

**A Healthy Church: Winsome, Truthful Witness**  
**Titus 3: 1-8**

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In this section of Titus, the apostle Paul rolls out a very familiar concept—that what has happened inside a believer should affect what comes out of a believer. That the truth they hold inside should be reflected outside. Belief and behavior together. What Paul is saying in this passage is that *a healthy church is both ruthlessly insistent on the truth and vibrantly winsome and gracious to even those who oppose it.* A healthy church is consistently unflinching in its dedication to the gospel, and at the same time, consistently gentle in its disposition toward others, especially those outside the church.

Let's look a little more deeply at this text. Paul has set up this letter by telling Titus that he is to “put what remains in order.” To set up good leadership for the local church. And we see from chapter one that a healthy church has to have leaders of godly character if it is to remain healthy. Because we also see in Chapter one that there exists in the church a group of people who are causing trouble. Their actions are morally suspect. Their teaching is erroneous. Their motivation is selfish. These aren't the kind of people that need to be leading the church. In Chapter two, that call to godliness in leadership is taken more broadly to describe what the whole congregation should look like. A healthy church not only has good leaders, but it has a flourishing community within the body that is built on solid teaching, both from the chosen leaders and from each other. Now in Chapter three, Paul turns his attention outward and tells Titus that a healthy church needs also to have the right attitude toward non-believers—an attitude that includes both consistently gentle disposition and unwavering dedication to the truth of the Gospel.

He begins in verse one of Chapter 3 describing how a Christian is to act toward governmental authorities—in submission and obedience. This is especially noteworthy in relation to what he has said in Chapter two. If you look back at 2:13, you read...”our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.” That term, “God and Savior” was actually a term in the first century Roman world that was used for the emperor. The emperor of the Roman Empire was considered divine and was often

called “god and savior.” And Paul is being very subversive here by clearly indicating that there is one God and one Savior and it is Jesus, and him alone.

Yet, here in Chapter three, even in light of the reminder that Jesus only is God and Savior, Paul tells Titus to remind his people that they are to be obedient to the authorities that they live under in this land. He’s saying that an enormous part of living the Christian life entails submitting yourself to authority that may or may not be righteous. Authorities that may or may not believe the way you do.

A great example of this is found in the book of Daniel. If you remember, in the Old Testament, after a long string of Kings that were supposed to be leading God’s people in righteousness and in worshiping the Lord but who were instead leading them into idolatry, God allowed his people to be conquered by Babylon. The Babylonians had a great strategy for conquering people. They would take some of the best and brightest of young people and take them from their families and bring them up in Babylonian culture. The plan was to conquer them from the inside. To build Babylonian culture in them so that no trace of their own culture would be left. Teach them to worship new gods and lean new culture.

One of these unfortunate young men is Daniel. He’s taken into the court of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. And what is so amazing about Daniel is his understanding of what he is called to do in this situation. He holds firm to the Lord the entire time and he ends up having to tell the king some very difficult things. He even has to put himself in some very dangerous, life-threatening situations, but all through it he is respectful. He is submissive. He honors the king. He even works for the good of the king and the good of the kingdom that he is being held captive in. He knows who is ultimately in control of all of it and because of that he knows he can serve with joy even a pagan king who has taken his people captive.

The Bible is calling Christians to the same attitude. We have the wonderful pleasure as Americans of being able to elect our leaders. That is the privilege and the power that we have been given, and it is our Christian duty to exercise that power well. But it is limited power. And we, just like the first century Christians here and just like Daniel 500 years earlier, are called to submit ourselves to the authorities we have been put under, knowing that it is the Lord who is sovereign over it all. Now, in other parts of the Bible, we are told that when God’s law and

the law of the land are in conflict, that we are to obey God's law. But the general principle at work here is that we are to act in humility and obedience to those who are in authority over us. That means we obey the laws of the land. That means if you are under 21, you don't drink. It means if you are a student, you obey your teachers, even when you don't like them. It means that you treat your boss at work with respect and honor even when he or she hasn't earned it.

Now look at verse 2. Paul's circle gets wider. He writes, "be ready for every good work...speak evil of no one, avoid quarrelling, be gentle and show perfect courtesy toward all people." What most commentators say is that Paul is almost certainly talking about those outside the church here. Not just the governmental authorities, who at that time were probably not Christians, but to all people, particularly the unbelievers all around them. He says in regard to your unbelieving friends and neighbors and coworkers and the people in the marketplace, don't quarrel with them, be gentle, don't gossip or slander them, and show them perfect courtesy. He is calling Christians to *a consistently winsome, gentle, and respectful disposition as it relates to the unbelieving world around.*

Now, let's just admit that we have all known people who are not like this. They are crabby. Angry. Always looking for some way to be *against* others. For something bad to say about someone else. And unfortunately, many Christians are like this. You may be here this morning and you would not call yourself a Christian and this is why—you're interactions with Christians have been mostly negative. You have found them to be eager to quarrel and harsh and rough and quick-tempered. To be poor listeners. To be disrespectful to your beliefs. To be narrow in their understanding of the world. And to generally be against the things you are for. Well, that's pretty frustrating. I get it. No one wants to live next to that person. No one wants that friend.

Paul is telling Titus to remind the believers in Crete that they are to be different. He is telling us that people—even the ones who don't believe what you believe—should like you. They should think you're a good person. They should think that you are *for* them. Does this include your boss who goes to church twice a year? Yes. Does it include your neighbor who has anti-Christian bumper stickers all over her car? Yes. Does it include your brother who you get into an argument with every time you are together? Yes. Does it include the gay couple that lives three

doors down? Yes. *Christians are called to a consistently winsome, gentle, and respectful disposition to those outside the Church.*

Now, let's switch gears for a minute...we started by saying that a healthy church is both winsomely gracious *and* ruthlessly insistent on the truth. So let's look at that second part. Check out verse 8. Paul says, "This saying is trustworthy, and I want you to *insist* on these things..." What is he talking about? Well, he's talking about all the stuff right before that. Here's what he said—verse 4... "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 on 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." Wow. What a sentence that is! Just in case you were counting, Paul spends about 60 words in this passage on how Christians should act. Then he spends almost twice that on what Jesus has done! And the words he uses are some of the best you'll even hear.

Listen again to what Paul says God has shown us—Goodness. Loving kindness. Mercy. And because of that goodness, mercy and loving kindness, listen to this string of amazing things Paul says God has done for believers—He has saved us. Rescued from danger, like being snatched out of the sea when we were drowning. He has washed and regenerated us (re-made us), like taking a soiled garment that is totally ruined and washing it so that it is so clean it is something completely new. He has renewed us by the power of the Holy Spirit. God's own Spirit has worked within us to take our hearts of stone and turn them into hearts of flesh. To take our arrogance and turn it into humility. To make us new creatures—changed our nature. And he has poured His Spirit out on us *abundantly*. He has justified us—called us righteous and declared us to be not guilty before him. He has made us heirs. Sons and daughters of the King. He has brought us into his family, where there is not only salvation but abundant provision. He has given us the hope of eternal life. No more despair. Only hope. All of this has been done for us by the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf. His life and death and resurrection have accomplished all of it for us. No work of righteousness on our behalf could earn all of this. No obedience from us. No system of religion. Only the finished and full work of Jesus FOR us. That is what He has done. To give us all of this. This saying is trustworthy. It's glorious. Insist on these things.

Again, remembering the story of Daniel. While he loved the king and worked for his good, he also held tightly to the Lord. And when push came to shove, Daniel was willing to risk his life rather than let go of the truth.

Likewise, A healthy church is one who guards this proclamation above all else. A healthy church is one who ruthlessly insists on the glorious truth of the Gospel. Jesus has done for us what we could never do for ourselves. And any church that does not guard this proclamation immediately falls into unhealthy and is in danger of being no church at all.

Here's what we've said so far—a healthy church is one that is winsome and gracious in its attitude toward non-Christians and toward the authority structures of the world we live in, and at that same time is insistent on the truth of the Gospel. Nice people and people that actually believe something.

This has not historically been easy to hold together. In fact, it's been really hard. Because on one hand you have what has historically been called the liberal church. And what you think of as liberal people and liberal churches are those who are usually pretty concerned with the people around them. They care for the poor. They fight for the rights of the oppressed. They are welcoming and winsome and accepting. But what has happened is that liberal Christians have misunderstood the call to consistent gentleness with relativism. What the Bible says very clearly here is that Christians are to live in harmony and gentleness with their neighbors who believe differently than they do. But what relativism says is that this is not possible. People who believe different things can't live together. And so the solution is to decide that there's no belief. Or at least that there is no transcendent belief. So whatever you think is just fine. I love you and I'm nice to you. When it comes to what you believe, the only way I can deal with the tension of loving you and believing something different is to erase one of those things. So I erase belief. I let go of the idea of truth. There is nothing transcendent. There is nothing universal. There is no "metanarrative." It's just whatever you believe and whatever I believe and truth is no longer truth, it's all just opinion. That has been the typical liberal approach. Resolve the tension by removing the truth.

And then notice the progression—when I take that truth away, how am I going to be made right with God? Well, it's through the thing I'm already pretty good at: being a nice, loving person who lives among others graciously gently. Basically, God will accept me based on my actions. I'm pretty good. He's bound to accept me. And so simultaneously we have brought God's perfect righteousness down and have brought our own righteousness up so that they have find a happy medium and meet in the middle.

But it's been hard for the church in the opposite way too. Because the typical conservative fundamentalist approach has been just the opposite. Historically, the more fundamentalist Christians have been those who have held very tightly to not only the idea of transcendent truth but also to the Bible as the inerrant Word of God. Typically, the conservative church has been good at ruthlessly guarding the truth. But here's what it's done—it's actually produced not better interaction with the world outside the church, but worse. We have formed little Christian ghettos with our own movies and television channels and we have shut our doors to our neighbors who believe differently. And we have vilified the government, especially anyone who might lean into that more liberal camp. We have resolved the tension in a different way. Because people who believe different things can't live together. That's not possible. So the solution is to close myself off. Disengage. Hide in my own little world. This has been the typical fundamental approach: remove the tension by removing my neighbors.

Then when you remove the tension, what's left. Well, it's the stuff that I'm already pretty good at—getting my doctrine all right. I have it all worked out right and what I believe is better than what you believe, therefore, God will accept me. This is just old fashioned moralism spelled a different way. Because at the end of the day, what is left are people with decent doctrine but totally unchanged hearts.

But thankfully, the Gospel is neither of these things. Because what Paul is saying here is that a healthy church—a church where there is real, vibrancy and power for both personal and societal change—a healthy church includes both a gentle disposition to outsiders and a fervent insistence on the truth.” And here's why. Look at verse 3. It's the key...

“for we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, 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 appeared, he saved us.”

Paul says that the only way you can hold both of these things in tension is through a radical humility. He says, “Hey, I was one of those people! I’m just as bad as they are. It doesn’t make sense to close myself off to them because when I see those outside the church, I see a reflection of who I once was and who I still struggle to be. I’m no better. In fact, they are often better people than me. But look at the power of the Gospel to change! To change even someone like me!”

That is the attitude that produces real heart change. And it is the only way you can hold these two seemingly incompatible things together. Because if we are honest with ourselves when we look in the mirror, we know that we are not who we should be. And so we turn to look at verses 4-9 and see the grace of God that has been shown to us and we can only weep for joy.

And when we understand how great that grace has been toward us, it radically changes the way we interact with those around us. We become those who are humble. Who are kind. Who are gracious. Who are gentle. Who are seeking the good of our neighbors. Who are seeking the good even of our governmental authorities. We will know that we are not accepted by God based on how nice we are. But because we are accepted by God because of his mercy, we will actually want to be nice to people. And we will know that we are not accepted by God based on our adherence to a system of belief, but when we are accepted by God because of his great mercy, we won’t want to let that truth go. We will hold it more tightly than anything else. We hold the truth more tightly than we ever have and open our arms to our neighbors wider than we thought we could.

Want to see a healthy church? Let me leave you with two short encouragements:

1. When you interact with your neighbors, coworkers, family members who are not Christians, find something that you can be *for* and begin there. Something that you have in common that is a bridge to the Gospel. And then pray that the Lord open opportunities for that bridge to be built.

2. And secondly, soak yourself in the truth of verses 3-9. Then watch them transform the way you open yourself to those around. Watch The Lord go to work.

Remember Daniel? Well, here's a third recommendation... read the first half of the book of Daniel. What you will find is that as Daniel holds firmly to the truth of the Lord And engages the world around him winsomely and gently, the Lord works in mighty ways. The King of Babylon is converted! The Lord works in the same mighty ways now!