

Shepherding Notes

Titus

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God's Salvation of the Elect

At the beginning of this Pastoral Epistle, Paul makes known to Titus and to all other readers of this letter that he had been called by God for the purpose of growing the faith of the chosen — "the elect." He writes that this ministry is "for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began." (vs. 1–2) Paul says that all believers are "God's elect" and chosen for salvation.

Commentator Hendriksen writes, "Just as God's grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, so also everlasting life was promised before all things." Before the foundations of the world were laid — before anything was created, from eternity past — the elect were chosen, grace was given, and the promise of life was made. No creature had yet been made; only God existed. This promise was an agreement among the members of the Godhead, the Trinity. There was a plan and agreement between the Father and the Son regarding the salvation of the elect. The Father chose the elect (vs. 1) and gave them to the Son to be His inheritance (John 6:37, 39; 17:6, 9). The Son accepted this gift, knowing He would need to enter this world, take on human flesh, become the God-man, and purchase salvation through His death on the cross. The Spirit would then bring dead hearts to life, causing them to be born again (John 3), and would seal them for the day of redemption (Ephesians 4:30).

John MacArthur writes, "The plan of redemption for sinners did not come after men fell but before man was even created... Before God promised forgiveness to sinful mankind, He had given a promise to His beloved Son." Jesus talks about this promise in John 17:24: "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world."

In eternity past, the Father promised His Son a people who would be His possession forever. Christ would purchase these chosen ones through His death. God's eternal choice was for the salvation of His elect, and He brings it to pass because He is the faithful one. I am often comforted to know that my wife was thinking about me throughout the day and praying for me. How much more, then, should we take confidence in our Lord, who had us on His mind and heart before anything was made.

What manner of love is this?

The Need for Proper Leadership

Paul stresses that church members should be concerned about what kind of men are nominated to hold office in the church as ministers, elders, or deacons. These men not only must "hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught" in order to give "instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it" (vs. 9), but also set an example in godly living for the entire church.

As you read this chapter, consider what traits of character and habits we should look for and value in such men. The qualifications Paul lists are not primarily about gifting, education, or personality — they are about character. An elder must be above reproach in his home, his tongue, his temperament, and his theology. The church rises and falls with the quality of its leadership, and the quality of its leadership is measured not by charisma but by Christlikeness.

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Adorn the Doctrine of God

Earlier in Titus 1, Paul warns that the false teachers affecting the church in Crete "profess to know God, but they deny Him by their works." (Titus 1:16) In this next section, Paul instructs different groups in the church how specifically they can "adorn the doctrine of God" with godly living. Jesus says in John 14:15: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments."

The leadership in the church should be an example of this. Paul exhorts Titus to "show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works." (vs. 7) The elder must be what he preaches and exhibit the doctrine in his character, teaching also by the way he lives his life.

Older Men

Paul mentions four particular groups that require Titus' instruction. First he tells Titus to teach the older men six things that are similar to his instructions for the elders: "Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness." (vs. 2) For older men in our church, this offers great hope. Your physical body may be gradually declining, but this is the time for your spiritual health to shine as a shining example. Let your life reveal the world's falsehood that physical health is everything. When you go to the hospital for surgery, display the patience and love of Christ. Show your self-control and moderation, even amidst great difficulty. Your faith, love, and endurance should be clearly shining, even if your physical stamina is fading. This is true spiritual maturity.

Older and Younger Women

Next, Paul turns to older women, teaching them five things: "Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled." Our secular culture idolizes youth and groans at the thought of old age. God and the Bible do the opposite — the Bible often associates youth with foolishness and age with wisdom.

If you are an older woman in the church, have you stopped to consider that it is your responsibility to teach the younger women? You are responsible for teaching them to love and submit to their own husbands, to love their children, to be self-controlled, to be pure, to be busy at home, and to be kind. If you are a younger woman, have you been watching and learning from the older women around you? It is so important for you to learn from them because of what Paul says in verse 5: "that the word of God may not be reviled." Younger women imitate those older women who imitate Christlikeness, and the beauty of the gospel will be evident to all.

Younger Men

Finally, Paul tells Titus to teach the younger men one thing: to be self-controlled. This is a key fruit of the Spirit, and without it, those younger men will never grow to be sober-minded and dignified, sound in faith, love, and steadfastness. Young man, who can you ask today to hold you accountable to be more self-controlled?

"Younger women imitate those older women who imitate Christlikeness – and the beauty of the gospel will be evident to all. The same is true of younger men who imitate godly older men."

Remember What the Lord Has Done

The center of our message is Christ, who Paul says "gave himself for us." Jesus Christ came as the incarnate Son of God, lived a perfect life, and died on the cross "to redeem us from all wickedness." Christ came to purchase a people, and "to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good." (2:14)

In chapter 3, Paul expands on this and showcases the crown jewel of the Bible — the good news of Jesus Christ. He wants Titus to instruct the believers to keep in mind from where they came and the grace of God that has been poured out on their lives. We too were foolish, disobedient, deceived, and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures (vs. 3). We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another (vs. 3). Perhaps not all of this was on the surface for all to see, but the Bible describes our own hearts as deceitful and desperately wicked. In the midst of this deadness, self-deception, denigration, and despair, true hope appeared:

"But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior." — Titus 3:4–6

This is the light of the gospel, and this is our salvation. This is no false hope of doing our best to obey the law, or trusting in our best efforts — all of which will disappoint. Why did God rescue us? Not because of righteous things we have done. This gospel is for those who have come to the end of themselves, and for those not holding up their own righteousness as a means of acceptance before God. This gospel is for those who know they are sick and without hope and in need of a physician. It is not about us, but it is "because of his own mercy."

This mercy caused God to wash us clean and forgive us of our sins, to regenerate our dead hearts and give us new hearts, and to pour out in full measure — God wasn't stingy, but poured out on us richly — the Holy Spirit into our regenerated hearts.

Two Reasons God Did This

- So that we would have genuine hope. Verse 7 says, "so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."
- So that we would abound in good works, to the glory of God. Verse 8 says, "so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works."

So today, brothers and sisters, I encourage you to remember what the Lord has done and remember from where you came. We were slaves to sin, and now we are slaves to righteousness and Christ, because the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared. Drink deep of the truth of the gospel and explode with hope. You have eternal life. In response, walk in the good works God has prepared beforehand for you to do. Walk as those who have real, genuine hope, and live accordingly.

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