

Church Matters - Studies in Paul's letter to Titus

A Good Life that Glorifies God!

Titus 3:1-8

November 20th 2022

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Short Term pain, but Long Term gain

"We're contacting you again as our records show that you're eligible for a further COVID-19 vaccination this autumn....." Some people have been reluctant to take up their Covid boosters because friends who received the jab have become ill for days, or even weeks! They know it will give them *long term protection*, but they fear the *short-term pain*. We may think of Paul's hard-hitting letter to Titus as a long-term health jab for the local church! Perhaps difficult in the short term, but, by God's grace, giving spiritual strength and protection in the long term.

Chapter 3, verses 1-8, happily divide into two; the middle section verses 3-7, which we'll consider another Sunday, God-willing, reminds us of the grace of God which has transformed our old lives. The start and end of the section, verses 1-2 and verse 8 are entirely practical, and concern how a Christian is to live out their daily lives in the world. Those who claim to follow Jesus must glorify God by living good lives. That's the basic instruction of this morning's sermon. The people who lived on the island of Crete, including the Christians before they were converted, did not live good lives: "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons." (verse 12) "They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good." (16). And while there seems to have been a particularly wicked streak to the people who lived on this island, the Scriptures teach that before you and I came to Christ, our lives were unpleasing to God, no matter how good we may have thought they were. "There is no-one righteous, not even one." is God's verdict on the whole world, Romans 3:10, "there is no-one who does good (good as God defines it), not even one." (verse 12)

But now that we have been saved by the mercy of God, the whole of our lives are changing and must change. And the one word Paul wants to impress upon us this morning is the word "Good." Followers of Jesus are called to live "Good lives." If you remember just one word from this morning's talk, let it be the word "good." God calls you and I to glorify him by living a good life. Paul writes it four times!

Jesus, “gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.” (2:14)

“be ready to do whatever is good.” (3:1)

“I want you to stress these things so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good.” (3:8)

And in case we've missing the point, again, 3:14:

“Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives.” (3:14)

Brothers and sisters, would someone looking on to your life and mine, say of us, “his life, her life is a good life, filled with good attitudes, good words, good deeds?” Let's think through what this good life looks like under three heads:

1. A good use of our leisure time
2. A good attitude to those in authority
3. A good treatment of all people

We must say, right at the outset, that you and I have to work out these things for ourselves. There is no one pattern fits all, our lives and circumstances are all different. Wherever you go in the world, today, look out for the Jehovah's Witnesses in the town centres! You will find that they all use exactly the same trolleys, with exactly the same literature on them, and they all wear smart clothes. The mark of all false religion is uniformity, where behaviour is decided by some committee at the top and passed down the line: everyone goose-stepping to the same drumbeat. True Christianity isn't like that. The guideline we are given this morning is to live a “GOOD” life, and each one of us are called to work out what that means in our own circumstances, single or married, young or old, male or female. And we shall find that *her* good life, looks very different from *his* good life. Both good, but in many respects, different. There is wonderful and glorious freedom in the Gospel. Let's remember that as we proceed.

1. A Good Use of Leisure Time

A good life, must begin with a good use of our time, 3:14 calls us to use our time productively, usefully, profitably. Most of our time is constrained by the necessities of

life, such as sleep and work. And we want to do good in this 75% of our lives. Bringing up children is good, employment is good, cooking and cleaning is good. Mowing the lawns is good. Doing the weekly shop, so on.

It's the free time, the leisure time, where we are free to make our own decisions, where we need to think more carefully about doing "good" in our day and age. And especially in a world that is given over to the relentless and hedonistic pursuit of pleasure. The Office of National Statistics, a government body, has produced a leisure survey which provides a rough guide to how people use their leisure time.

Out there in the UK most people spend just under 6 hours per day on leisure activities, let's just call it 6. This is an average, spread out over the whole week, and over a year. Men spend half an hour per day on average more than women on leisure activities. Leisure includes consuming media, sport, hobbies, and so on, and now occupies around a quarter or 24% time. I would suggest, brothers and sisters, that we need to seriously question the legitimacy of spending 6 hours a day, 42 hours a week, on personal leisure! That's how the world spends it's time but is it how we should?

We all need to rest, we all need down time, but is the expenditure of an average of 6 hours a day on personal pleasure a "Good" use of our time? I would suggest not. This is how the world spends it's time, and Paul predicted this in 2 Timothy 3:4, that in the last days men and women will be "lovers of pleasure." I am going to suggest to you that a portion of our free time, our leisure time—should be spent in doing good works. We all need to work these things out for ourselves, according to our strength and the circumstances of our lives, which change over the years. I remember when our first son was born saying to Yvonne, "What on earth did we use to do with our free time, our evenings, our Saturdays before we had kids?!" Our lives were suddenly consumed with just one little baby! But circumstances change. 30 years down the line, Yvonne and I are in a very different place with no children dependant upon us anymore.

All our circumstances are different: how much free leisure time we have will differ from person to person, but what I am suggesting is that some of that time should be spent on doing good works. You say, "I get that, but help me out, what can I do? Be practical?" Ok, so let me throw out some ideas, you run with them, or come up with your own.

(1) *Decide how much time you can give each week?* One evening a week? Two evenings? A certain number of hours? I know when I was single, I could easily give up three or four evenings a week. You work it out for yourself.

(2) *Look out for opportunities to do good.* Those could be in the church—we are all called to use our God-given gifts to serve one another in the church (Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12). We might help with finance, with children's or youth work, visit someone who is lonely, serve coffee, the needs are endless. There are vast opportunities to do good works in the church. If you don't know what you could do, just ask! But good works go beyond the boundaries of the church! We can spend time serving our neighbours, in good voluntary associations of all kinds! *"Let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and glorify your father in heaven."* (Matt 5:16)

(3) *Copy Christian examples around you.* Give me some Christian examples, you ask. Tabitha, Acts 9 had a reputation as someone who "was always doing good and helping the poor" (verse 36). When another disciple, Dorcas died, "All the widows stood around crying and showing Peter the clothes Dorcas had made" (9:39) Before any widow was allowed to receive social security from the church, Paul says in 1 Timothy 5, she had to have a reputation for "good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the saints, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds." (10)

I've mentioned believing women in the Bible, what about the example of Jesus for the men? We find him resting, yes, but there is not even a single record of him using his time in personal leisure: *"Jesus did many other things as well (is how John ends his Gospel). If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written."* And what was he doing: *"Jesus of Nazareth went around doing good"* (Acts 10:38)

How different is Jesus from the lives of so many men today whose lives are given over to the relentless pursuit of pleasure. *"British men"* says one newspaper, *"spend a staggering 20,472 hours of sport in a lifetime from the comfort of their own sofa."* (Express 2017) [That's over two years of their lives!]. One day brothers, we will give an account of how we spent the days of this short life.

A Christian life is a life filled with good works! In our homes, at work, in our churches, in our neighbourhoods, in our families and in the wider world. Prayerfully work it out!

2. A Good attitude towards those in authority

In the second place, a good life that glorifies God adopts a good attitude towards those in authority, *“Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good.”* (verse 1). Followers of Jesus are called to pay all their taxes, even though they may have gone up this week, we are called to obey all the civil laws of the land and to obey the courts, to follow the highway code and to respect all those in authority.

Christians are law-abiding citizens, aren't they? Paul wrote to the Christians living in Rome, under the tyranny of the likes of Nero, *“Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves... Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honour, then honour.”* Romans 13.

A life that glorifies God is a life filled with good works; possesses a good attitude to the rulers in authority, and finally, a good life that glorifies God is a life that treats all people well.

3. A good treatment of all people

“Slander no-one, be peaceable and considerate and show true humility towards all men.” How does a Christian treat outsiders, those who have not yet come to faith? He's nice to them, good to them.

“He slanders no-one” Do you know what slander is? The deliberate spreading of lies or gossip designed to damage the reputation of another person. The internet is so full of it that legal firms have departments dedicated to people who feel they have been libelled. 1. Stay calm, but act quickly to preserve relevant evidence. 2. Avoid the temptation to respond directly. 3. Print all relevant webpages. 4. Contact us to book a consultation soon as possible.

He is peaceable (literally not a brawler) and considerate (that could be translated gentle)” When a misunderstanding or injustice on the road arises, a Christian just lets it go, right? Why? *“When they hurled their insults at him he did not retaliate; when he suffered he made no threats.” (1 Peter 2:23)*

“He shows true humility towards all men” or as the ESV puts it, *“show perfect courtesy toward all people.”*

A piece on local radio this week reported that shop customers are becoming ruder and nastier to retail employees. Kate who has worked in retail for over 30 years, says, “It’s become the norm for customers to shout and abuse at a shop worker if they can’t provide what they’ve specifically come in for.” Perhaps then, one of the distinguishing marks of a Christian shopper in 2022, is the kindness they show to retail staff.

Conclusion and response

Pastor, that is a lot of practical teaching in one sermon! Ask the Lord how he wants you to respond. The Lord calls us to glorify him by living a good life, (1) filled with good deeds, (2) marked by a respectable attitude towards those in authority and (3) characterised by the good treatment of all people. May the Lord help us to respond, just perhaps in one or two ways, in his power, and for his glory.

And if you are not yet a believer, then the work God wants of you, is not good works, but listen to Jesus: *“The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.” John 6:29.*