

Separating the True Gospel from False Ones

Titus 1:1–2, 10–16; 2:11–14

The first thing I feel like I need to do is acknowledge that yes, I do have a black eye... I know that some of you, if I don't talk about it, will be distracted the whole time... "Whoa... did Veronica not like her Christmas present?" or "Is J.D. wearing mascara?" No, I ran into a pole at a restaurant the other night. When I say that, I know it doesn't sound believable... but it's true. I was walking out of a restaurant and thought Adon, my 5 year old, was getting too close to the parking lot so I yelled at him and ran forward and wham... so, this wound comes from heroically trying to save my son.

DPAC: So consistently awesome you don't stop to acknowledge the awesomeness we have grown accustomed to

Today we're going to begin a short series on the book of Titus... BIBLES. This is a **letter from the Apostle Paul** to Titus, a church planter in Crete.

- (Incidentally, the book of Titus is the **only book of the Bible written specifically to a church planter**—If you know your Bible, you might say, "What about Timothy?" Timothy worked among more established churches. Titus was on the front lines of hell.)

Crete, where he was assigned, was one of the most immoral places in the ancient world—sort of the Las Vegas of the Mediterranean.

Except it was an island and the Mediterranean hub for piracy. 1st century Tortuga. Imagine trying to plant churches among the cast of the Pirates of the Caribbean.

- Historians say that people there **stayed drunk**.

- **Lying** was a celebrated art form: In fact, in Greek, "Crete" was slang for lying. "To Crete" was to lie."¹ 'Stop creting.' 'You creted!'
- The **historian Polybius said** that nowhere in the ancient world were politicians more corrupt with public policy tilted toward the people in power than in Crete.²
- Even Paul says to Titus, ¹² **Even one of their own prophets has said, "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons."** ¹³ **This testimony is true.**
- You say, "That's rude. What happened to all that, 'I am the chief of sinners, stuff, Paul?'" Paul said, "Hey, your guy said it. I'm just saying he was on to something."

Some of you are like, "Liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons... I feel like you are describing my **fraternity**... or my **workplace**." Or maybe having just gotten back from the holidays, say, "That sounds like my **family**."

Which makes Titus incredibly relevant: **How do you live out the faith** in a really difficult, immoral place like Crete? **How do you respond** when Christianity is consistently despised and belittled? Where most people find it irrelevant, or even silly? **Paul writes to Titus to answer those questions.**

Paul has one concern for Titus in this book— "*the truth that leads to godliness.*"

¹ Tim Chester, *Titus for You*, 45. One modern day church planter wrote this: "Living the good life of the gospel is a challenge when we live in a wider culture that defines 'the good life' if other ways. It is particularly hard in a culture where *newspapers cannot be trusted* and *politicians are corrupt*; a harsh, *selfish, racist culture* in which there is a fear of crime; a culture where people are reluctant to do manual work, which is therefore left to migrant workers; a culture in which *people routinely overeat*... that was the culture of Crete."

² William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 444. Quotes in Tim Chester, *Titus for You*, 110.

In the 1st verse: ^{1:1} Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness—

- That phrase, “the truth that leads to godliness”—or at least that theme—is going to come up over and over during this book.

God's purpose in the gospel is to create for himself a God-loving and God-like people. (that's what '*godliness*' means) *That was the point of the Gospel.* When God saved us, he saved us for himself.

- I saw the **new Exodus** movie a few weeks ago, starring Christian Bale. **Don't want to hate on it...** Pretty good... It took a lot of liberties... For example, Moses is a Gladiator style warrior who does hand-to-hand combat with Pharaoh when the Red Sea washes over them... **My biggest disappointment** was that it left out the main phrase Moses is famous for: “Let my people *go*...” **But even the more-biblically-faithful treatments** of this story typically leave out the most important part of that statement: “Let my people go, that they might worship me!”
 - The second phrase is more essential than the 1st. what God saved us to is *more* important than what he has saved us from!
 - **Christians talk a lot about what God has saved us from—** sex, drugs, and rock and roll—but we often fail to talk much about what he has saved us to.
 - ***The point was not saving us from something, but to something.***

So, therefore, one of the ways to authenticate true religion from false, Paul says, is in how it cultivates godliness in your heart

Not busyness or external conformity, mind you—but godliness in the heart. **There's a difference.** There were a lot of false teachers around in Crete, and today... Paul says that the **true gospel creates godliness** in your heart; **false religion just gets** you busy. Fills up your schedule. Learn this. Do this. Don't drink this. Use these words, not these.

So what I want to do today is show you **why the gospel produces godliness** in a way that nothing else can, **why every other religious approach** won't work... and then have you **ask some evaluation questions** about your own faith: Is your faith producing godliness? (Incidentally, for those of you who made a **New Year's resolution**, you'll find out in chapter 1 why most of them don't work.)

So let's get started:

I. How the gospel produces godliness (1:1; 2:14)

Paul unpacks this in ^{2:11} For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. ¹² *It teaches us* What is the 'it': this is the most important question in interpreting the whole book of Titus!) to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify *for himself* a people that are his very own, *eager to do what is good.* (zealous)

- First, **what produces these things?** What is the 'it'? If I asked you, “Explain to me how you can become more self-controlled, more upright...” What would you answer be?
 - Greater **will power?**
 - More **knowledge?**
 - Accountability **partners.**
 - Quiet **time.**
 - Maybe if judgment was more real to us, and we thought about hell more...
- Paul's answer: *The grace of God.* The grace of God teaches us to *say no to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled...*
- The grace of God focus our attention three places:
 - Vs. 13: **UPWARD:** we look upward to the appearing of the glorious God

- And vs. 14 **BACKWARD**: ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness...
- **FORWARD**: “we wait...” because he will purify us!
- **Upward to the glorious God who gave himself for us and is coming back for us; backward to the price he paid for our sin and forward to what he’s making us into and what he has for us**

The upward, backward, and forward vision of the gospel will produce godliness in us.

Why does this produce godliness in us?

- **UPWARD: The gospel Redirects Worship**
 - Sin problems, as I’ve often explained, start as worship problems.
 - The original sin, Paul says, is that **“We gave the glory of God to created things.” (Rom 1:23)**
 - Glory, in Hebrew, is the word “kabod,” and means “weight” or importance. We gave the weight we were supposed to give to God in our lives to something in the creation.
 - NT word for glory means “beauty.” Put the two together, and you have a pretty good definition.
 - We gave an importance and a beauty to things more than we gave to God: I can’t be happy without money; family; respect; sexual pleasure, creature comforts, all good things, but we gave them a weight of importance that should have been reserved for God alone.
 - **Matt Papa** in his book *Look and Lives* says that **sin is simply worship misdirected**. We never **begin to worship, he says**, we are born worshippers. Like **breathing**. We just aim it somewhere.
 - **Some list of things** we deem most essential to life and happiness... and then we arrange our lives to possess these things.

- **To change sin at the heart level, which is where God wants to change it, he has to change what we worship.** Until that happens, all changes are superficial.
 - **We** are like the guy who dutifully serves one wife when he secretly wishes he were with another.
 - So, Paul Tripp says: *If we worship our way into sin, we have to worship our way out.*
- **The gospel, and the gospel alone, does that... it redirects and re-ignites our worship.** Because it shows us a God better—and more glorious (vs. 13)—than our idols.

What Luther called the **dilemma of the Great Commandment**: “Love the Lord your God”

- If you love something, you don’t need to be commanded: kiss my wife, eat a steak, take a nap
- If don’t love something, that can’t be fixed by command (me with Brussel sprouts—unless you wrap it in bacon and pour chocolate over it); or being commanded in high school by parents to love someone you don’t like.
- Luther: the **dilemma**: If you love something you don’t need to be commanded to love it; if you don’t love it no ‘command’ can change that.
 - “What the law requires is freedom from the law”.
- **BACKWARD: The gospel Restores Gratefulness**
 - In that passage in Romans I just showed you, Paul identifies a second component in the original sin (really unusual) **Romans 1:21, “They neither glorified God nor gave thanks.”**
 - *Thanklessness.*
 - *How many of us think of thanklessness as the core sin? (Pride, lust, etc)*
 - **Why would it be?** Think about it. **When you are thankless**, not only do you rob someone of the glory that belongs to them, you convince yourself you could have gotten on fine without them.

- **Think of it like plagiarism.** Plagiarism is harmful on two levels: a) you rob someone else of credit for their words, and b) you delude others and yourself into thinking you can come up with that level of ideas all the time.
 - Say I were to discover a manuscript of a new Jane Austen novel that no one but me knew about... she wrote *Pride and Prejudice* and this one was called *Lust and Loneliness* or *Malice and Misery* or *Anger and Anal-Retentiveness* or something like that... And because no one else knows about it publish it as mine and take all of the credit... and the publisher comes and said, "This was great. What is next?" I'm going to be in trouble... I can't write like that all the time. My failure to give credit deceived me and others into thinking I could produce ideas like that all the time.
 - **When we are thankless toward God,** not only do we rob God of the glory belonging to him, we delude ourselves into thinking that we are self-sufficient.³ *We forget that every breath we have comes from God.* Every blessing on earth is a gift that comes from his hand.
 - I TELL MY KIDS... thankful spirit is not just about politeness; it is life-giving!
 - **We are like the moon.** The light shining out of our lives is reflected light, borrowed light from the sun. **Move the sun, and we go dark.**
 - And that **lack of gratefulness**—that **self-sufficiency**—leads to **independence**, which leads to **more sin.**
- How does the gospel transform us? The gospel points out our inability to save ourselves. We are hopeless. Jesus had to do it all and we just receive it as a gift.
- **FORWARD: The gospel *Raises Expectations***
 - In the gospel, we see what God is making us and the future he has for us. He puts in us a taste, a hunger, for the future.
 - **John Piper at a conference my wife was at,** "Sinlessness. I can almost taste it." *Is that what you are excited about for eternity?*
 - If it is... you long for it and move toward that now. John the Apostle: "We know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure." **1 John 3:2-3**

These things deliver us from sin, at the heart level. You become a person eager, zealous (vs. 14) to do good works.

By contrast, Paul says... religion cannot do these things.

In vs. 10–16 of chapter 1 he goes after some false teachers at work in Crete.

- **The Jewish heresy he is talking about** here is, of course, particular to *that* context; **people aren't teaching the exact same things in Raleigh-Durham today, but what Paul describes** here characterizes all false religion:

¹⁰ For there are many *rebellious* people, *mere* talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group.¹¹ They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach—and *that for the sake of dishonest gain*...¹³ Rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith¹⁴ and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the commands of those who reject the truth.¹⁶ They claim to know God, but by their actions they

³ Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God*, 195ff

deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good. Tell us how you really feel, Paul.

II. Why Religion Cannot Produce Godliness

- **It emphasizes adherence to rules rather than internal transformation:** “mere words,” (vs. 10); adherence to “Jewish rituals, commands” (vs. 13)
- **It uses God:** “for the sake of dishonest gain.” (vs. 11). God is a means to an end. He’s the means to houses or cars or a better life now or eternity in heaven.

Religion, in fact, leads to the **opposite of godliness:**

- **Instead of gratefulness, religion produces pride.**
 - **Those who excel** at religion say, “Look at what I accomplished... I’m better than others.”
 - If I ask you why you are going to heaven, and you tell me anything about yourself... pride
 - **Or, if you fail** to live up to the standards, you fall into pride’s evil cousin, despair: “I am terrible at this.”
 - “I might as well give up and enjoy the pornography, or alcohol... at least this makes me feel good.”
 - Instead of producing more godliness... both pride and despair lead to more sin.
- **Instead of full surrender, religion calls for only partial commitment**
 - **If salvation is a negotiation**—you do things and God lets you into heaven as a result, then there is a limit to what you have to give to God. **But if he saved you** when you literally had nothing, then it all belong to him.
- **Instead of worshipping God and using things, you worship things and use God.**
 - **Illus.** College leader who used religion to exalt himself
- **Instead of hating sin, you negotiate with it**
 - **Your concern with sin is to avoid punishment.** So, you ask, “How close can I get and still be ok?”

- **People who love God hate sin.** They are **not concerned about how close** they can get to but, but they hate it so badly they want to stay away from it.
 - **Illus. Friend bitten by black widow in bed.**
Veronica: “If that happened, we’d have to move... not to another house; another state.” She hates them.
 - It’s not, “How close can we get.” We don’t have a cage with them. If I defanged one, she still wouldn’t hold it.
Illus. Tarantula.
 - Isa: In the new heavens and new earth, lion lays down with the lamb... there ha got to be a redeemed version of the spider. “Not in my heaven”
 - That’s how people who love God feel about sin. What it does to God... his glory... his creation... his Son.
 - **Richard Sibbes:** After being transformed by the gospel, the sin itself becomes more loathsome to you than the punishment!⁴
- **LISTEN: God has been after people who hate sin.**
 - Dog and throw up

Religion keeps you busy: *Rituals, commands, words.* But **religion never curbs sin.** If anything, it encourages it.

- Bending metal
- John Bunyan:⁵ “Run, John, run, the law commands, But gives us neither feet nor hands, Far better news the gospel brings: It bids us fly and gives us wings.”

So, Paul says, many religious people claim to know God, but vs. 16, but by the shape of their hearts they deny him. Even though their

⁴ Richard Sibbes

⁵ Attributed to John Bunyan, though maybe from later preacher Ralpl Erskine.

lives are religiously crazy-busy, the shape of their hearts is "detestable, disobedient and unfit for any good work." (vs. 16).

The gospel changes that. The kindness of God, Paul says, leads us to true repentance by re-invigorating worship, restoring gratefulness and raising expectations.⁶

- Spurgeon wrote, "When I thought God was hard, I found it easy to sin; but when I found God so kind, so good, so overflowing with compassion, I smote upon my breast to think that I could ever have rebelled against One who loved me so, and sought my good." C.H. Spurgeon⁷
- **Christianity is not turning over a new leaf**; it's the power of a new life. Not a *resolve* to live better; but a resurrection to life in Christ.
- You don't need New Years resolutions; you need a new heart and the power of the Holy Spirit... which comes **not by exhortations** to do better, **but by narration** of an event... "the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior" who came to earth to take our punishment for us, and is coming back... like our Prince, our Bridegroom, our Mighty Warrior, to take us to be with him forever.
- By looking upward, backward, and forward in the gospel...
 - (Religion) says: *You should not sleep with your boyfriend... You should read your Bible every day... You should not get drunk... You should witness to your friends... You should not lose your temper.* None of those are good news to someone struggling with those issues. To them, it feels like condemnation. But what the gospel says is this: Not "You should not," but *You need not... You need not get drunk because Jesus offers a better refuge than alcohol. You need not lose your temper because God is in control of the situation.*" (JD: you need not give yourself to money, because God is a better treasure; you need not make yourself a slave

⁶ Romans 2:4.

⁷ <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tullian/2011/10/07/law-without-gospel-leads-to-licentiousness/>

to romance, for God is your fulfillment and companion; you need not be controlled by the opinions of people, for your Heavenly Father loves you...)

- "Sin, says Tim Chester, "is always making promises; and the gospel exposes those promises as false promises and points to God who is bigger and better than anything sin offers. That is good news."⁸
- It's like I often tell you: the gospel is not good advice; it is good news!

So, in light of that, Paul urges us to...

A. ...Evaluate the religious teaching you receive.

- **What do the teachers you listen to emphasize?** The grace of God toward you and its power of new life, or a list of things you need to do?
- **Every religious tradition tends to lose this thread of the grace of God.**
 - If you came out a **ritualistic tradition** you probably had church attendance, the prayers, and a code of ethics emphasized: Go to church. Light the candles. Say the prayers. Avoid the sins.
 - If you came out of a **Baptist tradition...**
 - **Standards** of behavior: how Christians live
 - **Activity** in the church (**envelopes**)
 - It's not you getting busy for God that produces godliness, but beholding what he has done for you.
 - If you came out of a **prosperity tradition...**
 - Realizing your potential is the answer. If people could just understand their potential and how God can help them achieve that... their best life now.
 - Friend that calls this "visionary evangelism": giving people a vision of what they can be in the future.

⁸ Tim Chester, *Titus for You*, 55.

- It's **not the thought of your best life** that will truly transform you, but the **understanding that the best life ever lived** was given for you!
- ...a Pentecostal tradition: Spirit baptism. I'm into the fullness of the Spirit—wrote a book on it. But the Spirit of God is there to point you to the beauty of the gospel.
- ...a Reformed or Bible tradition: Learning. Transformation by education. But true transformation comes by revelation of the beauty of God.
- ...a liberal tradition: activism.

Many of these things are wonderful. But it's **not what I do**—what I **learn**, what I **experience**—that brings the power of new life. It's **beholding what he did.**

Song I used to sin as a kid: Would you be free from your passion and pride? There's pow'r in the blood, pow'r in the blood; Come for a cleansing to Calvary's tide; There's wonderful pow'r in the blood.

Satan loves to promote religion divested of the power of the blood!

- Fine with you going to church in places that don't emphasize the power of the blood
- **Paul tells the Cretan believers, and I say it to you:** Churches, and pulpits that do not centralize the gospel and the grace of God should be avoided at all costs, no matter how long your family has gone there or how many good people go there. You have to get out of them and avoid them.
 - **Does that sound too harsh to you?** Paul tells Titus to have nothing to do with counterfeit gospels. **All they do is promote rebellion and sin** in the heart.
 - Only the gospel gives life to you and your family.
 - So **get yourself into the presence of the grace** of God!

B. ...Evaluate your sincerity as a believer

- Do you see evidence of him changing you? **Like a Mack Truck hitting you.** (just a **black eye**)

- Be aware, I am NOT talking about perfection... **Illus.** *I seem to be more aware of my sin and shortcomings than ever.* Growth is a deepening love of grace; a greater desire to know God and understand him and his love.
- If this is not happening, one of two things is true:
 - You've **never really understood** the gospel of grace.
 - The **vision of it has never really settled** into your heart. **Vs. 11, "appeared."** **"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men."** (2:11)
 - Has it appeared to you? Is it *appearing* more and more? (like the million dollar inheritance?)

Conclusion:

Instead of making a resolution, why not ask for this from God for the New Year?