

“NOW, TURN GOOD TEACHING ... INTO GOOD DOING!”
by Rom A. Pegram (7/31/16)

I don't want you to forget that this is what Titus is really all about. “Laying a Christian Foundation in An Un-Christian World” ... is really about building a community of faith for Christ, which includes building its leadership! Basically, the question is: *Will there be community ... or won't there?* That's the bottom line...

Last week, we talked about 'good' or 'Godly' teaching ... that resulted in 'good' or 'Godly' living... Today, we move on just a bit, to put that teaching into practice. Now, we need to turn 'good teaching' into 'GOOD DOING!' Let's finish up Titus today and see what Paul's final comments are, as he coaches Titus in the laying of a Christian foundation on Crete...

“Remind the believers to submit to the government and its officers. They should be obedient, always ready to do what is good. ² They must not slander anyone and must avoid quarreling. Instead, they should be gentle and show true humility to everyone.

³ Once we, too, were foolish and disobedient. We were misled and became slaves to many lusts and pleasures. Our lives were full of evil and envy, and we hated each other.

⁴ But—“When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, ⁵ he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. ⁶ He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior. ⁷ Because of his grace he declared us righteous and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life.” ⁸ This is a trustworthy saying, and I want you to insist on these teachings so that all who trust in God will devote themselves to doing good. These teachings are good and beneficial for everyone.

⁹ Do not get involved in foolish discussions about spiritual pedigrees or in quarrels and fights about obedience to Jewish laws. These things are useless and a waste of time.

¹⁰ If people are causing divisions among you, give a first and second warning. After that, have nothing more to do with them. ¹¹ For people like that have turned away from the truth, and their own sins condemn them.

¹² I am planning to send either Artemas or Tychicus to you. As soon as one of them arrives, do your best to meet me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to stay there for the winter. ¹³ Do everything you can to help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos with their trip. See that they are given everything they need. ¹⁴ Our people must learn to do good by meeting the urgent needs of others; then they will not be unproductive. ¹⁵ Everybody here sends greetings. Please give my greetings to the believers—all who love us. May God's grace be with you all.” – Titus 3:1-15 (NLT)

The founder of the Methodist movement, John Wesley, has a famous quote I'd like to remind you of today—probably the most famous quote that JW is known for. JW said,

"Do all the good you can. By all the means you can. In all the ways you can. In all the places you can. At all the times you can. To all the people you can. As long as ever you can." — John Wesley

Man, it's as if John Wesley knew Titus! Well, that's pretty much Paul's message to Titus ... and to the people of God on Crete. And Paul is so practical here. He begins with something that we tend to separate from our Christian faith at times ... but we shouldn't. What is that? Citizenship. Yeah, I know ... separation of Church and State. But, what I also know is that the original intent of our country's founders was "Freedom of religion," not "Freedom from religion!" So, let me echo what Paul is saying here to Titus. We should live out our Christian faith—maybe, especially—in the area of our citizenship. That would be God's will for our lives; Paul knew that ... and so must we!

So, let's get into it... The guidelines Paul gives for those in Christian community include:

DO GOOD WORKS IN EVERY AREA OF YOUR LIFE – EVEN IN THE AREA OF CITIZENSHIP... In verses 1 & 2, Paul says, "Remind the believers to submit to the government and its officers. They should be obedient, always ready to do what is good. ² They must not slander anyone and must avoid quarreling. Instead, they should be gentle and show true humility to everyone." 'Anybody remember the last election? I think we forgot to read Titus before that event... So, why do we need to do good works ... even in our citizenship?

First, there's THE *BEFORE* PICTURE... In verse 3 of Titus 3, Paul uses his own life as a personal illustration. He confesses to Titus and the readers of this letter: **"Once we, too, were foolish and disobedient. We were misled and became slaves to many lusts and pleasures. Our lives were full of evil and envy, and we hated each other."**

Here again, *Paul lays down the essence of the Gospel*—third time in Titus. You know what, folks? It's a great theologian who paints himself into the picture—who uses his own life as the best example of what he's talking about. That's exactly what Paul does here...

Perhaps he was thinking about how hard it would be for Cretan Christians to undergo a virtual 'character transplant' from their tendency toward political agitation ... to become persons who majored in *good works*! I believe this is why Paul gives a personal testimony here; he'd been there, done that! Think back to the kind of lawless people we're dealing with on Crete. *Apparently, they loved political agitation.* The more agitation ... the better! They loved stirring up any kind of trouble they could, when it came to their government and/or leaders. But, is that God's way? (And let's remember this conversation at the next election, shall we?)

It is often in remembering our past that the grace of God becomes even more precious... That's my story. And I believe that was Paul's story. Folks, let's remember

what God has done for us ... and be thankful for that kind of mercy, before we decide to treat anyone—including government leaders—in *an unchristian way!*

Paul gave them THE *BEFORE* PICTURE of his life ... *so that they could see the power of God in his life—the power that transforms life!* And that same power of God could be at work in *their* lives. “Here’s who we once were,” Paul urged the Cretans, “but God is calling us to live out a whole new picture!” So, then he presents to them...

THE *AFTER* PICTURE... In verses 4-7, Paul tells Titus:

“But—‘When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, ⁵ he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. ⁶ He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior. ⁷ Because of his grace he declared us righteous and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life.’”

We *can* do good works ... even in the area of our citizenship (our civic duty), if we will but submit to God’s Spirit who can transform our lives—yes, our very characters—and empower us to live lives full of love like this world has never seen (*even in an election year!*)

So, it’s time now to turn the ‘good teaching’ into ‘GOOD DOING!’ Nothing will speak to the world as loudly as *how we behave in an election year!* That’s what the Cretans needed to hear. And maybe, that’s what we need to hear, too...

Paul finishes up his letter to Titus by encouraging him about the ‘good works’ that he is telling him he must teach ... and live. Here’s basically what Paul is saying:

PAY ATTENTION TO THE *USEFULNESS OF GOOD WORKS*... Verse 8 reminds us, “This is a trustworthy saying, and I want you to insist on these teachings so that all who trust in God will devote themselves to doing good. These teachings are good and beneficial for everyone.” The trustworthy saying Paul is speaking of is a summary of verses 3-7: *We are to keep the Gospel in focus at all times and not allow other things to become primary!*

Our faith in God must produce good works *on a regular basis*; that requires a high degree of intentionality. Paul said it best when he explained our responsibility when it comes to ‘good works’ (Phil. 2:12-13):

“Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. ¹³ For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.”
– Philippians 2:12-13 (NLT)

This is from Paul's letter to the church in Philippi. We need to be careful when we say things like 'good works come from God,' insinuating that it is God alone which good works come from; yes, it's God's Spirit that motivates good works—that's behind the good works ... but *it's our obedience that puts the rubber to the road!* "These teachings [about good works] are good and beneficial for everyone." Then, *Paul finishes up with what's NOT beneficial for everyone...* (Here's how NOT to waste your time as a follower of Christ and especially as a leader in the Church...)

Verses 9-11 explain, "Do not get involved in foolish discussions about spiritual pedigrees or in quarrels and fights about obedience to Jewish laws. These things are useless and a waste of time. ¹⁰ If people are causing divisions among you, give a first and second warning. After that, have nothing more to do with them. ¹¹ For people like that have turned away from the truth, and their own sins condemn them." Here's the LEADER'S GUIDELINE: GIVE TWO WARNINGS... I truly believe that some people who are a physical part of the church don't even know that they're being divisive at times ... but this is why we need good leaders in the church. Leaders are to have this talk with those being divisive—two talks (warnings) to be exact, then *they're to cut them loose...* It's the 'sacrifice one for the sake of the whole' idea ... and sometimes that becomes reality in the church...

Folks, in a nutshell, I believe that the message of Titus boils down to this: **Integrity:** **Living what you say you believe...** Is that what we're doing here? We preach LOVE. And it's not a LOVE that we made up. It's God's LOVE ... that is real, that is powerful, and that is absolutely available to all. BUT ... is that what we're living ... in every area of our lives (including our citizenship)?

- This is the foundation we need to be laying right here...
- This is the Christian community that God is looking to build...
- This is what God wants to see happen right here in this ... wild mid-west...

"Do all the good you can. By all the means you can. In all the ways you can. In all the places you can. At all the times you can. To all the people you can. As long as ever you can." — John Wesley