

Devoted to Good Deeds – Titus 3:12-15

CBC Ilderton

Andrew Hall
August 23, 2020

If you were leading a movement to bring about massive cultural change, what might you do? What directions would you give to a leader of churches that was trying to help a group of struggling churches in a very secular society filled with violence, harshness, laziness, and conflict?

I know what I would do. I'd write a long letter. I'd spell out all the ways we could make an impact for Christ. But not Paul. His letter is so dense and tightly packaged; and as you add water to the study of this letter it expands. And as Paul closes his letter, there is a denseness in these 4 short verses that we need time to unpack them and consider how we might be encouraged today. Paul's letter is a call to devotion, and so we should...

Be Devoted to One Another (3:12-13)

Whenever we think of Paul, I think most people imagine a man who works solo, being the fiercely independent man who works hard on his own. But throughout Paul's letters, we get a picture of a man who is working with a circle of dear partners and friends around him. They are close. They work together. They Both Apollos and Tychicus are mentioned before in Paul's letters. These dear friends laboured alongside Paul and were considered some of his trusted companions. When we hear these words at the end of Titus, we get the picture though of a man who had a solid circle of friends.

So as Paul sends the letter to Titus and the church, he sends it with Artemas and Tychicus. We don't know anything about Artemas, but Tychicus is mentioned several times in Paul's letters as a dearly loved and faithful brother. They will go to relieve Titus so that Titus can come to visit Paul in Nicopolis. Zenas is only mentioned here and Apollos is probably the one mentioned in 1 Corinthians. Paul wants Titus to be devoted to them by caring for their needs so they can continue on their way.

Paul was not a lone ranger Christian. He had people around him. His circle was one that was highly committed to one another. And this is the sense of Paul that we get throughout Acts and his letters. He's a man with a strong bond with his Christian friends. They are likeminded. They are labouring together for the sake of the gospel.

As a church, let's continue to grow together. Let's pull together. Let's see what God would be pleased to do. How might our love and devotion to one another be used by the Lord to strengthen churches around us? How might our commitment to loving one another through thick and thin keep us together so that our devotion becomes something we share with others?

Throughout this season, we have been pulling together as a church family, imperfect as we are. Baking, meals, calls, texts – the stories are many. As you commit to one another, God is pleased to build his church.

Be Devoted to Good Deeds (3:14)

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The way that Paul wants Titus and the churches on the island of Crete to be devoted to one another is through good deeds: “And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful.”

But good deeds aren't something that come natural to people. Notice that before you are devoted to good deeds, you have to learn to be devoted to them. You have to study how you can serve others. You have to know the other person and what will serve them best. It's not just doing good, it's learning, studying, examining, and thinking through what would help my brother or sister in Christ so that they would be able to serve Christ more effectively and not be hindered.

Good deeds have been the theme of this letter. The divisive teachers who had caused trouble in these churches were unfit for any good work (1:16). But Christians are to be zealous for good works (2:14), and ready to perform good works (3:1). Now here, as in 3:8, Paul says we should be devoted to good works. Imagine what it would be like if we were people who were not those who were argumentative, divisive, speaking well of others, and studying how we could have the maximal impact upon others. Imagine a husband and father who was thinking, “How could I serve my wife and children in a way that would radically bless them when I get home from work?” Or a wife and mother who asked, “What would show love to my husband and family today?” Or an employee who asked, “What could I do to go above and beyond what is expected of me today to make work a better place?” Or a student who asked, “How could I make school a better place for others today?”

This kind of thinking shows that the saving message of Jesus Christ is beautiful (2:10). It shows that we have been saved from the divisiveness of futile thinking. And it blesses others with a little taste of the goodness of God's grace.

As we learn to identify needs, Paul says that one way we are devoted to one another is by caring for those urgent needs. In the context, Paul is most certainly thinking about how Artemas, Tychicus, Apollos, or Zenas will be cared for. How will the gospel message advance if the practical needs of God's servants aren't cared for? So he tells these churches to remember to learn to be committed to caring for those urgent needs. If their practical needs aren't met, gospel ministry will not be fruitful, but unfruitful. Energy that could be spent on spreading the gospel and strengthening churches instead will be spent on survival. Sharing with those in need is not 'outreach', but it most certainly is an act of loving our neighbours as we love ourselves and making it clear that the message of our self-giving God who died and gave himself for us has changed us to think more about others than ourselves.

Church, what might God be pleased to do if we began to think more and more about how we as individuals and as a church bless our community by doing good? What might happen if we studied our community and found ways we could serve them, love them, and make an impact in their daily lives? Could we become a church that, if we weren't here, our community would regret our absence?

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Let us learn to love one another and love our community so that we might ‘adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour’ (2:10) and become more effective in sharing the radical love of our self-giving God.

Be Dependent Upon God’s Grace (3:15)

And now, as Paul ends this letter, having reminded Christians to be devoted to one another and to the good works of the gospel, he speaks a word of blessing. He sends love from everyone who is with him. He sends love to the churches who are hearing this letter read to them. And he finishes with these words: “Grace be with you all” (3:15).

And here, we end where we began. It is not our devotion to God, not our devotion to one another, not our devotion to good deeds that Paul reminds us of. It is God’s devotion to us. The motivation, the source of strength, the empowerment for service: grace. Our self-giving God, who gave his One and only Son to rescue us from the penalty of sin and deliver us from the power of sin now gives us the grace for the promotion of good deeds.

What will enable you to be self-giving in good deeds? Grace. What will cause you to think of others and not merely yourself? Grace. What will stir your heart to love others? Grace. From beginning to end, the Christian life is of grace. Grace can be defined as ‘undeserved blessings being given’ and ‘supernatural empowerment for life.’ And as Paul ends with a word of blessing, he’s not merely saying, “So long! Farewell!” He’s saying, “May God’s undeserved blessings supernaturally empower you to serve others in radically generous ways that shows that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is beautiful news.”

We don’t become Christians by doing good. We don’t stay Christians by doing good. We don’t get to heaven by doing good. We become Christians, we stay Christians, and we get to heaven to live with God by being dependent upon his grace.

What might God be pleased to do through a church and a people who, because of the love of Christ, are the kind of people who love their church family, love their community, and love doing good? What might be different about this north London region? What might God be pleased to do?

Maybe this isn’t a question we should be asking, but a study we should be doing – how can we devote ourselves to love and good deeds to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour to display the beauty of Christ? May God’s grace be with us to make a difference for him!