

Titus (Part Seven): Maintaining Good Works

Grace and Works

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It has always really bothered me how nominal Christianity sidelines and discounts works. I understand why they do it; because they do not want necessarily to obey God. I mean, that is what it comes down to. They want all the benefits without any of the effort that is required to be a child of God. So they have focused on salvation by grace to such an extent that doing works, that is, obeying God's Word and living out His teachings in our lives, has become basically antithetical to their philosophy, to their belief system.

They have convinced themselves that doing works makes them that scary term, "legalists." That is the word they threw at the Worldwide Church of God for many years and even those who were trying to make the changes in the Worldwide Church of God, saying that those who believed as we have been taught there were legalists, the belief that keeping the law will save them. That was not the case at all. We never believed that keeping the law would save us. It is just a misunderstanding of what we taught.

But nominal Christianity has basically a philosophy that says Christ did it all for us. He did everything so they do not *have* to do anything. So they do not, which is so much easier to do. Human nature always slides towards the lazy and the "I'd rather not" if they do not want to be inconvenienced somehow. So they take a phrase like in Acts where it says, "believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved" and they make that basically the center of their belief system. That all they have to do is believe and salvation will be theirs.

Now I find this idea to be self-imposed spiritual blindness. The Bible is literally full of instructions and examples of the requirements to do work, that is, to live out the way of God. These so-called Christians purposely misunderstand the function of works. They are part of the sanctification process. That is, they are aids. Works are aids in making us righteous and holy, and they have no part in justification. We believe that! We believe in salvation or justification by grace through faith. And it is clear there in

Ephesians 2:10, "not of works lest anyone should boast." How much clearer can that be? But then he says, we have been created to do works. So Christ has put us into this position where we have to learn to do good works and practice them. Very simple.

The Bible is clear that our works cannot in any way put sinners, that is, us, in a right standing with God. But after a person is justified before God through grace, works are *invaluable* in our cooperative efforts in God's work of creating holy, righteous character within us. Works are tools, works are helps, works are aids to help us to learn how to be like Jesus Christ.

Now, I do not want to get too much more involved in the nitty gritty of the New Testament's grace and works theology, but Scripture makes it very plain, at least to my eyes, that God has high moral and ethical standards and He commands us to follow them. He commands us to practice living His way of life, living by His rules. We are to put off the bad habits and the sins that we have accreted over a lifetime and put on a good and godly habits, like the habits of God Himself. God urges us to practice charity, to put others needs ahead of our own, and not to get weary in well doing, but to forge on, keeping on, doing and maintaining good works.

Just think of this. I mentioned as I started this particular paragraph in my notes, that the Bible is chock full of admonitions and examples of good works being required. Just confine yourself to the three chapters of the Sermon on the Mount and you cannot but come away with the distinct impression that Christianity is not just for believers, but for *doers*. In a way, we could say that is what James concluded about the Sermon on the Mount. It is the doers that will be justified ultimately.

Now, the apostle Paul's epistle to Titus is full of admonitions to go beyond mere belief and to do. Particularly he uses phrases that talk about doing good works. The phrases good work or good works appear six times in this short three-chapter letter and they come in two different forms that are very similar in meaning.

The first one is *agathon ergon* in Greek. It is literally "good work" and it implies moral action, a virtuous deed, something that is truly good and helpful to other people. The other phrase is *kalon ergon* and it literally means

"beautiful works." *Kalon* means "beautiful" or "delightful." So what he is talking about here, slightly different, are good and right works, delightful or attractive deeds that others look upon and say, wow, that was great. Or again, virtuous actions.

Generally, works are instructed or alluded to several more times in Titus, not using those particular phrases. In fact, one of them in chapter 3, verse 5 is works of righteousness. That is *ergon dikaiosune* which is works of justice or integrity or virtue or generosity. They all basically imply the same thing, that these are good things that we are doing for others to help them. In the latter one, even our works of justice or righteousness, as he says there, cannot save us, but they do a great deal of good.

So, Paul's phrasing of this, actually beyond just the term good works, covers the whole gamut of this subject. I want to go through the seven times (counting works of righteousness), that they are specifically mentioned.

Chapter 1, verse 16, Paul says that the defiled and unbelieving are disqualified for every good work. So, these are the people who are outside the actual ability to do truly good works because they are sinners. The sinners who do not even have the internal fortitude, if you will, to do something truly good. They just do not have it. God's Spirit has not touched them yet to give them the ability to actually do good works. That is *agathon ergon*.

The next one in chapter 2, verse 7, is where Paul tells Titus to show himself a pattern or an example of good works. This is *kalon ergon*. He is showing him that we are to model good works toward everyone, especially the ministry, but all of us in one way or another. Verse 14 tells us that God has created us and is working with us, His own special people, to be *zealous* for good works, that we have a *zest* for good works, that we *want* to do them. We are *delighted* to do them for other people.

In chapter 3, verse 1, we should be *ready* for every good work. We should *prepare* ourselves for good works, is what he is saying. This is *agathon ergon*. We need to figure out and study and be ready at any moment to supply a good work. Obviously, in chapter 3, verse 5, we went over that one, "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy, He

saved us." So he is telling us and telling the Cretans through Titus very clearly that these works are not going to save us, but they need to be done.

Chapter 3, verse 8, he says, we are to be careful to maintain good works. We are to be thoughtful about being able to do good works on a long-term basis. And then that is *kalon ergon* again. As well as this one in verse 14 where he says, "Let our people also learn to maintain good works."

So we can see that he is hitting works in several different ways from several different vantage points so that we will get the idea that this needs to be a major part of our lives. Good works are not something that we just do on the off chance that something happens to come up and bite us on the ankle and we figure out that we need to do good works. We need to understand that Paul is trying to help us to see how central they are to our Christian walk. They are right alongside grace. Grace is a lot of what God puts into it; works are how we respond.

This was very necessary for the Cretans to learn because they had come out of a very sinful, self-absorbed, self-aggrandizing society and Paul was trying his best to show them that, yes, God has given you a great purpose here, given you a wonderful life through His Spirit. But there has got to be something that you do and that thing that you do is giving of yourself toward others, helping them, as well as learning and growing in God's way of life just in our general way of life.

And I have kind of latched onto this idea in trying to emphasize in every sermon that our society is a lot like Cretan society. We have come out of a society, a culture that is very self-centered. We do not want to do for others unless we can get something out of it ourselves, get something back, and works are not to be that way. They are to be given selflessly and done for the other's good far above our own. So we can learn a great deal from what Paul teaches Titus here in this little epistle.

Now, I mentioned already that the good works that Paul instructs the Cretans to do has a different purpose.

Titus 2:14 [talking about Jesus Christ] . . . who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and to purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

The purpose of the good works is in that second phrase of what He did. He redeemed us. That was an act of grace. But the next part is what He is doing after justification or redemption, and that is purifying for Himself His own special people. The works that He requires of us is part of that purification process. It is the sanctification, the holy making, if you will, of people whom He has called. That is not all done. We are covered by the blood of Jesus Christ and His righteousness covers us before God so that we can go before Him and get the things that we need from Him, which He is very willing to give. But as we go through our lives, He wants us to look more and more like His Son.

So, we have our own righteousness too that we are trying to grow in. We will never have the righteousness equal to Jesus Christ's own righteousness of ourselves. But He wants to see a trajectory of our learning and growing in righteousness and true holiness, so that when He gives us His Spirit in its fullness in the resurrection, when we are changed to be like They are, that we will have it fixed in our minds that we will not sin, that we will always do good, that we will always be loyal and faithful, we will always act like Him.

That is what the what works are to do. They are to give us trials and tests and little exercises of how we can be like Christ and make the right decisions, the kind of decisions that Christ would make. That we will be open and giving like He is and help people along, not just ourselves. So in other words, good works are paramount as tools in the sanctification process. They help make us holy and righteous. You could say they hone us in the image of Jesus Christ. Why do you think we live, most of us, so long after our baptism? Because God has got us pulling a very long row so we learn to live like He does.

So, Paul is urging them constantly in this letter, through every chapter, that they need to be examples of putting those tools to work. They need to be preparing themselves to serve, they need to be careful to keep practicing

good works no matter how long they have been in the church and how far they seem to have come. They need to keep on keeping on and learn how to maintain good deeds, that is, by doing them frequently, because when emergencies do arise, and they do arise within the life of the church, they arise within the life of the individual and within the church, and we know where things are headed in this society, if we maintain good works then we will be geared up and ready to step in to help the needy in those times of distress.

Our ingrained habit of good deeds will prove welcome during the trying days that are ahead. We will be ready by long practice to pitch in to provide what we can and sacrifice what we must to aid those who are in trouble. Just think about it. If we have not already been for a long time acting like good Christians, we will likely not act as good Christians when the going gets rough. So we have to have it ingrained as an attitude, as a habit, that we are always going to react to situations in a godly way and give what help can.

We are going to plunge into Titus 3 again today, and if time allows, and I hope it does, I think it will, we are going to finish this little epistle today. In this last chapter, chapter 3, Paul exhorts us to teach, not just grace, but good and profitable works, as I have been talking about already. He urges us to avoid arguments and division, and in the end, he returns to an admonition about good works. It was on his mind, he wants to really drive it home that Titus needed to teach the church to do good works. It is in the doing, not just the believing, that we get these character traits ingrained in our minds, make them what we are. We will see, definitely through the sermon, that far from being a grace only preacher like he is presented elsewhere, the apostle Paul encouraged good works as our response to God's merciful calling. I want to read chapter 3, verses 1-8 so we get the whole flow of what Paul is trying to say here.

Titus 3:1-8 Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men. For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior toward men appeared, not by works of righteousness which

we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace, we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.

What we have here in these eight verses are basically three major points that I will give you here. First, he admonishes us to live up to God's standards, humbly realizing how sinful we once were. And we need to work on those areas that are particularly ingrained. These things that he mentioned here were those things that were particularly ingrained in Cretan society. So he tells us, if your society is like Cretan society, these are things you need to work on too.

The second point that he makes through verses 4-7, is that in God's kindness, love, and mercy, He pulled us out of this world of sin, offering us grace and eternal life and the inheritance of the Kingdom of God, though we did not deserve any of it.

Third, in verse 8, is that our faithful response to God's gracious acts toward us is to apply ourselves to good works. Belief in Christ and loyalty to the covenant should lead to righteous godly living in giving of ourselves. Remember in Romans 12:1-2, he talks about us being living sacrifices and doing what is reasonable to serve God and to serve our brethren, and even this world.

Those are the three points: live like Christ, be thankful for what God has done in pulling us out of this sinful world, and respond to Him by living His way, by doing good works.

Now we are going to tackle verses 4-7 verse by verse. It is a theological inset, if you will, to the flow of what he was saying. What he says here: "But when the kindness and love of God our Savior toward men appeared" immediately, if someone has been reading this epistle, he thinks of chapter 2, verse 11, which says, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has

appeared to all men." It sounds very similar. It has very similar phrasing, but they are different. Even though the phrasing is similar, they are talking about different things.

Both of them are talking about God's grace and God's gifting of certain things, but where he talks about God's grace in chapter 2, verse 11, he is really kind of hinting or intimating that the gift that God has given is the revelation of the gospel message through Jesus Christ. That is the gift that He has given us. And it has been given to all men. The Bible, of course, is the best selling book in all the world and so it is out there for people to come to read at least. They really cannot understand it without His Spirit, but it has been there, it is a gift that He has given to all, and through it He draws people to Christ, obviously. But it is only through God's Spirit that we can really understand it.

But in chapter 3, verse 4, he is talking about God's kindness and *love* appearing through the same life of Christ, through His offering of Himself the salvation that He wrought through that. And notice that God's kindness and mercy here or God's kindness and love has not appeared to *all* men. He just says men. It is not the same group that he is talking about between 2:11 and 3:4. Because God's kindness and love has not been showered on all men through a calling, which is what he is talking about. He has not *called* all men. He will ultimately call all men, give them a chance for salvation. But in this time, this age, He has only called a *few*, certain men and women.

So what he is saying here is that this grace, this gift that He has given is not universal. There is no such thing as universal salvation in this age. It is only to those He specifically calls; His election of some, a very few in this age. And that is why as he goes on here, he talks about *we* and *us*, because he is writing specifically to Titus and the Cretan church and he is talking to those specifically who had been converted. This grace is a rare and exciting opportunity for a very small group of people, at least at this time.

As verses 5 and 6 clarified, it has appeared to those on whom He has poured out His Spirit. So Paul is here contrasting the converted Cretans to their unconverted family and neighbors like he did early on in the chapter. Trying to help them understand that God's graciousness toward them, His mercy in His calling is a spectacular gift. It is priceless. They needed to understand

that, that needed to be at the foundation of all they believed and all that they do. God has given them something that no one else in this world except those very few can possess. That is, an election from God.

Paul calls this gracious gift kindness and love of God our Savior. Kindness is the Greek *restotes*, which can also be translated as goodness or gentleness or virtue, a fairly wide definition, but they are all very good things. The word does not signify goodness as an abstract quality. It is not necessarily the character trait, the abstract character trait of kindness or goodness, but it is goodness in action. It is goodness as it is *done*. You can say it is the basis for the action element of good works or good deeds. It is goodness expressing itself—helpfulness and service and aid toward others, doing good things for others, those are kind works, kind actions, kind deeds. So, Paul here describes what God has done for us as a good deed. It is His kindness in action. It is expressing His goodness when He saves us. That He reaches out in kindness to pluck us out of the world, and give us this great gift.

The other significant word here in this phrase is love. Now, most of you in just reading your English Bible would assume that this is agape. But it is not. This word is *philanthropia*, that is, the love of mankind. For the love of humanity, a love toward men. It is the source of our word for philanthropy. This word *philanthropia* is sometimes used in Greek literature as a synonym, *christotes*: kindness, gentleness, goodness, virtue. So they both, *christotes* and *philanthropia*, are very similar. Go back to your grammar and remember the teacher talking about appositives, when you have one word and then you use a similar word that means the same thing. The second one is an appositive to the first.

Well, that is kind of what of *christotes* and *philanthropia* are. They are appositives of one another in some respects. *Philanthropia* though is slightly different because it can imply generosity slightly more than *christotes*, and that is kind of how we use it today. When we use the word philanthropy or talk about a philanthropist, we are talking about, normally, a wealthy person donating huge sums of money to endow some sort of foundation and the purposes of the foundation are usually beneficial towards other people. They put their money in a foundation that does this or that for their various communities. We can think of, well at least I think of, Andrew Carnegie from Pittsburgh and all the money he made in steel. He spent a good deal of

his vast wealth building libraries for the education of America and he put these all over the country. He just had money coming out of his ears. He did not know what to do with it so he built libraries and so it became philanthropist. He did generous deeds to help people.

This context, of course, in Titus 3:4 is speaking of God's philanthropy, God's love towards humanity. And I think we should understand this not just in terms of His grace toward us, but as His constant attitude and posture towards humanity. He always loves people. He loves mankind as a whole and He loves individuals and that is His constant posture, His constant stance toward people. He wants to love them. He wants to give them things, He wants to be kind to them. He wants to abundantly bless them with things. I mean, think of all the ways that He told Israel that, "I'll give you just about anything. All you have to do is keep the covenant and love Me."

That is how He is constantly. He cares for mankind. And He wants to do what is best for everyone. His plan will ultimately bear this out, even though in the meantime, He has to be, as some would see it, the mean Judge who comes down in wrath and has to punish them. But ultimately it will work out for the good of all. And boy, does he generously supply our needs and aids us in our troubles. Our God is more than just kind and philanthropic, benevolent, open-handed. And if we see Him like that more often than the other way, that he is a stern judge, then we get a better grasp of Him.

Let us go take the flow of this chapter here into verse 5. So Paul has told us here that God is a loving God and He has shown us great kindness and great benevolence, great generosity by what He has done. He reminds them, "Okay, this is great. God has given us wonderful gifts, but we did not have anything to do with it. This is all from Him." It is "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit."

Lest we begin to get the big head here that He somehow pulled us out of the world because we were especially good people or had some talent that He needed, "Well, get over yourself," Paul is saying. "It's nothing having to do with you. This is all generated from heaven, all from God. So don't think that your works by any means is going to save you, to justify you." It has a different purpose.

But what we are talking about here is what God has done and we need to remember that. So His greatest open-handed act of benevolence is His merciful, or we could say compassionate, deliverance of His elect. As I said, Paul emphasizes that we had nothing to do with it. That we can say that God extending His grace is totally unilateral. It is all on one side. That is what unilateral means, one-sided. Because of His love that He did this. So we cannot work for our salvation. Our righteous deeds cannot pay for our sins. We cannot balance out the ledger with God by doing so many "hail marys" or what have you. That does not work.

All humanity put together has insufficient worth to affect redemption. Only the life of the Creator God could pay the price to redeem humanity from sin. And He paid it of His own free will. He initiated it. He was in the planning from the very beginning and He volunteered to be the one. And He came down to this earth and He lived a righteous life, a sinless life, and He gave Himself as the sacrifice for sin, which covers us, redeems us. It allows us to have a relationship with God. Only by coming under His shed blood can we be cleared of the death penalty that our sins have caused us to bear. Only His kindness and His philanthropy in His calling and leading us to repentance, as it says in Romans 2:4, does our justification by grace become possible. I mentioned that verse because it uses the same word there. It actually uses the word kindness twice. Paul writes here:

Romans 2:4 Or do you despise the riches of His goodness [There is *christotes*], forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness [or *christotes*] of God leads you to repentance?

Here, the New King James has it translated as goodness, but we could also read this, "Or do you despise the riches of His *kindness*, forbearance, and long suffering, not knowing that the *kindness* of God leads you to repentance." So it is all from Him. He was the one that initiated it and carried it through, bring you before God the Father.

Now the next phrases here in Titus 3:5 are very interesting. They are the "washing of regeneration" and "renewing of the Holy Spirit." Again, some see these as appositional, that is, synonymous. They are talking about the same thing and basically they are. They are very closely related concepts and

both of them are the means by which God saved us—by the washing of regeneration and by renewing of the Holy Spirit.

The first phrase, washing of regeneration, probably refers to both water baptism and cleansing from sin through Christ's shed blood. What we have here is the physical type, the ritual that we go through, baptism, being singled out as say covering all the various details of that process that happens at the beginning of our conversion. But it also shows the spiritual reality behind what has been happening in the rituals that we go through. The word regeneration is a long Greek word, I will attempt to pronounce it. It is *palingenesia*. You hear the 'genesis' in there. It means, literally, rebirth, or you could call it, a new birth or even a renovation.

By the way, this word *palingenesia* is used only one more time in the whole New Testament and that is in Matthew 19:28. And it is very interesting what it has to do with the controversy over the born again doctrine. Because here in Titus 3:5, Paul uses this word in terms of baptism and the beginning of conversion, whereas Jesus uses it to mean the ultimate change that we go through when He returns at the resurrection from the dead, when we become fully Spirit. And so what he shows here is that this washing of regeneration is when we become a new man, we have the spiritual ability to have contact with God, but we are not done yet. Jesus, on the other hand, used it when all that is complete. It is the same process, one is just the start and the other is the end, the completion of that.

So, if anybody tells you that the born again chapter, John 3, is all about just being born into the Kingdom of God at the resurrection, that is not so. There is a regeneration at baptism, we might say, at the beginning, and there is a fuller regeneration at the end. And the whole process there is shown through those two uses of the same word. But here Paul is talking about the birth, the beginning, the the start of all of this. So this is the conversion of a sinful person to new life in God. That is, we could say that he is speaking of the time, the short period when we go from the old man to the very beginnings of the new man, when we are babes in Christ. And this is very much what Jesus explains in John 3.

Now, the second phrase, "renewing of the Holy Spirit" may mean the same thing. That at specific time, early in our conversion, at the beginning, we are

given God's Spirit, making us renewed beings. So He gives us the Holy Spirit and we become new, new creatures, a new creation. Or, and I kind of like this one, the other way it can be read is that it may indicate a constant flow of God's Spirit *beginning* at that time. So it takes the reader's mind not just focusing on that initial conversion, but that the initial conversion has gone on through time to the present and that throughout that whole time, God has been constantly supplying His Spirit to us. That is like the spigot was turned on and never turned off. That through that whole time, He has been in the process of saving us. Yes, He did justify us at that time, but He is also continuing to help us to grow and overcome and become more like Him. Just part of that sanctification process.

Let us look at II Corinthians 4, verse 16, where Paul uses this idea in speaking to the Corinthians and then we will go to Colossians and see he does the same thing there.

II Corinthians 4:16 [where he says] Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing [this is our *human* man, carnal man], yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.

God is constantly renewing us through His Spirit. Let us check the one in Colossians.

Colossians 3:10 [he is talking about in verse 9 "we put off the old man with his deeds"] and have put on the new man [this is very similar context] who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.

It is the same word as he used back in Titus 3. It is used here in terms of knowledge. That God is constantly teaching us, God is constantly giving us new information, and how does He do that? Through His Spirit. One of the things that Jesus says about the Spirit is that it is a Spirit of truth. It will give us what we need as we go forward, help us to remember those things.

So, it is the same idea. That God not only started the process by the term that He regenerated us, made us new. But He is also continuing the process by *constant* renewal. We are not just saved on the day of our baptism, but continually, constantly as God's merciful presence in us and help to us show.

Let us get back to Titus 3 and move on. If I do not hurry, we will not get finished and that will be bad. It says at the end of verse 5,

Titus 3:5-6 the washing of generation and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior.

Now, this seems to support this second idea about what the renewal of the Holy Spirit is. Paul is speaking about abundant, overflowing, and constant pouring out of His Spirit, which began on that day and continues. It is continued without stopping. God never turns His eye away from us. He never stops supplying us with what we need. Notice Philippians 1, a few pages back.

Philippians 1:19 [he says] For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

So Paul is showing here in this verse that he could see God working in his life through the Spirit. He constantly supplied him with things that he needs. And this had happened since the time on the road to Damascus and had never let up. God was always supplying his needs through the Spirit.

Back in Titus 3:6, the word underlying "abundantly" here means richly, generously, copiously, profusely, or plenteously. We are getting the idea that God does not stint when it comes to giving us His Spirit. He is willing to just let it flow through us as strong as we can take it. And He wants to give it to us. Like I said, He is so open-handed and so generous and He wants us to succeed. And so He supplies all our needs through Jesus Christ.

The Spirit that is flowing constantly between us, that is our link to His Son and He supplies all these benefits. He is the Savior. He knows what we need and He will supply them. That is His job. His job is to know what we need and how we need to go to make the most of our potential. So we can say, as we have often said about salvation, that we were saved, certainly, but we are also *being* saved—the work of our Savior, the Son. And this all happens through this abundant outflowing of His Spirit toward us.

Verse 7 is a conclusion basically to this brief theological excursion, that having been justified by His grace, we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. So we have been justified, made upright before God by His unilateral grace and mercy. And He has done this with the purpose of making us His heirs. He has made Jesus the firstfruit, the Heir of all things and as His bride, we will inherit the same. That is His long-term goal, to raise up children, a bride (let us put it in the singular), to marry His Son so that they can live forever in a godly way—peace, harmony, love throughout all eternity. We have a hope, a very firm trust in God's promise, that that will be accomplished because we know God, we have seen what He can do. So we will have eternal life and great reward because we know that God will finish what He started. No one is going to stop Him.

Philippians 1:6 [Paul says] Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

That is God's good work—that He gave you kindness. He showed you generosity and that He is going to work and work and work and work to bring you into His Kingdom.

Romans 4:20-21 [Talking of Abraham here] He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced [this is that hope that we have] that what He had promised, He was also able to perform.

We have to have the faith and hope of Abraham, our father in the faith as it were, who believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness.

Titus 3:8 This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.

Now, among scholars there is a controversy over whether this phrase, "this is a faithful saying" refers to what came before or what follows after. Most commentators tend to lead towards it is referring to what came before, that is, verses 4-7. It is true and faithful what he wrote there and it is very encouraging. But the construction of the sentence, especially as the New King James has it here, is that it refers to what follows. That the faithful saying is that believers should be careful to maintain good works. It may be that the antinomian bias of many commentators predisposes them to discount maintaining good works as a faithful saying because they put all their eggs in the grace basket rather than the works basket.

But Paul commands Titus to affirm this truth constantly, he says. Whether we are talking about before or after, he does say that he needs to affirm constantly. That those who believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. The ESV translate the word affirm as insist, that Titus should *insist constantly* that they maintain good works. The word means to assert very strongly. It is supposed to be one of the bullets in the preacher's gun that he says, "You people need to maintain good works." I am not saying that he should hold a gun to your head to make you do them, but it should be part of his arsenal, certainly. A preacher should speak confidently and authoritatively about the care they should take to practice the right behavior that God expects. Preachers have to make sure the people in the congregation know that God *expects* them to live properly and rightly.

The thought-flow here is that if we believe God has called us and mercifully extended grace, spiritual rebirth, and a constant flow of His Spirit toward us, we must emphasize the proper response and that is, we *must* practice His way of life. Good works are not a minor aspect of the truth. It is of major front page news. We must do good works. We have to be careful, he says. That is, we have to be considerate or thoughtful about maintaining good work. There are things we have to meditate on, those are things we have to think deeply about. It is not something we do naturally. Carnal works and godly works are two ends of the spectrum.

We cannot take what we learned in the world and apply them to good works. It is not going to happen. We have to be thoughtful, thinking God's good thoughts, thinking righteously and in a holy manner about how we can help

each other, how we can do what is right, how we can speak good words to others. Many, many, many ways that we can do good works. But we have got to think them through.

Christianity is a thinking person's religion. We cannot do it by emotion. We cannot do it by habit, our old habits. We cannot do it by worldly philosophy. We have got to think through God's words, then apply them. You must consider every thought, word, every deed to make sure it conforms to God and His teaching. And then we have to *do*.

Further, the word translated maintain here (or engage in), implies that we must be *devoted* to good works or *resolute* about doing good works or *diligent* about practicing. It then really raises the level of intent here. Our thoughtful practice of God's way of life must be deliberate and constant. It must be diligent and devoted to doing good at all times. Only by applying ourselves resolutely to mirroring the life of God in our daily activities, will we or anyone else profit from our good works. Otherwise, if we do not, if we take them carelessly, if we do not think them through, we are going to be hypocrites, and we will show ourselves to be unappreciative for what God has done for us, because we will give an improper response to His grace.

Titus 3:9-11 But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless. Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.

As he begins to close the epistle, Paul returns to the local problems he started out with in chapter 1. These are more specific religious problems most likely perpetrated by Jews or Judaizers within the congregation. What he does here is he instructs Titus, especially, but also the people in the church, to shun or stand aloof to the foolish disputes. Now in the vernacular, you might say today, "Don't even listen to stupid controversies" or "Ignore altogether absurd questions. Just don't even listen to them." Such things as ridiculous Devil's advocate-type questions. We should not even entertain them, he says. It is not profitable. Nor are out-there, I mean, *really* out-there conspiracy theories and asinine speculations that have no proof behind it. Just do not even think about them. It is not worth the time.

He adds to the list of things we should shun deep studies into genealogies, he says here. That is, speculations about the origins of certain people. Some Jews were evidently asserting that physical descent, especially from Israel, was spiritually significant. That if you had the right genealogy, you were up there in God's list. So if one could prove that he had Israelite ancestry, he would have a leg up on other members of the congregation. Paul says, this is poppycock. He has been preaching against that idea from the very beginning. Our source is God and His election. It is not dependent on physical descent. There is neither Jew nor Greek, it does not matter. God calls you no matter who you descended from, well, wonderful.

He also instructs us to steer clear of arguments and quarrels and divisive debates of all kinds, as well as fights and battles over the law. He is talking about the picayune details of Jewish law in particular here, because this is what the scribes or the lawyers among the Jews would do. They would sit around in a circle and argue for days on end and sometimes even get into fights over the most obscure words in the law. What it meant, how it should be applied. Paul says these things just lead to division and are almost never resolved because they are so obscure. God's law is clear when we use His Spirit to understand.

All these wranglings and obsessions are a waste of time. We only have so much time in our converted life and we do not want to waste it in arguments and stupid pursuits of scholarship and whatnot, that are not going to mean a hill of beans in the end. Stick to the trunk of the tree, he says. We should be, instead, thinking about ways to do good works. That is what we should devote ourselves to. Those things are good and profitable. These other things, they are not profitable at all.

Verse 10 gives Titus the authority to disfellowship, or "reject," as that word is here, a person who has been twice warned that he is being divisive. Such a person has proved by his actions that he will not abide by God's teachings. So Paul says that Titus may be sure (that is the word knowing here), that the person is perverted and depraved. He does not have to feel guilty about putting him out of the church because he has proved that he is perverted and depraved.

The word warped here in verse 11 literally means turned inside out, that the person has been turned inside out. He is totally weird. That is why they have translated it warped or perverted. He is full of sin and he has condemned himself by his constant divisive harping and arguing. It is plain to see that he is not one of us. So Paul gives that permission.

Titus 3:12-15 When I send Artemas to you, or Tychicus, be diligent to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. Send Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their journey with haste, that they may lack nothing. And let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful. All who are with me greet you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all. Amen.

So, Paul's final instructions here in the book of Titus are mostly personal, telling Titus who to expect as visitors and what to do for them. He requests Titus' presence in Nicopolis. By the way, Nicopolis literally means Victory City. He wants him there and during the winter, but no one really knows where Nicopolis was. There were several across the Roman world. And we also do not know who Artemas and Zenas the lawyer were, except for what is written here in the letter. They are just names to us historically.

But before he closes, Paul cannot help himself. He gets in one more admonition about maintaining good works. Now the context is interesting here and probably significant because he had been talking about his inner circle. He had been talking about Titus, Tychicus, Artemas, Zenas, and Apollos, and these were men that traveled with Paul. They were his team. He would send them out here and there and they would do certain things for him. So he may be suggesting here that this is not an instruction toward Titus and the Cretan church, but toward his inner circle, which included Titus as well.

What he is saying here is that they too, let us call them the leading ministers under Paul, should be learning as disciples to engage in good works. They should not rest on their position within the church, they have to be one of the ones out in front doing the *leading* in maintaining good works. They should

not just be doing their ministerial functions, but more. Showing or modeling how good works are done. So they too have to learn to be diligent and devoted in their service for the people and to the world as well as they can.

By saying that they should do this to meet urgent needs, I think he implies that in their positions they must lead in rendering aid in the most pressing situations, letting other people within the church deal with some of the lesser situations that come up. And he ends with the comment that doing this will make them fruitful, that their ministries will be full and complete and produce the kind of fruit that God wants to see from them. Of course, these same instructions could apply to anybody in the church, but this one, because it basically repeats what is in verse 8, seems to be more focused on the ministry themselves.

As his farewell here in this book of Titus, Paul wishes God's grace on them, upon all who read this, because without God we can do nothing, without Jesus Christ we can do nothing. None of the growth will occur without the presence and activity of God. None of this would have *started* without the presence and activity of God in our lives. That is where all of this begins, and we should never forget it.

He is our source of all things good. Yes, works are good and right, and we should be doing them and be devoted to doing them. But God's grace toward us means *everything* as we walk the path towards His Kingdom.