

Belief And Behaviour

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good evening. It's a great honour to be speaking here at Carloway tonight. You've all been so warm and welcoming to myself and I'm really over the past few months and it's been a real pleasure to get to know you all. Your welcome has played a huge part in helping us settle into life on the island so quickly. So thank you all again for that. This evening, as we've heard, we're looking at Titus chapter 3. I approach this chapter with some hesitation, given Thomas's masterful handling of his chapter during the prize-giving sermon. Rest assured, I won't be calling upon any of you to step in for Phil as a visual aid this week.

I'm sure we've all heard the phrase, practice what you preach. This is often used and sometimes misused saying is still prevalent in our increasingly non-Christian society. It is frequently wielded as a tool to criticise others unkindly or to hold them to a standard we may not adhere to ourselves. However, despite its misuse, the phrase holds a significant truth.

Practicing what we preach is crucial in the Christian life. How we live directly impacts how we are perceived by those outside the faith. When our actions align with our faith in Jesus, they reflect the integrity and authenticity of that faith. This consistency is vital because non-Christians often scrutinise our behaviour to judge the credibility of our beliefs. If our lives do not match our words, it can lead to accusations of hypocrisy, which can hinder our witness and damage the church's reputation. But by embodying the values we proclaim, we not only give glory to God, but also provide a compelling testimony that can draw others to Christ. Living out our faith authentically demonstrates the transformative power of the

Gospel and reinforces the truth of this message. Our passage today, and indeed the whole book of Titus, emphasises living a life consistent with our faith. While we may not all be called to be preachers, we are all called to live our faith, live out our life in a consistent manner with our faith. So tonight we shall look at this passage in an effort to discover how we can live out our faith. We'll be focusing on chapter 3, but I think it's helpful to provide a quick background of the book as a whole. The book we have in our Bibles called Titus is in fact a letter written by the Apostle Paul to his close companion and fellow missionary, Titus, who was overseeing the churches on the island of Crete. The letter was likely written during Paul's later missionary journeys, giving that date of around 35 years after the death and resurrection of our Lord. Paul's purpose in writing to Titus was to provide guidance on how to lead and organise the church in Crete. He emphasised the importance of appointing qualified elders, promoting sound doctrine and encouraging good works among believers. The letter highlights the practical aspects of Christian living and the transformative power of God's grace. It serves as a reminder of the importance of leadership, of integrity and the witness of a godly life in advancing the gospel and strengthening the faith community.

In terms of our focus this evening, throughout this letter we see the constant theme of faith and practice, that what we believe should impact how we behave, that there should be an unbreakable bond between belief and behaviour. This truth has been the basis for Paul's instruction in dealing with Paul's teaching, his instruction for church leaders and his instruction for Christian living. How does each one of us live out being the church? How do we live out being the counter-cultural community we are called to be? Against the backdrop of false teaching and division Paul concludes his letter to Titus reminding us once again that our behaviour should be in step with our beliefs, that our faith and our practice go hand in hand, that we should live out our faith consistently. So how do we do that? Tonight we are going to look at three instructions that Paul gives Titus that help us to remember and put into practice this important truth. We live out our faith when we proclaim the gospel, when we practice the gospel, when we protect the gospel. So that will be our three points for this evening. We live out our faith when we proclaim the gospel, when we practice the gospel, when we protect the gospel. Firstly, Paul exhorts Titus to proclaim the gospel.

[5 : 50] In verse 8 we read these words, 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. These things are excellent and profitable for people.

So what are these things that Paul is asking Titus to insist on? To answer that we need to look back a bit and see exactly what Paul is referring to in verses 4 to 7. 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 in 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. This is the truth that Paul wants Titus to insist upon, the truth he wants us to put front and center, the truth from which everything else must flow. In these verses we have a beautiful summary of the good news of Jesus Christ that God in his loving kindness sent a Savior who saved us not because of anything we had done but according to his grace and mercy. God saved us by regenerating and renewing us by his Holy Spirit which he has poured out in us so that we might be adopted into his family and blessed with eternal life with him. We saw this great picture played out in front of us just a few weeks ago during the Sunday Club Prize-giving service and what a great illustration of the whole story of salvation that was. What a great salvation we have. What are we doing to share this great news with others? As Thomas said this morning, Jesus is brilliant so let's take the opportunity to share this with the people we know and love. We have an amazing message and we need to be proclaiming it to those who have not heard it. How can you in the week ahead share with someone about this amazing news? Perhaps there are people that God has been laying on your heart to invite some of the upcoming OM events or to Christianity explored or even to church on a Sunday. We have good news worth sharing. Let's not keep it to ourselves. Are we insisting on the Gospel?

Amidst all the talk of false teaching and the concern for sound doctrine, Paul is adamant that this is what we most insist on. Throughout the entire letter Paul consistently drives home this message. He repeatedly highlights the importance of right doctrine and how it should influence everything we do. We will soon come to look at some of the distractions occurring in the church and creeds, the foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions and quarrels about the law. Given all that turmoil, it's clear why Paul wants to direct us towards the things that truly matter. He wants us to start from the Gospel, ensuring everything else flows from that foundation. Paul's emphasis is on the priority of the Gospel and that is a constant theme in his writing. He continually reminds us that the Gospel should be our starting point, guiding and shaping all aspects of our life. 1 Corinthians 15 at verse 3 we read,

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to see us and entered the twelve. Paul wants us to insist on the Gospel. But Paul is not content with us simply knowing the great truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He emphasises to Titus why it is crucial to insist upon these teachings and to make them the focal point. Sound doctrine is not an end in itself, it has a purpose. It should be evidenced in practical ways in every Christian's life, demonstrating its impact and outworking. Again we read in our text for this evening, 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. So we have seen that Paul instructs Titus to insist on these things, to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but he does so for a purpose. We proclaim the Gospel, yet we must also practice it. And that brings us to our second point, we live out our faith when we practice the Gospel.

So how do we do that? Well Paul tells us here that we practice the good news of Jesus Christ by devoting ourselves to good works. Paul's fellow Apostle James is at pains to make this point in his writings also. In James chapter two we read, What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, Go in peace, be warmed and filled, without giving them the things that they are needed for the body, what good is that? So also, faith by itself, if it does not have works is dead.

[12 : 02] But someone will say, You have faith and I have works. Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. Now some have attempted to create a conflict between the teachings of Paul, who emphasises salvation by grace alone, and the teaching of James, who highlights the importance of good works. However, we affirm that both the book of James and the numerous writings of Paul preserved in the New Testament are God-breathed scriptures, divinely inspired through the Holy Spirit, and we know that the Spirit does not contradict himself. In our passage tonight Paul emphasises that those who have believed in God will naturally devote themselves to good works. This does not imply that anyone is saved by their good works, but rather that good works are a natural outflow of saving faith. Paul and James are in harmony. They present a complete picture of Christian life, salvation by grace through faith, which is then evidenced by a life of good works.

These good works are not the means of salvation, but are the fruit of a transformed life, rooted in the grace and truth of the gospel. This stands in clear contrast to what Paul mentions in chapter 1 about those whose foundation is not the gospel. He asserts that such individuals are completely unfit for any good work. To the pure all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure. But both their mind and their conscience are defiled.

They profess to know God, but deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good works. So the defiled and unbelieving are unfit for good works. But for those whose starting point is the gospel of Jesus Christ, good works will follow. It is important to recognise that non-Christians often do many things that are right and commendable.

They may tell the truth, raise their children lovingly, help others, give to charity and be loving and generous people. In fact, there are non-Christians who can serve as examples to Christians through the way that they conduct themselves. How is this possible? Jesus provides an illustration in his parable of the Good Samaritan. In this parable, Jesus makes his religious listeners uncomfortable by presenting an unbeliever as a hero. Many of us will be familiar with the story. A wounded traveller, attacked by robbers and left for dead, lies by the side of the road. A priest and a Levite pass by without helping. Two people who would have been regarded as as holy as can be. But it is a Samaritan, someone not considered part of God's people, who stops to help the wounded traveller, showing compassion and mercy. Through this parable, Jesus demonstrates that non-believers can indeed do the right thing. Many of us can recall instances where Christians have failed to help, so we must acknowledge that non-Christians have acted with compassion and integrity. We must rightly acknowledge that non-Christians can do right things, even to the extent that it may put many of us Christians to shame. What does Paul mean when he says that unbelieving are unfit for good works? What does it mean when we read in Psalm 14 that all have turned away, all have become corrupt, there is no one who does good, not even one? How can people do right things without God, yet the Bible teaches they cannot do good? Well, I think this hinges on our intentions. Non-Christians can do right things with the right intentions towards others, but God looks for another intention before considering something a good work. Whether it is done to honour Him. In Hebrews we read, without faith it is impossible to please God.

Intentions matter. A right action becomes a good work in God's sight, only if done by faith to honour Him. We need the Holy Spirit for good works. Without love for God, we cannot perform good deeds with the intention He desires. But the challenge for those of us who are Christians is that we do love the Lord our God, yet how often do we still fail to do good works? We need the Holy Spirit's renewal for good works. It starts not with our effort, but with changed hearts. We know the fruit of the Spirit, we know it is love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. When the Holy Spirit works in us, good works will flow. People will see God's power at work in us, a power impossible for non-believers who lack faith in Jesus and who lack the Holy Spirit's transformation.

[17 : 57] This is not a point of arrogance. We are not claiming superiority over those who do not know God. It is a point of humility, acknowledging our sinful nature, our unwarviness and our need for Jesus. It does not boast, it says, I cannot do this on my own strength. At the same time, it challenges us as Christians to examine ourselves. Is your life an outworking of the gospel? Do your co-workers, your classmates, your friends, your neighbours, do they see anything different about you? Or would no one even notice?

So what are these good works that Paul tells us to practice? Well, in some ways it would be quite helpful if he had written us a nice list, but I think it's more helpful that he hasn't. If we have a list, there's always a temptation that we work our way through, ticking off things on our own strength, trying to show that we are good Christians, literally ticking all the boxes. Paul doesn't give us many specifics here, and I'm glad he doesn't because we all have a tendency to put the cart before the horse in that regard. Paul doesn't give us a list of good works we must do. He tells us to insist on the good news of Jesus, and in doing so, our hearts will be in a position where good works can happen.

Now, that doesn't mean we shouldn't be disciplined, but we must be careful to get it the right way round. Let us proclaim the gospel, and let us practice it also. As Paul says elsewhere in Philippians, whatever happens, conduct yourself in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in that one spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel. It's no surprise then that, given the crucialness of the gospel, that it should be guarded against error. Paul wants us to proclaim the gospel, he wants us to practice the gospel, and now Paul wants us to protect the gospel. Titus is to do this in two ways, by avoiding foolish arguments and by dealing with those who won't. In verse 9, Paul tells us to avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. We've been thinking tonight of how our behaviour should be in line with our beliefs, that our faith and practice go hand in hand, how we can live out our faith. But now Paul is telling us what happens when we don't have that focus, what happens when we don't insist on these things. When we spend our time in foolish controversies, good works are not the result. What we get is unprofitability and worthlessness. After giving Titus many positive instructions, Paul tells him four things which he should avoid. Firstly, Titus is to avoid foolish controversies. On this point I'm going to defer to Spurgeon, who of course has said it better than I ever could, and it's still very much up to date though it was written in 1865. But this should not surprise us, as from Titus we learn that these issues are as old as the church. Our churches suffer much from petty wars over obtrusive points and unimportant questions.

After everything has been said that can be said, neither party is any the wiser, and therefore the discussion no more promotes knowledge than love, and it is foolish to so in so barren a field. Questions upon points wherein scripture is silent, upon mysteries which belong to God alone, prophecies of doubtful interpretation, and upon mere modes of observing human ceremonies are all foolish, and wise men avoid them. Our business is neither to ask nor answer foolish questions, but to avoid them altogether. And if we observe the apostles' precept to be careful to maintain good works, we shall find ourselves far too much occupied with profitable business to take much interest in unworthy, contentious and needless strivings.

So we are not to engage in these things at all, but as Paul instructs we are to avoid them altogether. Secondly, Titus was to avoid genealogies. Now this might sound like an odd point, but certain Paul's teachers apparently took great pride in proving that they were direct descendants of Abraham or other figures of old. Yet God is not concerned with who our parents are. He is concerned about our salvation. Titus was a Gentile with no Jewish heritage, but instead of comparing family history, Titus is to preach the good news of Christ.

[23 : 50] Thirdly, Titus was commanded to avoid dissensions, strife or quarrels. In other words, Titus is not to be known as argumentative. Now the New Testament gives many positive instructions to contend for the Christian faith. In Peter we read that we should always be prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you, yet to do it with gentleness and respect. And it is said of Paul in Acts that he reasoned with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead. It is also said that he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that Christ was Jesus. So public debates, contention and reasoning for the gospel and Christ is encouraged, but this of course is very different from arguing for the sake of arguing. Fourthly, Titus is to avoid quarrels or disputes about the law.

The false teachers of Crete were using the law of Moses to make accusations against Titus' fellow Christians. Paul tells Titus not to lose focus by arguing about the details of the Jewish law. Instead he is to centre his ministry on the good news of Jesus, promoting sound doctrine in the local churches. All four of these practices, pointless debate, arguments over genealogies, quarrels and debates over the law, are considered a waste of time.

They accomplished nothing except taking energy and resources from the ministry Paul had entrusted Titus with. Paul has been at pains to emphasise the importance of right doctrine throughout the letter. We are not being told to shy away from controversies in all circumstances, as there will be times when engaging with that is indeed profitable and worthwhile. Once again we do not have a list, but we do have some guidance to help us discern what is foolish and worthless. Do our discussions and disputes serve a purpose? Do they produce fruits or are they worthless? For example, it is very easy to get dragged into pointless discussions online in social media or forums. I confess that I have fallen into this trap in the past.

I have engaged in debates that were entirely unprofitable. The algorithms on Twitter and on TikTok are explicitly designed to encourage this. Debate and contention are magnified, arguments are presented to more people and any engagement is seen as good engagement.

We should take care not to get dragged into this cycle, which does nothing to point people to Christ. This atmosphere is not unique to the online world either. It is all too easy to have the wrong attitude when discussing matters of faith in general. How do you interact with people who disagree with you on a number of secondary issues? Are you simply trying to win a debate? Are you contending for your position out of a desire to be found in the right? Is it merely an intellectual exercise? Are you trying to win over that person or are you trying to score a win over them? So Paul instructs Titus that we must be careful to protect the gospel by avoiding foolish arguments. But he also instructs him to protect the gospel by dealing with those troublemakers. As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful, he is self-condemned. This is a similar pattern that is set out by Jesus in Matthew 18 when he is advising us on how to deal with disputes with her brothers.

[28 : 22] If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he then refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. In addressing those who stir up division within the church, Paul provides clear and firm instructions.

These individuals are not to be given a platform or undue attention. Their actions speak for themselves, revealing their true nature and condemning them. Titus is explicitly instructed to avoid associating with anyone who attempts to create divisions within the church. This directive reflects the serious nature of such behaviour. As the early Christian church expanded, the issue of false teaching became increasingly prevalent. The New Testament frequently addresses this concern, urging believers to distance themselves from those who spread false teaching.

For instance, John in his epistle echoes Paul's warning by advising believers not to offer any support to those who reject sound doctrine. Similarly, Jude highlights the subtlety of which some divisive individuals infiltrate the church, often going unnoticed until they begin to cause great disruption. The problem persists even today. False teachers and troublemakers continue to pose significant challenges within the church, and it is imperative for church leaders to vigilantly and courageously protect the integrity of the gospel. This involves not only correcting false teaching, but also, as we read here, when necessary, severing ties with those who seek to create division. Leaders must be discerning and proactive in maintaining the unity and purity of our faith community. By doing so, they uphold the truth of the gospel and ensure the church remains a place of spiritual growth and unity.

So as we draw to a close, we have witnessed Paul's unwavering emphasis on the link between faith and practice, the bond between belief and behaviour. This recurring theme throughout his letter to Titus underscores the challenges that we must live out our faith consistently.

Paul imparts this message through free clear and compelling instructions. As we have heard, we are to proclaim the gospel. We are called to insist on the truth of our salvation through the work of Jesus Christ. This is not merely an element of our faith, but the cornerstone, the foundation upon everything else that stands. Our proclamation of the gospel is a bold declaration that Christ's sacrifice and resurrection are the ultimate truths from which all aspects of our lives must flow. It is a call to keep the message of Jesus at the forefront, ensuring that it remains the main thing from which everything else flows.

[31 : 56] Secondly, we have heard that we should practice the gospel. Our faith in Jesus must translate into tangible actions, a visible outworking of the Spirit. This means that the grace we have received should manifest in good works, reflecting God's love and mercy to those around us. It is a reminder that our faith should influence our everyday interactions and decisions.

By practicing the gospel, we become living testimonies of God's transformative power, showcasing how faith can reshape lives and communities.

Thirdly, to protect the gospel, we must guard the church against those who would seek to disrupt its unity with foolish and worthless arguments. Paul warns against getting entangled in disputes that detract from the core message. Our focus should be maintaining the purity and integrity of the gospel message, standing firm against divisive insouciances that seek to lead us astray. Protecting the gospel is about safeguarding the truth and ensuring it remains undiluted and uncorrupted. As we meditate on these instructions, let us seek God's guidance and strength. May God prepare and enable us, both individually and as a church, by His Spirit, to proclaim, to practice and protect the gospel. Let us be steadfast in our commitment to live out our faith in ways that honour Him and reflect His glory.

May our lives be a testament to the transformative power of the gospel, shining brightly in a world that desperately needs the hope and love of our Lord Jesus. In this way, we can be faithful stewards of the gospel, living out the truth, our behaviour in step with our belief. We go forth, empowered by His Spirit, to make a lasting impact on His kingdom.

Amen.