

## Thoughts From Other Minds:

The "*faithful saying*" is the summary of the gospel in verses 3-7. We are to keep the gospel in focus at all times and not allow other things to become primary.

Our faith in God must issue forth good works on a regular basis. This requires a high degree of intentionality. ... good works don't just happen as though we were passive bystanders watching God work through us. There's always that tension of the extent to which God is the source of our good works and to which we are responsible for them. This tension is beautifully stated by Paul in his letter to the Philippians: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Phil 2:12-13) This is the *both . . . and* of Christian conduct. ... Merely to be passive, expecting God to override our lethargy or fear, is unrealistic. But merely to see ourselves as unaided contestants in the struggles for justice and righteousness is a sure road to frustration. It is "*good and profitable*" for us to "*be careful to maintain good works.*"

This is hard work. It requires diligent labour. Somewhere along the way, I was taught that the life of Christian discipleship was easy. It was portrayed as a mere matter of trusting God and resting in Him. I've long since come to appreciate the inner peace and rest that comes from trusting in God. But I've also come to enjoy the challenges and disciplines of trying to be a faithful follower of Jesus in His constant care for the hungry and the poor and in His insistence on justice and righteousness. He never said it would be easy, and if we dare to take Him seriously, we will experience that growing joy of taking up crosses. Such a life is based upon doing useful things – good works that are '*good and profitable to men.*'"

Among the useless things are religious debates and divisive people. ... People who are divisive – those who are engaged in getting followers for their particular brand of religion or their particular doctrinal distinctions – are to be rejected after two admonitions.

Would that we could hasten the day when we would invest our financial and emotional resources in the production of good works rather than good arguments or good programs. The advent of mass media ... has, so far, developed mostly into a competition for the ratings. And the best ratings seem to come to those who concentrate on drawing a following for themselves. The basic problem may be inherent in the medium itself. It is essentially a spectator sport. The recipient is a "viewer." The responsibility of the viewer is to support the program. The only measure of accountability is in the cards and letters. It is difficult to assess the effect of the media on the production of good works in the lives of viewers. That requires life in community together – and that's why "the assembling of ourselves together" (Heb. 10:25) is essential in the development of good works. Would that we could sort out our priorities around doing good works!

Gary W. Demarest, *The Communicator's Commentary*, 1, 2 Thessalonians; 1, 2 Timothy; and Titus, pp.329-30.

## Camperdown Noorat Terang Presbyterian Pastoral Charge

5 February 2017—The Lord's Supper

**Sermon:** "The goodness of the Lord and the future # 6" (text: Titus 3:1-14)

**Scripture:** Titus 2:11-3:15

### Sermon Notes

**Introduction:** We began our New Year with preparation for an uncertain future by focussing on the goodness of God and the overflowing of his love to us in mercy—but what does God expect of us in response? As 'England expects every man to do his duty', so God expects us who have received his goodness to do good to others.

By nature we try to gain favour with God by being good. But when we understand God's grace and know that our best is spoiled by sin, we know only hope is in Christ's righteousness, imputed to us and received by faith alone. But it is easy for us then to forget that good works are important not instead of faith but as its fruit.

In the NT at the first dispute is about justification by grace through faith, not by works; Jesus taught that a tax-collector who cried, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner, when home justified, rather than the Pharisee, confident in his own righteousness; so also Paul (Eph 2:8-9); later NT writings emphasise good works (eg. Titus 3:1, 8).

### 1. Recipients of God's goodness

We are to devote ourselves to good works not to earn God's favour, but because in Christ we have already received his favour; we are to 'be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work ... etc.' as those who are obliged to do good because we have received good from God.

Once we were far from being good or doing good (Titus 3:3). Some might object that they were never that bad; foolish, perhaps, disobedient, yes, even led astray—but not 'passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another'! But God sees us as we are, or were; much worse than we think, or thought.

We compare ourselves with others worse than we think we are and pride ourselves that we are 'not like other men' (Luke 18:11); also, we don't feel our slavery to sin because it is a willing slavery—but it is real, all the same (cf. John 8:31-34; Romans 6:17).

It is only when the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin by applying to our consciences God's law and we try to reform ourselves that we find that we are slaves, unable to escape our sins. A good indication of the truth of the scriptural verdict is how easily and naturally we think the worst of others, rather than 'I'm sure they meant well'!

If we know ourselves then we know that this description of our natural state is no exaggeration; if we are not like this anymore it is because 'the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared' (v. 4) and 'he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy ....' (v. 5)

The 'goodness and lovingkindness' (ESV—'kindness and love', NIV) of God is Jesus Christ, God's Son. He is the supreme expression of God's goodness; he is his love for humanity personified; we know God loves our fallen race because in Jesus 'the goodness and lovingkindness ['philanthropy'] of God our Saviour appeared'.

Jesus did not die to make God love us; God sent him because he loved us: 'In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.' (1 Jn 4:9).

This historical overflowing of God's love for us has also appeared to us in the gospel: 'God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us ... made us alive together with Christ...' (Eph 2:3-6); 'brothers beloved by the Lord, ... God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved ....' (2 Thess 13-14).

Through both of these appearances, the historical and the gospel, God's goodness and philanthropy has come to us not in drops but in a river of mercy that is reflected in the apostle's long sentence (vs. 5-7). Saved—from sin, from the wrath of God, from eternal torment, not because we earned it, but according to his mercy!

He did it! What we could not do he did, "by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour"; not the washing of baptism, but a real washing, so that 'being justified (forgiven, accepted) we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life'.

If you are not thrilled by this river of goodness and lovingkindness of God then perhaps you have not known the fear of hell and the joy of forgiveness of sins and peace with God. Charles Wesley wrote 'O for a thousand tongues' to mark the first anniversary of his conversion: 'Look unto Him, ye nations, own Your God, ye fallen race; Look, and be saved through faith alone, be justified by grace.'

## 2. Doers of good

God's goodness in Christ Jesus has overflowed to us and so we are to be ready for every good work. With people who are foolish etc., we are 'to slander no one'; we are not to speak in such a way as to damage the reputation of another'; we are to avoid quarrelling, and we are to be gentle, showing meekness towards all men'.

Having believed in God, we are to be careful to devote ourselves to good works; we are to be careful (v. 9) 'to avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and useless'. Devoting ourselves to doing good is more than merely abstaining from evil; submission to rulers etc. are good works, and we are to submit without disobeying God.

The 'good works' primarily in view are practical matters such as the support of other believers; those engaged in Christian evangelism and missionaries (v. 13) and more generally: 'to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful' (cf. also Gal 6:9-10). As God has had mercy on us, may we have grace to have mercy on others.

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## My Notes:

### Questions for Reflection:

1. Why was it that the first controversy of the gospel as preached by Jesus and his apostles was about justification by grace through faith apart from our works? (cf. Luke 18:13-14, with Romans 10:1-3; Romans 3:9-4:25).
2. In the ESV the expression 'good works' occurs: once in Matthew (5:16); once in John (10:32); once in Acts (9:36); once in Ephesians (2:10); four times in 1 Timothy (2:10, 5:10, 25; 6:18); four times in Titus (2:7, 14; 3:8, 14) and once in Hebrews (10:24); what conclusions might we draw from this? Is it a warning?
3. How do you identify with the scriptural description of our state before we come to saving faith in the Lord Jesus? (Titus 3:3)
4. Why does the apostle Paul call Jesus 'the goodness and lovingkindness' (ESV) or 'the kindness and love' (NIV) of God? (v. 4, cf. 1 John 4:9-10). When did this 'goodness and lovingkindness appear? (cf. Ephesians 2:3-6; 2 Thess 2:13-14).
5. What does it mean to be careful to devote ourselves to good works, negatively and positively? What sort of cases or persons are worthy of our good works? (vs. 13, 14; cf. also Galatians 6:9-10 and *Thoughts from Other Minds*, overleaf).