

Insisting On The Right Things

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[0 : 0 0] Well, tonight we are continuing our study on Titus. So I'd like to read again verses 3 to 8 of Titus chapter 3. For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led us three, 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 Saviour 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 Saviour.

So that being justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. 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 we've been spending the last few Sunday evenings looking at Titus, a letter written by Paul to Titus, who was a pastor on the island of Crete.

And our study is called Because We Believe. And that title, as we've said each week, is capturing two key emphases that we always need to keep in balance as we follow Jesus.

[1 : 1 9] So on the one hand, we need to be clear about what we believe and why we believe it, because the gospel has doctrinal content that we need to know. There's a body of truth that we need to be clear about.

But alongside that, we also need to be clear about the impact that that faith should have on our lives. So the gospel also has ethical implications that needs to shape our lives.

And so as Christians, we believe the gospel. And because we believe, then we want our whole lives to be shaped by it. And that's one of the big themes that runs through this letter of Paul to Titus.

The fact that our day-to-day lives as individuals and as a church family are to be shaped by the amazing truth that we've come to know and believe. And so because of what we believe, we want, as Paul says several times in this letter, we want to devote ourselves to good works.

And when we think about good works, it's so easy to misunderstand that phrase in terms of the gospel. We do not do good works in order to be saved. That's legalism. We do these good works because we believe.

[2 : 3 5] Now tonight, we've come to our second last sermon. So this week and next week, we'll take us through chapter 3 and bring our study to a close. And the two sermons that we're going to do this week and next week are going to be looking at two immensely important principles that we need to remember as we follow Jesus together.

On the one hand, we need to insist on the right things. And on the other hand, we want to avoid the wrong things. So these are going to be our two titles for tonight and next week.

And tonight, we're focusing on verses 3 to 8 under that heading, insisting on the right things. And that word insist comes from verse 8 right there.

Paul says, I want you to insist on these things. And that word speaks about thinking clearly and speaking confidently about all the truths contained in these verses.

And what Paul wants for Titus is what the Holy Spirit wants for us, that we would insist on these things as well. So we don't want to hold on to the truths of the gospel in a kind of vague or hesitant way.

[3 : 47] Instead, we want to hold our convictions with clarity, with consistency, and with confidence. We want to insist on the right things as we follow Jesus.

There are key things that we absolutely insist on. And so we're going to look at these together, and we're going to do so under three headings. We need to insist on the problem.

And we need to insist on the solution. And we need to insist on the response. So we'll go through these one by one together. First of all, the problem.

And in verse 3, Paul does something that he frequently does in his letters. He gets us to think about our lives before we came to faith.

And you see that there in verse 3. For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led us to the slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.

[4 : 47] And here, Paul's not just describing himself and Titus. He's actually describing the human condition. And he does so in very, very stark and penetrating terms.

And so we're just going to go through them one by one. He starts by saying that we're foolish. And that word describes behavior that displays a lack of understanding. In other words, just behavior that doesn't make sense.

And that connection between, you know, a lack of understanding and behavior that we shouldn't engage in is so important. Because how often is it in life we say something or we do something.

And then when we come to our senses again, we think, Why did I do that? Why was I so stupid? And that whole concept of foolishness captures the patterns of behavior that we frequently fall into in our lives.

He also says that we were disobedient. So foolishness is the language of kind of ignorance or lack of thinking. Disobedience is the language of rebellion. And so it's a refusal to listen.

[5 : 58] A refusal to acknowledge God's authority. A refusal to listen to anybody except ourselves. Then Paul says that we were led astray.

And that happens so easily to us. We wander away from God. We're influenced by others. We hear voices enticing us.

We see sin tempting us. We give in. And it's almost like gravity pulling us in all sorts of different directions. Next, he describes how we are slaves to various passions and pleasures.

And the language of slavery there is very, very important. Because so often when we indulge in a passion or a pleasure, whatever that might be, we think that when we're doing that, we're demonstrating our autonomy and our independence.

And so when people go to jail or gambling or an outburst of power or money or sex or alcohol or gambling or an outburst of anger, whatever it might be, when we do things, we think that we're in charge.

[7 : 14] We think, I'm doing this because I want to do it. I'm in control. I'm in control. And yet the truth is, every time we fall into these sins, we are capitulating in the face of temptation.

And the behavior that we think demonstrates our autonomy is actually the behavior that confirms our slavery. And we see that so often around us and we see it in our own lives as well.

Then Paul talks about passing our days in malice and envy. And that word malice is also just speaking about, it can also be, it just means evil, things that are wrong.

And it's reminding us that we can go through our lives day to day and give a place to things that are evil in our hearts. And at the same time, we can be envious of what we see in other people's lives.

So we kind of allow things that are wrong and evil in our hearts. And then we see good things in other people's lives, we're envious of them. And again, the language here is quite harsh.

[8 : 23] And I think it's important to say that I don't think that Paul is saying here that, you know, that every day we spend the whole day just being evil and awful and envious all the time.

I think the point is more that he's emphasizing that it's so easy for something that's evil to find a wee place in our hearts.

And then it stays there. And so day after day after day, there's something in our lives that's wrong.

And likewise, resentment, jealousy, envy, it's so easy for these things to creep into our hearts and to stay. So that day after day after day, that pulse of envy and jealousy is beating in our hearts.

And so whether it's whatever it might be, and the Bible gives us dozens of examples, whether it's a habit of lying or criticizing other people or of greed or of lust or of anger, or whether it's jealousy of friends or family or colleagues or classmates.

[9 : 31] These are all fires in our hearts that we can just keep topping up every single day so that we spend our lives. We're going through our lives, passing our days, and these things are there.

And then Paul talks about being hated by others and hating one another. And again, the language here is so strong. And yet this is the constant pattern of behavior throughout human history.

So whether it's issues of race or nationality or religion or politics or football or land or school among classmates or whatever it might be, again and again and again, we see relationships characterized by hatred.

People feel hated and people feel hatred. And the whole thing frequently spirals out of control. So one group or individual feels hated, so we feel hurt.

And so we feel that justifies us in having a kind of hostility towards others. And then we express that hostility and hatred towards them. So they then feel hurt. They feel hated. And that justifies their behavior.

[10 : 36] And the whole thing spirals out of control. And on and on it goes. And so this verse paints a really negative picture.

It's describing the human condition in very, very heart, very, very direct. But we have to accept it hard to read.

But we have to accept that it's accurate. We have to accept that it's accurate. In fact, these are the verses in the Bible that are the easiest to prove.

Because it's what we see in the world around us. And we see little sign of it reducing. Now in saying that, it's so important we balance that. There's so much that's good in the world. Common grace is a wonderful reality whereby God brings so much good in so many different parts of the world.

There are many, many beautiful things in our lives. But all of this stuff is there too. And if you take Titus 3.3 and hold it up against the news headlines this week.

[11 : 43] Do you think that Paul is going to be proved wrong or proved right? So we accept that it's accurate.

But alongside accepting that this is accurate, we also have to insist that this is all a problem. And this is where we face an interesting question.

You read a verse like that. Let me ask you the question. What is your instinctive reaction to that verse? And I ask that question because if I look at myself, my instinctive reaction is mixed.

And what I mean by that is that at one level, I accept the reality of what that's saying. I think, yes, that's accurate. These are fair comments. But at the same time, there is part of me that instinctively wants to play all of those things down.

And so whether it's Titus 3.3 or any of the verses in Scripture that give a kind of penetrating diagnosis of our sinful condition, we think, well, yes, it's bad, but it's not that bad.

[12 : 45] And maybe it's not that serious. And whether it's when we read a verse like this or whether it's when we're kind of confronted with sin, it's always so tempting to play it all down just a little bit.

Now, this is where we discover that God's instincts are so much better than ours because one thing that is absolutely true about God is that he never plays down sin.

And that means that in God's eyes, these things absolutely are a problem. And the key point is that that doesn't make God cranky or unreasonable or angry.

It actually reminds us that God is beautiful and majestic and glorious because these things really are a problem.

And playing down a problem is just an even bigger problem. And thank God that he does not play these things down. We would never want a doctor to play down cancer. We'd never want a judge to play down serious crime.

[13 : 59] We would never want a police officer to play down a missing child. Do we want a God that plays down these kind of problems? Of course we don't. Instead, we want to be like the Holy Spirit who inspired Paul.

We want to insist that these things are a problem. And that doesn't mean going around, you know, judging everyone around us and thinking, oh, yeah, I can see that guy's foolish or, yeah, they're being led to stay.

It doesn't mean judging people like that at all. What it means is just being consistent and clear that the stuff that we read about in this verse is not good. All of that is a problem.

But alongside that, we need to look at our own hearts and to recognize that we're not immune to all of this either. And that's because the truth is we also have to confess that this is actually our problem.

Because when I look at verse 3, I think two things, one after the other. First of all, I think that all of these things are crazy. They're wrong. People shouldn't do them. And then I realize I've done them all.

[15 : 13] I've done them all. And it's reminding us that the problem of sin is real. We can't ignore it. We can't play it down. We cannot escape its grip.

Instead, we need to insist on the problem. This is our biggest problem. And there are a thousand voices that will tell you to ignore the problem or to resist the problem or to play down the problem.

The Bible is telling us to insist on it. And why is it doing that? It's doing that for our good.

Because this chapter and the gospel does not stop at the problem. It goes on to give us the solution. And verses 4 to 7 are just an amazing summary of that.

Now, as we saw last week, a key thing that we have to notice is that despite the fact that the problem is all our fault, the solution in the gospel is all done by God.

[16 : 24] And that's set out so, so clearly in verses 4 to 7. Because in verse 3, you've got this emphasis on we ourselves were. We were this. We were this. We were this. We were this. We were this. But from verse 4, God responds. And his response is amazing. Let me just go through it with you.

I'll rub out all these scribbles first so we can go through it a bit more clearly. First of all, it says that the goodness and loving kindness of God, our Savior, has appeared. Now, I want you to see how utterly brilliant this is.

So, you go to verse 3, and it's full of all stuff that's wrong and bad and a problem and foolish and just wrong in every way.

And we are guilty of all of that. And God responds with this. Goodness and loving kindness.

[17 : 33] That is God's response to our brokenness, our unworthiness, our foolishness.

And God wants us to insist on that. And that's so, so important. We need to insist, absolutely insist on this phrase.

We need to absolutely insist on this phrase. No, I want that to be yellow. I don't want it to be red. I want it to be red. Yellow. We absolutely have to insist on this. So, you're sitting here thinking, I feel foolish. I feel disobedient.

I've been led astray. I've been a slave to my passions. What on earth is God going to think of me? How is he going to respond to me? The Bible is insisting that his response to you is goodness and loving kindness.

That is what he's going to meet you with. That is his response to all of our mistakes. The goodness and loving kindness of God has appeared.

[18 : 34] And then it says that he saved us. Sorry, I want to change my thing here so I can make it clearer. He saved us. He saved us. Not because of works done by us in righteousness.

He saved us. Not because of any righteous work that we have done. So, our sinfulness, everything in verse 3 means that in terms of righteousness, we've got nothing.

We can offer nothing. We can offer nothing. We can offer nothing. And we can accomplish nothing that makes us good enough. And that's why God says, come with nothing.

God says to you, come with nothing. Just come as you are. Because his salvation is not, and never has been, and never will be, about us doing works of righteousness.

And God wants us to insist on that. And so, when you're niggled by thinking, I need to fix myself. I need to learn more. I need to change myself. I need to improve. There's so much that I need to do that needs to be different about me for God to accept me.

[19 : 52] It's not true. And God is insisting on that, that you do not need to do anything. Because he will save us, not because of any works of righteousness that we have done.

Instead, he responds to us according to his own mercy. Mercy is that great expression of kindness, compassion, and help towards those who are in desperate need.

And mercy is such a brilliant topic for us to think about because our culture has become so merciless. And you see that particularly in social media. Somebody makes a mistake, they are pounced on.

And it's utterly merciless. Somebody discovers something embarrassing that they've done in their lives. It's broadcast everywhere. And if there's ever an opportunity to pull somebody down and to expose them to public ridicule, then our society jumps at that chance because we've become so merciless.

God is so magnificently different. He is merciful. He will always meet you with mercy. And he wants us to insist on that.

[21 : 15] To insist that no matter how guilty you feel, no matter how much you feel like you've let him down, no matter how much you feel that you have stuffed up in your life, no matter how much you feel that you are so rubbish compared to every other Christian or every other person seeking the Lord, you feel rubbish compared to everybody else, God will meet you with mercy.

His unrelenting desire to show you kindness and help in all your needs. The gospel insists on that.

And so you can never get to God any other way except through his mercy. He will always, always, always insist on being merciful to you as you come to him. And in displaying that mercy, we receive the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.

Now that's a very, very rich theological statement there. It speaks so powerfully of the work of the Holy Spirit. So as God, the Holy Spirit, applies the gospel to us, as he applies to us all that Jesus has accomplished on the cross, it means that we are cleansed.

So we are washed clean. Sin washed away completely. It speaks about, it's the same concept that Jesus spoke about when he speaks about being born again, that we have new life in us through the Holy Spirit coming into our hearts.

[22 : 42] Our hearts are no longer a heart of stone. They become a heart of flesh. They become alive spiritually. We are given that new life in him, in Jesus, through the Holy Spirit.

And that new life begins a transforming work of renewal in our hearts so that we are being restored into the people that God made us to be. That work of the Holy Spirit is taking place in every single person who trusts in Jesus.

And God wants us to insist on that. So if you are a Christian or if you become a Christian, you're washed, you're clean. God is insisting you're clean. So every time the devil tries to accuse you of something, God says, no, they're clean.

He's clean. She's clean. I've washed them. And when you feel like you're oppressed and weak, or maybe you feel like your body is failing and crumbling before your eyes, you have been regenerated.

You have new life. You have eternal life. And God is insisting on that. He or she, she's going to be with me forever because she's alive. And I am renewing her.

[23 : 46] I'm renewing him. I am insisting on that work. I'm committed to it. I'm never stopping. And all of that work of the Holy Spirit is possible because that Holy Spirit is poured out on us richly through Christ Jesus, our Savior.

So in other words, all of this happens because the Holy Spirit's been poured into us. The Holy Spirit has come to dwell in us. God's made you his temple.

He's made you his dwelling place. That's why he's always with you. That's keeping the great covenant promise of God to be with us forever because he comes to dwell within us. Never, ever, ever are you without him.

He will never, ever leave you. And God insists on that. And God wants us to insist on that. So there is never a second in your life. Never go a million.

If you are trusting in Jesus, if you are a Christian, if you become a Christian, you will never go a millisecond of your existence ever when God's not with you. He is insisting on staying by your side, of making his home in your heart, and of holding you, and keeping you, and guarding you.

[25 : 08] And he's not half-hearted on that. He is insisting on that. And the result is twofold. We are justified by his grace, no longer guilty, no longer condemned, instead forever declared righteous, all because of his grace.

And as a result of that, we become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. We're united to Jesus. We're co-heirs with him. There is so much ahead of us that is amazing that we are going to share with him.

And God wants us to insist on that. Because your future, if you trust in Jesus, is absolutely sure, absolutely guaranteed.

These are all the things that God is insisting on. They are all the things that God has accomplished in his magnificent mercy and grace towards us.

All of these theological truths are magnificent. But you've got to remember that they're not too good to be true. They are too good to be false. God's commitment to you is so good, and so certain, and so sure, nothing will ever take it away.

[26 : 33] We need to keep insisting on them, keep thinking about them, keep leaning into them, keep grounding our identity and security upon them. And we can, this is where we can have confidence.

If we look at ourselves, if I look at myself, my confidence evaporates. But we can look to the Lord and feel confident and safe and secure.

And please, you've got, please, you've got to see in terms of understanding the gospel that a line needs to go here. Sorry that my slide is getting all messy.

But a line needs to go there because this is what we do. This is what God does. And that's what transforms everything.

That is why every one of you can know eternal life in Jesus because he's the one who does it all. God insists on every detail of your salvation.

[27 : 38] He insists on every detail of the solution. And that takes us to the response. my enemy, the clock, is plaguing me today.

But this will take five minutes and then we'll be done. Because verse 8 speaks to us about the response to all of this. This saying is trustworthy. Let me go onto it clearly there.

The saying is trustworthy. I want you to insist on these things so that those who believe in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. So as we insist on the severity of the problem, as we insist on the magnitude of God's solution, we need to insist that the right response is to be devoting ourselves to good works.

And this is getting to the heart of what this whole series is trying to convey. That because of what we believe, because we believe in the severity of the problem, because we believe in the magnitude of the solution, we want our lives to be lived in a way that honors God and that conforms more and more to his infinite goodness.

Now there's loads that we could say on this. I just want to highlight two key reasons why we insist on this response. We do so because this response is grounded in logic and it's grounded in love.

[28 : 59] And these two things are really important to remember. In the gospel, there is a beautiful logic. And you can see it in these verses. The problem of sin has left us enslaved and helpless and it leaves us hurt and it leaves us all too capable of hurting others.

But God delivers us from slavery, he heals us from our hurt and he transforms us into people that display his goodness. And that means that if you're a Christian or you become a Christian, being devoted to good works just makes total sense.

It's logical. because we've been freed from all the stuff that makes our lives rubbish and instead we've been put in a new way.

The Holy Spirit is helping us to live in a new way. And of course the opposite's true. It's why this is why works that are not good in our lives as Christians, whether that's selfishness or cruel words or arrogance or division or whatever else it may be, all of that is totally illogical in the life of the Christian.

Now when we talk about logic this is getting us to a point that's so important to remember. In terms of the logic of the gospel good works I'm going to run out of room so I need to go sideways.

[30 : 24] Good works are a consequence. They're not a cause. they're never a cause. They're always a consequence.

So many people think that good works cause salvation. Be a good person and God will save you. That's never true. It's not the gospel. But we absolutely insist that although we are only saved by the grace and mercy of God as a consequence of that we want to be devoted to good works.

And the great image that the New Testament uses of that is fruit. That good works are the fruit in our lives that come from the change that God has made in us.

But alongside that logic of the gospel we also need to emphasize and recognize that our good works are grounded on the love revealed to us in the gospel.

Now this is a bit harder to describe. Logic is easy to describe because it's just mathematical and engineers like me love processes like that. Love is harder to describe because it's relational but the key point is simple that as Christians we want to be careful to devote ourselves to good works simply because God's love is just amazing.

[31 : 47] God's love for you is just amazing and he loves you and he's devoted to you and he's delighted in you and he wants so much for you and you think Lord that's amazing I just want to live for you I want to respond to your love with a life that pleases you and so the posture of good works is not so much mathematical whereby we're thinking well if we do good works then xyz will happen because that doesn't always happen for us the posture of good works is not mathematical the posture is far more just a case of Jesus is amazing he's been so amazing to us we love him we want to listen to him we want to follow him we want to please him and we want to honour him so that means our good works are never about bargaining or never about kind of getting this that and the next from God it's just realising God's amazing and I just want to live for him this week and every week of our lives and this is the thing that will help us turn away from sin because when we are facing temptation it can be helpful to realise that sin's illogical but usually when we're falling into sin and struggling with temptation we've long since left logic and rational thinking behind us and so when you face temptation it's far far more helpful for you to think of this to think of the fact that Jesus loves you so so much and you love him and whatever temptation the devil is waving before you is not worth it and as we think in those terms the power of temptation over us will diminish why do we want to turn away from sin and do good simply because

God's love for you is so so good and so in the gospel logic and love go hand in hand the logic of the gospel releases you to do good the love of God in the gospel motivates you to do good and we want to keep on insisting on both of these things so in these verses we've got the problem we've got the solution we've got the response these are so important to remember these are the right things that we want to constantly insist on and as we close we've always got the choice do we want to insist on these things or do we want to resist these things and we want to pray that by grace God would press these truths into our hearts and that they'd shape the way we live this week for the rest of our lives Amen