

Introduction

We said last time (3:1-7) that believers must be constantly reminded to live properly because we formerly were ungodly but God saved us out of that. This is consistent with what we found earlier in the book, namely that Jesus Christ died to redeem us from sin, to purify us, and make us zealous to do good works (2:14).

Beyond this, the passage told us about the basis, means, and hope of salvation. Neither the basis nor the way of attaining salvation is good works. God's lovingkindness and mercy ultimately are the foundation out of which comes the possibility of our salvation; His work of regeneration and renewal effect it in our own life; and as a result we are declared right with God and have the hope of eternal life.

1. Maintaining Good Works – v. 8

The text starts with "This is a faithful saying." What a word! Does this faithful saying refer to what comes before or what comes after? In two cases, it refers to what comes after (1 Tim. 1:15, 2 Tim. 2:11). In the other one (1 Tim. 4:8-9), it refers to what comes before. Our verse is like the latter. Namely, "this" and "these things" refer us back to what we just learned in 3:1-7, not forward to what is said later in the verse.

"These things" therefore refers to the whole notion that believers are to live godly lives because of what God has done for them in bringing them out of their past. This is the only thing that makes sense once one becomes a believer. Now then, Paul tells Titus to confidently affirm this concept. Let's examine two details:

A. Precondition: believe in God

The only ones who can really understand this call to the "good life" are believers, and they are the ones to whom Titus is to address his preaching in this regard. If you believe in God, this instruction is for you.

If you do not believe in God (and in Jesus Christ, obviously), then this teaching is not relevant to you. There is only one issue at stake for you: salvation itself. Step 1, if you will, is to get saved; step 2 is to live the way a saved person is supposed to live.

Note that this precondition takes the issue of "works salvation" off the table. No matter how rigorously good works are demanded on the basis of the remainder of verse 8, the demand is limited to the sphere of those already justified people. Thus Paul makes clear that the call to a holy life comes subsequent to the call to trust in Christ.

B. Purpose: To do good works.

Titus is not simply to get up and repeatedly affirm that believers need to do good works, as if repeated chanting of a mantra will get something to change. Do I hear you saying "WHAT? Isn't that what the verse says?" Not exactly. Rather, he is to constantly affirm "these things" of which we spoke before, and do so with the purpose of persuading people the only logical course of action is to do good. "These things" is larger than just repeating a slogan. It is to teach the whole of the gospel message and all its implications.

The word to "affirm constantly" can mean to "confirm" or to "speak confidently" or to "insist." This gives us the idea that Titus does not have to waffle or be foggy in what he is saying. Rather he can confidently assert that the gospel places certain strictures on the believer which are reasonable, not unreasonable.

To be "careful" to maintain good works means giving sustained thought, being intent on, being concerned about, or paying attention to something. The word "maintain" means to show concern for something or to care. Taken together, they ought to really impress on us the need to thoughtfully prepare and be concerned about good works. They must be practiced, not just left in the thought realm.

As has been said, "What is the biggest problem in Christianity? Reply: 'I don't know and I don't care!'" How true, pathetically. If you don't know "these things" and you don't care about them, how in the world are you ever going to live a life pleasing to God?

To wrap it all up, "these things" is used again to indicate that what we have been discussing is "good and profitable." To think on good things is helpful. This verse gives us a lot of that (Php. 4:8).

2. Avoiding Useless Things – v. 9

Coupled with the call to thoughtfully persevere in good and profitable things is to avoid certain things at the same time. In verse 9, we see that certain activities, issues, and ways of doing things are to be avoided. In verse 10, Paul shifts to the avoidance of a certain type of person. But for this verse, there are four items that we must shun or stand back from. They are:

A. Foolish Questions. These are "moronic disputes." The burden is on us to discern these case by case, but maybe you can think of some that you have been involved in. The classic scholastic questions like "Can God make a rock so big He cannot lift it?" or "How many angels can fit on the head of a pin?" are only two ridiculous examples. The topics in question are foolish themselves, and many folks who pontificate about them don't know what they are talking about either, making the situation doubly foolish (1 Tim. 1:7).

B. Genealogies. This word means just what it says—lists of ancestry. This could be related to some sort of Gnostic teaching or it could be that certain Jewish teachers and rabbis speculated about people based on genealogical information.

While it is interesting to study your ancestors (and that is not forbidden in this verse), to use that information somehow to try to gain an advantage over someone else is ungodly. God is not partial (James 2:4, 1 Peter 1:17) and there is no racial or family or nobility "leg up" or caste system with God. Debates about this are a waste of time.

C. Contentions. Here is the word for strifes, quarrels, discord. It is always seen as a vice. We used to live in these kinds of ways (3:3), but now should not.

D. Strivings about the law. In addition to the fact that those whom Paul had in mind may not have understood what they were talking about (1 Tim. 1:7), this could be simply a striving over the parts of the law that are binding on the believer in the present dispensation. In summary, the law doesn't apply, yet you have people wrangling over it! Silly!

These things are labeled boldly as unprofitable and useless. You will not find any edifying value in them (1 Tim. 1:4). To be involved in them is a waste of time, energy, thought, and opportunities to do something else.

3. Rejecting Schismatics – v. 10-11

The third major point of the passage is that believers have to reject divisive people. They cause people to be divided into two or more groups, whereas like-mindedness should prevail.

A. Due process. You don't lightly reject a professed believer. There is a process to formally engage the person. If they ignore two warnings, then it is time to avoid them.

B. Reason. We do this because we know that the person is perverted (gone the wrong way) and living in sin. It may be that he is not a believer at all (and outer appearances do not give us a lot of hope). But sin and apostasy needs to be avoided in the church so that others are not affected (1 Cor. 5:6). The man's own actions condemn him.

C. Balance. What is the balance here? Great wisdom and discernment are needed. But sometimes separation is necessary, though it is not pleasant. But it must be done, both from unbelief and bad doctrine (Eph. 5:11), and sometimes from believers (2 Thess. 3:6, 14-15).

Conclusion

If you don't understand that you are required to do good as a believer, you are not properly understanding all that has happened to you and all that God asks of you. Your thinking must be out of line if you reject the idea that a life of good must come out of the personal redeeming work of Christ. It is just the nature of things to be that way.

The well-lived life will also avoid certain useless things and will reject people who are promoting division among God's people. There is not a place in the local church for dividers. Instead, we need multipliers (soul-winners, Bible teachers, etc.).

Additional Notes

1. Maintaining Good Works – v. 8

Other “faithful sayings” occur in the Bible. They emphasize the purpose of Christ’s coming was to save sinners, the high value of godliness, and the certainty of the Christian hope for those who stay faithful (1 Tim. 1:15, 4:8-9, 2 Tim. 2:11).

1. C. Reminder: Some more about good works

Good works are those good things done out of the right motivation, to glorify God. Paul mentions several things about this topic in his letter to Titus:

1. Unbelievers are disqualified from doing them – 1:16
2. They are not a basis of salvation – 3:5
3. Pastors are to be an especially good example of good works – 2:7
4. Believers are to be eager to do them – 2:14
5. Believers are to be ready to do them – 3:1
6. Believers are to be intent on doing them – 3:8
7. Believers are to be learning to cultivate the skill of doing them – 3:14

We also know from Eph. 2:10 that we are appointed to do good works, that is, God has laid out as part of His eternal plan that we ought to do good works. Furthermore, we must encourage one another to do them, as in Heb. 10:24.

2. D. Strivings about the law

Some people try to make the moral part binding on the believer today but exclude the ceremonial and civil parts. The reality is that *none* of the Mosaic law is binding on believers today, that is, by virtue of the fact that that covenant has been broken, discarded, and replaced with something new. Oh, certainly many principles carry over, but not all. Certainly no one is saved by keeping the law (Acts 15:1).