

Teaching the Truth that Leads to Godliness

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[0 : 00] Well, let's take up our Bibles, shall we? And we're going to have our Bible reading. Paul Brennan is beginning a series this evening in the letter of Paul to Titus.

So we're going to read in Titus chapter 1. I think if you have one of the big blue church visitors Bibles, that's page 998. I think that's right. And we're going to read Titus chapter 1 and the first nine verses.

So the letter of Paul to Titus at verse 1. Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior.

to Titus, my true child in a common faith, grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior. This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order and appoint elders in every town as I directed you.

If anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.

[1 : 50] For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.

He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

Amen. May God bless to us this, his word. Amen. Please do have Titus, chapter 1, open in front of you as we look at this together.

That's page 998. I wonder what place good works have in your Christian life.

What place do good works have in your life? An optional extra? Or something for the spiritual elite? You know, those superstar Christians somewhere over there.

[3 : 08] In this very short letter, Paul goes on and on and on about good works. Why does he do that? He seems to think it's rather important.

You can't miss it once you notice it. It's jammed packed, full of stuff about good works. Just take a look with me. Chapter 1, verse 16.

He's speaking about false teachers there on Crete. They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.

Look on to the next verse. But as for you, Titus, teach what accords with sound doctrine. Verse 7. Show yourself, Titus, in all respects to be a model of good works.

Verse 10. Showing all good faith so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior. Verse 12.

[4 : 13] Training us to renounce on godliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age. Verse 14.

Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself of people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. Chapter 3, verse 1.

Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work. Verse 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.

Verse 14. And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works. Jammed packed. Full of exhortations to good works.

Good and godly living. That is what Paul expected to see there on Crete. In the Christians there, in the church there on Crete, good works.

[5 : 22] But why? Why this insistence on good works? Well, good works are crucial. They are fundamental to the witness and mission of the ordinary church for regular Christians.

Just notice that phrase in chapter 2. I'll read from verse 9. He's going through all sorts of examples of different groups in the Christian church. And verse 9.

He gets to slaves. They are to be submissive to their own masters and everything. They are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith.

So that, here comes the reason for all that good living. So that, in everything, they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior. The purpose of the good works, they are there to adorn the gospel, to make it beautiful.

Now, this is not to say that mission is reduced to being good. Not at all. We're hearing about that this morning. I'm not saying that, and neither is the Apostle Paul.

[6 : 35] He's not saying that all you need to do is cut your neighbor's grass and you completed your part in the mission of the church. No, at the heart of mission is the proclamation of the gospel.

The good news about what Jesus Christ has done, his finished work. But how you live, how each one of us lives, your godliness or lack of it will either adorn the gospel, make it beautiful, or it won't. Paul's point in that section in chapter 2 is that all segments of the Christian community that he lists there are to live praiseworthy lives.

Not simply for the sake of obeying God, but also because their behavior will commend or detract from the gospel.

Paul expected to see there on Crete a people who lived out the implications of what they said. A church who not only proclaimed the truth about Jesus, but lived lives that were worthy of him.

[7 : 45] Good works. Good living. Adorning the gospel. Making it beautiful. Now if we'd been there, if we'd been on Crete when Paul's letter came in, we would have scoffed at the idea of a church on Crete doing good works.

No way. You must be joking, Paul. Not on Crete. It was not a promising place to plant the gospel. Crete was a disaster zone. Just look how it's described in chapter 1, verse 12.

One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, Cretans are always liars. Evil beasts. Lazy gluttons. He's not talking about the English.

He's talking about the Cretans. And in fact, he wasn't alone in this assessment. Another writer from the time said this, Crete had no wild beasts, for its own inhabitants were sufficient.

It was not the sort of place that you expected to see growth in godliness. It seemed beyond help. No chance. Not on Crete.

[9 : 02] A place like that could never be transformed by the gospel. Perhaps that's how you feel about Glasgow. About your neighbourhoods.

Maybe amidst all the excitement about Tron at Kelvin Grove. You don't really think that it's possible that new converts, new life, transformation is possible.

Deep down, we don't really believe that God can transform people. I sometimes think that way.

We doubt the power of the gospel. We begin to ask questions like this. What sort of church is really going to win people to Christ?

What sort of church is going to keep me going in the Christian life in the long run? A decade? Two decades? Three decades? Four decades down the line? Four decades down the line?

[10 : 32] That sort of superficiality is Paul's warning in this letter. The sort of Christianity that wins people to Christ. The sort of Christianity that keeps people there is in some ways very ordinary and unspectacular.

The sort of Christianity that wins people to Christ is full-blooded Christianity lived out in the presence. What was going to transform Crete then?

Glasgow now was not strategy X or Y. But the word of God taught, pressed home, and lived out in the lives of ordinary Christians in the day-to-day.

Folk like you and me who live lives that are shaped by the gospel. Who do ordinary sorts of good works in the day-to-day with the people that we see day-to-day.

The sort of transformed lives that Paul expected to see there on Crete would only come about by one thing. Transformed lives here in Glasgow.

[11 : 40] Through the Robry's work in Nigeria in Bible translation. Through the translation of sermons downstairs into Farsi. Through the work of DBI in North India.

Transformed lives. Lives that are transformed so that they adorn the gospel. Lives full of good works. They will only come about by one thing. And it's the truth.

It's God's truth. His words. Gospel truth. In order to transform lives must be proclaimed.

Proclamation is to come through men. Whose lives already demonstrate the power of the gospel they proclaim. That is Paul's model for Crete. It's Paul's model for us.

So then two key, simple, straightforward points this evening. Firstly, the truth transforms.

[12 : 41] Therefore, what is taught really matters. Verses 1 to 4. And secondly, because what is taught really matters. Who your teachers are really matters.

Verses 5 to 9. So firstly, the truth transforms. Therefore, what is taught really matters. Paul states his big point right there at the start in verse 1.

His purpose for writing. His ministry plan for the Cretan church. His reason for writing. And it's this. Paul, for the sake of the faith of God's elect. And their knowledge of the truth.

Which accords with or leads to godliness. That was the fruit that Paul expected to see there on Crete. And it's astonishing, isn't it?

When we remember the sort of place that Crete was. The fruit he expected to see was the godliness of God's elect. What is it that will lead to godliness?

[13 : 39] Well, it's the truth. Second half of verse 1. Let me read it from the NIV. Knowledge of the truth. Which leads to godliness. The truth of the gospel.

The news about Jesus and all that he did on the cross. His resurrection. His ascension. All that. That has the power. To transform and change any life.

The gospel transforms. It leads to godliness. Now, do you really believe that? Do you really think that truth will lead to godly living?

The sort of life that will adorn the gospel. And attract your friends to consider Jesus. Do you really think that hearing, understanding, thinking about truth is what is really important?

Think about small groups. Or release the word. If we don't believe that it's fundamentally the truth that transforms.

[14 : 46] Then we'll not think rightly about these small groups. They are there not to meet your felt needs primarily. They are there so that you are fed with the truth.

Whether it's a men's group. A women's group. A student group. A small group. At the heart. It's the same thing. The truth.

God's words. Don't look for or expect anything else to be at the center. If you just come for some other benefit. Then when that benefit ceases to be given to you.

Then you'll just leave. At the center of all these things. At the center of what we do as a church. Is God's word. Because that alone transforms.

That alone will lead to godliness. Godliness. And a focus on God's word can seem counterintuitive. It often doesn't deliver instant.

[15 : 48] Impressive results. It can seem powerless. It's just words. But the reality is. It does produce. Lasting fruits. And godliness.

Just think. Of your own life. Think about the way God has been at work in your life. Over the last few months. Years. Decades. The truth.

Transforms. How could it not? The glorious gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The news of what God has done for sinful men and women.

How could it not transform? When I survey. The wondrous cross. On which. The prince of glory died.

My richest gain. I count but loss. On poor contempt. On all my pride. Love so amazing. So divine. Demands my soul.

[16 : 53] My life. My all. The fruit. Of that glorious gospel message. Is godliness. Darkness. but where do we find this truth well the answers in verses two and three the truth is to be found in paul's preaching just look on to verse two in hope of eternal life which god who never lies promised before the ages began and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which i have been entrusted by the command of god our savior paul's preaching is the funnel through which god's great news the news of eternal life is made known that's where the truth is found in paul's preached words it's where the truth is found now in god's preached word and if that's the

case then what is taught really matters for those on crete what was taught in the church is really matters and for us here in glasgow for every church across the globe what is taught really matters and so here's our second point because what is taught really matters who your teachers are really matters verses five to nine if the great need on crete was proclamation of the truth which leads to godliness then the question arises who are to be the teachers what sort of man is titus to appoint as teachers that's his great task that is why paul left titus in crete so that verse five he may appoint elders in every town as i directed you i will look at these verses in two parts first the traits of the teachers he was to appoint and then secondly in verse nine the task of the teachers so what traits were these teachers to exhibit well they were to be men who were above reproach at home and in public the sort of men that titus was to appoint the task they were not perfect or sinless but they are to be above reproach mud cannot stick they are to be free from scandal such a man is to be blameless in other words he cannot be open to accusations both at home and in public and as you read these words well as i read these words i tremble because i know myself but men like this existed titus was to find these men in crete so they weren't superstars they weren't super christians they were men who were above reproach so let's look at them in terms of their home life and public life looking first at the domestic life that paul has in view a trustworthy teacher the sort of man who titus is to appoint if he's married is to be the husband of one wife he is to be a one woman man and to demonstrate faithfulness to her now this doesn't exclude single men from church leadership at all but if he is married this is what he is to be faithful now not all of us here are going to be called to be leaders and teachers in the church how does this apply to us

is it just for them well are you praying for your church leader are you praying for him and his wife in this regard how are you helping them to have a good and faithful marriage how are you helping them in this way so that they are not under undue strain and stress in exercising church leadership i've lost count of the number of things i've read recently about marriages of church leaders falling apart it's just devastating it's not just the fallout for that marriage that family there's a fallout in the church it's devastating so are we helping our leaders in this respect a one woman man a man given to given to flirting with other women is not a wise choice for a church leader but the church too has a responsibility here if you're a woman here this evening don't make life difficult for the church leader by flirting with him we all have a responsibility to behave wisely in this area what about his children well his children aren't to be wild or disobedient they've been brought up in the instruction of the lord the sort of man who is to be a church leader is able to manage his home he is faithful to his wife and his children have been taught truth and are generally well behaved not perfect if you spend 10 seconds with my daughter you'll realize that but family life matters that doesn't really compute in our culture does it we seek to draw a firm line between public life and private life I remember when I applied to do Corn Hill maybe 4 or 5 years ago and Edward wrote to my manager at work and one of the things that he asked her was about my marriage she could not believe that she was having to answer a question about my marriage that just never comes up in normal job interview processes does it but it does matter the state of a man's family life his marriage matters if a man is not leading his family towards Christ likeness then he's not going to be able to do that in the church family but again as members of the church we all have responsibility if a church is to have good and godly leadership we all need to do our part to help the families of church leaders including encouraging their kids praying for them helping them from being wild it's not easy for the children of church leaders do you pray for them help them so a man's family life above reproach what about his public life look again at verse 7 for an overseer as God's steward must be above reproach he must not be arrogant or quick tempers or drunkard or violent or greedy for gain but hospitable a lover of good self-controlled upright holy and disciplined is this how other people see him how others see you imagine your church imagine we are in the process of appointing a new leader a new leader if you were to go into that man's workplace and ask his colleagues what sort of man he was what would they say would they laugh with the possibility of him going to church leadership or would they say yeah he's a trustworthy guy above reproach at home and in public these are the traits of the leaders of the church they're also the traits that Paul is expecting to see in all the church he expects to see good living behavior that befits the gospel look at the very last verse of the whole letter it's clearly a letter that's intended to be read by the whole church it's for the whole church he says grace be with you all plural this is a letter for the whole church and leaders must demonstrate the sort of living that is to be expressed in the church as a whole if godly living is to be seen in the church then it must first be evidenced in its leaders above reproach in the home

and in public such a man is to be trusted with the household of God such a man is a trustworthy teacher such a man is to be listened to so pray for your leaders in that regard these are the sort of men to look out for for future leadership these are the traits but what are their tasks we've seen that character what is their task what are they to do

well the task of teachers they must hold firm to the words we see it there in verse 9 he must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught so that he may be able to give instruction and sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it so one they are to instruct two they are to rebuke instructing and rebuking these are the two key things but the primary thing is there at the start of verse 9 a church leader is to be a man who holds firm to the trustworthy word as taught hold firm to it no matter which way the cultural winds are blowing no matter how strong those winds are the church leader is to hold firm to the truth the truth as taught by Paul the truth contained in his words and to do that to hold firm well it's going to be deeply unpopular isn't it you just have to think for one moment about current debates around euthanasia abortion homosexuality gender to hold firm in those areas that will bring scorn it will bring mockery it will bring huge pressure just to go with the flow but the man who teaches in the church is to hold firm to the words tenaciously cling to what God has revealed because God never lies he never lies he is trustworthy and true that sort of man the man who clings to the truth who holds firm no matter what he will be able to instruct and rebuke that is what the church leader is to do now it's quite easy

I think to focus on the first of those tasks isn't it instruction we don't really have a problem with that of course that's the job of the teacher they're there to teach instruct that's what they spend most of the time doing as a congregation isn't it as we meet Sunday morning and evening as we meet in all sorts of groups through the week at the heart of it is teaching instruction but there is a necessary corollary to instruction of the truth and it's rebuking those who contradict it it's rebuking those who promote error untruth and Crete was a place loaded with untruth Paul devotes all of the second half of chapter one to those teachers who teach untruth Paul spends so much time on it he's so clear on it because untruth will destroy the church untruth does not lead to godliness untruth has to be challenged and Titus was to choose men who would not only instruct in truth but also rebuke those who contradicted the truth and that rebuking that task of rebuking will look very different depending on the error being dealt with depending on the nature of the church leader his character some will be in the form of a direct instruction from the pulpit perhaps a popular

[31 : 00] Christian book needs to be tackled and critiqued perhaps a quiet word in private is what is needed but regardless of what form that rebuking takes it must take place there's always going to be untruth bubbling away and if it's just left untackled that will reap devastation in the church instructing and rebuking these are the tasks of the church leader the teacher they are the tasks because for the church on Crete to thrive transformation will come only through the truth godliness comes only from hearing the truth who teaches in the church who leads the church is of vital and primary importance so you and I need to pray for our church leaders that they would increasingly demonstrate these traits that they would ever more hold tenaciously to the truth there was great pressure to wander away pray for your leaders truth leads to godliness and good works good works witness to the world around us they adorn the gospel they make it beautiful teachers and what they teach are vital for a church that does its job that undertakes its mission and so your good works the good works of this church are heavily dependent on your leaders now don't mishear me our great shepherd is the lord jesus he is our great pastor he is our leader but he employs under shepherds men if you have a leader who is above reproach who holds firm to the truth who rebukes error give thanks give thanks for a man like that pray for him that he would continue in it it really is of vital importance if a church leader begins to wander from the truth it's very likely the church will follow suit to quote one preacher speaking about these verses you probably won't get present godliness without godly leaders you won't get present godliness without godly leaders who your leaders are really matters so if you find yourself in a church where the leader does not live a life above reproach where there isn't instruction in truth and he ducks rebuking that's not the sort of church you want to be in it will not help you grow in godliness it will not be a church that helps you to adorn the gospel truth the truth really does transform what is taught really matters your confidence in the truth your growth in the gospel depends on it the church's adorning of the gospel through transformed lives depends on it so let our prayer be that our confidence would be in the power of the gospel in the truth that is where the action is that is where

God will be at work in his truth as it's proclaimed we can have all the buildings in Glasgow but unless the proclamation of the truth is front and center and driving things forward the whole enterprise is futile so will we commit to pray for our leaders for Willie for the elders for your small group leader for the Sunday school teachers for the release the word leaders all those who teach the truth let us pray that they would hold firm to the truth they wouldn't shift from it that their lives would adorn the gospel so that the church so all of us as they teach we too will hold firm to the truth our lives will be transformed as we feed on the truth as it changes us by God's spirit and so that we would adorn the gospel that we would make it beautiful for the watching worlds let me pray for the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation for all people training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self controlled upright and godly lives in the present age waiting for our blessed hope the appearing of the glory of our great God and saviour Jesus Christ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works father we thank you for your gospel we thank you for the good news of what Jesus Christ has done for sinful people like us may you raise up strengthen those who lead and teach in the church so that truth is taught so that we are equipped for the work of mission for the work of proclaiming the good news of Jesus and for living lives that adorn that gospel hear our prayer in Jesus name Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen