

HOW YOUR LIFE CAN MODEL THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL

Teaching Through Titus Verse by Verse - Part twelve

Sunday, January 15th, 2012, a.m. - Teaching #1529

How To Make Your Life Count - What to Pursue and What to Avoid

Titus 3:8-15 - "The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. 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. [10] As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, [11] knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned. [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. [15] All who are with me send greetings to you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all."

It is always refreshing to find someone, like Paul, who just never lost his appetite and marvel for God's grace in his life. Today's text begins with the words, "***This saying is trustworthy....***" What statement? Paul has just been caught up in an emotional elaboration of the vastness and freeness and steadfastness of saving grace in Jesus Christ:

Titus 3:3-7 - "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] 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."

Paul moves from subject to subject very quickly in this letter to Titus. Usually his ideas appear and are replaced quickly by others in one or two sentences. But then, when he starts reminiscing about God's grace, the words start flowing and flowering and piling up. Most of us have to ***stir ourselves up*** to praise and thanksgiving to God for His grace. Paul had to ***hold himself back***.

But this was more than just an ***emotional gush*** for Paul. His song of praise is more than mere ***politeness*** toward God. Notice how he ends those words in **verse 7** - "***....that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.***"

Now there's a connection in that verse. We're meant to tie together things that can easily be discussed only separately. ***When you magnify grace you establish hope.*** Because Paul never let his mind slip about the greatness of God's grace, he never doubted the reality and certainty of future hope in Christ Jesus. This just makes sense. If my future hope depends on my ***worthiness***, or my ***cleverness***, or my ***industry***, then I'll never be at peace with God. I'll constantly wonder if I'm making the grade. And even if I think I'm making the grade, how do I know for sure that ***God*** thinks I'm making the grade? After all, He's the judge and it's His view that counts.

But deep, long, meditative, careful, joyful musings on grace are the soul's life-jacket. Ponder grace and you'll stay afloat in life. No wonder Paul talks so lovingly about the "***grace in which we stand***" - **Romans 5:2** - "***....Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.***" And notice again the connection between ***standing in grace*** and ***rejoicing in hope***. You can't rejoice in hope while you stand on your good behavior. You can't rejoice in hope just from saving the environment. You rejoice in ***hope*** as you drill down deeply into God's unflinching, rock-solid, sinner atoning ***grace***. ***Redemption*** is the ground spring of hope.

All of this leads into Paul's closing thoughts in this letter to Titus. And some of his applications of this text are quite surprising. We'll look at one central point today and another next Sunday.

1) **IN PAUL'S TEACHING, GRACE AND HOPE WERE THE ANCHORS FOR HOLY LIVING**

Think about that point, because it's quite surprising. One would think magnifying the free, certain, heaven assuring nature of grace through Christ Jesus would make one ***less*** motivated to a red-hot, dead earnest pursuit of holy habits and affections. It would be like parents paying off the child's entire Visa bill at the end of every month. Would that make the child ***more*** careful in his spending or ***less***?

But look at these verses:

Titus 3:8 - "The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God ***may be careful to devote themselves to good works***. These things are excellent and profitable for people."

The ***trustworthy statement*** is the previous passage on God's wonderful grace and our certain hope. Paul wants those two things constantly taught to the church. And the ***reason*** he wants them constantly taught is so believers will persistently stretch themselves into

deeper and deeper commitment to **good works** - **Titus 3:8** - "**The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works....**"

Obviously, people can **believe** on different levels. There is a kind of belief, according to Paul, that has nothing to do with Christianity whatsoever. There is a kind of believing that leaves **mind unstirred** and the **will unengaged**. Paul warned against the deception that would bank on that kind of belief doing any good for anybody.

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." Underscore that overlooked adjective "**Lord.**" Believing in **Jesus** doesn't save anybody. James says the **demons** believe in God. But they don't **honor** Him. No, saving belief is the radical reorientation of the whole mind and will **away from the rule of self** and **toward the absolute ruling authority of Jesus** that brings transformation of character - **"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved."**

That's the kind of faith - belief - that Paul has already talked about in this very letter. He talked about the **change grace brings into the life of its receiver** - **Titus 2:11-14** - "**For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, [12] training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions,** [This is the *negative* drive of free grace] **and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,** [This is the *positive* drive of free grace] **[13] waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, [14] who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness** [not just our *sin*] **and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works** [almost the very same words as our present text]."

These verses give a picture of the whole plan of salvation. **Why did God save you? To what end did He redeem you?** Just because He loved you? Well, He did, and does love you. But **no** - that's not the **end** He had in mind when He saved you. Paul says He had a **plan** when He saved you.

Here's the plan: Right from the moment God reached down into your life with His free saving grace in Jesus Christ, He had oodles and oodles of good deeds - glorious, obvious, outstanding works that would flow from your life. In fact, those good deeds are an actual **component** of His saving grace in your life:

Ephesians 2:8-10 - "**For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast. [10] For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus** [that the salvation part - when God created new life - regenerating life for you through, or "in", Christ Jesus] **for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."**

Notice the way these verses peel back the layers of the motive Father God had in sending God the Son to die for your sins. **Why did God have all these good works pre-ordained for you?** Because He didn't want to save just **you**. God has lots of **other** people He wants to save. But those people are just like you and I. Some of them don't see their **need** of salvation. Others don't believe it's **possible** for God to save and change them. Many others **don't go to church** and will never **hear** about Jesus and His saving love.

This is where you and I come in. God wants people to look at our **changed lives** - our **deeds** - and see the difference He can make. People can't see the **beliefs in our heads**. They can only see the **outward works of our transformed lives**. He wants other people to have **proof** that Jesus can totally change **their** lives because they can see He **already has** changed **our** lives.

Jesus doesn't want to just **save** you. He wants to **advertize** through you. He wants to be **glorified** through you. You've seen the **before and after** pictures in magazines. That's exactly what Jesus says He wants to do through us - **Matthew 5:16** - "**In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."**

Right there! That's **why** Jesus saved you - so that people who need Jesus, but can't possible look into your heart, could look at your visible life. They would see your good deeds and come to glorify God rather than you. This is where we see the whole process and meaning of conversion - the actual **obstetrics** of the New Birth. All sorts of people **claim** to love Jesus, and **claim** to be born again. So it's very important that the church be crystal clear on how grace and saving faith manifest themselves.

And that's why Paul closes this letter to this young church the way he does. Like any good teacher, he's coming back to the main points of his letter. He's **recapping** what the people must take special hold of and remember.

TMT ITK TMT TMT - Do you know what that means? No church should ever forget this - "**THE MAIN THING IS TO KEEP THE MAIN THING THE MAIN THING!**" And here's the main thing. We're saved by grace. Wonderful, abundant, mind-boggling grace. There is no other way to be saved. But that grace works in your life the way yeast works in bread. **It doesn't just sit there. It produces holiness.**

There is a terrible misconception in the church. And it has to do with divine grace. We think of grace almost exclusively in terms of what it **erases** rather than what it **produces**. Worse yet, people can sometimes think that grace is primarily God's way of **living with my sin**. God **tolerates** my sin because He's gracious. In other words, grace means I can live with a few less obvious sins and get away with it when Jesus comes again because, after all, God is gracious and I believe in Jesus.

But that's not what grace is or how it works. Not at all. Grace has nothing whatsoever to do with **tolerating** sin. Grace has everything to

do with *resisting sin* and, with God's help, *overcoming sin*. That's why Paul insists on **KEEPING THE MAIN THING THE MAIN THING** - Titus 3:8 - "...that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works....."

This kind of *stretching after good works* isn't legalism. I'm constantly amazed at the limited understanding there is in the church on the nature of holiness as opposed to legalism. Good works, not rooted and motivated in humble gratitude for grace received are *useless* for promoting genuine godliness because, isolated from the motivation of humble thankfulness for grace, they generate both *pride* and *judgmentalism* in the human heart.

Good deeds that are the *fruit* of abiding in the renewing grace of God through Christ flow out of humility and thankfulness for atoning grace that is totally unearned. Because we *marvel* at grace, we are also *transformed* by grace. Good deeds are the *fruit* of grace rather than the brittle, performance oriented attempts to impress God or man. Rather it's the result of *truly comprehending God's free grace*:

Romans 12:1-2 - "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. [2] Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

2 Corinthians 5:14-15 - "For the love of Christ controls us, [what an amazing phrase!] because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; [15] and he died for all, that [there's the *reason* or *result* of His death] those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised."

These are just two examples out of dozens. There is great *effort* being described here - a *great deal of work*. But there's no *legalism*. What's being described in these passages is a *great passion for holiness* fueled by a *deep hold on free grace*. This is the proof of the pudding as far as salvation goes.

So, in a rather convoluted fashion, Paul has set three goals for these Christians to pursue: **FIRST, relish the bounty and greatness of redemption in Jesus Christ. SECOND, let that constant reflection of grace fill your mind with a purposeful focus on your future hope - "...so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (7b).** And **THIRD, let thankfulness and hope fuel the pursuit of holy living so the purpose of your salvation can be fulfilled as others see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.**