

20260118 Titus 3

Key Components of Being a Christian: Believe, Abide, Follow - Where is your Fruit?

Titus was a Greek believer who was a young traveling companion to Paul. His name means "honorable." During their travels, Paul left him in Crete where he was a pastor/teacher. In our study of the first chapter, you might remember that Paul wrote him saying that all Cretans are liars. They were a worldly people who dealt in deception. As a matter of fact, they had perfected the fine art of deception to a degree that many ancient writers wrote about it. That's pretty wild when you think about it, a whole island population known for their lying. Paul is writing this short letter to give Titus specific instructions on how to pastor there in such an environment, and he elaborated on what the church should look like and how its members should behave. There is a lot of good Bible teaching in this book as well as good instructions on how elders should be chosen etc. Many scholars believe that the letter to Titus predated Paul's letter to Timothy, so we see the first glance at qualifications of elders. The letter includes qualifications for elders that are a little different from the ones listed in Timothy, but they are complementary. In the book of Titus, we learn much about how the church should work and what the roles are for different age and sex groups therein. Last week, we studied specifically what was expected of older men, older women, younger men, employees, and the congregation in general. These are the activities and attitudes that make a church into a functional family. They are attitudes and attributes which we should all strive for.

The truth is that in many families there is great dysfunction. This happens for a multitude of reasons, but the reality is that some mothers are poor role models because they were not taught the proper way to be loving mothers and wives. They may have been abused. The same is true about some fathers. Just because a man fathers children doesn't mean that he knows the first thing about being a "daddy." This is where older men and women in the church can have very important roles in teaching that which was never taught from dysfunctional parents. This is one way in which the church works as a community of faith. Last week we heard Paul instructing Titus in how to foster the teaching of the younger generation by the entire church community. That makes a strong church. It encourages good growth among the young people and helps the next generation to steer clear of some of the dysfunction and baggage that came with their own upbringings.

In chapter one, Paul instructed Titus to rebuke the troublemakers and false teachers. This is one reason why it is so important to learn what the Bible really teaches. This discernment is the best defense in recognizing falsehood and false teachers when we see them. Paul says that they are "unfit for doing anything good."

Pastoring is not easy. It is a balance. We (pastors) must be able to not only love and encourage, but we must be able to “bite and fight” as characterized by Martin Luther. It means we must sometimes call things as they are, which might include running people off who are a danger to the flock. It’s a hard role. You will always end up with a group that doesn’t support you when you do such things. These are the kinds of things that can bring great division to the local church, and they can do great damage to the cause of Christ.

In chapter two, Paul tells Titus, “but as for you, you’re going to do the following... teaching what is in accord to SOUND DOCTRINE.” There is some really sound advice in this book because it tells us that sound doctrine is important, but it emphasizes the importance of living that teaching out. It is much harder to live out the Bible than it is to study the Bible. I mentioned that I grew up in a church that stressed Bible doctrine and study but didn’t evidence much love between the members. They sat there and took page after page of copious notes, but had nothing resembling a Christian community. I liken it to a field full of cabbages. They were all head! The Bible not only tells us what to believe, but it tells us how we should live. I had a conversation with one of our members this week who had a very good summary for living as a Christian. Her summary is: believe, abide, and follow. This teaching of Titus emphasizes those things exactly. Paul’s giving Titus all the good advice he can give because pastoring can really be tough. Chuck Swindoll said that pastors should have thick skins and tender hearts. Those are tough lines to differentiate sometimes. Let’s now get into our final chapter of Titus.

3 Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, [Romans 13] to obey, to be ready for every good work, (Titus 3:1, NKJV with author’s notes in brackets).

This is a tough word for many of us to handle. In America, we live in a republican democracy where we must respect authority and respect the offices to which folks are elected. As long as the law of the land doesn’t conflict with the higher authority of God, we are to obey it. Can you imagine how difficult it was to hear these words in the Roman Empire? The emperor ruled with total power and there was no means or measure of democracy. The people had no voice. And yet, they were instructed to obey and to be ready for every “good work.” Although at present, we don’t find laws which specifically require us to go against the laws of God, there might come a day when we must engage in civil disobedience when the government may be in conflict with the authority of God. In the meantime, we are to obey. We may not always like or care to support who is in office, but we must respect the office itself. I think as believers, we should be engaged in the political process. I think that we will be held responsible for whether or not we voted and how we voted. What are we supportive of? I choose my candidates based on who I believe best preserves my freedom of religion and my

freedom to share my faith. I also vote for those candidates who best support a biblical world view. Let's continue.

² to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men. (Titus 3:2, NKJV).

This exhorts us to guard our tongues. If you don't have anything positive to say about someone, don't say anything at all. Don't criticize. Don't tear people down with your comments. I find it intolerable to be around a person who seems to go from one negative comment about a person to another. This is directly in opposition to what the Bible teaches. If you seem obsessed with the faults of other, just STOP IT. It is sin. Additionally, strive to be peaceable. That means a lot of things. Are you a calm person who treats others with courtesy, or do you always seem to be in the middle of a conflict with someone? Choose courtesy instead of conflict. I am not the one saying this. God is saying this. Paul tells us that as best as you are able, be at peace with all men. Don't stir stuff up. Try your best to settle disputes and conflicts with others. Don't be an excitable person, riled up by everything. We should be active listeners and do our best to be good communicators. God gave you two ears and one mouth. We need to take the hint. I always like to point out that there is a "co" in communicate. That means it takes at least two to have a conversation. Talking AT people is not communication. Don't dominate conversations in which you engage. Talking over people is not having a conversation. Speak, then be quiet. Let the other person talk. Paul tells Titus that likewise we are to be gentle people. This means being the opposite of harsh. Handle others carefully with some tenderness. This means we need to be careful with the feelings of others. It doesn't mean we have to cater to their nonsense, but we are to be careful to operate and engage with others in an humble way. That's just the opposite of being proud and self-centered.

³ For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. (Titus 3:3, NKJV).

Paul now describes what our hearts were like before we came to Christ. We were fools. So, what is a fool? A fool is a person with no wisdom. The fool has said in his heart that there is no God (Psalm 14:1 author's paraphrase). A person may have all the knowledge in the world, but that does not make them wise. Only a fool could look at the complexity of the universe and deny the existence of some kind of divine architect. As I love saying, "knowledge is knowing that a tomato is scientifically and botanically known as a fruit, but wisdom is knowing not to put it in a fruit salad." If you're a botanist, a tomato is a fruit. If you're a chef, you'll consider a tomato as a vegetable. Have wisdom in how you use it. Have Holy Spirit wisdom in how you live out the word of God.

Yes, though we don't want to admit it, before coming to Christ we were foolish *and disobedient* in so many ways. We were deceived by the world, and we served only our own lusts and desires. We were selfish instead of learning to be selfless. Apart from God our natural inclination is not good but filled with malice, wrongdoing, nonsense, selfishness, a lack of rejoicing, and being envious of others. Paul adds that whether we want to hear it or not, we were hateful instead of loving. It sounds strange to hear that we were hateful, but Scripture tells us that if we're not for God, we are at odds with Him and against Him. Jesus said it clearly, *He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.* (Matthew 12:30, NKJV).

⁴ But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, ⁵ not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:4-7, NKJV).

Verses 4-7 are some of the richest theological verses in the Bible. It was by the kindness of God that He came to earth in the form of a man as Jesus. It was the love of God for mankind that motivated Him to send Jesus to us as our Savior. Pastor Larry speaks much about the love of God being the great initiator of all that happened/happens in a spiritually positive way in our lives. It is only when we understand God's love for us that we can begin to understand how and in what way we might love ourselves. This didn't happen because of anything we did or didn't do. Paul reminds Titus that **NONE OF IT WAS DONE BY ANY RIGHTEOUSNESS** which we have done, but rather by God's mercy that He saved us. He showered us with His grace. Remember that grace is getting favor and goodness that you did not deserve, and mercy is not getting punishment that you did deserve. God showered His favor on us when we never deserved it. Because of our rebellion and sin, we deserved damnation and eternal separation from God. However, in His love He spared us. But both by His mercy and grace He washed us clean through our new birth (our being born again), and He graciously poured out His Holy Spirit onto and into us. He didn't hold back either but poured it out on us abundantly. The following verse should be memorized and repeated until we have our doctrine straight.

⁵not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, (Titus 3:5a, NKJV).

As a consequence of that work on the cross, we were "justified" by His grace. What do we mean by "justified?" I like to think of it as though He sees us "just as if" we had never sinned or fallen. It's an exchange that I don't believe our human minds can fully understand, but Paul tells us that He who knew no sin was made sin for us so that we

might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21, author's paraphrase). He took on our sin at the cross and left us clean before the Father.

⁸ This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men. (Titus 3:8, NKJV).

Paul then reminds Titus that maintaining good works is something we must work at. Doing good works is not natural. It is not even natural to us when we have been saved and have become "new creations." We must be careful to never confuse "good works" with our salvation itself. Paul emphasized right there in the previous verse that it isn't because of anything we've done that we're saved and justified. But Scripture repeatedly exhorts us to "maintain good works." That's the third part of that description of the key components of the Christian life: believe, abide, follow. James, the brother of Jesus, clearly tells us that a so-called faith without accompanying "good works" is obviously not a living faith in any way. In fact, it is dead. So you might be asking, "Pastor, how can I know what good works I should be doing?" That's where reading the word, praying, and obeying comes in. The Holy Spirit will instruct you in every good work. The Holy Spirit will provide you with wisdom and give you discernment in challenging situations. He will encourage you and empower you. He will convict your heart to pursue righteousness and justice in how you live. Stay in the word, engage in prayer, and you'll be led into doing those things that you need to be doing.

Paul then warns Titus to be on the lookout for those who come into the church arguing about peripheral matters. They are disrupters. They affect the unity.

⁹ But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless. ¹⁰ Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, ¹¹ knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned. (Titus 3:9-11, NKJV).

Paul is quite repetitive in his warnings about "foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law." He says they are "unprofitable and useless," but what exactly is he talking about?

Remember that while these admonitions might have application for us regarding getting too caught up in secondary disputable matters, Paul was dealing with the Jewish party. They kept coming in behind his work, throwing the Mosaic law back into the mix and thrusting Levitical requirements and observances into the requirements of being saved. They repeatedly were trying to bring add-ons into the gospel message. There is no room in the gospel message for anything but Jesus. I have been criticized for being

too gospel focused and for not being gospel focused enough. I tell our young adults to not spend too much time in their Bible studies arguing about predestination and such things. There are millions of people that are bound for hell, and those types of arguments won't help you in evangelizing others. Paul warns Titus to not let divisive people have a voice. They're trouble makers. They are "unprofitable and useless."

All members of the church should be doing what they can to maintain the unity of the church. Be a unifier and not a criticizer. Paul felt so strongly about this that he said those who show up and try to drive wedges among the sheep should be openly rejected. Paul now finishes up.

¹² When I send Artemas to you, or Tychicus, be diligent to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. ¹³ Send Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their journey with haste, that they may lack nothing. ¹⁴ And let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful. ¹⁵ All who are with me greet you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all. Amen. (Titus 3:12-15, NKJV).

We don't really know much about who Artemas and Tychicus were, but I did note that Paul urges Titus to take care of Zenas the lawyer! As a lawyer, those words just warm my heart. With all teasing aside, Paul tells Titus to look after those ministering and make sure that they lack nothing. He finishes up by reminding Titus again of the importance of living lives filled with good works. We should be meeting urgent needs, and we should be conscious that our lives never become unfruitful. Fruit is absolutely important in the life of a believer. Jesus said, "By their fruits you will know them." So let me ask you this morning. What is the fruit of your life? Where is the fruit of your ministry to others?

Let us pray.

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 (Edited and proofed by Amanda Neese- Webster, Texas.) All financial gifts to this ministry are tax-deductible as a 501 (c) (3) Corporation.