

DEAR TITUS...

A 3 WEEK SERIES IN THE BOOK OF TITUS

Connect group questions

Titus 3 – Dear Titus... be ready to do good

How do you feel about the expression 'born again Christian'? Is that how you would describe yourself?

SAVED FROM OURSELVES

Read Titus 3:3

Verse 3 describes our sinful nature rather than our sinful behaviours.

1. Why do we find this so uncomfortable?
2. Why is it important to reflect on these attitudes honestly with ourselves and with God?
3. To 'be enslaved' sounds dramatic and alien to our ears, but we can be enslaved by anything that has become our personal idol, when a good thing becomes an ultimate thing, that draws us away from our worship of God our Saviour.
4. What pre-occupies your time, thoughts or energy that be 'enslaving you'?

SAVED BY JESUS OUR SAVIOUR

Read Titus 3:4-8

5. How should we respond to God's kindness?
6. What is the significance of the Holy Spirit in God's work of salvation?
7. How might this change the way we pray for our non-believing friends and family?
8. What does Paul mean in verse 8 by 'these things'?
9. What will it look like to be devoted to good things?

SAVED TO DO GOOD

Read Titus 3:8-15

Titus 3 encourages us to stress 'these things' the gospel and avoid controversies but often we find that we stress controversies and avoid the gospel.

10. How might a conversation with a non-Christian friend about our Prime Minister's declared Christian faith fall into either pattern?
11. If there is division within a church how does Titus 3:10 encourage us to resolve it?
12. Titus 3 encourages us to do good in the context of everyday life.
13. Why do we find quarrels and controversies so attractive?
14. What makes it difficult to avoid quarrels and controversies?
15. What implications do these verses have for Christians who have strong social or political views?
16. What will motivate you be ready and devoted to doing good? How will these verses encourage you if you are met with malice or envy?
17. We are all different. What will a 'productive life' look like for you? (verse 14)

Be ready to do good

Introduction

I was driving to work during the week and saw billboards for this – Kind July. Have you heard of it? I hadn't.

I'd heard of Dry July, which always seems like a good idea.

So I had a look at their website and their tagline says

'Kindness is not just a nice idea, its something you do'

and there are ideas for showing kindness in communities, in workplaces and in schools.

Apparently it's an initiative to help prevent the harm of suicide, bullying and violence among our youth.

Kindness. It's one of those universally accepted good things in life. Surely no one could object to a random act of kindness?

But kindness isn't just a random human thing.

Kindness begins with God 'when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared'. (v 4)

Outline

Well we are at the end of our series on the letter to Titus.

Paul is writing to his true son (1:4) Titus, authorising him to appoint godly elders in the churches in Crete because there is false teaching that is causing lots of problems.

Titus is to encourage the believers to live in fellowship with each other, to practice self-control and to teach each other by their godly example because they have been saved to adorn the gospel.

Now as we come to the last chapter, Paul is reminding us that we have been saved from ourselves, by the work of the Spirit poured out through Jesus,

we need to be ready to do good, for the sake of our fellowship and for the sake of the gospel, the trustworthy message.

So we'll be thinking about three things:

1. Saved from ourselves
2. Saved by Jesus our Saviour
3. Saved to do good

Please keep your Bibles open to Titus 3 because it will help us to anchor ourselves in God's word.

1. Saved from ourselves

I don't know whether some of you have the same problem as me. Because my up close vision is middle aged, I need reading glasses.

But putting on makeup with reading glasses is tricky. So I use a scarily magnified mirror.

Its good because it means I don't end up looking like a panda bear but its bad because you can see every spot and line.

God's word is a bit like that mirror. It perfectly reflects the image in front of it warts and all.

And like my make up mirror, it's good and bad.

It's good because we have no choice but to see ourselves as we really are and its bad because left to our own devices we really are very bad.

We need to be saved from ourselves.

Look with me at verse 3.

At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures.

Our relationship with God couldn't be worse because this behaviour completely dishonours God.

And our relationships with each other couldn't be worse either. Because this behaviour directly affects other people.

We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another

We're foolish - something the Bible warns against, especially in Proverbs and Psalms.

Proverbs 1:7 says

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,
but fools despise wisdom and instruction

In Psalm 14:1 'The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God'.

The fool lives as if God doesn't exist.

Which is like speeding on the Bruce Highway as if the speed cameras don't exist.

When we don't believe God exists, we live however we like, and without meaning to, makes ourselves the gods of our own lives.

Our thinking is foolish and we deceive ourselves

We become enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures that make us feel good.

We make empty promises to change, to straighten ourselves out, to detox, to give up but it only ends up damaging ourselves and others. Enslaved.

It's pretty strong language isn't it?

Are you enslaved by sin, by something that has a hold on your life? That you feel helpless to escape? That's ruining your life?

Repentance is important but it may be that you need practical help as well.

If that's you please speak to Mark, or a connect group leader, someone you trust to get the help you need.

When we're enslaved we're helpless and hopeless.

Unless we get rescued.

Unless we get saved.

2. Saved by Jesus our Saviour

The good news is that verse 3 begins with three small but significant words:

At one time

That was our past. We were dead in our sins (Rom 5:8).

And verse 4 says But when. This is our future. Now we are alive in Christ.

At one time we were enslaved by sin but when.

Its as if Paul is showing us the before and after photos of our personal, spiritual makeover.

Ugly before, beautiful after.

And look at the language in verse 3 and 4:

We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.

But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared

Can you see how God counteracts our malice and hatred with kindness and love?

Paul has used strong language to describe the dangers and problems, remember in Chapter 1, the false teachers are described as detestable, disobedient, unfit for doing anything good.

And in Chapter 2 Paul warns against ungodliness and worldly passions.

God sees us we are in the mirror, the mirror of his own perfection, and there is no way to see anything except sin.

We have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Rom 3:23)

But instead of recoiling in horror or disappointment or anger, we read

'but when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared.'

We're told twice in verse 5 that he saved us

God our Saviour responds with kindness and love and saved us not because of the righteous things we had done.

Because there's nothing we could have done. Nothing that could begin to undo the problem of our sin.

God does not deal in brownie points.

No, he saved us because of his mercy.

Even though he is the judge, he looks on us with kindness and love and chooses not to give us what we actually deserve.

Mercy.

Verse 5 continues

He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit

God our Saviour saved us by choosing to show mercy not judgment.

And he saved us by making us completely new.

This isn't just a budget renovation, where they get rid of most of the dodgy, old stuff and add new stuff to make it look shiny and new.

Which we know never lasts because that part of the old building will start to age or decay or break or leak and it won't look quite so shiny.

This is starting again from scratch. We can't just get a makeover on the outside we need to be made new on the inside.

We need new hearts, new minds, new attitudes to God.

And this can only happen, by the work of the Spirit.

Often we think that when we believe in Jesus we receive the Holy Spirit but we actually need the Holy Spirit in order to believe.

We are washed, reborn and renewed by God's kind, merciful provision of the Holy Spirit and only then can we choose to follow Jesus.

Something is happening when a Christian first hears the gospel, when they first meet Jesus.

When someone hears the gospel, puts their trust in Jesus its because the Spirit has gone ahead to renew and regenerate, to open eyes and ears and hearts so that they can follow Jesus.

Verse 6 continues that the Holy Spirit is poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

And we are justified by his grace.

Without Jesus we stand in the dock, guilty before God.

But because of God's mercy, because of the Holy Spirit poured out through Jesus, we are justified, made right with God as if there had never been a charge at all.

No charge, No record. Case dismissed.

Because the sentence passed on us has been carried out perfectly by Jesus on the cross out of God's kindness and love.

He died in our place so that we might have life.

And the goal of God's kindness and love, his mercy, his grace is that

we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life v 7

New life in a new creation.

Look back to Paul's description of his mission at the beginning of the letter in Titus 1:1-2:

To further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness – in the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time

We're renewed so we have a new spiritual condition.

We're received grace so we are heirs.

We're justified so we have a new legal position.

And all of this means we have hope of eternal life.

And as if Paul is hearing us think 'Sounds too good to be true' or 'that's not what the false teachers are saying'.

He says in verse 8 'This is a trustworthy saying'.

Paul continues to remind us that the message is true, not a lie, just as he did in Titus 1.

If someone surprises you with a random act of kindness, how would you respond? A gift, a meal, some sort of help that you really appreciate.

Would you do nothing? Say nothing? That would be rude, wouldn't it?

No, most of us would be thankful, really thankful.

How does that translate when we think about God's saving kindness?

We need to be excited, thankful, ready to do good.

3. Saved to do good

We're pretty familiar with Paul's language.

The letter to Titus is punctuated with the phrase 'so that'

Remember in Titus 1 'truth leads to godliness'.

Godliness, loving what is good, was to be the key character trait of the elders Titus chose

'so that' he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

In Titus 2, teaching what is good according to sound doctrine, was to grow faithful behaviour within Christian communities

'so that' in every way they will make the teaching about God our Saviour would be attractive.

And here in Titus 3:8, we have another encouragement, another 'so that'

This is a trustworthy saying. And I want to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone'.

These things, the amazing truth about God's kindness and love in the face of our malice and hate,

His mercy, his regeneration by the Spirit, the coming of Jesus, the gift of grace, justification, our adoption as heirs and the hope of eternal life,

The gospel. The Father's mercy, the Son's death in our place and the Spirit's presence in us.

These are the things to stress, these things are excellent and profitable for everyone

Because believers need to be encouraged and built up in their faith

And non-believers need to hear the gospel and to have us praying for the work of the Spirit to open their eyes and ears.

We can't really stress the gospel enough.

What would others would say are your priorities? What are the things you stress? What came up in your conversations this week? The tennis? The cricket? I'm not mentioning rugby league. Your family? Travel plans? Health issues?

Whatever is most important to you probably gets most oxygen.

When you meet new people socially, what clues would give you away as a Christian?

Its not always comfortable. I taught Christian Studies at a local Christian grammar school for 15 years and the question 'what do you do' was almost always a conversation stopper.

How might you stress the gospel more in your everyday life?

The encouragement to 'doing good' bookends chapter 3.

Look back at verse 1:

Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle towards everyone.

And it comes again at the end in verse 14

Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order to provide for urgent needs and not live unproductive lives

Paul's reminder to be subject to authorities was probably very challenging in Crete.

Polybius wrote:

'Now, with few exceptions, you could find no habits prevailing in private life more steeped in treachery than those in Crete, and no public policy more inequitable'

And yet we have a responsibility to be subject to our God given rulers because our obedience, and willingness to do whatever is good, to serve our communities, is part of the way we can adorn the gospel.

We're called to slander no one. Imagine the school gate, the office staff room, the change rooms at the club, even the quiet corners of our church halls, without gossip or complaints?

We're to be peaceable. Can you be ok when you're misunderstood or wronged? When you don't get the last word? We're not to trade peace for being right.

We're to be considerate, thinking of others before ourselves. Putting on humility.

And we're to be gentle. This is hard when the world is often hostile. Its countercultural when the world says we should to assert ourselves and not be pushed out of the way but this won't adorn the gospel.

We're to stress the goodness of God by doing whatever is good for others.

We haven't received grace so that we can continue sinning (Rom 7)

And on the flipside, Paul reminds us that the opposite of stress is to avoid.
Look at verse 9

But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them. You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are self condemned.

This warning seems to address the situation where there is disagreement about some point of theology and the way we do church.

And there is no shortage of topics that could keep people busy arguing.

Some things are salvation issues like whether Jesus was the Son of God, some things are just controversies, like whether a Gentile needed to be circumcised.

Paul seems to be saying that if its just a controversy and its causing a division, not only is it not doing anyone any good but its probably damaging the gospel so the person needs to be sorted out.

Not only should we avoid the controversy, we should avoid controversial people.

So what are the things that pull us into controversies? Do you feel yourself getting irritated when you don't get your way? Is there a particular person that seems to tempt you to quarrel?

And what can you do to prevent things turning from sensible, respectful conversations into nasty, hurtful and ultimately useless quarrels.

Titus 3 shows us our personal before and after image. We want to go forwards by the Spirit to become more like Jesus, not slip backwards to sin and legalism.

As we come to end of the letter to Titus, I wonder what has resonated most with you?

Is it the truth of the gospel that must be protected at all costs?

The importance of appointing elders who love what is good?

The value of the Christian community in which we teach and model the gospel of grace?

So that we earthly lives now with a heavenly perspective, making the gospel attractive to outsiders?

Or have you been challenged by that magnifying mirror that shows all our flaws which can only be made clean and pure by the kindness of God our Saviour?

The kindness which was made possible by the purifying work of the Spirit, poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

And are you ready to do what is good, wherever God has placed you?

Because God is kind.

Not just kind in July but kind forever and ever.

Let's pray