

The Good Life

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Date: 19 July 2015

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[0 : 0 0] And let's now turn to our Bibles, and we're going to be looking at Titus chapter 1 this morning, and that is on page 998 of the Church Bibles. Titus chapter 1, 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 Saviour.

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

[2 : 5 5] Good morning. Please do turn with me back to Titus, chapter 1. And we're going to be looking at the first four verses of chapter 1. And let me just read those again, and then I'll pray, and then we'll think about this passage together. So Titus chapter 1, verses 1 to 4.

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 or leads to 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. Let me pray.

Father, we do thank you so much that you have revealed yourself to us. You have made yourself known. And we thank you that we can just spend a few moments now listening to you as we consider these opening verses of Titus. Please would you change us, change how we think, how we feel, would you change how we behave, so that we might live lives that honor you, our great King.

And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. What do you think is the key to good and godly living? What's the key to that? Think about your own family? Think about our church, our city.

[5 : 13] What will really transform a city like Glasgow? The right people in power? The right rules in place?

The right protections imposed? Think about your family if you have one. If I can just protect my kids from this influence or that school or that film or that group of friends.

What's the key to a good and godly life? These are good and right questions, aren't they? How is it that in a city, in a culture that is becoming less godly, in a church that is becoming increasingly secularized, how will the gospel possibly flourish in places like that?

How can we ensure that we and future generations will grow in faith and in godly living? What hope is there for a city like Glasgow?

Well, this short letter to Titus has much to say to us. It's a letter from the Apostle Paul to Titus, a younger man who he had left on the island of Crete.

[6 : 31] And he had given him the task of establishing and building up the young church there. This is a letter all about gospel growth and growth in godliness.

And it's about those things in a very, very unpromising place indeed. Crete was not the most promising of mission fields.

In fact, it was a disaster zone. It really was not the sort of place that eager missionaries were falling over themselves to go to. Just look at chapter 1, verse 12.

One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.

It's pretty tough stuff. Paul is here quoting from a Cretan, one of their own, a philosopher called Epimenides. And he was held in high regard by the islanders.

[7 : 37] And that was his assessment. Liars, lazy gluttons. He wasn't alone. Another writer from the Times said that Crete had no wild beasts on it, for its own inhabitants were sufficient.

Hardly a top destination spot, is it, for holiday? And it was not the sort of place that you would expect to see growth in godliness. Surely a place like that is beyond help.

A place like that could never be transformed by the gospel, could it? But that is not Paul's approach. He has hope for Crete, and he had hope for the Cretan church.

His hope for godliness in Crete, in the flourishing of the gospel on Crete, is the same hope that we can have for the flourishing of the gospel in a city like Glasgow, in places like we live.

Paul's big hope is this. Truth. Gospel truth leads to godliness. God's gospel transforms.

[8 : 56] Truth transforms. And Paul's way is God's only way to deliver godliness. Only through the truth does godliness come.

It's right there in verse 1. Paul's mission statement for the church. He writes for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with or leads to godliness.

That sums up his letter perfectly. Truth which leads to godliness. Now, on one level, you and I might believe that.

Truth leads to godliness. Yes, we nod our heads. Truth transforms. But do you really believe that? Do I really believe that?

Truth just seems so weak, doesn't it? Statements about God and Jesus, about what he has done, just seems pretty powerless.

[10 : 04] We think more is required. Something extra is needed, surely. That conversation at work the other day, where I really stuck my neck out and spoke about Jesus.

Just seems so foolish, doesn't it? Just words. Words just disappear into the air. And you wonder if anything really happens. Did they really hear it?

And even if they did hear it, did it do anything? Did it change anything? But Paul assures Titus that yes, truth transforms.

Paul assures us that truth transforms. Good doctrine. Truth really does lead to godly living. It leads transformed lives.

It's what Paul expected to see in Crete. It is what he implores Titus to teach and to expect there in the church from Crete.

[11 : 02] Titus is a letter all about the godly life, the good life. Just look at chapter 1, verse 1, which I read earlier. And then look down to verse 16.

He's talking about those false teachers. They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works, how they live. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.

But then chapter 2, verse 1. But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. And then down to verse 7. Show yourself, Titus, in all respects to be a model of good works.

And in your teaching, show integrity, dignity, and sound speech. Chapter 2, verse 10. Showing all good faith so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.

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

[12 : 04] Verse 14. A 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. 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. And then the penultimate verse in the book.

3.14. And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works. It's a letter all about good works. Good living.

Good living. Titus is a letter about good and godly living in the most unpromising place.

If the gospel can flourish in a place like Crete, then there is hope for Glasgow. There's hope for your family, for your friends.

[13 : 11] Three points this morning. Firstly, the fruit of the gospel. Second, the foundation of the gospel. And third, the fount of the gospel.

So first point. The fruit of the gospel. Truth alone leads to godliness. Truth alone leads to godliness. Paul gives his big point right there at the start in verse 1.

His purpose in writing, his ministry plan for Crete, his reason for writing is this. He writes for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth which leads to godliness.

This is the fruit Paul was expecting to see in Crete. And it's astonishing. Especially when we remember the kind of place that Crete was.

What is it that will lead to the godliness of God's elect? Well, it's truth. It's truth.

[14 : 10] Knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness. God's gospel, his truth, contains dynamic power to change any life.

The gospel transforms. It leads to godliness. But 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 later in chapter 1. Paul knows the power of truth and untruth.

Transformation that leads to godliness comes through the truth. Which is why Paul bursts forth with two astonishing and glorious gospel summaries in this letter.

It's a short letter. You get two great statements of the gospel. Just look with me at chapter 2, verse 11. For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness, unworldly 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 Savior, 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.

[15 : 41] And then look down to chapter 3, verse 3. For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us. Not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, being justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Aren't those just great words? Great gospel truths. And knowing these great things, these facts about the gospel, what Jesus Christ has done, knowing that, being transformed by that, will lead to godliness.

Nothing else has the power to do that. Nothing else has the power to transform lives. Do you think that truth will lead to godly living?

Do you really believe that? Think about youth work. When it comes to the youth programs the church runs, is your main concern for your children, for the children of others in the church, is your concern that it's fun and cool, attracted to the youth?

[17 : 36] Or is your concern that truth will be taught, straightforwardly, patiently, over the long run, with the long-term goals of godliness, and gospel fruitfulness, at the front and center?

It seems counterintuitive, doesn't it? We want something that's big and impressive and fun. But the way to truth, the way to godly living, doesn't deliver instant, impressive results often.

But it does produce lasting fruit, and godliness. Let me read to you a few lines from James Philip, as he comments on the opening chapter of Titus.

And I share this, not because I see this as a particular weakness, in our approach to youth work. The opposite. This is an affirmation of it. And I want to encourage those of you, who are involved in youth work here, to keep at it.

To keep doing what you're doing. And I share it also, because it's a helpful corrective, to how we naturally think. He writes this, perhaps, 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.

[19 : 06] We lose the young today, not because the church's standard is too high, high, but because it's too low. So low, that to them, it seems scarcely worth their 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 Jesus means. But it is truth, that leads to a godly, and profitable life.

Truth. Doctrine. It doesn't sound cutting edge, or up to much, does it? But, it transforms. How could it not?

The glorious gospel, of what Christ has done for us, the news of what God has done, for sinful men, how could it not transform? When I survey, the wondrous cross, on which the prince, of glory dies, my richest gain, I count but loss, and poor contempt, on all my pride.

[20 : 27] Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast, save in the cross, of Christ my God. The very things, that charm me most, I sacrifice them, to his blood.

Were the whole realm, of nature mine, that were an offering, far too small. Love, so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.

How good a gospel, like that? Not transform. It is a powerful gospel. The truth, transforms.

The fruit of the gospel, is godliness. And it comes, through teaching truth. But what is the foundation, of that truth?

Where does it come from? We'll look down, at verse two. The foundation, of the gospel, is a truth, that is reliable. Paul writes, in hope, of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised, before the ages began.

[21 : 44] There were many, in Crete, who made claim, to the truth. But Crete, was known, to be a place, of liars, and lying.

There were people, spreading untruth, in the Cretan church. You see that, in the second half, of chapter one. Paul uses harsh words, against those false teachers, and rightly so, the truth is at stake.

But why should they, listen to Paul? Why should they, listen to Titus? What's the difference, with their message? Why is what they say, trustworthy? Well in verse two, we see why.

the God, who never lies, truth, that was promised, before the ages began.

That is why the truth, as taught by Paul, really is the truth. That's why it's reliable. God never lies. That's a direct attack, on the sort of place, and culture, that Crete, was.

[22 : 48] That was the culture, of the church, that was growing up in. Cretans were liars. We've seen that already. So much so, that the Greeks, had a verb, Kretitsu, which meant to lie, or deceive.

Crete, was a place, of liars. And in that place, we have the God, who never lies. The promise, of eternal life there, 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, for Scotland, winning, anything.

That's a futile hope. But the Christian hope, is a sure thing. It's an unshakable, foundation. The truth, that Paul tells us, about here, is the reliable truth.

What they were hearing, from others in Crete, was untruth. And it was to be rejected, in favour of, what Paul was teaching, what Titus was teaching. It's the truth, because it comes, from the God, who never lies.

[24 : 03] What God has said, he will do. And he will do, all that he has promised. That sort of truth, is going to transform.

Because it comes, from the God, who never lies. So you and I, we need to listen, to the truth, don't we? Claims about, the untruth of the Bible, claims about the, untrustworthiness, of the Christian gospel, are rampant, aren't they?

Dawkins, Hitchens, and their pals, are at it all the time. They rubbish Christianity, and put forward, their own alternative truth, and people buy it. Folk you chat to, every day, in the office, across the fence, on the bus.

They absorb, what they hear, and they believe it. So you and I, need to be careful. Careful, who we listen to. If truth, leads to godliness, then your godliness, depends on your teachers.

The question is, what teachers, are you listening to? Who in the world, are you listening to? What are you absorbing, from the world around you? Who are you listening to, in the church?

[25 : 21] Who sermons, do you download? Whose books, do you read? This almost, seems too obvious, to say, but we must, always, measure what we read, and hear, with the teaching, of the Bible.

It's almost, too obvious, to say, isn't it? But, it requires effort, it requires thought, but, it must be done.

Who are you listening to? And give thanks, for those teachers, who do hold to the truth, for those teachers, who hold out, the truth, as preached by Paul.

Encourage them, give thanks for them. And this leads us, to our final point, which answers the question, where do we find, the truth, that leads to godliness?

How do we really know, that the teacher, we're listening to, really holds to the truth? Well, our third point is this, the fount of the gospel, the fount of the gospel, is truth, as proclaimed by Paul.

[26 : 31] Verse three, At the proper time, God manifested, in his word, through the preaching, with which, I have been entrusted, by the command of God, our saviour.

The truth, is to be found, in Paul's preached truth. It's a surprising place, perhaps, to find the truth, Paul's preaching.

But, Paul's preaching, is the funnel, through which, God's great news, the news of a time, eternal life, is made known. That is how God, makes known, his truth, through Paul's preaching.

Paul is trustworthy, his teaching, is trustworthy, because he, is God's apostle. He was commanded, by God, to go and preach it. He was untrusted, with it.

And the implication, is this, to ignore, Paul's teaching, is to ignore Christ. To disregard, Paul, is to disregard, Christ.

[27 : 37] A failure, to listen to Paul, is a failure, to grasp, the eternal life, that is on offer. The stakes, are high. And, Titus's job, there on Crete, was to proclaim, the same message, that was preached, by Paul.

That is the truth, that is going to deliver, godly living, and transform lives, on Crete. The least likely, place, for gospel growth, and transform lives.

That was, Titus's mission fields. That's where, he was to do his work. And his weapon, was God's truth. Paul's gospel.

The gospel, leads to godliness. That is, Paul's conviction. And it's the same gospel, that you and I, must hold out, as we long to see, godly lives.

A city transformed, by the gospel. And we, as a church, must be committed, to seeing more, and more churches, in this city, that hold, to Paul's gospel.

[28 : 50] That's the implication, isn't it? More churches, that hold out, the gospel truth. That will lead, to godly living, in this city. And that, will be costly, for us, as a church.

It will mean, sending out, young men and women, that we've invested in, and trains. It will mean, investing in more buildings. It will cost us, money, and people.

But it is a price, worth paying, isn't it? Because the truth, leads, to godliness. The truth, transforms.

So, how will a place, like Glasgow, pretty unpromising, place, isn't it? How will that, flourish, in godliness?

goodness. Well, we can quite easily fool ourselves, sometimes, as we come along here, on a Sunday morning. Hundreds of people, gather here.

[29 : 57] It's encouraging, isn't it? It's great. But think of the thousands, of people, walking outside, the front door, up and down, Bath Street, on Buchanan Street, right now. People, who know nothing, of the truth.

Think of your colleagues, in the office, the mums you meet, at the school gate, the other boys, in your class, 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. If you're a Christian, here this morning, it's transformed your life. Just think about, your own story, for a moment.

Once, dead in sin, without hope, now alive, and having, the certain hope, of eternal life.

[31 : 07] God's truth, leads to godliness. Do you believe that? How will Glasgow, be transformed?

It's a broken city. How will it be transformed? How will we see, a flourishing, of the gospel here? Well, the old city motto, wasn't too far off, was it?

Let Glasgow flourish, by the preaching, of his words, and the praising, of his name. That is the only way, it will flourish.

Godliness in Glasgow, amongst the people, you know, your friends, only through the truth. Let me pray.

Let me pray. but when the goodness, and loving kindness, of God our Savior, appeared, he saved us, not because of works, done by us, but according to his, own mercy.

[32 : 34] Thank you so much, Father, that you have revealed, the truth. It has been made known. We find it, in Paul's preaching, we find it, in the Bible.

and we thank you, that your truth, is powerful. It transforms. Help us, to believe that, to hold out, this truth, to our city, to our friends, to our family.

Give us boldness, we ask for your sake. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.