

STUDY GUIDE

PLEASANT RIDGE BAPTIST CHURCH
TITUS: LIVING IN THE FAMILY OF GRACE
GOSPEL-CENTERED GOOD WORKS
TITUS 3:1-15
08/20/2017



MAIN POINT

Salvation in Christ leads to a lifestyle of good works.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Gather photographs of members of the group when they were young (or photos of well-known people when they were young). Invite the group to identify who each person is.

What made it easy or difficult to match names with faces? Who has changed the most? Who has changed the least?

Physical changes as well as changes in hairstyles and fashions are obvious. Likewise, Christians undergo change—transformation—as a result of their Christian commitment. Our goal is to make sure that change is obvious to those around us.

In his letter to Titus, Paul urged the Christians on Crete to look at the change in their lives since they became Christians and demonstrate that change through their good works.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ TITUS 3:1-3.

What is significant about the fact that Paul called on Titus to “remind” his congregation of the series of imperatives in verses 1-3?

Paul began this portion of his letter with a command for Titus to “remind” his congregants of several things. This was not to be a one-time thing for Titus, for the verb is structured in such a way as to imply that Titus was to “keep on reminding” his congregation several things. Clearly, these imperatives were not new to the Cretan congregation, and they would never get to the place where they didn’t need reminding. The practical implication for them—and us—is fascinating: even though we have the Holy Spirit to empower us to live lives of obedience, we continually need to be reminded of our need to live lives that reflect the holiness and grace of the God who saved us. The Holy Spirit works in us through the process of reminders.

What were the six imperatives that Paul gave? What are some practical examples of how each of these imperatives can be lived out daily?

Have you ever experienced a situation in which unbelievers were able to watch your reaction to a challenging

life situation? What happened?

Why did Paul ask the Cretans to consider their former life (v. 3) to help them live according to their new life in Christ (vv. 1-2)? How does considering our life before Jesus help us live more like Jesus?

A common misconception of the Christian life is that soon after one begins following Jesus, that person gives less attention to his or her sinful nature and more attention to his or her practices of personal holiness. This is only partly true. As we grow in our relationship with God, we not only become more aware of God's holiness and our need to live holy lives, but also we become more aware of our sinful state. The effect is that we grow in our gratitude for the grace God has shown us in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Perhaps this is why Paul reminded the Cretans of their former lives—so that they would revel in the grace God showed them in Jesus. Verses 4-7 affirm this.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ TITUS 3:4-7.

How can we know for sure that salvation is purely a matter of God's mercy and not a reward for our good works?

What difference does it make that God saves us out of His great mercy and not because of anything we do?

There are many paradoxes to the gospel, one of which is that it exhorts us to good works while simultaneously teaching that such good works do not make us right with God. Rather, works show the world and confirm to those who doubt that God has, indeed, graciously saved us by Jesus, the only righteous One. We did nothing to earn or deserve this—God acted according to His nature, which is one of kindness and love. For this reason, we give all honor and glory to Him, not ourselves. Any righteous acts we do are strictly the result of His great love and kindness at work in our lives.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ TITUS 3:8.

What was Titus to do with Paul's imperatives and gospel message in verses 1-7? What was Paul's concern?

Paul's desire was for Titus to stress the gospel and its implications to the Cretan congregation. Why? Because a gospel-centered practice of good works is profitable for all. We are to live according to the gospel, because the gospel is good for all who see its evidence in our lives.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How do our good works benefit others? How do they benefit us?

How can you say "thank you" to God in the next few days for His saving grace toward you?

What is one way you can serve others in your home, workplace, or church this week? How will you hold yourself accountable to serving them?

PRAY

Thank God for the salvation He has graciously given you. Ask Him to help you demonstrate to others

that trusting in Christ for salvation has made a difference in your life and resulted in your good deeds.

COMMENTARY

TITUS 3:1-8

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.

3:1 The phrase "ready for every good work" refers back to 1:16 and 2:14. The false teachers were "disqualified for any good work" (1:16). One of the purposes of the cross was to create a people "eager to do good works" (2:14). And here, in contrast to the false teachers, Titus was to teach the people to be "ready for every good work." The qualities encouraged here (vv. 1-3) are in contrast to the description of the false teachers in 1:10-16.

The first reminder calls for the Christian to be subject to rulers and authorities. Christian submission is always voluntary. Recognizing God's sovereign rule, the individual is to submit willingly to those recognized leaders of the social order. The phrase "rulers and authorities" refers to government officials and law.

The Christian teaching of God's coming judgment of the nations, coupled with the doctrine of freedom, may have led many believers to disregard civil authority. Besides, Roman rule was not always appreciated, especially by conquered groups and tribes. Polybius and Plutarch wrote that the Cretans fumed under Roman rule. So it is possible that Titus had to deal with anti government sentiment even in the churches. Paul's directives to Titus are consistent with his writings elsewhere as well as other biblical texts. Submission to government involves being obedient, as long as civil law does not conflict with divine command (Acts 5:29). In the Book of Romans. Paul gave not only the command but the rationale and theological basis for obedience (Rom. 13:1–7). But, as usual, Christian ethics goes beyond the obvious.**

3:2 The sphere of Christian behavior expands beyond one's formal relationship to the government. Paul wrote, slander no one. Any speech that harms another qualifies as slander—insults, abusive speech, defamatory remarks, rumors. Slander desires to elevate self at another person's expense. As usual, Paul created a contrast. It is never enough to refrain from a behavior; Christians must engage life properly. So Paul instructed believers to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men. The opposite of slander, these qualities seek to elevate others, even at one's own expense. A peaceable person maintains a congenial attitude, ready to defer to someone else. Such a person rejects aggressive or violent methods of attaining personal advantage. Regarding unbelievers, a Christian is to remain focused on the individual, guarding the relationship. Believers sometimes get mixed up in the war with sin, regarding others as enemies rather than people in need. Our fight is not against flesh and blood, Paul wrote (Eph. 6:10–18), but against authorities and powers. A peaceable person is considerate, setting aside personal concerns for the welfare of others. This person is careful in thought, speech, and action, weighing the ramifications of each. In summary, we are to show true humility. Once again, the scope of Paul's instructions is wide—including all people. True humility retains a proper understanding of one's self. A person need not debase and malign himself in order to be humble; this is self-absorption of another sort. True humility thinks sensibly, refusing the lure of competition and comparison.**

3:3 At one time we were not anything like the person described in verses 1 and 2. Paul made two points in remembering our past: it forms a basis for humility and compassion in the present, and it emphasizes the change that Christ has brought. In the past we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived. Paul included himself in this description. Without Christ all people follow this type of lifestyle and thinking. Like all people everywhere, we belonged to the fallen system and lived according to our fallen nature. Being foolish is obstinacy, a dig-in-your-heels refusal to admit the truth. The fool willfully goes his own, headstrong way. Being disobedient involves choice. It refers to a decision to reject God's ways. As a person becomes seduced either by twisted Christian doctrines or man-made philosophies, he becomes deceived regarding the truth. This fuels both foolishness and disobedience, resulting in a life marked by sin: enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures.**

3:4 "At one time" we were enslaved to depravity (v. 3). Then Paul wrote But when and introduced a seismic shift. Something crucial happened through a dramatic, historical event that challenges our imprisonment to sin: the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared. This is the incarnation, the appearance (epiphany) of Christ among men. God's

kindness and love compelled Christ's appearance at Bethlehem, his exemplary life, and his substitutionary death and resurrection.**

3:5 Jesus, in these actual events, gained salvation for all people who believe. Rescuing us from the grip of corruption, he saved us.

The work of salvation comes solely from God's mercy, not because of righteous things we had done. As Isaiah 64:6 states, "All our righteous acts are like filthy rags." We can contrive no goodness by which to attain the favor or forgiveness of God. Salvation comes independent of human effort or desire. God initiates, acts, and pursues because of his mercy. Salvation comes through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. These terms explain, in part, the complex activities which faith in Christ generates. The washing of rebirth refers to the cleansing from sin which results from trust in Jesus Christ. This purification of the sound spirit brings life. No longer living on a purely natural or physical level, believers are transformed from spirit-death to spirit-life. They count themselves "dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:11). Renewal carries the same idea, that a person has come into a new existence, both in this life and for eternity. The Holy Spirit participates in Salvador, establishing his presence in the soul and enabling each person to act in true righteousness. God has poured out this Holy Spirit on us generously. God always acts in extravagance, and his gift of the Spirit to those who believe demonstrates his greatest liberality. Not only has he rescued us from the frustrations and enslavements of sin; he has assured a spiritual power and development that would lie beyond us without his personal interaction. The Spirit enables us to follow in the ways of Christ.**

Salvation comes not by works but through the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit. Some interpreters have understood this as saying that baptism ("the washing") causes salvation, but in the context human deeds are clearly downplayed and the emphasis is on divine action and initiative. The washing described here is the spiritual cleansing that is symbolized outwardly by water baptism.

3:7 Paul told us God's purpose in providing salvation: so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs. Some people claim that justification means "just as if I'd never sinned." That may be cute, or clever, but it does not do salvation justice. Actually, "salvation" is a legal term describing a guilty person before the bar who is then pronounced blameless by the judge. This does not mean the individual has been found guiltless. Instead, it means that the person has been released from guilt, his offense paid for. All of this is by God's grace, apart from human merit.

Christ purchased our soul's freedom through his death and resurrection. In this way, God pardons those who trust in Jesus, bestowing upon them Christ's righteousness. Romans 3:22–26 states, "This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus."

God cannot tolerate or excuse sin, but he can give his own Son as the substitute payment that justice must extract. Personal trust identifies us with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. In the same way that we share in his death, we share in his victory over death. He grants us his righteousness through faith.

Having received pardon and been given his righteousness, we share in his glory. We become heirs having the hope of eternal life. Those who rely upon the salvation work of Jesus are adopted by God into his family. He extends to us an inheritance. Each family member receives equally from the goodness of the Father. There is no favoritism with God. The riches of God become our inheritance—eternal life, full righteousness and holiness, uninterrupted fellowship, and unhindered fulfillment of our creative intent "Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory" (Rom. 8:17).**

3:8 All that Paul has written is trustworthy; it is unailing because was given by God. Salvation, righteousness, faith, and hope are indisputable facts of Christian belief. Paul wanted Titus to teach these truths to the Cretan believers. If we can agree that Paul's statements are true, we conclude that: (1) Christians are called to a high standard of thinking, attitudes and conduct. (2) Every believer comes with a background of disobedience toward God and with selfish drives which alienate him from God and others. (3) God has provided a way for people to reestablish a pure and honest relationship with him through Jesus Christ. (4) Faith in Christ's death and resurrection results in God's pardoning our corrupted lives and spirits. (5) Our future holds a glorious existence with God in eternity.

If we can hold to these conclusions, then we must also reason that the life which Paul commended to Titus is an attainable and worthy pursuit. But Christian growth does not occur automatically: we must be careful to devote [ourselves] to doing what is good.**

**Knut Larson, *I & II Thessalonians, I & II Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, vol. 9, Holman New Testament Commentary. ISBN: 978-0805402094