

Insist on Truths that Transform Hearts

Titus: The Church Established / Titus 3:8-15

Introduction:

Today we are closing out our series on the book of Titus, looking at how Paul wraps up his letter in Titus 3:8-15. As we began this series, we saw, in the opening of this letter, how God cares for His people to have true faith. As we looked at the rest of chapter 1, we unpacked how God's care is exercised by establishing the leadership of elders, in the church, who are qualified men that shepherd the church through faithful exhortation, and even rebuke at times. Chapter 2 revealed how God's people should live within households, because the grace of God in redemption frees us to live lives that magnify the gospel. And, last week, in the beginning of chapter 3, we saw how God's grace in salvation has changed everything, freeing us to live in peace and composure when engaging with the world. As we come to the conclusion of this letter today, it is fitting that we find ourselves here on the Sunday before thanksgiving, as it provides us with one of the main ways we respond in thankfulness to God for the gospel of Jesus Christ. In Paul's closing remarks to Titus, he gives an encouragement to continually insist on certain things, a command to engage properly with certain people, and a purpose that bookends these final remarks, which has been woven throughout this letter. Let's start by noticing what Paul wants Titus to continually insist on, calling him to,

INSIST ON TRUTHS THAT TRANSFORM HEARTS

Notice how the beginning of verse 8 links to the previous verses. As Paul says, "The saying is trustworthy," he brings verses 4-7, where he expounded on the mercy of God in salvation, to its most appropriate close. He is saying, "This truth, about the mercy of God in salvation, is a trustworthy saying." Some commentators suggest it's like an Amen. Like the moments when a preacher says something that causes an out loud "Amen!," as an emphatic and hearty agreement. Paul uses a similar phrase in 1 Timothy 1:15, saying, 15 "The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." Similar to our passage, the saying is the salvation of sinners through Christ. Trustworthy, is that same term Paul used when referring to how elders must "hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught," in Titus 1:9, showing its connected to what elders hold firmly to. Paul is saying, cling to the truths of verse 4-7. So, let's look at Titus 3:4-7 to remind us again of those glorious truths. 4 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 5 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, 6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. "The saying is trustworthy." And after pointing to the trustworthy truths of the gospel, Paul says, look at verse 8, 8 "... and I want you to insist on these things." Notice, also, the end of verse 8 where Paul says, 8 "... These things are excellent and profitable for people." The things Titus should insist on are important because they are excellent and profitable things. So, what are these things? They have to primarily include the trustworthy saying, right? Paul is definitely focused on that. But is it just that? Look back at Titus 2:15, where Paul says, "Declare these things," then calls for Titus to "exhort and rebuke with all authority." The things Titus is to exhort and rebuke there include the encouragements of Titus 2:2-10, where he shows how we should live within households. Yet, just like here, Titus 2 also includes the gospel as the ground for those encouragements in verses 11-14. This helps us to see that the things Paul wants Titus to insist on are the ways we should live grounded in the truths of the gospel. Titus is to insist on both the truths of the gospel, and its call on our lives. We can't divorce one from the other. If we insist only on the encouragements for how to live, without the truths of the gospel, we have nothing but vain moralism, and as we saw a couple of weeks ago, we miss a valuable component for growth.

However, if we insist on the truths of the gospel, without encouragements for how it is lived out, we miss the transformation the gospel brings. We must insist on both as truths that transform hearts. We, as God's people, need to constantly hear the truths of the gospel and the demands those truths make on our lives, because notice again in verse 8, 8 "... These things are excellent and profitable for people." Paul is saying, these things aren't just excellent and profitable for God's people, they are excellent and profitable for all people. There is a missions and evangelistic component in Paul's view here. We insist on these truths because they can both transform the hearts of God's people and transform the hearts of those who have yet to believe. Paul drives this insistence home by a command to avoid things that distract from these truths. Look at verses 8-9 again, 8 The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, ... These things are excellent and profitable for people. 9 But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. "Foolish controversies" are ignorant, worthless, or silly disputes. This doesn't mean we don't engage with theological and doctrinal questioning seeking clarity on the truth of God's word, but we avoid those things that are clearly foolish. "Genealogies" are mentioned in 1 Timothy 1:4 alongside myths as "endless genealogies." This is probably the overemphasis, in those days, on Jewish heritage through details in genealogies, even inserting mythical beings at time. Next, Paul says to avoid "dissensions," which are strife in relationships caused by disagreements. Finally, Paul says to avoid "quarrels about the law," which points back to the commands of people being promoted by the false teachers in Crete. These are the battles over whether believers are bound by the Jewish ceremonial law, which Paul showed in chapter 1 they are not. Paul concludes by helping Titus see that these things 9 "... are unprofitable and worthless." This avoidance strengthens the thrust to insist on truths that transform hearts, because they are profitable for both believers and the world. As Titus is insisting on truths that transform hearts, Paul also wants Titus to engage properly with certain people, calling him to,

BE VIGILANT WITH DIVISIVE PEOPLE

Pay attention to the strength of Paul's language towards a particular kind of person in verses 10-11. Paul says, in verse 10, 10 "As for a person who stirs up division." These are people who will not follow the trustworthy word as taught by the apostles, and cause divisions within the church through their teaching. As we saw in Titus 1:13, the warnings are meant to train through encouragement and reproof. The goal is correction that leads to being "sound in the faith." Note how Titus is to be vigilant, by 10 "warning him once and then twice," showing persistence in correction. But, if persistent correction doesn't work, Paul says, in verse 10, to 10 "... have nothing more to do with him." This involves both a refusal to continue the fruitless conversation and a redemptive exclusion from church life. Then, to help Titus feel confident in this, Paul says, in verse 11, 11 "knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned." Titus has nothing more to do with them because their divisive nature points to the reality of their hearts. They claim to know God but deny Him by their works. Finally, we should see that Paul wants Titus to insist on truths that transform hearts, and be vigilant with divisive people, for a pointed purpose, calling Titus to,

HAVE ALL STRIVE TO EXCEL IN GOOD WORKS

Did you notice in the reading how this purpose bookends these closing remarks? Pay attention to verses 8 and 14, as the language is almost identical. In verse 8, Paul says the insistence is "so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works," and, in verse 14, "let our people learn to devote themselves to good works." The purpose of heeding Paul's calls is that the church would learn how, and be careful, to devote themselves to good works. This is a dominant theme throughout this letter. Christ has purified His people for them to be zealous for good works. God has provided the cleansing and renewing power of regeneration by His Spirit, so that we would strive to excel in good works.

Church, God, in the gospel, has not only saved and redeemed, but continues a sanctifying work to make us more like His Son Jesus Christ. This is what Romans 8:28-29 tell us the good is that everything is working toward. The transforming power of the truths we insist on enable us to perform these good works, so we should strive to excel in them. And we need to see that Paul isn't calling Titus to an arbitrary understanding of good works but has been pointing to these works throughout this letter. The good works in this book can be identified in 2 ways. First, good works involve,

1) LIVING IN WAYS THAT MAGNIFY THE GOSPEL

Throughout this letter, Paul has been charging Titus to teach believers how to live lives that magnify the gospel. When Paul says be devoted to good works, our minds should immediately gravitate towards these ways of living as the good works we are devoted to. Do you remember the goal of Christ's purifying work in redemption, and how God's grace trains us in certain ways? Look back at Titus 2:11-14. Titus 2:14 reveals that Christ, 14 ... gave himself for us... to purify... a people... who are zealous for good works. Verse 12 shows that grace trains us in this zealous pursuit, 12 ... to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives. This shows that our devotion to good works is the very ways we live lives that magnify the gospel, which we saw in Titus, chapters 2 and 3. In Titus 2:2-10, this devotion to good works is, "older men," being, "sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. It's "older women," being, "reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine." Teaching "what is good." These good works are "young women," loving "their husbands and children," being, "... self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands." It's "younger men," being "self-controlled," and Titus being a, "model of good works," showing, "integrity, dignity, and sound speech" in his teaching. And good works are "bondservants," being "submissive to their own masters in everything," being "well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith." These things are part of the good works we are devoted to. In Titus 3:1-2, this devotion to good works is, being "submissive to rulers and authorities... obedient... ready for every good work." It's speaking "evil of no one," avoiding "quarreling," being "gentle," and showing "perfect courtesy toward all people." All of these things are the first way we strive to excel in good works. Are you being careful to devote yourselves to these things? The second way is found in the final instructions and greetings, where we see that good works involve,

2) PROVIDING FOR PRESSING NEEDS

Paul closes this letter in typical fashion, with instructions and greetings. Inside of those greetings, Paul points to this devotion to good works again, highlighting one way we strive to excel in good works. Pay attention to verses 13-14 in these final instructions, he starts by saying, 12 When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. 13 Do your best to speed Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way; see that they lack nothing. 14 And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful. After calling Titus to come see him once Artemas or Tychicus arrive, he gives Titus instructions to see that Zenas and Apollos, verse 13, 13 "... lack nothing." Then, he connects this work to verse 14, saying, 14 "And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need." Paul calls for Titus to provide for the needs of Zenas and Apollos, who are probably the ones delivering this letter on their missionary endeavors, then calls for the churches to help cases of urgent need. As Titus provides for Zenas and Apollos, he is a living example of caring for cases of urgent need, so that both he, and the church, will "not be unfruitful." As James 2:14-17 reminds us, 14 "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?

17 So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” Church, our devotion to the good works of providing for pressing needs shows that the gospel has transformed our lives, producing faith that is alive, because we are able to freely give in thankfulness for the abundance we have received. Are you striving to excel in good works by providing for pressing needs? We would be remiss if we didn’t address the final verse of this letter. Look with me at verse 15. 15 “All who are with me send greetings to you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all.” After sending greetings to Titus from everyone with Paul, he asks Titus to greet those who are in the faith, as evidenced by their love for Paul and others. Then he concludes in the same way he opened, asking for the grace of God to be with them. It is the grace of God that saves, and the grace of God that trains. Therefore, we must remember, that to live lives that magnify the gospel, we always need the grace of God.

Conclusion:

The conclusion of this letter helps us to see one way we respond in thankfulness for all that God has done in the gospel, so it is fitting that we find ourselves here on this Sunday before thanksgiving. Paul calls for Titus to insist on truths that transform hearts, which is primarily the trustworthy saying of the gospel, because, as we are thankful for the amazing reality of all that has happened in the gospel, we will respond with a careful devotion to good works. As John Stott appropriately says, “Doctrine inspires duty, and duty adorns doctrine.” And church, in my short time here, I have already seen and heard of how you are working to press into these things. One example really stood out to me, as I heard of how this church family rallied around Kevin and Marisol Clark during a season of urgent need. Listen, as they share their story in this video. This is a beautiful example of a devotion to good works by providing for pressing needs. Other stories could be shared, but, church, let’s not get complacent. Rather, let’s continue to press into more and more devotion to good works and adorn the gospel as we do. We are going to lean into another opportunity to devote ourselves to good works this morning. The worship team and choir are going to share a song with us as we bring the Thanksgiving food offerings up to the front and lay them at the foot of the stage. As the choir and worship team start making their way up, let me provide some encouragements for this time. This is not intended to be an opportunity to show off how giving we are. Rather, this is intended to be a tangible representation of hearts responding to God in thankfulness. You are not required to bring your food offering up front and could leave it by the information table if you'd rather do that. Yet, during the choir song, if you are able and desire to, consider physically walking your gift to the front of the stage as a tangible symbol of your heart responding in thankfulness for all God has done, causing you to devote yourself to helping those in need for the sake of the gospel. Church, hear me, we want to guard our hearts from doing this as a show, but there are times when tangible expressions of things can be helpful, think of times when you raise your hands or literally bow down in worship. So, prayerfully participate if desired, with the goal of speaking to your own heart a call forward in fulfilling the calls we have seen from God’s word this morning. The song the worship team and choir will share is called “I Speak Jesus,” because we never want to forget that everything we do is for the sake of proclaiming the gospel of the glory of Jesus Christ. Oh church, if we only provide for the physical needs of others and miss the call to provide the truth of their most pressing need to trust in Jesus, our efforts would be fruitless. We need to bury the truths of the gospel deep in our hearts, so that as we devote ourselves to good works, the gospel is shared from our lips as the reasons behind everything we do. So, let this song encourage you to share the glorious name of Jesus with others, as you devote yourselves to good works. And at any point during this song, you can bring your food gift to the front of the stage as the Lord leads.

Let me pray this over us before we head into this time of response?