

"Things which become sound doctrine"

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In his epistle to Titus the Apostle Paul laid great stress upon two things: first, upon "sound doctrine" (Titus 1: 9); second, upon "the things which become sound doctrine" (Titus 2: 1). These two are closely related as cause and effect, so much so that each may be used as a test to the other.

In opening the epistle the Apostle wrote of "the truth which is **after godliness**," for all real "truth" has **this** as its effect and fruit. That which has not is thereby declared to be spurious and not "truth" at all. But, on the other hand, in writing, "speak thou the things which become sound doctrine," he indicated that any course of behaviour or speech not in keeping with truth and sound doctrine is thereby condemned. Sound doctrine and sound conduct fit one another like a die and the impression it makes in the wax.

Though this short epistle is mainly occupied with instructions as to conduct, there is yet given a very clear summary of sound doctrine, both as to the grace of God that has appeared, working redemption on our behalf, and also of the mercy that in washing and renewing us has wrought out our salvation. The former deals with the objective work wrought for us, and yet outside and apart from us, by Christ. The latter deals with the subjective work, wrought within us individually and severally by the Spirit of God.

In the first place then, sound doctrine sets before us the grace of God. In Crete were found, "unruly and vain talkers and deceivers specially they of the circumcision." These were full of, "Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth." Law was their theme, but law degenerated into human commandments; and they, while binding law upon other people, are stigmatised by a fine stroke of irony as **unruly** themselves. The genuine law had once appeared, but now it is the grace of God that has appeared.

Next, this grace has brought with it salvation for all men — the marginal reading here being the better translation. Grace overleaps the boundaries that were observed under the law. Then God made known His demands to one nation only. Now with the offer of grace He addresses Himself to all men. How many may humble themselves to receive His grace is another matter.

Further, the grace has been expressed in the Lord Jesus, who "gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us." Israel was typically redeemed from Egypt, the land of darkness and bondage, that they might be His servants and witnesses. Our redemption was a more vital matter, to deliver us from all iniquity, and purify us to Himself for His own special possession, a people zealous of good works.

Then also, the grace which has redeemed us teaches us in very effectual fashion. Formerly the law was schoolmaster, and it imposed upon man demands and instructions from without. Grace teaches by acting upon the heart and conscience within. If we look back to our school days, when many things

were imposed upon our memories by books from without, we realize how much of it we have clean forgotten. Yet there were many things, which never taxed our memories but yet wrote themselves on our hearts and ingrained themselves into our characters. These things we have not lost and never shall. It is after this fashion that grace teaches.

Lastly, grace also directs our eyes to the future, so that we are "awaiting the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ" (New Trans.). The grace that has appeared redeems, instructs, and leaves us to await the glory; for the second coming of our Lord is an integral part of "sound doctrine."

The thought of what the Cretans were by nature lies as a dark background to this epistle. Paul quoted with approval the very uncomplimentary saying of one of their own prophets, "Cretans are always liars, evil wild beasts, lazy gluttons" (New Trans.). But in the third chapter Paul speaks not of the Cretans alone, but of himself and all of us. "We ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another." This being the case, thorough moral cleansing is our deep necessity.

This deep need has been met by the appearing of God's mercy and love to man — His philanthropy. We have been saved by a work wrought in us, a work of washing and renewing. The word translated, "washing" is one that literally means "bath" or "laver," and the only other place where it is used in the New Testament is in Ephesians 5: 26. In Leviticus 8: 4-6, we read how Moses brought Aaron and his sons to the laver and there bathed them all over. This is typical of our passage. Subsequently the priests had to wash hands and feet in the laver every time they entered the sanctuary; and this is more typical of the passage in Ephesians.

The word translated "regeneration" also only occurs twice in the New Testament, the other occasion being in Matthew 19: 28, where it signifies the new order of things which will be established when the Lord Jesus Christ reigns, and when "a nation" — Israel — will be "born at once" (Isa. 66: 8). We learn in Titus that though we have not yet arrived at the hour of this world-wide regeneration yet believers today are the subjects of the washing of regeneration individually. The new birth in all its cleansing power is theirs.

Connected with this is "the renewing of the Holy Ghost." The Spirit acted in our new birth, as John 3 shows, but this renewing is produced by the Spirit being "shed on us abundantly," as the fruit of which we have that more abundant life, of which the Lord spoke in John 10: 10. We have been saved from all the folly and moral filth, of which Paul had just spoken, by the new birth and the renewing effected by the indwelling and work of the Spirit of God. Thus saved and also "justified by His grace," according to the redemption previously mentioned, we are "made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." All this sets before us an outline of "sound doctrine."

Titus was to "speak the things which become sound doctrine," so that the converts in Crete might be characterized by them and not be displaying their bad national features. A believer today may try to excuse an outbreak of temper or some fleshly display by saying, "Oh, well, that is my make-up; that is the kind of person I am." "No doubt it is," we may well reply, "but have you not been washed and thereby saved from such things?" Godliness is to mark us; and that means displaying the Divine nature and not our own deformities.

We are informed as to the things that become sound doctrine in the latter part of Titus 1 and the earlier part of Titus 2. Bishops are first addressed, then aged men, aged women, young women, young men, Titus himself, and then servants. It is when we come to these last, who were really slaves, or "bondmen," that the most comprehensive summary is found.

The present "world" or "age" is still pursuing its degraded and unsteady course, and it will not be altered until the appearing of the glory. Today God alters the whole character of those whom He saves by grace, that they may pursue their course through the unaltered age upon altogether new principles; those of sobriety, righteousness and godliness.

"Soberly."

This word occurs five times in the Authorized Version of Titus. On one occasion it is the translation of a word which means watchful or vigilant (Titus 2: 2). The other times the word used denotes temperance, prudence and general soundness of mind. The word "sound" also occurs five times, and is the translation of a word which has the sense of "healthful," which we have imported into our own language as "hygienic." The epistle to Titus may well be called the epistle of **spiritual hygiene** and **sobriety**.

The force of "soberly" turns in upon oneself. It does not so much define one's attitude towards God or one's neighbour, as one's own personal mental poise. A sober man is one who has learned his own nothingness in the presence of God. He has been brought down from all those high and lofty thoughts of self which lie at the heart of every child of fallen Adam, and consequently he sees God in His true light. This being so he has learned to estimate himself and people and things in something of their true value, and is not imposed upon by mere appearances. This imparts to him a solidity and weight, the very opposite to the fickleness, instability and levity which are so natural to us all. Let us so live in the light of eternal things that we do not waste our lives over the passing frivolities of the hour.

"Righteously."

A righteous man is one who renders what is right to all outside himself; to God first and foremost. When the Lord Jesus said, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" He was preaching practical righteousness.

The men of the world do not concern themselves with the claims of God, but they keenly scrutinise the Christian to see if he acts rightly to his fellows. Hence righteous action on our part is of the greatest importance, for a breakdown here destroys much good, and an ounce of practical unrighteousness will outweigh a ton of eloquent preaching. Are we weak as to this point?

Except we walk prayerfully with God we may easily and almost insensibly be infected with the spirit of the present age. There is great clamour for one's own rights with a determination to shirk responsibility as far as possible. To get as much as possible in return for as little as possible is all the rage. Therefore let Christians beware! Grace teaches us to live righteously.

It teaches the Christian to give full and proper pay to those he employs. It teaches the tradesman to give full measure, and eschew any trick by which illicit gain may be made. It teaches the workman to give steady and honest work, as conscientiously when not supervised as when under supervision. And if any have a believing master, or conversely a believing servant, no advantage is to be taken of that fact, as 1 Timothy 6: 2 shows.

"Godly."

The bearing of this word is clearly in regard to God. Our business is to "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things." The doctrine is beautiful in itself, yet it may actually be adorned by us; and

what will more effectually do this than the display of His character in those who profess it? We may safely affirm that nothing will.

If the Apostle's words through Titus had their proper effect, and there was found in the midst of the liars, evil wild beasts and lazy gluttons of Crete, a people who were visibly purified unto God for His special possession, characterized by these three things, and zealous of good works, what an effect must have been produced to the glory of God!

No less effect would be produced upon the men of this age, if these excellent things which become sound doctrine were more fully promoted amongst us, and in display for all to see.