

George Philip Bible Readings

Paul's Letter to Titus

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This epistle along with 1 and 2 Timothy forms the group called the Pastoral Epistles and all three are concerned with the life, order and work of the church. They were written towards the end of Paul's life and they give not only Paul's thoughts, but his considered and authoritative guidance to those who were to take over the pastoral care and teaching of the church after his death. The situation seems to have been that Paul was released from the imprisonment mentioned at the end of Acts and was able to carry out a further preaching tour, including a visit to Crete. During this time of liberty he wrote 1 Timothy and Titus, whereas from 2 Timothy it is clear he was again in prison and awaiting execution. Titus, along with Timothy, was one of Paul's close associates, a man Paul trusted, who proved in experience to be worthy of that trust. Some suggest Titus was a brother of Luke and that this is why Titus is not mentioned by name in Acts. Something of Titus' involvement in the missionary work of Paul is seen in his accompanying him to Jerusalem at a time of spiritual controversy when the truth and purity of the Gospel had to be defended (Gal. 2:1). He was a Gentile, who stood in the liberty of the Gospel and saw no need to submit to legalistic pressure regarding circumcision (Gal. 2:3). Titus carried out a difficult ministry in the contentious and arrogant church in Corinth (2 Cor. 8:6, 16-17), paying more than one visit to them. In a spiritual sense Titus could almost be regarded as Paul's 'trouble-shooter', exercising something of a ministry of superintendence, a work which meant a great deal to Paul, as 2 Cor. 2:12-13 and 2 Cor. 7:5-7 make plain. It seems Titus carried the Second Letter to the Corinthians to that church and Paul speaks of him as a partner (2 Cor. 8:23). Paul had no doubt as to the integrity and trustworthiness of Titus (2 Cor. 12:18) and, after his spell in Crete, it seems Titus was again commissioned by Paul for yet another piece of service (2 Tim. 4:10). What a man to copy! Could we be trusted again and again with service? Or do our colleagues feel 'let down' and disappointed so that they look for someone else?

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If we are to care for and guide the church in the world we must be clear as to its need. Many diagnose the sickness of the church and declare it has failed in terms of liturgy and worship and so new forms of worship are invented. Others say the failure is in the areas of unity, pacifism, disarmament, unemployment and other social action, and they urge the church to get to grips with 'the real issues of our day'. The truth is that the church has failed in respect of the Word of God: in preaching it, in ordering the life of the church by it, and by refusing to submit to its supreme authority in life and doctrine. In the Pastoral Epistles Paul's emphases are on right doctrine, right conduct and right administration. It appears from 1:10-12 that Titus had a particularly difficult task in Crete, and no doubt his experience in Corinth, plus all he had learned through his association with Paul, stood him in good stead. This is one reason why we need to be attentive to and open to the ministry we sit under. God's purpose is not just our present blessing but training for our future work. Many a Christian has wasted God-given opportunity for training by insisting on being occupied in Christian activity which has taken up all the available time and energy. This is short-term thinking, especially for those young in years who are at the stage of secondary and tertiary education. Granted, practical experience of Christian work is necessary and beneficial, but to learn principles and to become a true and dependable member of the church is more important. It is in this way you build up reserves, you learn to pace yourself, and you come to know that being right with God and being in the right place is of the very essence of fruitful service.

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The first qualification for anyone called to Christian service is to know that he is a servant, a bond-slave. The second qualification is to be a 'sent-one' (apostle), laid hold upon and commissioned by God. How sad it is to hear a man saying he 'decided to take up the ministry.' How different is the testimony of mighty men in the Scriptures (Amos 7:14-15; Jer. 1:4-5; Gal. 1: 15, 16). But these two qualifications are not enough in themselves to lead to a fruitful ministry. Indeed they might even lead to pride and to an over-valuation of our own position and significance. There must be an awareness of exactly what we are commissioned to do. It is to further the faith of God's elect and to further their knowledge of the truth, which truth must be matched by godliness of life. This in turn leads on to hope and the confirmation of hope, which is a great dynamic in Christian life and

service. We pause at v.2 because Paul in these few verses virtually writes a thesis on the nature of Christian ministry. The principles apply to all who are involved in any way in teaching and leading others, whether it be in congregational ministry, Sunday School teaching, or any other activity, including the encouragement and guidance we should be giving to each other in the context of Christian friendships and witness to non-Christians. The phrase 'God's elect' indicates God's 'chosen ones', chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, justified by His grace, and called to holy, Christ-like lives (Eph. 1:4; Rom. 8:33; Col. 3:12-13). It is through knowledge of the truth that the elect are brought to faith, and the evidence and confirmation that we are indeed elect lie in the fact that we believe the Gospel (Rom. 10:17; 1 Cor. 1:21; 1 Thess. 1:4-5; 2:13). Paul, of course, is a true evangelist, and he is not content simply to bring people to a first, initial response and commitment of faith. As far as he is concerned the evidence of new life in Christ is that it will grow. All evangelists must remember this before counting statistics.

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If we link verses 1 and 3b we see how central the preaching ministry is to the outworking of all God's purposes for His people. When we study the Acts of the Apostles carefully we see that the pattern of Paul's ministry, everywhere he went, was simply an opening up, a presentation of, and a reasoning out of the Scriptures (e.g. Acts 17:2-3). Whether in terms of evangelism, or teaching new converts, or building the church, Paul made it his business to exercise a comprehensive ministry of the Word, as he made plain to the elders at Ephesus (Acts 20:20-21,27). He kept back nothing that was profitable to them, even though it may not have been palatable at the time. But he also made it his business to exercise his ministry in a way that would not hinder the truth of the message either by human cleverness or by personal gracelessness (1 Cor. 1:17; 2:1-4; 1 Thess. 2:3-12). This emphasis on the centrality of the Word of God being preached is a necessary one in our generation, when even in evangelical circles preaching is being discounted in favour of other methods of communication, and when even worship is thought of as separate from and independent of the preaching and the hearing of the Word. Paul emphasised to Titus that the Word of God is vital and creative in respect of faith, growth in grace and truth, and in the development of godliness. This thought of godliness has to do with character and with our whole manner of and attitude to life. It speaks of consecration, moral worth and active reverence towards God and all that belongs to God. It indicates a man who has God manifest in every activity of life. It speaks of those who seek first the kingdom of God (Lk.12:31), whose every attitude is related to God and subject to God. Godliness and contentment go together as 1 Tim. 6:6-7ff. makes plain.

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The contentment spoken of at the close of yesterday's reading has a significant background which is in fact the inspiration of it. The faith, knowledge and godliness Paul has spoken of rest on the hope of eternal life and are inspired by that hope. There are two concepts here: the fact of the sure hope of the Christian which is the anchor of his soul (Heb. 6:19); and the fact of the world to come. The Christian lives his life and exercises his ministry against the background of eternity. His citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20) and in this world he is essentially a pilgrim and stranger (Heb. 11:13; 13:14). But he knows where he is going and he is sure of it (Heb. 11:10, 14-16). His sure confidence is grounded in the God who cannot lie, who gave His pledged promise 'before the beginning of time'. 'God's promises are grounded in His eternal purposes.' (Guthrie) What God has purposed from all eternity He will surely bring to pass at the proper time, and the agency of His working is His own perfect Word in its proclamation. We must never think of the Gospel as something of an emergency measure invented by God 'at the last minute' to deal with the complications introduced by man's sin. God's plans were set from the beginning and we must accept this, however hard we find it to understand, because it is this sureness in God that becomes the firm foundation of all our life and ministry. Read 2 Tim. 1:8-12 then return to Titus and see clearly the close link between God's eternal purposes, God's trustworthiness, the trustworthiness of God's Word, and the place that Word plays in the outworking of all God has planned. If we then recognise that God has entrusted to our stewardship the ministry of the Gospel there will be a new reality, earnestness and care in all our activity, and a new sense of responsible privilege.

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Having stated the foundation principles Paul is almost ready to start his teaching regarding the need for right doctrine, right living and right administration in the work and witness of the church. But first he greets his colleague Titus, referring to him as his true child in common faith. This description may have several meanings. It may signify that Paul had no doubts at all about the radical conversion and spiritual experience of Titus. It may suggest that Titus owed his salvation or at least his growth and progress in the faith to Paul and his ministry. That would have created a particular bond between the two men. On the other hand the words may simply be Paul's way of saying that Titus was a man after his own heart, with the same attitude to and commitment to the Gospel as he had. Paul certainly seems to have regarded Titus highly and it was with confidence that he entrusted the difficult situation in Crete to him. If by this time Paul was growing old and getting near the end of his ministry, he must have been greatly heartened to know that a younger generation of ministers, tried and proved in their youth, was coming forward to continue the task. This is something that must be looked for, especially in places where a ministry has lasted for a long time. Younger people who read these notes should ask themselves if they would be ready to take places of responsibility in the congregation if the older men and women were to be taken away. Some young people, and some not so young, are not aware of just how much they are being carried by others who may not be scintillating and gifted but who are in truth pillars of the church. Paul finishes his introduction with a greeting or blessing incorporating grace and peace. Grace is God's free and undeserved favour and peace flows from it. These two blessings attend us in all our ways and enable us in every situation.

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In order that the life of the church might be rightly organised, supervised, led and taught, elders are to be appointed. This was the pattern of Paul's own missionary work right from the start (Acts 14:23) and he made it plain that elders were to regard themselves as being responsible for and guardians of the people and work that belonged to God (Acts 20:28-30). They were also charged to do their work as elders with a glad spirit of service, setting themselves as examples to the flock, examples that could be safely followed (1 Pet. 5:1-5). When there is true oversight of a congregation many, if not most, of the difficulties and distractions will be rectified with comparative ease; always, of course, in the context of the ministry of the word. But this requires two things. There must be within the church a recognition that supervision is necessary, and a willingness to be guided, led and corrected. There must also be the right kind of men to whom this task of supervision can be entrusted. The whole matter is vitally important, especially in a day when indiscipline is a mark of society and when even gentle correction is often resented by Christians. The counsel of Heb. 13:17 should be heeded. On the other hand leadership and discipline are effective and gently operative only when those in authority are manifestly persons of integrity and grace. If we would guide and correct others, then we must be able to say humbly what Paul says in 1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Phil. 3:17. All this being so, we must face the question as to how such elders are to be chosen in any given congregation, whether that congregation is a company of fairly new or longstanding believers. Whatever the method of appointment, Paul leaves us in no doubt as to the kind of men who are to be considered. As we think of this tomorrow we may well feel that every elder and minister we know is disqualified. If we recognise our own disqualification also, we will be thrown back on the grace of God by which alone we live.

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The list of qualifications for elders or presbyters is comprehensive. To be blameless is to be beyond reproach so that people inside or outside the church are unable to point the finger. This same qualification is required of deacons (1 Tim. 3:8-10). It calls for a life lived in the open with God, walking in the light, refusing to behave in a way that would arouse either suspicion or misunderstanding (1 John 1:7; Acts 24:16). The direction about marital status, 'married only once,' (RSV) or, 'the husband of but one wife,' (NIV) is difficult to understand in detail although the emphasis on moral character is clear. It may bar those who had been polygamous before they became Christians. It may refer to some who professed Christ but who were lapsing into the easy attitude of society and taking a 'second' wife. This does not seem to be the correct interpretation because (unless the situation was similar to 1 Cor. 5:1) such wrong behaviour would not be countenanced in church members. Does

this regulation bar from the eldership a man who has been divorced and re-married? Does it require that an elder be a married man? Perhaps it refers to his loyalty to and his conduct of relationships. Any man who is careless about another's deep feelings is not eldership material. Paul certainly seems to be thinking of married men when he refers to the children. The standard is very high. It certainly indicates that a man's home, the atmosphere of it and the attitudes and life style of the members of the family, are a good indication of the man's spiritual calibre. Paul seems to assume or to expect that the children of believers will grow up in the 'nurture and admonition of the Lord and in the ways of the church of Christ.' If this is not the case (and godly men in Scripture had renegade sons) the attitude of the parents is significant. If they grieve and love and pray, that is one thing. If they consent to their children's waywardness and even find vicarious pleasure in them, that is quite another thing.

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Note how Paul, having started by speaking of elders (presbyters) as a recognised group of office bearers, now goes on to speak in individual terms of a 'bishop', (RSV) or 'overseer', (NIV). The elder is a bishop, in the sense that he oversees the people of God (the Greek word used is 'episkopon' from which we have our familiar term 'episcopal'). We are dealing here with something very different from the modern system of episcopacy with its hierarchical system of bishops and archbishops. The elders are the bishops who are called to be stewards of God's affairs. It seems that it is in respect of the practical stewardship of God's affairs and His people that this second list of qualifications is given. It is because he is an overseer and steward that the bishop must be blameless. There must be no shadow cast on the work of God, or the testimony of the Gospel, because if it is, then God's name is dishonoured (Rom. 2:24). This is why the standard must be set high for both elders and ministers. Their office is a public one, and what may be excused in an ordinary member of the church cannot be excused and must not be condoned in those called to holy service. Part of the Church of Scotland Ordination Vows of a minister (who is a teaching elder) is to "engage in the strength of the Lord to live a godly and circumspect life.' In order that a bishop or overseer might be blameless so that no-one can point the .finger, his life will always be somewhat narrower and more restricted than it needs to be. There will be things which in themselves are not wrong, things which would do him no harm, things which would give him pleasure without any sense of God being displeased, but he will not claim his right to these things lest they be misunderstood, lest they cause another to stumble, and lest they hinder his usefulness to God. This is the pattern of Jesus who did not claim His rights (Phil. 2:5- 6).

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The areas in which an elder/bishop must be careful and the particular graces called for are listed in detail. God's stewards are dealing with people as well as things, and people vary tremendously in personality. They can be perverse and as stupid as sheep, as the Bible so often says, and this calls for all the capacity of a shepherd, teacher and guardian. The elder must not be arrogant, overbearing or self-willed. If he is, there will be constant friction and unnecessary rebellion in the congregation. He must not be quick-tempered or hot-headed, for that is the very opposite of God who is essentially long-suffering. One of the best restraints on impatience with people is to remember how very patient God has been with us. The elder must not be over-fond of wine and the 'good living' which goes with it, because that leads to a spirit of self-indulgence in which personal pleasure and inclination begin to qualify Christian service and availability for God. Paul goes on to make plain that a man prone to a violent temper is not a man to be trusted with looking after God's flock. Neither is a man who is greedy for gain, especially dishonest gain, to be trusted with this office. A greedy man can be greedy for power and can so easily make use of his office to build up a little 'kingdom' of his own within a congregation. It is so easy to adapt one's teaching and to qualify one's influence in order to advance one's self. This is something that can enter into the exercise of hospitality, so that homes become competitors with and distractions from the House of God, rather than ministering to the good of the whole gathered family of God. If we feel the standards are high and the dangers both real and subtle, then we are learning.

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To be hospitable is to have a real care for and devotion to the good of others. It means to have a welcoming spirit at church and at work, as well as at home. It is the opposite of forming a narrow elitist group which it is almost impossible to break into, and it means reaching out to draw in the awkward as well as the lonely. The overseer or elder must be a lover of goodness, attracted to and having a high valuation of all that is of real moral and spiritual worth. To be in the company of such an one makes you want to be good. There is nothing mean or grudging about such a man but he is never foolishly extravagant. He is master of himself, knowing how to behave and to react in given situations, always discreet. He is upright (the word is righteous) and this may refer to his dealings with people. He is also holy, devout in relation to God and in every area of his life he is self-controlled or disciplined. This kind of man does not 'become' spiritual for specifically religious occasions. His whole life is lived unto God and when he speaks, especially in the context of the church, you are instantly aware that he is a man who knows what it is to speak to God in prayer. Titus may well have wondered how he was going to find men like this in the congregation in Crete, but Paul was certainly expecting that, through the Gospel, converts of this calibre would be brought to Christ and would grow in grace quickly. After all, if people are truly born of the Spirit, should not the fruit of the Spirit begin to be seen in them from the beginning (Gal. 5:22-24)? Perhaps we expect too little from new converts. Perhaps we set too low a standard for those who have been Christians for years.

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So far the emphasis has been on the moral and spiritual character of the elder, but there is more to this office than just 'being'. There is a ministry to fulfil and an influence to exercise, and this is the emphasis of v.9. The man who would be a blessing and a help to the church must be one who holds firmly to the sure and trustworthy message as it has been taught. The words signify that already there was a recognised body of doctrinal truth, about which liberty of opinion was not allowed. Paul may well have been thinking of his words in 2 Tim. 3:14-17 and, without doubt, a man's attitude to the Scriptures, his reverence for them and his commitment to them lie at the heart of all he is and does in Christian service. We live in a day when even ministers have lost their way because of so-called 'new insights' regarding Scripture and Christian doctrine. These 'new understandings' are nothing but old-fashioned unbelief and, like the Pharisees of old, men have made the Word of God of no effect because of their traditions (Matt. 15:6). Men have held to their own changing opinions rather than to the trustworthy Word of God and, as a result, ministers and whole congregations have ended in a maze of uncertainty and confusion. Error has prospered because inside the church there have not been either the ministers or the elders sufficiently grounded in sound doctrine to instruct believers or to confute and confound those who teach heresy. In a generation like ours, when there is so much ignorance as well as unbelief, we need to be able to say, 'That is not what the Bible says,' and then go on to tell people what the Bible does say about God, man, sin and salvation.

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These verses make plain why strong, clear-minded, true-hearted elders and teachers are needed. There were within the life of the church those who were actively teaching error and upsetting whole families. We see also that the early church had its fair share of difficulties and disturbances. Trouble and conflict in a congregation are not always a bad thing. They may indicate that there is a core of believers who are earnestly contending for the truth against those who have entered the church and even gained some position in it (Jude 3-4). Paul describes these people in strong, pointed language. They are insubordinate, rebellious against the official rule of the church. They are 'doing their own thing' and going their own way. They are unteachable, of course, because since they are constantly talking they never hear anything. Paul says quite clearly that for all their talking they have nothing to say. They are empty, and, because they have the appearance of being 'spiritual', they are deceivers. Paul goes further and identifies the 'group' who are the troublemakers, and sometimes it is necessary to do this publicly in order to prevent others being drawn into the net of deception. Paul's words are strong, not least because these false teachers had a mercenary motive. They were in it for the money, and when money plays too big a part in a church or in a believer's life there is something far wrong. The circumcision party were those converted from a Jewish background who were of the opinion that they were 'superior' because they had

been circumcised. They hounded Paul right through his ministry and he dealt with them very bluntly in Gal. 5:1-4. They were making certain things or experiences essential for 'real salvation' and that is a denial of Christ and the Gospel. We still have people in the church who say, 'Unless you do this or that you are not a real Christian.' They must be silenced.

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Paul has been speaking about false teachers who need to be silenced, bridled or muzzled and the reason for the strong language is seen in the description now given of (some of) the Cretans. The words quoted in v.12 are from a poet and prophet (who lived about 666 BC), and Paul indicates that the Cretan temperament has not changed. If one of their own honoured people criticises them in strong language, Paul cannot be blamed for doing the same. This bluntness, since it seems to be in accord with facts, cannot be denounced as sub-Christian, and it has the same sharp condemnation as we find in Jesus' words, 'Woe to you, Scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites,' (Matt. 23:1-3,13,16,23,25,27,29). Some things need to be said and to be said loudly and clearly. Paul denounces the false teachers who were harming God's people, and calls them liars, cruel and malicious (evil brutes) and contemptuously greedy (gluttons). It seems Paul was warning Titus as to the temperament and disposition of the people of that island, so that Titus, as minister of the Gospel in that congregation, might be mentally and emotionally prepared for the reactions that might well come when he disciplined the troublemakers. There is a time for gentle persuasion, coaxing people back from a measure of straying, especially if they have been beguiled by plausible frauds. But there is a time for sharp rebuke. The objective is to bring these people of evil influence back to soundness of faith. There is no word here of ex-communication. But when both tenderness and sharpness fail, even that final sanction might have to be applied. This stern task is to be done by Titus and the elders. We see now more clearly why elders must be of spiritual calibre. Read Jesus' words in Matt. 18:15-20 and the words of Jude 19-20.

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The start of v.15 contains words that are usually misunderstood. People quote them as if they meant, 'If you think a thing is good and permissible, then it is'. But that leads to all manner of permissiveness and moral indulgence being excused on the ground that the person sees no wrong in it. If we look back to v.9, 13, 14, we see that Paul is contrasting those who hold by the trusty Word of God and those who go aside to Jewish myths and man-made rules and standards. The 'pure' are those who hold to and live by God's good word and its health-giving doctrines. For them life is safe for it is hid with Christ in God (Col. 3:3) and mere physical contact cannot defile it. We could do well here to read Jesus' words in Mark 7:1-23. A mind and heart kept pure by the washing of the Word (Eph. 5:26) will not easily go the way of impurity. A true conversion makes you want to be good and causes you to grieve when you are bad. But these false teachers in spite of all their claims to 'holiness' were corrupt and unclean inasmuch as they had departed from God's good Word. In consequence their minds and spirits were being increasingly soiled and spoiled and they could only have the same effect on all they contacted and influenced. To see the effect on mind, emotions and personality when the truth of God is refused and departed from, read Rom. 1:21-24, 28-32. The second verse of today's passage emphasises how those who depart from God's truth very often make a great protestation of their faith in God and their commitment to God. But their attitudes and actions shout loudly the truth about them. Think of how some, whose dedication is to a church building and to memories of the past, oppose with an awesome bitterness the coming of a truly biblical, evangelical and Christ centred ministry that glories in a salvation that is all of grace. Ponder well the fact that so many rest their hope of Heaven on salvation by works. It will help you to pray and to witness.

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It is imperative in the life of the church to be aware of the elemental conflict between truth and error, between sound biblical doctrine and the ever-changing opinions and positions that are based essentially on human philosophy. Paul has already indicated this in 1:9, 13-14. In such a context the instruction to Titus is crystal clear. He is not urged to 'attack' error, nor to preach 'against' it (nor to pray 'against' it) because all these

approaches are essentially negative. The real corrective to error is truth, and the command here is not simply to preach or herald the truth, but to teach sound doctrine. This is the only way by which the church and individual Christians will know what they believe and how to discern subtle, as well as obvious, departures from the truth. This is very important in today's climate of ecumenism. There are some matters which belong to the area of church discipline and government and we can agree to differ in such areas provided what we do is in agreement with Scripture. Some methods are better than others and some more fitted to one situation than another. But, when it comes to basic salvation doctrine, especially concerning the Person of Christ, the nature of His substitutionary death for the sins of men, and the way of salvation by grace alone through faith, then there is no room for 'agreeing to differ'. This is why we must make it our business not just to proclaim the true biblical gospel but to build the church, grounding it in God's truth so that we will preserve the authentic gospel message for the generation that comes after us. What is the worth of evangelistic success if babes in Christ are not nurtured in truth and built into the church? It would mean that every generation would have to start from scratch. The commission given was to teach and to make disciples in all nations.

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Necessary as yesterday's comments were, we have not yet dealt with v.1 which called Titus to teach 'what befits' or 'what is in accord with' sound doctrine. Good doctrine is not enough in itself for evangelical witness. The doctrines of grace must become incarnate in our lives and there is no excuse for lives that are lacking in grace. Of course, right living is not set forth as an alternative to right believing. We are saved by faith, but if our professed faith does not produce in our lives the works of graciousness, humility, purity, honesty, integrity and considerateness, then our faith is dead. So says James 2: 14-26. Can that kind of faith save? The answer is negative. On the other hand, a life in accord with sound doctrine will serve to silence or even to prevent evil slander against the church (8). It will also adorn or set in clear relief the gospel we preach and by which we live (10). We could well take as a text for this whole section (Titus 2:1-10) the words of Jesus in Matt. 5:16, 'Let your light so shine . . . '. But let it be emphasised yet again that right doctrine and right living belong together, and it is the right believing that provides both the power and the motivation for right living. This exposes the folly and the essential error of those who say, 'We will never get agreement in doctrine, so let us concentrate on acting together to influence society.' It cannot be done. In a generation of lies and half-truths (is there a difference?) sound doctrine and good lives are the truth and light that society needs.

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In Cretan society there was a great need for the witness of older men. They are called to be temperate, with a spirit of moderation marking their speech and actions. They are to be serious of purpose as befits senior members of a congregation. This does not mean long-faced but, after all, the older men must be aware of how much of their span of life is gone and how little may remain. It is tragic when old people forget that they are on the borders of eternity, but it is glorious when the light of eternal day is already shining on their faces. Age should make us all sensible, with a sense of values, a knowledge of our limitations, and a balanced sense of what should be expected from people who are younger. The older men are also called on to manifest in their lives in rich measure the graces of faith, love and patient endurance. What an encouragement it is to see men who have lived their lives sound in the faith that is grounded in Scripture; men who have served a life-time all for love of Christ; and men who have persevered through multitudes of trials and tribulations without ever having turned back. To get to know such men is a means of grace, because you will learn from them many lessons, not least a deep sense of gratitude to God whose mercy has not failed them. Is there a suggestion in Paul's exhortation that as age increases there is a danger of slipping back into an easy-going self-indulgence that allows the carnal and fleshly side of nature to have too much influence? Was Paul thinking of how Abraham's youthful sins re-emerged twenty years later when he was a man of ripe faith (Gen. 12:11 ff; 20:1 ff.)? Was Paul thinking of how Isaac's eyes grew dim when he grew old and how his fleshly love of life nearly caused him to introduce confusion into God's work (Gen. 27: 1 ff) ?As we grow older let us see to it that we grow wiser. Watch and pray!

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2:3-5

Take two general lessons from these verses for our first study. The witness and influence of the older women are in the interest of the younger women, because the younger ones need such counsel and guidance. This is a very important principle because it is all too easy to try to model ourselves on our own generation and peer group. We want to be like the others who are on the same level as ourselves, because we think this will lead to a more cosy and comfortable life-style. It is not so. It tends to lead to dullness, and that is why gatherings restricted to 'young people' (if we know what we mean by young) tend to become in-turned and often unhealthy because the combined experience of a group of young people is essentially limited. They have not lived long enough, and the years they have had have been supported and underwritten in so many ways that they just have not been aware of. They may feel independent. But wait. Look at the older women. When you are their age will you still be going hard after Christ with gladness and joy in your heart as they are doing? Who, among those who knew her, in our congregation will ever forget the prayers of Evelyn Sloan, who was still in church twice a Sunday and at the Prayer Meeting every week until she was nearly ninety years of age? Who will forget her youthful spirit, her love for the Lord, and her prayers for the dying 'that they might have an abundant entrance into the Kingdom'? Older women, we cannot do without you. The young need the example and the encouragement, and they need to know that even when many of your deep hopes and longings were not fulfilled you still went on with Christ. With women like that the Word of God is not discredited (5b).

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2:3-5

The older women are to be reverent in their behaviour and this must refer to dress, deportment, speech and general attitude. The prohibition regarding slander and drink reflects something of the contaminated society in which these believers had to live. It was out of that kind of atmosphere and life that they had been converted and they were best keeping as far away from these things as possible. This is wise counsel for us in our generation in which there is a tendency for Christians to make their social gatherings as much like worldly gatherings as possible. There is not the preaching of 'separation' from the 'world' that there once was in evangelical churches. It is not only older women who need to guard against wicked, gossiping, trouble-making tongues. Nor is it only older women who are warned against becoming slaves to drink. You can be a slave to alcohol even though you never get drunk. You can acquire a 'social' habit and find that you 'have to have' a drink. At the end of v.3 Paul urges the older women to teach what is good, not in the sense of public leadership in the church, which is the function of the elders, but in respect of the home and family life. This is not pleasing doctrine to the 'woman's lib' movement nor to those married women whose demands for the right to a career become the paramount consideration in life. But it is biblical teaching, and we need to remember that when the gospel brought great emancipation to women in Paul's day this led in many areas to an assertiveness that was neither Christian nor womanly. It is this that Paul is guarding against, setting a standard of domestic and family behaviour so that the Gospel would not be discredited. A Christian home should have something that marks it out as different from others.

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2:3-5

We must not fail to grasp the significance of these verses in respect of the vital importance to society and to Christian witness of the home. It may be that in using the word 'train' Paul is recognising that the instruction given will cut across natural inclination. It may not suit the young Christian woman to see her first God-given duty in such domestic and submissive terms. But if this is God's pattern, then we must accept it. It may be that in calling on the older women to teach the younger women, Paul is emphasising and commending the patterns of love, marriage and home life that have been tried and proved over generations. No one would seek to justify the imbalanced biblical teaching on marriage and home-making introduced in a past day by men who were simply selfish and indulgent and acted like petty tyrants. But at the same time we see in our present society cohabitation instead of marriage; government-paid nurseries instead of the family context for growing children; easy abortion as a way out of sexual responsibility; and ever increasing divorce statistics. These all testify that man's pattern for life is significantly less healthy than God's. We are only beginning to reap the fruits of humanistic philosophy of behaviour. The real crunch is yet to come. All this insists that we learn God's pattern for love and family life. Read 1 Pet. 3:1-8 and see how spiritual all this is. Then read Eph. 5:21-33 and see how

exalted a concept of womanhood there is in God's pattern. In a fallen world where even our thinking gets confused and twisted, it is best to listen to God's counsel rather than to man's.

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2:6-8

If women are to be true to the pattern God sets, then men, especially young men, must be true to the standards of true manliness. If the women are to be self-controlled or pure, then the men also must learn, to be self-controlled. Again we are in the area of inclination, natural desires, and the temptations particular to the man woman relationship. There is no excuse whatever for trifling with or manipulating another person's feelings. There must be honourable intentions right from the start and, if a relationship is truly of God, it will not be unduly difficult to keep it on a right level, free from any hint of permissiveness that we would be ashamed to let people know about. Of course, Jesus knows! He, above all others, knows the temptations and the struggles. That is what Heb. 2:18; 4:15 makes very plain. And, since it is the Holy Spirit of the sinless Jesus who dwells in our hearts, the standard of self-control and purity is by no means beyond us. At this point Paul addressed Titus (7), who was after all one of the younger men. He had to remember that his ministry would carry little weight in the community unless his life corresponded to his teaching. There is not a different rule or standard for ministers, except that it must be higher and stricter, since the minister is a public person very closely identified with the work of the Gospel and with Christ Himself. There are many, many reasons why we should pray for all young Christian men, especially those training for and actually in the ministry. They will be targets for the Devil! If they are living a double life, granting themselves concessions or taking liberties in the moral realm, they are indeed in great danger; but not only from the Devil; God may take a dealing with them. But remember, when a Christian falls, be it man or woman, we seldom know much about the costly battles that may have been fought and won in private. But God knows all there is to know.

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2:6-8

Yesterday's note may have been more a sermon than a strict exposition so we look now at the detail of these verses. Self-control and example of life are duties laid upon Titus (6,7a). No minister has a right to ask of others what he is not prepared first to be and to do himself. Of course he must urge and admonish without waiting to reach perfection. He must speak about behaviour as well as doctrine. Those who preach and teach, especially if young in years, must do so with integrity and seriousness, so that people will recognise at once that their pulpit utterances are not a performance. Some young preachers seem to feel a comedy performance is necessary in order to 'attract' people to the Gospel. Some, young and old, contrive in the pulpit, by extravagant gesticulation, by tonal manipulation and by cleverness with words, to draw attention to themselves. To hear people leaving a service saying, 'He was a scream!' is tragedy indeed. Little wonder some congregations don't want the Gospel. Of course, we must not confuse seriousness with dullness, and if we manage to make the glorious doctrines of salvation by grace dull, then there is something far wrong with ourselves. Sound speech (8) seems to refer to wholesome content linked with wise teaching methods (7b). This is the kind of ministry that can shut the mouths of lions. It does not always do so, for wicked men will deliberately look for ways of opposing (Dan. 6:4-5). No one's words were better than those of Jesus (John 7:46) and yet they said He was in league with the Devil (John 7:20; 8:48). An enemy put to shame may feel the unreasonableness of his position, knowing that he has nothing evil to say against us, but still maintaining his enmity and opposition. Our business is to see to it that he has no case against us.

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2:9-10

Paul's teaching of the Christians in Crete now moves from the realm of the home to that of daily work. We have to work like Christians whatever the nature of the work, whether masters are good or bad, whether or not the work is boring and the conditions poor or even unjust. The reason for this is that all our work is done for the Lord and not man (Eph. 6:5-7; Col. 3:22-23) and we have the example of our Lord Jesus who yielded all His rights (Phil. 2:5-8) and who maintained a spirit of humble submission even when He was reviled (1 Pet. 2:23). It is of immense importance to note very clearly that neither here nor in his other epistles does Paul launch an

attack on the institution of slavery, the wrongs of employment, nor the structure of society. This does not mean he approved any of the wrongs, nor did he close his eyes to them. He does not here refer to the responsibilities of Christian masters, as he does in Eph. 6:9; Col. 4:1. His emphasis is on employees, who in that day were often slaves and not just servants. Paul was fully aware that then., just as now, because of the fallenness, perversity and essential self-centredness of human nature, all that is meant by revolution would almost certainly lead to chaos and to a deeper tyranny and bondage. Think of how in the second half of the twentieth century so many 'liberated' countries have instituted a ruthless and corrupt system that has suppressed human rights to a degree worse than before independenc. It is suggested that Paul here, as in 1 Tim. 6:1-2, is referring to slaves with Christian masters, but it does not seem necessary to narrow down the application. We assume that when issues of Christian conscience arose, especially when called to deny the Lord or to bow to a pagan idol, then the believer was free to refuse. He would then have to be prepared to pay the price.

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2:9-10

These exhortations are of vital application in our generation when the motivation in almost every realm of society and work is that of rights rather than responsibilities. Being stubbornly awkward, or 'refractory' (RSV), has to do with a deliberate frustrating of the master's plans, and finding perverse pleasure in so doing. Pilfering is simply petty thieving, and it has become almost an accepted thing in many work-places. Total fidelity and a sense of loyalty to the master and to the firm is something that seems to be disappearing. Christians are called to be different. It will not be popular. It may result in a Trade Union calling a strike. It may result in a boss dismissing you to keep the peace with the rest of the staff. But this is the standard set again and again in Scripture: Eph. 6: 5-9; Col. 3:22-4:1; 1 Pet. 2:13-23. It would appear that Paul is counselling the indirect approach, calling Christian workers (some bosses work and some workers work) to be the salt that restricts corruption, the light that shows the way, the leaven that permeates and the righteousness that shows a better way. How different this is from the confrontation and mutual accusation that have become such a blight on society. Perhaps it is because Christians have refused to live like Christians in the workaday context that the other way has become the usual way. Perhaps there is a deeper explanation for the ills of society: God's judgment on the nation. But that is another subject.

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2:9-10

We gave several passages to consider yesterday and we return for a final study of this subject of Christians and their work. History testifies that when there are living Christians and a living spiritual church in the nation, then society and its structures change for the better. But change is never easy. It is costly for slaves who have no rights, but equally dangerous for workers who have only rights and no responsibility. Paul is clear that even in 'dark Satanic mills' (Blake) Christian slaves have the opportunity to 'adorn' (RSV) to the Gospel or to make it attractive. If we believe that God places us where we are; if we believe *He* orders the affairs of the world and not men or devils; if we believe that all things work together for good and that nothing can separate us from the love of God (Rom.8:28,38-39); and if we believe that the motivation of our lives is to glorify God, and that the fulfilment of our lives is in the world to come, then our attitude will be far more realistic. We will learn how to face both plenty and scarcity and to be content (Phil. 4:11-13; Prov. 30:7-9). After all, as Jesus said, a man's life does not consist of the things he possesses (Lk. 12:15). The realism of Jesus in Lk. 12:16-21 is quite devastating. What desolation there is in materialism! We cannot take it with us. Suffering Job was wise when he said, 'Naked I came forth from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return.; the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord' (Job 1:20-21). This is life lived unto the Lord. This is what it means to seek first the Kingdom. This is what it means to have a Saviour and to live for Him in every area of life. Christian workers of the world unite in grace, truth, love and loyalty and, by honouring those we serve with the quality of our work, we will honour God and do our brothers a mighty lot of good.

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2:11-14

This chapter began with an exhortation to teach what befits sound doctrine. Then Paul went on to elaborate on the pattern of life that was in accord with sound doctrine. The passage ended in v.10 with a reference to

adorning 'the doctrine of God our Saviour' (RSV). Paul now takes up this thought of salvation as being the work of God and he expounds this theme in today's verses and again in 3:3-7. Paul seeks to make plain that it is only on the basis of what God has done for us and has given to us in Christ that we are able to live the life he has described in 2:1-10. Power and enabling come before practice and performance. In Christ we are raised to newness of life and therefore we are called to live new lives in the liberty and victory He has given (Col. 3:1-5; Rom. 6:1-6,12-14). The grace of God has come on the scene, working for us glorious salvation and lifting us up to a totally new level of experience and possibility in Christ. Therefore we must live as men and women raised from the dead (Eph. 2:1-5). We are not victims of circumstances, personality or heredity. We do not struggle towards victory. We have been given victory in Christ. All things are ours and we are Christ's (1 Cor. 3:21-23), so that we might live like Him. Paul is concerned that we should think clearly about salvation. It is the work of God's grace from beginning to end (Eph. 2:8-9). It is not a 'combined operation', as if God did His bit and we did ours. It is all of God's grace. After all, we were dead in sin and from that state of total inability God quickened us by His Spirit, enabling us to hear and to believe the Gospel. Think of how this sovereign, saving activity of God is expressed in some hymns, such as 'While I passed my Saviour by, His love laid hold on me,' (Anon) or 'Speak with the voice that wakes the dead, and make Thy people hear' (Midlane). This is what is going on when the Gospel is being preached.

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2:11-14

The appearing of the grace of God can be thought of in two ways. On the one hand it is mighty power breaking into the arena of human experience, and on the other it is like the light of dawn dispelling darkness and ushering in a new day. Both aspects, power and tenderness, are needed. Think of the Aaronic blessing, Numbers 6:22-26, that speaks of the Lord making His face to shine on us. Think also of the Sun of Righteousness rising on us (Malachi. 4:2) to heal our hurts. Paul speaks in 2 Cor. 4:6 of salvation in terms of God's light shining into our hearts. To the believer all these aspects of God's gracious salvation thrill the heart, but we must remember how men refused the light, preferring darkness (John 3:19) and how they resisted the grace of God that had come near in Christ, saying with amazing venom, 'We will not have this man to reign over us?' (Lk. 19:14). The sovereign grace of God calls and enables men to believe, but it does not overpower them in a way that relieves them of responsibility. Indeed the coming of light can operate as an instrument of judgment rather than of salvation, leaving men without excuse since they can no longer plead ignorance (John 15:22). This helps us to understand the meaning of 'all men', for it cannot mean that every man and woman will be saved and go to heaven. It means that the salvation of God reaches down powerfully to bring salvation to all classes and kinds of people and this must have been a particular encouragement to Titus working among the grim population of a place like Crete. It should remind us not to restrict the Gospel to any class or age group but to look in faith for salvation even in the most unlikely areas. But in our own day we must recognise that one of the major barriers to evangelism is the deeply inbred belief that everyone eventually goes to heaven no matter what they believe or how they live.

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2:11-14

We ended yesterday's note by referring to 'universalism', the idea that because God is love, all will eventually find their way to heaven. This is not what the Bible says, as John 3:16-18; 8:21,24; 14:6; Acts 3:19; 4:12 and many other Scriptures make plain. The other barrier to evangelism and faith is the fact that people are indoctrinated with the idea that salvation is by works, by religion, by morality or by sacraments. But Scripture makes plain that by works no person shall be justified in God's sight (Rom. 3:19-20). Someone has defined religion as 'trying to seek God, find God and please God by your own efforts.' Paul makes it plain here that salvation is by grace. We come to God empty-handed with no plea of any kind. And even our desiring to come and our ability to come are the work of that same grace of God. But the grace of God is not an automatic thing or formula that works instant salvation. The grace of God has appeared, training or teaching us, and Paul goes on to express the purpose or objective in some glorious 'negatives', followed by equally glorious 'positives'. From various sources we are today urged not to make the Gospel negative but to be positive in showing what the Gospel gives and brings. But one very positive note in the Gospel is that you cannot have Christ and come to God and still hold on to your sins. One sure sign of the grace of God touching a life is the grace of

repentance and a new desire to be and to do what pleases God. To this end God exercises gracious discipline upon us. It is not harsh or tyrannical, even though the sanctions of God's holy Law stand as a watchdog to warn, rebuke and correct us when we stray. The discipline is that of the God of all grace whose desire and design is to establish, strengthen and settle us in Christ, so that we might have and exercise to the full all His gracious provision for us. He is a God to trust and to listen to.

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2:11-14

The grace of God becomes our personal instructor and guide in order that we might renounce irreligion (RSV), or ungodliness (NIV), and worldly passions. We are educated into seeing the need to renounce wrong things, and to that end we are often chastened and corrected (Heb. 12:4-11) as well as comforted, counselled and taught (John 14:15,26; 16:13). It leads to an energetic life of learning and developing, as 2 Pet. 1:3-11 makes plain. We are to learn a decisive rejection of ungodliness, that attitude of life that forgets God, sits lightly to God and is concerned to please self rather than God. The ungodly have no reverence for God or for the things of God, which they devalue and neglect. Worldly passions are exactly what the term suggests: those strong desires and inclinations that stir the flesh and dull the conscience, so that consequences are forgotten and the whole of life becomes a pilgrimage of gratification, whether base or refined. Read Rom. 1:18ff and 1 John 2:15-17 and take seriously what the Bible says about worldliness. There seems to be far less preaching about separation from the world than there once was in evangelical circles and, while we recognise the danger of 'rules and regulations' and an arbitrary approving and disapproving of things pertaining to entertainment, dress and party-going, we need to take a fresh look at the new wave of 'Christian' worldliness. The advent of TV to our homes means we watch what we would not once have watched. The 'realistic' paper-back trade means we are reading what once would have been regarded as 'dirty' books. The 'sexual' revolution means immodest and improper behaviour has become accepted even by Christians. We seem to have Christian centres for Sunday sport and Christian discos. Even Christian weddings seem to require a worldly party if the day is not going to be 'flat'. The old way of separation, even with its dangers, seemed safer and better.

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2:11-14

Being a Christian means living a Christian life that is recognisable by its attitudes and graces both positive and negative. We are called on here to live lives that are sober or self-controlled in respect of ourselves; upright or righteous in relation to others; and godly, in true devotion, reverence and obedience towards God. This is obviously a pattern and practice of life that begins with an inward reality and a conscious awareness of God. Its first concern is to be pleasing to God and to be worthy of God. But from such a life there will flow a witness of grace that will point others to God. Think of Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount in Matt. 5:1-16 and Paul's words in Phil. 2:14-16. But this does not at all mean that our service and witness will be self-conscious. Read Matt. 25:34-45 and see how surprised these disciples were by the Master's commendation. They had not been aware of the significant service they had been rendering in Christ's name. There is a glorious self-forgetfulness in being right, and living to please God. Was it not Mary Slessor who said to the new missionary in Calabar who asked her 'What can I do?' - 'Lassie, it's not doing, it's being.' Of course it is all to do with who we are trying to please, and which world we are living for. Attitude is important, as we shall see tomorrow when the background to the whole of Christian life is set.

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2:11-14

The fact that we are taking a whole week to cover a short passage signifies that it is full of concentrated theology and Christian practice. In v.13 Paul sets the whole of Christian life and service against the background of the personal return of our Lord Jesus Christ and the consummation in glory of the perfect Kingdom of God. We are saved in this hope (Rom. 8:24) and we live and rejoice in this sure hope of glory (Rom. 5:1-2). But does this in fact describe us? Do we live as pilgrims and strangers who look gladly for a solid city that is to come (Heb. 11:10,13-16) and do we really believe that to be with Christ is far better than the best this world can give (Phil. 1:23)? Do we in fact live our lives in the assurance and hope of the world to come and would anyone looking at us, listening to us and observing our pattern of life, guess that we regarded ourselves as people

whose citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20)? There is a tremendous emphasis in the New Testament on the return of the Lord, and the exhortation is often couched in words similar to our Lord's in Lk. 12:35-40. This is not escapism, although some of the preaching about the Second Coming is in that strain. Nor is it essentially frightening, although some preaching about the Lord's coming has terrorised children and sensitive souls with the thought of waking up and finding their Christian loved ones snatched away and themselves left behind. The New Testament emphasis on the Lord's coming in glory is one of fulfilment and triumph (Phil. 3:20-21; 2 Cor. 5:1-5). We must never lapse into defeatism, no matter how dark the clouds may be. The Bible declares that the night is far spent and the day is at hand (Rom. 13:11-14). The mighty Spirit of God is at work in the whole order of creation and He gives us assurance that the issue is not in doubt (Rom. 8:18-25). Because of this, we who are in the world must learn to use it aright, not abusing it nor being anchored to it (1 Cor. 7:31). The day will soon be here when we will shout with gladness the words of Isaiah 25:9.

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2:11-14

Following on yesterday's reading we do well to consider the hymn that says,

'Tell me the same old story
When you have cause to fear
That this world's empty glory
Is costing me too dear.' (Hankey)

Over against our worldliness we set the magnificent statement that our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ gave Himself for us.

'Amazing love! How can it be
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?' (Wesley)

He gave Himself for us, to stand in our place and to die for us in glorious substitution. In giving Himself *for us* He also gave Himself *to us*, in all the virtue, benefit and power of His death and resurrection, by His eternal Spirit within us. The objective in this great work of salvation is declared to be threefold. It is first of all to redeem us from all wickedness, not just to free us from the guilt of sin but to deliver us from its power. Anything less than this would not truly be salvation. There is not much to rejoice in if we are simply told that all our past sins are forgiven if we are left to struggle miserably with the power of sin. How grateful we should be for the great hymns of the faith that declare:

'He breaks the power of cancelled sin,
He sets the prisoner free.' (Wesley)

Salvation has as its second objective to purify a people who will be reserved for God's personal possession (1 Pet. 2:9-10). This is a marvellous thought because it means God wants to have us, and to have us in a very personal way. He is not ashamed to be called our God and He would have us live with Himself in pleasurable fellowship. It is not idle fellowship nor does it have mere satisfaction as its objective. The third objective is that God should have a people who are mastered by a desire to do His will, to serve Him in love and to delight in His service. That is plenty to think about for one day.

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2:15

Paul now urges Titus to see to it that his ministry in Crete has this all-round, all-embracing faith and works, a God-honouring and God-pleasing emphasis. Sometimes the sheer dimension of the message leaves a preacher feeling very incompetent. Sometimes the cost of urging such a message on a congregation weighs heavily, because even Christians are not always disposed to receive what is good for them. There are those who oppose any kind of searching ministry, especially if it has an element of discipline. There are those who stand aloof, refusing to respond, devaluing both message and messenger, deliberately refraining from any comment, unless to criticise. But it happened to Jesus. Paul knew plenty of it, and he urged both Timothy and Titus to be strong, calling them and us to follow his example. Think of Paul's farewell to the elders at Ephesus (Acts 20:17-35) and

the reference there to tears. But Paul's ministry was with authority and Titus had to speak in the same way. This has nothing to do with personality, age, eloquence or talent. Paul, they said, was a poor speaker and not very attractive to look at (2 Cor. 10:10). The authority is from God who calls, and from the message that is incontrovertible truth. The preacher is to declare or teach, with the objective of communicating rather than impressing. He is to exhort or encourage, seeing to it that his ministry is not all challenge. And he is to reprove or rebuke with grace, but still with authority. And, one test of a person's growth in grace and maturity is his willingness to accept rebuke in a submissive spirit. The last exhortation here is important. Titus, because he is God's man, called and ordained to minister and to shepherd, must not allow himself to be disregarded, despised or slighted. A Christian's attitude to his minister is important, to God.

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3:1-2

From the glorious heights of salvation theology, Paul moves, without any sense of tension, to practical issues involving the believer's life in this world. He has been emphasising eternal things and values, and focusing on God's purposes and on the world to come. But there is no suggestion of believers being 'so heavenly minded that they are no earthly use'. There are some Christians who are escapist, but in all his epistles Paul makes plain that it is those who are clearest and surest about heavenly things who are most able to be of real use in the world as it is. The only way to be of use in a confused and disordered world that has lost its way is by being clear about God's standards and principles. In difficult circumstances it is easy to react and rebel, but that is not God's way. Remember that Titus was ministering in Crete which was under Roman rule. The Cretans by nature were a tough people (1:12) and what they disliked they tended to kick against, and they were apt to become agitators and disturbers of the peace. But Paul insists that the Christians must not be like that. The life of faith has to be lived under every flag and every form of government, even a totalitarian one like that of Rome. The challenge of these verses is deep and it links with similar exhortations in Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Tim. 2:1-3; and 1 Pet. 2:13-17. Jesus taught the same in Matt. 17:24-27; 22:15-22. Now, this attitude of faith and submission is possible only if we recognise that our circumstances are ordered under the sovereign providence of God. And, before we start trying to change things, and certainly before we start revolutions, we must ask why it is that things in society are as they are. It may be the harvest of sin. It may be God's stern but necessary means of awakening repentance.

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3:1-2

A right attitude to all duly constituted authority is required of every Christian. That includes speed limits, parking restrictions, income tax returns, good timekeeping and good quality work. It does not mean that we close our eyes to wrong, nor does it forbid us using every rightful means to change both law and society. But it does forbid that cynical, contemptuous attitude that sees only faults and never recognises anything good. That is only the negative side. We have also to be ready to take our rightful share in every good and honest work as the Lord directs. Of course, if our involvement in schemes of doing good steals our hearts away from the rightful priority of spiritual commitment then we will cease to be much good to anyone. It is those who seek first the Kingdom of God who are a blessing and benefit to the kingdom of the world. We acknowledge the principle stated in Acts 5: 28-29, but the proof that we have truly discerned a spiritual principle which must not be yielded is that God will honour us in the stand we take. Always make sure that what we consider to be principle is not just prejudice or preference. Never forget that the pattern for all Christians is the Master Himself who did not claim His rights but yielded all His privileges and position (Phil. 2:5-7). In a world like ours it is significant that restlessness, resentment of authority and discipline, and noisy protest have become virtually a way of life. Confrontation is the 'in' thing and seems to be regarded as the only way to improve society. But is improvement of society the motivation or is it simply selfishness?

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3:1-2

If v.1 calls us to be good citizens, v.2 calls us to be good neighbours. Love begins at home, and with those who live and work with us. We must learn to treat people with value, respect and courtesy. We are forbidden to speak evil or to slander. Read James 3:5-10. Our inward attitude influences what we say and how we say it.

But, in like manner, our conversation has a great effect on how we think of people. Read Eph. 4:23-32 and recognise how easily anger can corrupt and blind us so that we lose touch with reality. Granted people can be both exasperating and cruel, but those who have received much forgiveness from Christ must learn to forgive. We do not in any sense close our eyes to things that are manifestly wrong nor do we excuse the wicked things people do to us and to others. But, like Joseph in Gen. 50:20, we recognise that the badness of men can be overruled by God in order to work out His purposes. Read Rom. 12:14-21. Today's verses in Titus are wonderfully plain and practical. What does it accomplish to speak evil of others? What benefit is there in being the kind of person who 'stirs it up' and starts quarrels? To be gentle, mild, considerate, humble and courteous can do nothing but good. A soft answer does turn away wrath (Prov. 15:1). But it takes the strength of faith to give it. Let us see to it that our Christian social action begins right where we are. It is more important to love real people than to have a love for 'humanity'. Many who fight to stop mass killings by nuclear weapons can be remarkably indifferent to the deaths of aborted babies. But then, babies can be so inconvenient. They can deny our right to pleasurable liberty and career!

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3:3

In Christian ministry and in all Christian service there is always the temptation to be impatient and to become disheartened. This is particularly so in an atmosphere of troubled rebellion (v1) and in a situation full of hurtful speaking (v.2). But we are called to be patient, kind and hopeful and to remember the kind of people we once were and the kind of lives we once lived. For a long time we were unresponsive and, even after our conversion, we were so slow to learn and to grow that our spiritual mentors must often have despaired of us. But they persevered, and even though their dealings with us may not always have been wise or free from ulterior motive, we have, by the grace of God, reached the spiritual stage we are now at. Think back to what we were and what we could have become but for the grace of God. We were foolish and without spiritual understanding. Our attitudes and actions were stupid. We were disobedient, often because of stubbornness, knowing what was right but refusing to do it. We were led astray, deceived, deluded, living in a world of our own imagination, thinking we were spiritual. We were led astray from Christ because we were taken in by nice and impressive people who may well have pandered to our pride. Before Christ laid hold on us we were not free: we were slaves to various passions or tendencies in our personalities and to our longing for certain kinds of pleasures. We were all that in ourselves to a greater or lesser degree, scarcely knowing the potential we had for evil because we were so often hemmed in and restricted by circumstances and sheer self-interest. But we were also anti-social creatures, and in all too many of our relationships we were marked by malice, ill-will and envy, grudging what other people had. Hating and hateful are words that have a suggestion of a way of life going very bad. The human heart is deceitful and corrupt and we do not yet know just how much we have been saved from (Jer. 17:9). Read Eph. 5:3-8; and 1 Cor. 6:9-11.

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3:4-7

Paul never wearies of declaring how totally our salvation is all of grace. It was God who did it from beginning to end. The goodness and loving kindness of God appeared on the scene of our helpless situation and He saved us. It had nothing to do with any deeds of righteousness we had done or had tried to do, because nothing we could do could have changed our guilty, lost and helpless condition. We were not even seeking for God, because the natural tendency for the sheep-like sinner is to go away from God (Isa. 53:6; Rom. 3:9-18). If we claim that we were in fact seeking for God and beginning to hunger after God that is an indication that the Spirit of God was already at work in us. How we need to see that God in His grace may be at work for a man's salvation long before that man or anyone near him is aware of it. We know of a teenage boy who attended a godly man's Bible Class and learned all the old Redemption Hymns. This was followed by a life of irreligion, never attending church, and greatly embroiled with godless friends. Then, in his seventies, through what he had heard so many years ago, quickened by the Spirit and influenced by his children who had been converted, he came to faith. Never underestimate God's sovereign activity nor His perfect methods and timing. He is the God of salvation and He sent His Son to seek and to save the lost. We do well to look back over the years and to give thanks to God for the many people who have been instrumental in leading us to Christ. When we get to Heaven we may well find that someone, quite unknown to us, prayed us into the Kingdom.

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3:4-7

Consider some of the words Paul uses to describe the great salvation that is ours in Christ. He speaks of being saved, washed, reborn and the renewal that follows from it, justified and given hope of eternal life. These words call for a series of sermons (why not?) rather than a daily note. God saved us. All we now are and have is the result of His mercy, and we can claim no merit or virtue at all. This is one reason why we have no right to be critical or contemptuous of others. Now, if salvation is by grace, then the reference to the 'washing of regeneration' cannot refer to any magical or automatic 'working' of the rite of baptism. Regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit, and yet in John 3:3-7 there is also reference to 'water'. It may be that the verses in Titus form part of an early Christian hymn or affirmation of faith used at a baptismal service. This may be the significance of the first words of v.8, 'the saying is true'. If this is so, then baptism is being spoken of as a significant symbol of the washing that takes place by the Word and Spirit of God. Jesus spoke of His disciples being clean through the Word (John 15:3), and Paul speaks of washing by the Word in Eph. 5:26. Peter speaks of being born anew through the living Word of God (1 Pet. 1:23). What we must do, instead of getting lost in argument about the water of baptism, is to think of the washing of salvation. It speaks of thorough cleansing. Wash and be clean was the gospel to Naaman (2 Kings 5:10). There is a fountain open for uncleanness (Zech. 13:1) and though our sins be scarlet they shall be white as snow (Isa. 1:18). David's penitential Psalm speaks of being washed through and through (Ps. 51:2) and Revelation 1:5 praises Him who washed (AV) or loosed us from our sins by His blood. He makes us clean. That is a relief.

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3:4-7

We are not only made clean, we are made new creatures in Christ. This is what regeneration means (2 Cor. 5:17). We are born again from above and have a new heart, a new life and a new spirit. Read Ezek. 11:19-20 and Jer. 31:33-34. What we once were has passed away. We are re-created not just renovated. 'Regeneration is that act of God by which the principle of the new life is implanted in man, the governing disposition of the soul is made holy, and the first holy exercise of this new disposition is secured' (Berkhof, quoted by Hendriksen). We have a new life, a new life force, a new disposition in which our heart and flesh cry out for the living God. We could never have been this by nature. But, by the mighty working of the Spirit of God, we have been changed and there is within us a perfect Christ-life in embryo. The potential is all there. Christ is in us, the hope of glory (Col. 1:27). Read Paul's great affirmation of this in Gal. 2:20. Read and study what Paul says about this new life and power that is at work within us in Eph. 1:15-23; 3:14-20. What we must always grasp as we speak of regeneration is that it is a once-for-all work of God by the Holy Spirit and cannot be reversed. This makes it very clear that salvation is indeed a passing from death to life, glorious life, eternal life, the gift of God in Jesus Christ. But that is only the beginning, as we shall see tomorrow.

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3:4-7

Regeneration is a once-for-all, completed act. We are alive in Christ. We have been born. But birth is only the beginning not the end, else Heaven would be full of spiritual babies, and, wonderful as babies are, we expect them to grow and are deeply concerned if they do not grow. This is why renewal is so closely linked to regeneration. It speaks of a life-time of experience, as there is worked out in our lives and characters by the same Holy Spirit what God has implanted. Paul speaks of this working out in Phil. 2:12-13, and in Rom. 12:2 he speaks of the transformation of our lives by the renewing of our minds. This emphasises the place of instruction by the Word in the whole business of renewal. It is not one single experience of renewal, with or without 'manifestations'. Renewal is an ongoing work right through Christian life transforming us into the likeness of Christ. 'While regeneration is never directly perceived by man, and becomes known to him only because of its effects, renewal requires the conscious and continued surrender of man's whole personality to the will of God.' (Hendriksen) In all our preaching and praying how we need to look for emerging evidences of the secret, unfettered work of the mighty Spirit of God! Just as some seeds germinate slowly and some quickly, so it is with the seed of the Word in men's souls. We are regenerate by the Spirit and so begin to hear the Gospel and to believe, and so come to a conscious conversion experience, sudden, slow or simple. We begin to desire

the milk of the Word and to grow (1 Pet. 2:2). Our appetite is significant. Our struggles become creative. Our life becomes discipleship, and so it goes on through all our days. Renewal has to do with sanctification and growth to maturity. 'Sanctification is that gracious and continuing operation of the Holy Spirit, by which he delivers the justified sinner from the pollution of sin, renews his whole nature in the image of God, and enables him to perform good works.' (Berkhof, quoted by Hendriksen).

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3:4-7

In this great description and exposition of salvation we still have to deal with v.6-7 which, amongst other things, emphasise the lavish generosity of God, cf. Eph. 1:6-8. Note how the whole eternal Trinity is involved in our salvation. God the Father pours out His Spirit in abundant measure through Christ the Son. Now, since the Spirit is a 'person' and not an influence, His being poured out on us is not to be thought of quantitatively as if we each received a share of the Spirit. But at the same time we do not all prove the all-sufficient power and provision of the Spirit to the same extent. There may be many reasons for this, and one of them may be our propensity for 'using' the Spirit for our own ends rather than for the sole purpose of bringing glory to Christ. The reference to the outpouring of the Spirit may point to Pentecost, and the Spirit once given to the church is never withdrawn. The same thought of outpouring is found in Rom. 5:1-5, following on the theme of justification, which Paul emphasises here in Titus. The saving work of God through Christ by the Holy Spirit results in our being declared righteous and set in a right relationship with God. Since this declaration is by the God who cannot lie, then our salvation is irreversible. Neither men nor devils can contradict what God has declared settled. Being justified we become heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:14-17) in the sure hope of eternal life. If we read over v.3-7 we find that Paul has spoken of what we were, what we are in Christ, and what we shall be, and this is also the theme of 1 John 3:1-3. Perhaps we should summarise it all by saying, 'Think what Spirit dwells within you.' (Lyte)

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3:8

One verse is enough. Paul calls Titus to emphasise all these issues of salvation-doctrine and salvation-behaviour. We cannot affirm too constantly the central things of salvation. We need to understand our salvation and to know ever more fully what we have and what we are in Christ. This is one reason why we need to study the Word and to sit under the ministry of the Word. We need to be encouraged to have confidence in God. When Paul speaks of those who have believed or trusted, he seems to signify those who have their faith fixed on God. There is a suggestion of stability and permanence, a sureness in God that becomes the ground of the believer's pattern of life. That life will be marked not just by sound theology but by good works. Note how Paul says we are to be careful to apply ourselves to good deeds. This is not a sporadic flurry of applied Christianity, an occasional willingness to do a little bit for others or for the church; it is a settled and disciplined pattern of life. How sad it is when we ask some Christians to help and they consent, but with such an unwilling graceless spirit that we wish we had not asked them. But, going outside the life of the congregation, how important it is that a Christian's way of life should be manifestly one of glad involvement in good works. It is all too easy to get involved in what is cheap, tawdry and unworthy, but that is not the way of Christ. We must set ourselves to do the things that are manifestly worthy and of good report (Phil. 4:8-9). Worldly people are both clear and demanding about standards expected from Christians. How often the Bible exhorts us in various ways to let our lives be worthy of the Gospel (Isa. 52:11; 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; Eph. 4:1).

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3:9

Paul has been calling for active Christian involvement and participation in all that is good but now he speaks a word of caution. We must never think that we personally must be involved in everything, nor must we be tempted to speak authoritatively and comprehensively on every subject. We have our limitations and there are dangers. On the one hand we can use endless talk and discussion as a substitute for or an escape from actual Christian activity. On the other, we can allow our discussions to become more and more theoretical and speculative and further and further away from what the Scriptures actually say. This is important in a context where false teachers are operating (cf. 1:10-16) and it is something that must always be guarded against,

especially in a generation when discussion is far more popular than instruction. Some who are eloquent in religious matters can be teaching half-truths (Acts 18:24-26), but some can be teaching heresy quite deliberately. We must be very careful with those who, within the life of the congregation, gather round themselves a group whom they are teaching contrary to the main line of the church's ministry. But even in dealing with these aberrations we are to be careful not to be too drawn into what Paul calls foolish controversies (1 Tim. 1:3-4,6; 6:3-5; 2 Tim. 2:23). The Devil can use these distractions to burn up time and energy that should be devoted to teaching the truth. There is a time for turning away from such people, making it plain by our actions that we do not consider them genuine enquirers after the truth. Whatever the exact meaning of 'genealogies' and 'quarrels over the law', it is clear they were the cause of distraction from God's truth and of disturbances within the fellowship. Keep clear of such things.

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3:10-11

Even as he counsels Titus to guard the faithful against evil and corrupting influences, Paul is aware of the fact that some will be so proudly stubborn that they will persist in their evil ways. Paul refers to such as 'factious' (RSV), or 'divisive' (NIV), and the old AV uses the word 'heretic'. The emphasis is not so much on the false teaching of the man spoken of as on his self-will and self-assertion. He is the kind of man who goes his own way no matter what anyone says, and such is his pride that he considers himself spiritually superior. But to sit under a godly ministry of the truth in the context of a church manifestly blessed by God and still to go your own way is sheer perversity. This attitude is not 'independence' of thought nor is it 'relying on God and not man' nor is it spiritual maturity. It is sin. So says Paul. Such people divide the fellowship and seduce others away from trust in God's appointed leader. It happens all the time wherever there is a real work of God. The Devil sees to this. What is to be done with such people? Paul says they are to be admonished, that is, rebuked and warned in the name of the King and Head of the Church. They are not to be invited to 'come and discuss things'. Nor are we to enter into argument with them. They are to be told to stop their evil activities and influence. And if, after a second admonition, they are still wilful, we are to have nothing more to do with them. We are to shun and avoid them (Rom.16:17), and so let it be seen that we are not prepared to be party to their activities. Anyone with any degree of spiritual discernment will see and know that such persons stand self-condemned. Some, of course, will take their side. But they are siding against God.

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3:10-11

These verses and yesterday's note are so sobering and stern that we must consider them again and do so by looking at various Scriptures. In Matt. 18:15-17 the application seems to be firstly to quarrels among Christians which harm the unity of the fellowship in its dedication to the Gospel. In Acts 5:1-11 the discipline is directly exercised by God (not Peter) to cut out the cancer of hypocrisy from the church. In Acts 13:6-12 stern action is taken against an evil man who was hindering another's conversion. In 1Cor. 5:1-5 the frightening discipline is in respect of immoral behaviour on the part of a Christian, behaviour that other Christians excused or even justified. A similar discipline is found in 1 Tim. 1:19-20 in respect of two men who made it their business to deny the resurrection. In 2 Tim. 2:14,16-18 believers are warned to avoid certain people because their influence is bad. In 2 Tim. 4:14 Paul declares that God Himself will deal with a certain man, whom he names, because he did harm to the apostle. After all the Bible says we are not to touch the Lord's anointed (1 Chron. 16: 22). It is an open question who is to be identified as 'anointed'. God knows! In 1 Cor. 11:27-32 Paul seems to speak of physical ill-health being in some cases due to spiritual wrong, especially in relation to the Lord's Table. In 2 John 10-11 we are warned not to receive certain people nor to allow them to share the hospitality of our home. If we do, we will get involved in their wickedness. All these references indicate that we need to have a serious attitude to the truth of the Gospel and to the well-being of the church fellowship. There is too much at stake to be otherwise.

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3:12

You cannot read these verses without being aware of Paul's very wide involvement with, and leadership of, the churches of his day. Perhaps we can understand this best by thinking of the careful consideration given by a

missionary field council to the needs of specific areas and the people available to meet these needs. It is a matter that we should be much in prayer about for both the home and overseas field. The placing of workers is strategic and we must look to God for guidance and over-ruling. Either Artemas (about whom we know nothing) or Tychicus (2 Tim. 4:12) was to be sent to Crete to relieve Titus who was urged then to come to Paul, if at all possible. Paul often refers to Tychicus (Acts 20:4; Eph. 6:21; Col. 4:7; 2 Tim. 4:12) and he was obviously a much loved and deeply trusted brother in Christ and partner in the Gospel. Paul would have been the first to acknowledge his debt to such men, but we must also recognise that it was Paul's own radical commitment to Christ in grace as well as truth that caused men to give him such love and loyalty. Paul let it be known not only that he loved and valued them, but that he needed them and wanted them. Think for example of Phil. 1:3-11,19 and 2 Tim. 4:9-13. We know nothing about Zenas the lawyer but his profession indicates something of the variety of people found in the congregations of the early church. Such variety is needed, not only for the mutual encouragement and inspiration that Christian growth requires but to be available to do the different kinds of tasks that need to be done. Think of the problem and burden to Paul if there had not been secretaries to write at his dictation. The references in 1 Cor. 16:21; 2 Thess. 3:17; Gal. 6:11 refer to his taking the pen in his gnarled hand to add the final greeting.

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3:12-15

We may assume Apollos is the same eloquent preacher as the one referred to in Acts 18:24-28 and 1 Cor. 1:12; 16:12. There was no conflict or tension between Paul and Apollos, possibly because both recognised the other's gifts, graces and capacities. Both were so aware of the privilege of serving Christ (Eph. 3:8) that they felt no need to compare or envy each other's success. After all, they knew full well that apart from God's grace they could do nothing (1 Cor. 3:5-6; John. 15:5). Paul urged Titus to see to it that Zenas and Apollos were provided for materially so that they could continue their journey in the Lord's service. No doubt these men, if they were 'missionaries', would be willing to live on very little. But why should those engaged in full-time service be called on, and indeed be expected, to live on less than others? The exhortation in v.14 seems to follow on closely in this matter of practical help. The RSV indicates the need to help others but the NIV seems to suggest by the phrase 'provide for the daily necessities' the thought of Christians being self-supporting. Both aspects are indicated in the references 1 Thess. 4:9-12; Eph. 4:28; and 2 Cor. 9:8,10,12. The final greeting in v.15 needs no comment. It is full of tenderness, although there may be detected (by those who want to see it) just a hint that there may have been some who were not particularly disposed to love Paul. There were those, especially in Corinth, who had a very poor opinion of Paul but although that hurt him deeply (for they owed their salvation and much more to his ministry under God) the love and loyalty of others more than compensated. The grace of God was indeed sufficient, and with that blessing he concluded his letter to Titus.

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