

Practical Proverbial, from Titus, 2 July 2019

Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness. Titus 1:1 (NIV).

Welcome back, you of God's elect. That's right: King Jesus Himself chose YOU. Before you chose to believe in Him, or question Him, or even think about Him, He chose you to believe in Him. To communicate with Him; to understand Him; to worship Him; to receive His eternal blessings of peace and love and joy and fulfillment.

Paul wrote this letter to another of his protégés, a man named Titus. It is believed that Titus was a Greek, a Gentile, who Paul had ordained as a bishop in Crete. Titus had apparently been with Paul at the time 2 Corinthians was written, and Titus was also apparently successful in evangelizing the word of God. Part of that word was learning to understand that he (Titus, as well as Paul and all the other believers) was elect by God: chosen by God Himself to further the faith and knowledge of people.

That's our mission, too. I'm not a bishop in the church; perhaps you are (I know at least one). Yet we, as followers of Jesus, are chosen by God to help others increase their knowledge of Him. This is the secondary theme of most of Paul's letters (the first being to give glory to Jesus). Paul uses his words to convey to his readers – and to us – how it is our God-given mission to share the faith with other people by how we think, speak, and act. Some people, like Titus, will do it in leadership positions. Others, perhaps like us, will do it through our words and actions.

God chose us each for that, we and we alone. He made us in love to be unique, to have unique thoughts and talents and abilities that nobody else has. He put us in the time and place where we are to live our lives for service in His Kingdom. You may not always feel special; I'm betting you don't think you're called or even chosen by God for much, at least not most of the time.

That doesn't change the fact that you are. God put it on your heart to take an interest in Him, to want Him in your life somehow. He did that so that you might know Him more, and then so you might share Him with the people in your orbit. Nobody else on Earth is you; nobody else can do what you do. That's because God elected you to be you and you alone. He wants you as you are, just for who you are. Just like he did Paul and Titus.

For further reading: Romans 1:1, 1 Corinthians 1:1, 1 Timothy 2:4, 2 Timothy 2:2, James 1:1, Titus 1:2

King Jesus, thank You for choosing me, for equipping me to live this life. Help me do that.

Practical Proverbial, from Titus, 3 July 2019

Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness, in the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time. Titus 1:1-2 (NIV).

Here's a little more of why God put it on Paul's heart to write to Titus; part of the purpose for this letter: the hope of eternal life.

I think of "The Color Purple." Great book; great movie. In the movie, Oprah Winfrey's character, Sofia, is strong and determined while Celie, played by Whoopi Goldberg, is more withdrawn but steady. Sofia is bull-headed in everything she does. Celie is consistently abused, both physically and emotionally, and has resigned herself to that fate until Sofia calls her out on it. Celie's response: this life doesn't last forever but heaven will. Sofia's response to that? That's great but what about now?

Wouldn't that response apply to most of our world. After all, it's reasonable, isn't it? What about now? What about me? Don't I matter?

Perhaps both Celie and Sofia were right; perhaps it's a 'both/and' situation. The hope of eternity is a promise, not a wishing well kind of hope. It's a certainty, a foundation. God, who never lies, promised it. It's like the law of gravity: something universal on which we can rely. It matters now and later at the same time.

God chose mankind to display His grace and His love. He could have chosen honeybees but He didn't. We are the elect, and those who follow Jesus know this. Why? Because God, who doesn't lie, gave Himself in His Son to die for us when we didn't deserve it. Because He won forever in heaven for us when we couldn't. That means we get to enjoy the peace of that hope right now. It can change hearts to live with a better outlook...if we let it. It's the Sofia moment: what about now? Yes, Oprah: what about now. The peace of God is for right now, for dealing in love and justice with our fellow man, including those who abuse us. Including those who are bull-headed. Including ourselves.

And the peace of God is for our eternity in heaven as well. It's for later, for after the elect are given an eternal reward of living in His presence. Abused people are forgiven by Christ; abusers, too. And bull-headed people, too. Jesus did EVERYTHING necessary and possible to open God's presence to us. All we have to do is accept it. The reward for it is heaven, which, as Celie might say, we'll see in a little while.

For further reading: Numbers 23:19, Romans 1:1, 1 Corinthians 1:1, 1 Timothy 2:4, 2 Timothy 2:2, Hebrews 6:18, James 1:1, Titus 1:3

King Jesus, I believe Your promise. The hope of heaven is mine now and forever. Teach me today to share that in how I live this gift of my life.

Practical Proverbial, from Titus, 4 July 2019

Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness—in the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, and which now at his appointed season he has brought to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior. Titus 1:1-3 (NIV).

Why now? Why have the elect (us) learn about the hope of eternal life (for both now and always)?

Because it's time.

So today is Independence Day in America. Seeing as how the place where the Declaration of Independence was signed in 1776 is now a World Heritage Site, in a way, July 4th is a holiday for the entire world. It's the day when man declared his rights by standing up to a tyrant. King George wasn't the most evil tyrant in history; think Herod the Great, or Stalin, or Mao, or Hitler for that. But George III was a tyrant all the same, demanding that all people in his kingdom bow to him as the ultimate authority.

"Not so fast," was the collective reply of our American forbearers. If you've ever studied the people who wrote our Declaration, you'll find they are some of the most amazing political thinkers in all of human history. They were also some of the boldest, willingly committing mass treason in the name of natural law and natural rights given by God alone. It's amazing to think that so many people could come together at once and produce a simple statement that says "these are our rights" and defined western democracy for the rest of all time.

It happened because centuries of thought, and decades of experience and preparation culminated in a gathering one Philadelphia summer. Because God brought them all together. Because it was time.

Now is your time. Now is our time. Now is our time to not only celebrate this wonderful thing done by our ancestors. Now is also our time to thank God for them and what they did, and to realize that the rights they bequeathed to us enable us to live the lives we do here and now. God put Paul where He did to spread the Gospel for the first time. Jesus put His Spirit into Paul, and you, and me, and all of us to do the same, both here in America and world-wide. Thank God for the American founders on behalf of all citizens of our world. And thank God for Jesus.

Because it's time.

For further reading: Numbers 23:19, Luke 1:47, Romans 1:1, 1 Corinthians 1:1, 1 Timothy 2:4, 1 Timothy 1:10, 2 Timothy 2:2, Hebrews 6:18, James 1:1, Titus 1:3

Lord Jesus, You have me where You have me because it's time for me to do Your bidding. Empower me, educate me, and embolden me today to declare my independence from sin for the rest of my life.

Practical Proverbial, from Titus, 8 July 2019

To Titus, my true son in our common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior. Titus 1:4 (NIV).

As far as we know, Paul didn't have any children. Yet he refers to both Titus and Timothy as his sons. That's not uncommon. You and I, perhaps we've felt a familial affection for people to whom we aren't related yet have been caring, strong examples for us. I've had mentors in the Air Force, and at jobs, and in my church and family. How about you?

It's the common faith that puts us on common ground. The bottom line of that is, as always, Jesus Christ. It seems pretty impossible to think that God, the supreme being, could have created everything and then not consider Him to be the fundamental we all share in common. It simply defies logic.

And Paul was a logical man, using human experience and reason to appeal to a culture familiar with common experience and human reason. He lived in a world ruled by Romans but largely shaped by the faith of the Jews and the Hellenistic culture of Greece. The people of Paul's day were familiar with faith, both Jewish, this nascent Christianity, and a hundred other faith practices of pagans. They were familiar with the idea of God, even the common but radical idea that God would make Himself incarnate among us out of love, grace and peace.

That was a radical concept then; it's still radical today. It's still contrary to a world where the strong survive. Paul saw that real strength, however, came not from a sword or political power but, instead, from the grace of God. He would greet his fellow believers in the language of their shared faith, and he would then pray over them the grace and peace from God the Father and His Son, Christ Jesus.

Common ground from which Paul would mentor and teach. Paul's people needed the common ground of believing there was a God who loved them, who endured their pain, who identified with their plight, who provided a way out. The people of our time need that exact same reassurance. Over a billion people (out of 7 billion) currently hold that faith, share that common ground. That means a huge majority of our world either doesn't know or doesn't accept our common ground. It means that we have a shared mission from Christ. Share Him through how we live our lives. Give an answer when asked. More than that, give an answer by the things we do with and for others. If we want to invite others onto the common ground of faith in Jesus, let's do so by praying for them the grace and peace of Jesus by how we live today. Let's be mentors in the faith.

For further reading: Romans 1:7, 2 Corinthians 2:13, 1 Timothy 1:2, Titus 1:5

Lord Jesus, help me to share You in how I live today.

Practical Proverbial, from Titus, 9 July 2019

The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. Titus 1:5 (NIV).

The church is an orderly group, so that the work of our God may be advanced. Like it or not, we need order, we need structure through which to manage our lives. Very few people could simply say “I’m going to build a house today” and do it successfully without order, a plan, and help. Very few projects could be executed without planning to order the work, ensure it’s done correctly, and implement a solution that doesn’t interfere with other things already in place. Hardly anyone would wake up in the morning and decide “I’m going to get married today and have a 500 person reception” and then have it happen without a great deal of help (and money).

Jethro advised Moses to organize judges and leaders for minor tasks so that the major work of Israel could be accomplished. After shepherding the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses was beaten down with hearing all the disagreements and legal disputes that happen in a nation of a million former slaves. His father-in-law, Jethro, paid him a visit there in the desert of Sinai and advised Moses to appoint a structure of leaders who could handle lesser disputes. That way, only the most sensitive or pressing disputes would land in Moses’ lap for him to take to the Lord.

Delegation is a wonderful thing.

Paul recognized this. He trained Titus to be a leader in ‘the Way,’ and then appointed Titus as a bishop in Crete. This happened less than a generation after the resurrection of Jesus, meaning that the church has had formal structure since very early on. Indeed, even the twelve Apostles were a group of improbable leaders right from the start. But the important lesson is that the church works well when there is organization. That doesn’t mean every minute decision must be made collaboratively or by committee. But it works well when a senior leadership team delegates tasks to lesser groups or committees or leaders who can act. Titus was one such person. He was competent. Paul recognized it, so Paul commissioned Titus to lead and go forth. And that’s what happened.

Mind you, any group (but especially the church) must be mindful to delegate only to people equipped to act or lead. Most people hate working for control freaks. Whether it’s a small church task or building a new line of cars, people don’t like working for other people who get high on power. A good leader knows their limitations and will seek advice and help when they need it.

How will you lead today? How can you lead – and serve – where you are today?

For further reading: Exodus 18:1-26, Acts 27:7, 1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:6

Lord Jesus, empower me to serve and lead where You have me today. Thanks for Your help.

Practical Proverbial, from Titus, 10 July 2019

An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Titus 1:6 (NIV).

Our goal should be to want to serve the Lord with honor. Our conduct shouldn't detract or distract from His purpose, His work. Our lives as leaders in the church should be upright, and bring great credit on ourselves and the united church of Jesus Christ (that last phrase is actually very close to every Air Force medal citation I've ever read).

Good luck with that.

Years ago, I was asked to serve as an elder but I pointed out that my conduct (at the time) would preclude that; Paul would have agreed. Nobody has asked me since, and all glory to Jesus in all things, including humbling one's self to serve the Kingdom in unconventional ways.

How many of us are truly blameless? Many couples deal with infidelity, either physical or emotional. And where are today's families whose children are not a little wild and disobedient? When I left home, my faith drifted and I didn't attend a formal church for most of a decade. I believed in Jesus, but I wasn't sure about many things, or what faith really meant. I can say the same thing about all three of my kids. And, as a proud Dad, I'll brag that all three are coming out of that fog just as I did. All three have faith-journeys of their own with the Lord, both in and out of formal congregations.

They aren't blameless. They aren't angels. They aren't perfect. Neither am I. Neither are you.

Could you or I be an elder? Some people who read this blog are; some are pastors and evangelists; some are teachers; some serve in other ways. It isn't a clique or a club or some group where you get a secret handshake. It's a way to serve God's church in an orderly position. And the elders, pastors, evangelists, and teachers I know who serve the church are flawed human beings, people who make mistakes, sometimes cuss like sailors, and do things that bring discredit on the family of Jesus.

Got skin? Got sin. The cure for the common sin is Jesus.

Who then is 'fit' to serve? Certainly not the leaders in my church, or yours. Or me. Or maybe you. None of us but all of us. "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." Jesus said that.

I don't know if you're truly blameless, or if your kids are wild (or even if you have any). What I do know is that God can use your life in His work, maybe as an elder, but definitely in some good way.

For further reading: Matthew 19:26, 1 Corinthians 4:1, 1 Timothy 3:1, Titus 1:7

Lord Jesus, use me in Your service today. Forgive my sins, and help me repent to move forward from them to better serve You.

Practical Proverbial, from Titus, 11 July 2019

An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Titus 1:6-7 (NIV).

Paul tells us what our leaders (especially our church leaders) should be. Then he tells us about habits they should not have. It's a lesson we should enthusiastically, but carefully, heed.

We've been here before. Donald Trump, Bill Clinton, Barack Obama, Jim Bakker, Mel Gibson, John F. Kennedy, Jay-Z; name your celebrity or politician. I dare say most couldn't pass Paul's smell test to be an elder. Most people don't vote for politicians because they're saints. Most people don't listen to popular artists or movie stars because those people are paragons of virtue. We listen to those people, watch them, vote for them because we like them and what they say or do, or we agree with some of what they say and do.

Got skin? Got sin. Donald and Bill and Jim and the rest are me. They're you. Sinners and fallen.

Those who are our earthly leaders, celebrities, and such are fulfilling roles that God appointed for them as well. That doesn't mean we should excuse repugnant or bad behavior. It does, however, mean thinking about it in context of why – and who and where – they are.

In Titus 1, Paul is talking specifically about leaders in the church. You'd think that a faithful humanity would want our church leaders and civic leaders to have the same virtues. In reality, we do. Yet, in the church, we should hold our leaders to a Godly standard that isn't always germane for civil service. Especially in a time when so many are uber-sensitive to the (not in the Constitution) separation of church and state.

We shouldn't be jerks (but so many are). We shouldn't be wallowing substance abusers (but many are). We shouldn't be violent (but way too many are). We shouldn't pursue dishonest gain (but way too many use the church as their own springboard). There's a lot we, as leaders of the church of God, shouldn't do. But there's lots more we should do. Our leaders are, as front-line soldiers, representing the family of Jesus. We should be morally upright, publicly virtuous, and a good example for others to aspire to follow.

In other words, we should model Jesus. That's what Paul is telling us to do. It isn't any more complicated than that. Trump couldn't do it. Neither could Clinton or Obama or any of the others. Neither could you or me. But, then again, maybe all of us could. With the help of God, anything is possible. Maybe we could – and should – lead in His name.

For further reading: Matthew 19:26, 1 Corinthians 4:1, 1 Timothy 3:1, Titus 1:8

Lord and leader Jesus, help me to lead in Your way today.

Practical Proverbial, from Titus, 15 July 2019

Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. Titus 1:8-9 (NIV).

A bit more on elders and the kind of people they should be. Last time, we talked about how we should all lead in Jesus' name; how we should model Him in how we lead others, whether it's at work or in the church. Here, Paul (again) lists traits and behaviors that elders/leaders should have, specifically for fit service to the church.

But it's more than that. You know it is.

I'm struggling with Agile. I'm a project manager (or at least I used to be) and I have been trained over the years in the traditional business methods for managing project (specifically IT projects). To get something done, you plan it, you organize it, you staff it, you execute it, then you deliver it. Included in that are dozens of sub-concepts such as project plans, budgets, sponsor management, test development, test execution, planning for shut-down, and post-delivery evaluation just to name a few

Agile upends all that. Agile is a way of managing and thinking that streamlines delivery of things, specifically software. It cuts out much of the traditional process and focuses on what is most important at the moment to rapidly deliver what matters most. It uses new tools and quick solutions. And I'm struggling with that concept, that focus on rapid, sometimes incomplete, delivery over the more cautious approach of tradition.

In a way, Paul is advocating traditional "waterfall" staffing of the church, recommending that those who serve her must exhibit the traits of maturity and godliness so that God's message can be shepherded in a needy world. Impulsive, cut-to-the-chase approaches go only so far when sound doctrine is in the mix because sound doctrine always loves, always perseveres, always bows down at the feet of Jesus before anything else.

And yet the early practice of Christianity was agile. It DID cut to the chase, namely that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life and that nobody would come to God except through Him. The traditional ways of worship that went back even to Noah wouldn't justify a man to the Father. Only Jesus can do that. The message of redemption is for both the mature and the immature, the Jew and the gentile, the new and the old. Paul's decades-long journey in righteous Judaism was up-ended in a flash on that road to Damascus. And that's a great thing.

Do you struggle with that? Whole churches struggle with the idea of traditional approach over 'modern' agility. Where does God have you in how you react to that?

For further reading: Romans 12:13, 1 Corinthians 16:13, 1 Timothy 1:19, 2 Timothy 3:3, Titus 1:10

Lord Jesus, help me to see Your mission how we do it.

Practical Proverbial, from Titus, 16 July 2019

For there are many rebellious people, full of meaningless talk and deception, especially those of the circumcision group. Titus 1:10 (NIV).

History matters. It's pretty difficult to understand how Jesus fulfills everything about the Old Testament without understanding the history of the Old Testament and why things were the way they were. And it's pretty tough to understand what Paul means when he's talking about "meaningless talk and deception" and "the circumcision group" and how that affects one's belief as a follower of Jesus Christ.

What does having a man's foreskin sliced off have to do with believing in Jesus? It's everything and nothing. Circumcision was given – and directed – to mankind as a way for men to remember God's devotion to them. So that they would know God is with them in the most private, intimate of places in their lives, God commanded Abraham to circumcise everyone in his race. There were spiritual, medical, hygienic, and physical reasons for all this yet the message to man was still the same: (from God) I am yours and you're marked as mine. No matter what anyone does or says, God is ALWAYS present even in our proudest and most personal moments.

Sort of like now. In Romans, Paul talks about how a Christian's circumcision is of the heart, how God marks us from within. The old covenant has been replaced by a new one. God's Son Himself would cut away the sheath around our hearts and reside within. From now on, it would be God working from the heart – and the words and actions emanating from it – that would make new believers. There would still be those who insist on putting rules and boundaries around our faith, but those wouldn't be able to touch God where He truly lives. Or harm us there.

Because, then as now, the world is full of people who rebel against that, ridicule it, try to pull people away from it. Most of our world doesn't believe in Jesus Christ. Most of the world isn't circumcised 'downstairs' or inside. Six of seven billion people either don't care or don't know about the man from Galilee. And among those who do know Him, there is internal dissention, disagreement, discord, and disunion on just who He is and a host of other largely meaningless issues; don't this, don't that. Don't. Really. Matter.

Because He still is. He's still the Son of God. He's still a person in the Trinity. He's still the Way, the truth and the life, and the only path to God. Because He still circumcises those He marks as His own.

It would be difficult at best to understand these things without knowing why circumcision originally mattered. History matters because He still does.

For further reading: John 14:6, Romans 2:29, Acts 10:45, 1 Timothy 1:6, Titus 1:11

Lord God, thank You for the gift of circumcision, both its original meaning and Your circumcision of the heart.

Practical Proverbial, from Titus, 17 July 2019

They must be silenced, because they are disrupting whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach—and that for the sake of dishonest gain. Titus 1:11 (NIV).

Let's get this out there. I don't like censorship. As a matter of course, I don't like it when government, or authorities, or 'people in charge' try to shut down the free exercise of ideas. My wife will tell you: I enjoy debate, especially political debate. Too often, I debate to try to get the last word. I don't like it when someone tries to quench the debate using volume to drown out, or lies to change the topic, or (worst of all) making a topic off-limits while attempting to hammer you with it.

That isn't what Paul is talking about.

In this verse, Paul is reminding Titus that there are those in the church who are purposefully spreading false doctrine. He's saying to the new bishop that there are those under said bishop's spiritual umbrella who are telling parishoners that they must be circumcised to receive Christ, that they must do X or Y to be worthy of Jesus, that they must perform some kind of task to contribute to what Jesus did on the cross.

The churchy term for this is "works-righteousness", meaning you must work or do something to earn salvation or make yourself righteous. Paul's term for it might have been "lying."

It was a lie in Paul's day; it's a lie now. We do nothing to contribute to our salvation or to our being made righteous in the eyes of God. Everything possible, everything necessary, everything we could even think of doing was already done by God Almighty Himself in Jesus' self-sacrifice at Calvary. More importantly, He did it at Easter, when He opened the door to heaven for anyone who would believe by opening that garden tomb.

You don't have to be circumcised to believe in Jesus. You don't have to pray the rosary. You don't have to say the Lord's Prayer, or ten 'hail Mary's', or go along with the leadership team, or not question the pastor, or wear a suit and tie to church. The only thing you or I bring to Jesus is ourselves: our imperfect, sin-addled selves. We say "I believe" and learn that He made everything (even our saying "I believe") possible. We don't become Christian drones by doing this: we are adopted as His family. It's Him, not what we do.

And I don't like being told otherwise. I'm an intolerant work in progress, and I don't like being told I'm wrong if I'm not. I could use your prayers in learning to better deal with this; I'll offer you mine as well. We're both struggling against the lies of censorship.

For further reading: 1 Timothy 5:13, Titus 1:12

Practical Proverbial, from Titus, 18 July 2019

One of Crete's own prophets has said it: "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons." This saying is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the merely human commands of those who reject the truth. Titus 1:12-14 (NIV).

Paul's words seem harsh here, resorting to gossip and common canards. Yet before you or I go judge Paul, let's go back to that history. And context. Both are necessary to avoid the too-contemporary mistake of painting Paul with a broad brush.

First, consider Paul's task in Titus 1. He was protecting the church by refuting false doctrine. Paul wrote the letter to encourage Titus on what to teach the young church. Part of that includes identifying what was wrong about what was being said at the time. The purpose wasn't to hammer those misleading the church: the purpose was to steer even them back to the road of the straight and narrow.

He was also using irony, namely the irony of a popular aphorism from the area where Titus was ministering. Per John Gill's commentary, this is attributed to Epimenides (a poet) and Ovid (also a poet), both of Crete, who associated the ancients of Crete with falsehoods. It was they, not Paul, who associated Crete with dishonesty.

Last, Paul was being honest. He was being honest by talking frankly about the dishonesty of those who would mislead the church by demanding they do things according to Jewish traditions (like circumcision). Many of the converts into the new Christian following were former Jews. Christianity itself was seen as an offshoot sect of Judaism, and the roots of the Christian faith are wholly Jewish. It's understandable that some people would think that the traditional Jewish laws governing circumcision, sacrifices, festivals, and daily life would, then, apply to Christians.

It's also false. Those who would preach that from within the workings of the church must be silenced. Their falsehoods must not be allowed to take root or believers could be swayed away from following Jesus. It isn't that Jesus wasn't strong enough to overcome that. It's that people weren't. As we talked about yesterday, that same push happens today. The Catholic concept of paying a penance has its roots in the false idea of doing something to earn God's grace. The idea that churches must adhere strictly to a man-made church calendar is another manifestation of it.

If tradition glorifies God and helps people believe in Him, it can be a good thing. Yet the second it becomes about adhering to the tradition and not giving that glory, then the tradition is bankrupt. It was true in Paul's day; harsh or not, it's true now.

For further reading: Acts 2:11, Acts 17:28, Colossians 2:22, 1 Timothy 5:20, Titus 1:15

Lord Jesus, forgive those who misconstrue Your holy words. And help me today to only truthfully teach them to others through what I say and do.

Practical Proverbial, from Titus, 22 July 2019

To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good. Titus 1:15-16 (NIV).

Splash! There. There's a splash of cold water, thrown from the cell of a Roman prisoner two thousand years ago. Got your attention now?

Fact is that the fact is. Truth is truth. Over the weekend, a friend online called me out for being a terrible Christian. And the fact of that is that I don't know if she's right or wrong. My friend and I are political opposites and she's known for calling out those with whom she politically disagrees. I'm sure she's going through some tough times, too. And Facebook isn't a place for intimate friendship, not a good place for truly intimate conversation.

So she called me out on sin. I've posted so many things over the years that I don't know whether she's right or wrong. Specifically, she said (that I said) that homosexuals were sinful. To be frank, I may indeed have said that; I don't remember. But it's possible. Homosexuality is only one of the sins listed out in Scripture, specifically by Paul (and Moses and others). Yet in our world, it isn't acceptable to say that.

Splash, again. It isn't me that determines what is sinful. It's God, through the Word He gave us to guide our way to Him. It isn't PC to say what's sinful. If we lose sight of what is sinful and what isn't, we lose sight of what's right and what's wrong. You want to know things that are sinful? Open up your Bible and read.

And in doing so you're going to find the reason for Paul's bucket of cold water. His name is Jesus and He came to atone for those sins so that they might not control us, kill us, or divide us any longer. Jesus didn't tolerate sin: He opposed it, vanquished it. Yet if all we focus on is the sin, we miss Him. Sin is a destroyer. He came to save us and guide us in turning away from sins. To do that, we have to call out sin for what it is, then avoid entangling ourselves in it. If we tolerate sin in our own lives and don't turn from it, we're lying about our faith in Jesus because Jesus calls us to turn from sin and follow Him. To repent. To forgive. To love. To help others find their way to Jesus so they may know Him and do the same.

Maybe my friend was right. If she is, then I apologize. Yet, right or wrong, where are you in your turning today?

For further reading: Jeremiah 5:2, Hosea 8:2-3, 1 John 2:4, Titus 2:1

Lord, help me in following You and only You

Practical Proverbial, from Titus, 23 July 2019

To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good. Titus 1:15-16 (NIV).

Before moving on from these verses, we have to talk (again) about sin. Remember from last time how I said that a friend called me out for calling out a specific thing as sinful. And that sin is a destroyer. And, more important than these, that Jesus annihilated sin by confronting it and leading us from it.

Here is a partial list of my many sins: being unloving, lying, ungratefulness, adultery, blasphemy, theft, anger, hatred, intolerance, judgmentalism, lust, unkindness, unfaithfulness, coveting, dishonor, unrighteousness, vulgarity, immorality, envy, greed, disobedience, drunkenness, rebelliousness, sloth.

Need I go on? These are just a few that rattle off the top of my head. There are more. I regret them. I'm sorry I did them. I'm even more sorry I hurt others in doing them. If all I focused on was my sins, I couldn't function. Indeed, there would be no point in going on if the only thing worth living for was evil, more sin.

The thing about it is, when you're living in the middle it, those sins are all you want. They're a twisted poison that infects your heart and mind. They're a heroin rush. They're slavery disguised as freedom. You think they'll make you happy but you know deep inside that's really a lie. You say you believe in God but you never really do. You refuse to give yourself over to God, so hypocrisy simply becomes yet another sin you'll just live with. You don't like it; you don't even want it, except you do. Except they occupy your thoughts and become your focus.

Jesus rewires that thinking.

His focus is purity; His purity. He longs for you to have it. He looks into your heart and sees someone better. He looks at you and says to you, "let me take that from you." He sees those sins and asks you to give them over to Him, so that He can carry the guilt and the hurt and the shame and the impurity of them. He who is only that purity and has no sin takes your sins and takes them off you so that you don't have to deal with them anymore. He offers you true freedom.

And even after that happens, we make mistakes. Even after, we deal with the consequences of our actions in that past 'life.' Even then, He is with us, helping us to stand, helping us to keep our focus on Him. Helping us to apologize when we do wrong. And helping us to stay free by resisting the temptation to fall back.

For further reading: Titus 2:1

Pure, saving Jesus, thank You for saving me!

Practical Proverbial, from Titus, 24 July 2019

You, however, must teach what is appropriate to sound doctrine. Titus 2:1 (NIV).

If you think about it, this is the job of every teacher, every parent, every mentor. If you read the four Gospels closely, you'll find that Jesus is referred to as "rabbi" – meaning 'teacher' – more than any other title. Teachers are supposed to teach what is correct, what is good. They're supposed to teach sound things that will be needed or useful in life.

Yet we aren't Jesus so sometimes that gets off track. Sometimes, in the course of teaching, we teach other things, things that aren't necessary or useful. You know: like algebra. Just kidding: I'm sure algebra is useful but I don't specifically know how, at least not in actual mathematics. Good, well-meaning, intelligent people teach algebra and other un-useful things, and sometimes that runs contrary to what matters most.

Paul spends part of Titus, chapter one denouncing people who are teaching unsound doctrine, namely that there are things we must do to be acceptable to God; that there are things we have to do to earn our salvation. It was ecclesiastically and practically wrong in the early Church, and it's wrong still today. Doing things to please God so He will love us is contrary to His nature. He loves us because He's all love, because of His Son. Adding to that mocks Him.

That's especially important for we believers. It's especially difficult in our age of social media, divisive politics, and 24/7 global reach. Christians have been purified by the atoning death of Jesus; nothing more, nothing less. That's hot iron on a sinful wound to people who don't want to hear it. Those people set up rules around what you can and can't say, all to shut you down. And when we slip up and are human again? "WHY YOU DIRTY HYPOCRITE! I TOLD YOU THIS JESUS THING WAS A WASTE!"

Baby and the bathwater both on the way out. No walking the walk and talking the talk together.

The cure? The response? Go back to Jesus; sound teaching to sound doctrine. Love God with all your heart, then love our fellow man. Jesus loves you and forgives you all your sins. Come as you are to Him any time to receive His love so that you may be healed and reach others. The Ten Commandments are a mirror to point us to God. Sin is sin but love is more powerful. Jesus is God in the Trinity of Father, Son and Spirit. Those fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5? We get to live them out in a skeptical world to better walk and talk the sound teaching of sound doctrine of God's holy call. We're all teachers now.

For further reading: 1 Timothy 1:8-11, Titus 2:2

Rabbi Jesus, forgive me my sins and help me to change my sinful ways. Teach me to better love my fellow man, and to better share the gifts of Your love and Spirit.

Practical Proverbial, from Titus, 25 July 2019

Encourage older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, love, and patient endurance. Titus 2:2 (EHV).

Just the other night, I had a conversation with my uncle. He's 84 years old and in mixed health. I'll try to not puff him up too much since he reads this blog, but in my eyes, he's the kind of man the Apostle Paul was describing in verse 2. He's temperate (of attitude and disposition), worthy of respect (because he's worked hard to live an upright, Jesus-led life), he's self-controlled (which is amazing considering the volcanic temper of his father: another of my heroes), and sound in faith, love and endurance (all of which he has always modeled for those who know him and even those who don't).

When I get to be 84 (IF I live to be 84), it's my hope that someone will say those same things about me. But I doubt it. I'm not the man my uncle is, and that's ok. I'm my own man with my own experiences thanks to the life God has given me to live and the talents with which He's blessed me. Perhaps in my own way I've made a positive impression on other folks. It's my best hope that, if that has happened, they will turn around and do the same for someone else. That's how Jesus' Kingdom grows. It's a lesson I have learned, in part, from my uncle.

But no matter what someone thinks of him, me, or anyone else, Paul's standard is still solid gold. We want our older men to be men we can look up to. Both in the church and out of it, we want grandfathers and mentors who we can model, copy and honor. It's especially true in the church, where elders are supposed to be worthy of respect and the kind of people we want to be. Especially the elder men. But it matters in all walks of life. Just ask my son, who has been taken under the mentoring wing of a rough cowboy boss who's teaching him valuable work and life skills. It's a pleasure to see.

Perhaps that "patient" quality is the one that makes the most impression. Patience is the culmination of those other five attitudes. It's the demeanor and behavior that both identifies experience and implements reason. I think of the best leaders I've ever known, especially in churches, and, to a man, they've all been patient. There's a time and place for quick action, even impetuous action. But in most things, patience is preferred. Work well and work deliberately, then let's let things unwind as they will; as God wills them.

I'm thinking both my uncle and my son's mentor would agree. And it would make Jesus happy.

For further reading: 1 Timothy 5:1, Titus 2:2

Lord Jesus, thank You for living out here through good men. Help me to better model their behavior because I'm modeling You when I do that

Practical Proverbial, from Titus, 29 July 2019

Likewise, encourage older women to be reverent in their behavior, not slanderers, not enslaved to much wine, but teachers of what is good, so that they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, busy at home, kind, and submitting to their own husbands, that the word of God might not be slandered. Titus 2:3-5 (EHV).

Last time, Paul advised older men to exhibit certain qualities. Here he does the same thing for women.

Let's get this out there: male chauvinism. At first glance, Paul seems like a chauvinist. But when you read more of what he wrote and consider it in the context of his times AND in the audiences he was addressing, you find he isn't. You find that he's merely echoing the qualities of the kinds of people God wants us to be. Paul is no chauvinist.

I follow two Facebook pages that are full of funny memes: "Mommy Needs Vodka" and "Mommy Drinks Wine and Swears." They're snarky words to say about the conduct of older women. Perhaps in his experience he had encountered women who drank too much or gossiped too much or whatever. We don't really know.

The pages point out all kinds of funny situations where, you'd think, good women would be driven to drink (mainly because of the conduct of their husbands, kids, or things around them). It's all in fun, and shouldn't be taken seriously. But if you read such pages too closely, you'll pick up more than a subtle whiff of female chauvinism, bias in favor of a different view. In the end, perhaps the only thing you can walk away with (from such things) is a laugh, or maybe a tweak on your morality. They aren't really chauvinist.

Yet underneath this is the opposite message from Proverbs 31; a message with which Paul would be familiar. In those verses the author outlines the behaviors a wife of noble character would exhibit. Read them today; they're a beautiful passage in Scripture. And they comport exactly with Paul's words here in Titus.

Perhaps that means that they both describe the kind of people God wants His perfect creation, woman, to be.

Me, I love a woman who has a drink but tempers her behavior. I love my wife who lets her hair down without making herself (and me, in the process) undignified. I love that her character is strong, admirable, and that she's the kind of woman other women should want to be. She loves fun and being around friends and family and even likes a little wine, in moderation. That isn't God-displeasing. If saying that makes me a male chauvinist, so be it. I think not.

For further reading: Proverbs 31:10-31, Ephesians 5:22, 1 Timothy 3:11, Hebrews 4:12, Titus 2:6

Lord God, You give us examples and qualities of the kind of people You want us to be. Help us to do just that

Practical Proverbial, from Titus, 30 July 2019

Likewise, encourage younger men to be self-controlled. In all things show yourself to be an example of good works. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness, and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that the one who opposes us will be put to shame, because he has nothing bad to say about us. Titus 2:6-8 (EHV).

If you extrapolate “younger men” to mean “younger mankind,” then it’s easy to see how this applies to all younger men and women; I’m not sure that jives with the original Greek but let’s go with it because it makes sense here.

In all things, we (as both older people and society as a whole) want our younger people to be upright and moral. The younger generations reflect what they were taught. My generation can rail all we want on “well those millennials!” But if millennials (or whoever comes after them) aren’t taught things that matter, is all the blame on them? No. At least not according to the Apostle Paul.

Or God. God, through Paul (and others in the Bible), charges all of us who come before others to “show” and tell. To teach; to mentor; to pass on what we know; to inspire; to prepare the next generations to take over this world He gives to us. To treat those after us as younger siblings, sisters and brothers in Jesus. None of us lives here forever. It’s up to us to learn from those who came before us so that we may live well here, and then pass that on. We are both learner and teacher.

I always enjoyed school because it was an escape. Sometimes it was a challenge. But it was always a haven outside the reality of where I was. Yet I missed the point of school, which isn’t programming or propagandizing or any of what so many think it is today. Even in secular schools, the point of schooling was and is preparation to live in God’s world.

We can’t do that without integrity, seriousness, and sound speech (indicating sound thought in the heart). Those things matter to us because, to so many in the world, they won’t matter. So many people will oppose them, turn away from sound thinking in favor of emotion or unserious things. It’s happening all throughout our pop culture. If we want to turn that back – and help others know Jesus – then we should want our older men and women to be people of upright character. It’s their/our job to mentor the younger men and women to follow God, live in peace with each other, and make the most out of the lives God gives them. If younger people are to follow Jesus, we need to show them how.

For further reading: Ephesians 5:22, 1 Timothy 5:1-2, Hebrews 4:12, Titus 2:9.

Lord Jesus, inspire me to do my part to mentor younger brothers and sisters in Your ways

Practical Proverbial, from Titus, 31 July 2019

Encourage slaves to submit to their masters in everything, to be pleasing to them, not to be argumentative with them, not to steal from them, but to demonstrate their complete trustworthiness, so that they may show the teaching of God our Savior to be attractive in every way. Titus 2:9-10 (EHV).

It's about submission, not slavery.

Slavery is an off-limits topic in our politically-correct culture. We aren't allowed to acknowledge that slavery happened except in terms of denouncing it in the most vociferous tone. No doubt: slavery is an abomination and a wrong. No doubt, too, that more people than just Americans were or held slaves throughout human history. Indeed, it's occurring, still, today, on every continent except, perhaps, Antarctica.

How does Paul advise us to deal with slavery? Encourage slaves to be submissive. WHAT? Yep. Encourage those suffering through the degrading misery of human bondage to submit to their masters as a reflection of submitting to God. Demonstrate patience and endurance. Demonstrate honesty and trustworthiness. Demonstrate these qualities that slaveowners, through their very role, are lacking. Do so as a way that the slave owners and others may see Jesus through us, through the example of trust in Him. As Jesus said, "let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

Right on, right on.

God didn't make slavery, but He allows it to occur so that people may learn to depend on Him. God didn't make cruelty but He allows it so that others may learn love for Him instead. God didn't invent political-correctness but He allows this modern slavery to ideology so that we might see He's so much bigger than our nonsense. We get to see that by first submitting to Him.

It isn't PC to talk about positive things that resulted from slavery. Historically speaking, after emancipation, the black community in America was the most cohesive, familial, dignified and faith-based community across all demographics up until the advent of the 1960s Great Society. Even under the oppression of Jim Crow, former slaves rose to overcome that oppression with dignity and honor; if only those oppressing would have done the same. Perhaps God's message (through Paul) to us today is to endure the unendurable with that same dignity and honor. He encourages us to submit to Christ by submitting to those who would put us in bonds in a thousand different ways. This so that, to God may be the glory.

For further reading: Matthew 5:16, Luke 1:47, Ephesians 6:5, Titus 2:11.

Lord God, to You be the glory in all things, even the worst that humanity can conceive. Remind me always to submit to You in all ways.

Practical Proverbial, from Titus, 1 August 2019

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people. Titus 2:11 (EHV).

Consider why this verse says what it does, where it does. We've already read verses 1-10 of Titus 2. You'll remember that they talked about sound doctrine and sound, upright behaviors of those who teach that doctrine; that they talked about encouraging people, especially believers, to exhibit these upright behaviors so that God may be glorified.

Why? Because His grace has appeared and it brings saving to everyone. EVERYONE.

Jews? Saved. Muslims? Saved. Liberal Democrats? Saved. Buddhists? Saved. Conservative Republicans? Saved. Donald Trump and Barack Obama? Saved. You? Saved. Everyone.

God gave His undeserved gift of salvation to everyone who would accept it. Not accepting it doesn't negate that He gave it. Rejecting it doesn't mean it's wrong. It's available even to those who reject it and Him. All they have to do is submit, to believe.

The most amazing words in this verse are "appeared" and "bringing." They denote God having taken it upon Himself to come to us in an amazing way. He wasn't just born: He appeared. He came on the scene, fulfilling hundreds of prophecies and ancient predictions. The mathematical odds of it happening are staggeringly impossible, but He did it; 10^{157} or 1 in 10 with 157 zeros behind it (see <https://www.empower.global/the-mathematical-probability-that-jesus-is-the-christ/>). God found a way to come to us as His Son, Jesus, in a way that would make Him the central figure in all of human history but without being a tyrant. He who could be all the CGI spectacle that Hollywood could ever imagine appeared as a humble servant boy who grew into a humble servant teacher.

And when He appeared, He brought salvation with Him. He saw in us a terminal fault. We were sin-soaked. We couldn't save ourselves on our own. A thousand years of instructions to the Jewish people on how much they needed God couldn't save them from their own sins. Billions of people lived before Jesus and billions have lived since and not one of them could save themselves from the desolation of living without His hope. But He could. He could do what was necessary to make it possible for people to live in peace with Him forever. He alone could vanquish death; He alone could redefine life.

Jesus didn't have to do it but he appeared to bring salvation. He who powerfully but plainly spoke everything into existence didn't have to appear and bring salvation, but He did it anyway. Out of love. Because of love. Because of His perfection and His merciful nature, He chose to give us a gift that could never be deserved, never earned, never repaid. He didn't ask for repayment. He only asked for our love. When you consider that this verse came on the heels of others about behavior and submission, perhaps that's the most grace-filled miracle of all.

For further reading: Romans 3:24, 2 Timothy 1:10, Titus 2:12.

Savior from eternity, thank You.

Practical Proverbial, from Titus, 5 August 2019

It trains us to reject ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope, that is, the glorious appearance of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. Titus 2:12-13 (EHV).

It happened again. More shootings, more murder, more violence done on innocents. The media assesses blame; politicians pander for cheap points; people take sides yet again. Average folks simply living their lives are gunned down and nothing seems to change. It happens every day in our cities, yet when a mass shooting occurs, it shocks us. We send our thoughts and prayers but some scoff at those, mocking them, mocking us; mocking this Jesus we follow.

God's word is for our use, not for us to build walls around ourselves or our houses of worship. God's word, specifically the saving grace He describes through it, is an active tool that trains us to repent and re-shape our lives. To reach those who don't know or are hurting. God's word, ALL of it, is the one thing that can consistently teach us how to live together in peace.

So, if we can live in peace through God's word, how is it that, over the weekend, those mass murders happen, one here in Texas and another in Ohio? God gives us this wonderful tool and yet evil seems to prevail, people still choose evil over peace. Christian cliques or no, these things still keep happening.

I wonder if the shooters ever considered the words here in Titus. Jesus called Paul, and later Paul taught Titus. I wonder if someone ever exposed them to the lessons Paul taught about how clinging closer to Jesus wards off the temptation to submit to evil. While we wait for the blessed hope and return of Jesus our Savior, we have to live with each other here on the Third Rock. Perhaps Paul would agree that the only way we can do that is by keeping our eyes focused on Jesus, our hearts cleaving to Him. By constantly going back to the cross to remember what He did for us on it. Especially when scoffers ridicule believers by saying this Jesus is absent.

Especially after this weekend, we need that invisible Christ who reaches out through us to comfort our sisters and brothers and resist the urge to respond with more evil. In the aftermath of murder, now isn't the time to focus on the slander, or to stick to our cliques. To paraphrase my friend, Chad Bird, now is the time to see how violence done to innocents is atoned to peace through the innocent man on the cross who had unspeakable violence done to Him.

For further reading: 1 Corinthians 1:7, 2 Timothy 3:12, 2 Peter 1:1, Titus 2:14

Practical Proverbial, from Titus, 6 August 2019

He gave himself for us, to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people who are his own chosen people, eager to do good works. Titus 2:14 (EHV).

Another thought on how Jesus overcomes evil. You may be overwhelmed with coverage about El Paso and Dayton already. It's wall to wall on the news; it's only a couple of days since these mass murders happened, so they aren't done yet.

Knowing that, consider this: Jesus redeemed us from ALL lawlessness. The lunatic in the WalMart with the gun? Jesus redeemed him. The dozens of people he shot and the twenty-plus he slaughtered? Jesus redeemed all of them; indeed, He's already welcomed some to heaven. The leftist devil worshipper who shot even more in Ohio? Jesus redeemed him. Ditto all of his victims. Trump, Obama, David Muir, Markos Moulitsas, Alex Jones? All redeemed by Jesus. All of them; all of us.

The unwise scoffers who say thoughts and prayers are useless; the preacher who preaches they aren't; the politicians, news anchors, back-to-school shoppers, mechanics in the garage, Bedouins in the desert, city-dwellers in Kuala Lumpur, cancer patients in the ward and the doctors and nurses who treat them; my tender grandchildren: all of them – all of us – were purchased back from the violence and unbearable sin that killed murdered so many people. Jesus gave Himself, then He gave His Spirit so we could live our lives through Him in this world. What once sin-filled He re-made to be spotless, made righteous. Before Him, we couldn't stand in front of God and live. After Him, we can't help but not stand there because with Him is our natural home.

All because Jesus overcame evil. The evil that slayed those innocents in Ohio and Texas was the same evil that slayed the Savior. For a few moments, evil triumphed, thought it had defeated the ultimate redeemer. And then the stone rolled back. And then reality sank in. And then the light overcame the darkness to purify a new people, chosen by Him to be His treasured possession, to do His good works. Jesus had given Himself as a ransom for many. Where Satan must have laughed in nervous delight, he now would cower in abject fear. And it's still so true today. Lawlessness can dominate a moment but, in every ending, Jesus will always rule each day. It has been this way for centuries.

And it's true even now. The grieving will bury their dead. The politicians and the bloodsuckers will jockey for position. The rest of us will move on. Yet maybe we can get to move on by remembering that the same Jesus who vanquished Satan in that garden tomb is the same one touching our hearts each day. Maybe this time we'll remember it longer.

For further reading: Exodus 19:5, Deuteronomy 4:20, Psalm 135:4, Proverbs 16:7, Matthew 20:28, Hebrews 1:3, 1 John 1:7, Titus 2:15.

Come give us Your comfort, Lord Jesus

Practical Proverbial, from Titus, 7 August 2019

Keep telling people these things. Continue to encourage and rebuke with full authority. Let no one ignore you. Titus 2:15 (EHV).

Finally, a summary. After Paul has spent the chapter giving instructions on what must be taught to various people, he wraps it up with a brief commission. “Keep on keepin on, Titus. Don’t let anyone stop you.” Remember what you’ve been taught.

Right on, right on.

Especially today. I work in an industry where there is an unwritten code that you may not openly talk about Christian faith, conservative politics, current events outside a given viewpoint, non-supportive gay rights, or even, in some places, an out-of-town sports franchise. Seriously. If you want to survive in this well-paying industry, those are simply the rules of the road.

I wonder what Paul would say about that. Given Titus 2:15, he might be upset. Yet given something he said in 1 Corinthians 9, perhaps he wouldn’t. Perhaps he would tell Titus to keep telling people these things yet doing so in a way to relate to them in their own manner. Paul said he would become all things to all people to do whatever he had to do to win some people for Jesus.

That’s important to remember here. Keep preaching but relate. Paul is telling Titus to stand fast and stick to the truth. Stand with Jesus: anything else, you can let it go. Yet do so in a humbler, serving way to meet their needs, relating to peoples’ circumstances. Some need encouragement, some need rebuke. God put these things on Titus’ heart (and Paul’s) to use them for the greater good of God’s Kingdom.

“Keep on keepin, on, Titus.” Remember what you learned. Stand and speak. Minister in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Help folks. Inspire justice and wisdom. Do what you need to do to be heard...by them. By the people Jesus puts in your path. In ways they can understand. In matters they need to hear.

And the people of 1st century Crete needed to hear that Jesus had overcome evil for them. That He lived, died, and lives again so that they, too, might do the same. Theirs was a brutal world of short lives lived in hardscrabble poverty and oppression. The people of Crete needed hope and a leader to impart it. They needed Jesus.

So do we. So do all the people wandering in darkness after the terrible things that happened last weekend. So do all the hurting people who reject Jesus and the prayers to Him as too little, too late. So do our coworkers. So do I. So do you. There is a time and place for words, and every time and every place is the right one for living out this faith the Savior put into our hands. Keep on keepin on with it.

For further reading: 1 Corinthians 9:22, Titus 3:1

Risen Lord, help me today to keep on acting, speaking, and living for You, for others in this world

Practical Proverbial, from Titus, 8 August 2019

Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready to do any good work, to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, to be gentle, and to display every courtesy toward all people. Titus 3:1-2 (EHV).

Early on in church history, Paul and Peter clashed. The former once called out the latter, at Antioch, for hypocrisy. This resulted in a temporary schism between believers who sided with Peter – for adhering to some Jewish customs – and believers who sided with Paul – for determining that Jewish customs no longer applied. The matter was eventually settled by a council in Jerusalem, with the eventual outcome being the recognition that the new covenant through Christ completes the old Jewish covenant and its laws.

Even Peter and Paul had to submit to rulers and authorities, and they founded the temporal Christian church.

A few years after this, they submitted to earthly authorities by facing execution by the Romans. Tradition has it that Peter was executed by crucifixion around the time of the great fire of Rome. Around the same time, Paul was also executed by beheading. Both of them willingly went to their deaths, Peter even ASKING for the more severe penalty of being crucified upside down. THAT is the ultimate submission to authorities.

Yet while submitting, neither Peter nor Paul gave in to the authorities. Their lives might have been spared if they had simply recanted of their faith in Jesus, yet they didn't. Read the news today and you'll find that there are Christians in places like Iran, Indonesia, North Korea, and China who are persecuted or killed for preaching Christ crucified. Recant and we may let you live. Hold on to this Jesus and you're dead.

The response of Peter and Paul and the others: "so be it. Come Lord Jesus, quickly."

In a world where this kind of thing was commonplace, Paul's direction to Titus was "submit with honor." Don't give up what you believe, and practice all the behaviors recommended of one who believes in Jesus, yet submit to the authorities over you. It's good practical advice to us today because, to be honest, the same thing still happens. We don't have much control over our lives because, to be honest again, God allows authorities over us to have control over much of what we do.

What we do have control over is our choices, our thoughts, our actions. No authority can MAKE us think something or say something. And where behavior and actions can be compelled, the responsibility of doing something that we are forced to do rests with the one compelling, not the one compelled. God knows this; God respects this. What He asks us to do is to submit to the rulers and authorities that He allows here and trust that He will work all things for the good of His Kingdom.

For further reading: Romans 13:1, Galatians 2:11-14; Ephesians 4:31, 1 Peter 2:13-14, Titus 3:3

Help me to submit, Lord

Practical Proverbial, from Titus, 12 August 2019

For at one time we ourselves were also foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved by many kinds of evil desires and pleasures, living in malice and jealousy, being hated and hating one another. Titus 3:3 (EHV).

Been there, done that. You know that aphorism; chances are you've said it. You're experienced; you've lived; you've been around the block. In the Queen's English, you're trustworthy because you can identify with the circumstances we each encounter.

If you say you aren't sinful, you're fooling yourself. But don't leave yourself hanging out there, on a limb and out of hope. Every one of us is sinful; we all suffer from that same malady. It need not define you. You've been there, done that. Let's not leave it there.

The Apostle Paul, perhaps the greatest missionary ever, could identify with his friends and fellow followers of 'The Way.' He had been foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved by evil, living in malice, jealous, and both hated and hating. He knew that everyone who would (initially) read his letter there in the first century was just like him. He understood their sins; he understood they were sinful. He didn't say these things to guilt them; neither do I. It's simply a fact. It's simply one side of who they (and we) were.

Let's not leave it at that. Paul had been there, done that; so had his friends. You and I have too. So has Pope Francis (or Benedict XVI, wherever he is). So was Billy Graham, and your sainted grandmother, my best friend, and that newborn baby who's crying to be held. It's ingrained into our psyches, part of who we are when we are born, and until we accept Christ's Holy Spirit into us, it's who we are, even when we try to do good. When we're 'there,' doing 'that,' 'that' is sin. Yet when we embrace Jesus, EVERYTHING changes.

Holy Spirit redefines us, eliminates the hold sin has on us, eliminates the consequences of death that sin places on us. He removes it and washes us clean from what tarnished us before. Where 'been there, done that' had once been our mission statement, it now becomes common ground on which we can reach out to others so that they, too, might receive Jesus' Spirit and all the good He gives. It's our pedigree to serve in amazement the God who makes everything new.

Just one verse ago, Paul reminded his friends to be subject to authorities so that others might follow God, too. Here, in verse 3, he reminds us why we should. Even the authorities have been there, done that. Even they need Christ like we do. So, today, when you're at work and overwhelmed, or when you're dealing with your kids and you're frustrated, or you're alone and lonely, remember that we've all been there and done that. Jesus makes it all new.

For further reading: Ephesians 4:31, Titus 3:4

Lord, forgive my sins and wash me clean

Practical Proverbial, from Titus, 13 August 2019

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. Titus 3:4-5 (EHV).

So we've been sinful and Jesus gave Himself for us despite that. Have you ever really noodled that thought? Would you die for Jeffrey Epstein? Or Charles Manson? Would you die for the bully who targeted you for a year in third grade? Or your ex? Would you die for the Nazi concentration camp guards who willfully, willingly sent people to their deaths (or pulled the trigger themselves)?

Jesus did it without hesitation. In fact, he did it willingly, out of the most extreme love and devotion we could think of.

Not to make light of it, but you may be thinking "I get it. Jesus. Gotcha. I'm not Jesus." No, you aren't. None of us are.

Represent Jesus anyway.

It's mind-blowing how the New Testament is replete with proofs like Paul's of how Jesus died for us. It's also replete with statements from Jesus about the power of faith. Think of what He said about tiny faith (the size of a seed), or power over nature (as in how He commanded the fig tree), or Him commanding the waves when the Disciples were terrified, or moving mountains. He wasn't speaking in purposefully hyperbolic statements even though they were powerful and dramatic. Have you considered that He may have simply been stating a fact?

We who were once undeniably sinful can have the same abilities of faith that Jesus does? Yes. And yes again. And yes. ANYTHING we ask for in true faith in Jesus can be done.

So, I'll ask you again: those despicable people I mentioned: would you die for them?

Your response: "NOT FAIR! So I'm saying that, yet because I feel even a smidgeon of resentment or anything other than pure love, I'm disqualified? I'm not good enough?" Yes and no. Yes, you're not good enough on your own, and, no, you can't do anything to make it right. Because Jesus already did. You and I don't have to do anything to add to or complete that. He already did everything. Yet if we hold on to things of the past – including resentment or the conscious vestiges of forgiven sin- then can we truly expect to think we're acting like Jesus? He never did those things.

When Peter remembered he was walking on water, he started to sink. So it is with us. Yet in His mercy, Jesus made that walk possible. He does for us as well. Should we be willing to die for those who are detestable? You know the answer. Represent Jesus anyway.

For further reading: Matthew 17:20, Matthew 21:21, Mark 4:35-41, Mark 11:22-24, Acts 22:16, Romans 11:14, Ephesians 2:9, 1 Peter 1:3, Titus 3:6

Lord, forgive me and help me to let it go. Then help me to do Your will.

Practical Proverbial, from Titus, 14 July 2019

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. Titus 3:4-6 (EHV).

Let's expand on that idea of "represent" Jesus anyway by adding a sentence. The kindness of God and the best of His Spirit He gives to us, pours out on us, through Jesus. Mind-blowing thought.

Perhaps these verses are yet another exposition of the three-in-one Godhead. You won't find "trinity" anywhere in the Bible, but in verses like these, you'll find mention of God, His Spirit, and His Son Jesus. They are all one and the same and He is in all Them. God the Father sent the Son to save humanity. God the Father and Son renewed us through His/Their Spirit, who was given through Jesus the Son, who sent Him (Holy Spirit). When you see One, you're seeing the others. Pray to One and They all hear. Hear from One and They each said it even if One speaks separately. Confusing? Perhaps. But if you simply take it at face value, then it makes sense, because it's our God of loving mystery.

Part of the reason it makes sense is because He gave us things with which to remember Him. Baptism, communion, worship, festivals and holidays: He doesn't need those things but knew we would. God's Spirit came to us to renew us. "But I don't feel like I need to be renewed," you might say. Oh yeah? Ever feel tired? Ever feel anxious? Ever get depressed, or overwhelmed, or nervous, or just plain upset? Ever felt like that but didn't really know why? If you've felt those things, you need to be renewed.

When you sense that – and when you don't – you need to have Him pour Himself out over us. I think of it like standing under a waterfall. Or maybe in a rainfall...or a thunderstorm. Sometimes I need the gentle spring rain; other times the summer downpour. Yet however I need Him, even when I don't know how I need Him, He's there, pouring His grace down on me like rain. Like cleansing, purifying, feeding, nurturing, forgiving rain. Like a stream of living water to freshen and renew. Like an ocean full of life, power, and adventure. Like a cleansing hot shower, coursing down over me, washing me clean again. He feels like pure water, poured gently from a crystal pitcher into a clean glass. Poured out. He empties Himself to fill up others.

For further reading: Matthew 17:20, Matthew 21:21, Mark 4:35-41, Mark 11:22-24, Acts 22:16, Romans 5:5, Romans 11:14, Ephesians 2:9, 1 Peter 1:3, Titus 3:7

Savior God in three and one, I praise You for being You. For all You give to me; for pouring Yourself out on us all

Practical Proverbial, from Titus, 15 August 2019

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. Titus 3:4-7 (EHV).

Let's add one last sentence because this is the why. If the five 'why's' are who, what, where, when, and why, then verses four through six (from "But" through the second mention of "Savior") are who, what, where and when, and verse 7 is the why.

We're justified by Jesus' grace so that we might become heirs with the hope of eternal life. He sprinted to the cross to die, and then to rise from death, for us. Because He loved us. Because He saw the complete depravity of sin and knew it couldn't be tolerated. Because He understood that sin had compromised us, that we'd let that happen, and that we couldn't do anything about it. Jesus opened eternal life because of His love for sinful you and me.

To do that, He made us just. He made us righteous, clean again. God demanded an atonement for how our sins had violated holiness. Jesus, God-Himself, said "there's only one way to truly make them righteous again" and so He did it. The choices we made – sins – voided our righteousness. We couldn't be in the presence of holiness again without being destroyed by the loving, beautiful perfection of Him. So Jesus made Himself the atonement for our sins and, in doing so, transferred righteousness to us. We didn't deserve it; we couldn't do it. But He did it anyway. He loved us to provide for us as the Father. He loved us to die for us as the Son. He loved us to live through us as the Spirit. Three in One through this miracle called "resurrection," God did this thing to make us justified in His presence.

Because of His mercy. His justice, His love, His patience, His kindness: He wanted to share them, to give them, to pass them around. He wanted to give us things to live for more than just existence or achievement or property. God wanted our lives to have meaning and His meaning was the only one that matters. So, in His righteousness-making mercy, He made us heirs in His promise of eternal life. Of eternity now and later. Of being part of the spiritual world today. Of sharing His supernaturalness now, and always. Because of His mercy.

That's why.

For further reading: Matthew 17:20, Matthew 21:21, Mark 4:35-41, Mark 11:22-24, Acts 22:16, Romans 3:24, Romans 5:5, Romans 11:14, Ephesians 2:9, 1 Peter 1:3, Titus 3:8

Thank You, God, for Your love, Your righteousness, Your mercy, Your hope. Help me to share them today!

Practical Proverbial, from Titus, 26 August 2019

This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone. Titus 3:8 (EHV).

Awhile back I wrote about my uncle (in the context of Titus 2:2); how he is an older man worthy of respect and honor. Today I'm writing about how he's dying with dignity and strength. Those things are possible for him because, decades ago, he decided to follow Jesus and live his life in a way that was devoted to Him, to what is good. My uncle is in hospice today, and it won't be long before he leaves this place, and is young again in heaven.

I'm watching from far away while this happens, knowing that he listened to the Apostle Paul countless times in his life. That good words like Paul's, here, prepared him for this time when he is readying to meet Jesus face to face. It was trustworthy for Paul to say that it was honorable, excellent, and able to bear much good fruit for those who follow Jesus to devote themselves to doing what is right, what is decent, what is honorable.

My uncle has lived his life doing those things, and when he dies, we'll gather around his funeral to remember how a man we loved taught us so many good things about how to follow Christ. Buzz didn't earn a trip to heaven; none of us do. But Jesus earned it for him, made it possible for him to leave behind the cancer and debilitation and loneliness that sometimes plagues us here on the Third Rock. When the door opens, he'll walk through and be renewed and be in the presence of He who made it possible.

THAT is the point of Paul's words to Titus today. THAT is the point of my uncle following Jesus throughout his life. The things that are excellent and profitable in this life are from Jesus and because of Jesus and in Jesus. We aren't talking A+ on-your-report-card excellent, or Bill & Ted adventure excellent: we're talking perfection. And we aren't talking about your-best-life-now financial profitable, or YUGE 401K profitable: we're talking about souls standing in eternal praise of God. Here in this world, living lives in thankful praise of Him can earn we followers respect and honor, yet it isn't for this world that people live such lives. It's to praise Jesus. It is for being part of forever even now...and then after.

My uncle, Buzz Kornmann, understands all this. I hope he isn't too embarrassed by my saying it here. Say a prayer for him, please, and for his family. And please make it a prayer of happiness and thanks: like he would.

For further reading: 1 Timothy 1:15, Titus 3:9

Lord Jesus, thank You for good men in our lives who lived to teach us to follow You

Practical Proverbial, from Titus, 27 August 2019

But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, rivalries, and quarrels about the law, because these are useless and fruitless. Reject a divisive person after a first and second warning, because you know that such a man is twisted and is sinning. He condemns himself. Titus 3:9-11 (EHV).

This is ground we've covered before, in 2 Timothy 3, 1 Timothy 6, 2 Thessalonians 3, and 1 Thessalonians 5. From those books, you'll recall that Paul advised Timothy and the Thessalonian Christians to avoid things that are not of God and people who aren't living in Godly ways. It's still true for us today; we all know this. If we want to truly repent and change (or let Christ change) our lives, then we have to get clean, get spiritually (maybe even physically) healthy. That includes staying away from negativity.

So let me ask this question: is it loving to walk away from a sinful person knowing we're all sinful? Most of us see online memes about deleting negative people from our lives. Psychologically speaking, it's good advice, even critical (especially if the person is controlling, manipulative or emotionally or verbally abusive). Yet what if you're married to that person? Or what if it's you? What if you have no control over who you work with or what others say? How much hypocrisy is there in knowing we think, say and do things offensive to God yet calling out others who do the same and then expunging them from our lives?

If it were only that easy.

Truth is that, yes, again, this is still true and it's still good advice. Sinful or even negative people draw us back into things Jesus forgave and forgot. It's impossible to remain healthy if we continue unhealthy practices. Sometimes, yes, that will mean that we have to avoid some people and their sins. We can't – and shouldn't try to – fix some people.

So the first thing to do is to pray for them. In praying for them, ask Christ to help you know and say and do the things He would have you think, say and do. Ask for the fortitude to lovingly talk with someone whose conduct can threaten your well-being. Do so out of an attitude of caring for them...and that can be tough. Do it anyway. And, if after two (or so) times, if they won't change, then walk away. Continue to pray for them; be kind; be strong in your faith and actions. Let go to let God. Let Him do the work of changing the situation, of healing all hearts. Surrender your care for the person to Christ because, in doing so, He will show you real care for them even as you're lovingly walking away.

For further reading: Matthew 18:15-18, 1 Thessalonians 5:14-15, 2 Thessalonians 3:6-14, 1 Timothy 6:3-5, 2 Timothy 3:1-9, Titus 3:12

Lord, teach me to love and nurture others even when I must walk away from them

Practical Proverbial, from Titus, 28 August 2019

When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. Do your best to speed Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way; see that they lack nothing. And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful. Titus 3:12-14 (EHV).

Let's look at these verses in the light of David and Goliath. This isn't a Dave-original thought; I'm passing along a lesson from Chad Bird, who posted it today at 1517.org. We are taught to look at the account of David vs Goliath as man facing a giant. As a tale of overcoming. As a story of Israel whipping its greatest enemy. And that's all true.

And that's all a really gross sleight of hand that we make to rob God of the glory He deserves in it. It wasn't David who killed Goliath: it was Jesus. It was Jesus putting Himself there, strengthening the little boy with the out-sized confidence. David's faith in God was absolute, so God put Himself in David's place and facilitated the work, allowed the conquest, powered the stone to kill the nine-foot ogre who defied God's chosen people.

As kids, we're taught to think of the story with David as the focus, but that isn't the focus at all. If we want to look at the lesson honestly, we can only look at it through the lens of Jesus as another lesson of deliverance, of God actively interceding in the sin-torn lives of His people to deliver them from themselves. You know: the way Jesus did.

Ok, and that has what to do with Paul bidding Titus to send people for help, and then to exhort the believers to do good works? Zero in on that word "do." That little word is the one that wraps us around the axle. Paul does need help, so he does send messengers to Titus, then asked Titus to do something. He then asked Titus to "do your best," to see that Zenas and Apollos "lack nothing." With more 'doing,' Paul exhorts Titus to do more, to urge the followers to do good works, to do help, to do things that are fruitful for the Kingdom. All great advice. All great ideas. All great things.

All wrong.

Jesus said that He is the vine and we are His branches, that apart from Him we could do nothing. Nothing. He meant it. He's at the center of every thought and deed we can have. Breathing? Not without Jesus. Today's scrum goals? Only through Jesus. Drop the kids at school, microwave the meal, change the oil, watch "Stranger Things," sleep peacefully, vanquish Goliath? All only through Jesus living in and through us.

Check out 1517.org for more unconventional wisdom on the Scriptures.

For further reading: John 15:5, Titus 3:15

Lord Jesus, turn my understanding upside-down today. YOU are my center.

Practical Proverbial, from Titus, 29 August 2019

Everyone with me sends you greetings. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all. Amen. Titus 3:15 (EHV).

After well-intentioned exhortations for Titus to 'do good', Paul concludes his short letter to the bishop of Crete. But let's not rag on Paul too much. He meant well, and he actually was passing on good advice. In the moment – and if you take the previous verses out of context – it's easy to see that we can lose focus on Jesus without much effort. We ARE to do good works; Paul was right to encourage Titus to do them; it was proper. But it was only proper if it was a way to let go and let God work through 'doing.' We should give Paul the benefit of the doubt because he was doing the only thing he could in the letter: send a written Casey Kasem long-distance-dedication to his friend that his friend might be encouraged.

Most of my friends here in Texas are Christians. In fact, most of the people I know in North Texas I know because we have gone to church with them. Sure, a few are neighbors, co-workers, and acquaintances I know through my wife. But most are fellow church-goers. My wife and I are tight with four or five other couples who we call "our Peeps" because, well, we're each others' people. While I can't picture any of us saying the exact words "greet those who love us in the faith," I can picture any of us saying something similar (usually while holding a glass of wine).

And while "grace be with you all" isn't something I would picture any of us saying in conversation, the meaning is there. We wish each other well because we're friends, because we're brothers and sisters in faith, and because we love each other. Indeed, hoping God's grace into each others' lives is one of the reasons we get together. We thrive on sharing God's grace through fellowship (and that wine).

These days, I could cry about most anything, but that's a blessing that comes with having your heart broken and people around you who care to share God's grace with you after. Years ago, whenever we'd leave my in-laws', there would always be tears. I wasn't comfortable with that back then, but things change. I've shared plenty of tears with our peeps, and my in-laws, and over the rest of our lives, I'm sure more will come. But those, too, are that blessing, even when we all cry ugly. Tears are a way of saying "God's grace with you is important enough for me to cry for you."

I imagine Paul might have shed a few tears when signing off from Titus. Or leaving at all. That's quite the dedication, and the Peeps might agree. Maybe Casey Kasem, too. It's a good place to let it be.

God's grace be with you. See you next time.

For further reading: Philemon 1