

Bringing God to Life

Remarkable Christianity, Part 4

Titus 3:8

Introduction

Several years ago I photocopied an article which I unfortunately failed to footnote. A pastor recorded an incident that struck me at first as rather bizarre . . . but upon further thought, not so bizarre after all.

It took place in Russia before the Iron Curtain had been pulled back – ever so slightly. This author, a pastor, and several other pastors were traveling through north eastern Russia, looking for opportunities to develop Christian radio outlets.

One of their stops was in a city where the local Commissar (sort of like a Mayor) met the group and led them on a tour. He didn't know they were pastors – only that they were Americans. And he evidently wanted to communicate a message to these American visitors. As they walked toward the middle of the town, he told them that they were very proud of their church and he invited them to see it for themselves.

As they neared the church building, the pastors were frankly surprised to see a beautiful white building with its typical onion-shaped turrets. As they stepped inside, the lobby or vestibule was similar to any American vestibule with doors leading into the sanctuary.

However, when they pushed open the doors and stepped into the sanctuary, they were astonished. It had lost all resemblance to a house of worship. Stacked from floor to ceiling were rows upon rows of chicken coops, all filled with cackling hens.

The Commissar made a sweeping gesture around the sanctuary and said with great pride, "Our church building is the finest hatchery in the region." And

then he looked at his American guests and announced, "God is not real . . . chickens are real."

Listen the average person on the street isn't all that convinced anymore that the God of the Bible is real. What used to be an exclamation point is now a question mark.

Jobs are real . . . houses are real . . . family is real . . . suffering is real . . . money is real . . . the pressures of life are real . . . chickens are real . . . we're not convinced that God is real.

This isn't really a new problem.

One editorial comments, "The world is too big for us . . . too much is going on . . . too many crimes . . . too much violence and too much devotion to entertainment. Try as you will, you get behind in the race, in spite of yourself. It's an incessant strain to keep pace and still, you lose ground. Science empties its discoveries on you so fast that you stagger beneath them in bewilderment; the political world is news seen so rapidly you're out of breath trying to keep up with who's in and who's out. Everything is high pressure. Human nature cannot endure much more; so reads the Atlantic Journal, June 16, 1833.

How are we to communicate to our generation that God is real? That Jesus Christ is a safe harbor; that He is the essence of genuine hope; that His gospel is real and His grace is available?

Is it any surprise that God actually left the advertisement campaign to the Christian?

And in a nutshell, here's how we do it . . . we, who have received grace, become disseminators . . . distributors of grace.

Our lives become undeniable demonstrations of the fact that not only are chickens real, but their Creator, our Redeemer is just as real – which happens to be the driving incentive behind Paul’s statement to *Titus in chapter 3 and verse 8*.

1. We are advertising a gospel that is truly reliable

Paul is about to bring his thought to a series of summary statements. He’s telling the believers on the Island of Crete – and every believer to this day – that we are, first of all, advertising a gospel that is truly reliable.

Notice how Paul begins *verse 8 of Titus chapter 3. This is a trustworthy statement and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently.*

Speak these things confidently. What are “these things” Paul is referring to?

He’s referring contextually to the previous sentence we took 2 Sundays to dissect – that long sentence which began in verse 4 and extended all the way to verse 7.

Which means, remarkable Christians are going to communicate:

- with confidence the truths of God’s love and kindness (v. 4);
- that God’s Son did in fact make an appearance (v. 4);
- that faith in Christ alone saves us apart from good deeds (v. 5);
- that God’s Spirit cleaned us up with a full body bath of redemption (v. 5)
- and that the Holy Spirit is in the process of renewing us day by day (v. 5);
- that Jesus Christ – equal to God the Father – is sufficient to save us (v. 6);
- that Christ’s replaced our sin with his righteousness and all charges brought against us have been thrown out of court (v. 7);
- and not only did He justify us, He actually made us co-owners of the coming Kingdom (v. 7).

Paul says, “Listen, you don’t need to beat around the bush – this isn’t wishful thinking – this isn’t folklore or make believe or a string of old wives tales – this is the gospel and it is reliable truth from God.”ⁱ

These things communicate with confidence!

And by the way, Titus, it starts with you . . . did you notice Paul’s personal appeal in *verse 8 – I want you to speak confidently.*

Titus, I want *you* to do it.

Now I don’t know if Titus was hesitating in the face of cultural opposition or even disgruntlement in the churches.

It’s possible Titus was holding back.

Paul hinted at this potential hesitation, you remember back at the end of *chapter 2 and verse 15 where he tells Titus, “These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you.”*

And now here in *verse 8 of chapter 3, “Titus, I want you to speak confidently.”*

Like a coach on the sidelines as time is running out – he yells in the ear of his quarterback – “Here’s what I want you to do.”

There’s no doubting the play and there’s no mistaking the passion either.

Paul effectively says, “Listen, Titus, I know you’re young and culture is evil and the church might even be resisting these truths . . . stay in the game . . . and don’t hold back.

Swindoll in his new Insights series on the Book of Titus delivers his commentary on this text as he writes, “There were so many voices of error on the island of Crete. The same is true everywhere; [so] this is, after all, the primary purpose of a pastor/[teacher] – he is responsible to proclaim grace clearly and emphatically. He cannot allow reluctance to delay him, he must not allow hesitation to interrupt him, and he should not be apologetic. If a pastor stands on the authority of God’s Word, he can afford to be bold.”ⁱⁱ

And for those who preach or teach the word of God – you know full well, the temptation of holding back . . . not addressing a certain subject . . . skipping over a few verses and maybe even avoiding entire chapters . . . you know what it’s like to face down the subtle desire to be pleasing to men, rather than pleasing to God.

Paul also uses the present tense in this challenge – you could translate this phrase in verse 8, “*keep repeating these things with confidence.*”

Paul began with the same thought in *chapter 3:1*. This is ongoing . . . this is a repetitive task.

Remind them . . . remind them . . . remind them again – you need the reminder and so does the Flock.

One pastor I read some time ago said this, rather tongue in cheek. Three friends decided to go deer hunting; a lawyer, a doctor and a pastor. As they were walking in the woods, suddenly, along came a large buck. It froze and all three men simultaneously raised their rifles and fired. Immediately the buck dropped to the ground and all three men ran over to it. Sure enough, it was dead. Trouble was, they couldn't determine whose shot had actually killed the deer and a heated debate took off with each man claiming their shot had hit the mark. After a few minutes, a game officer came by and asked what all the commotion was about. The doctor told him that he was debating with his friends, the lawyer and the pastor who actually shot the buck. The officer bent down and after just a few seconds stood back up and said, "The preacher shot the buck." "The preacher?" they said, "How can you be so sure?" The officer said, "Easy . . . the bullet went in one ear and out the other."ⁱⁱⁱ

Very funny; but you're listening now, aren't you?

The truth is, both the pastor and the flock are prone to forget . . . and Paul wants pastors and parishioners, elders and members to speak, to listen and to learn these truths over and over again.

Because ultimately, the world is going to hear them from us:

- we are God's advertisement plan in the community;
- we are His billboard along the interstate of life;
- we are His power point in that executive suite;
- you are exhibit A in the defense of the gospel;

We are communicating a gospel that is truly reliable.

And because of that, we can speak with confidence and assurance these things which Paul has clearly delivered in this letter.

Now if we really want to communicate to our generation, there's a second key distinctive about remarkable Christians in this regard; secondly,

2. We are surrendering to a God who is truly personal

Before we reach one of Paul's final challenges that emanates from the gospel, Paul says, "Let's just make sure we know who were talking to."

Did you notice the next phrase in *verse 8* where Paul specifically identifies *those who have believed God*.

This is Paul's audience – those who believed God.

The perfect tense of this verb points to a specific time in their past – this specific time which would be when they were born again – when they believed in God their Savior, as we pointed out in our last session together.^{iv}

They've come to know God through Christ personally.

They *believed* at some point in the past and they are viewed here now as ongoing in that belief . . . God is not some distant life-force out there somewhere.

He didn't somehow wind up the universe and now sits out there somewhere watching us from a distance – no! That might have been a hit song by Bette Midler, but God is not watching us from a distance.

God is personal – so personal, that you can ask Him to become your personal Savior through faith in His Son.

Paul is effectively saying, "I'm about to call you to a lifestyle of remarkable Christianity . . . but before I do, let me just clarify who I'm talking to . . . I'm thinking about and writing to those who personally know Him.

And that's critical; the individual Christian who lives with the conviction that God is alive, is the Christian able to become involved in other people's lives.

And that's exactly where Paul is headed.

Not only are we advertising a gospel that is truly reliable; the foundation for reaching our world is surrendering to a God who is truly personal . . . and then thirdly,

3. We initiate a lifestyle that is truly exceptional

Now notice *verse 8 once more, This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God – here it is – will be careful to engage in good deeds.*

Paul has already made it clear that a person isn't saved by means of good deeds. *Not by works of righteousness, Titus 3:5*, remember?

We don't do good deeds to go to heaven; we do good deeds because we're on our way to heaven and we want to take others with us and good deeds get their attention.

This is the advertising campaign of Christianity.

The undeniable demonstration of a changed life.

That's why Paul dotted this letter with the concept of living out your faith in front of others through good deeds.

John Calvin the reformer put it this way; We are saved by faith alone, but faith that saves us is never alone.^v

You might want to circle these verses:

- 2:7 – be an example of good deeds
- 2:14 – zealous for good deeds
- 3:1 – be read for every good deed;
- 3:8 – be careful to engage in good deeds
- 3:14 – learn to engage in good deeds and to meet pressing needs

Oh, so there's more to this Christianity thing than learning our doctrinal "p's" and "q's"?

Listen, Paul isn't repeating himself because he's determined to write 3 chapters and he's run out of material.

Remarkable Christianity isn't just an education in good doctrine; it's a life of application through good deeds.

We have received the kindness and grace of God – remember? Now don't keep it to yourselves . . . open up a franchise and become a distributor of kindness and grace to your world.

Which, by the way, reflects the character of the Savior we've surrendered our lives to, for Luke's Gospel reminds us that our Lord was ***Himself kind to even ungrateful and evil men. (Luke 6:35)***

I want you to notice Paul's comment here that we should ***be careful to engage in good deeds.***

Be careful to do good deeds.

This is the only time in the New Testament that this verb "be careful" appears.

It means to think about . . . to be intent upon.^{vi}

To be intentional.

It implies being creative and thorough in your investigation of how and what to do in the form of good deeds.

The verb is in the present tense which means that Paul is referring not just to a singular isolated good deed, but a way of life.

This is your mindset.

You know anybody like that? They just seem to live to help – doing something good for someone else is second nature; they're the first ones to take on the extra assignment – the distasteful chore – they'll get their hands dirty without complaint.

They literally look for good things to do.

They are an exception to the rule.

People at school know who they are; the football team knows who the players are; the corporate office knows the employees who are – in every facet of life . . . these are people who are ready to engage.

And Paul is effectively writing here – If anybody's going to be like that, it oughtta be the Christian.

The word he uses for "***engage***" – ***be careful to engage in good deeds***, is a word that refers to initiative.

So now you have intentionality plus creativity plus initiative . . . wow, this person will make their exceptional mark somewhere . . . whether simple, mundane, behind the scenes, or public, well known and apparent to all.

These are remarkable Christians who are initiating a lifestyle that is truly remarkable. And they benefit other people.

And let me say this benefiting will have concentric circles outward. Like a rock thrown into a pond, the ripples move outward.

So, beginning here, if one place oughtta be immediately benefited by Christians and their good deeds, it would be the church, right?

Paul would write in ***Galatians 6:9, Let us do good to all people, and especially those who are the household of the faith.***

I mean, if we are people of creativity and energy and willingness and initiative, the first place that outta benefit is the place we call our household of faith, right? This house then is filled with people eager to do good deeds.

Should we ever have vacancies in nursery help? Should we ever need teachers to help train our children in this household of faith? Should we have a shortage of greeters and ushers and volunteers throughout a myriad of ministries here? Do we really only need 4 guys to try and park 1,000 cars? Can you imagine if we had 40 guys to organize the chaos?

Our choir and orchestra has grown tremendously in the last year – but many of these people show up for the first service at 8:00 and don't leave until after the third service at 11:00.

Can you imagine if we had 300 in the choir and 100 were only needed one hour?

My point is this – there is a church out there somewhere that needs you – their efforts are missing your hands and your heart. We need you too, but if you don't think you need us, find that church out there and roll up your sleeves.

As one author put it, stop dating the church. Find one and settle down. You'll never find a perfect one. You used to date that girl and then you married her. Is that woman you married perfect? Yes!

Are you perfect? No – but she said yes, praise God.

It's an unfortunate reality in the average church, including ours, that 20% of the people do 80% of the work; and 20% contribute 80% of the budget, while the other 80% contribute only 20% of the needs, both physical and financial.

And that's why we, blessed as a church though we are, still have needs in just about every department and every ministry opportunity.

Find that place where you can do good deeds to all men and especially those of the household of faith. That's God's design.

Paul writes, *be intentional to engage in every conceivable good deed.*

And that extends outward in concentric circles, doesn't it?

You engage in good deeds in your own personal household; in your immediate household of faith; and to the greater body of Christ as God gives you opportunity.

We've tried to spoil our global staff over the years – many of you contributed to them in our recent Christmas in September program; you're participating in our upcoming bumper crop for the local food shelter which will benefit so many people.

As a missionary kid, I remember people handing my dad some cash – a \$20 bill and half-joking, half-serious say, "Don't tell my pastor about this – he won't be too happy it wasn't given to the church."

How small can you be?

I remember growing up with my 3 brothers – we spent time each summer on deputation with our missionary parents – traveling up north to churches and individuals who supported our family. We

would always end up traveling through Iowa and stay in the home of a faithful couple named the Peepers. I'll never forget their name – and neither will you. Mr. and Mrs. Peepers. When we pulled into their driveway my mother would give us a little lecture not to make fun of their name – because we would.

We actually loved coming there, because no matter when we arrived – Mrs. Peeper was ready to serve us homemade sour-dough cinnamon rolls with extra icing.

Now we'd have to sing first. So us four boys would sit on the couch, our feet dangling off the edge and sing some choruses. Like,

*“Why worry, when you can pray,
trust Jesus He'll be your stay –
“Don't be a doubting Thomas,
rest fully on His promise,
why worry, worry, worry, worry . . .
when you can pray.”*

We'd sing and they'd give us cinnamon rolls – what a deal.

Once when our car broke down in Iowa, they drove all the way out to get us and bring us back, while the car was repaired.

They weren't on a church staff; they weren't former missionaries or parachurch leaders . . . they were farmers.

Ready to engage in good deeds, especially to the wider household of faith.

Listen, the drama of grace and truth is not like a Broadway play where we sit out in the audience and watch it. Rather, we get out of our seats and put on a costume and we get out on the stage and we play a role in the drama [of grace] as God directs us all.^{vii}

But I want you to notice what Paul says here, particularly to Titus . . . it goes way beyond our immediate family and our church family and the church family at large.

Notice again in the last part of *verse 8. These things (that is, these good deeds) are good and profitable for men.*

He's telling us that the engagement of our good deeds will be profitable to mankind in general.

Not just for the religious elite; not just to those who are converted; not just to people we know; not just to people who are in here – but to people in general.^{viii}

Out there!

During the days of Paul, infanticide was epidemic. Children would be left exposed to die. Baby girls were especially at risk of being abandoned to die. Christians began providing care for these abandoned children.

One second century Christian was eventually martyred by the Romans for supporting and protecting a number of deformed and crippled children who had been saved from death after failed abortions and exposure. It was such an affront to the Roman culture, violating their cultural norms – and of course, bringing down guilt on their heads – they put him to death.^{ix}

Seneca, a leading Roman philosopher communicated the majority opinion when he wrote these tragic words; “We drown children who at birth are weakly and abnormal.”

We have arrived once again, this time with medical sophistication and prenatal science, but to the same ethical position as these people living on the Island of Crete.

A couple today who is found to carry a child with defects is encouraged by the majority opinion to take its life while in the sanctuary of the womb.

Christianity came along and viewed life as precious – no matter how difficult or disabled.

Dionysius, a church leader in the 3rd century wrote about the plague that had swept through Alexandria in A.D. 250. The citizens he wrote, “thrust aside anyone who began to be sick, and kept aloof even from their dearest friends, and cast the sufferers out upon the public roads half dead and then left them unburied, treating them with contempt when they died.”

We’re not going to risk our lives, right?

How different was the behavior of the Christian? Dionysius wrote, “believers did not spare themselves, but kept by each other, and visited the sick without thought of their own peril, and treated them for their healing, drawing upon themselves their neighbor’s diseases, and willingly taking over to their own persons the sufferings of those around them.”

And that is happening to this very day.

Just last year, a New York Times editorialist wrote a column remarking on the work of evangelical Christians. He noted that while he wasn’t a Christian, and I’m quoting, “In reporting on poverty, disease and oppression, evangelicals are disproportionately likely to donate their income, go

to the front lines, at home or abroad, in the battles against hunger, malaria, prison rape, human trafficking or genocide and some of the bravest people you meet are these Christians who truly live their faith. He goes on to write, “I’m not particularly religious myself, but I stand in awe of those I’ve seen risking their lives in this way.”^x

What an advertisement for the gospel of grace.

We who have received mercy and grace effectively bring God to life before the watching world.

The world says, labor is demeaning; the Christian says, labor is honorable and I’ll go the extra mile.

The world says children are a burden; the Christian says children are a blessing from the Lord.

The world says climbing over people on your way to the top is what matters; Christians say serving others is what truly matters.

The world says, we’ve never seen God; the Christian says, “Let me show you what He looks like . . . and then he engages in good deeds that are excellent and profitable to all mankind.

And the world takes note of our good deeds – and they want to know why and we tell them about our gospel and our God and they join us in bringing glory to God.

A Christian Journal ran an online article recently about a Saturday morning effort by one church to revitalize one particular neighborhood near the downtown area of Compton, California.

All the volunteers were wearing their bright yellow shirts – nearly 50 in all streaming out of the site, getting ready to head off to lunch after finishing their renovation project on an old house. This one guy who wrote the article said he was 6 or 8 houses away when he passed a married couple working in their own yard. He writes, “I paused to compliment the woman on her rose bushes and she noticed my yellow shirt. She asked me what we were doing up the street and I told her how several churches were working together to serve the city. During my conversation with this woman her husband had been weed-whacking the other side of the front yard. But when he saw me stop, he turned off his machine, set it down and walked toward me. I will never forget his words. He nodded approvingly towards the renovated house and then looked me in the eyes and said, “I love your heart . . . where can I get a heart like yours?”^{xi}

This man was then able to share with them the gospel of Jesus Christ – explaining that his heart merely reflected God’s heart of goodness and kindness.

Dear flock, the greatest obstacle to Christianity is a Christian who will not live out his faith; the greatest advertisement for Christianity is a Christian who brings faith to life.

To a world that’s convinced that houses are real and money is real and heartache is real and jobs are real and even chickens are real – because you can get real eggs – tangible benefit – that’s real.

And then a remarkable Christian comes along and -advertises a gospel that is truly reliable -who surrenders to a God who is truly personal

-and then they initiate a lifestyle that is truly beneficial

And brings God to life in the eyes of the world; those remarkable Christians who are *careful to engage in good deeds – those things that are good and profitable for [all] men.*

So, what are we going to do about it? Where are you serving? What are you giving? What’s holding you back? Why not commit to start something this week.

Ask the Lord to help you as you look around for ways to serve not only this household of faith, but the larger body of Christ and then your community around you – so that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 10/7/2012 by Stephen Davey.

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i Adapted from John Phillips, Exploring the Pastoral Epistles (Kregel, 2004), p. 157

ii Charles R. Swindoll, Insights on 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus (Zondervan, 2010), p. 308

iii P. J. Alindogan, The Potter’s Jar blog, “Hearing” (3/4/12)

iv Kitchen, p. 557

v Sam Gordon, The Genius of Grace: the Message of Ephesians (Ambassador, 2003), p. 128

vi Kitchen, p. 558

vii John Benton, Straightening out the Self-Centered Church (Evangelical Press, 2009), p. 164

viii R. Kent Hughes & Bryan Chapell, 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus (Crossway, 2000), p. 363

ix Alvin J. Schmidt, How Christianity Changed the World (Zondervan, 2004), p. 152

x Adapted from Nicholas D. Kristof, “*Evangelicals Without Blowhards*,” The New York Times (7-30-11)

xi Bill White, *Community Outreach Moves a Neighbor to Consider Christ*, posted 11/08/2010 @ ChristinaityToday/PreachingToday.com