

The Truth That Leads to Godliness

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Preacher: Paul Brennan

[0 : 0 0] Well, very well and welcome to you to the Wednesday lunchtime service. We're beginning a series this lunchtime in the book of Titus. So perhaps you'd turn there with me. It's in page 998 in the Church Bibles.

So we're looking at Titus and we're going to be focusing on the first four verses of chapter one this afternoon. But I'm going to read the whole chapter. So Titus chapter one and I'll read the whole chapter page 998 in the Church Bibles.

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 Saviour.

To Titus, my true child in a common faith, grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Saviour.

[1 : 1 4] 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.

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.

For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party.

They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.

[2 : 4 2] This testimony is true. Therefore, rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth.

To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure. But both their minds and their consciences are defiled.

They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.

But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. This is the word of the Lord. Let me pray, and then we'll spend a few moments thinking about these verses together.

So let's pray. Father God, you are the creator and sustainer of all things.

- [3 : 53] You are the one who gives us our very life and breath. Help us as we gather together this afternoon to believe your promises.
- You hold out eternal life for all who would trust in the Lord Jesus. For all who would rest in his work for us on the cross.
- Thank you for your gifts of grace, which are granted to us only by Christ's merit. Thank you that you have revealed yourself to us in your word.
- Help us now to listen to your word. Amen. And to submit to what we find there so that we might be transformed.
- And so live godly and fruitful lives for your sake. And for your glory. We ask it in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.
- [5 : 01] Amen. Amen. Good. Well, please do keep those words and Titus open.
- We're looking at the first four verses there. One to four of chapter one. Now, I wonder what you think is the key to good and godly living.
- Think about in your own life, in the life of your church, in the life of our city. What do you think will really transform a city like Glasgow?
- The right people in power? The right rules in place? The right protections imposed? How is it that in a city, in a culture that is becoming less and less godly, in a church that is becoming increasingly secularized, how is the gospel going to flourish in places like that, in a city like ours, in a church like yours?
- How can we ensure that future generations will grow in faith and in godly living? How do we do it? Well, this short letter to Titus has much to say to us.
- [6 : 24] It is a letter from the Apostle Paul to Titus, a younger man who he had left on the island of Crete with the task of establishing and building up the young church there.
- This is a letter about gospel growth, about growth in godliness, in a very unpromising place.
- Crete was just a disaster zone. It was not the sort of place that eager young missionaries were queuing up, falling over themselves to get to.
- Just look at how it's described down in chapter 1, verse 12. Here, Paul is quoting from a Cretan, one of their own prophets, held in high regard. And this was his assessment of the Cretans.
- Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons. In fact, he wasn't alone in his assessments.
- [7 : 27] Another writer from the Times said that Crete had no wild beasts on it because its own inhabitants were sufficient. It was not the sort of place that you would expect to see growth in godliness.
- A place like Crete? It's got to be beyond help, surely. A place like that could never be transformed by the gospel. But that is not Paul's approach.
- He has hope for Crete. He has hope for the Cretan church. His hope for godliness in Crete and the flourishing of the gospel there is the same hope that we ought to have for our own churches, our own lives, for a flourishing of the gospel here in Glasgow.
- And Paul's big hope is this. Truth. Gospel truth leads to godliness. God's gospel transforms.
- It changes people. Now on one level you might believe that. We nod our heads. Yes, that's what happens.
- [8 : 42] God's truth leads to godliness. But do you really believe that? Do I really believe that? Truth.

Just seems so weak, doesn't it? Statements about God, about Jesus, about what he's done. Almost seems powerless, doesn't it?

We think that something more is required, something extra is needed. Think about that conversation at work the other day when you really stuck your neck out and spoke about Jesus.

Just seems so foolish, doesn't it? Just words. They don't seem to do anything. Words disappear into the air. You wonder if anyone really hears them at all.

And if they do hear them, does anything really happen? But Paul assures Titus and us that, yes, truth transforms.

[9 : 45] It's what Paul expects to see on Crete. It's what he implores Titus to teach them, to insist upon, to expect. Titus is a letter all about the good life, about the godly life.

It's what Paul expected to see on Crete. Just look with me, and we'll skim through some verses. Chapter 1, verse 16. He's talking about the false teachers.

They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They're unfit for any good work. Chapter 2, verse 1. But as for you, Titus, teach what accords with sound doctrine.

That is good living. Verse 7. Show yourself, Titus, in all respects to be a model of good works. Verse 10. So that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour.

Verse 12. Training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age.

[10 : 50] Verse 14. End of. Purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. Chapter 3, verse 1.

Be ready for every good work. Verse 8. So that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works.

And then verse 14. And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works so as to help cases of urgent need and not be unfruitful.

Titus is a letter about good, godly living and on a place like Crete. That is what Paul expected to see.

And it is possible in the most unlikely of places. If the gospel can flourish in a place like Crete, if Paul can expect good, godly living there, there is hope for Glasgow.

[11 : 55] Three points as we consider this together. First, the fruit of the gospel. Second, the foundation of the gospel. And thirdly, the fount of the gospel. So firstly, the fruit of the gospel.

Truth alone leads to godliness. Truth alone leads to godliness. Paul states his big point and it's right there at the start of verse 1.

His purposes in writing, his ministry plan for the Cretan church, his reason for writing to Titus. 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.

This is the fruit Paul was expecting to see in Crete. Faith and godliness. And it's astonishing, isn't it? Especially when we remember what kind of place Crete was.

The fruit he expected to see there was the godliness of God's elect. What is it that will lead to godliness? Well, it's truth.

[13 : 05] It's truth. Second half of verse 1. I'll read it from the NIV here. He talks about the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness.

Truth that leads to godliness. The truth of the gospel contains within it dynamic power to change any life. The gospel transforms.

It leads to godliness. And the opposite is also the case. Untruth leads to ungodliness. That was the problem in Crete.

There were people teaching untruth. Paul directly mentions those sort of people in the second half of chapter 1. Just look down at verse 10. for there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers.

There were people on Crete teaching untruth. And Paul knows the power of truth and untruth. Transformation that leads to godliness comes through the truth.

[14 : 09] Which is why Paul bursts forth with two glorious gospel summaries in this short letter in chapter 2 and again in chapter 3. great truths and knowing these truths these facts about the gospel about what God has done in Christ to rescue sinful humanity knowing these things leads to godliness.

Nothing else has the power to deliver that. God has the power to do but do you really think that truth is the answer to ungodliness as we observe it around ourselves as we see it in people's lives do we really think that truth is the answer?

Do you really think that truth will lead to godly living? when it comes to the youth programs the church runs or the SU camp what is it that you pray for when you think about those things?

Is your main concern for your children your grandchildren for the children of others in your church the children of your neighbours is your concern that those activities the church Sunday school or the SU holiday camp is your concern that it's fun and cool and attractive to the youth or is your concern that truth will be taught straightforwardly patiently with the long term goal of godliness and gospel fruitfulness at the front and centre it seems counterintuitive doesn't it?

doesn't seem to deliver instant impressive results but it does produce lasting fruit and godliness when the truth is insisted upon and taught with patience and determination let me read you a few lines from James Philip as he comments on the opening chapters of Titus perhaps he writes if we pandered less to the young in our churches today and instead placed before them the inflexible and total challenge of the gospel we might succeed in capturing the rising generation for Christ we lose the young today not because the church's standard is too high but because it is too low so low that to them it scarcely seems worth consideration there is a great temptation isn't there to water down the teaching not just with the youth but with everyone the temptation to go light on doctrine and truth to go easy on what the gospel demands about what following Christ really means but it is the truth and the truth alone that leads to a godly and profitable life truth doctrine it doesn't sound cutting edge does it it doesn't sound up to much but it transforms how could it not the glorious gospel the news of what

[17 : 32] God has done for sinful men how could that not transform as we dwell upon it when I survey the wondrous cross on which the prince of glory died my richest gain I count but loss and pour contempt on all my pride love so amazing so divine demands my soul my life my all the fruit of that glorious gospel is godliness and it comes through teaching the truth but what is the foundation of that truth where does it come from this is our second point this afternoon the foundation of the gospel gospel a truth that is reliable verse 2 a truth that is reliable many in

Crete made claim to the truth we've seen that Crete was known to be a place of liars and lying there were people spreading untruth in the Cretan church and Paul deals with them in the second half of chapter 1 harsh words are used and rightly so because the truth is at stake but why should the people there listen to Paul listen to Titus why listen to them above the others what is different about their message why is what they say trustworthy well look at verse 2 a few short words God who never lies the God who never lies that is why the truth as taught by Paul really is the truth why it really is reliable God never lies that's a direct attack on the sort of place that Crete was

Crete was known for liars and lying but God never lies this promise of eternal life that is made in verse 2 there and hope of eternal life which God who never lies promised before the ages began that promise the gospel promise is an unshakable certainty hope for the Christian is a sure and certain expectation of what is going to happen it's not like the way you might hope that Scotland win the upcoming world cup it's a futile hope but the Christian hope the hope held out here in Titus is a sure thing because the promise comes from the lips of a God who does not has not will not lie the truth that Paul unpacks here and elsewhere is the reliable truth what they were hearing from others in Crete was untruth it was to be rejected what Paul reveals is truth because it comes from the God who does not lie what God has said he will do and he will do all that he has promised that sort of truth from that sort of

God is going to transform it is certain it is true it is reliable that sort of truth will lead to godliness so you and I we need to be careful don't we who we listen to if truth leads to godliness then your godliness depends on your teachers and the question is what teachers are you listening to whose sermons do you download on the internet whose books are you reading and this almost seems too obvious to say but we must always measure up what we hear and read with the teaching of the bible but that requires effort and thought doesn't it got to think about what we're hearing and reading does it measure up but also give thanks for those teachers who do hold to the truth encourage them give thanks for them those who hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught and that leads us to our final point which answers the question where do we find this truth which leads to godliness how do we really know if the teacher we listen to holds to the truth well our third point is this the fount of the gospel is the truth proclaimed by Paul it's the truth proclaimed by Paul verse three look at those verses again

I'll pick it up in verse two 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 saviour the source of the truth the source of that life transforming godliness is to be found in perhaps a surprising place is to be found in Paul's preaching Paul's preaching is the funnel through which God's great news the news of eternal life is made known Paul is trustworthy his teaching is trustworthy because he is God's apostle he was commanded by God entrusted with it to preach it it was his task given by the Lord Jesus Christ to bring the gospel to the nations now the implication is this to ignore

[23 : 50] Paul's teaching is to ignore Christ to disregard Paul's truth is to disregard Christ a failure to listen to Paul is a failure to grasp the eternal life that is on offer stakes are high aren't they and it was Titus' task to proclaim that same message that was preached by Paul that is the truth that is going to godly living and transform lives on Crete the least likely place for gospel growth and godly living that was his mission fields and his weapon was the truth the gospel leads to godliness that is Paul's conviction and it is the same gospel that you and I must hold to if we long to see good godly living transform lives in

Glasgow it seems a very unpromising place indeed doesn't it just think about the neighbourhood you live in perhaps people you know think of the thousands of people right now on Buchanan Street walking up and down the shops milling around Bath Street people who know nothing of the truth think of your colleagues in the office the folk you sit next to on the bus as you go home this afternoon the lads up at the golf course do they seem like a promising mission field to you probably not but the truth transforms God's word is dynamic it does things it transforms lives it's transformed your life hasn't it just think about your own story for a moment once dead in sin without hope but now alive having a certain hope of eternal life

God's truth leads to godliness do you believe that how will Glasgow a broken city be transformed well the old city motto was pretty good wasn't it let Glasgow flourish by the preaching of his word and the praising of his name that is the only way it will truly flourish flourish and a lasting sense in Glasgow only through the truth God's truth transforms let me pray Father thank you that your word is truth it is reliable because it comes from the lips of a God who never lies and your truth transforms so as we think of people even now friends, neighbours, family and we despair help us to trust that your word does indeed transform and we pray that you may work in the lives of those we know to bring about transformation we ask it for your sake in Jesus name

Amen