

Introduction to Titus Chapter 3

The Washing of Regeneration, the Good Works That Are Excellent and Profitable, and the Final Pastoral Instructions

Titus chapter 3 is the concluding chapter of the letter and brings together the three great themes that have been running through the entire epistle: the relationship between the community of faith and the surrounding world, the theological foundation of the gospel, and the practical instruction for pastoral leadership. The chapter is remarkable for the theological density of its central passage — verses 4–7, which constitute one of the most compressed and theologically comprehensive summaries of the gospel in Paul’s letters — and for the pastoral practicality of the instructions that surround it.

The chapter opens with instructions for the community’s civic life: be submissive to rulers and authorities, obey, be ready for every good work, speak evil of no one, avoid quarreling, be gentle, show perfect courtesy toward all people. This is followed by the most bracing humility-grounding available: we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. The before-and-after contrast is not drawn to produce self-congratulation in the community that has been changed, but to produce the kind of humble, patient, gentle engagement with those outside the community that only people who remember where they themselves came from can truly sustain.

The great but when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared of verse 4 is the pivot that parallels chapter 2’s the grace of God has appeared. The goodness and the loving kindness (philanthropia, literally the love of humanity) of God broke into history in the appearing of the Savior, and the theological statement that follows in verses 4–7 is the most concentrated Trinitarian soteriology in the Pastoral Epistles: not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

The chapter then pivots sharply back to the practical: these things I want you to insist on, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. The faithful saying of verse 8, insisting on the connection between sound theology and good works, is followed by an equally insistent warning against foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, which Paul declares are unprofitable and worthless. The person who stirs up division after two warnings is to be rejected as warped and self-condemned. The letter closes with personal instructions about Artemas, Tychicus, Zenas, Apollos, and the Cretan community, and the final verse restates the letter’s central concern one last time: and let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful.

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We come to Titus chapter 3 as people who need the humility that the opening verses are designed to produce. We were once foolish. We were once disobedient, led astray, enslaved to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. Let that memory be the permanent medicine against contempt for those outside the community of faith, and against the kind of quarrelsome engagement with the world around us that the chapter explicitly warns against.

Lord, let the great but when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared be the pivot that it was for us, as it was for Paul — the moment when the direction of everything changed. Not because of anything we did in righteousness, but according to Your mercy, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, poured out richly through Jesus Christ our Savior. Let the fullness of that Trinitarian saving act be received and treasured rather than domesticated into a merely formulaic confession.

And let the justified heirs who have received this lavish salvation be, precisely because of it, the people most devoted to good works, most gentle with outsiders, most patient with the foolish quarrels that waste what the gospel has produced. Let the insistence on good works that ends this chapter be the practical shape of gratitude for the mercy that began it. Let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Titus 3:1–3

Civic Virtue, Remembered Depravity, and the Humility That Produces Gentle Engagement with the World

- (1) Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work,*
- (2) To speak evil of no one, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men.*
- (3) For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.*

The Context

The opening instructions of chapter 3 address the community's relationship with civic authority and with the broader society — the world outside the household of faith. The be submissive to rulers and authorities, obey, be ready for every good work follows directly from the close of chapter 2 (declare these things, exhort, rebuke) and extends the range of the community's formation from its internal life to its external engagement. The instructions are not politically sophisticated in the modern sense — they are not about the limits of governmental authority or the theology of civil disobedience — but about the default posture of the believing community toward the society it inhabits.

The speak evil of no one, avoid quarreling, be gentle, showing perfect courtesy toward all people of verse 2 is the specification of the civic disposition that the community should cultivate. The all people is important: this is not restricted to fellow believers but applies to the entire range of human beings the community encounters. In the Cretan context, where the surrounding culture was proverbially given to dishonesty and violence, the community's gentleness and courtesy would have been as countercultural as it was missionally significant.

Verse 3 is the most powerful motivating clause in the passage and among the most honest self-assessments in Paul's letters. The for we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another is not a general anthropological observation about what non-Christians are like. It is a first-person plural confession: this is what we were. Paul includes himself and every member of the community of faith in the pre-conversion description. The effect is to make the commanded gentleness toward outsiders not a matter of condescension from those who have arrived toward those who have not, but the humbled gratitude of those who know exactly where they themselves were before the mercy of verse 4 intervened.

Plain American English

Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak maliciously about no one, to be peaceable and gentle, and to show complete courtesy to everyone. For we ourselves were once stupid, disobedient, and deceived — slaves to all kinds of desires and pleasures, living in spite and jealousy, hated by others and hating each other.

Key Observations

“To speak evil of no one, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men”: This signifies **The Civic Virtue Being Required of the Community Is Explicitly Universal in Its Scope — All People, Including Those Outside the Community of Faith, Are the Recipients of the Gentleness and Courtesy That the Gospel Shapes.**

The all people of verse 2 ensures that the commanded gentleness and courtesy are not simply communal virtues practiced within the household of faith toward fellow believers, but postures

that extend to the entire range of human beings the community encounters in its civic life. This is pastorally important because the temptation of sectarian communities — then and now — is to reserve their gentleness for insiders while treating outsiders with contempt or combativeness. The Cretan context, where the false teachers were engaged in controversy and the culture was proverbially quarrelsome, makes this instruction particularly pointed: the community is to be distinguishably different in its civic engagement, not by withdrawal from the public sphere but by a quality of engagement that reflects the gospel it proclaims.

“For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another”: This signifies **The First-Person Plural Confession of the Pre-Conversion Condition Is the Most Powerful Available Motivation for the Commanded Gentleness — Those Who Remember Where They Were Cannot Sustain Contempt for Those Who Are Still There.**

The for we ourselves were once is the theological engine of the civic virtue commanded in verses 1–2. It is not an external command to be gentle with outsiders as a strategic communication choice. It is the memory of a shared condition that makes contempt for those in that condition impossible for the person who has honestly received the memory. The person who has genuinely confronted the fact that they were once foolish, disobedient, enslaved, malicious, and full of hatred cannot regard someone else in that condition with anything other than the compassion born of recognition. The list in verse 3 is deliberately comprehensive — covering intellectual failure (foolish, deceived), moral failure (disobedient, slaves to passions), relational failure (malice, envy), and social failure (hated and hating) — to ensure that no member of the community has a category of former sin that exempts them from the humbling recognition.

What This Means for Us Today

1. Cultivate the Civic Engagement That Is Shaped by the Gospel Rather Than by the Culture’s Default Combativeness, as a Form of Witness That the Gospel Itself Motivates:

The instructions of verses 1–2 describe a civic posture that is as countercultural in the contemporary West as it was in first-century Crete. The public discourse of contemporary democracies is increasingly characterized by the very vices that Paul prohibits here — speaking evil of opponents, quarreling, contempt, the aggressive assertion of rights at the expense of courtesy. The community of faith that practices what Paul describes here — submissive to governing authorities, ready for every good work, slandering no one, not quarreling, gentle, showing perfect courtesy to all — will be as visibly different in its civic engagement as the Cretan church was meant to be in its own context.

2. Use the Memory of Your Own Pre-Conversion Condition as the Permanent Medicine Against Contempt for Those Outside the Faith:

The for we ourselves were once is not a historical curiosity but a pastoral prescription. Every believer has some version of the list in verse 3 that applies to their own pre-conversion or pre-formation experience. The regular, honest rehearsal of that list — the acknowledgment of one’s own former foolishness, disobedience, slavery to passions, malice, hatred — is the most effective available antidote to the condescension and contempt that can so easily develop in communities that have been inside the faith for a long time. The church that remembers verse 3 about itself will find it impossible to

engage the world outside with anything other than the compassion that the memory of shared humanity and shared fallenness produces.

How This Relates to Today

The civic instructions of verses 1–2 have direct application to the contemporary church's engagement with political life, social controversy, and cultural conflict. The temptation of Christian communities in periods of cultural conflict is to adopt the combative posture of the surrounding culture — to speak evil of those on the other side of political disputes, to engage in the brawling that social media enables and rewards, to reserve courtesy for allies and contempt for opponents. Titus 3:1–2 describes a different posture: the submissive, obedient, gentle, courteous engagement that is rooted not in political strategy but in the gospel that has transformed the community from the condition of verse 3.

The self-description of verse 3 is also one of the most important available resources for Christians engaging in apologetics and evangelism. The awareness that we ourselves were once in the condition of those we are trying to reach — not inherently superior, not born into the community of faith, but recipients of the mercy that verse 4 describes — shapes the entire manner of the engagement. Evangelism that has forgotten verse 3 tends to become condescending. Evangelism that has remembered it tends to become the kind of compassionate, humble testimony that reflects the mercy it is trying to commend.

Key Lesson: **The civic instructions of verses 1–3 establish that the community of faith should engage the broader society with submissiveness, readiness for good works, gentleness, and courtesy toward all people, grounded not in strategic calculation but in the humbling memory that we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, enslaved, malicious, and full of hatred — the first-person plural that makes contempt for those outside the community of faith impossible for anyone who has honestly received it.**

Titus 3:4–7

The Washing of Regeneration: The Most Compressed Trinitarian Soteriology in the Pastoral Epistles

*(4) But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour
toward man appeared,*

*(5) Not by works of righteousness which we have done,
but according to his mercy he saved us,*

*by the washing of regeneration,
and renewing of the Holy Ghost;*

*(6) Which he shed on us abundantly
through Jesus Christ our Saviour;*

(7) That being justified by his grace,

we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

The Context

Verses 4–7 are the theological center of the chapter and, arguably, of the entire letter. The but when of verse 4 — turning from the description of the pre-conversion condition in verse 3 to the divine intervention that changed it — is one of the most dramatic pivots in the Pauline corpus, comparable to the but God of Ephesians 2:4. The goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared: not a principle or a theological concept, but a historical appearing (epephanē), the same word used in chapter 2:11 for the appearing of grace and in chapter 2:13 for the anticipated appearing of glory. The salvation Paul describes is historically anchored.

Verse 5 is the Pauline sola gratia in its most economical form: not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy. Every element of the salvation is on the divine side of the ledger. The saving is God's. The mercy is God's. The means is specified as the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit — the two phrases capturing the double dimension of the new birth: the cleansing that removes what was there before (washing of regeneration) and the positive renewal that creates what was not there before (renewing of the Holy Spirit). Whether the washing of regeneration refers specifically to baptism or more broadly to the new birth has been debated throughout church history, but the regenerative significance of the event — not merely the external rite — is the clear point.

Verse 6 adds the abundance of the Spirit's outpouring: whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior. The richly is the same abundance as the richly of Ephesians 1:7 (the redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace). The Spirit is not given sparingly. And the Trinitarian structure of verses 4–7 is complete: the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior (the Father's initiative) has appeared; the Holy Spirit is poured out (the Spirit's work); through Jesus Christ our Savior (the Son's mediating role). The salvation that the passage describes is Trinitarian from the initiative to the means to the application.

Verse 7 gives the outcome of the saving: that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The justification is by grace — the same sola gratia of verse 5 restated. And the result of justification is heirship: the justified are not merely forgiven sinners but heirs, with all that inheritance implies about relationship, status, and future expectation. The hope of eternal life — the same phrase used in chapter 1:2, where the eternal life was promised by God who cannot lie before the ages began — closes the circle: the pre-temporal promise of chapter 1 has been historically realized in the appearing of chapter 3, and the community that receives it now lives as heirs of what has been promised.

Plain American English

But then the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared. He saved us — not because of any righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of

rebirth and the renewing work of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying.

Key Observations

“But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared”: This signifies **The But When Is the Most Dramatic Theological Pivot in the Chapter — the Divine Goodness and Philanthropia Breaking into the Human Condition Described in Verse 3 from a Direction That the Human Condition Could Neither Anticipate Nor Produce.**

The but when (hote de) is the structural pivot that makes verse 3 not merely a description of former sin but the dark backdrop against which the divine initiative becomes visible. The goodness (chrestotes — moral excellence and generosity) and loving kindness (philanthropia — literally love of humanity) of God our Savior are the specific divine attributes that motivated the appearing. The philanthropia is remarkable: God’s love for humanity is the term used, not a more restricted love for the elect or the righteous. The appearing of these attributes in Christ is the historical event that changed everything described in verse 3. Nothing in verse 3’s description of the human condition could have generated or earned this appearing; it came from the character of the God who is the source of it.

“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us”: This signifies **The Most Economical Statement of Sola Gratia in the Letter — the Salvation Is Entirely on the Divine Side, with the Human Contribution Explicitly Excluded in a Way That Denies Even the Most Minimal Works-Righteousness Basis.**

The not because of works done by us in righteousness is the most direct available exclusion of any human contribution to the basis of salvation in the letter. Not works of righteousness done by us in general — not even righteous works, which might seem like a plausible basis. The exclusion is as absolute as it is possible to state. And the corresponding positive — but according to his own mercy — locates the entire salvific initiative in the divine attribute rather than in any human qualification. This is the soteriology of Ephesians 2:8–9 (by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works) stated in its most compressed form. The pastoral implication for the community is as significant as the soteriological one: the people who have been saved entirely by mercy, not by works, have the strongest possible reason to practice the humility that their pre-conversion condition (verse 3) and their post-conversion status (saved, justified, heirs) both require.

“By the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour”: This signifies **The Trinitarian Structure of the Salvation Is Complete — the Father’s Initiative, the Spirit’s Regenerating and Renewing Work, and the Son’s Mediating Role Are All Present in the Most Compressed Trinitarian Soteriology in the Pastoral Epistles.**

The washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit describes the experiential reality of the new birth from two angles: the negative cleansing (washing away what was there before) and the positive renewal (creating what was not there before). The Holy Spirit is the agent of both.

And the richly poured out through Jesus Christ our Savior specifies the mediation: the Spirit's lavish outpouring is through the Son, making the salvific event explicitly Trinitarian in its structure. The Father's goodness and loving kindness initiate and motivate; the Spirit regenerates and renews; the Son mediates the Spirit's application. This is as complete a Trinitarian account of the salvation as can be found in any three verses in Paul's letters, and its placement in a pastoral letter addressing civic behavior and false teachers demonstrates that Trinitarian theology in Paul is not academic but pastorally foundational.

“That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life”: This signifies **The Outcome of the Justification Is Not Merely Forgiveness but Heirship — a Status That Implies Relationship, Future Expectation, and the Full Inheritance That Connects Back to the Pre-Temporal Promise of Chapter 1.**

The heirs according to the hope of eternal life is the final statement of the justified community's status, and it is deliberately richer than the mere forgiveness of sins. Heirs have a relationship to the one from whom they inherit. Heirs have a claim on a future possession that is not yet fully in hand but is certain by virtue of the relationship. And the hope of eternal life connects the status of heirs back to chapter 1:2, where the eternal life was promised by God who cannot lie before the ages began. The community that has been saved, regenerated, renewed, and justified is the community of heirs whose present life is shaped by the certainty of what they stand to inherit — the same eschatological orientation that calibrated the present-age ethics of chapter 2.

What This Means for Us Today

1. Receive the Trinitarian Soteriology of Verses 4–7 as the Fullest Available Account of What Happened in the Salvation That Is the Foundation of Everything Else in the Letter:

The compressed Trinitarian structure of these verses — the Father's goodness and loving kindness motivating the appearing, the Spirit's washing and renewing as the means, the Son as the mediator through whom the Spirit is poured out richly — is the foundation beneath every behavioral instruction in the letter. The community that is commanded to be gentle toward outsiders (verses 1–2), devoted to good works (verse 8), and ready for every good work (verse 1) is not being asked to perform these things as the basis of its standing but as the response of those who have been justified by grace and made heirs of eternal life. Keep the soteriological foundation clearly in view under every practical instruction.

2. Resist Both Complacency and Pride on the Basis of the Salvation That Is Entirely Unmerited:

The not because of works done by us in righteousness produces a double pastoral effect when it is properly received. It eliminates pride in the salvation, because nothing the community contributed to the basis of it gives it grounds for self-congratulation. And it eliminates complacency, because the mercy that saved the community from the condition of verse 3 is the mercy that also trains in the godly life (chapter 2:12) and produces the heirs who devote themselves to good works (verse 8). The same grace that humbles the pride of the self-made religious person also activates the gratitude that produces the good works that are the proper response of those who have been justified by grace.

3. Appreciate the Richness of the Spirit's Outpouring as the Ground for the Ongoing Transformation That the Behavioral Instructions of the Letter Require: The whom he

poured out on us richly is not merely a statement about the abundance of the Spirit's initial gift but about the ongoing resource available to the community that is being asked to live in the countercultural way the letter describes. The gentle, courteous, good-works-devoted community of Titus is not being asked to produce these qualities from its own moral reserves. It is the community on whom the Spirit has been poured out richly, the community that has been regenerated and renewed — and that ongoing renewal is the resource for the ongoing formation that the behavioral instructions require.

How This Relates to Today

The but when of verse 4 has a specific formal function in Paul's argument that speaks with direct relevance to any contemporary account of the gospel. The human condition of verse 3 — the full description of pre-conversion foolishness, disobedience, slavery, malice, and hatred — is the condition that the gospel addresses. The but when establishes that the initiative for changing that condition came from outside the condition itself. Contemporary accounts of the gospel that soften either the darkness of the condition (making the gospel unnecessary) or the gratuity of the divine initiative (making it contingent on human worthiness) have weakened the very pivot that gives the passage its power. The but when is as dramatic as it is precisely because of what precedes it.

The washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit has also been a site of theological controversy (about baptism and regeneration) that has sometimes distracted from the pastoral point the passage is making. Whatever one's view of the relationship between the sacrament and the regeneration, the passage is insisting that the new birth is real, that it is the Spirit's work, that it is richly given, and that it produces people who are justified heirs of eternal life. These affirmations are the common ground of the Trinitarian Christian tradition, and they are the foundation beneath the practical instructions that the letter's final verses will lay out.

Key Lesson: **The great theological pivot of verses 4–7 — from the human condition of verse 3 to the divine goodness and loving kindness that appeared, saving through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit poured out richly through Jesus Christ — is the most compressed Trinitarian soteriology in the Pastoral Epistles, establishing that the justified heirs of eternal life owe their status entirely to mercy rather than to works, and that the entire foundation of the letter's behavioral instructions rests on what God has done rather than on what the community has achieved or deserves.**

Titus 3:8–15

Devoted to Good Works, Avoiding Foolish Controversies, and the Final Pastoral Instructions

*(8) This is a faithful saying,
and these things I will that thou affirm constantly,
that they which have believed in God*

*might be careful to maintain good works.
These things are good and profitable unto men.
(9) But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies,
and contentions, and strivings about the law;
for they are unprofitable and vain.
(10) A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject;
(11) Knowing that he that is such is subverted,
and sinneth, being condemned of himself.
(12) When I shall send Artemas unto thee,
or Tychicus, be diligent to come unto me to Nicopolis:
for I have determined there to winter.
(13) Bring Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their journey diligently,
that nothing be wanting unto them.
(14) And let ours also learn to maintain good works
for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful.
(15) All that are with me salute thee.
Salute them that love us in the faith.
Grace be with you all. Amen.*

The Context

The faithful saying of verse 8 likely refers to the entire soteriological statement of verses 4–7 — this is a trustworthy statement, and Paul wants Titus to insist on it. But the insisting is immediately given its practical purpose: so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. This is one of the clearest available connections in the letter between sound theology and good works: the trustworthy saying (the gospel) is to be constantly affirmed so that the people who believe it will devote themselves to good works. The theology produces the practice; the faithful word produces the fruitful life. And the immediate qualification — these things are excellent and profitable for people — distinguishes the profitable good works from the unprofitable controversies that verse 9 will name.

Verse 9 is the sharpest and most direct dismissal of profitless religious controversy in Paul's letters: but avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. The contrast is precise: good works are excellent and profitable (verse 8); controversies about the law are unprofitable and worthless (verse 9). Paul's criterion for distinguishing between what should be insisted upon and what should be avoided is explicitly utilitarian in the sense of asking what actually produces fruit in the lives of the people the ministry is serving. The false teachers of chapter 1 who were subverting whole households for shameful gain were engaged in exactly the kind of controversy Paul is dismissing here.

The instruction about the divisive person in verses 10–11 is the most specific piece of pastoral policy in the letter's final section. After a first warning and a second warning, the person who

stirs up division is to be avoided. The rationale is diagnostically interesting: knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned. The person who persists in division after two warnings has revealed, by the persistence itself, that the problem is not the absence of the right argument but the condition of the will. Self-condemned implies that the person knows what they are doing is wrong but continues anyway — making continued engagement a waste of the community's finite pastoral resources.

The closing instructions of verses 12–15 are the most personal section of the letter, with specific references to Artemas, Tychicus, Nicopolis, Zenas, and Apollos. The practical details — do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, send Zenas and Apollos on their way, make sure they lack nothing — are the ordinary logistics of apostolic ministry and form a vivid contrast to the theological density of what precedes them. The final exhortation of verse 14 — and let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful — closes the letter on the same note it has been returning to throughout chapter 3 (and the entire letter): good works. The grace that appeared, the mercy that saved, the Spirit who was poured out richly, the justification that made heirs — all of it exists, in part, so that the people of God might not be unfruitful.

Plain American English

This is a trustworthy saying, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God will be careful to devote themselves to doing good. These things are good and helpful for everyone. But steer clear of foolish debates, genealogies, arguments, and fights about the law — these things are useless and worthless. Warn a divisive person once, and then again. After that, have nothing to do with them. You can be sure that such people are twisted and sinful — they're self-condemned. As soon as I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, because I have decided to spend the winter there. Do everything you can to help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way and make sure they have everything they need. And I want our people to learn to engage in doing good in order to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful. Everyone with me sends you greetings. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all.

Key Observations

“That they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men”: This signifies **The Purpose of Insisting on the Faithful Saying Is Explicitly the Production of Good Works — Sound Theology Exists in the Letter's Framework Not as an End in Itself but as the Generator of the Fruitful Life It Produces.**

The so that those who have believed may be careful to devote themselves to good works establishes the relationship between the theological insisting of verse 8a and the practical fruitfulness of verse 8b. The faithful saying — the gospel summarized in verses 4–7 — is to be constantly affirmed not as an exercise in doctrinal maintenance for its own sake, but because its constant affirmation is what produces the community devoted to good works. Theology in Titus

is never an end in itself; it is always in service of the formation of a people who are fruitful, zealous for good works, adorning the doctrine of God their Savior. The insisting on the theology and the insisting on the good works are not two different concerns; they are one concern expressed at two levels.

“But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain”: This signifies **The Criterion for Distinguishing What to Insist On from What to Avoid Is Explicitly Productive vs. Unproductive — Sound Doctrine Produces Good Works, Foolish Controversies Produce Nothing Profitable.**

The contrast between verse 8 (excellent and profitable) and verse 9 (unprofitable and worthless) is the sharpest available statement of Paul’s criterion for distinguishing fruitful from unfruitful ministry content. The foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law are not dismissed because they are theologically wrong (though they may be) but because they are fruitless: they produce no good works, build up no community, help no one in cases of urgent need, and leave the community unfruitful in exactly the way verse 14 most wants to avoid. This is a demanding standard for evaluating the content of preaching, teaching, and theological discussion: does this produce the devoted, fruitful community that sound doctrine is supposed to generate? If not, it may qualify as a foolish controversy regardless of how interesting it is to debate.

“A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself”: This signifies **The Two-Warning Policy Before Rejection Is the Most Specific Piece of Pastoral Policy in the Letter’s Final Section — and the Rationale Is Diagnostic Rather Than Punitive: Persistence After Warning Reveals a Condition of the Will Rather Than an Absence of Information.**

The instruction to warn a divisive person twice before avoiding them is the most concise available model of graduated pastoral response to persistent error. The first warning gives the benefit of the doubt — perhaps the person does not see the harm of what they are doing. The second warning removes that excuse. And the avoidance after two warnings is not punitive exclusion but the recognition that continued engagement with someone who has heard the correction twice and persists is a waste of finite pastoral resources better directed toward the fruitful. The self-condemned rationale is diagnostic: the persistence after two warnings reveals that the problem is not the absence of the right argument but a warped will that knows it is wrong and continues anyway. Additional arguments cannot address a problem that is fundamentally not an argument problem.

“Let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful”: This signifies **The Letter’s Final Exhortation Returns One Last Time to the Theme That Has Sounded Throughout All Three Chapters — the Good Works That Are the Fruit of the Grace That Has Appeared, the Purpose of the Redemption, and the Practical Shape of the Gospel.**

The and let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful is not a mere addendum but the letter’s final thematic statement. Good works have been the practical destination of the letter from the beginning: the elder who holds firm to sound doctrine so he can teach and refute (chapter 1), the older women who teach good (chapter 2), the community adorning the doctrine of God our Savior in every station

(chapter 2), those who have believed careful to devote themselves to good works (chapter 3), and now the final exhortation to devote themselves to meeting urgent practical needs. The good works that close the letter are not merely ethical performance but the practical fruitfulness of the community that has received the grace that has appeared, been washed and renewed by the Spirit, justified and made heirs — and is now living out the purpose for which Christ gave himself.

What This Means for Us Today

1. Evaluate the Content of Preaching and Teaching by the Productive Standard Paul Applies — Does This Generate the Devoted, Fruitful Community That Sound Doctrine Is Supposed to Produce:

The excellent and profitable versus unprofitable and worthless contrast of verses 8–9 is one of the most demanding and most practically useful evaluative tools available to contemporary ministers and churches. The question it poses is not merely is this theologically accurate? but does this produce the good works and fruitfulness that the gospel is supposed to generate? Theologically accurate teaching that generates endless controversy, division, and fruitlessness rather than devoted, good-works-producing community may qualify as what Paul is dismissing in verse 9, even if the content is not technically false. The standard is productive — does it build up the community of faith and serve the people of God?

2. Practice the Two-Warning Policy for Divisive Persons Rather Than Either Premature Exclusion or Indefinite Tolerance:

The graduated pastoral response of verses 10–11 is one of the most specific and most practically actionable pieces of pastoral policy in the letter. Two warnings before avoidance. Not immediate exclusion (which might be punitive and insufficiently patient), and not indefinite tolerance (which wastes pastoral resources on someone who has demonstrated by their persistence that additional argument will not help). Implementing this in contemporary church contexts requires the courage to give actual warnings — not merely hints or suggestions — and the discernment to recognize when persistence after two warnings has revealed a condition of the will that makes additional engagement unfruitful.

3. Connect Good Works to Urgent Practical Needs, Treating the Material Care of People in Genuine Need as One of the Primary Forms That Gospel Fruitfulness Takes:

The let our people devote themselves to good works so as to help cases of urgent need is one of the most practically specific statements of what good works means in the letter. It is not primarily a vague exhortation to virtue but the direction of the community's energy toward people who have actual urgent practical needs. This connects the theological richness of verses 4–7 to the most ordinary and concrete forms of practical compassion: meeting urgent need. The community that has been saved by the philanthropia (love of humanity) of God (verse 4) is the community most called to practice the human love of neighbor that meets people in their practical need.

How This Relates to Today

The unprofitable and worthless versus excellent and profitable distinction of verses 8–9 speaks directly into the contemporary church's tendency to invest enormous energy in theological controversies that produce heat rather than light and division rather than formation. Paul does not say that the issues involved in foolish controversies are unimportant in the abstract — he says

The closing instruction about Zenas and Apollos — send them on their way and make sure they lack nothing — is also a model of the practical, logistical support for ministry workers that is itself a form of good works. The letter that has been concerned throughout with sound doctrine and good works closes with the specific practical acts of provision for traveling missionaries that express the same community care that the theological content of the letter has been requiring. The high theology of verses 4–7 and the logistical practicality of verses 12–14 are not in tension; they are the same love of God and love of neighbor expressed at different levels of abstraction.

DIAGRAM OF TITUS CHAPTER 3

PAUL'S FINAL INSTRUCTIONS TO TITUS ON GRACE & WORKS

SUBJECTION TO AUTHORITIES & DOING GOOD

vs 1-2

- Be subject to rulers & powers (vs 1)
- Be obedient (vs 1)
- To be ready for every good work (vs 1)
- To speak evil of no one (vs 2)

THE PURPOSE OF MERCY

vs 4-7

- For we ourselves were also foolish (vs 3)
- To be peaceable, gentle (vs 2)

MERCY & GRACE ARE THE CAUSE

THING GOODS OF MERCY

vs 4-7

- For we ourselves were also foolish (vs 3)
- According to His mercy He saved us (vs 5)
- By the washing of regeneration (vs 5)
- Through Jesus Christ our Savior (vs 6)
- Being justified by His grace (vs 7)

GOOD WORKS ARE SECURE

(vs 8)

This is a faithful saying
Be careful to maintain good works (vs 8)
These things are good & profitable (vs 8)

AVOID FOOLISH DISPUTES &

vs 9-11

IDOLATRY BRINGS DECEIT

- Avoid foolish disputes, genealogies (vs 9)
- Avoid strivings about the law (vs 9)
- Reject a divisive man after rebukes (vs 10)
- Knowing that such a person is warped (vs 11)

THE PURPOSE OF SOUND DOCTRINE

vs 12

- Send for Tychicus or Arternas (vs 12)
- Send Zenas the lawyer & Apollos (vs 13)
- Greet those who love us in the faith (vs 15)

SOUND FAITH IS SECURE

THE PROPHETIC IS SECURE

GOOD WORKS ARE PROFITABLE

vs 12-15

FINAL PERSONAL INSTRUCTIONS

'GOD'S TRUTH'

THE PROPHETIC PROMISE IS SECURE

GOOD WORKS ARE THE FRUIT

vs 12-15

This Chapter 3 is Paul's concluding instruction on the island of Crete. It begins with clear directives for church order and civil subjection, highlighting the transformative power of God's grace and mercy. Leadership is essential to encourage good works and silence divisive, foolish talkers who disrupt households. The final section, echoing the "complete rejection" and "burning judgment" summaries of IMBAE II, presents a stark verdict: To the divisive, foolish, and rebellious, avoid them. Their multi-faceted claims are laid bare. Their multi-faceted claims are exposed by the final text in a verdict on final works. The final instruction is final.

Closing Prayer for Titus Chapter 3 and the Whole Letter

Heavenly Father,

We close Titus chapter 3 — and with it the entire letter — having traveled from the theological foundation of chapter 1 through the community formation of chapter 2 to the soteriological summit of chapter 3's great but when passage and the practical destination of chapter 3's closing call to good works. We have received the qualification standards for elders who hold firm to the trustworthy word. We have received the household instructions for older men and women and younger women and men and workers, all charged with adorning the doctrine of God our Savior. We have received the grace that appeared, training us in renouncing ungodliness and living self-controlled, upright, and godly in the present age, waiting for the blessed hope of the appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

Lord, let the but when of chapter 3 be the organizing pivot of our theological imagination as it was Paul's. We were foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved, malicious, and full of hatred — but when the kindness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, not because of works we had done in righteousness but according to Your mercy, You saved us through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit poured out richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that justified by Your grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Receive our gratitude for this. Let the gratitude be visible in the good works that this salvation exists, in part, to produce.

Make us the people this letter describes: sound in doctrine and sound in life, with households in order, communities that adorn the gospel they profess, civic engagements shaped by the gentleness that remembers where we ourselves came from, and practical compassion that meets urgent needs rather than generating profitable controversies. Let us not be unfruitful. Let the grace that appeared produce in us the fruitfulness it was working to generate — the purified people, zealous for good works, for whom Christ gave himself.

Grace be with us all. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria
Glory to God Alone