

True Living

Titus 3:1-15

Gordon Randall – Sunday, 11th December 2011

INTRODUCTION

Today we conclude our short Sermon series on Paul's letter to Titus. In the last two weeks Ian has covered chapters 1 and 2 and today I complete the series with chapter 3. Let's quickly remind ourselves what we've covered. Remember Paul and Titus between them have taken the Gospel of Christ to the Island of Crete. Paul having left Crete is now writing to Titus who has been left on the island to try and nurture, develop and build up a fragile young Christian Community. You might describe this new community as a church plant or perhaps the first example of a fresh expression of church with Titus trying his best to pioneer new frontiers for the Christian faith.

Titus was being instructed to try and sort things out and appoint appropriate church elders. But his task was far from easy - there was false and misleading teaching going on and some of the behaviour of these so called Christians was far from godly! To encourage Titus Paul sends him this letter where the basic message is "teach sound doctrine".

So in short – in Chapter one Titus is to nurture Elders, Church leaders who in contrast to the false teachers are to pass on the authentic Christian faith and practice what they preach.

In Chapter two Paul emphasises the importance of self control in the life of a Christian and of being distinctive and different from the way of the world, He tells Titus how to relate to the various age groups in the church and urges him to be a good example of a mature believer and teach with courage and conviction.

Now in Chapter 3 the emphasis is on true living –being a conscientious Christian Citizen in society with Paul brilliantly grounding his words in Christian doctrine with a magnificent description of salvation and the Christian response to this free gift.

To help us I've broken this passage down into four key areas.

1. Who we are to be
2. Who we were
3. What God did
4. What we are to do

But first note how this final chapter starts - "Remind the people". Speak to my wife Ruth – she'll tell you I'm someone who constantly needs reminding. I like to think it's simply a man thing! Remember your glasses, remember your packed lunch, remember to put the cats out at night (or you know what you'll find on the floor in the morning), or the classic remember to pick up Lorna and bring her home. I am ashamed to say I have even forgotten to pick up other people's children such is my inability to remember. Believe me my memory is poor and not remembering has often got me into big trouble so having a wife around who reminds me is actually a real blessing. So reading this and others passages in scripture it's reassuring to discover quite a bit of reminding goes on. Many Biblical writers take pains to make old truths new and stale truths fresh. As Paul says "remind the people" he is making the point - **this is very important**. It was important for the Christians of Crete 2000 years ago and it remains important for Christians today. So let's move to our first point...

1. 'Who we are to be'

Verses 1 and 2 say: *Remind* the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, ² to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to show true humility towards all men.

Paul tells Titus to remind the people about their social relationships in the world, first to the authorities in particular and then to everyone in general. So does this mean we should give the state unconditional loyalty and obedience? The answer is of course 'no' – that would be to worship the

state. For example how could early Christians call Caesar 'Lord' when of course they recognised Jesus as Lord?

Nevertheless, Christian duty in principle is to submit to the state. Don't get me wrong, our first allegiance is to Jesus as Lord, but we must obey our government and its leaders as well. For example in Romans 13:1 Paul writes: Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

However, some of these early Christians in Crete were not exactly behaving in an appropriate way and Paul was telling Titus to remind them they were not above the law. Naturally today – we also are to obey the civil law but that is only the beginning of our civil responsibility; just as Paul was urging the Christian Cretans of that time so we must also do all we can to be good citizens. In a democracy, this means participation, a willingness to serve and being public spirited – as it says in verse 1 “be ready to do whatever is good” – in other words grab opportunities, be eager not reluctant to live out our lives in society. But we must be discerning in this – the words ‘do whatever is good’ clarifies our responsibility but also limit it. We cannot cooperate with the state if it reverses its God-given duty – for example promoting evil instead of punishing it, and opposing good instead of rewarding and furthering it.

These opening two verses offer a brief description of the expectation of Christian behaviour in public life. In relation to the authorities (just like the early Christians of Crete) we are challenged to be conscientious citizens (submissive, obedient and cooperative), but these verses also point to our relationship with everybody else in society, irrespective of their race or religion, we are to be peaceful, courteous, humble and gentle. Once again the bar is set very high indeed for those seeking to follow Jesus particularly when we look at the world we live in where every day through the screens of our televisions and the stories appearing in our newspapers we witness some awful things - violence, resentment, rudeness and hatred - to name a few.

With that lets move to our second point...

2. 'Who we were'

Why is there an expectation for Christians to have a social conscience and behave responsibly in public life? The answer is – we were ourselves once anti-social, but – God saved and changed us!

Don't get me wrong – I'm not suggesting I'm perfect or any of us are perfect. I know only too well what I was once like and also what I am still like – but despite that God saved me, He saved you, He saved us. And he can therefore transform other people as well. Remember – we are work in progress, having become a follower of Jesus our hearts open to the Holy Spirit but whilst the victory has been won we remain in that in between time waiting for Jesus' return when victory will be made complete and we will become perfect.

So as we read verse 3 we discover it describing some pretty grim human behaviour and Paul offers it as a description of **who we were**. But although it's about 'who we were' it's still important to remember our own failures - we are work in progress, we mustn't despair and rant excessively over other people's sins while being blind to our own. We don't want to grow hopeless or cynical about the power of the Holy Spirit to change even the most challenging person.

Let me be honest and admit here and now - I struggle doing the few things mentioned in the first couple verses of Titus 3 “to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to show true humility towards all men”. I'd guess many of us struggle just to do those relatively small things even in this last week. Yet it is in the midst of the mess and meanness of human stupidity, selfishness, violence, and sin that God's grace appears as we move to our third point....

3. "What God did"

...and discover in verses 3 to 7 these amazing words that Paul offered to Titus, the Cretean Christians and us today. Please read these words in your bible as I speak them...At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice

and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

As I think back to the time in my life before I was a Christian I realise I was enslaved to sin. I was stuck in verse 3 – foolish, disobedient, deceived and **enslaved** by all kinds of passions and pleasures. But then something amazing happened - the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, that is in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus He saved me, He saved you – He saved us. As we read this superb description of salvation see that its source is “the love of God”.

In verse 4 we read of God’s ‘kindness’ shown even to ‘the ungrateful and wicked’. We read of his ‘love’ which reflects his concern for the whole human race. In verse 5 we read of his ‘mercy’ extended to the helpless who cannot save themselves and in verse 7 we read of his ‘grace’ which reaches out to the guilty and undeserving.

Salvation originated in the heart of God. It is because of his kindness, love, mercy and grace that He intervened on our behalf, He took the initiative, He came after us, and He rescued us from our hopeless predicament. God redeemed us from the tyranny of sin with the precious blood of His own Son. We cannot escape from sin on our own; only the life of God’s Son can free us.

Verses 3-7 summarise what Christ does for us when He saves us. He moves us from a life full of sin to one where we are led by the Holy Spirit. All our sins, every bit of them are washed away. In becoming a Christian, we acknowledge Christ as Lord and recognise His saving work. We gain eternal life with all its treasures. We have renewal by the Holy Spirit, and He continually renews our hearts (work in progress). None of this occurs because we earned it or deserved it; it is all God’s gift.

Now look at verse 8 “This is a trustworthy saying”. Paul is emphasising - verses 3-7 are absolutely true and must be trusted. And Paul doesn’t just leave it there – he now underlines the crucial necessity of good works emerging from all those who have been saved. Which moves us to our final point...

4. ‘What we are to do’.

In verse 8 we read: And I want you to stress these things (“these things” being - the essential ingredients of salvation), so that those who have trusted in God (in other words those who have been saved by faith) may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good (in other words ‘good works’). Although Paul has made it plain in verse 5 that God has not saved us ‘because of the righteous things we have done’, he nevertheless now insists the Cretean Christians and us today must devote ourselves to good works.

Humility now marks our life of discipleship because we recognize how undeserving we are and how far God has gone to extend life and hope to us all. We are saved by God for a purpose. The letters in the New Testament make clear over and over again that purpose is to do good works. Good works are not the ground of salvation, but they are its necessary fruit and evidence. And “these things are excellent and profitable for everyone”.

Good works come in all shapes and sizes. It could be Street Pastors, reaching out to the elderly through Luncheon club, helping those in debt through Junction 5, being a school governor, working with the puppet team, telling the gospel in school assemblies, giving someone in need a lift, carefully listening to the lonely, serving someone with a cup of tea or just simply giving someone a smile.

It could be delivering the Christmas leaflets (Ruth asked me to put in that one). Whatever it is it counts – By good works the gospel is adorned and so commended to those who don’t yet know Jesus.

Sadly some people actually use the phrase “do gooders” in a negative or put down kind of way and yet according to so many of the letters in the New Testament good works, doing good, is the way we demonstrate that we are saved, it is the way we express our godliness, it is the way others know we have a transforming relationship with Jesus.

Only last week Ralph Kay mentioned to me how a non-Christian friend who regularly comes into this building to attend one of the many activities that occur here during the week contacted him to say how she experienced the spiritual witness being radiated by Christians here voluntarily living out good works.

Good works are the way godliness expresses itself in the wider world. Our good works are the expression of our priorities and our attitudes. So we are not saved by our good works, but our good works demonstrate that we are saved.

Now listen to verse 14: Our people must learn to **devote** themselves to doing what is good, in order to provide for urgent needs and not live unproductive lives. The Cretan Christians and us today are to **devote** ourselves to good works to meet urgent needs so that we are productive followers of Jesus and productive citizens of our communities.

Think about what the word 'devote' means – words like 'loyalty', 'enthusiasm', 'dedication' come to mind.

Verses 9 to 11 demonstrate - we are **not** by **contrast** to waste our time and energy in pointless quarrels, stupid controversies, dissensions or anything that is divisive. This doesn't mean we should refuse to study, discuss, and examine different interpretations of difficult Bible passages. Paul is warning against petty quarrels, not honest discussion that leads to wisdom.

He is writing with a sense of urgency – Speak evil of no one, avoid quarrelling, always be friendly, be gentle, show courtesy to all. Life is too short. There is so much important work to be done. Christians can be as guilty as anyone of spending their time arguing about stuff most people don't even care about instead of devoting ourselves to good works to meet urgent needs.

CONCLUSION

Good works are excellent and profitable for everyone to be a part of – every ill person visited, every bereaved family comforted, every person shown the love of Christ through our care, comfort and compassion – the list is endless. These are things we are called to do, we are to be energetically engaged in doing good – whatever is profitable and excellent.

So as we finish let's close as we began "Remind the people" – remember what we were like without God. Remember what he has done for us in Christ. Remember our need to respond to His amazing love, grace and mercy. Remember to allow the Holy Spirit to lead us on to the virtues which Jesus specifically came to exhibit and teach – humility, meekness, gentleness and love.

Let's remember to strive for true living, to grow as imitators of God, and walk and work in love. Let us remember that our good works are the very essence of the Divine life within each and every one of us.