

Main Idea: When we are allowing our light to shine before people, there will be eight visible evidences of it. That they may see your good works, said Jesus. This is what they will see, says Paul as the Spirit of Jesus directs him to write this letter.

An Overview of Titus: This is what it takes for a church’s light to shine brightly.

Chapter One: The Church must have *godly leadership*.

Chapter Two: The Church must have a *godly congregation*.

Chapter Three: The Church must have a *godly reputation* in the community.

I. We must demonstrate proper attitudes and actions towards government authorities (1).

A. Submit to government authorities.

B. Obey civil laws.

C. Be ready to do whatever is good.

II. We must be known in the community for being people who use our tongues to promote peace, are considerate, and humble (2).

III. We must live in the grip of grace, never forgetting that the reason we are different is because of what God has done, not what we have done (3-7).

Think about it: Some questions to ponder together...

1. What are some things that can hurt a church’s light-shining capacity in a community?

2. What are some specific things we can do as a church to develop and maintain a God-honoring reputation in our community?

Jesus said that we are the light of the world and that the world should see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven. But what did He mean by “good works”? What should we be doing that will cause the world to see our light? I believe we find the answer to that important question in a text we’ll look at for a couple of weeks, Titus 3.

Scripture Reading: Titus 3

What role is the church supposed to play in a pagan society? We face the abortion issue, the explosive increase of crime, the flaunting of permissive lifestyles, the gay agenda and the political legislation that accompanies it, and we wonder... How does God want His church to respond to contemporary, political issues, especially in light of the rapid moral decay we’re seeing?

I want us to think about a couple of common answers to the perplexing question. The first, which reached its peak in popularity about three decades ago, is to *unite and fight*. There is strength in numbers.” Think of past organizations like the Moral Majority, the Christian Coalition, and groups like “Reformation Ohio” that rallied the troops who hold to traditional, family values, and beckoned the church to get involved in the political process. “Stand up for your rights. Speak out.”

Some took it a step further. “Get angry with what's happening. Let your voice be heard. March on Washington. Demonstrate at the Court House. Unite and fight.” Such was and is still but to a lesser degree the first answer we hear.

But the pendulum has swung for many to the other side, and so we hear a different solution to the problem. *Retreat and moan*. Our culture is too far gone and it will contaminate us if we try to change it. We must pull out of the public sector. Get out of the public schools, get out of public offices. After all, Christianity is a personal matter, not a public one.

** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

² For a previous look at this passage, see WBC 4/2/2006.

And of course, in between these two approaches are various combinations of the two. Then throw in social media and whatever your approach you have ample opportunity to express it.

So what role is the church to play in this context? I believe Jesus addresses this question for us with His powerful words of Matthew 5:13-16, “You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world. Let your light so shine before people that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”

What is our role? Unite and fight? No. Retreat and moan? No. Be what you are, says Jesus. You are salt, so be salty. You are light, for I the Light of the world live in you, so let your light shine.

Okay, that’s helpful, but what does it mean in practical terms? I believe the key is to see how Jesus’ first followers applied Jesus’ teaching, and we see this in the rest of the New Testament. After the four gospels we see the book of Acts, and then the epistles. Acts gives us *examples* of what being the light of the world looks like. The epistles give us *explanation* of how to do it.

Last week we looked at Acts 2. When the church is the light of the world it shows up in our priorities (the first church valued God’s Word, one another, worship, and prayer, verse 42), our practice (the first church members were serious about God and each other, verses 43-47a), and then in our progress (the church grew because of the Lord’s working and the people’s witness, verse 47b).

So from the perspective of those who first heard Jesus, that’s what being the light of the world looks like. But the NT gives us more. When we come to the epistles we find out how to do it.

We’re going to go today and the Lord willing next week to a how-to text, and I want to take a moment to show you why this particular text. Look again at Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:16. What did He say is the effect of letting our light shine? “...**that they may see your good works** and give glory to your Father who is in heaven (ESV).” So when the light is shining, Jesus says the world around us will see our good works.

But what kind of good works? Turn to Titus 3, and notice the repetition of these words “good works” (in the ESV), three times in this chapter.

Verse 1 “Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every **good work**...”

Verse 8 “The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to **good works**. These things are excellent and profitable for people.”

Verse 14 “And let our people learn to devote themselves to **good works**, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful.”

So when we let our light shine, people will see our good works, says Jesus. And Paul applies that exhortation, showing us with clarity what these good works are to be.

Think of it this way. We have a mission from the Lord Jesus. *You shall be my witnesses (Acts 1:8). Go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19).* That is our assignment. It’s why we’re here. The Savior came to seek and save lost sinners—it’s why He died on the cross and conquered the grave—and it’s our calling to let sinners know they can be reconciled to God through faith in the person and atoning work of Jesus Christ.

But a church’s ability to fulfill its mission is affected by its reputation. A *unite and fight* church tends to alienate the very sinners it’s commissioned to reach. And a *retreat*

and moan church, tucked away in a safe holy huddle, often loses sight of the lost people. Here's where the good works come in. The good works provide the platform from which we speak.

So how do we let our light shine in a world that mocks righteousness? The epistle the Holy Spirit directed Paul to write to Titus can help us.

Titus was Paul's associate serving on the island of Crete, a pretty ungodly place frankly. But the Lord had rescued a group of people there, and these brand new Christians needed help organizing a church. That was the job Paul assigned to Titus (1:5). In this letter Paul identifies three prerequisites that God wants present in His church. In order for a church to fulfill its mission, these three traits must be in place. I'll just mention the first two to set the context for the third, which will be our focus.

Chapter One: The Church must have *Godly Leadership*.

Chapter Two: The Church must have a *Godly Congregation*.

I am amazed at how simple Paul's strategy for evangelism really was. He doesn't give us a complicated program. Instead, he zeroes in on three basics. First, as a church, we need to have *godly leadership*: a team of leaders who meet God's standards, who know and teach God's truth, and who are committed to dealing with problems in the church God's way.

Then we need to have a *godly congregation*: a group of people who are committed to learning and living by the Word of God, from the older men and women, to the younger. In Titus, God says that if a church possesses godly leadership and a godly congregation, it's well on its way to being effective in evangelism.

Then comes a third basic addressed in chapter three. The first two have to do with internal matters, what's happening inside the church. In chapter three, Paul opens the church door and takes the church to the community. He explains what we must do if the light of Christ is to shine brightly and clearly before a lost world around us.

Chapter Three: The Church must have a *Godly Reputation in the community*.

As Christians, we are called to live *in* the world, but not *of* the world. That's a given. But what should the world see in us? What kind of reputation does God want us to have in this community? We find the answer in Titus 3.

When we are allowing our light to shine before people, there will be eight visible evidences of it. That they may see your good works, said Jesus. This is what they will see, says Paul as the Spirit of Jesus directs him to write this letter.

I. We must demonstrate proper attitudes and actions towards government authorities (1).

Notice what Paul insisted Titus was to do with the congregation in verse 1, "Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient [KJV 'to obey magistrates'], to be ready to do whatever is good [KJV 'to be ready to every good work']..." The verb "remind" is a present imperative, implying that this was to be a regular practice in the church. "Remind them, Titus, of their civil responsibilities. Remind them over and over again."

Why would this reminder be necessary? Paul's exhortation implies a couple of things. First, it implies that Paul himself had addressed the subject when he had been in Crete. Historians tell us that the Cretans had a notorious reputation for fretting and fuming against the Roman yoke. But when they became followers of Christ, Paul taught them that had to change. No more badmouthing the Roman government.

But old patterns don't leave over night, so Paul told Titus, "You remind them again, Titus, and keep reminding them." Which points to a second implication. Paul's words indicate that Christians need to be taught what God expects of them, in every area, but in this case in such a practical matter as the proper attitude towards the government. God wants His people to be model citizens, but that doesn't come naturally. Consequently, the church needs to teach civil responsibilities over and over, for few catch it the first time.

And I want you to think about the government Paul here has in mind. How many of the civil rulers were Christians when Paul wrote this? As far as we know, very few if any were for the simple reason that Roman citizens were required to give allegiance to Caesar. Let that sink in. Today at least some of our government officials are followers of Christ, but to folks who had few and probably NO Christians serving as civil rulers, Paul gave this charge, "Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient..."

Now let's take a closer look at the Christian's responsibility towards government. Paul insists that we have three responsibilities.

A. Submit to government authorities.

The Greek verb translated "be subject" (*hupotasso*) has military connotations and is a combination of two words: "under" + "to arrange," hence "to rank under." As Christians, we are to submit, to support, to accept the leadership of civil authorities.

Why? For two reasons. First, government authority originates where? With God. God delegates authority to civil powers. I remind you that is true whether or not we happen to agree with the authorities. In Romans 13:1-7, the apostle elaborates and states in part, "For there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God."

There's a second reason we must be subject to our rulers. When Christians are submissive to the government, it gives the church a good name in society. The opposite is also true. The only time we should *not* submit to government authority is if it tells us to do something that violates God's authority.

B. Obey civil laws.

The word Paul uses here is the same word Peter used in Acts 5:29, "We must obey God." But here Paul says we are to *obey* earthly rulers and laws. Christians should have a reputation for being law-keepers. The implications are pretty significant, aren't they?

God has placed our president in his position, and we are to obey him. The same goes for our lawmakers, our local officials, and our law enforcement. With the one exception being when civil authority violates God's authority (Acts 5:29), we are to keep the law.

So for Jesus' followers, the issue isn't whether you can save a few bucks by "adjusting" some figures on your tax return without getting caught. The issue is obedience. The issue isn't whether you agree with copyright laws, nor if you can duplicate your friends' music in the privacy of your home. The issue again is obedience. We have a third responsibility.

C. Be ready to do whatever is good.

The literal order in the Greek text is this, "For every good work be ready." Do you want to know a great way to capture the attention of unsaved people in a community? God's Word says, teach church members that when they see a good work that needs to be done, do it!

Our culture is becoming so increasingly self-centered that if Christians will devote themselves to doing good, we will stand out like a searchlight in the midnight sky! And

isn't that what Jesus meant when He said, "Let your light shine"? The popular mentality these days is, "Let someone else do it. Why should I get involved?"

In a day where greed and personal gain rule, we have a great opportunity to reveal what genuine Christianity is all about. We ought to be eager to meet needs, in our homes and church first, but then also in our community. With this motivation, the one identified in Philippians 2:5, "Let this mind be in you which also was in Christ Jesus." Why should we do good works? Because our Savior did.

Do our neighbors know we care about them? "For every good work be ready," says God's Word to us. The opportunities come every day, in small ways and sometimes big. Every day our community has the opportunity to look at our lives and get a picture of what Jesus is like.

So here's the first good work. We must demonstrate proper attitudes and actions towards government authorities. Let me say that again. When our light is shining, this is what people will see. We, the followers of Jesus, *must demonstrate proper attitudes and actions towards government authorities.*

Back in 1994 Joseph Stowell wrote a book with a very insightful title, *Loving Those We'd Rather Hate*. In it he made this observation:

"I fear that looking at some of us within the church of Christ today, it would be hard to see that we are on a seek-and-save mission since we look so much more like we're into search-and-destroy. I have to wonder if the doctor who heads the abortion clinic in our neighborhood would say that one thing he knows for sure is that 'these Christians are adamantly against what I do, but they seem to have an unusual concern for me as a person.'"³

Stowell continues, "I have a sneaking suspicion that in many churches in America, if the pastor were to get up on Sunday morning and say, 'This coming Saturday we're going to marshal our forces to go to the local abortion clinic and protest the death of innocent lives and seek to save as many babies as possible'—especially if he offered a nice pancake-and-eggs breakfast at 8:30—chances are he'd get a pretty decent crowd for the day. If on the next Sunday he got up and said that this coming Saturday the church had planned another strategic kingdom event—based on the fact that they live in a community full of people who have been born but who are dead in trespasses and sin and are liable for the eternal judgment of God—and then announced there would be another great pancake breakfast at 8:30, a time of training, and a blitzing of the community on behalf of reaching those whose eternities were in peril, my guess is that there would be a lot fewer out the second Saturday than there were the first. The reality that there wouldn't be nearly the fervor for the second Saturday is a reflection that we as a church have yet to be consumed with the focus of the ministry of Christ and the early church."⁴

The fact is, what we are facing today is nothing new. Jesus Himself ministered in a pagan world. So did the early church. And what did they do? How did they respond to flagrant and commonplace immorality, social acceptance of homosexuality, financial corruption, and many of the other sins that confront us today? For indeed, they faced them. The answer is almost an argument from silence. When you read the New Testament you discover that those "issues" weren't *the issue* for the early church. **THE** issue was the fulfillment of its mission—*Go and make disciples, teaching them to obey*

³ Joseph Stowell, *Loving Those We'd Rather Hate*, p. 15.

⁴ Stowell, pp. 15-16.

everything I have commanded you. That was the focus they sought to maintain. Nothing must distract us from our mission, not even “good” causes, for in reality, the accomplishing of our mission is the best thing we can do for our society.

Brothers and sisters, when we let our light shine, people will see the evidence of it, and Paul starts with this particular evidence. We’ll exhibit proper attitudes and actions towards government authorities. The second evidence is related to the first.

II. We must be known in the community for being people who use our tongues to promote peace, are considerate, and humble (2).

Verse 2 states, “To slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men.” The KJV puts it this way, “To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, showing all meekness unto all men.”

This is so practical. Having a good reputation in a community happens one person at a time. To “slander” or “speak evil of” is literally “to blaspheme.” It means to badmouth, to smear another person's character or reputation.

So here’s a personal question. Are you careful with what you say about other people? We may not agree with those around us, but we are to slander no one.

In addition, we’re supposed to be “peaceable” (lit. ‘not contentious,’ ‘not looking for a fight’) and “considerate” (the word means ‘gentle’). Would those two words come to the mind of the typical non-Christian when he thinks about evangelical Christianity in America? Are we known for being *peaceable* and *gentle*? Would those two words come to the mind of the unsaved person you work with when he thinks about you?

Beloved, if we are to be effective in evangelism, we must have a reputation in this community for being people who, instead of fighting for our rights, do everything we can to promote peace by being considerate and humble. That’s what we’re to be known for.

Let’s consider a very practical situation. How should we respond if someone cheats us out of some money? The world says, “You’ve got a right to get that money back, so do whatever it takes to get it.” But God’s Word says something different. Sure, what’s right matters and if it’s possible to get the money back, we should try. But our “rights” aren’t our number one concern. The testimony of Christ is.

And what if the person who cheats us just happens to be a Christian? That very scenario took place in Corinth. When Paul heard that a Christian in Corinth had brought a lawsuit against another Christian, he wrote a letter and rebuked the church with strong language. Listen to 1 Corinthians 6:5-6: “I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? But instead, one brother goes to law against another—**and this in front of unbelievers!**”

What bothered Paul most was that this lawsuit between two church members in the civil courts was making a mockery of Christ in front of unbelievers. We can tell the world that Christ offers peace but they hear a contradictory message when they see a lack of peace between two brothers. “Work the problem out in the church,” Paul says. “Keep it out of the courts.”

“What if two Christians can’t work it out? What if I’ve been wronged by a church member and I take it to the church, but I don’t get the justice I think I deserve? What then?” Paul answers that question in the next verse, 1 Corinthians 6:7, “The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. *Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?*”

Beloved, the reputation of Christ in His church is more important than my rights. In every situation, I need to ask myself, “If I do such-and-such, how will it affect the way non-Christians’ view my Savior?”

Listen again to the charge in verse 2, paying particular attention to the final three words, “To slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility *toward all men.*”

The truth is, we know how to be considerate and show humility to *some* people. Our problem is we tend to be selective, and in fact, inconsistent in the way we demonstrate compassion to people.

Let’s camp on that word *all*. We are to be considerate and show humility towards ALL people. In the Greek text the word “all” appears twice, calling us to show “**all** humility towards **all** men.”

The amazing thing about Christianity is that God enables us to love the unlovely—which is what He did with us. “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8).”

But God not only enables us to love the unlovely, He requires us to do so, to show love without any trace of discrimination.

To see how close we are to God’s standard, I invite you to take the following “compassion test.”⁵ Be honest. How would you respond if you were to hear the following? Your two options are: 1) “They got what he deserved,” or 2) “I’m saddened to hear that.”

1. A typhoon devastated a Muslim community in Malaysia
2. An AIDS victim who lives in your town has died, and, according to your newspaper, he was a leader in the gay rights movement
3. The abortion doctor in your town discovered a bomb planted in his new Mercedes Benz as he was about to leave for the airport to spend the weekend at his condo in Palm Springs
4. A convict at Lucasville was shot while escaping
5. A family of another race on your street is receiving threatening phone calls
6. Someone who has misused and deeply offended you just lost his job
7. Homeless persons are begging money on the street where you work

So how did you do on the test? You say, “Where’s the answer key?” We’re looking at it. It’s in Titus 3:2. God doesn’t say: Show *some* humility to *some* people. Nor, show *some* humility to *all* people. Nor, show *all* humility to *some* people. God says: Show *all* humility to *all* people. In fact, in the ESV it reads, “Show perfect courtesy toward all people.”

You say, “But that’s hard. How do we do it? How can we have that kind of reputation?” The answer is linked to the third evidence.

III. We must live in the grip of grace, never forgetting that the reason we are different is because of what God has done, not what we have done (3-7).

Verse 3, “At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived, and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures.” That’s our resume friends, and we must never forget it.

A. We must never forget what we were.

⁵ Adapted from J. Stowell, *Loving Those We’d Rather Hate*, 46-47

Look again. Look at what we were. Verse 3 puts it so bluntly, “At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.”

Does it bother you to see people sinning recklessly in our society? Sure it does. Sin should grieve us deeply, and when we see sin we should think, “That’s not right.” And our very next thought should be, “That was *me*. And that would still be me if it weren’t for the grace of God.” We must never forget what we were.

But we mustn’t stop with that thought. Paul won’t let us.

B. We must constantly affirm why we are no longer what we were.

And what’s the answer to that? Verses 4-7 tells us: “But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, **he saved us**, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. **He saved us** through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.”

When we start getting a little smug and cold-hearted towards the lost people around us, we need to re-read the three words Paul inserts here.

He saved us.

How quickly we forget. We didn't save ourselves. We couldn't. We didn't even want to, for we were foolishly enslaved to our passions and pleasures. Until God intervenes. Until God reached down and picked us up out of the death-trap of sin. Until God adorned us with the righteous robe of His Son, and adopted us into His family.

He saved us.

A church that has a godly reputation in a community is a church whose members think often of the grace of God. They study God’s grace. They sing about God’s grace. They memorize verses about God’s grace. They remind each other often of the grace of God.

Yes, we view sex differently than our co-workers do, and the unborn child, and the homeless, and a lot of other things too. But why? Friends, we must never forget that the reason we think differently now is because of what God has done, not what we have done. He saved us.

And what He’s done for us, He’s doing with others. He’s saving them too, the very people whose sin now is offensive to us and may even be attacking us. And He desires to use us to reach them. You are the light of the world, He says. Let them see your good works, so they, like you, will glorify Me.

I read an interesting observation about tow trucks in England. In American they’re sometimes referred to as "wreckers," but a traveler to England observed that some of the trucks he saw had the word "Recovery" written on them. Same truck, same mission, but a radically different perspective.⁶

Oh, how the grace of God changes our perspective! Followers of Jesus, we need this reminder. God has sent us on a recovery mission, not a wrecking mission. Our goal is the reconciliation of the sinner to God, not his destruction.

Does our community know that? Do the people who live on your street, who work with you, who go to school with you, do they know that you love them, and do they know you love them because of Christ? Do they know you are on a rescue mission and that

⁶ Stowell, 18

you want to see them saved from their sin, like you've been, and experience the life-changing power of God's grace, like you have? Do they know that you want them to experience the presence of God and the wonders of heaven, like you will?

Or do they just know that you don't like their lifestyle?

Beloved, we have the best news imaginable. God saves sinners! We should know, for He did it with us. And how did He do it? Here's how...

Verse 5—"through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit." In other words, he cleaned us up. He rebirthed us into a new life. He made us new. And how did He do it?

Verse 6—"through Jesus Christ our Savior". We didn't change ourselves. Jesus did.

I was talking with a repairman this week. "Are you a religious person?" he asked when he faced a snag in the project. "I'm asking because if you are, you might want to pray right now. This could get really bad if this wire doesn't go where I need it to go."

An hour later he was still working and I reminded him of his question. "The truth is, I'm not a religious person. I don't like religion. Religion is man's attempt to reach God. I believe that God has done the work to reach us through sending His Son, Jesus Christ. What I have is a relationship with God, not religion."

And he began to open up with me.

Friends, we're not offering people religion, but a relationship with the Living God. And how does that happen? How does a sinner enter into a relationship with a holy God?

Verse 7—"having been justified by His grace". Justified, that means, declared righteous in the sight of God even though we've done nothing to earn that standing. How did it happen then? By His grace, by the undeserved favor and help that God has given us because of the work His Son did in our place.

It's because of the grace of God that we are worshiping God today, all grace and only grace. We're prisoners set free, children in the family, heirs of a new heaven and earth that's coming, all because of grace. As long as we keep that in mind, we'll have a winsome reputation in this community.

Next Sunday morning, the Lord willing, we'll investigate the rest of Titus 3 and see five additional evidences that the light is shining as it ought. This is what we must *do* so they will *see*.

IV. We must be known for doing good in our community (8).

V. We must refuse to allow petty issues to distract us from our mission (9).

VI. We must practice church discipline when necessary (10-11).

VII. We must be generous in helping Christian workers who have needs (13).

VIII. We must be known as being productive, hard workers (14).

Think about it: So what are some things, according to Titus 3, that can hurt a church's light-shining capacity in a community? And what are some specific things we can do as a church to develop and maintain a God-honoring reputation in our community?

We're going to be discussing these critical questions and others later today in our community groups. I hope you'll join us as we seek practical ways to put what we're learning into practice, and so let our light shine.