

“The Reign and Advance of the Gospel”
“Instruments of Advance”
Titus 3:9-15
July 29, 2012

Intro: “However beautiful the strategy, you should occasionally look at the results.” – Winston Churchill These are the words of a great political leader. No I’m not talking about Barack Obama or Mitt Romney. I thought I would tip my hat to the U.K. in light of the Olympics this week, but these are not the words of current or former prime ministers David Cameron or Gordon Brown. These words come from one of Britain’s greatest and most quotable leaders, Sir Winston Churchill. “However beautiful the strategy, you should occasionally look at the results. Any school teacher, business leader, or little league baseball player understands that results matter. The church should be no different. --- Greedy for God and the works of God... But how??

The Point: Allow the gospel to reign in you that it might advance through you.

I. Protect the reign of the gospel through purifying the church (3:9-11).

Verses 9-11

The Gospel should reign in our lives

- We have one final warning against the evil and divisive nature of false teaching, and the first word of verse 9, “but,” tells us Paul is contrasting what he’s about to say with what he just said about the gospel in vv. 4-8. The context is crucial. Check them out with me.
- The gospel was of first importance to Paul. He understood that everything flows from the work of Christ. As we have seen throughout this letter, the gospel of grace saves us, changes us, and releases us to engage in good works all for the glory of God. Paul says the gospel is so excellent that we must not allow anything to creep in that would distract us from the gospel. He tells Titus to “insist on these things” and to “declare them with all authority” (2:15). The gospel must reign in our hearts because this is how we will bring honor and glory to God.
- App: This is why we must preach the gospel to ourselves daily. We must remind ourselves of the sufficiency of Christ’s work and lean hard into the grace he provides for each task before us. There is an excellent resource by Milton Vincent called *A Gospel Primer for Christians: Learning to see the Glories of God’s Love*. We may try to add it to our resource table soon. In the introduction to that work, Vincent says this: **“God did not give us His gospel so we could embrace it and be converted. Actually, He offers it to us every day as a gift that keeps on giving to us everything we need for life and godliness. The wise believer learns this truth early and becomes proficient in extracting available benefits from the gospel each day. We extract those benefits by being absorbed in the gospel, speaking it to ourselves when necessary, and by daring to reckon it true in all we do.”** The gospel changes everything.
- This is also why we value sound doctrine. We will be starting equipping classes in September and have a special event in October to really dig deep into an aspect of theology (we are not sure what we’re going to call it, but we will basically gather for about five hours and soak up the Word). Take advantage of our resource tables. If you miss a service one week, catch the sermon online.
- So Paul, for one final time in verses 9-11, puts down a strong message against any false teacher or false teaching that leads people astray by undercutting the gospel.
- There were some people who stirred up division in Crete by harping on “foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law.” Some of this may have simply been people raising speculation and debate for the sake of debate and division. Other aspects of this may reveal that these false teachers were leading people to find their righteousness and acceptance by God in something other than the gospel, whether that was their family pedigree or their own legalistic efforts to keep the law.
- In contrast with how Paul describes the gospel as “excellent and profitable,” he says these matters are “unprofitable and worthless.”
- While we may not have those some issues today, we will encounter people who stir up division in the church. It may be those who want to major on the minor points of theology. It may be those who create friction between people in the church (did you hear what he said/she said about you?). It may be those who simply have an ultra-critical spirit, not desiring to give thoughtful constructive feedback, but wish to stir up disunity. And division and disunity can spread through the church like a cancer.

- It's little wonder that Paul goes on in **verses 10-11** and says...

We should warn and correct those who sinfully deviate from the gospel

- These verses teach us that we must treat sin seriously. We must not be cavalier and casual in our approach to addressing sin in our church. Many Christians and many churches chose to sweep sin under the rug...
- Biblical Christianity provides a different prescription for this we know as church discipline.
- Just like any parent who protects and keeps their house in order, or any business owner that must remove people who would come in and cause trouble in their store, so the church must beware of people who damage the purity and reputation of the church. What exactly is church discipline? We find it laid out for us in Matthew 18, 1 Cor 5, Gal. 6, here and other passages.

Church Discipline:

- *When:* "We believe that restorative church discipline should be exercised in every case of substantiated, habitual, willful, unrepentant sin when the erring party is not willing to make any attempt to resolve the matter."
- *How:* Self-discipline.
 - Warn them once. We should confront people with wisdom, humility, and love, expressing our concern for them and calling them to repent and turn to God. Some people might say, "Well, it's not loving to tell someone they are wrong." Well, you're wrong! :) We all blow it, but some people willfully persist in their wrongdoing and they need to be warned for their own sake (remember the point is restoration) and for the sake of everyone.
 - twice, giving them a fair chance and time to see the error of their ways.
 - [tell the church; In Titus 3, Paul compresses what Jesus describes in Matthew 18.],
 - treat them as an unbeliever. If a person continually refuses to repent, that leaves us with no hope that they are truly in Christ. Verse 11 says this kind of person is "sinful and warped." He is one who deliberately persists in sinning. [I don't believe this person is past the point of restoration.]
- *Why:* 1) Individual restoration, 2) Purity of the church, 3) Our witness to non-Christians, and 4) for God's glory.
- **The goal of church discipline is always restoration!**
- If you struggle with this, look at the example of Jesus. He had compassion and spoke the truth in love, even when he had to warn people and call them out...
- App: I have met many people who have left the church and not returned because of bad experiences. Some of those experiences have to do with excessive and unfair judgments. Many of those churches probably misapplied these verses and may not have been on board with the mission & vision of Jesus in the first place. (Discipline vs. Judgmentalism...)

Trans: So Paul desires for the gospel to reign in the hearts of people in the church, and we are called to do everything in our power to promote godliness for the glory of God. Not only should we protect the reign of the gospel through purifying the church, we should also...

II. Push for the advance of the gospel with great passion (3:12-15)

Engaging in Mission in Community

- So what is Paul doing in in verses 12-15? Answer. He is getting business done!! He is fulfilling the words of Jesus to his disciples in Luke 19:13, where he said, "Engage in business until I come." And the business Paul was straight up getting done was the business of advancing the gospel.
- His life's passion was to see more and more people experience the life found in Christ alone.
 - He said in Acts 20:24: **"But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God."** (Acts 20:24 ESV)
- No matter what, even if I die, I am going to fulfill the mission of telling people about Jesus... *but* Paul knew that he could not do it alone. Let that soak in. Like Jesus, Paul got a team around him who he taught, trained and worked with so that the gospel would spread more effectively.
- So we find Paul, the Master Conductor, orchestrating moves that the mission might advance. Titus, I know I left you there in Crete to put things in order (1:5), and I need you to stay there a little longer. Be looking for Artemas or Tychicus, because they will be on their way to receive the baton from you and run the second leg

of the ministry race in Crete. When they do, I need you to pack up your gear and meet me in Nicopolis. We will pray, work, and witness there for the winter and then we'll move on. Oh, by the way, send Apollos, one of the greatest preachers of the early church, & Zenas the lawyer on their way.

- Paul knew how to put the right people in the right place to meet the right needs. And this teaches us a most valuable lesson that is all over the NT but sometimes so easy to overlook!
- **Mission thrives in the context of community.** Mission thrives in the context of community. (Mission statement – we glorify God (how do we do that?) by living out his mission (how?) as a community, as a community, together, unified, working with and for one another, a community, mission in community, needing one another for the mission as a community. And our community is one that is being transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ. He makes all the difference. Our church is a community that is transformed by and on board with the mission and vision of Jesus.
- Someone is going to get discouraged this week. Someone is going to lack resources. Someone is going to need some wisdom. Someone is going to need a little prayer to help them make it through.
- We need one another!!! Mission thrives in the context of community.

Meeting Practical Needs for the sake of Mission

- We see this at work at the end of verse 13. “see that they (Zenas & Apollos) lack nothing.” Paul says that Titus and the believers in Crete to take care of the needs for their upcoming journey.
- [The early church consistently met the needs of missionaries who went on journeys to take the gospel to people who had not heard.]
- There is not a greater mission under the sun than telling people of the love, hope and redemption that is found in Jesus. And while you don't have to be a vocational missionary to advance the gospel, we should certainly work to support and provide for missionaries who are doing the good work of advancing the gospel across the world.
- App: RHC currently gives 22%. (We're not trying to boast. That's just the facts. We wanted to build it into our DNA. Generous church.) Why? Because this is what we value. When we take up offerings each Sunday, it is so the gospel might advance not only here in Medford and Greater Boston, but to the farthest parts of the globe.
- Did you see the parade of nations on Friday night during the Opening Ceremonies to Olympic Games? I always love to see the flag bearers led the athletes in, each group with unique outfits that reflect their culture. As those 204 nations strolled into I thought about how many of them do not worship the God who made them. I thought about how God, who is King of the nations (all 204 represented at the Olympics) is worthy of their worship as Jeremiah 10:7 says, **“Who would not fear you, O King of the nations? For this is your due; for among all the wise ones of the nations and in all their kingdoms there is none like you.” (Jeremiah 10:7)**
- But I had one final thought: I am responsible; we are responsible to get them this message.
- If this is true, and it is, then we should pray radical prayers, give radical gifts of generosity, and make radical attempts to get the gospel to them. Let me say this: I don't know how much any person gives in this room, but I know how much we give collectively. For a church our size, our giving is not bad, but it could be better. There are hundreds of thousands of people around this area who need us to pray more fervently, give more generously, and witness more consistently, AND there are hundreds of millions of people around the world who need us to pray more fervently, give more generously, and witness more consistently.
- What about you? **Can you pray more fervently? Give more generously? Witness more consistently?** Most of us would have to say: yes. yes. yes.

Displaying the Gospel through Good Deeds

- In verse 14 Paul encourages them to display the gospel through good deeds: “And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful.”
- Using almost the exact same words as he did in 3:8 he tells Titus that the church should be devoted to good works that they might meet urgent needs and, in contrast to the false teachers, be fruitful.
- This week our church, along with several of our supporting churches who have traveled here this week, will be engaging in our Serve Medford week, a week devoted to engaging in good works.
- We will be cleaning, restoring and beautifying parks in Medford, volunteering at the Boys' & Girls' Club, leading a Kid's Club at one of the housing developments in our city, serving senior citizens at the Saltonstall building, doing some work here at Springstep, helping internationals learn English at MIT, engaging in random acts of kindness, and hosting our Community Fun Night for kids and families in the city.
- Why are going to do this? Because we want to meet practical needs in our city? Yes. Because we want to add value to our city and make Medford a better place to live? Yes. But is that all? No. In all of our good works, we want to display the character of God to people in our city. We extend love and mercy because God has

extended his love and mercy to us. We serve and extend generosity because God has served us and extended unbelievable generosity to us in the gospel. So our desire is not simply to do a few nice things in our city, but our goal is to display something true and beautiful and compelling about God. And we will have opportunity, at appropriate times and places, to share why we do what we do, and not only display the gospel but also declare the gospel.

- [But don't miss that Paul says, "our people." Paul possessed such a deep love for a people that were probably not all that easy to love. Crete was a rough place and rough places are usually filled with rough people, and yet, Paul had a deep and abiding love for people. He completely identified with the believers in Crete understanding that they belonged to him and he belonged to them.]
 - **1 Thess 3:8: "For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord."**
- **Verse 15:** Grace be with you all. "Last words are lasting words." Paul wanted these words ringing in their ears and reverberating through their hearts. Is there a better final word of encouragement? Is there a more fitting word to those who have experienced God's grace in salvation and need to continue to experience God's grace for daily living than to simply say: "Grace be with you all." We are in constant need of grace.

Conclusion:

- We are going out to serve this week... Does the gospel reign in you? Be an instrument of advance this week by being motivated by the gospel.

Pray

Lead into Response: "Choose" (Every time we hear the Word and encounter God, we have a decision to make. We can choose to respond....)