

Title: Good Work! You're Living The Spiritual Life

Text: Titus 3:1-8

Theme: Christian behavior must be grounded in the basic truth of the Gospel

Date: 6/8/14

Benediction: Col 1: 9 - 10

“Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men.

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 Savior 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 Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. 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.”

(Titus 3:1–8 NIV)

## Commentary

### Context is very important when reading the letter from Paul to Titus.

Titus was Paul's “fixer”. if there was a problem in a church Paul would send a representative to the church with a message of correction and instruction (see for example the church at Corinth). However, as church life was in it's infancy - and very messy - it was not uncommon for the first representative to encounter significant difficulty in addressing the problem. At times like this Paul would pull out a bigger hammer. A young guy named Titus. Titus was the last warning a church would get before Paul came himself - to do some deep cleaning. When Titus arrived for the first time in a region to help the church the message from Paul was clear: Listen to Titus, or you will have to deal with me!

So as the modern reader approaches this epistle he must remember that this is not a letter to the church, but a clear outline of what Paul expected Titus to accomplish, and the unvarnished intercourse of a commander and his trusted, loyal and loved lieutenant. It is likely that Paul would not have made some of the statements in this letter to the church. It is likely that he would not have wanted Titus to make those statements either. The stark language that Paul uses rather serves to convey to Titus the intensity and passion Paul feels both for the church in Crete and their reaching the goal of being changed by the Gospel.

### What does the “good” life look like?

1 - 2 “Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men.

In January of 2000 after winning Super Bowl XXXV, Art Modell held up the Lombardi trophy and told cameras, "This trophy belongs to the people of Baltimore, Baltimore County, and Maryland." The icy rain that anointed the return parade only served to stoke the already raging excitement felt and expressed by Baltimore residents and fans. The wild card Ravens had blown away all expectations in even reaching the big dance. So when they took the victory the praise they received was well earned. I doubt that Ray Lewis was greeted by strangers with a "good work Ray". Such a belittling statement would have disparaged the effort and sacrifice that it took to secure the championship.

To many of us the compliment of "good work" is brother to a thumbs up. "Good work on the proposal Jones" we can hear a boss saying as he stops at Jones' desk for a brief kudos. Similarly the idea of doing good works has lost some of its distinction. We may think of the boy scout helping an elderly woman across the street, or the person who chooses to not use profanity as doing something good. That is, they are practicing behavior that is morally upright and virtuous. And we divest these same behaviors of being righteous, holy and sacred. But if all that is good has its source in God, when we separate the moral from the divine we automatically lose both the reason for, and the impetus to strain to receive the commendation "Good Work!"

The book of Titus is unique from Paul's other letters in the prominence of the phrase "good works" or "doing good". The phrase is present in almost all of Paul's letters - occurring only one or two times in each book. However, in Titus the phrase appears in six of the 64 verses of the letter. In fact, the word "work" (*ergon* - from which we get the word "energy") appears only one time in the letter without being qualified by "good". Three of the seven occurrences of "*work*" are in this text Titus 3:1-8. The seventh occurrence is in 3:14 in the paragraph that follows our text. We will take a quick look at the first three times Paul uses this term to see why it is so important to him in this letter. But first notice in our passage the contrast between the "good" and "bad" works that Paul describes in verses 1-3.

In verses 1 - 2 Paul gives Titus instruction to pass on to the Cretans so that they may know how to, and therefore confidently walk in "good works". In these verses "good work" looks like having obedient and appropriate behavior towards authority, and having humble and charitable attitudes and behavior towards neighbors.

Paul uses the phrase "rulers and authority" in this passage to refer to the human government, in this case Rome. In other places (such as Ephesians 6) Paul uses this same phrase to refer to spiritual authorities. However, the context makes it clear that human rulers are what Paul has in mind here - Paul has never given instruction to submit to spiritual authorities in this way. To do so would be to instruct Christians to be obedient to Satan and his demons.

The full impact of this direction is enhanced when placed in contrast to the norm at that time on the island of Crete. The term "cretan" derives its negative connotation from this era. The government of Crete was corrupt by comparison to the already a pulling standards of Roman politics. And her citizens can be best compared to the imported prisoners of Australia. Crime, violence, and anarchy is the norm. Paul indicates to Titus just how strongly he feels towards this when he quotes the Cretan who described his people in what was likely the unabashed boast of a proud fool in Titus 1:12.

Despite these problems Paul points Titus to the fact that the Christians on Crete have already been instructed in what sort of life they ought to lead. Verse 1 begins with the instruction "remind the people". In other words, the problem is not lack of understanding, or a poor grasp of the practicals. The problem is an unwillingness to live in accord with the life of Jesus. The simple truth is that we need to be often reminded to do what is good. And to be reminded how and why we ought to do what is good.

### What does the “bad” life look like?

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.

Listen to those words and try to imagine the challenge before Titus on the island of Crete. It seems from the scant historical picture that we have of Titus' life that he evangelized Crete before Paul had been there as a missionary or as a prisoner. In Acts 27 while on his way to make his appeal to Caesar Paul spent a winter in anchorage in a Cretan harbor. Paul was only on the island for a few months, but it was enough time for him to be certain and clear in his assessment of the problems facing the church in Crete.

In chapter 1 Paul states that he left Titus at Crete to straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town (1:5). We know that this task was uniquely and particularly challenging because 1. Paul left Titus his trusted co-laborer knowing that Titus was up to the task when others may not have been. 2. In 1:12 Paul quotes a Cretan as noted earlier that Cretans are, “liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons” - Paul then states in 1:13 that he finds this to be an apt assessment. Additionally, in 3:3 Paul states the manner of life that used to describe the Cretans as we have already seen. and 3. Paul left instructions specifically for dealing with the Judeaizers. In 1:10 - 11 Paul describes the so called “circumcision group” as being rebellious, mere-talkers, and deceivers and Paul states forcefully, “they MUST be silenced!”

Not wishing to leave Titus unsupported in his task Paul tells Titus that the goal and purpose in instructing the Cretans is that they would be healthy or sound. In verse 9 Paul states that the purpose of an elder is to be able to “encourage others by **sound doctrine** and refute those who oppose it” Paul repeats this idea of “soundness” in verse 13 when he directs Titus to “rebuke them sharply, so that they will be **sound in the faith**”. In Paul's mind if something is “sound” it is healthy. And healthy life is the result of accurately applying correct instruction. To this end in 2:1 - 2 Paul tells Titus, “You **must teach** what is in accord with **sound doctrine**. **Teach** the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and **sound in faith**, in love and in endurance.”

The first use of the phrase “good work” is used in contrast to the wickedness found in Crete. In 1:16 Paul concludes his charge against the Cretans by saying,

*“They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for **doing anything good**.”*

Then, in response to the abundance of wickedness in Crete Paul instructs Titus in 2:7 - 8

*“In everything set them an example by **doing what is good**. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech which cannot be condemned.”*

Taken together with the idea of health, it is likely that Paul is making a literary allusion between the word “good” (*kalon*) and a significant harbor on the island of Crete called Kalos (the “good” or “healthy” or “pleasant” harbor). During the winter anchorage in Crete of Acts 27 Paul and Titus would have spent much of the time together discussing and ministering to the immature Cretan believers. To Titus, the “good” harbor was more than just a name, it was the place where he enjoyed brief, yet deep and intimate relationship with his father in the faith for what would probably be the last time on this earth.

The twin concepts of soundness and good work are both the recipe and the result for the true follower of Jesus. As stated earlier however there exists an ever present entropy that

results in separating the morally good from the divine. And if this message were to stop here we would be left with good moral teaching, and a works based salvation - If you live a good, moral, healthy life and don't lie, or rebel, or hate, then you will have fulfilled your purpose in life.

Furthermore, (and we MUST SEE THIS) this is a very easy trap to slip into. On the one hand the only part of our life that we truly have control over is our conduct and behavior. On the other hand our culture screams at us "Be good! but for *goodness* sake keep God out of it!" The truth that we must daily wrestle with and appropriate is that Christian behavior must be grounded in the basic truth of the Gospel. In other words, it is in the very moment of being confronted with the goal of goodness and health we are first thrust into the realization that we are powerless to meet the goal on our own. We need a savior!

### **When did God change our lives?**

4. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.

Pay very close attention to the timeline that Paul describes here. Kindness and love come before savior in the verse, but not in time - They come from Him. The Savior had to exist *before* His kindness or love could exist. In the same way, the love and kindness could not appear before they existed. So first was the Savior, then from the savior was extended love and kindness, which then appeared to us. And at the very same moment of the appearing of love, salvation was completely accomplished. If you have heard me before you have probably heard me as rhetorically, "Where am I in that equation?" The unfathomable glory of the Gospel is that it is ALL OF GRACE from first to last.

Here in verse 4 Paul uses the word "works" without the qualifier "good" in it's only occurrence in the entire letter. He states,

*"he saved us, NOT because of righteous **things we had done**, but because of his mercy"*

In fact this, according to Paul is why Christ came. In 2:14 Paul says of Jesus,

*"[He] gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good."*

Friend, this is by far the most fantastic news I know!

### **What did God do?**

5 - 6. 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 Savior,

Look at how Paul focuses the spotlight so boldly and unapologetically on Jesus here! He saved us. Paul repeats what he has already stated in verse 4. Out of jubilation, out of ecstasy, out of the depth of gratitude only known by those who have been called to a reckoning before Jesus Himself. And this salvation was no trivial matter. We were filthy, covered with the stain of sin - He washed us. We were dead in our sin - He brought us to life through rebirth and renewal through the Holy Spirit.

Your sin did not stop Him from reaching you. Your dead corpse was not enough to overcome His love. Focused on you, into your heart was the power of a billion suns hurled with

laser like precision by the Spirit of Jesus at your powerless, rotting, putrified lifeless existence. And in that moment you exploded forth as a super nova - but never to fade away - the living, declaring, testifying child of God. All by the work of the power and glory of the Spirit as He filled your life.

Notice the way Paul describes the quality of God's actions towards you. He Saved you. He renewed you. He gave you rebirth. He was abundantly generous in all of these actions as He poured out the Holy Spirit into your life. Notice too, how Paul displays the seamless work of the Trinity in verse 5. God does the pouring. The Holy Spirit is the means of power working the rebirth in you through the agency or transmission of Jesus the Savior.

Please marvel with me for a moment while I strip this down to the bare essentials of the Gospel. God created the world and it was perfect. While things were perfect God and Man were friends. But Man betrayed God by disobeying God's rules. The Bible calls this disobedience "sin". And since the first rule was broken by Adam God and Man have been at war. We are the ungrateful, belligerent, would be usurping rebels hellbent on overthrowing the rightful King and perverting and pillaging His creation. And, the horror of our state is that even if it were possible for us to return to God - on our own we would *NEVER* submit to any terms of peace. The only way we know is the way of the sword, the knife and the gun. And on the other side of the equation God's anger and righteous fury has been stoked by our sin into a raging inferno. He is perfect, holy, sinless. And He hates all sin. And the only means of appeasing His holy anger is for justice to be served against all sinners. Sentence must be passed, and execution must be swift, brutal and without mercy. The writer of the book of Hebrews tells us in 9:22,

*"In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness."*

This was the state of things. And into this state God supernaturally interjected His own Son, Jesus the Savior. Jesus came to take our place in front of the Holy judge. And even to take our place on the executioners block. The Gospel that is powerful to save is not merely that God sent His son into the world, but that His Son, Jesus the Savior was murdered by a condemned people so that those same people would not have to be punished any more.

And for all who place their hope for salvation in this Jesus and receive by grace the forgiveness of their sins God not only allows that person to return, but makes that man or woman His adopted child, and heir to His entire Holy estate. God working mightily, of His own accord, not in repayment for anything I have earned, but for His own good pleasure, on my behalf to take an enemy and make him a son. Friend, again I say, this is the most fantastic news I know!!

### **Why did God do this?**

7 - 8. so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. 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."

Remember I said earlier that in Paul's mind the process through which the true Christian life may be lived - and the hope and joy of that life experienced - is by correct teaching being appropriately applied. So how should you and I apply this to our lives?

First, we can make application by seeing and receiving by faith that as verse 7 says, we have,

*“been justified by his grace, [in order that] we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.”*

Paul tipped his hand to this glorious truth all the way back in the first lines of his letter. Paul’s greeting in this letter is the longest of all of the letters Paul wrote with the exception of the letter to the Romans. And by comparison to that massive theological treatise, the letter to Titus is dwarfed. In his greeting Paul is giving a brief synopsis of the message that he wants Titus to grasp. Look at 1:1 - 2 where Paul described his reason for serving Christ,

*“for the faith of God’s elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness— a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life.”*

The unmistakable parallel themes in these two passages -- God’s people (“we” and “God’s elect”), the work of grace (“been justified” and “knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness”), and the hope of eternal life (“heirs with the hope of eternal life” and “knowledge resting on the the hope of eternal life”) -- serve as the substantive book ends to Paul’s letter. These concepts taken as a whole comprise the hope that Paul has surrendered his life to, and become a slave to in order to share this hope. At the end of the day Paul measures Titus’ success by this metric - Are the Cretans fully surrendered to this truth, in thought, word and deed? We too, make application by asking the same question of ourselves. Are we this morning fully surrendered to this truth? Does this truth serve as a filter through which we see our moral and spiritual failures? Is it the measure by which we assess our strength and “goodness”? Is it the lens through which we view the pain, offenses, and conversely success and triumph of those around us?

Second, we can make application by placing our confidence in the sufficiency of the truth of the Gospel. Paul says this in the first part of verse 8,

*“This is a trustworthy saying, and I want you to stress these things”*

Let’s not read past this too quickly. Paul gives this instruction to Titus because Paul is intimately aware of the propensity of believers to fall prey to the lie of Satan - “did God really say?” Because of our weakness Titus is told with double force to reinforce the faithfulness of our Heavenly Father. On the front end Paul says, “This is trustworthy”. Another way to say this would be, “Titus, of all of the things that we have talked about, this one you can take to the bank every day. This check will never, no never bounce.” Then, on the heels of saying this Paul urges Titus “stress these things”. Don’t just point them out. But state them, with conviction, with force with excitement over and over and over again until the Cretans have become so familiar with it that they can finish the sentence for you. And when they can do that, stress it even more boldly!

Dear brother, dear sister: God will be faithful to you. It does not matter what you have done. It does not matter what you see around you. It does not matter who is involved in the problem. God did not spare His own Son. Will He not - along with His Son - give you everything you need? Stand on Christ the solid Rock, all other ground is quick sand.

Finally, we can make application by embracing the reality of our new “good work” life. Paul finishes verse 8 by saying,

*“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.”*

In January of 2000 after the Ravens clinched the world championship the residents of Baltimore did not have to be coaxed onto the streets for the return parade. Despite the icy temperature and freezing rain the fans lined the streets to do their part in the “good work”. And, in the same way that no one would look at Ray Lewis and give him a half hearted thumbs up for the job he had done, no fan in that celebration could be faulted for riding on the coat tails of a victory which they had no part in winning. It was only right that the fans share in the glory of the team which represented the tenacity, resolve and pride of Baltimore. So much so that if asked every Raven fan would proudly proclaim, “We did it! We WON!”

See in the verse here that the “good works” grow out of the truth that made them even possible. Because of this the moral works now take on the nature of the Divine. They become “good” works. Not only that but they prove to be profitable to the worker, and the one receiving the work.

So I have to ask myself: Do I embrace both the title and duty of “good worker”? Do I walk in humility knowing that nothing good comes from me? Rather, everything good in me was accomplished by God, through the power of the Spirit, because of the work of Christ? And, do I fully give myself to being the most faithful “good worker” possible? Do I throw myself with abandon into the natural celebratory outflow of the victory of Jesus over sin and death?

Friend, this week remind yourself to show through your life and behavior that you are no longer under the condemnation of a Righteous God. Remind yourself each day that Jesus has delivered you from death to life. Meditate on the security that you have since you are a child of God. Celebrate and rejoice the new life that has been created in you, and give yourself to show forth your good works so that men may see them and glorify your Father in Heaven - Amen.

## **Benediction**

Now, May God fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,  
Colossians 1:9 - 10