

## **"Do Good"** **Titus 3:1-8**

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### **Introduction:**

This morning I would invite you to turn with me to a rather short letter that was written by the apostle Paul to a preacher who had basically been dropped off on an island with a horrible reputation. I am referring, of course, to Paul's letter to Titus, who had been left on the island of Crete. **\*\*PPT\*\*** We are looking at a picture that was taken (I believe) on the north shore of the island of Crete—a very beautiful island, located in the Mediterranean Sea, just south of the nation of Greece. But although the island is beautiful, the people were not. The residents of Crete were so evil, in fact, that their reputation had spread all throughout the Mediterranean world. In **Titus 1:12**, Paul quotes one of their own poets, a man we now know by the name of Epimenides. Epimenides once said, **"Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons."** Very interesting! The residents of Crete knew about their own reputation in the ancient world. Even in plays over in Greece, we have examples of the bad guy, the lazy, gluttonous, liar—wearing the title of Cretan—the immoral man was always depicted as being from the island of Crete. That is the kind of culture we are talking about this morning.

And yet we know from **Acts 2:11** that there were at least several people from Crete who were represented on the day of Pentecost. We assume, therefore, that those Jews from Crete who were baptized on the first day of the church eventually returned home and established a congregation of God's people on the island—a little outpost of righteousness behind enemy lines. A number of years later, as Paul travels around the Mediterranean world, he eventually converts a man by the name of Titus and leaves him on Crete (according to **Titus 1:5**), to, **"...set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city."** The book of **Titus** is probably most famous for the list of qualifications for elders. But in the rest of the book, the apostle Paul puts a huge emphasis on doing what is good **\*\*PPT\*\*** as he encourages the Christians on the island of Crete to be good Christian examples in a very dark world.

We might notice, for example, what Paul says in **Titus 2:7-8**, Paul addresses the young men, and he says, **"...in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, sound in speech which is above reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us."** We know from experience that as soon as people find out we are Christians, many times they watch our behavior, and they are looking for an excuse to discredit the Christian faith. How sad it is to see someone who wears the name Christian using profanity. How sad it is to see someone who wears the name Christian losing his temper with an outburst of anger. How sad it is to see someone

with a Christian bumper sticker weaving in and out of traffic and driving recklessly—an embarrassment to the Christian faith. And so Paul, then, reminds the church on Crete about the importance of being good.

We might also notice what Paul says in **Titus 3:1-2**. He says, ***“Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men.”*** And so in contrast to the rebellious and lazy society in which they lived, the Christians in Crete were to be good citizens—they were to obey the authorities, and they were to get involved in good works to help the community. As one commentary put it, they were to basically “love the neighborhood.” They were not to sit around and whine about how immoral people were on the island of Crete, but they were to be light and salt, just as Jesus told all of us to be in the Sermon on the Mount. And the same thing is also true here in Madison: Our personal lives may be the only Bible that our coworkers and neighbors ever read. Our example is so important.

We might notice in **Titus 3:1** that the instruction to be good comes in the form of a reminder. In other words, this is something that the Christians on Crete already knew (the congregation had already been in existence for as long as possibly 30 years), but like all of us, they apparently needed a reminder. This morning, then, as we remind each other about the importance of doing what is good in the midst of an evil society, I would like for us to consider the reasoning that Paul gives to us in **Titus 3:3-8**. Why should we be good? Paul says (starting in **verse 3**)...

***“For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men.”***

Looking back at these six verses, **\*\*PPT\*\*** I would suggest that there are several reasons for being good while living in an evil society, and all three reasons can be stated in the form of a reminder.

**I. First of all (according to verse 3), we are to remember WHO WE WERE.**  
**\*\*PPT\*\***

And so before we keep ourselves aloof and look down our noses at the world around us, Paul tells us we need to remember where we came from. We need to remember

our own weaknesses. We need to remember some of the sins of our past. Perhaps you have heard about the little girl who asked her mother about some of her mother's grey hairs. The mother said, **"Well, every time you do something wrong and make me cry or make me unhappy, one of my hairs turns grey."** The girl thought about it for a little while and then said, **"So why is ALL of grandma's hair white?"** And so, perhaps like all of us, that mother needed a reminder of what she had done in the past!

As Christians, we have been rescued from disaster, we have been snatched from the rooftop of a flooded house; we have been dug out of the rubble. Spiritually speaking, we have been dragged out of a burning building. And so as we look at the world around us we are painfully aware that those left behind still need to be rescued themselves. Paul is telling us that in order to properly respond to an evil society, then, we need to remember our own previous condition.

At the beginning of **verse 3**, Paul says, **"For we also once were foolish ourselves."** I find it interesting that Paul includes himself in all of this. He says that **"...we also once were foolish."** A foolish person is someone who is ignorant. As Paul warned earlier in **Ephesians 4:18**, that those who are lost have been, **"...darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart."** We remember the parable that Jesus told about the wise man who built his house upon the rock and the foolish man who built his house upon the sand. When the wind and rains came, the foolish man's house fell apart. The foolish man illustrates someone who rejects the word of Christ. There was a time in his life when even Paul had rejected the word of Christ.

Paul also refers (in **verse 3**) to being **"disobedient."** In some way, probably all of us have been at least a little rebellious—perhaps against parents, or teachers, or government, or some other authority in our lives. Literally, the word refers to being unpersuaded—someone who hears the argument, someone who hears the evidence but stubbornly refuses to accept it.

In **verse 3**, Paul also refers to being **"deceived."** As I understand it, this word describes "wandering," and it is the basis for our English word "planet." We remember from school that people in the ancient world could easily see the pattern of movement in the stars, but the planets took a little longer to figure out—in their view, the planets seemed to "wander," their movements didn't make sense at first, and so they were given the name of "wanderers." This is the word that Paul uses here. In **1 Peter 2:25**, the Bible describes us as being like sheep who have gone astray. In **Jeremiah 17:9**, the prophet warned that, **"The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?"**

In **verse 3**, Paul also says that we were at one time, **"...enslaved to various lusts and pleasures."** Jesus taught in **John 8:34** that, **"...everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin."** We see this all the time, where careless flirting gets out of control, and it gets to the point where a marriage is destroyed. We see it with

various addictions—alcohol or pornography—one thing leads to another and we are quickly enslaved.

Paul also refers to spending our lives, **"...in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another."** Perhaps most of us have had bad thoughts about other people—even wishing that something bad would happen to them. Envy is the sin of resenting someone because of something they have that we want.

But the key to all of these sins (at the beginning of **verse 3**) is that we were **"once"** this way. In other words, we are no longer bogged down in sin, but we definitely remember what it is like. So, first of all, if we are going to live as Christians in a sinful society, if we are going to have an impact on an evil world, we need to remember who we were.

## II. But secondly, we also need to remember that **GOD SAVED US** (we see this in **verses 4-7**). **\*\*PPT\*\***

Not only do we need to remember where we came from, but we need to remember who got us out of the mess we were in! Sometimes we sing the song, **"On Christ the solid rock I stand—all other ground is sinking sand."** Paul reminds Titus of the rock on which he now stands. And the passage now shifts—in **verse 3**, we were the ones doing the action. But in **verses 4-7**, we find that God takes the initiative. God gets the ball rolling. Starting in **verse 4**, we have a list of qualities.

We notice, first of all (in **verse 4**), that God is kind—**"...when the kindness of God...appeared."** In **Luke 6:35**, Jesus said, **"But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men."** God is kind, even when we do not deserve it. As I understand it, the Anglo-Saxon name for "God" comes from the word "good." God is good, and God is kind.

In one Dennis the Menace cartoon, Dennis and his friend Joey are shown walking away from the Wilson's house with their hands full of cookies. Joey says to Dennis, **"I wonder what we did to deserve this."** And Dennis answers by saying, **"Look Joey, Mrs. Wilson gives us cookies not because we are nice, but because she is nice."** In a similar way, God is nice. God is kind, and God gets the process started.

We also read in **verse 4** about the **"love"** of God. We read about God's love appearing. The word for **"love"** here goes back to the same Greek word from which we get the English word "philanthropist." God is a philanthropist towards us. God loves to do things for us, just as a wealthy citizen may love doing things for the community. God's love **"appeared"** through Jesus Christ. As we read in **Romans 5:8**, **"...God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."** The love of God has appeared through Jesus Christ.

Down in **verse 5**, we also read about the "**mercy**" of God. We have been saved according to God's mercy. God does not look forward to catching people in sin. God is not eager to punish. But instead, God is eager to save. God is eager to forgive. God is for us, not against us. God wants us to succeed. God is merciful.

Paul points out in **verse 5** that our salvation is not based on the fact that we have earned it. Several years ago I went to hear a lecture by an Islamic imam, and this Islamic leader explained salvation under the Islamic faith. He explained that God keeps a list, and a person is saved when the good deeds outweigh the bad deeds. But thankfully that is not the way it is under the Christian faith. Under the Christian faith, God is merciful. God is not like the team captain on a playground who goes out and picks the strongest players while all of the weak players are left behind. God is merciful!

In **verse 5**, we also find that God has saved us, "**...by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.**" I personally do not see how someone could read **verse 5** without thinking of baptism. In other passages (such as **Ephesians 5:26**), baptism is referred to as a "**washing.**" At the point of baptism we are also regenerated. We have been given a new beginning, a new birth—where does that sound familiar (**John 3**)? At the point of baptism we are renewed. We are born again. But we are reminded here that God is the one who does the work. God is the one who does the forgiving. We remember **Colossians 2:12-13**, where Paul referred to, "**...having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions.**" Through baptism, as Paul says, we put our faith in the "**working of God.**" At the point of baptism, God made us "**alive together**" with the Lord. At the point of baptism, God "**forgives us all our transgressions.**"

In other words, baptism is not one of those self-righteous deeds that we do thinking we can earn our way to heaven, but baptism (just like belief) is a work that God does. We submit to it, we allow ourselves to be buried in water, but God is the one who does the work. God does the forgiving.

And finally, Paul says (in **verse 7**) that we have been saved by "**grace.**" Sometimes we define grace with an acronym, "**God's Riches at Christ's Expense.**" The word "**grace**" refers to a gift. Grace means that no one is too bad to be saved. God loves to save really bad people. If you have something in your past that you would be ashamed for anyone to know about, God already knows about it, and God is willing to forgive. God's grace is greater than any sin.

And so the main point here is that we need to remember not only where we came from (in all humility), but when it comes to doing good in an evil society we also need to remember who saved us. God is kind, God is loving, God is merciful—He has saved us through baptism, not as something we have earned, not as something we deserve, but as a gift of grace. We are to remember who saved us.

### III. As we come near the end of this passage, we also need to remember the **RESULTS (OR THE BLESSING) OF OUR SALVATION (verse 7)**.

**\*\*PPT\*\***

And again, by remembering what we have been given, hopefully we can get motivated to keep on living a good life in an evil world. Salvation is an amazing blessing, but sometimes we might fail to appreciate it. I am reminded of a young couple who had a rather embarrassing experience on their honeymoon. They got to the fancy hotel in the early hours of the morning, and when they got to the room they saw a couch, and some chairs, and a table, but no bed. They discovered that the couch was actually a hide-a-bed, so they pulled it out and spent a terrible first night in a very uncomfortable situation. First thing the next morning, the groom got up and went down to the front desk to complain, at which point the clerk said, **"Did you open the door in the room?"** The young man went back upstairs and opened the door he thought was a closet, but on the other side was a huge bedroom full of fruit baskets and chocolates. They had spent the night in the lobby of the suite. They had missed a huge blessing. And in a similar way, sometimes today we need a reminder of our blessings.

And so we notice in **verse 7** that we have been **"justified."** We studied this word several months ago, and we learned a good way to remember what it means. When we have been **"justified,"** God looks at us—**Just As If I'd** never sinned. We have been **"justified."** Paul explains it in **Romans 3:24**, where Paul refers to **"...being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus."** In other words, when we are saved, our sins are covered by the grace of God—through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross—just as if we had never sinned.

Paul also points out (in **verse 7**) that we have been made **"heirs."** In other words, we will receive an inheritance. As a result of being born into the family of God, we will receive the blessings that go along with being the children of God.

And finally, Paul also points out (in **verse 7**) that we have received the **"hope of eternal life."** We remember the promise that Jesus made in **John 10:28**, **"...I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand."**

### **Conclusion & Invitation:**

As we close this morning, we get back down to **verse 8**, where Paul says once again that we are to **"engage in good deeds."** In a society like Crete (or even like Madison), when Christians go against the grain and do good deeds, and respect authority, and live at peace—I think Paul would agree that everybody wins. As Christians, we go to heaven. But society also benefits by seeing a good example. Unbelievers can see the power of the gospel.

By way of motivation to keep on living the Christian life, Paul tells us to...

- Remember who we were.
- Remember who saved us.
- Remember the blessings (the results) of salvation.

Our conclusion this morning is the passage that brother Gary read for us earlier—from **Philippians 2:14-15**, where the apostle Paul told us to, ***"Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world."***

The question for all of us is: Which side are we on? There is quite a contrast in the verses we've been looking at this morning:

- Are we foolish, or are we saved by God's kindness?
- Are we disobedient, or are we saved by God's love?
- Are we deceived, or are we saved by God's mercy?
- Are we enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, or are we saved by the washing of regeneration?
- Are we spending our lives in malice and envy, or are we saved by the renewing of the Holy Spirit?
- Are we hateful, or are we saved by the grace of God?

If you have not yet accepted God's free gift of salvation, the offer is open for as long as you live or until the Lord returns, whichever comes first. In response to God's love, the Bible tells us to turn away from sin. The Bible then tells us to allow ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins. This is not something we earn. This is not something we deserve. But this is something that God has told us to do. If you have any questions, we would love to study with you. But if you are ready to obey the good news right now, you can let us know as we sing the next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: [church@fourlakescoc.org](mailto:church@fourlakescoc.org)