

Lesson 3: The Gospel Life *Titus 3*

Hook



Main Point: We advance the Gospel by our new life of good works.

Write the following idioms from our culture on the board and ask the group what the idioms all have in common, whether what they are saying is true.

- Don't just talk the talk, walk the walk.
- Practice what you preach.
- Talk is cheap.
- Actions speak louder than words.
- Put your money where your mouth is.

Then say:

There are so many idioms in our culture that say this same thing because this is something everyone knows to be true. Whether you're a Christian or not, it's just universally true. You can say you believe something all day long, but if you don't live by it, you don't really believe it. Jesus made this point in His conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount.

Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.... Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods

came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”
Matthew 7:21, 24–47

What do people think about you when you say one thing but do another?

When you act like this, do people trust you? Do they believe you?

Lesson 3: Healthy Teaching *Titus 3*

Book

Main Point: We advance the Gospel by our new life of good works.

Text Summary: This chapter reiterates what we learned in the last chapter of Titus. The details may be a little different, but the general principle is the same—live godly lives, in unity as one church, both for your own benefit and as an example to the world of God’s goodness. Paul again gives the theological reason for our good works—why we *should* do good works and how we *can* do good works. God has not just saved us *from* sin, but He has saved us *to* a new life of godliness and good works. Paul wants to make sure Titus insists on this, that the church at Crete really gets this, and starts their new church off on the right foundation.

Titus 3:1–2 [Read]

Sub-Point 1: Believers should live at peace with all people and be ready for every good work.

Why is it important that believers are submissive to rulers and authorities?

Why should believers be at peace with everyone?

Why should believers speak evil of no one and avoid quarreling?

“Remind them” (v. 1) shows us that these are all things they have been taught before. This is part of sound doctrine, what every church should be taught. These are simple general principles for living in peace with the outside world and in unity inside the church.

v. 1: “Be submissive” – Blind, unquestioning obedience to human authority over God is not biblical (Acts 5:29). But believers are not exempt from submission to rulers and authority figures in this present age, even if those authorities are not Christians (Romans 13:1–7; 1 Peter 2:13–17). As long as those authorities don’t require them to do something that is contrary to God’s law. Believers are to be both “submissive” in attitude and “obedient” in actions (v. 1).

v. 1. “Be ready for every good work” – The word *for* is more literally translated “to do”—be ready *to do* every good work. Lea and Griffin write, “This extends the Christian’s responsibilities from a mere passive posture (obeying laws) to an active, positive involvement in society.”¹ We are called to be in our communities, bringing light to the darkness (Matthew 5:13–16).

Verse 2 broadens the command to include how believers should treat all people of the outside world, not just authority figures. The objects of the verbs are “no one,” “all,” and “all people” (v. 2). This is how believers should treat all people of the secular world, similar to what Paul

¹ Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, *1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 1992), 318.

commanded in Romans 12:18—“If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.” We should be the peacemakers (Matthew 5:9). When believers live in peace with the outside world, it points to Jesus as the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). Specifically, we live in peace by:

- Speak evil of no one – This is the word *blaspheme*, which is typically used of blaspheming God. But because all people are created in the image of God, to speak evil against someone is also to blaspheme.²
- Avoid quarreling ... Be gentle – In the Greek, these two verbs go together, and they have another object—“to all”—that is left out of the ESV translation. It more literally reads, “be peaceable and gentle to all.”³
- Show perfect courtesy –The phrase more literally means “showing humility toward all,” which would point to our lives as a reflection of Christ’s humility (Philippians 2:6–8).

Grammatically, this last phrase reads like a summary of the ones before it. If we live in humility toward all people, we will speak evil of no one and be peaceable and gentle to all. As we learned in our lessons on Philippians 2, humility means putting others’ needs ahead of your own. It doesn’t mean *thinking less of yourself*; it means *thinking of yourself less*. Here, Paul tells Titus and the Cretan church that this doesn’t just mean the way we live with each other in Christian community, but the way we live with the outside world. If we are consistently putting others’ needs ahead of our own, we will be at peace with them.

Humility means when we’re frustrated with someone, instead of speaking evil about the person or getting into a fight (v. 2), we put ourselves in that person’s shoes. What is she going through that would make her act the way they do? Maybe she is going through a really difficult time, maybe she has an unhappy life, maybe she simply doesn’t know the joy of Jesus as you do. How can you help shine some light into this person’s life instead of grumbling about her or spreading gossip or fighting?

As believers, we know we shouldn’t be the ones starting gossip about someone or starting a fight. But it can be so easy to get caught up in it when someone else starts it. But imagine what kind of witness for Christ it would be if you refused to take part in the gossip around you? What if you just said kindly, not in a judgmental way about those who are gossiping, “I don’t want to speak ill of anyone”? And then maybe even saying something nice about that person? How would that change the environment of your workplace or your neighborhood? What would it show them about Jesus?

Imagine the same for a situation when someone tries to pick a fight with you. What if you just don’t take the bait? What if you calmly just said, “I don’t want to fight about this with you” or just walked away? What if you said, “I am happy to discuss this and I want to hear your side, but I don’t want to fight.” And then you *actually listened* to that person’s side. What if you even

² Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, *1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 1992), 319.

³ Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger, *Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament, 28th Edition* (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012).

offered to help him or did something nice for him instead of fighting? How would it change that person's attitude? What would it show him about Jesus?

What should you do when someone is driving you crazy and you really want to say bad things about that person?

What should you do when someone around you starts gossiping?

What should you do when someone tries to pick a fight with you?

When someone is mistreating you, how can you live peaceably with that person without getting treated as a doormat?

Titus 3:3–7 [Read]

Sub-Point 2: God saved us not by our works, but by His mercy. He justified us, washed us, and regenerated us in the Holy Spirit.

Why is it important to know that our good works don't save us?

Why should we do good works, then, if they don't save us?

What does it mean to live by the regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit?

Here Paul restates the theological basis for our good works from chapter 2. The interplay of faith and works has been a theological debate for all of church history. It is discussed in the New Testament so much because it is something that many people have misunderstood, in that first generation of believers and every generation since. So much so that some theologians have argued that Paul and James contradict each other on the issue of justification by faith.⁴ After all, James says: "You see that a person is considered righteous by works and not by faith alone" (James 2:24). But if we read that verse in context, we can see that James isn't saying it is our works that save us, but that faith isn't really faith if it does not show itself in works. "Faith, by itself if it does not have works, is dead" (James 2:17). It is still faith that saves, but faith devoid of works isn't real faith at all. And therefore, cannot save.

Passages such as this one in Titus do a good job of explaining the interplay of faith and works. Again, if we break this passage down, it makes it a bit easier to digest.

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

⁴ Thomas Schreiner, "Do Paul and James Disagree on Justification by Faith Alone?" *The Gospel Coalition*, Apr 21, 2017 - <https://www.theGospelcoalition.org/article/do-paul-james-disagree-on-justification-by-faith-alone/>

But when the goodness and lovingkindness 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 renewal of the Holy Spirit
Whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior
So that being justified by His grace
we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life

This is similar to what Paul writes to the church at Corinth—“and such were some of you, but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified...” (2 Corinthians 6:11). Before Jesus, we were like the unrighteous. We not only did evil things, we were “passing our days in malice and envy” (v. 3). We were not just doing bad things; we were living in sin.

But when Jesus came, He saved us. Not because of our works, but because of His mercy. Not because of our good works, because *we weren't doing good works*. We were living in sin. We were slaves to sin. Verse 3 describes the twin theological concepts of original sin and total depravity.

The expression “original sin” names the alienation of *every* human from God (Romans 5:12). We are *born into* brokenness. In Ephesians, Paul declares us to be “dead” in sin (2:1) and “*by nature* deserving of wrath” (2:3). The expression “total depravity” names our *complete* brokenness. It doesn't mean we aren't capable of doing “good” things, but that we are powerless to fix the problem of sin ourselves.⁵

Even the “good” things human beings do without God are not works of righteousness, because we are not in right relationship with God. Righteousness comes from God. We cannot do righteousness apart from God. This is why Paul can describe our lives before Jesus in such drastic terms in verse 3. Though people who don't know God may do things that seem good to us on a human level, they are not godly works. Our relationship with God has to be fixed before we can do godly things.

But when Jesus saved us, He put us in right relationship with God. When He poured out His Spirit on us, we were washed from our sins *and* regenerated in the Holy Spirit (v. 5). This is the key to understanding *how* we can do good works. We have been regenerated. We have been made new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17). The word for “regenerated” in this passage literally means “a new birth.”⁶ It is only used here and in Matthew 19:28 when Jesus talks to His disciples about the new creation of his future kingdom. One day, all of creation will be made new. But in this present age, those who have been saved have been made new creations in Christ. “The old has passed away” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Towner writes, “The crux of the matter

⁵ Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 274.

⁶ Strong's 3824

is a fundamental change or transition that has occurred.”⁷ Because we are new creations, filled “richly” (v. 6) with the Holy Spirit, we are *able* to do godly things. We are *able* to do true good works.

But remember the *interplay* between faith and works. We are *able* to do good works now, but we have to make the choice to do so. Paul is exhorting these Cretan believers, just as James did, not just to say they believe, but to *live out* their faith. Towner writes: “God has intervened in human history to bring about a change. The whole salvation complex—rebirth and renewal, justification and hope—is reality, grounded in the historical events of Christ’s ministry and death/resurrection and in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. But to experience the new reality, the believer must actively decide to step forward; the reality of the Christian possibility is not experienced through reciting a creed, but by performing it in faith.”⁸

Did you feel you were a slave to sin before Christ? Or did you think you had a pretty good life before?

Do you feel like a new creation in Christ? Can you point back to your life before Christ and see a difference?

If we are able to do good works through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, how do we tap into the power of the Spirit?

In what ways do you struggle to live at peace with people? To live in humility?

Titus 3:8–11 [Read]

Sub-Point 3: Believers should be careful to devote themselves to good works, not stirring up division.

How does division hinder the advancement of the Gospel?

What should we do if division arises in our church?

Paul tells Titus to *insist* on these things (v. 8). “These things” referring to the theological truths he just expounded. Titus must insist that they can do good works. That they can live with humility. That they can walk by the Spirit instead of the flesh. That they can bear the fruit of the Spirit. He must insist and not let them get away with making excuses of how the Christian life is too hard, the standard is too hard. It is hard, but it is not too hard if you have the Spirit living in

⁷ Philip H. Towner, *1-2 Timothy & Titus, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series Vol. 14* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1994).

⁸ Philip H. Towner, *1-2 Timothy & Titus, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series Vol. 14* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1994).

you. As G.K. Chesterton wrote, “The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult and left untried.”⁹

Paul tells Titus to “insist on these things” (v. 8) in the same way that he told him to “declare these things” at the end of the last chapter, and to “let no one disregard you” (2:15). He says something similar to Timothy – “Let no one despise you for your youth...” (1 Timothy 4:12). Both Timothy and Titus were relatively young and yet were put in positions of authority over entire congregations, even multiple congregations in a city, including people who were much older than they, who probably resented a younger man trying to tell them what to do. But Paul gives Titus his authority, to act on his behalf, first by leaving him there in charge at all. Then by sending this letter to him and the Cretan church, calling him “my true child in a common faith” (1:4). He also explicitly gives Titus authority to impose these things on the church by telling him to “rebuke with all authority” (2:15). This was Titus’s responsibility, to insist on these things, “so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works” (3:8).

Paul makes a very explicit contrast in these verses:

- v. 8: These things are excellent and profitable for all people
- v. 9: They are unprofitable and worthless

The things Paul tells them to do in v. 1–2 are excellent and profitable. But the things he tells them not to do in v. 9 are the exact opposite – worthless and unprofitable. These things are: “foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law” (v. 9). These are all the things that the false teachers have been doing, very similar to what Timothy was dealing with in Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3–4). Some commentators believe these have to do with Gnostic teachings, some believe it was a Jewish sect who insisted on Christians conforming to Jewish ritual purity, which would be consistent with “those of the circumcision” (1:10).¹⁰ Either way, these things are the opposite of what Paul called believers to—living in peace with everyone, not quarreling, not slandering. As Wall and Steele write, “Paul’s resolve to maintain order and work for solidarity in important matters, such as agreement about the core claims of the Gospel, reflects a proper understanding of divine providence. If God our Savior is one God, then the social and spiritual manners of the community in which God’s saving grace appears and is worked out will be of a piece with God’s redemptive plan. In Paul’s mind, this looks like ‘good works’ when viewed on the ground, and these good works extend beyond households of believers into the public square for all to see.”¹¹

v. 10: “As for a person who stirs up division” – Paul tells Titus to avoid all of these theological discussions with these false teachers (v. 9), but instead warn them once, and then twice, and then “have nothing more to do with them” (v. 10). This method is in line with what Jesus taught the disciples (Matthew 18:15–17). As in 1 Timothy 5:19–20 and 2 Timothy 2:25, the purpose of

⁹ G.K. Chesterton, *What’s Wrong with the World* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co, 1912), 48.

¹⁰ C.K. Barrett, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 132.

¹¹ Robert W. Wall and Richard B. Steele, *1 and 2 Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012), 384.

these confrontations is to rebuke – to get the false teacher to repent. Not to punish them, but to bring them back to the Lord, to sound doctrine. This is true discipline in the context of relationship, as God the Father does for us.

Some people may criticize the “have nothing more to do with them” (v. 10) as harsh, but Titus isn’t supposed to immediately kick these divisive people out. He is to give them two chances to repent first. Only after they refuse to repent twice should he have nothing more to do with them. This is a clear command to church discipline for people who are intentionally stirring up division, spreading false teaching, and refusing to stop. This passage is not about excommunicating people for every small misstep. Or when they are confronted, see the error of their ways and repent. Excommunication is reserved for people who are intentionally causing division in the church and who are unrepentant about it. They are those who refuse to stop, even when confronted by church leadership. This is to protect the unity of the church. To keep the church focused on sound doctrine and unified in their teaching and mission.

Church discipline is a difficult but necessary part of maintaining a healthy church, and we must take it seriously. Paul does. He uses very strong language with Titus when it comes to training and rebuking people in the church at Crete:

- “they must be silenced” (1:11)
- “rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith” (1:13)
- “declare these things, exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you” (2:15).
- “insist on these things” (3:8)
- “have nothing more to do with him” (3:10)

The procedure for church discipline outlined here and in Mathew 18 is very gracious, and yet gives a method for removing sin and division from the church *if* the person stubbornly refuses to turn from sin. The goal is always repentance and bringing that person back into unity with the rest of the church. But if they refuse, we must follow through on separating them from the fellowship, for the health of the church as whole.

Why does Paul take silencing false teachers so seriously?

What would happen to our church if we allowed divisive people to continue to spread false teaching and draw some people away from sound doctrine?

How can we encourage unity in our church?

Titus 4:12–15 [Read]

Paul tells Titus to come to Nicopolis to meet him there in the future, when he sends for him (v. 12). Artemas is unknown except for this reference. Tychicus is the carrier of the Ephesian/Colossian letters (Ephesians 6:21; Colossians 4:7–8) and is also mentioned in Acts 20:4 and 2 Timothy 4:12. So these two were messengers of Paul, sent with letters or instructions to different places. Most commentators believe that they would be sent to Crete to replace Titus, to continue to rule over the churches in his stead.¹² The implication is that Titus will not be in Crete for much longer—just long enough to set up the churches, get solid leadership in place, and exhort them to devote themselves to sound teaching and good works. Titus is not there to be the pastor of the church in Crete, he is there to plant the church and move on.

Paul tells Titus to send two others on their way and see that they lack nothing. Zenas is unknown except for this letter, but Apollos was a powerful Jewish preacher who was born in Alexandria and fully instructed in the Gospel by Priscilla and Aquila at Ephesus (Acts 18:24–26; 1 Colossians 3:5–6). Titus is to provide other coworkers of Paul with whatever physical provisions they needed for however long they stayed in Crete and for their journey. Though Paul himself had a “day job” and didn’t take payment for his ministry, he encouraged churches to pay other ministers fairly for their work among them (1 Corinthians 9:9–18; 1 Timothy 5:18).

Regarding “good works” in this closing segment, Paul reiterates again his overall main point, that believers should devote themselves to good works. But he gives two new specific examples:

- to help cases of urgent need
- and not be unfruitful

As we have already said, good works are the fruit of the Spirit, what the Spirit bears in our lives. Those who are filled with the Spirit will bear fruit, will do good works. But there is also this other aspect of “good works” that hasn’t really been mentioned yet in all of Paul’s talk about it so far—financial generosity to help those in need.

Paul closes this letter quickly with basic greetings and a general “grace be with you all.” This is to all of the believers in Crete, not just Titus. Reiterating the fact that even though this letter was written to Titus, the message of it was for the whole church.

What have we learned from Titus about what it means to be “devoted to good works”?

What have we learned about living at peace with the world?

How does living at peace with the world advance the Gospel?

¹² Gordon D. Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011).

Lesson 3: Healthy Teaching *Titus 3*

Took

Main Point: We advance the Gospel by our new life of good works.

Pair up with someone you feel relatively close to, someone you can share openly with. With this partner, share:

Ways that you need to work on “practicing what you preach.”

Ways you struggle with doing “good works” as described in Titus.

Things you need to improve upon in your walk with Jesus.

How you think you can improve.

Now, since we know that the power to do good works comes from the Holy Spirit, and isn't something we can manufacture, each pair should spend some time praying for each other. Focus particularly on these things you shared. Pray for the other person to be filled with the Holy Spirit, to bear fruit, to be empowered to do good works, to grow in spiritual maturity. Pray particularly for the areas he or she mentioned he/she needs to work on. Continue to pray for that person in the coming weeks and months. Check with each other regularly to check on your progress.

Challenges

Demonstrate self-control. When someone drives you crazy and you want to speak ill of him or her, stop and pray for that person instead. When people around you start gossiping about someone or someone tries to pick a fight with you, do not engage. Kindly refuse or walk away if you have to.

Do good works. In an effort to “be prepared” for “every” good work, start each day with a specific prayer, asking God to open your eyes. To make you aware, all day, of opportunities when you could do something good for someone else. Then pay attention, all day. Look for opportunities to do good. You'll be amazed at how many you see when you try.

Live with humility. Along the same lines, ask God to help you put others' needs ahead of your own—to think of other people first. Pray for God to open your eyes to other people's needs and situations. Practice thinking about other people, putting yourself in their shoes, asking if there is a way you can help them. Especially when others are frustrating you or being unkind to you, stop and try to put yourself in their shoes. Consider why they may be acting the way they are. What they may be struggling with. What their needs may be.