

Devoted to the good

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[0 : 0 0] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, I pray now that you'll help me to stress the things that you want me to stress, so that the message of Titus will be heard loud and clear, so that we would go and live out our lives as your spirit-filled people who are eager to do good.

All this we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen. Now, many of you will know that I'm a basketball fan, and one of my dreams is to one day go watch an NBA game in person. And whenever you watch an NBA game, you know that sometimes the coach will call a timeout, and all the players will get together in a huddle.

That's when the coach will strategize or encourage the players or give them a kick up the backside if necessary. But of course, the huddle is not where the action happens.

Fans don't pay \$150 just to watch the players stay in a huddle for the whole game. The action happens when you see them back on the court after the huddle, as they play and they execute the game plan before a watching audience.

And that's how churches are like, too. Sometimes churches are criticized as holy huddles. And I want to push back against that slightly, because the Bible does make clear that Christians should huddle together regularly for encouragement, for celebration, for fellowship, for feeding.

[1 : 3 5] There is a sense in which we are to be holy huddles. But the critics are right if our holy huddles are simply forms of escapism from the world, as if we are to spend all our time hiding away.

You see, Christianity is an inherently public faith. As one theologian points out, God sends the sun into a public arena, Bethlehem.

It is a public work that Jesus does. The crowds and the religious mafias see it openly. Jesus dies publicly.

He is seen to be resurrected publicly. The giving of the Spirit at Pentecost takes place in public. It did not happen to a holy huddle hiding somewhere in private.

The early church is a public thing. They are thrown out of the synagogue publicly. Christianity is a public faith, not merely a private one.

[2 : 4 3] And so by definition, a Christian is a public Christian. Our godliness is always one that is lived out in public. At Crete, from a few weeks ago, do you remember what the false teachers implied?

You can be bad outside church as long as you are good inside it. But Paul says that just cannot be.

And that is why Paul goes on to talk about what he does in Titus chapter 3. Now, don't forget, in this letter, Paul's overriding passion is for us to live the good life.

Indeed, in chapter 3 alone, he mentions that three times. In verse 1, he wants us to be ready to do whatever is good. And in verses 8 and 14, he hopes that we will be a people devoted to the good.

So what's his strategy? Let's recap. In chapter 1, he says it is very important to appoint godly elders who believe and teach the gospel and exemplifies the good that comes from it.

[3 : 58] Because, like it or not, leaders influence for good or for bad. And then chapter 2, he says Christians must be shown how to live godly lives.

Lives that fit the gospel. Especially in the context of intergenerational Christian community. And now, because Paul knows our faith is a public faith, he says we must learn to be devoted to the good, not just in our church family, but also in society.

We must live out godly lives before a watching world. Because the gospel is meant to impact every sphere. And that is the subject of chapter 3.

But just like in chapter 2, Paul doesn't just instruct. Instead, Paul will keep turning our gaze back to the grace of God.

For unless God's grace is acting as our personal trainer and our biggest cheerleader, the good life that makes Jesus attractive will remain out of reach.

[5 : 11] So this morning, this is how we will proceed. First, we will look at what it looks like to be publicly devoted to the good. And then we will see what can generate that kind of life.

And finally, we will try to answer the question, how can we stay devoted to the good? So firstly, what it looks like to be publicly devoted to the good.

Look at verses 1 and 2. Now notice, Paul gives Titus seven reminders. The first two items are to do with our relationship with those in authority, whereas the rest is about how we relate to our fellow human beings in society.

In other words, here are two ways we live good lives publicly. By being gracious citizens and by being gracious neighbors.

Let's take them in turn. Number one, by being gracious citizens. Verse 1. Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities.

[6 : 19] This is to be the default position of the Christian. Now, if you've heard the term civil disobedience before, what Paul is calling for here is civil obedience.

And I can hear you groaning already. Straight away, we feel the sharp edge of God's word. Yeah, God, can we like skip this one? Don't forget, we live in Malaysia, not some utopian democracy.

So verse 1 doesn't apply, right? After all, are not our authorities incompetent? Or worse still, corrupt? We are naturally skeptical of our authorities.

We assume they have bad motives. And yet, Paul says, submission is part of what it means to do good. Indeed, Paul assumes the Christians at Crete already know this.

This is a reminder, after all. Perhaps they had already heard the teaching of Romans 13 in some form, where Paul spells this out in more detail.

[7 : 32] So let me briefly tell you what it says. In Romans 13, Paul explains why we should be subject to the governing authorities. It is because God has ordained their position and their jurisdiction.

God himself has appointed our human rulers. It is the consistent witness of Scripture that God raises up human leaders and he casts them down again.

See Daniel 5 verse 21, or Jeremiah 27 verse 5 to 6, or Isaiah 41 verse 2 to 4, or Proverbs 8 verse 15 and 16.

And God has appointed them to carry out a definite purpose. They act as God's agents, even when they don't acknowledge it. They reward the good and punish the wrong.

So that's why we should respect their office. You see, unlike us today, the ancient world is probably more sensitized to what happens when there is no government.

[8 : 43] Back then, many cities were never far from falling into anarchy, and people knew that only a functioning government would guarantee some form of public order and collective justice.

They knew very well that when governments collapse, like we've seen in recent history, in places like Iraq or Syria, society descends into chaos.

So because of this, submission is a virtue. Now of course, there are limits. When Paul says, be obedient, he doesn't mean blind obedience.

He doesn't mean obedience at any cost. You see, back in the day, Rome understood itself to be like a mini-god. The emperor liked to give himself titles, like son of God and savior.

But if you believe the gospel, you acknowledge only one person to be the son of God and savior. And that is not the emperor.

[9 : 57] So the reason you submit to the emperor's government is not because you believe his authority is absolute, but because God says, the government is his servant.

You submit, knowing that the emperor is not at the very top of the hierarchy. God is. And so actually, the gospel downgrades, rather than upgrades, the government's political authority.

The emperor's word is no longer the last word. And if his word comes into conflict with God's word, we can say what the apostles say in Acts 5 verse 29.

We must obey God rather than man. So yes, there are limits. But don't let the disclaimers make us lose sight of the fundamental instruction.

Submit to rulers and authorities. Yes, even when they are not the best. Certainly, Crete didn't have a great government.

[11 : 11] One ancient historian says, it is almost impossible to find anywhere else where the public policy was more unjust. But that doesn't negate the command.

So even if we disagree with our government's foreign policy, or how they structure their subsidies, we are not to withhold our taxes. When we discuss governmental issues and officials, we can debate, and disagree, and seek change, but we do so with verse 1 in mind.

We are gracious citizens. And verse 1 doesn't just apply to national authorities. No, verse 1 remains our mindset, even when we are trying to renovate our facilities according to building codes, or when we are on the road and subject to traffic laws, or when we are thinking through employment procedures.

And that applies to other relationships where authority is in play as well. So when we are relating to our bosses at work, even when we might not align with their every preference, verse 1 is to guide the way we conduct ourselves.

Again, not because we are doormats who accept every injustice, but because we trust God and His wisdom in allowing what He has allowed for the moment while still working according to His purposes.

[12 : 52] Now, we have spent a bit more time on this instruction because it's the one where we might feel a little bit more resistant to. But that is not the only way we devote ourselves to the good in society.

So here is way number two, by being a gracious neighbor. That means being ready to do whatever is good.

So here is the idea. Don't just bring a 9 to 5 mindset to doing good. Oh, okay, I fulfilled my quota for today, time to switch off.

Instead, seize every opportunity to bless others. We can do good to whoever we encounter, however we encounter them, whenever we encounter them.

If being a good citizen is about being submissive, being a good neighbor is about being proactive. And being a good neighbor has a lot to do with how we interact with others.

[14 : 01] And those interactions should always be marked by grace. You see, there is a muscular version of Christianity that is popular with some people, isn't there?

In this version of Christianity, the Christians love nothing more than a good fight. They love to post fiery comments on their Facebook accounts, attacking someone or slamming something all the time.

And they justify it by saying that they are standing up for Jesus. They are standing up for the truth. They are refusing to be bullied. But I want to suggest that this version of Christianity doesn't always match up with biblical Christianity.

Yes, obviously, there are times to exercise courage and take a stand where necessary. You could say that's what Bishop Danaou did recently, over the TBS issue.

But we shouldn't be in a hurry to go looking for an all-out confrontation. Because, look at verse 2. We are to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle towards everyone.

[15 : 23] In short, we are always to be gracious, not graceless. Now, that actually takes a good amount of self-control.

How easy it is, isn't it, to talk bad about people who are not in the same room as you. And it's even easier to disguise it simply as giving our opinion.

But we are to slander no one. We are not to do what everyone else in the Kopitiam is doing. Sure, we are to discern and evaluate.

That's what Paul does in regard to false teaching. But we are to restrain our urges to say the worst about people. Instead, we're called to be peaceable and considerate.

Now, isn't that the way Christ is? He is someone who is gentle, which isn't the same as being timid. We often confuse the two.

[16 : 27] Being gentle is all about an attitude whereby you might be firm, but you are not domineering or high-handed in any way. Rather, you remain tender-hearted.

And that's Christ. And that's who we are to be. Not just the people we find agreeable, but to everyone. And let us dwell on being considerate for a moment.

Now, we don't think about this much, but we really appreciate it when we see it in a person, don't we? It is that person who is less concerned for themselves and more concerned for you.

They are the person who remembers the conversation last week where you shared a problem that you're facing. And when they see you next, they mention that they prayed for you, they follow up by asking more about it, and they even give you a little something to lift your spirits up.

They are the person who recognizes that their Bible study leader has put in a lot of prep for the study this week, and so they keep their word that they will show up rather than bail at the last minute.

[17 : 38] And they even read the passage beforehand as the leader has requested. And that's all part and parcel of what it means to be someone who is considerate, who is a gracious neighbor.

But all of this is difficult because it doesn't come naturally. It's not natural for us to submit to others. It is not natural for us to look to the interests of others.

If anything, I want others to submit to me. I want others to look to my interests. Being a gracious person is just not in our nature.

And remember what Cretan society was like. Glance back yourselves to chapter 1, verse 12, if you have forgotten. These are not exactly people who are easy to be gracious towards.

So that brings us to our second point for today. What can generate a public life devoted to the good? If people are bad to us, why be good to them?

[18 : 55] Paul says, simple, verse 3, You see, what were we once like?

We were the very opposite of the picture in verses 1 and 2. Notice how Paul lists seven things in verse 3. Just as he listed seven things in verses 1 and 2.

And I think that is deliberate because he wants us to compare and contrast the two. Look what we were like without Christ. We were foolish.

Now that doesn't mean uneducated or lacking common sense. Rather, in the Bible, a fool is someone who lives as if God is not there.

And that is how we live. You might have believed God exists, but you don't live as if he's the God of your life. And so that means you are disobedient.

[20 : 17] Or put another way, you are not submissive. You resisted the ultimate authority. You decided how you use your money, not God.

You decided how you conducted your relationships, not God. And that's how we were when we didn't follow Jesus. And when we tell God, I don't want you to be in charge of my life, we do not end up free.

We don't end up mastering our lives. Instead, we end up enslaved. We end up being ruled by empty pursuits and fruitless quests that never satisfy us.

And because we are ruled by our passions and pleasures, we don't think about others. We don't do good to them. We hate it when they get in our way.

We want to take from them instead of giving to them. And there is nothing attractive or beautiful about verse three.

[21 : 22] After all, which society would you prefer to live in? One dominated by verses one and two people or one that is full of verse three people?

The answer is obvious. So we come back to the question, what can generate a public life devoted to the good?

What changes a verse three society to a verses one and two society? Answer? Verses four to seven.

It is nothing less than the gospel itself. Nothing less than the appearing of Jesus makes the difference. Now, at this point you might say, ah, this sounds familiar.

Isn't Paul repeating himself? Didn't Dr. Hompak cover this last week already? Well, yes and no. Paul does bring us back to the same gospel, but he doesn't cover the same angles.

[22 : 28] And this time he stresses three different dimensions which together form a basis for why we can do good. First of all, Paul wants to stress our complete inability to transform ourselves.

You see, we need to be clear. A life devoted to the good could never come from ourselves. Ever since we left the Garden of Eden, it is not in our nature.

We contributed nothing. It is not even that we were 25% good and God just needed to top up the remaining 75% with his goodness to get us over the hump.

No. Notice how everything in verses 4 to 7 is God's doing. He appeared. He washes us. He poured out on us.

He justifies us. And it is all because of his mercy, verse 5, and not because of righteous things we have done. So God did not reach down to you because he thought, you know what, between you and the other guy, I think you have a better deal.

[23 : 44] You've got more potential. No. So when you look at someone else in society whom you think is worse than you, that was actually you before the gospel came to you.

The only reason you can live a beautiful life today has nothing to do with you or me. It is God alone. And that should rid us of any arrogance.

And then second of all, He wants to express the nature of God himself. Have you ever watched a TV show or a movie where the hero has to go and save someone who has done bad to him?

And the hero sighs and he says, I guess I'm the hero, so I can't leave him to die, but I shall wish that I can. And maybe occasionally we suspect God is like that too.

We know he saves us. Paul even says it twice in verses 4 and 5. But maybe God is a bit like that TV hero. He saves us grudgingly because he has to, but really he wishes he could just let us die in our sin.

[25 : 07] But look at verse 4. How does Paul describe our Lord? He puts it in these terms. When the kindness and love of God, our Savior, appeared, he saved us.

Notice what that means. It means God's rescue of us is rooted in his loving kindness. us. He wanted to save us because that is who he is.

It is always who he has been. Think about it. Why did God create the world? He didn't have to, but he did because he wanted us to live in this good world and enjoy the blessings of experiencing his loving kindness.

And he chose to rescue us while we were still his enemies for the very same reason. Because he wants us to experience his loving kindness.

He hasn't changed. He wants us to experience him for who he is. I love how one of my favorite theologians, Kevin Van Hooser, puts it, in being gracious, God is being fully himself towards undeserving others.

[26 : 30] when God saves us, he is simply being who he is. Knowing that changes us. And then combine that with the third gospel truth that Paul wants to stress, the work of the Holy Spirit.

You see, the gospel doesn't just show us who God is. It also makes us like him. Remember what's our big problem?

We have a nature that always pulls us towards sin. But now, God gives us a double dose of himself. He gives himself in his son who died on the cross for us.

And in his generosity, he doesn't stop that. He gives himself again in the person of the Holy Spirit. And what does God do through the Holy Spirit?

Well, for one thing, he adopts us. That means we get certain rights. Verse 7 talks about being heirs, having the hope of eternal life. But he does more than that.

[27 : 42] He regenerates us. And if adoption gives us the rights as God's children, then regeneration gives us the nature of God's children.

This is such a transformative experience that Titus 3 verse 5 says that it is like being washed and born a second time. It is like a rebirth.

And this time, we do not get corrupted spiritual genes. Isn't that incredible? You see, that is the only way we could change from becoming first three people.

to verses one and two people. We have to be made alive, then made new. And that is the work of the Holy Spirit.

This, my friends, is the gospel. What can generate a life devoted to the good? It is the gospel. It is the gospel that robs us of any sense of moral superiority.

[28 : 50] the gospel that tells us how generous God is in giving all of himself for others. And it is the gospel that says our very nature has been changed.

If you are not a Christian this morning, you need to know this is our message. It is not a message that says, oh, just be good to others. No, our message is a good God showed his goodness to not good people so that we can be ready to do good.

And when we know that God has so poured out his loving kindness onto us, we realize that same loving kindness will now naturally spill over from us into others.

This message alone is what will transform society. It is not better education, it is not better government, it is not any social movement, only the gospel alone can secure this cycle of goodness.

And so how can we stay devoted to the good? And that's our final point for today, how we can stay devoted to the good. Well, it's becoming obvious, isn't it?

[30 : 11] Look at verse 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.

Stress these things. Stress the truths of Titus 3 verse 4 to 7. If the gospel is what generates a life of goodness, then it makes perfect sense to keep the gospel the main thing.

truth. And that is exactly what Paul has been doing. And notice how he does it. He doesn't do it by repeating John 3 16 endlessly. No, instead he keeps exploring the many dimensions of the gospel.

Indeed, even in verses 4 to 7 itself, there is still more that we could have mentioned if we had time. We could have talked about what being justified means, or the hope that we have, for instance. And Paul says, keep hammering these truths until they are driven deeply into every soul.

Dwell on what a generous father we have. Or dwell on his patience with Israel in the Old Testament. Dwell on Christ's willingness to humble himself even to death.

[31 : 27] Dwell on the blood of Christ, which cleanses you from the pollution of sin. Dwell on how the spirit makes us new creations. Dwell on all these gospel truths and a thousand more besides.

From every book of the Bible, every single Sunday. Because as these are stressed, what is the impact?

Verse 8, it is profitable for everyone. Not just for Christians, not just for the church, for everyone.

and don't get sidetracked. That is the next way we are to stay devoted to the good, by not getting sidetracked.

Look at verse 9. But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless.

[32 : 29] It's easier than we think to get sucked into these things. As the pastor Tim Chester observes, the reality is that all too often in church life, we stress controversy and avoid talking about the gospel.

It may be true that our preaching stresses the gospel, but our conversations so often stress controversy. The letters and emails that people write stress controversy.

The points that people stress raise controversy. Now, notice Paul doesn't say avoid all controversy. Obviously, there are certain controversies we must get involved in, especially those that twist the gospel or harm the spiritual health of the church.

But sometimes we spend our energy getting worked up about things that are really trivial. But Paul says, hey guys, remember, foolish controversies are unprofitable.

If you invest your time in them, you will get negative returns. And these controversies don't necessarily have to be heresies.

[33 : 43] Anything that distracts from the gospel can be damaging. If we are getting more worked up about dress codes or flower decorations, then how to speak of Jesus and how to live for him, we've got our priorities wrong.

And don't get into quarrels about the law. In other words, make sure that the gospel remains central, not some speculative teaching or doctrine that have no clear basis or answer in scripture.

Because once you're more interested in who the Nephilim are or who those angels in drew are rather than in Jesus himself, you are setting yourself up to become an unproductive Christian.

And that also means sometimes warning a divisive person. Verse 10. You see, these are the very people who more or less guarantee that you can get sidetracked from the gospel. They are the ones who must challenge every decision, who is resistant to correction, who actively divide the people of God without good cause.

Now, these are different from those who offer constructive feedback and who reluctantly but lovingly rebuke where necessary. You can do all that in the spirit of Titus 3, 1-2.

[35 : 10] But divisive people are the opposite of Titus 3, verse 1 and 2. And it would be hard for a church that has such people in their ranks to focus on the gospel and be doing good.

So, Paul says we have to warn divisive people twice with the hope of bringing them to repentance or else otherwise break fellowship with them.

That's how serious it is. Paul seems to have in mind Jesus' teaching in Matthew 18 here, where a similar, though more detailed process is also put forward.

good. And that's what we have to do to stay devoted to the good. And then finally, we can stay devoted to the good by continually learning to do good.

Look at 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.

[36 : 13] A devotion to good works does not happen automatically. it is something to be cultivated. And the best way to do it is by practice. It's simply by doing it.

It's a bit like developing a habit. Just as you make sure to go to the gym every Thursday or have your coffee at 4pm every weekday, so you develop the habit of doing good.

And Paul gives us a work example in verse 13. He reminds Titus, hey, make sure this guy Zenos and Apollos have everything they need.

Food, clothes, whatever it might be. Help them with their travel arrangements. Get the visas ready. Make sure they have the right transportation to the port.

Do good to them. But here's the really important thing to notice in verses 12 and 13. These are not just random acts of goodness.

[37 : 18] You see, what is the reason behind not just this instruction, but the prior instruction for Titus to join him at Nicopolis? it is all for one purpose, to advance the gospel.

Titus is to join him in Nicopolis because there is no church there as yet. And Zenos and Apollos are not just anyone, they are full-time gospel workers.

Now, this doesn't mean that only full-time workers can do good, or we do good only to full-time workers. I hope that is clear from the entire book of Titus. All of us can do good to everyone, but never forget the aim.

It is to make the gospel attractive, it is to advance the gospel. We are eager to do good so that people can know the good God.

So as we close, I hope our six-week journey through the book of Titus has been a blessing for us all. As we enter into the Christmas season, let us actively look for opportunities to do good to someone.

[38 : 34] Let's look to serve someone younger if we are older, or serve someone older if we are younger. Let's pray for self-control to protect the credibility of the gospel, and above all, let's keep dwelling on the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Amen. This is the message of Titus. Be eager for good. And how can that happen?

It is as the last few words of Titus 3 verse 15 says, Grace be with you all. You can be eager for good when you experience the presence of grace in your lives.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you again for you have spoken to us in your word.

We thank you so much for the glorious gospel, the gospel that says we have a new nature, we are new creatures, we have been reborn, we have been renewed, and all this is not because of any righteous thing we have done, but because of your mercy.

[39 : 54] Father, thank you for freeing us while we were still slaves and your enemies. And so Father, will you help us now to be people who are gracious, gracious in the church, gracious outside the church, gracious citizens, gracious neighbors, and help us to continually stress these things and avoid foolish controversies and genealogies.

All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.