be accompanied by good works.

And Titus was to remind the people of that back in verse 1. So will we resolve to do what is good, I wonder?

Will we be submissive to rulers and authorities, meeting deadlines at work, paying the bills on time, being honest in our tax returns, being loyal and speaking respectfully about those who are over us, obeying traffic laws even, so we don't give Christians and Christ a bad name.

We will be known in our offices, neighbourhoods and social circles for being gentle, kind and peaceable rather than slanderous, selfish and argumentative.

[11 : 49] So Paul reminds Titus of what the people are to do. But then secondly, he also reminds him of what God has done.

That's our second heading. Paul reminds Titus of what God has done. You see, there's a very simple reason why Paul says at the end of verse 2 that Christians are to be courteous or humble, as some translations put it, towards everyone.

Look down with me at verse 3 again. We're to be courteous or humble because we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that being justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

The saying is trustworthy. Now I said earlier that Paul could have finished the letter at the end of chapter 2, that he'd basically given Titus his manual for church growth in Crete.

[13 : 13] And that's largely true. But there's one thing which he's only sketched out in outline up to this point. And that's what exactly the message of the gospel is which motivates us to live godly lives.

Okay, he's told us right at the start of the letter about the source of this truth, where we can find it, through his own preaching. And he gives us a hint as to its content in chapter 2 when he speaks of Jesus' two appearances.

We looked at that last week. But he hasn't actually fleshed it out in detail. And one thing in particular was assumed or left unexplained earlier in the letter.

I wonder if you spotted it. Just look back with me to chapter 1 and verse 9 again. Paul says there that an elder must hold firmly to the trustworthy word as taught.

But he doesn't actually tell us what that trustworthy word or message is. Not in chapter 1 anyway. We only know that it's the word that's been taught, the message brought to light through Paul's preaching.

[14 : 26] But what exactly is this word to which Titus is to hold firmly? What is the truth which accords with godliness to use the language of the opening verse of the letter?

What is the gospel? Well in chapter 3 Paul spells it out with crystal clarity. Look down to me at verse 8 of chapter 3 again.

At the end of this long description of human sin and God's work in saving us Paul says the saying is trustworthy. Or it could be translated this is the trustworthy word.

Paul uses exactly the same Greek expression here as he does in chapter 1 verse 9. So here in verses 3 to 7 of chapter 3 Paul tells Titus what the message is that elders were to hold firmly to and to teach in chapter 1.

The truth that leads to godliness. And verses 3 to 7 can really be divided into two sections. What we were like and what God then did.

[15 : 39] What we were like and what God then did. And both sections are making essentially the same point explaining why Christians are to show courtesy towards all people.

Why the gospel ought to motivate us to be godly. So first of all what we were like and that's verse 3. Paul stresses that we're to show courtesy to all people because once upon a time we were just like them.

Let me read verse 3. For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.

You see, we might be tempted to look down on the ungodliness and spite and selfishness of unbelievers. But you know what? We used to be like that.

Once we were just like them. That's what Paul says. At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, led astray and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures.

[16 : 53] That's our natural default state. By nature we're no different from those politicians who made headlines in the newspapers this week. What we have here is a grim description of sin, isn't it?

It's an ugly picture and one of utter helplessness of needing to be rescued. Those who are foolish and deceived need to have their eyes opened.

Those who are disobedient need forgiveness. Those who are enslaved need to be set free. Do you see how Paul is trying to emphasise that we were completely helpless?

There was nothing we could have done to save ourselves. So how then can we look down on others as if we're any better than them? But notice also what God then did.

Look on with me to verse 4. Because God would have been perfectly justified in judging us all. But instead he responds to our malice, envy and hatred with kindness, love and mercy.

[18 : 04] Did you notice that extraordinary contrast? Verse 4. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us not because of works done by us in righteousness but according to his own mercy.

And Paul wants to emphasise how our salvation from sin was all of mercy. We contributed nothing to it.

The first reason why we're to show gentleness and courtesy towards everyone is because we were once just like them. We can't, but it's also because we did nothing to save ourselves.

We can't even take credit for that. Salvation is entirely God's work from first to last. We'll be remembering that I guess when we celebrate the Lord's Supper later on.

And once more this point is so important that Paul hammers it home a bit like a prosecutor producing one piece of evidence after another to make his case. Just notice how many times Paul emphasises that it was God who saved us in these verses.

[19 : 12] So in verse 4 it was God's goodness and loving kindness which instigated our salvation. In verse 5 he saved us and he did so not because of works done by us.

We played no part in it but because of his own mercy. And he goes on notice that we were given rebirth through the work of the Holy Spirit not by our own initiative.

And then finally he summarises it all in verse 7 with that word grace. God's undeserved love to us. We were justified declared right before God by his grace Paul says.

Paul has of course described the work of God's grace at the end of chapter 2. It's the most wonderful message isn't it that lies at the very heart of the Christian gospel. We deserve condemnation but instead of condemnation if you look on to the end of verse 7 by his grace God has made us heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Isn't that extraordinary? I have less right to inherit eternal life than I do to inherit the throne. but God in his grace has chosen to make me an heir.

[20 : 39] He's given me that privilege as a free gift because at the cross Jesus paid the full penalty for sin that had cut me off from God. God can I say that if you're here this morning and you're not yet a committed follower of Jesus this is the message that lies at the heart of the Bible.

It's an amazing message of free forgiveness guaranteeing eternal life. A message that can transform lives and hold places as the book of Titus makes clear.

The most powerful transformative truth this world has ever known good news that our messed up world so desperately needs. So the trustworthy saying, the trustworthy word which is to be at the heart of every Christian leader's ministry is the message of grace.

The authentic gospel message is about our sin and God's mercy in rescuing us through Jesus so we might have eternal life. And when we've understood that, when we've understood all that God's done for us it can't fail to change our lives also.

The knowledge of the truth leads to godliness. And for that reason it was this gospel message that Titus was to teach and that leads us on to our final heading, Paul reminds Titus of what he is to do.

- [22 : 05] Paul reminds Titus of what he is to do. Let me read verse 8 again, have a look down with me. The saying is trustworthy and I want you to insist on these things so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to do good works.

These things are excellent and profitable for people. You see Titus already had all the tools he'd ever need to grow the church in Crete because Paul's gospel was all that he'd need.

What was it Titus was to teach? Well it was the trustworthy saying, the gospel message we've just thought about. The saying is trustworthy and I want you to insist on or stress these things Paul says.

As we saw in chapter 2 verse 15 Titus was to emphasize the basic gospel message, to keep teaching the truth of the gospel over and over again, to repeatedly remind his congregation of it.

words like remind in verse 1 and insist here in verse 8 remind us that for the most part faithful Christian ministry doesn't involve saying lots of different things but a few things lots of times.

- [23 : 27] Titus was to keep saying the same things again and again because Christians in Crete needed to keep hearing those same things again and again. Just as children often need to be reminded of the same things over and over.

Don't walk near the fire. Don't interrupt mummy when she's talking to someone else. Do tidy your room. Well so we need to hear the gospel time and again. Titus was to keep teaching the truth like a politician continually repeating their message.

But the danger I think is that we zone out when we're reminded of the gospel, when we sit under the ministry. That's the kind of ministry. You know what it's like when they do the safety briefing on a plane just before takeoff.

I guess many of us feel like we've heard it before and so we just switch off when it's explained. But we mustn't be like that with the gospel. The reason why Titus was to keep teaching the truth was because that's what we need to keep hearing if we're to be strengthened and equipped to keep serving Jesus in our daily lives.

Did you notice that in verse 8? The saying is trustworthy and I want you to insist on these things. Why? So that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works.

- [24 : 56] Paul was to teach the gospel so Christians would be motivated by it to live godly lives. The knowledge of the truth leads to godliness. Right belief produces right behavior.

Godly convictions lead to godly conduct. Teach Paul's gospel because Paul's gospel teaches. And again this is a message we need to remember today.

Because so many church leaders today just teach morality. Walking to many churches in this country. And sadly you'll get very little of the truth.

Very little from the Bible. But lots of morality. Lots of the pastor's own musings on how we should live. What we should and shouldn't be doing. And plenty of encouragements to be religious perhaps.

Perhaps there are churches that teach Titus 2 to 10 without teaching verses 11 and 14 as the motivation behind it. But that kind of ministry wasn't to be Titus' ministry.

- [26 : 05] He was to teach the gospel. The trustworthy message of verses 3 to 7 of chapter 3. And the irony of course is that as he did so it would lead people to devote themselves to doing good anyway.

Teach works all you like but people won't become godly through it. Teach grace instead and people will want to do good works all the time. A knowledge of the truth leads to godliness.

It's the gospel not better education or social equality or particular political philosophy or moralism that will transform society in a broken world and more importantly save souls for eternity.

once again notice also in verse 8 that these things that is the trustworthy gospel message will be excellent and profitable for people.

Everyone needs to hear the gospel and will be helped by it. The gospel is the universal medicine for curing any spiritual ailment. So if we're a new Christian and want to grow up into a mature Christian then what we need is the gospel.

[27 : 21] If we've been a Christian for 50 years and want to keep going flat out then what we need is still the gospel. If we're struggling at the moment in our Christian life and are very conscious of sin or feel far from God then the remedy will be the gospel.

That's what we need to meditate on to be reinvigorated in our faith. If we're involved in some kind of Christian ministry ourselves then the gospel is what we need to be equipped to minister to others.

If we're not yet a Christian then the gospel is what we need. The promise of forgiveness and the hope of eternal life if we turn to Jesus. You see whoever we are whatever spiritual condition we're in we need to be reminded of the gospel again and again and again and again and again.

The gospel is excellent and profitable for people and for that reason Paul urged Titus to insist on these things to keep teaching the truth of the gospel.

You see we never graduate from the gospel in the Christian life. To move on from the gospel is to move away from it. And so we must pray for our Tituses, our church leaders to keep teaching the gospel.

[28 : 36] And we must ourselves seek out churches where the gospel message is not just assumed but central. Where the basic gospel message Paul outlines here is articulated again and again.

It's the message that every person in every culture in every period of history needs to hear every day. That's why on the camps that I run we make sure that the gospel message is at the heart of our main talk scheme every year even though some would urge us to teach something supposedly more sophisticated or intellectual or theologically stretching.

So Titus was to keep teaching the truth. But finally as we saw in chapter 1 notice too that he'd also need to defend the truth.

As well as continually teaching the truth he need to keep opposing false teaching. Have a look at verse 9 with me. But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions and quarrels about the law for they are unprofitable and worthless.

As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice have nothing more to do with him knowing that such a person is warped and sinful. He is self-condemned.

[29 : 51] The language of verse 11 is so similar to the end of chapter 1 that it's likely the same false teachers are in view here. It's not easy to be certain as to the exact nature of these controversies, genealogies and quarrels about the law which seem to interest these false teachers so much.

But from the reference to the law and from chapter 1 they probably involved adding Jewish regulations, perhaps Jewish superstitions to Christian belief. What is clear though is that such people were more interested in these trivial things than they were in the gospel.

And rather than being sucked into their petty arguments, Titus was to avoid such things altogether as verse 9 makes clear. You see if he became sidetracked by things other than the gospel, Titus would stop stressing the gospel and the focus would move away from what mattered most.

And if that happened, people wouldn't be motivated to live godly lives and so the gospel wouldn't attract outsiders. That's the point of the end of verse 9.

The gospel in verse 8 is excellent and profitable for people. Whereas the false teaching of verse 9 notice is unprofitable and worthless. It doesn't lead to godliness.

[31 : 09] It doesn't lead to right behavior. It doesn't commend the gospel. And so Titus was to avoid such teaching. Ministries that cease to put the gospel central and become sidetracked by other things will quickly lose their way.

They won't make people godly and they won't enable the gospel to advance. But if he wasn't to get sucked into their fruitless squabbles, what was Titus to do with these false teachers?

Well it's there in verse 10. Titus was to warn these false teachers instead just as he was to rebuke folk in verse 15 of chapter 2. And if they still didn't repent, eventually it would be right to cut himself off from them completely so serious is wrong teaching.

Just so sadly there are Bible believing Christians today who have found it necessary to cut themselves off from false teachers within the Church of England and elsewhere. So in this closing chapter of Titus, Paul restates the great themes of his letter.

He reminds Titus of what the people were to do to live godly lives that commend the gospel. Of what God had done, his grace in saving us from our sins, and of what Titus himself was to do, to keep teaching that message of grace that transforms lives.

[32 : 35] Faithful Christian ministry isn't actually particularly complicated or flashy. It involves an ongoing confidence in the gospel and its power to change lives.

And it requires men who have the courage to teach God's word faithfully, refuting error and applying it to the lives of their people. So what does this all mean for us as we seek to advance the gospel, not in Crete, but in Dulwich or throughout Britain in our worldly 21st century culture?

Well it means that we need to be praying for godly men to be raised up in every town to preach the gospel. It means we need to pray for our church leaders to be faithful in teaching the truth as revealed by Paul, clearly and courageously and silencing error as they do so.

And above all we need ourselves to be living such radically good and godly lives, motivated by the gospel, that people will take notice and will ask us to give them a reason for the hope that we have.

That's the message of Titus. Teach Paul's gospel because Paul's gospel teaches. Let me lead us in prayer as we finish. The saying is trustworthy and I want you to insist on these things so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works.

[34 : 01] We praise you afresh this morning for the wonderful gospel of your grace, our heavenly Father. We thank you that you saved us, not because of works done by us, but according to your mercy.

And we pray that you would help us to be those who continue to remember and remind ourselves of that good news of the gospel. We pray that Grace Church Dulwich would continue to be a church where that message of the gospel is proclaimed faithfully also.

And we pray that as that happens you would first of all transform our own lives, that we would live godly lives which make the gospel attractive and that then through us the gospel would advance here and beyond.

And we ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen.