

The Nature of Christian Good Deeds

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We are at a special day for many, many reasons not the least of which is that we're coming to the end of our exposition of the book of Titus. This will be our final message out of the book of Titus this morning. One that sets us for the new year and really kind of helps set a tone for what we want our lives to be both individually and corporately in the body of Christ. We said a few months ago as we introduced this book of Titus, that Paul was giving a blueprint for a young church. There was not leadership established at the place where Titus was on the island of Crete. Titus needed to go and establish and appoint elders. He needed to help the people understand what Christian living was to be like and tucked away in chapters 2 and 3, Paul gave a great statement of theology that shows how the work of Christ on the cross, his saving redemptive work on Calvary, undergirds everything that we do in the church. Christ is our sure foundation and when we understand the implications, that he laid down his life to buy us out of the slavery of sin, it has a transforming effect on the paradigm from which we live life.

We've gone through all of that in the past few months. And one of the things that we emphasized that is woven throughout this letter of Titus, is that the Apostle Paul emphasizes the role of good deeds, not in earning or obtaining salvation, but good deeds as the fruit of true conversion. That there is to be a usefulness to the Christian life. That there is to be a transformation of character that comes from having been delivered out of the realm of death and sin and into the realm of light and salvation and I want to remind you of this because it sets the tone for the closing passage in the book.

Look at Titus chapter 2 verse 7, where Paul says in verse 6, "urge the young men to be sensible," he says, "in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, sound in speech which is beyond reproach." He tells Titus, "Be an example of good deeds. Let your life testify to the reality of true salvation by the quality of life that you live, that there is a practical usefulness in what you do," and that in itself would be more than enough to rebuke the spirit of our age, the spirit of sloth and entertainment-driven approach to life, men who waste their days playing video games day after day after day and call it their hobby. What does that have to do with living a productive life, we might ask? Well, in the Christian life, we see that there is to be an orientation of our mind to saying, "Here I am in this life that God has appointed to me, how do I manifest good deeds in the situation that I find myself in? In the circle of relationships that I have? Where are good deeds to be shown in my life?"

That is immensely practical but that isn't the only place where Paul mentions it. It's woven throughout the letter. Look at chapter 2 verse 13 where he's speaking about the future coming of Christ. He says, "We are looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Christ Jesus who gave Himself for us," and here's the purpose, "he gave himself to redeem us from every lawless deed." To buy us out of our debt of sin. He came to pay that price. To deliver us from sin and watch this, this is inherent in the work of Christ. If you say that you know Christ, this applies to you and defines your life purpose. It says that Christ gave himself "to purify for Himself a people for his own possession, zealous for good deeds." That an aspect, a central defining aspect of salvation is not simply that we would not go to hell when we die, it is so much more than that. That while we walk on this earth, we would be conscious of the fact that Jesus Christ owns us as believers in Christ, that he owes us and that his purpose for us is that we would be uniquely devoted to his service, that our heart affections would uniquely belong to him alone and that our Lives would be manifesting the good deeds that he purchased us to perform.

Look at chapter 3 verse 1, Paul tells Titus "Remind them because they are subject to forget. They are liable to forget this, so Titus, remind them of what they've already heard: be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed. Be ready," he says. And then in verse 8 he says, "This is a trustworthy statement," referring back to the great passage in verses 4 through 7 that talk about the salvation that Christ has purchased for us. He says, "This is a trustworthy statement and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently so that," here's the purpose once more, "those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men." And so he has repeatedly in these short 45 verses of Titus, he repeatedly emphasizes the role of good deeds and to the particular audience that Titus would be speaking to, it was necessary because the Cretans, Paul says in chapter 1, were known for being rebellious, empty talkers, and deceivers. Their lives were empty. They were people who talked but never did anything. They were rebellious and so Paul is addressing an entire way that a particular people lived and it has instruction and meaning for us as well, application for us here today. We're not all that different.

Now as we come to chapter 3 verse 12, here's what's going on: Paul is now closing out his letter. He said everything that he needed to say to Titus in this letter and so he's closing it with some final instructions of a personal nature and extending greetings from those who are with him. Now keep in mind as we look at this, that this section of Scripture reminds us that Christianity arose in genuine time and space historical circumstances. That when we talk about biblical Christianity, we are not talking about an abstract philosophy that was concocted by some academic back 2,000 years ago. These truths that we hold dear were given birth through the life of God's people in time and space circumstances and relationships and we see that laid out for us in this closing passage and that tells us something. That tells us something really important: that the good deeds of which Paul has been speaking and as we see how he applies it here in the final four verses, the good deeds are done in the context of human relationships in the body of Christ and that means that we have to think rightly about one another. That I am

here to serve you and you are here to serve each other if you are part of the body of Truth Community. We are not meant to be isolated pods of people that are disconnected. The life in the body of Christ is not meant to be done on the periphery, done as a spectator. Done on Sunday morning and then having nothing to do with each other until another 168 hours pass by. There is to be an involvement of life and this passage shows that to us.

You see, beloved, our Lord Jesus Christ builds his church and he builds it through the lives of his people. Through the teaching of the word, of course, but he does this and he builds his church through the lives of his people and we see this laid out for us in the passage that is our passage for this morning. It's Titus 3:12-15. Let me read it and set it in your minds as we begin. Paul writing to Titus says,

12 When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, make every effort to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. 13 Diligently help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way so that nothing is lacking for them. 14 Our people must also learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful. 15 All who are with me greet you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all.

This is one of those passages of Scripture where if you're going through a Bible reading plan you kind of rush through it and you wonder why it's even in there. What do words about Zenas and Apollos and Artemas and Tychicus, guys that you've never heard of before, what does that have to do with anything? Why is this even in the Bible, you might be tempted to ask. Well, let me just remind you of a familiar passage of Scripture that you don't even need to turn to. 2 Timothy 3, verses 16 and 17, says that, "All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." And so we need to have in our minds and I thank God that you people that are here in this room, that you are marked by this, but let me just remind you that we need to have in our minds a deference and a respect and a humility for Scripture that says that, "God has spoken here and he has something that I need to hear," even if it's not immediately apparent to us. We have such a high regard for every word of the Scriptures because every word of the Scripture came from the mouth and the heart of God, that we say, "Okay, what's in here for me? What am I to learn? What am I to apply? What am I to appropriate from every passage of Scripture that I read?" And so that's the mindset with which we approach this passage which you might not immediately turn to. If you did not do verse-by-verse exposition, you would never preach on this passage because it wouldn't seem like it had anything to say and we would be at loss for passing it over like that.

We're going to see some special things from this stated in two different principles. What is it about good deeds? What is it when the Bible speaks about Christians living a life of good deeds, what can we learn from this closing passage? Notice that this recurrent theme of good deeds is right in the heart of what's in verse 14. Right in the middle of this closing passage, Paul says, "We must learn to engage in good deeds." Well, somehow that must be relevant to the surrounding verses in the context. And here's what we see"

first of all, two aspects of the nature of Christian good deeds that I want to show you. Point number 1 is this: we serve with our presence, our physical presence. P-r-e-s-e-n-c-e. I thought it might be good to spell it out and distinguish it since we're just off of Christmas. I didn't want you to be thinking of a different kind of presence there. We serve with our presence. We serve with our lives and see, here's the thing: the biblical pattern for ministry, this is so vital and crucial as we look to the future life of our church, the biblical pattern for ministry is one that involves close interaction with real people, with real needs, who give their lives over to the people of Christ. This is meant to be a living body. God intends for the local church to be a living body by which we mean that there are interpersonal relationships that are going on that provide a context for love and good deeds.

Look at chapter 3 verse 12 remembering that we're talking about, we're reading about, real live men of flesh and blood in this verse, who were men of a like nature just like you and me. They just lived 2,000 years ago. They shared in the image of God. They were bearers of the image of God. They had been redeemed by the blood of Christ just like you and me. There's really no difference between the men in this verse and those of us that are here in the 21st century in terms of their fundamental nature and who they were as servants of Christ. And so we're reading about people who could, we trust, walk in and spiritually speaking, they would fit with us because of their shared commitment to Christ and the common redemption that we had with them and that we will share with them throughout all of eternity. These are our brothers in Christ that we are reading about.

And so in verse 12, we see four people that are mentioned here. We see the Apostle Paul. We see Artemas. We see Tychicus and we see Titus because Titus is the one who is receiving this instruction. So here we go in verse 12, Paul says, "When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, Titus," four people that are involved there in Paul's thinking. Paul says, "I'm going to send someone to replace you, Titus. It's either going to be Artemas or Tychicus, I'm not sure which just yet, but when they arrive, I want you to leave Crete and come be with me. I want you to come to Nicopolis because I'm going to spend the winter there." Now just as a matter of brief geography, if you can picture in your mind the Mediterranean Sea and the boot that is the country of Italy, Nicopolis was a city that was east of the lower boot of Italy on the western coast of Greece, just to give you an orientation that this is a real time and place that is being spoken of. Nicopolis means, "city of victory." That name was often applied to places of conquest by prior conquerors but Paul is telling Timothy, "I'm not there yet but I'm going to Nicopolis." He needed to go to Nicopolis because you couldn't travel safely on the sea during the winter. The storms were too dangerous and so he's going to Nicopolis and he says, "I'm going to be there for a period of time and, Titus, I want you to be there with me and so I'm going to send somebody to carry on the work that you are starting and then you come and be with me."

Now think of Paul as a spiritual leader. There's a sense in which he's almost like a Field General directing the movement of his troops. Tychicus and Artemas, we don't know much about them. Tychicus is mentioned a few times in Scripture and actually in our bulletin in the coming weeks, we're going to do a little look at the life of Tychicus, we

won't teach on that from the pulpit. Artemas, this is the only place that he's mentioned. We don't know anything about these men, not much to speak of, but here's the thing that we know for sure: these were men who were obviously competent, mature, Christian men because Paul was sending them and delegating them for spiritual ministry to replace Titus as the church on the island of Crete continued to be developed. These were competent men who were going out to serve at the direction of the Apostle Paul and Paul says, "Titus, they can do your work there but I want you with me." Now think about that. Think about what that means. We tend to think of the apostles as at least sometimes if we're thinking somewhat superficially, we tend to think of them as the stallions of the faith, these powerful, stalwart men who were invincible. The Scripture paints a little bit of a different picture for us: they were men who needed support. They were men who sometimes got discouraged. We're going to see this with the Apostle Paul in just a moment.

But Paul is calling Titus to his side as he spends the winter in the city of Nicopolis. That means something. Leaders, even leaders, need supportive men around them. Spiritual leadership can be a lonely place. You bear responsibilities. You carry on duties and sometimes it's a lonely place to be. You wonder if you're doing the right thing. I'm not attributing this to the Apostle Paul, I'm speaking now in the post-apostolic age. You wonder if you're doing the right thing. You get discouraged by your own struggle with the flesh and leaders need man beside them who can encourage them and support them in the work. As it were, as they held up the arms of Moses, leaders need man like that around them if they're going to be effective in their task and here's the point for today's text, is that Titus had been like that for Paul in the past.

Look over at the book of 2 Corinthians, chapter 7. Paul doesn't really explain in the book of Titus why he wants the man, Titus, with him at that particular time, but Titus had a track record which gives us a sense that he had a special role of encouragement in the life of the Apostle Paul. Look at chapter 7 of 2 Corinthians, verse 5. Paul writes to the church at Corinth and he says, "Even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without and fears within." And so Paul is opening up. He's pulling back the curtains and giving the church at Corinth a look inside his heart at what was happening in times past before he wrote this letter to them. He says, "We had conflicts. There were people opposing us on the outside and we had our own personal fears inside." You have to admire the transparency of the apostle there in contrast to the way that some leaders today in the church try to present themselves as spiritual supermen who have no need. Paul didn't describe himself that way.

Look at verse 6, he says, "But God," contrast, while we were in that conflicted state, "God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus." Isn't that sweet? And not only by his coming but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you as he reported to us your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me so that I rejoiced even more." He's saying, "I was getting discouraged but then Titus came and everything got better in a hurry." There was something about the spiritual demeanor of Titus. There was something about his undeniable, personal affection and devotion to the Apostle Paul. There was something about the way that he handled himself with a humble,

gracious spirit that came to Paul and suddenly Paul's heart was refreshed in the Lord. Could it have been that as he wrote at the end of his life that Paul wanted that refreshment again when he was writing the book of Titus? It doesn't say for sure but I'm confident that whatever the motive was, that Titus had that impact on him when he arrived.

Look over at verse 13 of 2 Corinthians 7. Paul says, "For this reason we have been comforted. And besides our comfort, we rejoiced even much more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all. For if in anything I have boasted to him about you, I was not put to shame; but as we spoke all things to you in truth, so also our boasting before Titus proved to be the truth." Watch this in verse 15, this is telling us what the man Titus was like. "His affection abounds all the more toward you, as he remembers the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling. I rejoice that in everything I have confidence in you." So here's this man Titus, let's be honest, we pretty much just know him as a name at the top of the 56th book of the Bible but he was a real man. Real flesh and blood with spiritual qualities that are highly commendable. Paul speaks of his joy, speaks of the comfort that he brought to him. In the midst of his discouragement, Titus was there and then suddenly the sun came up and things were bright and joyful once more. Wow, wow, we're talking about the Apostle Paul was affected that way by the man Titus.

That tells us something about the nature of good deeds that Paul has in mind as he writes. Titus had a gracious spirit and an affection for God's people and good deeds sometimes are carried out simply by our personal presence with others. Do you know what that means? It means a couple of things, among others. A couple of things come to my mind right now: first of all, that should make you and it should make me very careful to think about the way that we're living our spiritual lives. You and I have an effect on people by our presence and that presence can be an instrument of great blessing if we are walking in the Spirit, if we are cultivating an affectionate, gracious, humble, joyful heart. That's not just for our sake and for God's sake, it spills over in the lives of those around us and if you have that in mind, then you start to realize that there is a whole level of responsibility in the way that you live your life because you realize that you can't let yourself become a grouchy person, a grumbling complainer. When you realize that your presence is part of your ministry, you start to realize, "Ah, people are affected by my demeanor. My life affects them and it can be an instrument for good like Titus' joyful affectionate spirit was on the Apostle Paul." The whole way we live life, the whole way that we conduct our heart is affected by the recognition that the Christian life is one of good deeds and you realize that good deeds are carried out sometimes by your personal presence, your friendship, your relationship with the people of God.

It was well over a year ago that my Mom underwent very serious cancer surgery. It was life threatening. We were not sure that she had even weeks to live at the time and her surgery was in the city of Indianapolis. Two hours one way from here and my sister and I and another family friend were facing a very long vigil for this extended surgery during the day. Dane and Karen Logan that day, made a four hour round trip to be with us, to sit with us, to serve us during that time. Dane's an elder now. Do you know what? Back then we hardly knew each other. We were barely friends because everything was new here at

Truth Community but I can tell you that their sympathetic presence with us, nothing that they gave us, nothing that they did, the mere act of kindness that said, "We will be with you through this time." It was a great profound blessing to me, my sister, and to our family friend during a very difficult day. They lit up the place simply by being there with their kindness. The moment, here's the thing that I want you to see and I didn't get their permission to say that before I told you about it, the need of the moment called for presence. It didn't call for a check. It didn't call for somebody to fix something. Nothing could have served us like that except for someone's presence with us in that hour of darkness. For those of you that don't know, my Mom came through the surgery and she's doing well today. It's remarkable just to close the story off that way.

But beloved, we have to be mindful that the spirit with which we live our lives is part of our ministry to people around us and that there are times where nothing but our presence can do and we embrace that. We embrace that. We're happy for that because we see a fellow believer in need and we say, "Can't do anything. I have no idea what to say but at least I can be there," and sometimes your presence says more than 1,000 words could say. And if you don't know what to say in a particular moment of crisis, don't worry about it. Your presence says all that needs to be said. We recognize from the Scriptures, we recognize from the model of Titus and the Apostle Paul, that there is a ministry of our personal presence in the lives of people that can't be replaced in any other way and we embrace that. We recognize, we look for those opportunities that we're able to meet and say, "This is an example of the good deeds that I can do. This is a life of good deeds. I'm there." We think about our lives that way and we serve with our presence.

Now, sometimes our Christian deeds will take a different character. That leads us to our second point. We serve not only with our presence, sometimes we have to serve with our resources. Look at Titus again. Go back to Titus and look at verse 13 with me. A completely different turn in the nature of the good deeds of which Paul is speaking. "Diligently help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way so that nothing is lacking for them." Here Paul is calling for something completely different. He's saying that we not only respond to the relational needs but also to physical ones and Zenas and Apollos had legitimate needs as servants of the Gospel and Paul says, "Titus, I want you to provide for these." Now we don't know anything about Zenas other than what we see written here. He was a lawyer of some kind, perhaps skilled in Jewish religious law, perhaps skilled in Roman law, beyond that we don't know. We just know that he had a trained legal mind of some kind and he was part of the service of the Gospel. Paul knew him and so did Titus. Apollos, we know a little bit more about from Acts 18 and 1 Corinthians. He was a skilled teacher of Scripture. Together the two of them must have been a formidable duo in the ministry of the Gospel. Zenas with his legal training, Apollos with what Scripture uniformly testifies was a man of great skill in teaching the Scripture and they are going about obviously with a teaching ministry, to further the Gospel there in the first century and so, these men are about the work of Christ. It's possible, if not likely, that these two men were the ones who physically carried the letter from Paul and delivered it to Titus. That would make sense since they were the ones that needed the help. They were going to be there and it would make sense that they were the ones who physically carried the letter to Titus and said, "Here's the word from the Apostle Paul."

Well, here's what I want you to see: these men, accredited and affirmed by the Apostle Paul, out and about on Gospel ministry, had legitimate physical needs in order to carry forth the work that they were doing for Christ and Paul calls that to Titus' attention. Look at it again with me in verse 13. He says, "Diligently help them on their way so that nothing is lacking for them." He says, "Titus, they need resources. They need to be helped on the way." And Paul didn't expect Titus to personally supply that. This was a corporate responsibility for the Christians there on the island of Crete. It was a corporate responsibility as you can see from verse 14, look at it with me. He says, "Our people must also learn," they're not like this apparently. They were falling in this way and so they needed to grow; they needed to learn that this was part of their responsibility as believers. He says, "Titus, those people, our people, those who share in the faith have got to learn, they have to understand that they have a responsibility to step up and meet the needs of the Gospel work when it's going forward. Here you have, Titus," he says, "you have two men in front of you, my delegates, who are about the work of the Gospel and they have needs for resources. Titus, our people need to meet them. Our people need to step up, as it were, dig into the pockets of their own and supply it. Give these men, give these servants of Christ what they need to do their work."

Now, that tells us something about life in the body of Christ. Life in the body of Christ is a great privilege. Life in the body of Christ where the word is taught and where elders watch over your souls, where elders pray for you on a consistent ongoing basis, that is a privilege. The joy of relationships within the body of Christ, that's a privilege. This is sweet, wonderful fellowship to be in the body of Christ. To have, as it were an area of respite from the temptations and the assaults of the world around us. That's a privilege. That's a joy. This is peace. This is a foretaste of heaven in the body of Christ. And how glad I am to be able to share in that foretaste with you. This is precious. This is lovely. This is good. This makes life sweet and worth living.

Beloved, here's what I want you to think about. This is what our passage calls us to recognize is that that privilege in the body of Christ comes with a correlating responsibility. There is responsibility. We don't just take, we give. If we reap the spiritual benefits of being in the body of Christ, if we reap the benefits of a Gospel ministry, then we share in the responsibility to materially support those who provide it. That's what Paul is saying here in verse 14. He says, "Our people need to learn to engage in good deeds." He says, "Titus, this is their responsibility. They need to step up and meet the needs of these Gospel workers. And so, Titus, I want you to be diligent to help them, to provide for them and it's a corporate responsibility that you have every right and prerogative to call upon them to step up and meet." So we serve not only with our relational presence though we do that week-by-week, day-by-day, we also realize that good deeds also involves a claim on our resources.

Now, for those of you that do not regularly attend Truth Community, you would have no way of knowing the truth of what I'm about to say. Those of you who do attend will know and quickly affirm that everything that I'm about to say is absolutely true. At Truth Community, we don't make finances prominent. We don't pass a plate during the service.

We don't send out fund raising letters to our people and we like it that way. We made a conscious deliberate choice to de-emphasize the role of finances and giving in the life of our body. That was a deliberate philosophical choice that we made that fleshes itself out in the fact that there is a small little box on a table out there where donations can be made, otherwise, we don't say a word about it unless the text of Scripture calls for it. What has the result of that been? Well, the Lord has more than abundantly met our needs. You can ask our treasurer, Paul Spires, about that anytime you want and he'll tell you story after story. But I want to tell you that this is an opportunity for me to thank you, to thank those of you who so faithfully give. We have dozens of families that are faithful in supporting our church and this text is an opportunity for me as the pastor and on behalf of our leadership to say thank you for what you do. God bless you. We see this being lived out without any exhortation to you to do it. That's awesome. That is absolutely wonderful and we're so grateful to be a part of a church that's like that where people just intuitively recognize it and step up and do it and then the Lord goes beyond and sends gifts of \$200-300,000 to us in the past three months to further the work from people who have nothing to do with our church. Just outside the church and doing it.

The Lord is blessing us financially where we're seeing lived out in our midst the very thing of which Paul speaks here. We have a group of people, we have a body of believers who instinctively engage in these kinds of good deeds. Isn't that awesome? And do you know what that means? As we continue to live this way with one another, do you know what that means? It means that you can come to church Sunday by Sunday without fear that you're going to be beaten over the head about reaching just a little bit deeper for the latest fund raising campaign, number 6 in this calendar year. I love the fact that our church is like that and it works because of the spontaneous generosity of the people of God in our midst. Praise God! My heart is filled with gratitude for you and for the work of God in your heart because your giving is a reflection of and appreciation for what Christ has done in your life. We are greatly blessed to be a part of a body where we don't have to beat each other up. You don't have to cringe about the next time that he's going to preach on tithing from the pulpit. I don't do that. I don't even believe in tithing because the Bible doesn't teach it for New Testament believers. I don't want to shock you there, that's for another time but the New Testament speaks of joyful, cheerful giving according to your means and we're blessed to be in a place like this where we can do that. So thank you for what you do. Every one of you that give like that.

By the way, I have no idea, I never see the giving records. I don't want to see them. Those are kept apart from my involvement. I have no idea who gives what apart from my own family. Not even with my kids. I don't even know what my kids give. I know what I give, Nancy and I give. I don't know. I don't care to know. I just see the corporate result of it and I'm grateful.

Now, let me just say to kind of round out the application of that: for those few of you who never give, you really do need to rethink life. You need to rethink your involvement in the corporate life of our church. Supporting your church, supporting the ministry of the Gospel is an aspect of being a Christian. This is part of our responsibility. This is part of what God calls on us to do. It's not about the pastor. It's not really about the church. It's

about using your resources and realizing that the Lord owns them all and it's appropriate for you to support that ministry from which you derive a spiritual benefit. We receive and we give and it goes both ways.

But overall, knowing that I speak for our leadership and our elders, we're so grateful. We are so profoundly thankful for the way that the Lord has blessed our church and so profoundly grateful for those of you who give without being asked. That's incredible. That's incredible and I hope that you feel like I do: I want to keep it that way, don't you? I want to keep it that way. Well, the way that we keep it that way is by individually taking on the responsibility without being reminded or being scolded. Better yet, I'm not going to scold you about it. The way that works is when we all do our part and the Lord meets our needs through the provision of his people. What a great special thing it is for us to have established that so early in our lives as a body of believers.

Now, Paul has come to the end of everything that he wants to say. He's taken care of his personal instructions, "Titus, I want you with me. Titus, our people need to engage in good deeds." Now he closes it here in verse 15 with brief by affectionate words. He says, "All who are with me greet you. Greet those who love us in the faith," and the closing benediction, "Grace be with," watch this, "you all." You all. Paul might have been from the South, I don't know. Probably not. But when he says "you all" there at the end, that tells us that he intended this letter to be publicly read. It wasn't private correspondence with Titus that we happen to get. Paul wrote this to Titus but he intended it to be read to everyone so that we know that this is application that goes beyond Titus but it's for all of the church. And we see here in verse 15 the gracious attitude that underlies our service, that underlies our good deeds, that underlies our presence and underlies our giving.

Paul says, look at it, "Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all." The personal greeting, a recognition of the love that animates life in the body of Christ. A prayer, as it were, that God's grace would continue to abound on the people who were under the sound of this letter. Paul says, "Grace be with you all. Greet those who love us in the faith. Everyone who is with me greets you." There is just a sweet spirit of love and gentleness that closes this letter and it reminds us, it shows us, that we serve in the body of Christ, we are faithful to attend week-by-week in the body of Christ, we go to be with the grieving and sorrowing in the body of Christ, we give in the body of Christ, because look at verse 14 as we close, why do we do this? Why don't we just stay home and sleep in on Sunday morning? Why don't we just keep all of the resources to our own personal self? Why? Why? That makes no sense. This is not the selfish attitude that is inculcated by our society and culture around us. Why? We live this way horizontally because of a vertical reality that is the anchor and the cornerstone of everything in this book.

I remind you one final time before we leave the book of Titus and move on to other things from the pulpit: Christ Jesus, chapter 2, verse 14, I want you to look at it with me. Put your eyes on those verses. Titus 2:14, our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus gave himself for us. He laid down his life on the cross for us to buy us out of our spiritual slavery, to redeem us from every lawless deed. Christ wasn't merely canceling hell for you on the cross, he was buying you so that he would

own you. He bought you for himself that you would belong to him and live the way that he wants you to live and one day to be with him forever. Why do we live this way? Well, because that's the purpose of salvation. That's why Christ bought us was in part to have us as his own possession. "And we are so grateful, Lord Jesus, we are so grateful that you came down and that you went to the cross and gave yourself for us. We're so profoundly thankful that it overturns every priority that we ever had beforehand in life and makes us glad to pursue this kind of life that has been laid for us in the book of Titus, a blueprint for a young church." That's why we live this way. It's vertical. It's not to impress anyone. It's not to earn God's favor. We've been on the receiving end of undeserved mercy and now we live that way in response.

Those of you who still are outside of Christ, I ask you once again: won't you come to him? Don't you see the preeminent claim upon your heart that the Lord Jesus Christ has? When the Gospel comes to you as it comes to you right now, understand that it's not a suggestion. Jesus Christ commands you to repent and believe in him, to turn from sin and receive salvation before it is too late. Today is the day of your salvation. Today is the day that you must come to him. He gave himself for us. He sacrificed his life to appease the wrath of God so that you could receive the grace of God and it's time to bend the knee before him, to turn from your sinful ways and receive him now. Today. There is no reason for waiting, delaying. The time for excuses is over. Christ has preeminent claim on your life and in love he says, "Come to me." In his Lordship he says, "Come to me." Won't you come?

We're so grateful for what the Lord has done in our body over the past two years. We have leadership. We have Christians who love the word. We have the resources that we need to move forward. All of that in 2012 and 2013. Do you know what? I can't wait to see what happens in 2014, can you?

Let's pray.

Father, we are so very grateful for our Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself to redeem us from every lawless deed and to purify for himself a people for his own possession, zealous for good deeds. Father, would you help us to grow. I thank you for what is already taking place in the lives of our people, in the lives of this flock. Father, help us now to excel still more, to press on, to move on in spiritual growth and that kind of spiritual maturity. Help us to that end, Father, we pray. We thank you that our souls are redeemed and secure in Christ and that there is no fear of condemnation because Jesus Christ has paid it all.

Father, you know the hearts of all that here. You know, if even just a small percentage of people here don't truly know Christ, that there are still several too many who are in that condition, God, we ask you again to save their souls. We ask you again, Father, for the work that only you can do. We ask you for a work of your Spirit on the hearts of the unbelieving and that you would turn their unbelief to belief, their rebellion into submission, their heart of stone into a heart of flesh. Father, by the power of your Spirit, make our Lord Jesus Christ sweet and preeminent and lovely and worthy of following to

them. Draw their hearts to a saving knowledge of your Son. Help them to consciously repent of sin and consciously submit their life to the Lordship of Christ, henceforth to live for him forevermore.

Father, we're grateful for the work that you've done, the recent converts that sit in our midst and we pray for them and yet, Father, we acknowledge that there are some, young people in particular, who are still outside of Christ and it grieves us. Father, our joy can't be complete while those that we care about are still outside the fold. So Father, while we're grateful, we're also humbly earnest before you and we pray for the souls of those who are here today in this room who are impatient and cold toward the Gospel. Father, if you don't give us conversions, our ministry would be sadly incomplete. If you don't save souls, Father, under the sound of your word which you alone can do, Father, our joy will be mixed with profound grief and so we ask for them, we ask for your glory and we ask, Father, even for ourselves that you would do saving work in the hearts of those that are here.

For those that you have redeemed, Father, for those that are faithful, for those who love Christ, O God, we thank you for what you have done and for what is still to come. We are the heirs of eternal life. We are going to gather around the throne of Jesus Christ. We are going to be resurrected ourselves and we are going to be with our resurrected Christ throughout all of eternity and, Lord, that is too wonderful to contemplate and comprehend. Thank you for the richness of our salvation and we pray, Father, that you would help us to be faithful to your word at Truth Community in the year to come. Help us to be faithful individually and corporately. Help us to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We pray these things in his name. Amen.

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