# **Titus 3:1-8**

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# Remembering the grace of God in Christ Jesus, let the Spirit’s work of renewal be evident in your good works.

Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

I would like to share two phrases that I believe are the cause of high blood pressure and grey hairs everywhere. They are phrases that children use often when confronted with the questions “why did you do that?” or “why didn’t you do that?”. They go something like this, “I forgot” or the ever popular “I dunno”. Children who maybe have done something that they have been told not to do “a thousand times”, when asked why they did it will respond with either one of these responses. But the amazing part about these phrases, is that they aren’t exclusive to small children. Young people can quite easily use the same excuses for either being forgetful, lazy, or rebellious. “Why didn’t you do you homework?”, why did you forget to do....?, what were you thinking when you made this recent bad decision? (My parents have asked me that question a lot in my life.)

I think we can all agree that forgetfulness, laziness, and indifference cause a lot of problems in life. Whether it be in the family, in school, in our jobs, and yes, quite often in our Spiritual life, our shortcomings and failures are a constant source of pain. They can disrupt our earthly relationships and they can also affect our walk with our Heavenly Father. As those who have been graciously redeemed and bought by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, we are called to live a certain way. Paul’s letter to Titus is full of reminders and instruction for the believers, calling them to remember the things they were taught when Paul was still among them. Paul has told Titus what kind of men office-bearers should be so that the churches would not be led astray. He has instructed them on how they are to conduct themselves as a body of believers, older men teaching younger men, older women to younger women, and how young people are to conduct themselves.

Now Paul switches from relationships inside the church, to how the believers are to conduct themselves in an outward fashion. How are the Crete believers to interact with their rulers and fellow citizens? How can they show to those outside the church that their new life in Christ is something that controls them in all of their activities? Well that’s what we are going to look at today as we will aim to learn ourselves from Paul, how we ought to behave, what the motivation for that behavior ought to be, and what our end goal should be in our new evangelistic lifestyle.

**Theme:** Remember God’s work of Salvation in Christ, and through the Spirit, work for God’s glory and our neighbor’s good.

1. With Restraint and Anticipation (vs. 1-2)

2. Without Foolishness, because of Loving-Kindness (vs. 3-7

3. Being Careful and Profitable (vs. 8)

1. **With Restraint and Anticipation**

As Paul takes up his pen to again direct Titus’s teaching of the Crete believers, he doesn’t waste any time getting to the heart of the matter. The people who Titus is ministering to are the Jews and Gentiles who live on the island of Crete; a place not known for producing people of good behavior and upright morals. Paul cites one of their own “prophets” in chapter 1 who is said to have a given a trustworthy description of the Cretans as “liars, evil beasts, and lazy gluttons.” In history and Greek mythology, the inhabitants of the island are recorded as being rebellious, fiercely independent, sumptuous, given to much wine, and quite proud of living where Zeus had been born, as well as being the place of his tomb. It is possible, though not completely verified, that the Philistines may have come from the Island of Crete during the time of the OT. To summarize the culture surrounding those who Paul and Titus are seeking to minister to, it is hard to find anything nice written about the people who lived on Crete. They chaffed against the Roman rule that they were subject to, and they would have been more than happy it seems to have resorted to violence if they thought they had a chance of throwing off the Roman’s rule.

But Paul is writing to the believers living among rebellious, gluttonous, idolatrous people... and how does Paul tell Titus to address them? He goes straight for the jugular of their sinful culture and he calls them to live in a way that is starkly different. The island you live on is known for rebellion and a lack of self-control. It is full of idolatry and wicked living, with Jewish leaders who are trying to take away from the gospel by diverting attention to myths, rules, and genealogies. Here is what God has called you too: “REMEMBER what you have been taught by us”, says Paul, and the first step is to exhibit submission and obedience. There is no soft-peddling of the gospel. This isn’t a call to add Christ to your “already close to perfect life”. Paul calls the believers on Crete to radically change their lives and humble themselves before the authorities, to be submissive and obedient.

But he doesn’t stop there. It would be easy(maybe easier) to grin and beret. Just submit quietly, all the while seething under the surface. Like a child who “obeys” by doing their chores, all the while muttering under his breath about how unfair it is. Is this the submission that God’s children are supposed to exhibit? A resigned and grumbling tolerance of what God says? Of course not! Paul knows that and that’s why he presses on by saying that the believers must be “ready for EVERY good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.”

Paul, in line with all of redemptive history, is sharing the heart of God towards His people. God is not interested in heartless, outward, pietistic religion. God’s people in Israel were rejected and scorned by God “because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men”.([Is. 29:13](https://ref.ly/Is29.13)) The prophets excoriated the people for their lack of love for the fatherless and widow, for their selfishness and idolatry. God wants our hearts! He wants us to love Him with our heart soul mind and strength, loving our neighbors as ourselves! May God grant to us His Spirit that our cold dead hearts would come to new life in Him! Our Catechism reminds us that we are to “hate our sin and to run away from it!”, all the while showing a “love and delight to live according to the will of God by doing every kind of good work”.(L.D. 33)

These words ought to remind us of the life we ourselves are called to, a life that demonstrates how we are different from the world around us. Brothers and sisters, how often are we actively looking for the opportunity to do good work? It’s much easier to get lost in our own wants and desires, our own cares and concerns, and shut off the needs of the world around us, isn’t it? If we wanted to say that we made progress in the area of conversion and sanctification, would it be fair to say that if we do, it’s in the first? If I look inside myself, by God’s grace I think I have made some small steps in putting to death the old man. Fleeing from sin stays on my mind more. But do I, and I ask “do you”, also look for ways to come to life in the new man? Paul is calling for both in these verses. Brothers and sisters, as we look to improve on our baptism and grow in our faith, I encourage you to “be ready for every good work”. Looking for ways to demonstrate gentleness and courtesy towards all men in order that we might serve our Father with all the might that He works in us.

In these first two verses, Paul calls for the Cretans to live in a manner that is contrary to the world and in line with God’s will. He is calling them to live a life that is modeled after the life that was lived by Jesus Christ, the Lord and Savior of them and us. Christ Jesus, the one through whom God made the whole universe(!) took upon himself the form of a servant. He submitted to the instruction of His parents, He did not throw off or disregard the imposition of Roman rule, but He humbled Himself, even paying the tax of the temple and encouraging the right paying of taxes to the Romans. This from the One who upholds and installs all of the world’s kingdoms and rulers. We have been shown that we are to live as citizens of His kingdom, which means we trust in Him and obey His Word. His Word that teaches us to “pray for kings and all those who are in high positions”([1 Tim. 2](https://ref.ly/1Ti2)), “to be subject to all governing authorities, for all authorities are from God”([Rom. 13](https://ref.ly/Ro13)), while remembering that “we must obey God, rather than men.”([Acts 5](https://ref.ly/Ac5)) Followers of Christ are to restrain themselves from a desire to speak evil and rebel, instead looking for ways to demonstrate kindness, gentleness, and good works towards their fellowmen. Shining brightly in the darkness, living in a way that is markedly different, that is what they are called to. The motivation and strength behind that life-altering behavior is what we find in point two.

2. **Without Foolishness, because of Loving-Kindness (vs. 3-7)**

Concluding the description of the behaviors that should be demonstrated, we might pause and rightly say “no one just changes that much on their own”. Paul doesn’t disagree. He proceeds by describing for the believers what they themselves were once guilty of, what he himself used to be like. He seems to fill out the description of a Cretan that is found in Chapter 1 as he rattles off the list of sinful character traits that can be found in the lives of those outside of Christ. Paul ties his argument together by reminding the believers that they ought not to act in these sinful ways because to do so would be to allow sin to reign in their bodies, making null and void the preaching of the gospel which Paul had brought to them as God’s apostle. Paul is simply saying “you can’t do that anymore.” Those things… being foolish or ignorant, disobedient, lost, slaves to passions and pleasures, envious, and hating and being hated… what do those sound like?

They are a fairly complete paraphrasing of the 2nd table of the law. “Foolish and disobedient”, like rebellious children towards their parents. “Slaves to various passions and pleasures”, like commiting adultery or murder. “Passing our days in malice and envy”, think coveting our neighbors things or even stealing from them. “Hated by others and hating one another”, murder is the outworking of hatred, and slandering our neighbor is simply the verbal form of hatred. When we were lost in our trespasses and sins, this is how we conduct ourselves.

Is it ever OK for Christians to live like that? Paul wants to explode with a resounding “NO!” To live such a way is foolishness! Think of his argument in [Romans 6](https://ref.ly/Ro6), in which he likens living in sin to being a slave to it. Once we have learned of the love of God that is ours, how can we live willfully in bondage to sin? Paul says we can’t! He grounds the whole argument in verses 4-7 where he destroys any thought of either legalism or libertinism. The Christian life stinks of neither of those wrongs. All of the works that Paul calls the Cretans to do and all of the sinful things they are to abstain from, none of them ought to be obeyed to earn us God’s favor. “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.” We have done nothing deserving of His grace in, and nothing we can do will add to our salvation!

When we were still dead in our trespasses and sins, that is when Christ died for us. Not because we got so close to attaining the mark of righteousness that God rewarded our best efforts. He accomplished this “according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.” Paul is channeling the same doctrine that is found in Ephesians when we are told that “by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is a gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” The Crete’s get the same lesson as the Ephesians, and the same lesson as we do. The only thing that we contribute to our salvation is the sin that made it necessary in the first place. Back to [Titus 3:7](https://ref.ly/Tt3.7) “so that being justified **by his grace** we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

Salvation is a gift of God that has been poured out on us in the Holy Spirit uniting us to Christ Jesus! We are brought into the family through the mercy of God that was displayed in Christ Jesus. By the Spirit’s washing us and renewing us, we are pronounced justified and righteous. We are adopted and now found to be rightful heirs of eternal life! Because the Spirit works within us, being sent to us on behalf of the Father, through the person of Jesus Christ, we are now new creations. New creations that as Paul would say in 1 Corinth 5, must include the passing away of the old. As the Spirit of God lives in us, we are called, just as the Crete believers were called, to separate ourselves from the way of life that was once ours. The way of life that belongs to our old man, and still seeks to cling tightly to us. God must give us strength to do so, yet He calls us to “work out our salvation with fear and trembling”. Here in Titus, Paul calls the believers to remember not only what they once were, but also what God has richly done for them in Christ Jesus.

Paul is careful to avoid the charge of teaching a legalism, but does he stray too far and teach that the Cretans can do whatever they please now? Clearly not! Paul has called them to a life not of disobedience to the law, but to a life that seeks to fulfill the law because of gratitude. Gratitude that is ours as we remember the the working of our Triune God to accomplish our salvation. Being heirs of the hope of eternal life, believers are reminded that we have the Spirit working faith in our hearts, and out of that gift of faith we ought to produce fruits of thanks. The Spirit is the down payment for the eternal life that is to come. He is what we possess already in faith, as we await the glory that is yet to be revealed in Christ’s second coming. He is working in us, giving us new life and renewing in us a desire to serve and love God!

Isn’t it amazing to see the chain of salvation that unites us to Christ? God’s mercy and love for lost sinners is demonstrated in the sending of His Son. When the Son’s work of deliverance is complete, He pours out the Spirit upon us richly! And having been justified by our union with Christ, we are now heirs of eternal life, freed to live lives of joyful gratitude and good works!

The Crete believers were called to remember the gracious love of God towards them that was the grounds for His sending his own Son to die on a cross for them. The Greek word that we translate as lovingkindness in verse 4, is the connecting of the Greek words for love(phileo) and man(anthropous). It’s also the base for our word philanthropy, or love of mankind. So the questions which we rejoice to answer is when did God demonstrate His love for mankind most pointedly? [Romans 5:8](https://ref.ly/Ro5.8) “but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” [1 Timothy 1:15](https://ref.ly/1Ti1.15) “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.” This is the loving kindness of our God, and brothers and sisters it is amazingly good news. The kind of news that fills our hearts and hopefully animates our bodies. As we are reminded of this beautiful truth, just like the Crete believers, we come to our third point.

3. **Being Careful and Profitable (vs. 8)**

The gravity of the exhortation that Paul has asked Titus to deliver is cemented in Paul’s choice of words in verse 8. “the saying is trustworthy”. Paul is signaling that they are to pay attention to what has been spoken. And just for extra good measure, Paul says that Titus is to insist on these things that he just wrote! The gospel has been proclaimed: sin, salvation, and service. Unmerited grace to undeserving sinners. Goodness and lovingkindness of God saving sinners from their evil and hatred. No longer are we foolish, depraved, and led astray into further darkness and death, but we have brought into the marvelous light because of the saving work of Jesus Christ by Him pouring out the Spirit of life upon us! This is THE GOOD NEWS, and we can’t afford to forget it.

Congregation, we must be careful. Careful to never forget the grace of God that has saved us from a life of misery and death. Careful to never forget the wonderful love of the Father that is ours in Christ Jesus. Careful never to forget that our salvation is secure not because of works we accomplish, but it is solely founded upon grace. When we are careful to remember these things, careful to remember the love with which our Triune God loves us, it is then that we are profitable. Not profitable for our own earthly good, but profitable in a much more important and eternal way. When we are careful to remember the glorious truths of Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ, it is then that we are profitable because we don’t seek our own praise or promotion, but instead we humbly and joyfully point others to Christ Jesus.

When we abandon earthly pursuits and focus our eyes upon Christ, we store up treasures in heaven as we live joyfully in the service of our King! As we do so, we are gaining a reward that isn’t merited, but is purely of grace. When we devote ourselves to the business of grateful good works, we may even find ourselves to be the instruments that our Father is pleased to use for the saving of lost souls! What a wonder is this: that our Father in heaven is not only pleased to redeem for Himself lost sinners, but He even strengthens us and equips us that we can participate in this great plan of redemption.

As we live here on this earth, we are called by God to demonstrate thankfulness in how we interact with people, whether inside or outside the church. May it be especially true of us that as we live among the lost and the unbelievers in society that we conduct ourselves in such a way that they can see our thankfulness to God in our loving, kind, and thankful attitudes. Maybe, should the Spirit so move through us, we will find ourselves having reason to rejoice in God bringing lost sinners home through the witness we joyfully demonstrate before them. It is truly a wonderful thing to meditate on. That although we were lost, depraved, and slaves to sin, God our Father, sent Jesus our Lord, to demonstrate His goodness and loving kindness towards us in a most beautiful, loving, and powerful way. Our Savior came to seek and to save, to pour out God’s blessings upon his chosen people, sending His Spirit to take up residence in us, that we might be equipped for every good work. With the Spirit’s working within us, giving us the desire and strength to follow Christ in love, we are brought into the family and service of our God. There as His beloved children we offer to Him our praise... our thanks... our very lives, as we marvel at the grace and love that are given us by our Triune God! AMEN