

## Organizing the Mission "Mercy In, Mercy Out" Titus 3

### Introduction

- [Slide #1] D.L. Moody once said, "Law tells me how crooked I am; grace comes along and straightens me out."<sup>1</sup> And that's exactly what Paul has instructed Titus to do to deal with the disorder, the crookedness in the churches on Crete. Teach grace, grace, grace. For Titus, straightening out what was left unfinished involved the installation of godly men, elders who could apply sound doctrine, especially grace. The application of grace to various groups in the church—so important considering the church met in homes. And now chapter 3. The church's influence in the world around it—or to put in terms we've used so frequently throughout the past year, the mission. The application of sound doctrine affects the church's mission.
- Look at Titus chapter 3. The refrain of Titus 3 is the phrase *do what is good*. Look at the text. Titus 3:1. *Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good.* Titus 3:8. *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.* Now jump ahead to Titus 3:14. *Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives.* Beginning. Middle. End. Do what is good. Do what is good. Do what is good.
- In chapter 2 it was grace that teaches us to say no to ungodliness. And here in chapter 3 it's God's mercy that teaches us to do what is good. Chapter 2 is the school of grace. Chapter 3 is the school of mercy. [Slide #2]

### Big Idea

- **God's mercy produces churches of irresistible influence**
- In other words, how does Titus know if he has been successful in leading God's church out of chaos and to order? When God's people, empowered by grace, become eager to do what is good that church has turned the corner toward health. ICU is no longer needed. Remove the ventilator. Things are improving. And when God's people, empowered by mercy, begin to overflow with good deeds; they've just checked out of the hospital. Full health has been restored. **God's mercy produces Christians of irresistible influence who overflow with deeds of mercy.**

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<sup>1</sup> D.L. Moody, *Christian History*, no. 25.

- Structurally, Paul has set up chapter 3 almost exactly the same way as chapter 2. Behavior or commands first followed by the doctrinal basis for those commands second. Look at the text. **Titus 3**.

### Organizational Sentence

- **Two lessons from the school of mercy that produce students of irresistible influence**
- [Slide #3] Lesson one comes from **verses 3-8**; by his mercy God didn't write us off; he saved us. [Slide #4] And then from **verses 1-2** and **verses 9-15**, the second lesson; because God has treated us mercifully we can't write people off—we must do devote ourselves to doing good to them, to being merciful.
- Let me say a word about mercy, the only word in the English language **Chuck Norris** supposedly doesn't know the meaning of. Mercy is more than the withholding of punishment. Simply put God's mercy is his kindness and love, his goodness toward us in our moment of need. It is saving at the critical moment. At the peak of our misery and distress God extends mercy; he intervenes to save. Mercy and grace are similar; they are opposite sides of the same coin. It is because God is merciful that he can then offer grace.
- Before we too quickly say, "Mercy is easy. I get mercy." Let me add, if there's such a thing as cheap grace, grace without effect, there's such a thing as cheap mercy. Mercy shouldn't only produce a feeling of relief. "Whew, I didn't get mine." Mercy rightly understood is meant to change us. I need you to see from **Titus 3** that what we believe about God's mercy is meant to make us different people and change how we act. And in the case of **Titus 3**. **God's mercy produces a church of irresistible influence.**
- That influence comes from seeing God be merciful to us which makes us desirous to do what is good. Good deeds. Good works have an incredibly important place in the lives of believers. We know this. **James 2**. *Faith without works is dead*. The problem is there is a gap between the deeds we think we do and the perception nonbelievers have as they watch us try to live out our faith. We as believers have a credibility problem.
- In most people's eyes the church is irrelevant. Why? People outside these four walls, generally speaking, think we don't care about them. That's the perception. They see a faith without deeds. Generally speaking, the outside world thinks we exist only for ourselves; that we only care about meeting our own needs. In other words, we have no influence on the world around us because, as **Titus 3** would say, we have been fundamentally unaltered by God's mercy.
- Do you know the name **Anne Rice**, rormerly the author of very dark, gothic, vampire kinds of literature? In 2005 something unexpected happened and Rice becomes a follower of Jesus. Her life and writings dramatically change.

She starts listening and being taught by people like [N.T. Wright](#) and [Don Carson](#). Over the past few years she produced two Christ haunted kinds of books; *Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt* and *Christ the Lord: The Road to Cana*. Radical departures from her previous stuff.

- Just a couple of weeks ago a story surfaced about Rice doing an about face and rejecting Christianity. In an interview with *Christianity Today* explained why. She said, “Christians have lost credibility in America as people who know how to love.”
- How do we overcome the perception, or even the reality of being unloving and uncaring? How does a church come to have an irresistibly good influence on a bad world? It is only by the transforming power of God's grace and mercy. **It is God's mercy upon mercy that produces Christians of irresistible influence.**

### Transition

Look at [verses 3-8](#). [First lesson](#) from the school of mercy; the doctrine behind irresistible influence. We owe everything to the mercy of God.

- *At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. 4 But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, 5 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, 6 whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. 8 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.*
- Like the section in chapter 2 on grace these verses explaining God's mercy are about as good as it gets. God saved us. He saved us. Christians are a saved people. He saves his people from their sins. Listen. “It is not enough to affirm that the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men; we must be able to say that he saved us, even he saved me.”<sup>2</sup>
- The Christian story, your story, is a story of salvation. The Father has sent his son to be the Savior of the world. The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost. In [verses 3-8](#) Paul explains to Titus why salvation is necessary, where it originates, what it rests on, how it comes to us, what it leads to, and how that salvation proves itself.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Stott, p. 201.

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- Why is salvation necessary? You ask most people and about the word “save” and you’ll hear about what you do when you’re working on the computer or what a goalie does in a game. And should you press them further about human morality most people will generally affirm humanity’s goodness. “We are all basically good people.” And if humankind is basically good then **Titus 3:3** makes no sense and Jesus’ death on the cross is a ludicrous waste.
- Salvation is necessary because, whether we realize it or not, our condition is desperate. **Titus 3:3**. *At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.* This is our condition. This is why salvation is necessary. You and I, by nature, are mentally and morally depraved. We are foolish when it comes to understanding spiritual things. By nature we are not good people. Our wills are enslaved. We glide from day to day envying, hating. Sure there are occasional glimmers of goodness in the human spirit—an occasional spark that shows the mark of being made in God’s image. But for the most part we are dying embers. And in response to this condition—he saved us. God didn’t write us off; he didn’t let the spark die out. God rescued us from this mindset, this lifestyle.
- Salvation is not only necessary, it has an origin. **Verse 4 and 5**. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, **5** he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us. He saves his people from their sins. God saves. He intervenes. He intercedes at the crucial moment. If you at all swim in the pool of religion or spirituality you’ll frequently hear from the Life Guards that salvation comes not from without but from within. At this pool, and to drowning people the Life Guards shout “look into yourself, explore yourself, all the answers are within you.”<sup>4</sup> No. Salvation does not come from within. Salvation is external to us. It’s origin is God. The kindness and love of God. God, having noticed our condition, rescues. Motivated by his love, his goodness, his kindness, God intervened for you at the crucial moment. And he does this because he’s merciful. God doesn’t intervene because we deserve rescue and intervention.
- “God will never find in us anything worthy of his love, but he loves us because he is kind and merciful.”<sup>5</sup> He saves because he is merciful. *But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.* This is key. There is a huge difference between righteousness or salvation by works—things we do, and salvation the result of mercy.

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<sup>4</sup> Stott, p. 202-3.

<sup>5</sup> Calvin, p. 202.

- I need you to imagine a commuter train rumbling into a train station that is on fire—ceiling, walls, platform about to crumble. Smoke everywhere. You're on the platform, the doors open, the conductor steps out, and you're lucky enough to scramble on and find a seat. When you look around the car, you see tickets clipped on the top of occupied seats, paid for with hard-earned money. Those tickets displayed at each seat are the special concern of the conductor, who walks through the car to punch tickets and confirm that you paid for the right to take this ride. If the conductor finds you without a ticket, you will either pay on the spot or be escorted off the train at the next stop. To ride this train, what matters is the paid ticket. This is righteousness by works.
- Righteousness by mercy, on the other hand, works very differently. God's train pulls into the station, warning bell clanging. Platform and terminal on fire. The doors open and the conductor steps out. Masses of people crowd the doors clamoring for a seat; everyone wants to ride this train to the city where people never die. Eventually the conductor walks through the train to see if everyone belongs on board. But on this train the conductor is not looking for tickets clipped to the top of seats. In fact, anyone who tries to pay for the right to be on the train will be escorted promptly from the train at the very next stop. No one can earn the right to be on this train. What the conductor looks for as he walks the aisle is the penniless people he knows by name, the people who are his friends and who completely lack the means to pay. These poverty stricken people climb on board with only one hope: they believe in the generosity and loving kindness of their savior. They ride at the mercy of the conductor.<sup>6</sup>
- *He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.* This is God's way and it is scandalously wonderful.
- This wonderful salvation comes about through the work of God the Holy Spirit. Did you notice, all three persons of the Trinity are involved saving? God the Father notices our condition. Motivated by love and kindness and mercy He throws us a cross shaped life preserver. And in the process of rescuing us Christ the rescuer loses his life. But it is the third member of the godhead, the Holy Spirit, [verse 5](#), who actually saves us from our condition of spiritual ignorance and enslavement, our guilty consciences and foolish disobedience. *He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior.*
- The terms *washing of rebirth* and *renewal* are two, synonymous ways of expressing and describing the transformation that comes about from being rescued. Rescue is not without effect. So if somebody claims to be born again, this verse is one of the verses where that term comes from, so if

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<sup>6</sup> Adapted from an illustration by Craig Brian Larson, editor of PreachingToday.com

somebody claims to be born again without any effects, without any evidence of a changed life, they shouldn't be believed. You are fundamentally different upon rescue. *At one time we too were, verse 3*, but are no longer. Transformation. A rescued person is fundamentally altered. Something has changed.

- Part of that change in status is described by [verse 6](#) and [7](#). That changed status leads to something. We become heirs, with hope. *So that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.* To be justified means that God declares us righteous through the sin-bearing death of his son. What we once were graciously no longer counts against us. A person rescued by mercy has the hope of inheriting eternal life. This, Paul says in [verse 8](#), is a trustworthy saying. You can count on it happening.
- Do you see what Paul is doing here? He's instructing Titus about the merciful nature of salvation, why it's necessary, where it originates, what it rests on, how it comes to us, what it leads to, so that he might show how that salvation proves itself—people who in turn live mercifully.<sup>7</sup>
- I love this concise summary of 3-8 by [George Knight](#). “God saved Christians, though they had done no deeds of righteousness, simply because of his mercy. He did this through Christ by the washing away the bondage of their sins and regenerating and renewing them by the Holy Spirit. Having declared the Christians righteous in his sight by grace, God made them heirs who have the hope of eternal life. It is evident that Paul wants this saying about God's mercy, kindness, and love toward mankind to be a motivation for Christians to perform good deeds toward sinful people.”<sup>8</sup>
- “Good works are not the ground of salvation, but they are its necessary fruit and evidence.”<sup>9</sup> [Verse 8](#). *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.*
- God has treated us mercifully when we were foolish, disobedient, deceived, therefore we are to treat others, the world around us mercifully. Let me say it like this. How you treat others reflects your understanding of how God has treated you. Mercy in. Mercy out. The inflow of God's mercy should produce merciful believers who excel at good deeds. We must be ready to do whatever is good, [verse 1](#), to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men, [verse 2](#). We must

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<sup>7</sup> Stott, p. 201.

<sup>8</sup> Knight, p. 331.

<sup>9</sup> Stott, p. 206.

excel at doing what is good and working to bring relief at the critical moment of need because we are people of mercy.

- The reason we have a credibility problem as Christians, the reason we have no discernable influence on the world around us is because we have been fundamentally unaltered by God's mercy. **God's mercy produces Christians and churches of irresistible influence.**
- The inflow of God's mercy in your life should be producing an outflow of good deeds. In the Bible, there is no legitimate separation between belief and behavior. If you aren't living it then you haven't truly experienced it. God's mercy is not without effect; it must necessarily produce the fruit of good deeds in the life of someone who has really experienced that mercy.
- You know the Chicago River? The 156 mile long river that winds its way through downtown Chicago? It flows the wrong direction. I don't know if you knew that. It should flow into lake Michigan. It doesn't. It unnaturally flows away from Lake Michigan. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century civil engineers, through a series of canal locks, actually reversed the natural course of the river.
- When it comes to good deeds we try to do the same thing. Faced with the prospect of churches full of people who claim to know God's mercy, but have never truly encountered the mercy of God and therefore lack good deeds, we work tirelessly maintain some influence on the world around us by artificially engineering the flow of good deeds. It's the church on life support. For the most part dead and artificially kept alive by programs and guilt trips and cajoling from the pulpit to get people to serve and do good deeds. You know what? The most gifted pastors and church leaders are totally incapable of engineering the flow of good deeds from something that is spiritually dead. Only God is able to fundamentally alter the flow of your life, of my life, to produce something not natural to us—good deeds. Mercy in? Then mercy out. No mercy in? No mercy out. It is the mercy of God that prepares and compels God's people to do what is good.
- There is a huge difference between establishing church structures that artificially direct God's people toward good deeds and the people of God, transformed by his mercy, supernaturally flowing good deeds out into the community becoming a church of irresistible influence. That is only something God can do. He must save you. He must transform you. Are you saved? Are you transformed? Have you experienced his mercy? You must be born again. New birth, new life in Christ is as simple as saying yes to God. Yes to his assessment of your condition. Yes to his mercy. Yes to Christ.

## **Conclusion**

- "Christians have lost credibility in America as people who know how to love." Let me end with this. One thing that has puzzled sociologists for years has been the exponential growth of Christianity in the first few centuries after

Christ. A Princeton University sociologist by the name of [Rodney Stark](#) took it upon himself to try to answer this question. How does an obscure, localized, persecuted, uneducated band of Jesus freaks, who numbered in the thousands in 50 AD, grow to millions upon millions by the reign of Constantine in the early 4<sup>th</sup> century?

- His answer? Plagues. There were two plagues. One in AD 165 the other in 251; each time a third of the population was wiped out. The reason for Christianity's exponential growth? Christians were the only ones who did anything about it. Stark writes, "Pagans tried to avoid all contact with the afflicted, often casting the still-living into the gutters. Christians on the other hand, nursed the sick, even though some died doing so." End quote. And as millions were rescued physically they heard the good news of God's rescue through Christ. *For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*<sup>10</sup>
- What makes a person act like this? This is normal Christianity by the way. Mercy that saves and produces an eternal hope. You want to help end Christianity's credibility problem? It happens by the transforming power of God's mercy empowering you to show kindness and love, goodness toward others in their moment of need; at the critical moment, at the peak of their distress. That kind of behavior proves your salvation to be real. It is his mercy alone that produces Christians and churches with irresistible influence.

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<sup>10</sup> Colossians 1:13-14