

A Culture of Readiness

Titus 3:1-15

Grace Church | August 25, 2019

Announcements

Crestview

Equipping Courses

College Party

New Sermon Series

This is our last week in the book of Titus, so I wanted to give us a brief rundown of what we've been through so far. Our first week in Titus we were shown that the people of Crete, to which the book is written to, had been thrust into a distinct cultural moment. We called this their *cultural mythology*. The Cretans followed Zeus, a cultural moment where they had a distinct problem in their new church: they were having trouble being Godly. So we have seen that in the book of Titus, Paul gives us a few paradigms for how the church in Crete, and how we as church, might become godly. He starts with the leaders—appointing healthy pastor/elders in the church is the first step. Healthy leaders are able to provide an example of godliness and also to teach right doctrine that contradicts the false teaching the Cretans were hearing and believing.

This doctrine is so important, because what we truly believe in our heads eventually makes its way to our hearts and then to our hands. We then taught in chapter two that we are to teach one another: to live lives that accord with this right doctrine, to be self-controlled in personal holiness. This kind of living, Paul says, will *adorn* the doctrine of God and make it attractive. And so last week we saw that the right doctrine we are to believe is nothing less than the gospel of Jesus Christ. This gospel—that the grace of God has appeared in the person and work of Jesus—is the only way we are saved, and the only hope we have to become godly. If we cling closely to this right doctrine, the gospel of Jesus, then Christ will act to purify us and make us a people who are zealous for good works. We don't go beyond the gospel, but if our aim is to be godly, we cling to it with everything.

But today we will see in Titus 3 that there is a natural outpouring of our personal godliness. If we truly hold fast to gospel doctrine, it will not only create an individually godly church, but a publicly godly church.

One of my favorite books is by a farmer-poet named Wendell Berry. It's called *Jayber Crow*. It's the story of Jayber Crow, a normal, uninteresting resident of a small, rural town in Kentucky. Jayber is a barber. Nothing particularly fascinating happens in his life. He never marries. He is a barber his whole life. He lives on next to nothing. He is also the janitor at the church. He is the first person the townsfolk call when they need a grave dug. But there is a specific kind of godliness to him that Berry personifies incredibly well. Some sort of enduring spirit. He's not really outgoing or gregarious, but his godliness is portrayed in how publically and communally minded his life is. At one point in the book, he summarizes his understanding of the impact of the story of Jesus.

“As I have read the Gospels over the years, the belief has grown in me that Christ did not come to found an organized religion but came instead to found an unorganized one. He seems to have come to carry religion out of the temples into the fields and sheep pastures, onto the roadsides and the banks of the rivers, into the houses of sinners and publicans, into the town and the wilderness, toward the membership of all that is there.”¹

Titus 3 is the amen to Jayber’s premonitions. This gospel we possess creates a godliness that seeps out of the gathered church and into the world. We are ordinary, public people. We are not created to live without rubbing shoulders with all kinds of people like and unlike us. Our gospel has a firm foundation, but we are messengers of it, and we are not meant to hole ourselves up in an underground commune. Our doctrine is organized, our lives are not. We are created by God to take our doctrine and our godliness public, into the fields and pastures, roads and rivers, houses and towns, boardrooms and classrooms.

The point is, we cannot avoid the public square. We go to work, to school, to the grocery store, and we exercise our public lives. No matter how introverted you are, you can’t escape this. And we can’t escape the fact that most of the world is not godly. If you step out of the Baylor bubble for just one moment, you’ll understand this more clearly. Inasmuch as we are Christlike in our doctrine and in our actions, the Church of Jesus Christ is a *distinct* people living in a culture that is not like ours. Trying to be godly in public won’t always go over smooth with a culture that is inherently antithetical to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So here is where we sit this morning. We cannot force ourselves into underground caves. We are public, political people, through and through. So how do we do it? How do we maintain godliness not just in private, but in public?

Today, I want you to realize that If the gospel of Jesus Christ is powerful enough, the supernatural force of the cross and the empty tomb doesn’t just impact our private lives, but our public lives as well. The Word of God has something to say. In Titus 3, we will see at least two aspects of public godliness: we see its content and we see its fuel.

The Content of Public Godliness

Humble Submission (3:1)

Read verse 1 with me. After encouraging the men and women of Crete in their personal striving to adorn the gospel and orient themselves around the gospel? What is their next charge? Be submissive to rulers and authorities. Ah, theres that cultural curse word again: *submission*. There’s

¹ Wendell Berry, *Jayber Crow*.

something about the word *submission* that really grinds our gears of self-autonomy. What right do rulers and authorities of this world have over me?

The Cretans had some trouble with this as well. One ancient historian notes that the people of Crete were famously known for being constantly involved in “insurrections, murders, internecine wars”.² On their little island, they fancied themselves to be their own law. But still, the iron grip of Rome held them fast. At the time of the letter to Titus, do you know who was the ruler and authority of the Roman world? The Emperor Nero. They didn’t live in a time of political bliss, and yet the call to submit remains.

If you’re not caught up on your Roman history, let me refresh you. Nero was known for being a bit of a madman, cruel and selfishly indignant, even for imperial standards. It’s widely believed that he had a part to play in the great fire of Rome in AD 64 which destroyed most of the city. Some historians claim he set fire to the city himself. Nero was a musician, and it’s been said that he watched Rome burn from his palace above the city while he merrily played his fiddle. The Roman historian Tacitus, stating that Nero was trying to avoid the fire being pinned on him, chose a new scapegoat. He blamed Christians. So what did he do? He rallied up the early followers of Jesus to make a spectacle of them.

Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired.

Innocent men and women, flaming martyrs, burnt alive by Nero as streetlights. This is the highest ruler and authority, and what does Paul say that Titus is meant to remind the Cretans? To be submissive to this authority. The word here means “to subject oneself”. And not only subject, but to obey.

We live in an information age, where everyone has an opinion. We have freedom of speech, and I think that is an inherently positive right. But rarely is our freedom of speech used to respect and submit to with humble obedience those called to rule and exercise authority over us. Rarely do we submit with a glad heart to our bosses instructions, to our administrations unnecessary demands, to the codes and regulations of our city and state, to the ruling of our supreme court, and yes, even to the executive decisions of the president. But here is a clear lesson. Public godliness means sometimes we put away our desire to exercise control and we obey. We never obey an authority that is asking us to do something that is explicitly unbiblical, but for the most part of our lives, we submit. We lay down our rights. We surrender our pride.

² Cited from John Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus*.

Why? Because Christian action in the public sphere acknowledges the fact that we serve a high and *humble* king. We serve a king who subjecting himself to death, even unjust death at the hands of the rulers of his day. He did it to show that true power is not found in insurrection and rebellion—true power is found in humble obedience. If we are unable to obey our rulers and authorities, how are we to obey our heavenly father who cares for us?

I won't belabor this point. Think about how you interact with those in power above you. Do you strive for submission and obedience? Or do you talk about them behind their back and stubbornly make their job harder? This is not popular, but I believe the text is clear. This is public godliness—being willing to lay down our need to be right or justified and showcasing humble submission to our authorities, because the gospel tells us that we have been justified and made right in Christ before the only judge whose opinion matters: God the Father.

When we strive for humble submission in our public life, it also has another benefit. It checks our ego at the door and prepares us well to obey the second content marker of public godliness, a readiness for doing good.

Readiness for Good (3:1)

Read 3:1. I have a confession to make. So often I live my life with the thought “do I have to?” somewhere in the forefront to middle of my mind. This seeps into everything, from simple tasks of good for my wife and son (“do I have to take out the trash?”, “Do I have to hold the baby right now?”, “Do I have to give of myself emotionally to my wife after a long day?”) to more pertinent tasks of public godliness (“do I have to show kindness to this stranger? DO I have to talk to my barber? Do I have to acknowledge and listen closely to the man or woman on the street who I assume is just asking for a handout?”).

Titus 3:1 shows us that the “do I have to” culture is no way to adorn the gospel publically. Public godliness requires an attitude of *readiness* for every good work. I cannot get more practical church. The day where we become a people who are eager and ready and willing to dive into publicly displayed godliness is the day when we will shine the glory and love of Jesus the brightest. Think of the moment when a visitor, a non-member comes into worship with us. How *ready* are we to welcome them? Do we prepare our lives in such a way that when the good work of public godliness appears, we are ready? Do we prepare our lives to be kind to our neighbors when they come knocking, to act with mercy to the man or woman on the street asking for help, to respond with patience to our nagging children or our stressed out spouse or overloaded roommate?

You see, church, when we are truly ready for every good work, the world will notice that. You ever met someone who is truly prepared for every situation? It's pretty clear who those people are. This can be us—ready to display the gospel in every situation. In this readiness we echo Christ, who when each and every opportunity for godliness and good works that please the Father came, he was ready. He didn't squander a single moment. He was ready too, for the cross. He went there in order to make you ready. What does it mean to live a life of public godliness, where the gospel

oozes out of every pore of your being? It's a life that's ready at all times to glorify Christ and magnify his good work. It's a life that's ready to make much of Jesus and rejoice in his gospel.

The Psalmist in Psalm 45 describes it like this: *"My heart overflows with a pleasing theme; I address my verses to the king; my tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe."* Readiness for every good work means that in every situation, we are ready to find the avenue to praise and glorify God. It means our lives are an act of public worship that cannot be denied. When we are cut off in traffic, our hearts are ready not for anger and impatience, but like a ready scribe, our hearts are prepared to remember the goodness of God. It means that when the call comes and the family member you hold the dearest is dying, you are ready. By the work of Christ, the Spirit of God resides in you, and you are ready to do the good work of trusting in the faithfulness of God when the situation is dark and no one else will.

Being ready for every good work means that we echo Christ, who although he was ridiculed and beaten, and mocked and falsely accused, in that moment, filled with the Spirit, he was ready. What was his response to a world that is broken and full of hatred? We see it in our charge in verse 2. Public godliness requires gentleness to all men.

Gentleness to All Men (3:2)

Read verse 2. I love this, because this kind of attitude is exactly what we would expect from public godliness. No one likes a quarreler, no one likes the person who is constantly speaking evil of others. The word here for courtesy can be translated as gentleness, humility, meekness. Not stirring up trouble, not looking for a fight.

I have a friend whose brothers currently don't talk to him because they disagree with something he posted on Facebook. I'm serious. They literally have split apart their family, at least for a time, because of their lack of gentleness and constant quarreling. I can't help but think of the psalmist in Psalm 2, lamenting aloud: "why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?" But Titus here calls us to show *all* courtesy to *all* people. Gentleness. Regardless of class, race, orientation or political opinion. We are to be people of peace, of gentleness. We give the benefit of the doubt, even to non-believers. Consider your life, church: has the gospel so invaded your life that you exhibit a meekness and and gentleness to *all* people?

In the Cretan culture, these amiable traits were considered to be the characteristic desired in a king or ruler. The good king is the king who is gentle and amicable to all men. But here in the gospel scheme the traits of kings are to be displayed by commoners, for in Christ the common rabble become royal heirs. We echo our king, displaying the meekness and gentleness of Christ. Like a lamb led to the slaughter, he was silent before his accusers.

So here we have these examples of what public godliness looks like. Here is godliness that goes beyond these four walls and into the world. It's pretty simple. We submit and obey, even when it's hard and unpopular. We are eager and ready to do good, we avoid good works done begrudgingly.

We don't stir up trouble needlessly, but exhibit perfect gentleness and meekness even to those who mock us or cause us trouble. In a word, church, we are Christ-like. Do you want your unbelieving neighbor to know Jesus? What about your co-worker? What about that one person who you've tried to share the gospel with, but they are so stubborn, stuck in their thoughts and ideologies. You can't convince them. But you can show them. You can point your glorification of God outward. You can make your godliness public, not so that others would see and praise you, but so that you might worship and bring honor to Jesus. This kind of outward Christlikeness may not be flashy or edgy. But it's effective. Honoring and obeying authority when it's easy to slander is effective. Preparing your heart for worship in every situation is effective evangelism. Exuding the kindness of Christ not only in your keystrokes but your interactions is effective evangelism.

Christ wasn't content with practicing his goodness in the perfect community of the trinity. He came to showcase it publically. We are called to do the same. The love of God has been poured into our hearts in the gospel of Jesus, and it changes us so that we might showcase the character of Christ in the public sphere.

The Fuel of Public Godliness

I'm going to admit that oftentimes it's hard to hear a passage like verse 1 and 2. There's a lot to accomplish. And I'll also admit that I struggled to prepare this sermon this week. It was a busy week, and when I come to a text that tells me what to do and how to act, often I freeze up. My fear and my worry is that in preaching a text that calls our church to godliness and obedience, I will teach you to become a moralist. My fear is that in hearing what is required of you to showcase your godliness in public, you will begin to believe that it's your own godliness that saves you and sanctifies you. But thanks be to God, I don't have to worry. I don't have to sit in that fear. Not only did we crush that thought last week, but here in verses 3-11 of our text, we see that Paul is no moralist either. He spends two verses telling us how to act, but he is so full of the gospel of grace that he can't contain it any longer. He can't keep it in. He can't help but show us the fuel of our public godliness is not centered on our moralism or our ability to keep it together. Our fuel for public godliness is centered on the work of God in Christ.

If you are new to Grace Church, let me provide you with a disclaimer. We beat the same drum, week after week. We have one message. Our aim is to show you the glory of Christ revealed in the gospel. We do that every week. And here we are, ready to do it again, because we need to. Many of us have already forgotten, even in the midst of listening to this sermon, that the fuel of our godliness and our very life is nothing less than the gospel. We aren't very good at this thing. We aren't godly. But God. So let's see the gospel true again, because it's good news.

Realizing the Grace of God For Sinners (3:3-6)

This is the first fuel of godliness. **Read 3-6** with me. The first fuel to your public godliness, says Paul, is to take a look back on your old life. Remember who you once were, and who you would be

apart from Christ. For some of us, that was a long time ago. For some of us, we can see it like yesterday. But every so often it is helpful for us to pull out the pages of our old life and see how sinful we really were. We were foolish. Dumb. Really dumb. We thought and still think that sin is worth indulging in. We think that revealing picture is worth clicking on, that the rush of gossip leads to the flourishing of our self-image. But it's a lie. We are foolish apart from the wisdom of God which is found in Jesus. And we were disobedient, insolently disobeying our creator. Led astray and deceived by every whim of the world, slaves to our pleasure and our passions, doing whatever felt good in the moment with no concern for the consequences. Our days were wasted away in malice and envy, sitting and rotting with hatred and spite. This was us! This is you, apart from Christ. If Christ is not your master, sin is. There is no middle ground.

This is fuel for us. Before we ever attempt to display our godliness in public, we turn to remember that's nearly impossible to hate the world when we *are* the world if not for Christ. Our mantra, church, must be "but for the grace of God, there go I". We are all five minutes away from ruining our life. And when you see this truth clearly, it levels the playing field. You can't help but show courtesy to all people, because your sense of your own pervasive weakness and wickedness has crafted in you an unquenchable humility. We are all Peter, who swore he would never deny Jesus, only to do so in earnest just hours later.

And yet, the gospel teaches us not just the dirty state of our natural hearts, but just how radical the grace of God truly is. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. **Read verse 4 and 5.** We have not, do not, and will not ever deserve the mercy and grace of God. But look here, church. What does the text say? He is good and loving and kind to all people. He is ready for the good work of appearing to save. And he saves! Not because of our works, but because of his *mercy*. Underserved, free, abounding, mercy.

Do you ever contemplate how little you deserve the mercy of God? We are speaking here of almighty God. He formed galaxies by his breath, he dug out oceans with his words. All things and all people always in all places are continually subject to his power and authority. Psalm 33 says it best:

By the word of the Lord the heavens were made,
and by the breath of his mouth all their host.
He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap;
he puts the deeps in storehouses.

We dared to defy him, and he dared to show us mercy? What mercy is this, that the foolish become wise, that the disobedient enemies become obedient sons, that those led astray find the narrow path, that the slaves become heirs, that the day-wasters become tools and instruments of righteousness, that the haters and hated become the beloved?

Friends, we believe a gospel that preaches to all people the majesty and wonder of mercy unrestrained. How could we be the recipients of such mercy and then go and live public lives

where we fail to show mercy to sinners like us? When you truly understand what you deserve, and what you have received in Christ, you won't be tempted to quarrel unnecessarily with those outside the church. The gospel teaches us to treat every single person as a potential brother or sister in Christ. Because if not for the grace of God, **we would be worse than them, not better.** The grace of God is meant for sinners. Jesus came for the sick, not the well. Get this in your brain, and it will fuel you for public godliness and meekness towards all people.

Seeing the Glorious End of All Things (3:7-8)

Have you ever heard the phrase "He's so heavenly minded he's no earthly good"? I think that's baloney. We've seen already in chapter 2 of Titus the importance of waiting for our blessed hope, and here in chapter three we see something similar. **Look at verse 7.** After expounding on the riches of the mercy of God, Paul points us to the future. We are justified and are heirs (holy moly) *according to*, or in relation to, the hope we have for eternal life. In other words, some of these blessings in Christ due to his mercy are yet to come. And this hope we have, for eternal life in the age to come, acts as fuel for our public godliness.

In the book of Jeremiah, God calls his people, in a well-worn passage, to "seek the welfare of the city". These men and women are exiles, living in a city that is not home. And yet God calls them to live publicly minded lives, for in the welfare of the city, they find their welfare. What is the fuel for their public-mindedness? The idea that one day, the city of God will be restored, and they get to be part of that work. You see Church, when we understand that God is making all things new, we don't hole up in the ground and wait for it to happen. We get in on the action. Will we see total revitalization and spiritual revival in our city? I don't know, maybe, maybe not. That's up to God. But what we do know is that one day Waco as we know will not exist, and the new heavens and earth will be a place of unending joy and freedom. That reality to come fuels us for our work in the present age, because it says that even if we never see the fruit of our labor in this lifetime, what we are aiming for will come to pass one day. We are able to work out our public godliness precisely because we have a hope. We can predict the future, and so we are free to work towards that end.

As I prepared this sermon, I heard Tim Keller relate this concept to a short story by J.R.R. Tolkien, the author of Lord of the Rings. As he experienced writers block while working for years and years on his epic masterpiece, Tolkien penned a story meant to allegorize his life. It's called "Leaf by Niggle". In it, an artist named Niggle desires to paint a masterpiece of a great tree. He spends hours and hours in detail on every single leaf, but various chores and duties and his attention to detail mean that his masterpiece, the work he has thrown himself into, is never finished. Eventually, his painting is destroyed except for one perfect leaf of the tree. He moves on, and this is all he attributes to his life work. One tiny painting of a leaf. As the allegory closes, Niggle comes to a dream like place, meant to signify glory. There he finds not only the leaf he painted in full detail, but the whole tree and the forest too.

Do you see it? The work that Niggle did was miniscule. But in the end, his hope was realized. He never grasped the reality of what he painted in his lifetime, but in glory he saw all of it come to

fruition. His little leaf became a forest. In the same way, public godliness may seem fruitless, like you are raging against the machine and losing. Like all you have to show is one small leaf. But the hope of eternal life is that one day your feeble public godliness will be fully realized and godliness will flow like water in the new heavens and earth. Your tiny, perfect leaf will give way to a whole forest of perfection when Christ comes. It's this hope that fuels you for godliness in the present. Your godliness matters, because it's an echo and a piece of what is to come.

Knowing What is Worth Fighting For (3:9-11)

Now we come to our last fuel of godliness. **Read with me in verses 9-11.** In order to display public godliness, we have to know what is worth fighting for. Paul is speaking here of our priorities of godliness. The moment that our godliness in public becomes divisive, we have missed the point. When secondary issues become primary, we have missed the point and dove into worthlessness.

There are some things that aren't worth dividing over. What is in view here is that we view everyone rightly: We show mercy and grace, and we don't quarrel needlessly over silly things. There is no use quarreling and being divisive over your finer theological points—if they don't compromise the gospel, get rid of your desire to be right. There is not use arguing with your atheist friend endlessly over the proofs and measures of the existence of God in a vacuum. There are more pressing matters to attend to, like understanding the magnitude of the free grace of God in Christ. What's in view here is people who love to stir up division. Don't be that kind of person, says Paul. In fact, don't even associate with those people.

This is fuel for our public godliness because it frees us from defending ourselves constantly. Knowing what is worth fighting for puts us in a position where we can showcase what it means to be godly in public by not nitpicking but by displaying gentleness and grace. We are not surprised when sinners sin. We are not surprised when non-Christians disagree with our ethics in a fallen world. We don't dive into needless debates and Facebook rants. We will be vindicated by God in the end.

This is your final fuel in your strive for public godliness that adorns the gospel: don't waste your time chasing rabbits. Know what is worth fighting for. Christ knew what to fight for and die for. He didn't die for an ideology, he died for image bearers. He died for people. When you are tempted to disagree and argue in public, consider that fact. There is an image bearer before you. Christ didn't die so you could kill it in the debate circuit, he died so that in holding fast to faith you would be godly and gentle and plead with kindness that sinners would come to him to be saved.

Right Doctrine, Right Living.

Church, it's been a joy to walk through Titus with you. We have a long way to go in the example we find here. We are not godly yet. But by the grace of God, we can be. And one day, we will be fully. Christ has made it so, he bled so that we might be purified and sealed by the Spirit unto eternity.

He came so that the commands of God would be written on our hearts forever, he died so that we can obey.

Here's my last charge to you: be ready for good works. Get prepared. Make your reasonableness be known to all men. Take the gospel for what it is: Christ died to make you holy. Let your right doctrine lead to right living. And take your right doctrine and your right living and go public. Get going into your workplace and your home and your classrooms and your pubs and restaurants and grocery store lines. The gospel is good enough for you, it's all you have, it makes you godly, and that godliness is meant to be shown.

I love you church. Let's pray that as we close our time in Titus, we would hold fast to the gospel which makes us distinctly godly.