

Where We Are Going Series

Transforming Conduct (Titus 2:11-15)

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At A Glance:

- I. Introduction
- II. Explanation of Conduct
- III. How to Transform Conduct
- IV. Conclusion
- V. Questions for Further Thought

These sermon study notes are designed to be a tool used after listening to the sermon. This resource is a guide to help deepen understanding regarding the Scriptures and ideas presented in the sermon. Those who use these study notes are encouraged to look up, read through, and think about Scripture references in this guide. There is more information in these notes than what is presented in the sermon. These study notes are designed to be used as an independent study tool to help the formation of Biblical convictions, character, and conduct.

Transforming Conduct

I. Introduction

- A. Video: “Are People Born Good?” by PragerU.
- B. It might be tempting to think that those who believe people are basically good are those who do not accept the Bible as their authority, but this is not the case. In a recent survey, it was discovered that sixty-five percent of American evangelicals also believe this to be true, which is only slightly behind the seventy-one percent agreement for US adults in general.¹ Not only is there confusion about whether people are basically good or not, there is also confusion over how to define a good person, as well. Most people will quickly and easily be able to convince themselves they are good because they simply move the standard of goodness to where they are—think about how good we all are at justifying and rationalizing our actions, even when we know they were wrong. A moving target like this makes it very difficult to convince people they need a significant change in their behavior.
- C. Jesus put God’s standard of goodness for conduct this way: “⁴⁸ Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Mt. 5:48). On this definition of goodness, no one is good but God (Mk. 10:18, Lk. 18:19, Mt. 19:17). It is the life of Jesus that points out to us just how not good we really are (Jn. 16:10).² If we use God’s standard of goodness, every person has a spiritual need to be transforming their conduct. Our current behavioral choices are not good to a greater or lesser degree. There is always room for improvement, no matter how good we think we are.
- D. Due to the pervasive secular thinking adopted by the church, the church’s mission to help people act like Jesus is a challenging one. Yet, it is still what we are commanded to do by Jesus, and He not only provides all the resources to do so, He also walks with us to make it happen. Titus 2:11-14 describes what being a good person in our conduct looks like. The modern American church desperately needs to be instructed in the definition of good conduct and to realize our need to purposefully pursue it.

II. Explanation of Conduct

- A. The Bible, including Jesus’s teachings, is filled with commands and advice on how to conduct ourselves in this world. Life advice is found on almost every page. Knowing how to act morally and godly is clearly a major priority for God. Once again, we will take a quick tour of the Scriptures to see what God has to say about good conduct by looking at two critical passages.
- B. As we saw in our first message in this series, godly conduct is summarized and defined: “¹⁴ As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance, ¹⁵ but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior; ¹⁶ because it is written, ‘YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.’” (1 Pet. 1:14-16). “Follow your heart” is the motto of the world. “Follow God’s heart” is the motto of disciples. Disciples, described as obedient children, are expected to have a transformation of life from indulging their own desires to being

¹ www.thestateoftheology.com

² Without the help of the Holy Spirit, we would never see it. Left to ourselves, we would go through living thinking we are just fine and better than most other people. As another person has put it: we are not good at estimating our own goodness.

conformed to God’s desires. The holiness of God is intended to influence all of a disciple’s behavior, with no area of life left unaffected. The impact of Jesus on our lives should affect every action we make. The basic behavioral instruction from the Bible is: stop doing evil and learn to do good (Isa. 1:16-17).

- C. The place we start is ignorance of what is good as we are carried along by our own desires, “the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance” (v. 14). The natural human condition is not healthy—we are not good people. The assumption here is that the desires and ignorance in us is not positive, it is problematic. Since this is where our conduct starts, a change is both needed and necessary (“do not be conformed” v. 14) to the place where we naturally begin. We are told to stop living in our ignorance and indulging our own desires. Our desires and ignorance need to be replaced with something else: “be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior” (v. 15). This is a universal statement about a disciple’s conduct; everything they do is to be morally good and devoted to the honor of God.³ More specifically, we learn to act like God Himself as defined in the Bible, “like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves” (v. 15) and “because it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’” (v. 16). The justification for living a holy God imitating life is because the Bible commands us to do it. Peter quotes from Leviticus to make his point. To be good is to be holy like God, as He reveals Himself in the Bible, for every action we perform. Disciples are to be morally pure like God and live with Him in a harmonious condition. There is a pattern of life that transforms every day, every moment, and every action, until our last breath.⁴
- D. While it is easy to tell people to be good in their behavior, there are a variety of opinions on what good deeds are—especially in a culture that is so morally confused as ours. What does it actually mean to do good deeds? How are good deeds defined? What is the essence of holiness? An excellent description of what it means to be good is found in Titus 2:11-15:
- ¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, ¹² instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, ¹³ looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, ¹⁴ who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. ¹⁵ These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you. (Tit. 2:11-15)
- E. God’s grace educates us in the art of living.⁵ There are five descriptors provided by Paul in this passage that articulate the impact Jesus and His message has on our behavior. All these effects are the result of Jesus’ actions on our behalf and the grace God gives to us. Those who have received God’s salvation will have their lives changed in their actions. Those who don’t transform their lives from unrestrained behavior to having a passion for doing good deeds do

³ Holiness includes the idea of separation from evil as well as dedication to a life of righteousness toward God. Wayne A. Grudem, [1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 17, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 84.

⁴ Wayne A. Grudem, [1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 17, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 84.

⁵ Donald Guthrie, [Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 14, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 220.

not allow Jesus to fulfill His main purpose in their lives.⁶ Jesus appeared on earth to change the way people live in their day to day conduct. Jesus redeems us from immoral deeds and sets us apart for good deeds. This is what Jesus does in people’s lives. True salvation teaches us to deny ungodliness, it is part of the package. Therefore, anyone who rejects or does not express a transformation from ungodliness to godliness hasn’t experiences God’s true salvation.

- F. Good conduct is first described as, “denying ungodliness”. Moral actions require us to tell ourselves “no”. Disciples are commanded to be “denying” themselves. Throughout the Scriptures, unrestrained behavior is viewed as both harmful and immoral. Any action that pushes God to the side out of disrespect in order to engage in an activity are actions that are not good.⁷ If God can’t wholeheartedly be invited into the action we are performing, it is not good. Removing God from our thinking in order to do something is ungodliness. Doing anything that results in disrespecting God is not good. Like the threat, “Should I tell your mother?” stops bad behavior in children, bringing God into the equation and thought process of what we are doing defines what is good. If we have to consciously push God to the side in order to feel comfortable doing what we’re doing, it is ungodly.
- G. Ungodliness is not the only category of deeds we must deny. Good actions also deny “worldly desires.” A worldly desire is an intense desire that pertains to this world, and as Jesus put it, this realm.⁸ Any desire related to this life and this world that does not carry over into eternity could be considered a worldly desire. Desires that have nothing to do with God or His kingdom are worldly desires. If we understand that worldly desires are bad, we will see just how confused we are morally because we naturally tend to think there is nothing wrong with these desires. In fact, we usually encourage them. Jesus, however, encouraged His disciples to not be worried about food, water, or clothing and instead seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, knowing that God will provide for these other needs (Mt. 6:33). Jesus even wants us to deny our basic desires for survival for the sake of the kingdom! If we truly understand the gravity of denying worldly desires, our lives will be radically transformed. As we trust God to provide for our needs in this world and focus on God instead, our hearts begin to be detached from this world and attached to eternity and that which is most important. Prioritizing our pursuit of God over all our other desires will create drastic changes in our behavior.
- H. Moving from the negative—denying ourselves—there are also some positive things that we should be doing. The third descriptor of good deeds is to live “sensibly”. To act sensibly to conduct ourselves in a wise manner that keeps self-control over our passions and desires.⁹ Jesus enable us to live with every aspect of our lives in its proper place under our control.¹⁰ People’s lives get out of order when specific desires become imbalanced and over indulged. Good deeds are carried out when we have proper priorities and find a good and healthy life balance that is pleasing to God.

⁶ Colossians 1:21-23

⁷ Logos 9 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Titus 2:12 “ungodliness”

⁸ Logos 9 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Titus 2:12 “worldly desires”

⁹ Logos 9 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Titus 2:12 “sensibly”

¹⁰ William Barclay, [*The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*](#), 3rd ed. fully rev. and updated., The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 288.

- I. Fourth, followers of Jesus live “righteously”. Good actions are done in accordance with God’s moral standards.¹¹ God Himself defines what is good; it is who He is. Rather than being left to our own thoughts about right and wrong, actually doing good is attached to what God says about our behavior. The Bible is so powerful that it can even morally evaluate our thoughts and intentions (Heb. 4:12). Having a working knowledge of the character of God and the content of the Bible can lead to a life lived in obedience to the standards of God.
- J. Fifth and finally, good actions are described as “godly”. Godly actions are those that show proper respect to God.¹² To be godly is to be God-centered and God-focused. To be godly is to openly, willingly, and eagerly invite God into what we are doing, without shame or regret. Godly behavior is that which can be transparently participated in with the presence of God. In other words, good actions are those that are influenced and informed by the right attitude towards God. This is the exact opposite of the first item: ungodliness. Ungodliness pushes God away, while godliness brings God near.
- K. What makes your current lifestyle different from those who don’t believe in Jesus? Every person who hears the message of Jesus will face the danger of receiving God’s grace in vain (2 Cor. 6:1, Mk. 7:6-8). To receive God’s grace in vain is to think we have accepted the forgiveness Jesus offers without letting the message of God change how we live. When a person’s heart is not set on God and their worship of Him is simply a habit, duty, or tradition, God’s grace is received in vain. When a person’s faith in Jesus does not lead to obedience to His commandments, God’s grace is received in vain. A person who thinks he receives the benefits of Jesus without actively pursuing and following Him has deceived himself. Trusting Jesus requires us to openly invite Jesus into our lives and let Him have His way in us so that we live for His desires. Unless we are increasingly conformed to live like Jesus, we have received God’s grace in vain, as all true disciples “walk in the same manner as He walked” (1 Jn. 2:6).
- L. Living by the commands of Jesus distinguishes saving trust in Jesus from mistaken trust in Jesus (Mt. 7:21, Lk. 6:46, Tit. 1:16, Pr. 19:16).¹³ According to Jesus and the apostles, it is possible for people to profess to know God yet deny Him in their actions (Tit. 1:16). Simple intellectual assent to the identity of Jesus is not sufficient by itself to produce salvation and God’s favor. Actions conformed to God’s authentic teachings must accompany a person’s belief. As James put it, our trust is demonstrated and revealed in our actions. Saving faith is dead without any implementation in our lives.
- M. This understanding of Christianity, that true belief in Jesus must be attached to a particular lifestyle and moral standard, is very unpopular today. Many people want to hold onto Jesus, while at the same time, removing any and all moral restrictions He might place on their lives. People want to feel safe with Jesus and live however they want at the same time. This is not real Christianity. Those who promote Jesus’s view on this will likely be labelled intolerant and unloving. Disciples need courage in order to stand where Jesus stood and promote what Jesus promoted in a culture that is strongly opposed to these values.

¹¹ Logos 9 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Titus 2:12 “righteously”

¹² Logos 9 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Titus 2:12 “godly”

¹³ God’s judgment will be based on our deeds according to Jesus (Mt. 16:27).

III. How to Transform Conduct

A. Now that we know the importance of our conduct and what it means to do good, we can look at how we can start behaving the way God wants us to. A critical skill when it comes to conduct that pleases God is learning how to apply the Bible to all of life. Knowing the practical difference the Bible makes in our lives will transform our conduct. Disciples need to develop the skill of making connections between the truth of Bible and everyday living. We need to know where and how the Bible changes our behavior. According to Howard and William Hendricks, when it comes to Bible study, “Application is the most neglected yet the most needed stage in the process.”¹⁴ The reason disciples study the Bible is to do something in response. How many of us come to the Word of God with the expectation of doing something with what we learn? Do we see learning about the Bible as an end in itself?

B. The basic three step process of transforming our conduct, just as the other two C’s, begins with the Bible. We must first understand the Bible. Second, we connect the truth of the Bible to our lives. We find and discover relevant ways to connect God’s message with our current circumstances. Third, we put the Bible into practice. Jesus put the process this way:

²⁴ Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. ²⁶ Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ²⁷ The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall. Mt. 7:24-27

First we hear, then we understand what to do in response, and finally, we put it into practice. While Jesus leaves the second step unmentioned, it is assumed. A person can’t practice something without first connecting Jesus’s words to their own life context.

C. In what is probably the best book on Biblical application, Daniel Doriani provides a helpful and simple framework for transforming our conduct.¹⁵ He says there are four major aspects of connecting the truth of the Bible with our daily lives, which can be explained by asking ourselves four questions when we come into contact with the Bible. These four questions directly point us towards the transformation of our convictions, character, and conduct, although Daniel doesn’t use those words.

D. The first application question that helps give shape to our lives is: What should I do? God communicates with us through His word in order to generate a response from us. What response is God looking for in light of what I just read from His Word? Every person, and especially disciples, have specifically stated duties to carry out before God. Knowing what God expects us to do in the life situations we face is critical for right living. Having a working knowledge of our moral obligations before God is a powerful influence on our conduct. For

¹⁴ Howard G. Hendricks and William D. Hendricks, [*Living by the Book: The Art and Science of Reading the Bible*](#) (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2007), 289.

¹⁵ Daniel Doriani *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* (New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 2001), 98-116.

example, “³ For this is the will of God, your sanctification, *that is*, that you abstain from sexual immorality;” (1 Thess. 4:3). Every Christian has the responsibility before God to keep away from any sexual behaviors that God identifies as harmful and/or immoral. Followers of Jesus are to pursue and learn how to control their own bodies in honorable ways in the midst of the desires they have. Any time we read Scriptures, we can transform our conduct by asking ourselves what we should be doing in light of what we just read.

- E. Another question that helps us connect the truth of Scripture with our own personal life context is, “Who should I be?” We want to know how we can become the person whose character allows them to do what is right. Character applies the known proper course of action—the answer to the first question—to ourselves. Knowing what people are supposed to do leads to me as an individual actually doing it. This second question moves from us, “God wants people to...” to “I will do what God tells people to do.” Taking personal responsibility for who God wants us to be will impact our conduct. The truth of the Bible will move from knowledge and theory to actual practice.
- F. “To what causes should we devote our life energy?” is the third application question. The goals God wants us to pursue are presented in the Bible, and wise disciples will pay attention to them. Looking carefully for the priorities and values of God will help us live lives that lead to satisfaction rather than regret. Knowing what we should want to accomplish in life has a powerful influence on our behavior. Our dreams greatly shape our destiny. What we want out of life will determine how we act. The person whose goal in life is to become a pilot will act in specific ways to make that happen. Conduct is largely based on the causes we live for. In order to transform our conduct, we must first change our life direction.
- G. The fourth and final question is this: “How can I distinguish truth from error?”. The Bible helps us see the word from God’s perspective, and when we see reality as it is, we will act differently in it. Our conduct is greatly influenced by what we think—our convictions. If a person thinks they are in danger, they will take action steps to protect themselves. Discernment is necessary for understanding what is good (“¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.” Heb. 5:14). The truth of the Bible helps disciples understand how to think about each of these questions. Through a knowledge of the truth, we get a clear picture of the moral landscape and understand how that landscape applies to our immediate situation.
- H. When you sit down to either read or study Scripture, use these questions to guide your time with the Bible, at least for the application portion.¹⁶ By focusing on these questions, you will begin to make connections between what you are reading and your daily living. You will direct your thoughts from understanding the word of God to implementing the word of God. The greater the amount of time a person spends on Biblical application, the more relevant the Bible will seem. The more you look, the more you will see. With practice, a person will develop the ability to take any passage of Scripture and see where it connects with the real world. Use these questions the next time you approach the Bible, and let it become a regular habit.

¹⁶ For a more contextualized set of questions for us as a church would be to ask the following questions regarding the Three C’s: What should I think?, Who should I be?, What should I do?

- I. If you have a regular location for your time in Scripture, post these question in view so you can review them and work through them with ease. With one look you can work through these questions without having to memorize these questions. The more you use these questions, the more they will become second nature, and perhaps with time, you may get them memorized so you can use them without needing a visual reminder. Memorization isn't the goal-using these questions functionally is. Create some system that works for you in order to use these questions during your time in the Bible.

IV. Conclusion

- A. Real discipleship will involve each of the Three C's: convictions, character, and conduct. Fully developed disciples will not be produced if any one of these is missing. The conduct of a true disciple will be defined by denying ungodliness and worldly desires while replacing them with being sensible, righteous, and godly. This is what good conduct looks like.
- B. Those who are following Jesus will not merely know and do what is good, they will develop a passion for doing deeds that please God (“¹³ ...our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, ¹⁴ who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.” Tit. 2:13-14). Disciples are to be people who are “zealous for good deeds”. Are you?

V. Questions for Further Thought

- A. When have you felt a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment in performing good conduct? This isn't bragging, it is an intended outcome by God to encourage obedience.
- B. What are the results of genuine trust in Jesus in the lives of disciples (Eph. 4:20-30)?
- C. How do I define good deeds? Does my list of good deeds match Jesus' list (Rev. 2:2-3, 2:19)?
- D. Are there any good deeds I consistently omit or any bad deeds I consistently commit? If so, what convictions or character adjustments need to be made in order to make the necessary corrections?
- E. Are there any good deeds Jesus tells me to do that I have yet learned how to engage in them? Which ones? How might I develop the skills to do them?