

*Sermon on Titus 3 prepared by Jonathan Shradar*

**Titus 3:1-15**

**The excellent and profitable life may not be what we expect.**

This week I was getting a bit nostalgic for an old commercial. It was 2006 and there was a new naturopathic headache remedy being marketed. “HeadOn” was a stick of medicinal nature that you rubbed on your head. The commercial made it clear.

“HeadOn: apply directly to the forehead.” Repeated three times... Annoying in its repetitiveness but memorable. And after seeing the add you knew exactly how to use it, whether you bought it or not!

Paul’s exhortations in Titus are a lot like the HeadOn commercials. Same truth served up three ways! Repetitive, with hopes it will catch on with the church on Crete and beyond.

Appointing leaders that exemplify godliness, sacrifice for others. A community that stirs on everyone, men, women, young and old to doing good for the sake of each other and the sake of the gospel.

These imperative calls to action in this letter not as a way to gain salvation or eternal life, but as the way to live in response to being given salvation and eternal living.

Continuing the contrast of Christian living and that of false teachers, Paul roots our lives in the gospel and calls us to generosity, humility, and care for others.

He is essentially calling us to a faith that is unpopular, having our old life uprooted, all through a grace that is unending.

**Unpopular**

While in Titus up to this point most of the focus has been on relating inside the church, here Paul shifts to living with respect to outsiders. This is now the public expression of faith in Jesus. Sure we’ve mentioned adorning the gospel and living

for others to see, but here the exhortation is exclusive to our posture “toward all people.”

Honestly, what is described is unpopular. Even among those who claim to follow Jesus. I had to do some soul searching myself as I studied - repenting of ways I have been less than what is described here.

Includes public discourse, how we treat civic or governmental leaders (how we talk about them), and how we interact with the stranger, whomever they may be and however they live or however they think.

What should we be like as Christians? If you listen to enough voices you might think Christians should do whatever it takes to gain power in our world. Win every argument, or cancel those that we label worthless or wrong.

Much of what we see is a self-righteousness that claims superiority over others.

And it makes our experience tense! Just think about the potential conversations that await you during a Thanksgiving meal!

“In an age of culture wars we can grasp how much of life is affected by the charge to give proper respect to national leaders. How we vote, the ethics we use in political debate and action, the laws we obey, the legislation we seek, and the language we use to discuss governmental issues and officials—at church, at work, and around the dinner table—all of these areas of life are affected by Paul’s instruction “to be submissive to rulers and authorities.” Then this subjection is further defined by the instructions, “to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling [i.e., not be contentious], to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people” (v. 2b). Lest we think Paul and the other apostles simply did not know what we have to put up with, we should remember that these were the times of Caesars, occupational armies, and coliseums.” BC

A lot of this comes out in political discourse... is in the sights here with submission to rulers and authorities, but it has to do with all the ways we interact with “all people.” Conversations on theology, interactions with your HOA, how we treat the school district, people in line next to you at Wal-mart, driving down the road, with servers at the restaurant, neighbors, coworkers, allies and opponents.

I recognize how what Paul is calling the church to can be unpopular. I get it, I feel the impulse - I will fight you to prove we are supposed to be gentle to all people!

Submissive to rulers and authorities.

Obedient, ready for every good work.

Speaking evil of no one.

Avoiding quarreling.

Gentle and showing perfect courtesy toward all people.

Do you feel how opposed to self this is. How uncomfortable this feels? Paul surely doesn't know the "all people" I have to deal with!

Surely kindness is just "woke ideology!"

It's not Paul, or just a clear interpretation of the text that is the problem. It's us.

This is unpopular faith.

Not just now - then too - Paul preached the same thing everywhere. So unpopular he even has to encourage Timothy, his protege, to not be ashamed of it.

**2 Timothy 1:8–15** “Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, [9] who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, [10] and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, [11] for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, [12] which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me. [13] Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. [14] By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

[15] You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes.” (ESV)

He was in chains and the crowds couldn't get Paul to call for an overthrow of Rome or to promote the harassment of local magistrates. Instead he teaches gentleness, meekness, perfect courtesy.

When false teachers need an "us versus them" environment to thrive, where they bank on foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, quarrels about the law, Paul calls it all unprofitable and worthless.

We are to be about something else, about honor, respect, dignity. Doing good works that benefit everyone. We live in Christ with a pervasive humility that is caring, welcoming, valuing of the other. This is bringing renewal wherever we are.

God's saving work has direct implications for the way in which believers behave in the world. They should be devoted to doing the right and best thing in every situation. This includes pursuing peaceable relations with others whatever the cost.

The church is, as Francis Schaeffer put it, God's "demonstration community," his "final witness" to the lost world.

Paul reminds us into this unpopular faith by revealing what we've been brought out of.

## **Uprooted**

Two processes are simultaneously active in the words that follow the reminder to create the pervasive humility that is so important for the life and testimony of the church. First, Paul distinguishes the present Christian life from its past worldly counterpart, and then he unites Christians in understanding how dependent each is on grace as a consequence of that past.

**Titus 3:3** "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." (ESV)

I love Paul's inclusive language here. He could have said "you all were once..." but he chooses "we ourselves." This is his story too.

Paul reminds us of our history that we would respond graciously to others, to authorities, to each other because we have received the ultimate experience of grace in Jesus.

**1 John 4:19** “We love because he first loved us.” (ESV)

This love, this “goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior” saves us and uproots old hearts and ways - this is the regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.

“Regeneration is the sovereign work God the Holy Spirit of granting spiritual life to each Christian, raising them from the dead so that they are now able to repent and trust in Christ as a new creation.” That which precedes faith - unleashes the ongoing work of renovation of our heart.

Meant for more than being foolish, disobedient and entrapped by passion and pleasure, to be hated and hating.

Transformation comes from the “appearance” of the loving kindness of God our Savior to our hearts. He who saved us by a rich outpouring of his mercy and not according to our worthiness, becomes the passion of our endeavors. All true godliness is a consequence of understanding that God mercifully came and found us. He “appeared” to us. We did not, fundamentally, seek after him.

And his grace trains our hearts, teaches us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passion. It is an act of uprooting what existed before, to leave us ready for every good work.

It takes time... “renewal” grants a sense of continual work.

Early in this series we talked a lot about gardening and weeding... Well this week I got a crevice tool to remove pesky grass that has been growing in the little crevices between my sidewalk and the curb. Weeds that act just like the old ways of life!

The grass (sin) is seemingly fine with my weekly weed wacking of what is seen, it just grows back... but using the crevice tool, I could get to the roots. And it was

work! Some of these roots were a deep and tangled mess, some three-feet long. With repetitive motion of digging and pulling, the crevice is left clean.

This is exactly how the Holy Spirit uses the gospel on our hearts. Not merely weekly behavior modification but strategic uprooting of the dragons that once ruled our hearts... however deep their talons go.

The things that strangled us, that kept us from real life. Things the Spirit washes us from when we come to Christ.

Now submissive in the best sense of the word, kind, gentle, courteous, speaking no evil, because Jesus came to us with a gentle and lowly heart.

Our lives are now to be ruled by a pervasive humility modeled by our God and Savior, when we miss it, this serves as a reminder of “that’s not who we are...”

Instead: **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.” (ESV)

“Believing the leveling truths of the gospel creates a community where malice, envy, and infighting disappear along with the need to measure our righteousness against one another. In humility lies the key to living out our obligations to rulers, to one another, and to God—and what produces that humility is the message that Paul says must be our ultimate priority.” BC

The gospel leads to excellent and profitable things. Community that cares for partners in kingdom work, that strives for unity centered on Christ.

Living an unpopular faith as the gospel increasingly takes root in our hearts, anchored, kept, by a grace that is unending.

## **Unending**

**Titus 3:5–7** “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.” (ESV)

According to his own mercy.

This is eternal living, kind, ready for every good work because we have been saved. A grace that keeps going. That saves and trains.

His grace, that stands as our treasure and hope. That carries us all the way home into eternity. Made heirs according to hope.

Our culture may get the goodness of kindness and courtesy, they don't get the why. “*Kindness is a muscle!*”

Well we have the *why*, because Jesus modeled this for us justifying us by his grace when we were still his enemies, he called us his own.

“Trusting in Christ the King as your sin-bearer will get you from earth to heaven. But adopting his kingdom agenda will bring heaven's help to your earthly life.”  
Tony Evans

Clinging to this grace we become ready for what Jesus has prepared for us ahead of time.

This is the life that outsiders will see. As we welcome as Jesus welcomed us.

**The excellent and profitable life may not be what we expect.**

*Pursue the things that are excellent and profitable* - Steadiness, self-control, being perfectly courteous, valuing image-bearers, anchored in the eternal life that is ours in Christ.

Be a friend. Be safe. Because Jesus has been to you.

Paul's final words are, “Grace be with you all” (v. 15b). The apostle states this message last to let its implications reverberate in Christian hearts through the ages. May it be the message that all of us want to leave as well, to forever renew in the hearts and lives of God's people the message, “Grace be with you all.”

The grace of Christ: apply directly to your heart.

The grace of Christ: apply directly to your heart.

The grace of Christ: apply directly to your heart... and be forever changed.

May it be so in us.