

Titus 3
April 2, 2023

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: What do you think it means to be a good citizen in your community? [Let people engage]

Q: Why do you think it's important to avoid controversies and arguments? [Let people engage]

Q: So when is it beneficial to argue about an issue? [Let people engage]

Transition: Paul has some thoughts on these questions as well. Paul moved his thoughts to the duties of all believers, especially in relation to the government and the non-Christian world. Verses 1–2 remind us of our duty to government leaders and authorities. But he also includes exhortations concerning the practical implications for daily life in which we should not engage with people who are creating unproductive arguments and thereby exerting a divisive and otherwise destructive influence in the church and/or the community.

BOOK:

Doing What Is Good

3 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 to show true humility toward all men.

³ 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. ⁴ But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ 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, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. ⁸ This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

⁹ But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. ¹⁰ Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. ¹¹ You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.

Final Remarks

¹² As soon as I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, because I have decided to winter there. ¹³ Do everything you can to help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way and see that they have everything they need. ¹⁴ Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives.

¹⁵ Everyone with me sends you greetings. Greet those who love us in the faith.

Grace be with you all.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

The letter makes it plain that the Christian life is grounded in the grace of God (2:11–14). Believers must recognize this truth and rebuke heresy and avoid legalism (1:10–16). This can be done only by grace; grace that saves, grace that teaches, grace that strengthens, and grace that enables. In so doing we can see the relationship between doctrine and practice.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 2, pp. 267-268). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.*

Christians as Citizens (Titus 3:1–8)

Christians were often looked on with suspicion in the Roman Empire because their conduct was so different, and they met in private meetings for worship (see 1 Peter 2:11–25; 3:13–4:5). It was important that they be good citizens without compromising the faith. Their pagan neighbors might disobey the law, but Christians must submit to the authority of the state (see Rom. 13). “Ready to every good work” (Titus 3:1) means “cooperating in those matters that involve the whole community.” Our heavenly citizenship (Phil. 3:20) does not absolve us from responsibilities as citizens on earth.

The believer should not have a bad attitude toward the government and show it by slanderous accusations and pugnacious actions. The word *gentle* (Titus 3:2) means “an attitude of moderation, a sweet reasonableness.” Christians with this quality do not insist on the letter of the law, but are willing to compromise where no moral issue is at stake.

Again, Paul linked duty to doctrine. “Don’t be too critical of your pagan neighbors,” he wrote. “Just remember what you were before God saved you!” Titus 3:3 needs little explanation; we know what it means from our own experience.

What a difference “the kindness and love of God” (Titus 3:4) made! If you want a beautiful illustration of “the kindness of God,” read 2 Samuel and note David’s treatment of Mephibosheth, a little lame prince. Because Mephibosheth was a part of Saul’s family, he expected to be slain. But David, in kindness, spared him and treated him as one of his own sons at the palace table.

Salvation came not only because of God’s kindness and love, but also because of His mercy (Titus 3:5). We did not save ourselves; “He saved us.” How did He do it? Through the miracle of the new birth, the work of the Holy Spirit of God. I do not think that “washing” here refers to baptism because, in New Testament times, people were baptized *after* they were saved, and not in order to be saved (see Acts 10:43–48). “Washing” here means “bathed all over.” When a sinner trusts Christ, he is cleansed from all his sins, and he is made “a new person” by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Paul related this same cleansing experience to the Word of God (Eph. 5:26). Salvation comes to a sinner when he trusts Christ, when the Spirit of God uses the Word of God to bring about the new birth. We are born of the *Spirit* (John 3:5–6, where “water” refers to physical birth, which Nicodemus had mentioned earlier, John 3:4) and of the *Word* (1 Peter 1:23–25). “Which” in Titus 3:6 ought to be “whom,” referring to the Holy Spirit who is given to us at conversion (Acts 2:38; Rom. 5:5; 8:9).

Not only have we who are Christians been washed and made new in Christ, but we have also been *justified* (Titus 3:7). This wonderful doctrine is discussed in detail in Romans 3:21–8:39. Justification is the gracious act of God whereby He declares a believing sinner righteous because of the finished work of Christ on the cross. God puts to our account the righteousness of His Son, so that we can be condemned no more. Not only does He forget our sins, but He forgets that we were even sinners!

What is the result of this kindness, love, mercy, and grace? Hope! We are heirs of God! This means that today we can draw on His riches; and when He comes, we will share His wealth and His kingdom forever. This hope ties in with Titus 2:13: “Looking for that blessed hope.” But

there is something more involved: We should live godly lives and be “careful to maintain good works” (Titus 3:8). The only evidence the unsaved world has that we belong to God is our godly lives.

“Good works” do not necessarily mean religious works or church work. It is fine to work at church, sing in the choir, and hold an office; but it is also good to serve our unsaved neighbors, to be helpful in the community, and to have a reputation for assisting those in need. Baby-sitting to relieve a harassed young mother is just as much a spiritual work as passing out a Gospel tract. The best way a local church has to witness to the lost is through the sacrificial service of its members.

Problem People (Titus 3:9–11)

We wish we did not have “problem people” in our churches; but wherever there are people, there can be problems. In this case, Paul warned Titus to avoid people who like to argue about the unimportant things of the faith. I recall being approached by a young man after a Bible lesson and getting involved with him in all sorts of hypothetical questions of doctrine. “Now, if this were true ... if that were true ...” was about all he could say. I was very inexperienced at the time; I should have ignored him in a gracious way. As it was, I missed the opportunity to talk with several sincere people who had personal problems and wanted help. I have learned that professed Christians who like to argue about the Bible are usually covering up some sin in their lives, are very insecure, and are usually unhappy at work or at home.

But there is another kind of problem person we should deal with: the “heretic.” This word means “one who makes a choice, a person who causes divisions.” This is a self-willed person who thinks he is right, and who goes from person to person in the church, forcing people to make a choice. “Are you for *me* or for the pastor?” This is a work of the flesh (see Gal. 5:20). Such a person should be admonished at least twice, and then rejected.

How do we apply this in a local church? Let me suggest one way. If a church member goes about trying to get a following, and then gets angry and leaves the church, let him go. If he comes back (maybe the other churches don’t want him either), and if he shows a repentant attitude, receive him back. If he repeats this behavior (and they usually do), receive him back the second time. But if he does it a third time, do not receive him back into the fellowship of the church (Titus 3:10). Why not? “Such a man is warped in character, keeps on sinning, and has condemned himself” (Titus 3:11, literal translation). If more churches would follow this principle, we would have fewer “church tramps” who cause problems in various churches.

Conclusion (Titus 3:12–15)

In the closing verses, Paul conveyed some personal information to Titus, and reminded him of the main theme of the letter: Insist that God’s people “learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives” (Titus 3:14, NIV).

We know nothing about Artemas; Tychicus we met in Acts 20:4. He was with Paul in his first Roman imprisonment and carried the epistles from Paul to the Ephesians (Eph. 6:21), the Colossians (Col. 4:7–8), and to Philemon (cf. Col. 4:7–9 with Phile. 10). Either Artemas or Tychicus would replace Titus on Crete, and then Titus was to join Paul at Nicopolis.

It is possible that Zenas and Apollos (see Acts 18:24ff; Titus 3:13) carried this letter to Titus. Paul had sent them on a mission and Titus was to aid them all he could.

Paul ended the letter to Titus with a variation of his usual benediction (see 2 Thess. 3:17–18): “Grace be with you all.”

Grace—and good works! They go together!

Litfin, A. D. (1985). *Titus*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 766-767) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

3:1–2. A large part of any pastor’s public ministry is reminding people of what they already know. Titus was to **remind** the Christians on Crete to be good citizens within their communities, a virtue in which Cretans were notoriously deficient. Though Paul did not repeat it here, his thought was no doubt that this behavior, like that of a Christian slave, will adorn the gospel and make it attractive to others (cf. 2:10). Paul listed seven qualities expected of Christian citizens: (1) **to be subject to rulers and authorities**; (2) **to be obedient** (cf. Rom. 13:1–7); (3) **to be ready to do whatever is good** (cf. Eph. 2:10; 2 Tim. 3:17); (4) **to slander no one**; (5) **to be peaceable and** (6) **considerate**; and (7) **to show true humility toward all men**. A Christian citizen should be an influence for good in the community in every way, demonstrating the loveliness of Christ to all through courteous and gracious behavior. This is precisely the lifestyle that results from understanding God’s grace. In other words, the instructions in Titus 2:15–3:2 must be seen as concrete examples of the behavior required of one who understands God’s grace (2:11–14).

C. Grace as a motivation for godly living (3:3–8).

3:3. Paul never forgot the sinful condition from which he and his converts had been salvaged (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9–11; Eph. 4:17–24; Col. 3:6–7), and he reminded them of it once more. Instead of the gracious, Christlike people he was encouraging them to be, they once were just the opposite, being **foolish** instead of sensible, **disobedient** instead of submissive, **deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures** instead of self-disciplined and ready for every good work. Far from being peaceable, considerate, and humble, they were characterized by **malice and envy, being hated and hating one another**. Such is the brutish existence of people apart from God. While a veneer of civilization often obscures the bleak truth, the slightest crack in the surface of society reveals the reality behind the facade. The painful truth is that apart from God people degenerate into little more than animals wrangling over bones.

3:4. But all of that changed **when the kindness and love** (*philanthrōpia*, lit., “love for man”) **of God our Savior appeared**. The contrast is startling. In verse 3 man is the actor, but in verses 4–7 man is merely the recipient, and God becomes the actor. What man could in no wise do for himself, God initiated for him. (On the reference to God as Savior, see comments on 1 Tim. 1:1.)

3:5. God in His grace saves those who believe, not because of any righteousness in them (cf. Rom. 3:21–24; Eph. 2:8–9; 2 Tim. 1:9), but **because of His mercy**. The three words, “kindness,” “love,” and “mercy” (Titus 3:4–5) all represent aspects of God’s grace. The dual means of grace through which He accomplished this salvation are (1) the **rebirth** spoken of as a **washing** from the filth of sin, and (2) the **renewal by the Holy Spirit** (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17). No mention is made here of the role of faith in the process because Paul’s entire focus was on what God has done, not on human response.

3:6–7. God **poured out** the Holy Spirit on the world **generously through Jesus Christ our Savior**. Jesus was the Mediator of the Spirit (cf. Acts 2:33). The language intentionally conjures

up images of the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:17). God's purpose in pouring out the Holy Spirit was **so that, having been justified by His grace, believers might become heirs having the hope of eternal life**. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is intimately involved, the New Testament explains, with bringing to fruition God's gracious purposes to save (cf. Rom. 8:15–17; Gal. 4:6–7; Eph. 1:13–14). What God in His grace began, God in His grace will see to the end, through His Spirit.

3:8. The **trustworthy saying** formula so common in the Pastorals (cf. 1 Tim. 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Tim. 2:11) introduces Paul's return to direct address. Because what he had just been saying is trustworthy, Titus should **stress these things** in order to promote godly behavior in his listeners. Twice before Paul had instructed Titus to teach these things in accordance with sound doctrine (Titus 2:1, 15), and this exhortation is his final reiteration of what is probably the central thrust of the entire epistle. Paul was deeply concerned that God's people **devote themselves to doing what is good** because **these things are excellent and profitable for everyone**. Titus was to promote good works, for they go hand in hand with sound doctrine.

D. Behavior inconsistent with grace (3:9–11).

3:9. If sound teaching is profitable for everyone, **foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the Law ... are unprofitable and useless**. This is a repeated theme in the Pastorals (cf. 1 Tim. 1:4; 6:4; 2 Tim. 2:23; Titus 1:14). Titus was to **avoid** (lit., “turn away from”) such things.

3:10–11. As to the people who are advocating these useless things and thereby exerting a divisive and otherwise destructive influence in the church (cf. 1:11), Paul's instructions to Titus were direct and specific. He was to give such a person two warnings. If that did not work, he was to **have nothing to do with him**. The assumption is that a failure to respond to two warnings is a clear sign that the offender is **warped and sinful, and self-condemned**. Paul's thought here is similar to the Lord's instructions (Matt. 18:15–17), when He taught that after giving an offender three chances to repent, he is then to be cut off (but cf. 2 Thess. 3:14–15).

VI. Final Instructions and Greetings (3:12–15).

3:12. As usual, Paul ended his letter with some personal allusions. Though it is not known where Paul was when he wrote this epistle, he was planning to winter at **Nicopolis** on the Adriatic coast of Greece. Paul exhorted Titus to do his best to join him there as soon as **Artemas or Tychicus** arrived. Evidently Paul intended to send one of the two to relieve Titus in Crete. Of Artemas nothing is known. (On Tychicus, see comments on 2 Tim. 4:12.)

3:13. **Zenas the lawyer** is mentioned nowhere else in the New Testament, and nothing is known about him, not even whether he was Jewish or Roman. But **Apollos** was a familiar fellow worker. The apostle's instructions seem to suggest that both Zenas and Apollos were in Crete and that Titus was in a position to **see that they have everything they need**. Servants of Christ who are called to travel from place to place have always received support from the churches (cf. 3 John 6–8).

3:14. Some have suggested that the Cretan Christians may have manifested some of their countrymen's traits (cf. 1:12) and were therefore unable to **provide for daily necessities**, much less be of use to anyone else. This is probably behind Paul's reference to **unproductive lives**. In any case Paul had been stressing the need for good works, not to earn salvation but to serve others, and he pointedly reiterated it here. He expressed the same thought to the Ephesian congregation (Eph. 4:28).

3:15. It is not known who was included in the phrase **everyone with me**. **Those who love us in the faith** obviously excluded the false teachers who opposed Paul. The closing greeting, **grace be with you all**, is similar to that in both 1 and 2 Timothy. The plural word **you** indicate an awareness on Paul's part that he was addressing a broader audience than just Titus.

Dockery, D. S. (1998). The Pauline Letters. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (pp. 612-613). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

CHRISTIAN LIVING (3:1–11)

Paul moved his thoughts to the duties of all believers, especially in relation to the government and the non-Christian world. Verses 1–2 remind Christians of their duty to government leaders and authorities. It is important to note that early Christian teaching was not limited to the way of salvation, but included exhortations concerning the practical implications for daily life (see Rom. 13:1–7; 1 Pet. 2:13–17).

Some might suggest that such a response to ungodly leaders was inappropriate. Paul met this objection by reminding them of their own pre-Christian condition. It is only by God's "mercy" that we are saved. God brought about our salvation by changing our lives through the work of the Holy Spirit who was "poured out on us". By God's gracious gift of Christ's righteousness to us God now declares us justified in His sight and heirs of eternal life. (See the article "Salvation in Paul's Thought.")

Paul concluded his letter with further instructions about false teachers. Their stubborn refusal to listen to correction revealed their inner corruption.

CONCLUDING REQUESTS (3:12–15)

Paul announced his plans for the future. Another worker, Artemas or Tychicus, would be sent to replace Titus in Crete. Titus did not need to carry the burden alone. This transition situation offered Paul one more chance to stress the idea that believers need to be characterized by noble deeds. All the workers with Paul joined in sending greetings. Paul's typical closing blessings are addressed to all to whom Titus was to share Paul's greetings.

Theological Significance. Like the other pastoral letters, Paul's letter to Titus focuses on keeping the faith and refuting heresy. Especially significant, considering the nature of the Cretan heresy, are the repeated emphases on doctrinal fidelity (2:11–14; 3:4–7) and faithful living (1:16; 2:7, 14; 3:1, 8, 14). The letter makes it plain that the Christian life is grounded in the grace of God (2:11–14). Believers must recognize this truth and rebuke heresy and avoid legalism (1:10–16). This can be done only by grace; grace that saves, grace that teaches, grace that strengthens, and grace that enables. In so doing we can see the relationship between doctrine and practice.

Fields, W. C. (1972). Titus. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), The Teacher's Bible Commentary (pp. 770-771). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

Godly Living (Titus 3:1–11)

Paul continues his theme that God's purpose in redemption is to achieve a higher level in human affairs. Christians are to be good citizens (v. 1). They are to relate positively and

constructively to other people (v. 2). They are to rise above their own wasted, self-centered, discordant past (v. 3).

In the midst of urging Titus and the church leaders to promote a life-style of service and good works, Paul pauses with a reminder (vv. 4–7). Good works do not produce salvation! Rather, the reverse is true. Good works, a life of openness toward others and toward God, is a product of salvation. Salvation is by the grace and mercy of God. Salvation liberates one from the self-centered life. Those who think in a godly fashion will have a concern, a steady purpose to live and work in a godly fashion (v. 8).

Therefore, don't waste your time on pointless, worthless matters—"stupid arguments, long lists of names of ancestors, quarrels, and fights about the Law" (v. 9, TEV). If there are those who insist on doing these things and thereby disrupt the congregation, warn them a couple of times. If they do not stop it, have nothing more to do with them (vv. 10–11).

Personal Matters (Titus 3:12–14)

One of the purposes of the letter seems to be to request Titus to come to Paul. Artemas or Tychicus, one or the other, would free Titus of his duties in Crete so that he could join Paul at Nicopolis (v. 12). Paul had decided to spend the winter there. It may have been at Nicopolis that the Roman authorities arrested Paul for the last time.

Conclusion (Titus 3:15)

The exchange of greetings between the believers in both places, in Paul's location and at Crete, is in the special bonds of the faith.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). Titus 3). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.