

Living For the Good of People

Titus 3:8-15

Listen and see if any of these names sound familiar to you.

Harmon Morse, Robert Lincoln McNeil Jr., Alexander Fleming, Fredrick Banting, Charles Best, John MacLeod, and James Collip.

Harmon Morse was the first chemist to synthesize something called acetaminophen in 1878 and that is what Robert McNeil would later use to develop his fever and pain relief medication called Tylenol.

Alexander Fleming was a professor of bacteriology at St. Mary's hospital in London England.

After returning from a holiday on September 3, 1928 as he was sorting through a number of petri dishes containing bacteria he noticed that one dish had a spot with a blob of mold and that no bacteria was growing in that area.

With the assistance of others his discovery led to the development of penicillin the first genuine antibiotic.

Fredrick Banting was a physician who had a theory about how to treat type one diabetes.

Since he was not a research scientist he went a top professor at the University of Toronto John MacLeod who provided the necessary labs and a researcher named Charles best and together they were able to successfully extract insulin from the pancreas of dogs.

Following that discovery a biochemist named James Collip joined the efforts and was able to refine the drug to the point where it could be used on people and on January 11th 1922 the first patient, a 14 year old boy named Leonard Thompson was treated.

Acetaminophen, penicillin, and insulin completely changed the world extending the lives of millions of people.

According to a couple of statistics websites the average life expectancy in Canada in 1800 was about 40 years, today it stands at around 80 years.

That would not be the case without those three drugs.

Those medications have served the good of people and Banting, Best, and Collins were motivated by that desire.

According to the website www.diabetes.org.uk, in 1923 all three were awarded patents for insulin and each of them sold there patents to the university of Toronto for \$1.

Banting said, "Insulin does not belong to me, it belongs to the world."

That is a noble sentiment. He and his fellow scientists wanted their discovery to be for the good of the people who needed it.

[I don't know what any of the religious beliefs of those scientists were, but I do know that desiring what is good and life giving for people is something every single Christian should want. That is the point of the text we are looking at this morning **Titus 3:8-15**. In these closing verses of this letter Paul encourages Titus with four important lessons about living for the good of others. First, he shows us that to live for the good of others...]

Point #1 – We need confidence in the gospel. (Verse 8)

The person and work of Christ is the firmest foundation upon which we can stand and we can and should have full confidence in it.

Paul reminds Titus of the reliability of the gospel at the beginning of verse 8a (stop “things”).

The phrase “the saying” should immediately get us to ask the question, “What has just been said?”

What has just been said is verses 4-7 which tell us about God's work of salvation.

It tells us how we are saved by God's mercy and not by our own good works, it tells us how the Holy Spirit makes us alive and makes us new for the sake of Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Because Jesus died to make us right with God and for the sake of His glory God the Holy Spirit opens our eyes, ears, hearts, and minds to understand and believe rightly on Jesus' death and resurrection and therefore we are saved from God's wrath and can live in the hope of eternal life.

That is “the saying” that is trustworthy.

It is reliable, it is unchangeably true, and dependable.

The trustworthiness of the gospel leads Paul to give Titus this command. He says, “I want you to insist on these things.”

These things likely includes everything Paul has written in the letter so far about putting into place the things necessary for the churches on Crete to function according to God's design.

Because the gospel is both glorious and true the fruit of the gospel must follow faith in the gospel.

That is why it says here to “insist on these things...(verse 8).

Do you see the domino effect here?

Jesus' death and resurrection is true and all that God promises in Christ can be completely trusted.

Therefore, the effects of believing in Christ need to be held onto with a strong determination.

The reason for telling believers about the necessity of these things is so that they will be devoted to what is good in God's sight which is "excellent and profitable for people."

When God's people trust the word of God enough to obey it, it is good for everyone.

[It is sort of like planting a fruit tree. Let's say a pear tree is planted in the middle of town and a group of people in the town care for it so that it grows healthy and strong. Over the course of time it will start to grow pears and people can come and pick the pears and eat them. That tree will serve the good of everyone who enjoys its fruit.]

The same thing is true in the church.

If we believe the LORD and seek in His grace (that is always important to remember) to do what He says then everyone benefits.

We benefit because God's ways are good. The LORD has designed everything, particularly human beings, with a purpose and the good instructions He gives serve that purpose and so the more we embrace that the more our satisfaction and contentment in life will grow.

More than that our assurance of being in Christ and having the gift of eternal life will grow.

When that happens everyone else benefits because God's ways are life giving and it shows people that the gospel is true and the Holy Spirit is at work.

[Listen, if human beings decide to do whatever they want everyone loses. We see that in the world every day. Worldly things always lead to ruin sooner or later and in the face of that kind of sorrow the church ought to be a lighthouse lighting the path to a better way. Confidence in the gospel (especially when it's hard) is the best possible thing we can do for the good of people. Here is a second lesson. To live for the good of people...]

Point #2 – We need to steer clear of foolishness. (Verses 9-11)

People are most often hurt rather than helped if we make much of things that are of little to no importance and so we should avoid getting wrapped up in such things.

If you are reading from the ESV you will see the word 'foolish' is the third word of the sentence, but in the original language it is the first word in the sentence.

That is likely because Paul intends the word foolish to describe everything he mentions in the first half of verse 9. (**Verse 9a** stop at "law")

The word 'foolish' is very important here because it reminds us of the need to be discerning.

He knows full well that there are times when the Christian has to engage with a controversy, he knows that the bible in a number of places lists genealogies for important reasons, and he knows that understanding and applying God's law rightly is critically important to life.

If someone questions the humanity of Jesus that is a good time to look at some genealogies and show that He descended from David according to God's promise.

If someone argues that physical signs and ceremonies make us right with God instead of faith alone in Christ that is a good time to show from the scriptures that the OT law points us to the cross of Jesus.

There are other things, however, that are of minor importance which are foolish to fight over.

You would be amazed how much arguing happens over such things.

Did you know that in John 21 Peter and some other disciples catch 153 fish in their net?

Did you know if you add the numbers 1-17 together you get 153?

Some argue that represents the 10 commandments being added together with the 7 gifts of the Holy Spirit listed in Isaiah 11:2-3?

Others see the fish as meaning the gospel will go to every tribe tongue and nation.

The real answer is the number 153 most likely means there were 153 fish in the net.

Down through the centuries there have been many such things that people argue over and Paul's point here is that we should avoid such things.

Why? (Verse 9b)

Such things are useless and accomplish nothing good for anyone else.

It may serve to inflate our ego as we think to ourselves that we have some great insight or superior knowledge as compared to others but that is the opposite of what is good for us and it certainly benefits no one else.

Stay away from that and **(Verse 10-11)**.

People who stir up trouble for no good reason ought to be warned and if they refuse to listen Titus is to "have nothing to do with [them]"

By that he likely means don't engage in the argument, don't give the fool a platform where he has the appearance of credibility.

Make his foolishness clear and then be done with him because he is "warped, sinful, and self-condemned".

In other words fools show themselves to be fools.

[Anybody remember the solar eclipse back in April? That brought people like this out of the woodwork. There were maps about the path of the eclipse and the cities it was crossing. The colour of moon the dates and all that was supposedly showing that Jesus was going to be back 40 days after the eclipse. Don't buy into garbage like that! Jesus said no one knows the day or the hour and yet people keep doing stuff like that. Guess what they turned out to be wrong again and proved themselves again to be fools.]

We should steer clear of that stuff.

Listen, there is not a single solitary reason to look for some hidden meaning in the Bible to fight over.

There is more than enough glorious truth in the pages of this book to captivate the most brilliant of minds for all eternity.

If we have no capacity to see that and so we go off looking for things that aren't there we are foolish indeed.

[That kind of stuff is as Paul says here “unprofitable and worthless”. No one benefits from it and so getting wrapped up in it makes it impossible to live for the good of people. If you are spending more time on Youtube listening to people with charts, doing arbitrary math, and telling you about a bunch of so called facts with no credible sources I implore you turn off your computer and open up your Bible and plead with the Holy Spirit to show you the glories and treasures of Christ! That brings us to this third lesson. To live for the good of people we need to have confidence in the gospel, steer clear of foolishness, and thirdly...]

Point #3 – We need to participate in gospel work. (Verses 12-14)

The greatest need every human being has is to hear and believe the good news of Jesus Christ, so the greatest good we can do in this world is to be a part of telling people to repent and believe.

As Paul comes to the end of this letter to his pastoral apprentice he gives instructions regarding some people.

Verse 12 tells us about two men who are being sent to Crete (**verse 12**).

This is the only time the name Artemas appears in the Bible and the only thing that is specifically said about Tychicus is that he accompanied Paul on a journey into Asia and that he is a beloved brother and faithful minister.

It would seem that Paul is sending these two to Crete so that Titus will be freed up to meet Paul.

Paul wants him to come likely either to help with ministry or be helped through further discipleship from the apostle.

While we know little about these men we know enough to know that they were working with one another in gospel ministry.

Because that is what they are doing I think it is pretty cool that Paul wants Titus to meet him in Nicopolis which means “Victory City”.

It was named that because of a military victory of a Roman emperor but the name reminds me that work of the gospel will be victorious because of the One who rules all things.

He goes on to mention two more names in verse 13.

Again we know nothing else of Zenas and all we know of Apollos is that he was a gifted preacher who was well regarded by Paul and many others.

It would seem that they have been ministering on Crete or are about to arrive for a short time of ministry and then be on their way.

Titus is to help them in whatever way he can and to that he adds this in **verse 14**.

The cases of ‘urgent need’ here may refer to people in general who have urgent physical needs and he may also be thinking of gospel ministers who find themselves in need of immediate assistance.

Given the mention in verse 13 of helping Zenas and Apollos so that “they lack nothing” he likely has helping people in ministry in mind here.

That of course does not minimize the importance of helping people in need generally speaking.

It is impossible to read the bible and neglect to include caring for the physical wellbeing of people in the command to be devoted to “good works.”

We are to be kind and generous to as many people as we possibly can, but if we only care about caring physically for people and give no regard to their need of Christ they we have done them no good in a lasting sense.

[That would be like coming across someone out on the ocean who was in a boat with a dead motor and a hole in it and giving them a paddle and leaving them to themselves. Giving them a paddle means they might be able to move the boat but for how long and how far? Not very long at all because the boat is going to sink and the paddle will have done them no lasting good. They need to get off the sinking boat if they are going to be truly helped.]

It is good to help people in need, but we need to keep in mind that their greatest need is Christ.

In order for us to participate in Gospel work the first thing we need to do is know the gospel.

We need to know that people are separated from God and under His judgment because every single person has broken God's laws, we need to know that people can't fix that by doing good works, we need to know that Christ came into the world, lived in perfect obedience to the Father and offered Himself on the cross to pay our debt, we need to know that He rose from the dead and therefore He can save people from the wrath of God forever. We need to know that it is by turning away from rebellion against God and trusting in Jesus by faith alone that we are made right with God.

Gospel work is a message that is delivered to people. Yes doing good things for people goes with that but without that you don't have gospel ministry.

[We can all participate in that in one way or another. Not everyone is a gifted evangelist, teacher, preacher, or full time missionary. The bible says we all have different gifts and abilities and so we can all be using whatever gift we may have for the same goal. We can all do something to participate in good gospel ministries. Paul and his co-workers had countless people working behind the scenes many of whom we have never heard of. We may not be at the front line but we can all do something. That brings us to the last verse of Titus and the fourth lesson of our text this morning. In order to live for the good of people...]

Point #4 – We need to cultivate affection for God's people. (Verse 15)

Jesus said that people will know we belong to Him because of our love for each other and so by caring for one another in deep and abiding ways we are living out the truth of the gospel which people need to see.

Listen to the last thing Paul writes to Titus in verse 15.

Everyone with Paul, no exceptions, wants to send Titus their greetings.

Why? Just because that is the thing to do at the end of a letter?

I doubt it! It is far more likely they want to send their well wishes because they genuinely care about him and want him to know it.

It is bigger than just Titus, the apostle and his co-workers want to send their greetings to all who "love [them] in the faith."

That is another way of saying greet all the genuine believers in the churches of Crete.

He wants them to know that this tender hearted affection is a two way street.

He and his fellow gospel ministers love them as well.

We can have a lot of things right but if we don't have that then we don't have much of anything.

Most of us have probably heard the description of love from 1 Corinthians 13 read at a wedding, but the first part often gets overlooked. (**1 Corinthians 13:1-7**)

You know what that is hard!

It is a challenge to live that out with people who are challenging and most of you know that the church has challenging people in it.

That is why our affection for one another has to be cultivated.

If we don't, if we act towards one another the same way that unbelievers act towards one another what will the world see?

The world we see nothing different and that will do them no good.

The peculiar thing about the church is NOT that it is filled with perfect people who treat each other perfectly all the time.

If you are looking for that you are not going to find it anywhere on the earth.

The peculiar thing about the church is that we are striving to help each other be more like Christ and that we love each other despite our shortcomings, that we are willing to forgive, we are willing to admit that we are wrong, that we are willing to serve one another, and sacrifice for one another.

People need to see that, because that only happens because of the work of the Holy Spirit as He dwells within those that belong to Christ.

Because that is true it makes sense that this letter ends the way it does.

“Grace be with you all.”

Our only hope in living for the good of people. Our only hope for being confident in the gospel, for steering clear of foolishness, for participating in gospel work, and for cultivating an affection for God's people is the grace of God at work in us.

May God indeed be gracious to us and grant that these things would be true of us so that people might see and know that Jesus saves.