

They Lived It!

Titus 3:1-8

Gary Thomas in his book, *Holy Available*, tells the story of Francis of Assisi's conversion and the impact of that on his life. Francis lived in the 12th-century. He was born the son of a rich merchant, which allowed him to live the high life and enjoy all sorts of pleasure. But when he embraced Christianity he sensed God saying to him that all the things that he had loved in the flesh he needed to despise and all the things he formerly loathed you would "drink great sweetness and immeasurable delight.

Thomas makes the observation that if a believer today heard such words today they would be written down in a journal, or a poem or we'd write a song or a book, but we'd so easily forget them. Not Francis. He immediately applied what he sensed God saying to him. He hopped on a horse and rode out of town and he saw what he once most despised - a leper. With joy in his soul, Francis didn't run from what he once loathed, but instead he jumped down from the horse, knelt in front of the leper and kissed his hand and gave the man money.

But he didn't stop there, he rode his horse to a neighboring leper colony and asked for their forgiveness for how he had despised them. He gave them money and didn't leave until he had kissed each one.

Thomas says this about Francis, "His belief didn't just inspire him; it transformed him." (*Holy Available*, p. 13). He ended up preaching the Gospel in Spain and Egypt. Also, he established the Franciscan order, which was engaged in great missionary endeavors in the 13th and 14th centuries (*Christianity through the Centuries*, p. 220). Francis of Assisi lived out his faith.

As we come to chapter 3 in our study of the book of Titus, this is exactly what Paul calls us to. He will call us to live out our faith and he will present the motivation for doing so. We will see this in Paul's instructions to the believers in Crete.

Today, we are going to look at verse 1-8. The first thing that we see in this passage is a call for us to live out our faith.

I. A Call to Live Out Our Faith (vv. 1-2)

¹ Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, ² to malign no one, to be uncontentious, gentle, showing every consideration for all men.

Paul instructs Titus to remind the believers in Crete how they are to live. That he is to *remind them* suggests that these are things that they already been taught and so they just needed reminding.

First, he tells them to *be subject* and *obedient* to rulers and authorities. They are to willingly be subject to the various forms of human government under which they lived. And, this inward attitude of submission was then to be lived out in their being *obedient* to rulers and authorities.

Secondly Paul says to remind them *to be ready for every good deed*. Whether they are with fellow believers or out in society they were to simply to be ready to do what is good for whomever, whenever.

Third, he says they are *to malign no one*. This kind of speech was so common and yet, Paul wants Cretan believers to abstain from speaking evil of others. He says malign no one. It doesn't matter how bad another person might be; they were to refrain from speaking evil about anybody.

They were also to be *uncontentious*. The NIV says "peaceable." Literally, it means to be non-fighting. They are to refuse to engage in conflicts and quarrels. Instead, he wants believers to be *gentle* and to show *every consideration for all men*. Notice again that Paul is not just calling them to live this way with fellow believers. He says this is how they are to live with all people.

Often the focus of Paul's instructions are on how we are to live with one another in the church. He has a lot to say about that. But that really isn't the focus here. Rather he is focusing on how we are to live in society at large – with the government and with all people around us. Obviously, this list doesn't represent the full list of virtues that Paul in other places calls us as believers to manifest and yet just think about the impact of living out these seven imperatives.

What if we always respond properly to those who have authority? What if we consistently lived with an intentionality in doing good? What if we never spoke evil of others and we truly were peaceable people even with the most difficult of people? What if we lived with gentleness? What if we showed every consideration for all people? What would be the fruit of living in this way in the world? What if we really lived it?

Are we characterized by the kind of lives that Paul is describing here? Is this how we live in our neighborhoods, our dorm floors, our places of work? Is this how we live as a church in Manhattan? Are we known for these things? Do we really live it? That's what we are called to do. We are called to live out our faith.

Now, in the rest of the passage, Paul goes on to talk about the motive for living out our faith. Here he presents the theology that is the basis for the seven commands that he has just given.

II. The Motive for Living Out Our Faith (vv. 3-7)

In the NASB, the first word in verse 3 is, *for*, which makes it clear that what he is talking about here is the logical reason for living out what he has talked about in verse 1 and 2. He first says that we should remember who we once were.

A. Remember Who We Once Were (v. 3)

³ *For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.*

Essentially, Paul is saying that at one time all of us were once lost. He describes that condition this way by saying that we were all *foolish*; without spiritual understanding. All of us were *disobedient*. We refused to obey God and we resisted human authority. We were *deceived*. We were following false guides and were not on the right course. We were *enslaved to various lusts and pleasures*; we were controlled by these things. In our hearts there was *malice and envy*. Before salvation, Paul says, this is what our lives looked like. And so the sum of this kind of life was being hated and hating one another. This is who we all were, Paul says.

But don't just stop there, as you remember who you once were, do so as you remember what God did to save you.

B. Remember what God did to save us (v. 4-7)

Verse 4 begins with the word, *but*. We were broken and ruined and living poorly, but God showed up and did something. He saved us.

⁴ *But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared,*
⁵ *He saved us,*

The main thought in verses 4-7 is that God *saved us*. Verse 4 talks about the time when the kindness of God and His love for mankind *appeared*. This refers to the historical event of Jesus and the salvation that was manifest through his incarnation. Jesus' coming to earth and doing what he did was an expression of God's kindness and love for us.

Verse 5 goes on to say:

⁵ *He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,*

Our salvation did not come about by any kind of "righteous deeds" that we did. Scripture is clear that there is no such thing as a good work that we ever did when we were in our unsaved condition. We were saved not on the merit of any good thing that we

did, but rather we were saved by God's *mercy*. He graciously withheld the punishment that we so justly deserved. The basis of our salvation is 100% God; 0% us.

This salvation was brought about *by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit*. *Washing* is a metaphor of the cleansing power of our salvation. When God saved us, He washed us. Paul says specifically that this is the washing *of regeneration*, which is a divine inner act by which God imparts new spiritual life to the believer. We were dead because of our sin, but God imparts new spiritual life to us. This is an instantaneous change that ends our old life and starts our new.

As well God brings about a *renewing*. This starts with the impartation of a new life, but it is a life-long process of developing a new nature that lives out a totally different manner of life. Both the washing and renewing are activities of the Holy Spirit, whom Paul says in verse 6 was:

⁶ *whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,*

At the moment one trusts Christ for salvation, the Spirit is graciously and *richly* poured out within the believer to live and dwell there permanently. This is so significant because it means that this new life in Christ that we are seeking to live is not something that we are left to do on our own power and resources. God's life-giving Spirit is present to empower us to live our out faith.

Paul then goes on to say that we were made new and given this new life so . . .

⁷ *that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*

To be *justified* means that we were declared righteous. This relates to our standing before God. It's not that we have been made righteous and now we never sin; rather it means that we were declared by God to be righteous because of Christ's work. It is simply an act of God's grace that is imparted to us. And what a gift it is!

All this so that we *might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life*. When he says that we *might be made heirs* this is looking at our present standing in relation to the future. What we have been made heirs of is the hope of eternal life. This is what we shall receive. In once sense we HAVE received this, but in another sense, we WILL receive this in fullness one day.

Paul is saying that we need to remember that we were lost. We were all that he described in verse 3. We were messed up. We were not living like we should. And we could do nothing to get out of that condition. We didn't earn our way out of it by our own good deeds. No, we were saved by the mercy of God. It was totally something God did. He washed away our sin. He gave us new life. He justified us. He made us heirs of eternal life. And by remembering this, we find a motivation to live out our faith with

humility, gentleness, and a consideration for all people regardless of what they are like, because we too at one time were lost.

For some of you, you totally get what Paul's saying here. You remember so clearly who you once were and what God did to save you. That gratitude is a compelling motive in your life that drives you to live out your faith.

For others, I know you struggle with this. Some of you are thinking that you never really were the person that Paul describes in verse 3 because you came to Christ at such a young age. And how bad could you really be when you were only four, right? And so you find it difficult to be motivated by what God did for you.

I know some of you think this way because I thought this way for years. I came to Christ as a young boy and grew up living a pretty good life. And because of that I found it hard for my salvation to motivate me. But a number of years back, God very clearly impressed upon me that the only reason I didn't become the kind of person described in verse 3 was because God saved me. He drew me to himself at a young age to spare me from ever going down that path. But the point I finally got was that God still saved me from this kind of life. That would have been the path of my life if Christ hadn't saved me. And when that got clear in my mind, it humbled me and connected me to a clearer experience of the grace and mercy of God in my life that motivates me. For some of you this is exactly how I'd encourage you to meditate on this truth.

Now, I know that there are others of you here who look at what I've just talked about and when we see that Paul encourages us to remember who we once were, you're saying, "That's who I still am." If that's where you are, I would just say to you, that you don't have to stay there. The kindness of God and His love has appeared in the person of Jesus Christ that you too might experience salvation. And as we've seen, you can't do anything to earn it. It is all God. Jesus died on the cross to pay for your sins. All you can do is cry out in faith and say to God, "I trust You. I want Jesus to forgive me of my sin. I yield my life to you." When anyone does that, God forgives everything; He sends the washing of regeneration. Your sin is washed away and you are given a new spiritual life. And His Spirit who was richly poured out in your life begins a renewing process in you. And He justifies you and gives you the hope of eternal life. You can call out to Him today, even as you sit there.

And so, Paul commands us to live out our faith and then he presents our salvation as the motive for doing so. In verse 8, then, he wraps this up by saying that we need to intentionally live it.

C. Intentionally Live It (v. 8)

⁸ This is a trustworthy statement and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God may be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men.

When Paul says *this is a trustworthy statement*, he is talking about the doctrine that he has just laid out in 4-7. It can be counted on. It is true! And so *concerning these things* Paul wants Titus to *speak confidently*. The NIV says, “stress these things.” Why? So that believers will be careful to *engage in good deeds*. He wants us to be devoted to intentionally living out lives of doing good deeds. And when believers are careful to engage in good deeds, *these things are good and profitable* for all people. Our lives become a blessing to those around us.

Are we a church that is intentionally engaged in doing good deeds? Where do we need to grow in this? Are you as an individual? Where do you need to grow? I could give a dozen ways that we could be more intentional in doing good, but instead what I'd like to do is to give some time for you to simply reflect on this. Ask God, "What are the good deeds that you are calling me to do right now?" I believe that the Spirit of God who lives in you is more than able to prompt you and direct you to what he wants you to do. And so I'm going to leave the phrase on the screen. Reflect on it. Ask God. Invite Him to speak.

Before we go to this time of reflection, I wanted to say to those of you who sense that today is the day to call out to God for salvation. Do that in these moments. Okay, take some time to pray and reflect.

In their book, *The Externally Focused Church*, authors Swanson and Rusaw talk about a devastating plague that swept over Europe and Africa in the 3rd century AD. It was a time when some estimate that as many as 5000 people were dying each day in Rome. Some believe it was small pox; other the measles. Regardless, it was time when Christians lived their faith. Swanson and Rusaw cite Dionysius, the bishop of Alexandria at the time who wrote this:

Most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbors and cheerfully accepting their pains. Many, in nursing and curing others, transferred their death to themselves and died in their stead...The best of our brothers lost their lives in this manner, a number of presbyters, deacons, and laymen winning high commendation so that death in this form, the result of great piety and strong faith, seems in every way the equal of martyrdom.” (p. 114)

Dionysius went on to say this about the non-Christian response:

The heathen [pagans] behaved in the very opposite way. At the first onset of the disease, they pushed the sufferers away and fled from their dearest, throwing them into the roads before they were dead and treated unburied

corpses as dirt, hoping thereby to avert the spread and contagion of the fatal disease; but do what they might, they found it difficult to escape.
(<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/250107.htm>; book VII, chap. 22)

One historian summed up the Christian response to this plague by saying that they weren't a dead or sleeping church in their spiritual lifestyles of application of biblical doctrine, rather he says, "They lived it" (<http://unityinchrist.com/LegacyOfLove.htm>).

May we be a church so transformed and so motivated by what God did for us in saving us that we live with intentionality in doing good. May we live the kind of lives that would be good and profitable for all people.

Amen.