

TITUS



Day 299

“Sound In The Faith”

October 26 - Titus 1: 1-16

Salutations,
A believer in Jesus ought never to stop growing. Think back to the picture of the Vine and the branches. Jesus makes it clear that His will for us is to bear fruit. He doesn't mean apples or oranges or tangerines; He means true spiritual fruit. If you stop growing in this way, life becomes spiritually empty.

Since my first encounter with the Lord back in the 1970s I have been through a number of ups and downs. Who cannot relate to that? But no matter where I was, from that time forward I knew that satisfaction and hope and joy were only found in Jesus. I am thankful that the Lord is patient with me and has put up with a great deal of selfish whining through some of those years.

The teaching of the Word of God is meant to result in our movement from selfishness to godliness. The book of Titus, Paul's last pastoral letter, stresses that the result of following Jesus is a change towards His likeness. Paul expects Titus to take the bull by the horns and move the faith forward. He is not to let anyone bully him when it comes to standing up for the tradition of the gospel. Paul told this young pastor to rebuke those who do not conform to the teaching that leads to soundness in the faith.

These days it's hard to find anything that is sound. It seems like things just break down rather than give us lasting results. We go out and buy some new product and within a week it's next to the garbage. Why I keep so many things in my shed that are broken down I'll never know. If you went out there today, you'd see weed whackers and old paint equipment and boxes

filled with gadgets and meaningless odds and ends. I guess I think I'll get around to fixing some of it but, the truth is that I won't. I think I put up with the broken down stuff because I'd like to think that somehow, magically, it will all be put right again. We even lack soundness within ourselves because we seek soundness in the temporary things of this world.

Paul encourages Titus to be sound in the faith. This means that he should keep the message of the gospel fresh in his mind and be ready to share it with anyone who has an ear. It also means that he must stand against those who oppose the teaching. He must be able to clearly articulate the message and put those who distort it in their place. Soundness, when you're talking about music—depends on the quality of the instrument you are using. The gospel message is as sound as can be, but sometimes we don't hit the right notes when we become too lackadaisical in the way we use it.

Paul's emphasis on lifestyle and Christian example are a constant reminder to us that the gospel was meant to change our lives. This is an ongoing change. The love of Christ forever transforms us into His image. Those who think they can somehow embrace Christ but have no significant change towards godliness are mistaken. Purity and Christian character are the bedrock of cutting-edge ministry to others.

A powerless Christianity is no good to anyone. People need to see the hope that their lives can change if they follow Jesus. When they see someone who claims to be a believer stumbling around in his selfishness and sin, the message of the gospel is di-

luted, and there is nothing but confusion. Jesus wants to change us today no matter how much progress we have already made.

How about you? Are you sound in the faith? Do you know the message of the gospel fairly well? If someone is watering down the truth, can you put him in his place? Do you live for Jesus every day and rely on Him even when times are tough?

Today is a day to hear His voice and follow Him.

Being sound in faith happens when we hear the sound of His voice. He is sound, His message is sound, and we can be sound in the faith so that we will be ready to be used by God in the next hour if need be.

People will be drawn to you if you are sound. Most people are sick and tired of everything breaking down. Your soundness will attract them to the Lord.

God's blessings are sound,
Pastor Steve

take the heat when something goes wrong or breaks down. You will not be able to pass blame, complain, or run away. You will take the glory or the fall no matter what anyone else says or does. All aboard!

You will always be tempted to look at the other vessels sailing by on the starboard side and wish that you were as magnificent as they are. It will be difficult to maintain your course when it feels like other ships have it easier and are higher class than yours. Your eyes must always be locked on the affairs of your own boat; to daydream may be disastrous both for you and your passengers. All aboard!

Paul also teaches that self-control is a fruit of the Holy Spirit at work in us. He says that God will help you to take care of yourself. He tells Titus to teach the church members to practice self-control as a top priority, probably because it represents one of the main aspects of the life of Jesus. Jesus has given us the grace needed to be self-controlled. He indicates

that this grace is sufficient to help us live godly lives, Christ-honoring lives, in the world.

So what is the condition of your ship? Is it in need of repair? Have you been distracted lately from doing the things that will keep it sailing no matter what the weather may be? Which parts need attention? Do you need to study the map so that you do not veer off course (that means- be in the Word)? Do you need to encourage the crew (in other words, maintain the fellowship of the church)? Do you need to put in a call to the ship's designer and builder in order to get a better understanding of how and why it was made (that's continuing in prayer)? Or is it possible you need to forge ahead and be that example to the other boats at sea, so that they too can find their purpose for being afloat (be a witness to others)?

God's blessings move us forward,
Pastor Steve



“What Difference Does It Make?”

October 27 - Titus 2: 1-15

Grace and Peace to You,
Your life is significant. God has made you to be significant. What you do and what you say will impact someone for better or for worse. The fact that you can think and reason and make decisions proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that you are a meaningful creature.

I once read 2 Corinthians 5:17, that famous verse about our new identity in Christ, to a man in the park to whom I had just introduced myself, and he told me he did not care to be called a “creature.” I was reading from the only Bible I had at the time, and the version in which I had memorized the verse, the old King James, uses the word “creature.” Creature, of course, means “creation,” which is how it reads in other translations. The point is, that if you are “in Christ” you are new; the old has gone, the new has come. This is a very remarkable place to be, and exactly where we need to be. We all need to be someone different than the old sinful self that has dominated us from the womb.

Paul's encouragement to Titus, one of his “sons” in the faith, ought to also inspire us to live beyond the humdrum of daily existence. It motivates us to love godliness and hate sin. He reminds us that there

is a common element in the learning process all believers go through, whether they are older men, older women, or younger people. Did you notice that “self-control” is a common thread running through Paul's comments to Titus about the things he ought to teach?

What would more self-control mean to us? I think I would probably watch what came out of my mouth more. I'd think twice before going to an R-rated movie. I'd think before I moved forward with an important decision that would affect my life or the lives of others. I'd consider what alcohol might do to me in the long run. I'd be aware of my weaknesses and not put myself in temptation's way if I thought I'd be susceptible to falling in a moral morass.

Self-control is about—you guessed it—being in control of yourself. At the point of complete self-control, you are the captain of your ship and you take full responsibility for what happens on board. You are responsible for the maintenance and operation of the vessel. You decide who gets on board and what role each will play on your ship. You are the one in charge of reading the map and charting a course for the future. You will be sailing through both calm and stormy waters, but it is you and no one else who will have to



“Rebirth”

October 28 - Titus 3: 1-15

Good Day,
After my wife finally delivered our first child, she looked like she had been hit by a Mack truck. There is a reason why they call it “labor.” I, of course, was the coach. I recall being in a lunchroom down the hall eating a ham sandwich, and hearing her scream from the delivery room. Some coach I was. Despite all of the rigors of the experience, our little bundle arrived. She was two full weeks past her due date. Just the wait was grueling.

But when my daughter was finally born, the reality of what had occurred in our life was just a hair short of miraculous. Life had come. A living, breathing human being was added to the human race. How did that happen? Yeah, I know about the seed and the egg

and all that, but how did it really happen? We played our roles, but the outcome is still so amazing that it defies logical explanation.

Our third child weighted in at 10 pounds, 5 ounces. When the mid-wife lifted the brute from the womb and laid him on my wife's stomach, she gasped. They thought he would be in the 8-pound range. Oh no, he came out in the heavyweight class. The crazy thing was that she had him naturally, no meds, and with a minimal amount of screaming. I think that was because I was a better coach by then, and was able to help control the situation better. If you believe that, then I have some land in Arabia to sell you.

My favorite delivery story happened to some friends of ours. She so wanted to have a natural deliv-

ery that she made her husband promise not to allow her to have any drugs during labor. Anita is a fiery little Italian gal who commands your attention when she has her heart set on something. Her husband, Donny, is an attentive husband who enjoys making his beloved wife happy. During delivery things were going along fine for awhile, but once she reached the transition stage she asked Donny to get her some medication because it was more than she could bear. Donny was ready for this and politely told her “no,” thinking that he would eventually be the hero because of his faithfulness to her previous request. Anita became more and more animated and desperately repeated her plea. Donny resisted, reminding her of their earlier conversation. Anita clenched her fist, rose up as best she could and walloped him right in the nose. The nurse went to order the meds.

The fact that “this child” is born leads me to believe that her existence was designed by God. He is the one who formed her in her mother’s womb. Her personality and her face and her body and her heart and her mind are all so set that it makes no sense to think all of it happens by chance. My daughter and my sons were somehow, by God’s grace, created. Doesn’t David say in the Psalms that we were “fearfully and wonderfully made?” That is no accident. God is the author of life from first to last. He is not surprised by how someone looks or feels or acts. God is our Maker.

Likewise, God is the author of our new birth, our

rebirth in Christ. His salvation of our souls is not dependent on anything we have done. Paul is reminding Titus of the love, wisdom, and sovereignty of God. He says that God worked our salvation out on the basis of His mercy. In other words, even though we deserved judgment, God overlooked that and gave us pardon through Jesus. He says that the rebirth was a work of God, and that the Holy Spirit actively moves the hearts of those on whom God’s mercy rested. This rebirth and renewal has brought washing from sin and a fresh start in life for each and every person who has received the grace of God.

If you take a look at John 3, you’ll see this same emphasis. Jesus said that you would have to be “born of the Spirit” in order to be “born again,” or “born anew.” That is the same idea Paul stresses in our reading today. All that God has done for us in Christ gives us a new heart, one that is now clean and upright. This is a gracious gift of God and one that we ought never to take for granted.

Paul tells the young preacher to remember to honor this gift from God by following up with works that will reflect the thankfulness a renewed person feels. This attitude will keep him from getting trapped in meaningless arguments that lead to all kinds of disruption. Instead, the church is to be busy doing things that bring glory to God.

God’s blessings reflect God’s mercies,
Pastor Steve