

Good Doctrine, Good Deeds: *Devoted to Good Works*

Titus 3:1-15

Preached by Minister Jason Tarn at HCC on March 11, 2012

Introduction

One of the greatest tragedies in the last hundred years of church history has been a divorce in the minds of believers between having good doctrine and doing good deeds. Somehow the preaching and teaching of good Christian doctrine has been separated from the doing of good christianly deeds to help the least of these. In America, it all started in the late nineteenth century, when liberal mainline churches began to deny supernatural elements in Scripture. Liberal preachers denied things like the virgin birth, the existence of hell, the Resurrection, etc. Their message was labeled a “social gospel” because they effectively reduced the gospel to social actions – to doing good in this world. That meant a shift in focus from personal evangelism to a greater concern for feeding the hungry, helping the poor, or opposing systemic injustices in society like sexism or racism.

This didn't sit well with conservative evangelical churches, so in reaction evangelicals pushed for a renewed emphasis on evangelism and personal salvation. But as with most reactions, the pendulum swung too far in the other direction. Out of fear of a liberal social gospel, many evangelical churches began to neglect ministries of mercy. They worried that emphasis on social action would inevitably corrode the true gospel. **And so by the early twentieth century, we witnessed a great divide between liberal mainline churches that stressed good deeds performed for the public good AND evangelical churches that stressed good doctrine preached for personal salvation.** According to liberals, the good news of Christianity is all the good you can do for the good of this world. According to evangelicals, the good news is all the good that God has done for you in your salvation.

But the question is: *Must we choose between the two?* Are these two principles mutually exclusive? ***Is the Christian gospel only about the public good OR only about personal salvation?*** Or could the gospel have both in view? To be honest, many Christians (including myself) have difficulty connecting the two. In our experience, it feels like you can only do one really well. So any kind of push for social action and doing good in this world is linked, in our minds, with a loss of sound doctrine and passion for saving souls. And on the flip side, if you're all about personal salvation and right theology, then it usually means there is little regard for addressing social injustices in this world. **There seems to be two separate agendas and some Christians are just more inclined towards one over the other.** And sadly we often look down upon the other thinking they're the ones missing the point of Christianity.

But what I want to do this morning, by the grace of God, is to help bridge the gap – to help you make that connection between doctrine and deeds – so we can be a church that has a real passion for spreading the message of salvation AND be a church with a deep devotion to advancing the public good. I believe our passage addresses this very point. So far we've seen the Apostle Paul hammer home that good doctrine and good deeds are inextricably connected in the inner circles of the church (chapter 1) and the home (chapter 2). Now in chapter 3, he turns his attention to the outer circle of secular society. The same principle exists here too.

So if I could summarize the big idea it goes like this: **A good grasp of God’s goodness and grace (Christian salvation) should generate in you a deep devotion to do good in this world (Christian social action).** In other words, you don’t have to choose between the two. In fact, doing good in this world should flow directly out of our Christian salvation.

Because It is Our Christian Duty

Our first point is this: **1) Devote yourself to doing good in this world because it is our Christian duty.** I draw this point from vv1-2. *“Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.”*

To begin we need to stress that doing good in this world is our Christian duty. It is commanded of us in Scripture. **It’s crucial that we agree that Christian social action is not just a secular agenda dressed up in Christian attire.** Rather, doing good in this world – *“being ready for every good work”* – is our obligation. Paul starts off by telling Titus to remind the believers of this principle, implying that it was important enough for Paul to have taught these things the first time he visited these churches on Crete. **Social action was not considered a second or third-order issue reserved for advanced believers.** No, this was basic Christianity, and now Titus is to remind them of it.

Duty to Be a Law-Abiding Citizen

First, he is to remind them that it is our Christian duty to be law-abiding citizens. Paul speaks of being submissive to *“rulers and authorities”*. Our duty is to submit to civil authorities, which is expressed by our obedience to the laws they enact. That includes paying taxes and avoiding criminal activity. This is what it look like, in one sense, to do good in this world. Civil obedience is part of a Christian’s good works.

But you might be thinking Paul is a bit naive and that he doesn’t realize how secular and anti-Christian our government has become. But let’s not forget that the civil authorities in his day were persecuting Christians. Nero was burning them on crosses and feeding them to lions. The anti-Christian rhetoric we face is nothing compared to what they were going through.

So our submission to rulers and authorities is not contingent upon their fair treatment of us as Christians. It is our duty to obey even unjust rulers, but, of course, this is not an *absolute* obedience and allegiance to the state. Caesar might be our ruler but he is not our Lord. Jesus is Lord, and therefore if any earthly authority conflicts with his lordship, then it becomes our Christian duty, in that instance, to civically disobey.

But, still, the general principle is to be submissive to rulers and authorities as law-abiding citizens. But flowing into v2 with the emphasis on *“all people”*, Paul’s statement *“to be ready for every good work”* could be interpreted more broadly to include doing good deeds for society in general and for non-Christians in particular. If you look in v3, it begins by saying *“For we*

ourselves were once foolish”, implying that the “*all people*” Paul has in mind in v2 are specifically non-Christians who we, as Christians, once identified with before we were saved.

Duty to Be a Good Neighbor

The point is that our Christian duty is not just to be law-abiding citizens but, second, to also be good neighbors to the non-Christians around us. Doing good in this world is more than just staying out of trouble from the law. It’s about being a good neighbor who is eager to do whatever is good for the public good. Specifically, Paul says “*to speak evil of no one*” and “*to avoid quarreling*”. In other words, our neighborly duty is to be neither offensive nor quarrelsome in our speech or behavior as we engage the non-Christian world around us.

He goes on to say “*to be gentle and to show perfect courtesy toward all people*”. Literally it says to show *all* courtesy towards *all* people, meaning there is no limit to our courtesy and no limit to whom we show it. This is an extensive command, which could include all sorts of good deeds towards all sorts of people in society. So let me get more specific and more practical. Next Sunday, Pastor Fred will be launching our Compassion Project for this year. He’ll be explaining how we, as a church, plan to work together for the public good. Locally, we’ve highlighted three issues: serving the homeless, supporting local schools, and addressing the horrors of human trafficking. Globally, we’ve targeted the efforts to prevent the spread of HIV in Africa and to promote clean water projects in Nicaragua.

Friends, are you ready for every good work? Are you willing to show gentleness and all courtesy towards all in society, especially the non-Christian population, especially the least of these, especially those who are helpless and destitute? The first thing we need to do is to recognize this as a part of your Christian duty. Doing good in this world is not optional. It’s not something that only some Christians get involved with. It is something we are all reminded to do.

Because of How God Saved Us

But what if you don’t have much desire to do good in this world? What if, right now, you don’t really care for the various causes in our Compassion Project? But since you know you ought to, do you just suck it up, write a check, and hope that eases your conscience? No, we need to consider our second point: **2) Devote yourself to doing good in this world because of how God saved us.** According to vv3-7, there are three things we can say about how God saved us and how this should drive us to want to do good.

Saved by His Goodness

First, if you read v3-4 it becomes clear that we’re not saved by our goodness but rather God saved us by his goodness. We’re talking here about **the source of our salvation**. Contrary to popular thought, salvation does not come from searching your soul and looking within yourself. If that’s where you look for the source of salvation, you’ll be disappointed.

Look at v3 and read this devastating description of what you’ll find by looking within sinful man. This is what all of us were like before Christ appeared in our lives. “*For we ourselves were*

once foolish” without spiritual understanding. We were “*disobedient*” – we chafed at authority. And not only were we foolish and disobedient, we were “*led astray*”, deceived by the Enemy and enslaved by him, “*slaves to various passions and pleasures*”. We were “*passing our days in malice and envy*”, and we were “*hated by others and hating one another*”.

This is a sobering depiction of unregenerate man, of every single one of us apart from Christ. If this is accurate, then clearly God was not moved to save us because he saw something good in us. Clearly we have no goodness that merits salvation. **Yet in what we lack God abounds.** Look at v4. “*But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us.*” So though we have no goodness, God does. God’s heart is full of goodness and loving kindness (*philanthropia*, the love of mankind).

And when he revealed the contents of his heart, when his goodness and loving kindness “*appeared*”, he saved us! That word “*appeared*” is pregnant with meaning. It refers to the historical event of Christ appearing in the world. In his personhood, Jesus manifested the goodness and love of God. So they appeared when he appeared bringing salvation. **The whole point is that the source of our salvation originates in the good, loving heart of God.** This is such good news to learn that my salvation comes not from within since nothing good resides there BUT from the heart of God my Savior.

So how should this truth drive you to do good in this world? Let me draw your attention to that little word “*for*” at the beginning of v3 because it explains Paul’s flow of thought. V2 ends with our duty to work for the public good, and now you ask why? *Why should we treat all people, especially non-Christians, with gentleness and perfect courtesy?* **For we ourselves were once just like them until the goodness and love of God appeared.** Since God revealed his goodness and love for us when we were not good and not lovable in order that we might be saved, now we are to follow him and do the same, showing goodness and love to others even when they are not good and not lovable.

That means we should never wait for the “*all people*” in v2 – whether the poor or hungry or homeless – to first clean themselves up and do some good with their lives *before* we show them gentleness and perfect courtesy. **Rather, we should be ready to do good to all, serving out of a deep recognition that but for the goodness of God I too would be destitute and in such need since there is nothing good in me.** If you understand how God saved you by his goodness, it will generate in you a deep devotion to do good to others.

Saved by His Mercy

Second, according to v5, God saved us by his mercy – and not by deeds we’ve done in righteousness. “*He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy.*” Here Paul is talking about **the basis/grounds of our salvation.** We are saved on the sole basis of God’s own mercy.

I interpret that phrase “*works done by us in righteousness*” to refer to the good works done by believers post-conversion, which is why Paul adds the qualifier “*in righteousness*”. **So not even the righteous deeds we’ve done in good faith as Christians will be considered the grounds of our salvation.** All the discipline you’ve exercised, all the committed you’ve shown, all the ministry and service you’ve performed – none of that is the reason why you’re saved. It’s only by the mercy of God.

But God’s mercy itself does not save us, since mercy just describes his disposition towards us. It is only what his mercy led him to do that leads to our salvation, and this brings us back to what Christ did for us in his appearing. What’s in view here, in particular, is the cross even though Paul doesn’t directly say it. But we do see earlier in chapter 2:14 that he does mention Jesus giving himself for us to redeem us – an allusion to the cross. **The point is that we are saved not because we did anything to deserve it but only because God was merciful to send his Beloved Son** “*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*”.

So how should this truth drive you to do good in this world? The application is the same as before. The more you see how undeserving you are of God’s goodness, the more you realize your works done in righteousness are just filthy rags (Isa. 64:6), and that your salvation is only possible because God is merciful – all of this will fundamentally change you. **Jesus taught that those who have been forgiven much love much** (cf. Lk. 7:47). And it’s that love that will change your attitude and make you zealous for good works.

Let me give you an example. I often struggle with how to react to panhandlers. My immediate reaction is to think they’re going to abuse my generosity and spend the money on drugs or alcohol. And often times I can tell they’re just concocting a story, lying right to my face. So they’ve really done nothing to deserve my kindness and courtesy towards them. Yet because I know I’ve been shown all kindness and courtesy by a merciful God, I am compelled by such love to show the same kindness and courtesy towards the undeserving, towards those who might abuse my generosity. *How many times have I abused God’s generosity towards me?* As he showed mercy, so should I.

Saved by the Holy Spirit’s Work

So God saved us by his goodness and by his mercy. **Third, according to vv5-6, God saved us by the Holy Spirit’s work.** It says he saved us “*by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.*”

Here we’re talking about **the means of our salvation**. The *source* of salvation originates in the heart of God. The *basis* is the merciful sacrifice of God’s own Son, by which our salvation was *accomplished*. But every Christian was once like those described in v3, and so it is not until the Holy Spirit is poured into your life that Jesus’ accomplished salvation is personally *applied* to you.

How is it applied? “By the washing of regeneration” This washing refers to a spiritual cleansing since it’s associated with the Holy Spirit. We’re talking about a cleansing from sin, and not just individual wrongdoings, but from the inherent sinfulness that has corrupted our hearts. And it brings about “*regeneration*”. That word literally means “a new genesis”, a new beginning, a new birth. Jesus used the same word to describe the “*new world*” that the Son of Man will usher in at the end of the age (Mt. 19:28).

So just as Jesus will one day make all things new in the world, when we are saved – when the Spirit applies salvation to us – he makes all things new in our lives. We are reborn. And renewed. That phrase “*renewal of the Holy Spirit*” just reiterates the newness of the life we receive by the Holy Spirit as he is poured out on us just like in Acts 2 when he was poured out on the first Christians.

Brothers and sisters, when God’s goodness and loving kindness appeared, not only were you cleansed and forgiven of sin, but an inner transformation took place where you were reborn by the Spirit. At the moment of salvation, you received a new heart and a new spirit. You become a new person, a new creation. Jesus put his Spirit within you, and now by that Spirit he causes you to walk in faith and obedience.

How should this truth drive you then to do good in this world? The more you embrace your new heart and walk by the Spirit of God in you, then the more your affections and desires will conform to the affections and desires of God’s own heart. And if his heart is for doing good in this world to all people, then surely your heart will follow. Friends, once you get a good grasp of how God saved you by his goodness and mercy and Spirit, it will generate in you a deep devotion to doing good in this world.

Because of Why God Saved Us

We’ve seen the source of salvation, the basis, and the means now consider the purpose of our salvation. **3) Devote yourself to doing good in this world because of why God saved us.** There are two things to say about why God saved us and why this drives us to do good.

Saved to Inherit Eternal Life

First, we were saved that we might inherit eternal life. It says in v7 we were saved “*so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*” Now here the phrase “*being justified by his grace*” is connected with being saved.

In case you’re not familiar with this idea of justification, in Paul’s letters it was a technical term referring to a judgment made by God over those who trust in Christ, whereby we are acquitted before him, pronounced righteous, and thereby reconciled to him. Justification is an amazing gift that comes to us by grace alone.

But there is a higher purpose in our justification than simply being acquitted of guilt and reconciled to God. V7 says we are justified by his grace so that “*we might become heirs*

according to the hope of eternal life. By calling us “*heirs*”, Paul is using adoption language to describe the glory of our salvation. We are not only reconciled with the Holy Judge. We are adopted into his family with the hope of enjoying eternity with him.

In his book *Knowing God*, J. I. Packer, speaking of our justification, says this, “*This free gift of acquittal and peace, won for us at the cost of Calvary, is wonderful enough, in all conscience – but justification does not of itself imply any intimate or deep relationship with God the judge. In idea, at any rate, you could have the reality of justification without any close fellowship with God resulting. But contrast this, now, with adoption. Adoption is a family idea, conceived in terms of love, and viewing God as father. In adoption, God takes us into his family and fellowship – he establishes us as his children and heirs. Closeness, affection and generosity are at the heart of the relationship. To be right with God the Judge is a great thing, but to be loved and cared for by God the Father is a greater.*”

Friends, thank God that we are justified by grace alone but thank him even more that he calls us his children and gives us the promise of a glorious inheritance awaiting us in heaven. Now I realize Christians are often criticized for being so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly good. That we talk a lot about heaven and hell but care little for addressing all the hell on earth – all the injustices and inequities, the evil and sufferings

But according to v8, this criticism falls short. It appears the most heavenly minded people are actually those who are devoted to doing the most earthly good. Read v8, “*The saying is trustworthy* [referring to all he just said about salvation], *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. These things are excellent and profitable for people.*”

Just think about it. If you insist on these things. If you have a good grasp of what it means to be justified and adopted by God. If you have a strong, sure hope of a heavenly inheritance waiting for you, to the point that you know any sacrifice or suffering you might experience in this life will only make your inheritance that much sweeter – then you are freed to be radically generous and boldly sacrificial doing all sorts of good for the public good.

But imagine if you didn’t have this hope, if this life is as good as it gets. Then your primary concern won’t be for the public good but for making sure your life is as good and comfortable and secure as it can be since this is it. *Do you see? Heavenly minded people are freed to truly devote themselves to doing earthly good.*

Saved to Do Good Works that Benefit Others

This leads to the second reason why God saved us. We already saw it in v8. **We were saved so that we may devote ourselves to good works that benefit others.** So though we’re not saved *by* our good works. We are saved *for* our good works.

According to v9, there were individuals in the church who thought their salvation simply afforded them opportunities to gather together to debate foolish controversies and endless genealogies. They spent their time quarreling about the law instead of listening to it and obeying it. Paul says such things are “*unprofitable and worthless*”. They don’t advance the public good.

This is convicting for many of us. **We were not saved to simply have theological discussions and bible studies with each other.** Though I never want to devalue the importance of sound theology and studying the Word, we have to remember that we were saved for good works that advance the public good. Paul reiterates this point in v14, “*And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful.*”

Conclusion

So consider the people in your life – family, friends, church members, co-workers, classmates, neighbors, strangers on the street. *Where do you see cases of urgent need? Where do you see people hurting? People struggling? People oppressed? What can you practically do to help such cases of urgent need and not be unfruitful in your faith?* I encourage you to discuss and pray with your family or small group, asking how together you can work for the good of those God has put in your lives. Listen carefully next Sunday as we introduce our Compassion Project and ask God how he is moving you to action.

May we be a church that is zealous for good doctrine, especially the doctrine of salvation by grace *and at the same time* a church that is zealous for good works done for the good of all!