

Good Deeds, Good Doctrine
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Bible Text: Titus 2:1
Preached on: Sunday, August 25, 2013

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I invite you to turn to the book of Titus as we continue our study and I'm very happy to be able to make this pivot this morning in the text that we're going to be making here today. You know, the last couple of weeks we've had the rather unpleasant, in one sense, responsibility and even opportunity, I guess, to look at the reality of false teachers. We've looked at the reality of false teachers, how to speak to a wolf. The Scriptures tell us that there are many false prophets in the world and here in Titus in chapter 1, Paul had taught us that you have to speak to a wolf, you have to reprove him severely and silence his influence in the church and among the people of God. Last week we saw a contrast between true and false purity. If you look at verse 15 in chapter 1 with me, as he speaks about these false teachers he says, "to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled." The reality of false teachers is that internally they are completely defiled. They may look pleasant on the outside, they may have a million-dollar smile, they may say things that sound pleasing or sound humorous to you and entertain you but inside they are defiled. They are impure and they can only lead you to distraction as verse 16 says, "They profess to know God." They stand up and say, "I am a sheep. I know God," "but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed." That's the biblical description of false teachers that we've looked at over the past couple of weeks. That's kind of a minor key in Scripture, minor in the sense that it's a heavy key that we have to understand and we have to be able to appropriate and deal with and know.

But as we come to chapter 2 now, there is a pivot and Paul shifts away from discerning the negative to a positive presentation of what true biblical ministry looks like; what it's supposed to produce; what the pastor is supposed to be like. We see that in chapter 2, verse 1 and I want to read that verse because it's going to be our text for this morning. Paul, having just said all of these things about false teachers, turns his attention to Titus and, as it were, points his apostolic finger at him and says, "This is for you." Chapter 2, verse 1,

1 But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine.

Then he goes on in the rest of chapter 2 and speaks about different roles in the church for older men and women, younger men and women. But we're going to look here this morning just at chapter 2, verse 1, to get a direct sense from God about what true ministry

in the church is supposed to look like and the way that those who lead the people of God are to conduct themselves and what they are to say and what they are to promote. There is far more here in this one verse that I read than you would suspect on a quick reading. I'm going to outline this approach to biblical ministry in three ways or based on three points that I'm going to give for you. If you're taking notes, they're all kind of centered around what is good and the first point this morning is: the good distinction. Let's step back and just think about it this way: we understand that there's a lot of bad stuff going on in the name of God and in the name of Christ in the world today and even in the church. You have a sense that you can't rely on what anyone is saying because their lives contradict the message, their message is watered down. It's very difficult to find a pastor that will clearly state that unless you repent you will perish in your sins; pastors that will speak clearly about the doctrine of eternal judgment and eternal damnation. All of that stuff kind of gets covered up with a feel-good approach that is designed to maximize the crowds that attend rather than to maximize the clarity of the truth so that people can understand what God requires to be saved before they face eternal judgment. We understand that. We understand that there's a whole mess out there.

What we have to understand collectively as a body of believers that are growing together in Christ, is to understand that we're not to be so weighed down with that that we lose sight of the positive aspects of ministry that we're to bring. There's a good distinction that Paul lays out for Titus here in chapter 2, verse 1. Look at the verse with me again, "But as for you." Paul has said everything that he wants to say for now about false teachers and he says, "Titus, it's an emphatic contrast. But you," in the original language, "but you. I've been talking about false teachers, but you." It's a sharp snap of the fingers that calls Titus, as it were, to attention to show what biblical ministry is supposed to be like. So Paul is shifting now in his focus and we need to recognize this distinction. Paul is shifting from the need to refute false teachers, that's one aspect of biblical ministry, but he goes on to show the need to build up the church with sound doctrine. This is so magnificently important for us to understand. You cannot build up Christians, you cannot build up a long-term ministry, you cannot build up a long-term local church simply by pointing out the defects and falsehoods in other people's ministry. That is not an approach to biblical ministry at all. It's not enough to say, "Don't eat this, don't eat that." You've got to give positive food. You've got to give nourishment that people can actually take in and grow on and a purely negative ministry that only critiques other men, that only assaults false teaching and never brings that positive dimension about what we're to believe and what we're to do, is a ministry that is destined to ultimately collapse under its own weight.

So we see from the start a good distinction that Paul makes for Timothy. He says, "Timothy, as for you, there's something different that you need to do." Paul is about to emphasize how constructive teaching is to be put forward and so he's making a good distinction. That's point number 1. There are two little subpoints under this. Paul is telling Titus, "As you're making this good distinction, understand first of all that you have to be distinct in ministry." You have to be distinct in ministry. Paul had just instructed Titus to reprove false teachers severely. Look at chapter 1, verse 13, "For this reason reprove them severely so that they may be sound in the faith," the "they" being the true believers that were tempted to be drawn away by these false teachers. He says, "But you, you have

to make a distinction in your mind." So there has to be a clarity in the man of God. There has to be a clarity that realistically looks at the landscape around him and says, "This is really bad. There is so much error about, there is so much false Christian living, there is so much sin even within the body of Christ," and you look at that realistically and say, "Okay, this is the battlefield. This is where it's at. These are the problems that we are facing." But for the man of God and it's true for the man in the pew as well, you look at that and say, "Okay, I see that and now I want you to understand," you say to the mirror, you say in the presence of God, we say to one another. We say, "I see that and I decisively, emphatically, once for all reject that. My life will not be marked by that," you say to yourself. The man of God says, "My ministry will not be marked by that. I realize that this falsehood, I realize that this sin, I realize that this mediocrity that is done in the name of Christ is an abomination to God and is detestable. It is worthless for any good deed." And you drive the spike home in your mind. You pour concrete down your spinal column that says, "I'm not going to be like that. I reject that. I will be a set apart for the ministry of Jesus Christ. I will be faithful to him if no one else follows me."

That has to be the distinguishing mark of the man of God who is called to ministry in the name of Christ. There has to be a clear-cut distinction in your mind that says, "I see that and I reject it and now I'm going to devote myself to what God has for me in ministry." That has to be clear so that you are strengthened against the temptation to go along with the fads of the world. That has to be clear in your mind so that you are strengthened against the temptations of your own heart to compromise, to be lukewarm, to be insincere and to just go through the motions. Oh beloved, you and I, men and women, young people, we have to separate ourselves from that lukewarm spirit that is content to have an outer form of Christianity without the inner reality. There should be such a clarity of love for Christ and love for his word and commitment to the truth of Christ in your heart that says the idea of joining with the mediocrity, the spiritual mediocrity all around you, is simply a detestable thought in your mind. That has to be clear. It has to be distinct and you have to recognize and say, "Okay, I whatever anyone else does, as for me and my house, as for me and my church, we will serve the Lord according to the truth of his word and will let his word run our lives. We'll let his word run what we believe. We'll let his word run what we do without regard to the consequences and utterly indifferent to whether men notice or to whether men applaud. None of that matters to us because we have a singular desire, a singular focus to be faithful to the God who has revealed himself in the word to be faithful to the Christ who laid his life down on the cross that he might redeem our souls." That has to be clear. That has to be decisively set in our minds. The man of God must stand out by contrast and speak sound doctrine instead of false teaching. He must be committed to holiness, not compromise and that has to be the cornerstone of the way that he approaches life.

Look back in 1 Timothy. You can see this contrast brought out as Paul spoke to another one of his young disciples. 1 Timothy 6. I want you to see just the contrast, just the emphatic nature of it. Another aspect of this is that there is such an encouragement in this. It says, "Okay, this gives me courage to stand up. This gives me courage. This gives me the desire to stand up. I don't have to be swept in. I don't have to be sucked in by the vortex of all of the false ministry that is around me. I can actually stand and to be distinct

from this. God commands me to do it and that implies the fact that he's going to give me the power and the grace that is necessary to do it." It's not just for the man in the pulpit, it's for you in the pew as well. You don't have to be sucked into mediocrity and if you're living a mediocre Christian life, you bear a responsibility for that. If you are lukewarm in the word and your prayer list and you are happy to just go about in worldly things with no real thought of Christ in your life, first of all, you should examine yourself to see if you're even in the faith or not. I don't understand how anyone could be content as a true Christian to be mediocre like that. But if you find yourself like that, you need to grieve over it and you need to repent and say, "Lord, I'm sorry. I need to come out of this and realize that that's exactly what he calls you to do.

Look at 1 Timothy 6, beginning in verse 3. There is so much parallel to Paul's thought to Timothy as it is to Titus. He says, "If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness," you see, there it is, it's a godly life. It's not about whether you've made a past decision at all. We rode that horse to death many months ago in our pulpit ministry here. But it has nothing to do with whether you can say, "I made a past decision for Christ." True doctrine leads to true godliness and if your decision didn't lead to a transformation of life, it didn't lead you to a love for Christ, it didn't lead you to a hot-hearted pursuit of godliness, you have every reason to question whether your salvation is real or not. This is just the truth. It's the doctrine that conforms to godliness, verse 3 of 1 Timothy 6. If you don't agree with that, if you don't agree with those sound words, here's what Paul says. Here's what the Bible says about people who would dispute the clarity and simplicity of what we just said. Verse 4, it says, "he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain."

Now, that's a description of the false world of ministry, those who teach something different than what Scripture says. Remember, all that we're talking about right now is making a good distinction and having it clear in your mind about what you stand for, about what I stand for, about what we stand for as a body of believers in this region. What do we stand for? Well, verse 11 of 1 Timothy 6, having said all of these things and much more that I didn't take time to read, in verse 11 he says, "But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses." In verse 10, he had talked about the love of money and he says to flee from that as well. But what I want you to see, all that we are saying right now is that it has to be clear in our minds that we are fleeing from the worldliness that is all around us. We are fleeing from false views of ministry. We are leaving them behind. They are not going to have a voice in our lives. They're not going to have a voice in our ministry. We are leaving it behind even though we know it's out there, even though we realize that that's the water in which we swim, even though we realize that there are sharks in the water, as we do that, it's clear in our minds what we're about and what we are doing and what we're pursuing. It's not just a

negative turning away in fear that, "Oh, isn't the world so bad and the homosexuals are taking over and what about all the bad politics?" This is not, you must understand this, what we're talking about in this good distinction is not a fearful reaction to bad things that are around us, it is a confident pursuit of what God has set forth for his people to believe and to do. We are confident as we turn our backs on these worldly things. We are confident in the midst of the adversity that we see all around us and we're confident because greater is he who is in us than he who is in the world. And because he's told us to pursue this and so we pursue these things. We pursue this distinction with a sense of confidence and expectation.

The man of God, the biblical pastor, as he realizes these things, turn back to Titus 2:1, the biblical pastor realizes that in the midst of that, one of his great priorities in ministry is that he's going to speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine. He's not going to get sucked into this other stuff. He's not going to wait for somebody to write the next book that he's going to teach from. He's just going to study the word and he's going to be sound in the word and he goes forth and he speaks those things that are consistent with and that advance the sound doctrine that the Bible teaches. This is what our ministry here at Truth Community is all about. It's about being distinct. Not following the trends of the world; not following the trends of the broad Christian movement. We simply want to speak the things that are fitting for sound doctrine and live in accordance with them. It's really simple about what our passion is as a congregation. So a biblical pastor recognizing the things that are sound doctrine and speaking the things for sound doctrine, he understands that he must communicate the word of God with depth and he doesn't dabble in unprofitable talk because he has a job to do. That's the call of ministry according to Scripture: speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine, be separate, be distinct, don't be afraid to stand alone, be distinct in ministry and pursue what God has called us to do in the Scriptures. That's the kind of ministry that God will bless. We can expect his blessing as we are faithful to that as a congregation.

So we have to be distinct in ministry as shown by that contrast that begins verse 1. Look at it with me again, "But as for you. I've dealt with the false teachers now as for you, here is what you do. There is a distinction that I am calling to you." What's interesting about this in that chapter 2, verse 1, the "you" there. This isn't the colloquial Southern y'all, plural you, this is the singular you. Paul is speaking to Titus directly and saying, "As for you, Titus, as for you man of God, you set the tone, you set the pace. Here is what you are to do and if you will lead in this way, God will build a congregation that will support and further the things that you are standing for because it's the nature of Christ, it's part of the work of Christ." He said, "I will build my church." Well, here's the kind of man and here's the commitment of the man that he builds it around. It's a distinction in commitment but it's the distinction and commitment that I was just talking about, the singular you. Titus had a special responsibility for teaching here that Paul is highlighting. Look at the verse with me there, chapter 2, verse 1, he says, "As for you, Titus, here's your commitment, here is what you must do." He says, "Speaks the things which are fitting for sound doctrine." What's interesting about that verb construction in the original language is that it's speaking of an ongoing responsibility, an ongoing commitment. It's a present imperative in the original language which means that this is the ongoing,

unchanging nature of what a man is to be committed to. Listen, for the biblical pastor, for the biblical congregation, for the commitment of a true Christian: our commitment to sound doctrine is a never ending commitment that we carry with us throughout all of life. It's what we do week after week, day after day. It's the love of our heart. It's what makes our heart beat. It's the blood that courses through our spiritual veins. It never changes and that's so important for you to understand knowing that we've come from a lot of different places both geographically and from different churches and different backgrounds.

What we have to understand is that the biblical authority, biblical teaching, consistent verse-by-verse teaching, week after week, year after year, this isn't a passing fad. What we've been doing the past 18 months together, this isn't a stage that we're going through and then we'll move on to something bigger and more important later. We're already doing the most important thing as we teach God's word week by week. We're already expressing what we intend to do 20 years from now. When Paul says, "Speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine," he says, "Titus, as for you, your ongoing, unchanging commitment in ministry must be to have this kind of teaching ministry that puts sound doctrine, good doctrine, right at the center of everything that you do and say." It's an ongoing commitment. It's a distinct commitment. We're not waiting for the next book to come out to know what we're going to do three months from now. Look, at the risk of getting myself in trouble here: we really don't need more books on preaching, do we? We don't really need another book to tell us what the church is to do? You can go online and you can find books that you can stack all over the stage here. The problem is not a lack of information, the problem is a lack of practice and implementing and doing it. Let's just get on with it. What I want you to see is that a biblical pastor, a biblical congregation, never outgrows the need for sound doctrine. We never move onto something else. This is the ongoing commitment of what we do. "Speak the things that are fitting for sound doctrine," Paul says to Titus. "Speak in an ongoing way. Do this as long as the Lord gives you breath."

I often pray in various ways and at various times in a spirit that says, "If I'm going to deviate from that, just take me home. I don't want to live a moment away from the centrality of that conviction. I don't want to live a moment and so if my sinful heart is going to cause me to deviate either into unprofitable behavior or unprofitable teaching, Lord, just take me away. Get me out of the way so that there wouldn't be an enduring ending testimony about my life that he didn't stay with with the things that were fitting for sound doctrine." I'd rather die than deviate from that and that ought to be the commitment of your heart as a Christian as well. It ought to be so dedicated and deep in your heart that "Lord, I just want to be faithful to you. I just want to be biblical in my life. I want to be godly more than I want to enjoy the passing entertainments and fashions of this world. God, just let me be godly and if I'm not going to be like that, first of all, help me examine my heart to see whether I'm really a Christian or not and if I am a Christian, then just don't let me deviate ever. Don't ever let me deviate from that, O God." You see, all of this just puts all of life in perspective for us. It makes us think about what is really true and what really matters and it causes us to think seriously about what we're doing with our lives and that's the way it ought to be. We shouldn't be living superficial lives. We shouldn't be caught up and swept up in every worldly thing that comes along or

whatever entertains us for an hour. There ought to be beating in your heart if you're a Christian, there ought to be a beating that says, "God, I want to live a transcendent life." You young men, there ought to be beating in your heart if you are a Christian at all that says, "Lord, I've got 50 good years in front of me. Why not make them count. Why don't you use me and make those count?"

So when it comes to the pastor who Paul is addressing here with Titus, the spiritual leader, "But as for you," singular. What this means for the pastor and what it means for the congregation is that a congregation should want and a pastor should be a man who makes preparation for teaching his supreme priority in life. Preparation in teaching is the priority of the man of God. Look over at 1 Timothy again. I want to show you this from a couple of different places. Paul told Titus, "Speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine." He says, "This is the distinction. This is what makes you different. This is what you must do as my apostolic representative, Titus. You must speak continually the things which are fitting for sound doctrine." There is an emphasis on the content of his teaching. Now, 1 Timothy 4:15, you can see him saying the same thing to Timothy. The priority of biblical instruction on the priorities of the man of God. Paul says, "Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all." You know, it's okay for a young pastor if he doesn't have his whole teaching act together, the question is, is he growing month by month, year by year? Do you see progress in his ministry over time? So if you are a young guy moving into teaching for the first time and all of that, it's okay if you don't preach like a national radio pastor the first time that you preach. The point is: where is the commitment of your heart and are you making progress over time? Sometimes a congregation needs to be patient with a young pastor to give him room, to encourage him, to affirm him.

I remember my precious friend who is now in heaven, Bob M., who was just a precious, godly man in his 70s when I was first doing my first initial teaching and every time after I spoke, he would come up and say, "Great job! So encouraging!" Do you know what? I went back and listened to that stuff a few years later, he was not telling me the truth. It wasn't all that helpful but he affirmed me and helped me along the way. If you have a young man who is teaching along that and you see a commitment to Scripture in him, then you encourage him and you affirm him and just help him to progress along the way.

But that was a tangent, verse 15, Paul says to Timothy, "Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all." There is progress in the young man's teaching. Verse 16, here's the point that I circled around and now I'm getting to, he tells Timothy, "Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you." "Pay attention, Timothy. Pay attention to your teaching. Watch what you're doing. Don't treat this lightheartedly. Don't treat this carelessly. Take it seriously and make progress along the way." The teaching aspect of a pastor's ministry is preeminent in his priorities.

Look at 2 Timothy 2:15, Paul tells Timothy, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of

truth. But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness."
"Timothy, be diligent about this. This is so vital. This is so important. Be diligent about it and handle the word of truth with accuracy which is fitting for the God-breathed content that it is." Those of you that like to teach, that have opportunities to teach, that aspire to teach, let me say something to you: God bless you as you have that desire, as you think about that, as you pursue that. Maybe some of you young men say, "Should I give my whole lifetime to teaching the word of God?" Those are godly things to consider. My prayers are with you as you think that way. As you do that, have it central in your thought that this word is to be honored. Have it in your mind that this word is to be revered. This word is to be treated with the utmost care and sobriety of spirit and not to treat it lightly or carelessly. Don't pursue ministry because you want to be the upfront guy who people look at and talk about. Make it about a sincere, reverent fear of God, a fear of the word of God and a desire simply to be faithful to teach that. Set that straight in your mind before you take your first step toward ministry. Once that is settled in your mind, then see where the Lord leads you because the distinct commitment in ministry is to a serious teaching ministry of the word of God.

Look at 2 Timothy 4 where we see this again. How serious? How sober is this? Look, this verse, what I'm about to read, chapter 4, verses 1 and 2, this is just sobering. There should be a spirit of silent awe that comes upon us as we realize the significance of what Paul is saying. These are among Paul's final recorded words for us. 2 Timothy was the last book that he wrote. He's saying his final things to Timothy and what does he say to him? As Paul is about to depart from the scene and leave it to Timothy to carry on after him? Chapter 4, verse 1, he says, "Timothy, I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom." This is a solemn charge. This is so very serious. He says, "Timothy, wake up. I am charging you in the presence of God himself. I am charging you in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. I remind you that he is coming. He is going to appear. He is going to establish his kingdom. In light of all of these great eternal realities, here is the final thing that I want to say to you." Verse 2, "Preach the word. Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season," whether people want to hear it or whether they don't, be preaching the word, "reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction."

It's the priority of ministry to teach the word. That is the distinct commitment. We're not worried about what kind of coffee we're going to serve. You've probably seen some of those direct mail pieces that come in from different churches, "We've got great coffee. We've got great doughnuts." Are you kidding me? In the presence of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, in light of his appearing and his kingdom, serve good coffee? Serve good doughnuts? Are you kidding? Nothing could greater expose the superficiality and the fact that these people have nothing to say on behalf of the true and living God than they are talking about their coffee and doughnuts when Paul says, "I command you, I charge you in the solemn name of our Lord Jesus Christ, preach the word."

Do you know what we're getting this morning? We're getting a little bit of a preview of how much stuff that passes for Christian ministry today is just going to burn up in smoke in a moment at the final judgment. Not us, beloved. We're going to be distinct in

commitment. We're going to be distinct in ministry. We're going to preach the word. That's going to be our commitment at Truth Community. That is our commitment at Truth Community. And let me just say this as just some insight into what that kind of ministry looks like: that kind of teaching ministry takes time. It takes commitment on the part of the pastor. A pastor who is worth anything at all gladly serves his people and gladly wants to be with them in joy and in sorrow and that's true of the pastor of Truth Community wanting to be with the people of Truth Community as well. That's just very, very true and that's what should be part of the mark of a man of God. But understand this, beloved, in terms of understanding what we do, how we do it, why we do it: a pastor cannot let his social calendar compromise his primary duty to teach sound doctrine. A pastor has to be in his study. He has to be in his chair. He has to have his nose in the Scriptures and in his books and in his Greek New Testament so that he can fulfill the solemn charge that the Scriptures place upon him. A congregation that affirms that priority and respects that study time receives the long-term benefit in return. I just want to say this, some of you are new to our church, I just want to say this in affirmation of the people who laid the foundation for this place: I will be eternally grateful to God that I was called by a group of people who understood this priority long before I ever opened my mouth about it and made substantial commitments that were necessary in order to make that possible for the pastor to come and serve. The commitment that this place has shown to its pastor in order to enable me to be able to teach, has been a great encouragement to me and it's one of the things that gives me confidence about the long-term blessing of God upon Truth Community, is that the congregation here has already displayed intangible, important ways, in dedication of resources and dedication of time and says, "Yes, this is our priority too." It's a hard thing for a guy to be in a congregation where he wants to make this his priority and they're saying, "No, no, no. We want you to do other things." I'm in a blessed position here as pastor at Truth Community. I'm surrounded by men in leadership who say, "This is exactly what we want you to do." And I thank God for it. I thank God for you guys that have been instrumental in that. All I want you to see is that this is biblical. This is an outworking. This distinction and commitment has practical outworkings in time and resources that says, "Yes, we will devote ourselves to this. We won't merely pay lip service to it. We'll put things into place so that it can happen." That's what flows from a good distinction, a clear understanding of the importance of biblical ministry. You make it such a priority that you enable that priority to be lived out and I thank God for a church that shares that commitment with me.

So that's the good distinction. We're clear about what's happening around us. We say, "We're going to be distinct and this is how we carry out our distinction. It's through giving priority to the word of God." A good distinction. Secondly, the second aspect of good biblical ministry. I'll just call it this way, point 2: good deeds. Good deeds. This is a real shift from what you might expect. The commitment to sound doctrine, the commitment to a teaching ministry, is evident but as Paul goes on and teaches, he makes it clear that there is to be a practical outworking in life. This isn't simply a matter of academic debate, you know, a tennis match back and forth between good doctrine and bad doctrine, this is meant to have a life impact on everyone that is under the sound of the ministry. Look at chapter 2, verse 1. He says, "As for you, Titus, speak the things which

are fitting. The things which are fitting for sound doctrine." Now, what's he talking about here? Well remember, from a couple of weeks ago, Paul had just been saying that the culture in which Titus was ministering was a lazy, rebellious culture. They were not fit for much good at all. Look at verse 10 for example, he says, "There are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers." Verse 12, he says, "One of their own, a prophet of their own says that Cretans are always liars, evil beasts and lazy gluttons." It was in a lazy, gluttonous culture that the church on the island of Crete was worn. That has implications. That has significance. It means that the church was composed of people who had come out of that culture and as a result of a culture that was so debased, the church that was formed, the people who came out of that culture were still in need of further transformation. They needed to be instructed on the way Christians are to live and Paul makes a big emphasis of this.

We're going to see in future weeks what he goes on to say. It's very interesting to me. After he says, "the things which are fitting for sound doctrine," what is it that I'm supposed to teach, Paul? Ha. He goes on and he talks about the duties of older men in verse 2; older women in verse 3; young women in verses 4 and 5; young men in verses 6, 7 and 8. He goes on and he says, "Here are the things which are fitting for sound doctrine. Teach them how to live with Christian character. Develop Christian character in them." You would think by looking around at some ministries that the things that are fitting for sound doctrine are a multiplicity of programs that keep people busy at night five days a week. That's what you'd think. Paul doesn't go there at all. Paul focuses on the character of the people that are in the church and he says, "Titus, here are the things. You need to build up their character. These are the things which are fitting for sound doctrine." He shows the different responsibilities that men and women have as they live out life in the body of Christ. As he does that, as he talks about their character, he repeatedly emphasizes the role of good deeds in the life of a true Christian. Look at chapter 2, verse 7, for example. He says, "in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified." Look at chapter 2, verse 14, as he speaks forth the purpose of the redemption and work of Christ. "Christ gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." That would be enough to make the point, wouldn't it? He said it twice in a period of a few verses and he's not done. Chapter 3, verse 1, "Titus, remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed." Verse 8, "This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds." Verse 14, this is woven throughout the entire letter. He doesn't want us to miss it. Verse 14, "Our people must also learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful."

One of the things about biblical ministry, about a biblical church, is the fact that you quickly come to realize that church isn't about ticking off the to-do list for being someplace on Sunday morning and I realize how easy it is, especially in large ministries. Having come from a large ministry, I can say this with a measure of integrity, I think. When you go someplace and there are thousands of people around, it's easy to just live on the periphery of that, to deceive yourself into thinking, "Oh, I was at church on Sunday

and therefore everything must be okay." Absolutely false. That is not true at all. You see, it's not complicated for a Christian. Our lives are to be marked by a transformed life that is actually productive not only for our own selves but that is somehow productive in meeting the needs of others around us. The way that that takes place is that as we get together, as we come to know each other, you become acquainted with my needs and I become acquainted with yours, you start to meet my needs and I start to meet yours. It presumes, it assumes, it presupposes an involvement with the lives of one another in a way that knows each other well enough to know how I can serve you and then actually act upon that and do it. See a need, meet a need.

What I want you to see from this, Paul just kinds of alludes to the point right now. He's going to expand on it more later as we see and we'll talk about it in future weeks. When he talks about the things which are fitting for sound doctrine, he has shifted away from the focus on who's doing the teaching to the people who are doing the listening. The things that are fitting for sound doctrine, for you as you hear the word of God is for your life to be transformed, for your life to be engaged, for you not to sit on the sidelines but to be involved in ministry, to be involved in the lives of people in a way that makes your life productive and does good for others. It's not, oh goodness, it's not simply about you receiving teaching content and then going on living your life according to your own desires. You see, in a biblical church, to be under the ministry of a biblical church is a recognition of responsibility to others in the body and it's a recognition that my life can't just continue on in my own selfish pursuits without regard to the people around me.

I'll give you something here, how to know when you're under a biblical ministry, how to recognize whether you're responding to a biblical ministry properly in your heart. It's when you find yourself saying this to yourself and to others, you say, "My life is changing. I'm not like I was a year ago. I'm changing. My life is different than what it was. I see things coming out of my heart. I find myself doing things that are not like what I used to be." You see, that's a product, that's an evidence of the fact that your life is bringing forth the good deeds that biblical ministry is supposed to stimulate you to. Look over at Hebrews 10, turn just to the right a few pages. Hebrews 10:23-25, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful." Oh, there is so much sound doctrine built into that verse. Verse 24, "and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds," there it is again in another writer of Scripture. This is to be the product of biblical ministry, is that we stimulate one another to love and good deeds. Verse 25, "not forsaking our own assembling together. We encourage one another all the more as we see the day drawing near." Christ is coming. You know, the return of Christ is closer now than it's ever been. We see that coming and so we love one another and we manifest it in the way that we live. When you find yourself saying, "You know what? My life is changing. There is a spiritual, biblical power at work in my heart that is making me think and act differently." Oh beloved, if that's true, be encouraged. Be encouraged because it's an indication in your life that what's supposed to be happening is happening and that's a product that you truly belong to Christ and you're not an imposter.

Good deeds come out of a good distinction in ministry. Now, as you focus on that and we'll talk about these transformed lives in verses to come in future weeks. I'm just giving you a little bit of an overview for now. But as we focus on transformed lives, there is a final point that we need to make here and it's this: when we talk about life change, we're not talking about reforming your morality. We're not talking about something that's purely external. It's not something that you can even generate long-term on your own power because you see, good deeds come from point number 3: good deeds come from good doctrine. Good deeds come from good doctrine. They flow from good doctrine, not the other way around. You can't put the cart before the horse on this matter. Look at chapter 2, verse 1, with me again. Paul says, "Speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine." As you think through that, the sound doctrine is assumed. It's at the basis and you speak the things that flow out of that just as a flower grows out of good soil and proper hydration. As a flower grows out of that soil, so in the same way the good deeds flow out of good doctrine. You must understand biblical doctrine. You must understand biblical theology if you're going to live a biblical life. You cannot separate the two and this idea of sound doctrine has the idea of being healthy. It's a word that we get hygiene from. Paul is telling Titus to teach things that promote a healthy spiritual life.

What I want you to see, beloved, I'm almost done here, is that good doctrine, I'm going to illustrate this for you in a way that will be very evident. Good doctrine, a good understanding of the character of God in biblical salvation, good doctrine will shape your affections in a way that will compel you to live differently. It will force you. The power of persuasion in your heart will be so great that you will want to respond. You want to act upon it. You will act upon it if you are truly redeemed because that's the transforming power of Scripture at work in your heart. The transforming power of truth. You see, it's never just academic in the Scripture. The Bible condemns that. It says that demons believe and tremble. We recognize the real thing in our lives when our lives are transformed by this doctrine that we say that we believe.

Let me give you two examples of that is we close. I've got just a little bit more time than I normally do at this point. Think about the character of God. These are just examples. You say what is God like? God is is like a grandfather on a rocking chair. Well, that's not true, of course. Look at 1 Peter 1:14. What I want you to see here, what we're illustrating here is the point that good doctrine gives rise to good deeds, not the other way around. When you understand doctrine, when you're serious about biblical truth, it informs your heart and that informs your behavior. 1 Peter 1:14, "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance but," watch this, beloved, verse 15, "like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy,'" the Lord God speaking there. When you understand the perfect holiness of God, when you realize that he is utterly separated from sin, you understand that he cannot even be tempted by sin and he does not tempt men to sin. That's how separate from sin he is, how fully righteous he is. As you read the life of Jesus Christ and see his perfect righteousness on display time and time again and you start from that perspective of who God is, his holiness and his utter separate nature from sin then you say, "Oh, if God is like that, then I need to be pursuing that as well." The character of God who is perfectly holy compels you, motivates you,

searches you so that you would search out for holiness in your own life which he's given you to live. The character of God informs your pursuit of holiness and so you start from a theological understanding of the character of God and then it affects the way that you live.

Let's look at another example back in Ephesians 4. This one is going to pinch like a bad pair of shoes for some of you. Pinch like a bad pair of shoes. Let's stop for just a second and talk about what it means to be a Christian in very general, basic terms. To be a Christian means that you realize that you've sinned and offended a holy God. Every one of you has done that. Every single one of you without exception. You're all guilty before God in your own merits and so is your pastor. You've sinned and offended a holy God and someone comes to you with the gospel of Jesus Christ and says, "God calls you to repent and God has provided the means of salvation for sinners in the Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord Jesus Christ, it says in the gospel, suffered on a Roman cross 2,000 years ago in order to pay the payment for sin on behalf of sinners just like you. You can have all of your sins forgiven. God is gracious. God is loving. God is merciful. God will receive you even though you don't deserve it because Christ has paid a price for your forgiveness that if you receive him, God will forgive all of your sins and welcome you into eternal life forever." What a glorious gospel and here you and I are as unworthy recipients of that promise of God, that promise of eternal life in the gospel. God will save us if we put our faith in Christ. That's his promise and so here we are, many of us in this room we've believed in Christ. God has wiped our slate clean. He has not only wiped our slate clean of our transgressions, he says, "I'm going to look at you through the lens of my Lord Jesus Christ. I'm going to look at you as though you had lived the perfect, righteous life of Christ and so I accept you on the basis of the merits of my Son. I receive you as one of my own and you now have bold and confident access to me and I'm going to take you to heaven when you die and you'll see my face forever and ever where tears and sorrow will be no more." That's the gift that God has given to you and to me in true biblical salvation. That's wonderful. "You mean God, you're not going to hold against me all of my past rebellion against you? The times where I cursed your name? All of my sinful ways? You're not going to hold that against me? You're not going to raise that against me in judgment? God, this is wonderful. This is so perfect. You are so good to me. I want to jump for joy. I can't get my mind around this. I am fully and freely forgiven and I am now at peace and reconciled to God. Wow! This gospel is great! I'm so happy in Christ! This is so beautiful! To find out that the holy Judge of the universe I can now look in his face and see the face of my Savior. One and the same. I've been forgiven. My conscience is clear. God's justice has been satisfied on my behalf. I love being a Christian," you say to yourself and you have this good, clear, vertical perception of it. Here is what I want you to see: all of that is an expression of biblical theology. It's an expression of biblical truth. You don't find that kind of glorious hope in the gospel apart from the pages of the 66 books of the Bible. Anything else will tell you to work your way, do this ritual, let the good outweigh the bad and maybe God will let you in. That's part of all of that demonic doctrine that we reject out of hand and that we are distinct from. All of that, beloved, is based on sound doctrine, the teaching of Scripture.

Now watch this. Go to Ephesians 4. God has dealt with you so wonderfully graciously and that has consequences for the way that you live among men. Verse 31, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." How are you supposed to deal with those irksome people in your life? How are you supposed to deal with the past to the people who have wronged you and hurt you badly? Start with remembering how God has dealt with you in that great forgiveness that is so wonderful and say, "Oh, then this needs to flavor the way that I deal in relationships as well." Those of you that are harboring bitterness in your marriage, with your children, with other parts of your family or business associates or all of that, realize that if you claim to know Christ, it has a direct implication for how you respond to that and there should be a tenderhearted view that you take towards those who have wronged you because God has been tenderhearted to you in salvation. That is a requirement of the gospel, that if we've been forgiven, we give forgiveness. My point, the implications of this for forgiveness in your relationships is incidental to my bigger point. The bigger point is that doctrine impacts the way that you live. The commands of Scripture for what we are to do always flow from sound doctrine, good doctrine. Good doctrine leads to good deeds. Only someone who has a clear understanding of forgiveness in Christ is able to forgive somebody else on a horizontal level in a proper way. Everything else is just self-motivated and looking for an advantage. But beloved, I want you to think about those things that have made you bitter over the past few weeks, bitter this past week, bitter today, bitter this morning. I want you to think about that in light of the gospel. You think about your bitter, unforgiving spirit toward others in light of the great forgiveness that God has given you and you realize that has to change. Part of the Lord's prayer is, "Lord, forgive us our trespasses as we also have forgiven those who have trespassed against us." We don't insult the holiness of God by asking for forgiveness for our sins and being unwilling to extend it to others who have wronged us because good doctrine leads to good deeds which flows from a good distinction in ministry.

I am so grateful to God for what he is doing in the life of Truth Community which means to say that I am so grateful to God for each person that he has brought here. This has been a hard month. For those of you that haven't been around our church for very long, it's been a hard month for our people. A lot of death, a lot of sorrow just in the past four, five, six weeks that have been there. For those of us that share in the life of Truth Community on a regular basis, I just want to in light of these things, I just want to pray for you and I want you to rest in the comfort and encouragement and forgiveness of God and to realize that in this glorious gospel that promotes good deeds and is worthy of a sharp distinction in ministry, that in there lies all of your hope. In there lies everything that you need for the comfort and grace that you need to go forward. Look to Christ. Look to the one who laid his life down for you for your sins, and realize that that same one is going to generously supply grace for the day that is ahead.

Let's bow in prayer.

Father, we thank you for the glory of the gospel. We thank you for our forgiveness in Christ and we pray, dear God, that you would make us distinct in ministry, that we would

have such a clear sense of conviction about the truth of your word that we're not even tempted by the false philosophies of ministry that are all about us. Give in us, Father, give in this congregation, give us a love for the Scriptures, a love for sound doctrine and then the glad-hearted obedience that leads to a transformed life because of the power of truth at work in our hearts. Father, as we think about our life in our body, we love the truth and, Father, and we are so gracious that our Lord Jesus is tender and humble in heart. He said, "Come to me you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." Father, there are so many families that are in need of that tender gesture from our Lord, that genuine spiritual rest that transforms the sorrow of the moment. Father, I think of the Webster family, of the Spires family, of the Jackson family, of the Wade family, of others too numerous to mention. Father, and for those who perhaps are not dealing recently with death but dealing with other aspects of this fallen world, having genuinely been wronged and genuinely harmed by the wrong actions of others, Father, genuinely discouraged under the weight of difficult situations at work perhaps or other things. Father, in the gospel, in our Lord Jesus Christ, would you show each one of us in particularly clear ways how the gospel transforms the way that we view this so that we can live these things, live in the midst of these things with joy and with confidence and with a chastened sense of dependence upon you that would be worthy of our Lord Jesus Christ. Father, help us as we move forward. Help us as we live for you. Father, so much of the time that help is going to come through one another as we share in the burdens of one another, as we reach out to one another. Let the sorrow of some of these days be a display for us to show these good deeds to meet the needs of those that are in sorrow with the compassionate grace of our Lord Jesus Christ in tangible ways. Teach us by your Spirit what each situation would require. Lord, we look to you. We thank you for our salvation. We thank you that you've given us something to be committed to that is distinct from what we see around the world and we ask that you would empower it as we go. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

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