

Titus 3:1-7

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 May 2020

Preacher: Jordan Leach

[0:00] Good morning, Shoreline. Good morning, everybody. So we've been going through the book of Titus.!

And in today's section, we're going to see that the church is a group of people united by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul, however, he wants to do more than just provide us with a definition. He wants to compel us towards health. He wants us to be a healthy church that has an impact on others around us. So the question is, how do we become a healthy, fruit-bearing church? How do we become a church that has an impact? Well, the answer is the same way we came to be part of God's church in the first place. It is through the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is Paul's driving point. The church will be healthy. The church will produce fruit. The church will have proper impact when we continually press our roots deeper and deeper into the rich, nutritious soil of the gospel of Christ.

[1:22] There are no secrets, tricks or expert tips to growth as a Christian. Growth comes in the power of the spirit through the work of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But before I get too far ahead of myself, let me pause and direct your attention to the term gospel. Maybe this term is unfamiliar to you, or maybe it's become so familiar that his definition has become obscure.

Gospel literally means good news. But what is this good news? It is the good news about Jesus Christ and all that he has done to rescue and renew humanity.

I found one pastor's definition of the gospel to be pretty helpful and concise. He defines it as in its simplest form, the gospel is God's reconciling work in Christ, that through the life, death and resurrection of Christ, God is making all things new, both personally for those who repent and believe and cosmically as he redeems culture and creations from his subject subjection to fertility. We will get more into those details in a bit. But for now, I just want to note one thing, please, please note the nature of news. What is news? News is a proclamation of something.

[2:44] So what do you do with news? Well, you receive it. Real news and impactful news affects you, not the other way around. News that a coronavirus vaccine or that a COVID cure has been developed will inform your daily choices and the daily choices of those around you.

You and the rest of the economy will function differently based on this information. Now, this would be big news and it would most definitely have an effect and an impact on you.

You would operate in light of this news, but you would not be silly enough to think that you could have any effect on it. You know, you know that you don't have the intelligence, the education or the resources to add anything to the cure except to receive it and act accordingly.

Sadly, though, we often treat the good news of the gospel of Christ differently. We forget that Christ's work and all of its benefits is something that we received and something that changes us and produces things in us.

Instead, we try to earn its benefits and work to generate its produce on our own. Now, Paul. If you agree anything about scripture, you realize that Paul is a brave man.

[4:01] He was bold in the face of opposition. He stood up for what he believed, no matter the cost. He was hunted, beaten, imprisoned and shipwrecked all for the sake of the gospel. Though his life testified to the lack of fear, his writings clearly reveal that he did have one phobia.

Paul's phobia is that the church of Jesus Christ would abandon the gospel of Christ in favor of a righteousness gained through their own works.

Now, Paul absolutely wants the church to be devoted to good works, but the way in which we approach good works is of utmost importance. And Paul is here to instruct us.

And we would do well to listen because his approach is 100% opposite of the approach that is natural to us. We will see in today's text, as we have throughout the study of the book of Titus, that Paul is interested in healthy churches.

He's interested in healthy church in Crete and he's interested in Shoreline being a healthy church. He wants a church that is one rooted in the gospel and two producing the fruit of good works.

[5:09] Paul states this aim very clearly in the first verse of the book as he introduces himself as a servant of Christ for the sake of the elect, which is the true church, and their knowledge of the truth that accords with godliness.

And why does Paul want these things for the church? Well, we get Paul's answer in chapter two, verses 10. So that in everything we might adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.

In short, Paul desires the church have a gospel impact. True gospel impact is what the book of Titus is all about, but there's a right way and a wrong way to go about pursuing it.

Paul is going to continue his instruction towards the right way of pursuing gospel impact. So I'll pray for us and then we'll read the text.

I do only Father, Lord, as we gaze at the gospel and consider its impact in our lives. Lord, we know we are not capable of understanding the depth and the beauty that's laid out before us here.

[6:18] Father, Lord, you've given us your spirit to discern the things that are from you. And we pray that you might do that in our hearts today, that we could both understand your word and be impacted by it.

And that by being impacted by your truth, we might therefore be changed into your likeness and have an impact for your kingdom in the world. God, we need your help in this. We can't do it on our own.

Amen. So we're in Titus three.

And we'll read verses one through eight today. So starting in verse one. Paul instructs Titus.

Remind them 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 quarreling, to be gentle, to show perfect courtesy towards all people.

[7:23] 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 Savior 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 the renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Christ Jesus, our Savior.

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, that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works.

So let's consider the path that Paul lays out for us under the following headings. A reminder, to remind, to reorient, and to reiterate. First, Paul wants to remind us what proper Christian behavior looks like.

Then he wants to reorient us with the truth of the gospel. And then he calls us to reiterate this message. So first we'll look at the reminder in verses one and two.

[8:44] Paul instructs Titus to remind the Cretan church by saying, Remind them 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 quarreling, to be gentle and to show perfect courtesy to all people.

And what does he want to, so what does he want to remind them of? All throughout the book of Titus, Paul has been interested in the conduct of the church. In chapter one, he focused on the life and character of church leaders. In chapter two, he, he gives specifics about the membership of the church and how we ought to react in relationship to one another.

Now in chapter three, Paul is directing his teaching to how we ought to interact with the world around us. So what does he instruct? He instructs an obedient and cooperative attitude towards authority.

He encourages a readiness to do good work, to be kind and helpful in our speech, and for us to be gentle, courteous and humble towards all.

Notice that all of these reminders have an others orientation. They instruct us towards how we ought to interact with every person we come in contact with.

[9:57] Paul is reminding the Cretan church, and here is minding us, that as children of God, our interactions with others ought to have a special flavor, a Christ-like flavor.

But why does Paul feel so, such a need to remind us? Well, first, so that we might remember that in our actions and interactions, we are adorning the gospel.

He wants us to adorn the gospel and not put it to shame. Now, this has been a major theme throughout the book of Titus. Paul wants us to know that our daily interactions work to either reinforce or undermine the gospel.

We are either drawing people towards God or pushing them away. We are either representing the kingdom of God or the kingdom of self. Paul wants us to understand that our everyday actions and interaction matter on the cosmic scale.

They are not neutral. They point somewhere. And Paul wants us to be intentional about acting in a way that points people towards God. Secondly, we need reminded because the ways of this world come so naturally to our fallen nature.

[11:09] So let me show you how these two purposes of reminders play out. We'll look at Paul's first reminder. He is reminding them to be submissive and obedient to authorities. Paul's first focuses on our posture towards secular authority.

The context Paul is after is likely the government, but surely our attitudes towards our bosses or our companies or these policies that they put in place also fall into this category.

After all, we have a lot of questions. Rather than being combative complaining or submersive. We ought to default to respectful cooperation. Now pause for a moment. Ask yourself.

Is this a value of our culture? And is it natural for us? No. Respecting authority is not a cultural ideal. Instead, we are skeptical leadership.

leadership, we nitpick and we complain. There are entire TV networks, news websites, and YouTubers that are making millions, exploiting our cultural appetite for dissension. So how about in the church?

[12:12] Is a church much different? Does it conform the dependencies of our culture, or does it stand different and unique? Paul is reminding us that we ought to stand unique in our approach to human authority. Why? Because this will affect how other people view the gospel that we claim. We claim that our God is all-powerful, that our God is good. We say that he is the true ruler of all things, that he is working behind the scenes to accomplish his will through the construct of a human authority.

Yet when we play the victim card, when we badmouth authorities and politicians, when we throw our hands up in frustration or complain about taxes or policies that we don't agree with, we are demonstrating to the watching world that our Christian claims are simply a matter of talk and that they hold no real weight in our lives. Paul knows our fallen tendency. He knows how quickly we can get wrapped up in the flesh-informed and mentalities of the world. He knows that our old man inside of us loves controversy, hates authority, and feigns trust. And so Paul reminds us to be submissive, obedient, respectful towards our earthly authorities, to our earthly leaders. For failure to stand differently in this aspect will have an effect on our gospel impact. So you Shoreline brother or sister, is your attitude towards human authority consistent with what you claim to be true about God? Your attitude will have effect on your gospel influence because your friends, family, and co-workers. It will either revile or adorn the gospel of Christ. And now is a great time to be reminded of these things. We are in a time of heavy government interaction in our daily lives as our secular leaders seek to address this pandemic. There is also an election coming up. So will you heed Paul's reminder here and allow your attitude towards government to be an opportunity to adorn the gospel.

May political, may the political conversations you engage in at work have a different gospel taste to them. Next Paul encourages us to be always ready to do good works. Paul continues to remind us that Christians should be ready to do whatever is good and this takes place in the communities in which we live.

Good citizenship demands communal action. And so we must be cooperative and ready to step in and help. What opportunities for the gospel might we experience if a church, if we as a church are continually, if we continue to display a readiness to do good works? We'll have so many opportunities if we have this heart that we are always ready and looking for opportunities to do good to others. A people who intentionally seek out opportunities to do good. A people marked by a willingness to go out of their way to help others. Though our plates are full, we keep an eye upward and we keep our eye outward. We look to the Lord to provide opportunity and the ability and the ability while simultaneously tuning in to the needs of others around us. Personally, this was convicting to me this week. Though Paul is painting a positive picture for us in order to compel us, my mind was brought to how often I choose to pass by the needs of others. I discern opportunities for good but pass on without investigating. This enables me to operate in the gray area of, well, I don't know if they really needed help or not. So it's not like I'm actually refusing. Paul calls us instead to be ready to be aware to pursue opportunity for good. This will show others the nature of our God who made opportunity to show us kindness in Christ. Paul encourages us towards goodness of speech. Simply to refrain from speaking ill of anyone or the continual choice of gentleness versus argument in the workplace will do much to set one apart. Again, speaking ill of others, gossiping and argumentative attitude are natural to us as fallen humans. And without periodic reminder, we might get sucked back into our formal way of life. Always possessing goodness of speech requires much grace, but it will also do much to commend the gospel. Christians ought to be peaceable, refraining from strife and considerate exercising moderation. Finally, Paul encouraged us to be gentle and to show perfect courtesy to all people. Now this one is a high calling. Not that the others weren't, but Paul says to be gentle and show perfect courtesy to all people. Perfect courtesy to all people. Now that's tough, but it even gets tougher. The phrase can also be translated to show true humility to all people. This is because the Greek word used here literally means gentleness and meekness, which of course finds its application of both courteous, courteousness and humility. So if you haven't picked up on this yet, these standards are high. They're too high. The only person to ever show perfect courtesy to all people was Christ himself.

[17:35] And this is the underlying assumption of the book of Titus. All throughout Titus, Paul has been using this term good, goodness, kindness. Paul calls the leaders to be lovers of good. Paul calls older women to teach what is good. For younger women to learn to be kind, which is the same Greek word. Older men to be models of good work and for slaves to show good faith. And in chapter three, we see that Paul is instructing the entire church to be ready for every good work in the public sphere. And in 3.8, he encourages us to be devoted, to devote ourselves to good works in every sphere. So Paul wants us to be do-gooders.

But doesn't, doesn't, doesn't this have a negative connotation in our society? We're talking about having a societal impact. This idea of doing good doesn't necessarily resonate with, with our culture. Yes, but Paul doesn't want us, yes, Paul does want us to be do-gooders. But this biblical concept goes much deeper than our cultural concept. And the true, and true goodness will always be accompanied by humility.

So let's look back at the book of Mark to consider a portion of Jesus' conversation with a rich young ruler. We're looking at Mark 10, verse 17. And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus said to him, why do you call me good?

No one is good except God alone. On the way to answering this man's question, Jesus teaches us something profound about the nature of goodness, mainly that it comes from God alone. Only God is good. So when Paul is calling the Cretan church, when he's calling them to good works, he is calling them and us, he is calling them and us to be Christ-like. For only God is good and only his goodness can be, only true goodness can come from Christ. And this is obvious, at least something we can't do on our own. For how could we self-generate the life of the Son of God within ourselves?

while we were foolish, disobedient, slaves to our own passions and pleasures, hating one another and being hated, hating and being hated, and we were filling our times with envy and malice. So it's this big description of what we once were. Maybe you don't see yourself, maybe you don't see these traits in yourself, maybe you think that this definition applies to somebody else, but it does not. The text is clear. This description applies to everybody prior to their relationship with Christ. Paul wants you to see that your former self, see your former self in this definition. He wants you to recognize what you have been, because he wants you to recognize what you've been saved from. The Bible teaches that before Christ, even our righteous deeds were filthy rags. All you did before you were Christ was for your own gain. And what is done in service to yourself is rubbish. It is hatred. You are using people to get what you desire. It is making people and the God who made you a slave to your own passions.

For example, even helping people in need can be an act of hatred. For when you help others as a means to make yourself feel good, you are simply exploiting the vulnerable to serve yourself.

[25:38] My heart is filled with a certain type of hatred every time I drive by a cash advance business or see an advertisement about no interest credit cards for 12 months because I know the financial trap that lies on the other side of these deals. I understand that these places and these deals are designed to profit off of other people's weaknesses, ignorance, or desperate situations. Yet my natural man has no problem exploiting people in other more subtle ways. Volunteering to help myself look good or to help myself feel good.

Seeking to make my kids servants of my own agenda or serve my felt worth. Living piously for the purpose of my own pride. The text says that you were foolish, meaning that you were living according to your own wisdom, rather than submitting to the wisdom of the one who made the universe. You were living in disobedience before the God who made you. You were using all that he had given you, your life, your body, your abilities, your every advantage in life to serve your own passions and desires. Whether these passions and desires were being spent on things that seemed evil or not. Whether they were being spent on things that were culturally taboo or culturally acceptable. The fact of the matter is that you were using that which God had given you to serve yourself with no thought of him. It's like the only son of a widow.

A widow who spent all of her energy worked two jobs so that she could provide her son with the opportunity for college education. She taught him the value of hard work, used her free time to educate, attend and provide extra career activities. She did all that she could to raise her son well. And she succeeded. Her son received all these gifts. He attended a good college, applied himself, made wise choices, got a job, married a good woman, had two and a half kids and has become a good father.

Yet in all of this he never once called his mother. He never once returned to visit. He didn't even tell her that he had gotten married or had children. She learned all of that from Facebook. So was this son a good son?

[27:52] No. Though he applied all that he had learned from his mother, though he took full advantage of all that she had provided with him, he was wickedly unthankful and unloving towards the one who had given him so much.

And so were you and so was I. Romans 1 makes this point clear. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what could be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly perceived. Ever since the creation of the world and the things that have been made. So they are without excuse for although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give him thanks. We received our very life from God. All that we have has been given to us by God. Yet we lived as though he did not exist. We did not give him thanks and we did not acknowledge him. We were foolish, disobedient and in incessant pursuit of our own pleasure. But, but this guy, this God was rich in mercy and he pursued us. He saved us from the punishment that we deserve. He intervened in the midst of our sin. He called us back. He washed us. He cleansed us. He justified us and he gave us his spirit. He made us heirs and he gave us the hope of eternal life. What a savior. We have been focusing on good works and how we as Christians might go about pursuing good works.

That's one of the points of Titus.

And that's one of the points of today's sermon. And for this, I would like to draw your attention back to verses five and six of Titus three. Starting in verse five, it says he saved us not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy by the washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Christ Jesus, our savior. Paul, in referring to the washing of regeneration, is drawing our attention towards a biblical concept of new birth. We have been born again by the power of the spirit. We are being made into a new creation.

Each believer has been conceived anew and now possesses powers previously, powers previously unknown. And the renewal of the Holy Spirit is the renovation that begins in our hearts at the time of our new birth. You see, in our regeneration, we are being born into the family of God. The spirit has moved in and is doing a renovating work and he is bringing with him new power. The new power to walk in the goodness of God. The new power to be good, though only God is good. So when we read all of Paul's encouragement towards good works, know this is possible only through the power of the spirit at work in you.

[30:57] The spirit has been poured out, the spirit has been poured out generously on us. Think of that metaphor. God's spirit has been poured out on us, not sprinkled, but poured. God is not stingy in what he gives us through Christ, but he is generous, making his nature, his good nature, a part of us.

God is not stingy in what he gives us. This is the well from which true Christians pursue good works. Finally, as we move to verse eight, we see that Paul is reiterating and he is calling us to reiterate this message.

He says, this 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.

Now this is slightly outside of my defined text for today, but a concept that is crucial for us to understand. This saying refers to the gospel, this saying that Paul's referring to saying that is trustworthy refers to the gospel proclamation that we just looked at. Paul's instruction to Titus is to insist on these things so that those who believe may be careful to devote themselves to good works.

So how do we go about carefully pursuing good works? Well, by keeping the gospel central in all that we do, by reiterating its message, its power, its goodness.

[32:21] The gospel fuels right Christian living. It is the soil from which good fruit is produced. It is the power in which we might impact the world around us. And you would do well to remind yourself of its message every day. Remembering your pre-Christ state will enable you to treat all people with true humility and utmost courtesy. For how could you treat others with indignation when God in his goodness and loving kindness and because of his mercy pursued you in your rebellion and then blessed you with every good gift in Christ? It means we must also keep the gospel at the center of our corporate life and reiterate its message over and over again in our time together as a church. I heard this concept this week. The pastor said, Paul is not informing Titus of something he didn't already know. Rather, he has been reminding him of something he must never forget. Even though people are constantly looking for the new, the intriguing, or the innovative, faithfulness in a life of the church often looks like reminding people of what together we must never forget. This ought to be the case of our leadership here at Shoreline, but also the case for each of our members. Faithfulness to our gospel proclamation involves us continually reminding one another that which we must never forget.

It is not the reliance on self that we will produce good works or have an impact to the gospel, but it is through the reiterating is through reiterating the truth of the power of God that the power of God has come to us through Christ and that he is changing us and making us good.

so to wrap this all up this is one practical thing we want to keep the gospel centered although we do our flesh pushes ourselves to the center wants us to rely on self rather than the power of god rather

than resting what he's done rather than looking to our savior we want to look to ourselves and our accomplishments or our processes or our plans or this world or whatever it is and and it's just it's it's culture is constantly pushing that upon us and we must constantly push back by remembering and reiterating the message of the gospel but and maybe you're like me and you too have the tendency to grow accustomed to the gospel message although it's the best news in the universe it gets drowned out by the noise of life and busy you today i encourage you to carve out some time to grab a pencil and a paper and to walk through the gospel summary from today's text write down observations take note of key words and phrases record its promises and meditate on its imagery consider the emotions it's seeking to elicit and the motivations for which it was written note the past present and future work and promises of the gospel note the trying work of god in these passages in this passage and then also take time to apply these truths to your life today i guarantee that they have specific applications for your life press deep into these truths and it's and allow its message to reorient you because for when our roots are planted deep in the fertile soil of the gospel we will be receiving the nutrition needed to be a people that produce rich lush fruit of genuine good works fruit so good and different that others take notice and by taking notice they will be pointed towards jesus christ our savior uh dearly father lord thank you for this time to meet together as a church lord i thank you for your word god this is just one small summary of the gospel and we could spend so much time digging into its depths and i pray that people would do that today but lord uh there's so many aspects of the gospel so much uh aspects of your work in our life you're intervening in our world to save us to rescue us and to give us all of yourself lord um lord i pray that we would make it our aim in life to dig deeper and deeper into this gospel truth every day so that we might be a church equipped with your heart and your message so that we might have an impact for your kingdom in the world that we live amen