

Zealous for Good Works

3. A People Devoted

Titus 3:8

Session 3 of the Covenant Baptist Church Camp, Rossmoyne, Perth

November 2009

by
Hein Aucamp

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A People Devoted

Background

This is the third of three sermons delivered at the 2009 church camp of Covenant Baptist Church, Rossmoyne, Perth.

Preliminary

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Reading before the sermon

Titus 3:1-15.

Introduction

I realise that some of you have joined us for the first time today, so you haven't been here for the previous two sessions. We are considering Paul's letter to Titus. Our theme for the camp is *Zealous for Good Works*. In this letter to Titus, Paul is concerned about the shortfall in the behaviour of the Christians on Crete. So he writes to Titus and to give him directions for correcting the situation. We are working through three pieces of strategic information from Paul's letter.

We had two sessions yesterday. In our first session we looked at the information in Tit 1:15, where Paul speaks about people who were incapable of good works, even though they said that they knew God and even though they used Scripture. This information is of strategic importance. We have to know it. It affects how we arrange our church life, and what we allow in our churches. It is vital that we realise that there are people incapable of good works, and that they may even use Scripture.

In our second session, we looked at the information in Tit 2:14, where Paul speaks about a people rescued by the Lord Jesus Christ: as a result of that rescue they are zealous for good works. This information is also of strategic importance. Again, we have to know it. It is vital that we realise that only those rescued by the Lord Jesus can do good works. And again, it affects what we do in our churches, and what we teach.

In this session, we look at our final piece of strategic information. Earlier we read the whole of chapter 3. Now let's focus on Tit 3:8:

⁸This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.

This is our third piece of strategic information about good works. Paul tells Titus that Titus must affirm something constantly. Titus must constantly remind Christians that they must maintain a conscious mindset focused on good works. Think about it: as Christians we maintain a satisfactory level of fruitfulness and of good works only when we pursue it consciously, as a matter of priority. And we make it a priority and pursue it constantly when we are reminded about it through the ministry of the word.

Paul is aiming at turning the Christians on Crete into a people devoted to good works. In the first session I spoke about a people *incapable of good works*. In our second, about a *people rescued in order to do good works*. In our third and final session, I want to speak about a people *devoted to good works*. The title of this sermon is ***A People Devoted***.

If you had to imagine a people devoted to some cause, what mental picture would you choose? When we considered a people incapable, we thought about the Cargo Cult people with their wooden blocks on their ears and bamboo rods, trying to get the planes to land. When we considered a people rescued, we thought about Naaman the Syrian, rescued from his leprosy.

What about a people devoted? What do they look like? One of the great leaders of the previous century was rallying a people in crisis. Their nation was standing alone against a ruthless foe, and was outnumbered and poorly equipped. He demanded a response from them to surpass their ancestry and to inspire their unborn descendants. Here is some of what he said:

... the Battle of France is over. I expect that the Battle of Britain is about to begin. Upon this battle ... depends our own British life, and the long continuity of our institutions and our Empire. The whole fury and might of the enemy must very soon be turned on us.... Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so

*bear ourselves that, if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say: "This was their finest hour."*¹

Winston Churchill, in that hour of peril, was trying to summon forth from the British people everything noble in their tradition and to neutralise all flaws. He was focusing their devotion for one cause, and trying to dispense with anything contrary. And so he charged that generation to be a perpetual monument of their national character. That's our picture today of a people devoted.

In our first session we considered *when good works are impossible*. In our second session we considered *when good works are possible and inevitable*. Now in our third session we will consider *when good works are abundant*.

When good works are abundant

Paul, who wrote this letter, was an outstanding example of abundance in good works. He set a magnificent standard for devotion to good works. We start by considering the example he set. Let's look at the person who wrote these instructions.

The example of Paul

Paul the apostle wrote these instructions to Titus about good works, because he was concerned about the shortfall in the behaviour of the Christians in Crete.

Let's think for a while about Paul, and about the lessons that we can learn about good works from him. In our second session, we considered the perfect example of our Lord Jesus Christ: how He was supremely and absolutely zealous for good works. We saw how willingly He obeyed the Father with perfect obedience. And of course, He is pre-eminent. Paul cannot be compared to Him. Paul cannot take His place. Paul wouldn't want to!

Nevertheless, there are important things that we can learn from Paul's life that we cannot observe in the life of the Lord Jesus.² Paul started off as an enemy of God. Paul was once a person incapable of good works. Indeed, Paul had once promoted all those doctrines of the false teachers: he was an expert in them, and had surpassed most of his companions in his misguided zeal (Gal 1:14). The Lord Jesus was never like this. Then Paul was rescued by the Lord Jesus, and redeemed from every lawless deed. Paul repented; the Lord Jesus never repented – He never had to.

We see in Paul an outstanding example of what the rescue by the Lord Jesus Christ can do to the worst of sinners. In our previous session, we were considering the life of Christ in Himself: we were looking directly at the head of the body. But in this session, we are considering the life of Christ in His body, the church. We are seeing what is possible for someone who has been rescued and joined to Him. We are still really talking about what the Lord Jesus does, but we have changed the direction of our gaze slightly. In our previous session, we looked at the root and trunk of the vine; now we are looking at a branch in that vine. Every branch is saturated with Christ's sap; every good thing comes from Him; every fruit is borne only in Him. Consider John 15:5:

⁵"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

Paul's life is instructive to us. He had a wicked past; he battled with indwelling sin in the present. But he was running an outstanding race and was set for heaven to receive a crown of righteousness (2 Tim 4:7-8).

When Paul writes to Titus about how a people utterly incapable of good works can become a people devoted to good works, he speaks about his own experience. Look at Tit 3:3-7:

³For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. ⁴But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, ⁵not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

¹ Churchill's *Second World War, Vol. 3: The Fall of France*, Cassell, 1968, p201.

² See for example Stalker's discussion in his *Life of St. Paul*, Academie Books, 1983, p12-13.

Paul is the kind of person that you simply have to take seriously. Think of how bad he had been. Think of how committed to Christ he became. In Tit 3:3-7 Paul speaks about his old and his new stories. Remember we spoke about the palimpsest: the parchment that was reused. Paul isn't engaged in some idle speculation that people can be saved and perhaps might be able to produce good works for the glory of God. On the contrary, he was living proof. And what's more, he insists that this must be the experience of everyone who has believed in God.

Before maps were drawn of areas, the only way of finding about a new region was to talk to people who had been there. In 1497, Vasco da Gama set sail from Portugal to find a sea route to India around the south of Africa. First he followed in the path of Bartholomew Diaz, who had rounded the Cape of Good Hope ten years earlier. Then Da Gama reached uncharted waters. But he met Indian captains, who guided him to the west coast of India.³ Suddenly it became easier; they were his maps. Paul is a map for us of the Christian life. He knows every region thoroughly. Think of all the areas of the Christian life he knew intimately: saved sinner; missionary; persecuted believer and martyr; apostle; preacher; inspired penman of Scripture. Think of how he overcame his racial elitism to minister to the humblest of the Gentiles. Think of how he was all things to all men, that by all means he might save some (1 Cor 9:22).

Paul isn't some armchair theorist urging others on to exploits of which he knows nothing. The instructions he gives to Titus here about good works are about things that he has experienced himself. When he tells Titus that false doctrine must be confronted, remember that he himself confronted Peter in Antioch when Peter was influenced by the false teachers (Gal 2:11ff).

And Paul's heart burnt with gratitude to the Lord Jesus. He never tired of remembering that it was the Son of God who had loved him, and had given Himself for him. He always acknowledged that his success in the Christian life was because of Christ who lived in him (see Gal 2:20).

Paul ended his Christian race magnificently, when he was martyred for Christ. Robert Reymond puts it so well:

Paul, of course, would remind us that that day was his coronation day, for that day he entered into a state which was 'better by far' than his present one, one that was only positive 'gain' (Phil 1:21, 23), where he was 'made perfect in holiness' (Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 37), and where he responded for the very first time to his Savior's sinless love for him with a sinless love of his own.⁴

Let me put this question to you: 'Do you want to be like Paul or like Christ?' And the answer is that in this life we are most like Christ when we are like Paul. 'Imitate me as I also imitate Christ,' Paul said in 1 Cor 11:1. It is partly by the life and teaching of Paul that we learn how to mortify sin and to persevere in good works with our frail and flawed humanities.

So when Paul gives Titus instructions for solving the problem in Crete – where good works were lacking – we can be sure that his directions are good. We have been working through these directions. And we have agreed already that if Christians immediately and automatically became as fruitful and mature as they should be, much of the New Testament would not have been written. Paul wrote this letter to address the problem.

Paul's third strategic piece of information is about the mindset that Christians must have if we are to abound in good works. It was the mindset that Paul himself had. It was the mindset that Titus would foster by silencing the false teachers and their influence. It was the mindset made possible by the death of the Lord Jesus – and indeed inevitable in a measure. But Paul wanted that mindset fanned into a flame, and to result in an abundance of good works.

So let's look now at the mindset that is essential for an abundance of good works.

What mindset is required for an abundance of good works?

One of the most important things about Christianity is the role of the mind. We are instructed in Biblical truth, which must transform our minds, and which in turn makes us fruitful. Just one passage to prove it: Rom 12:1-2:

¹I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. ²And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

³ Blaney's *Very Short History of the World*, Penguin, 2004, p217-221.

⁴ Reymond's *Paul, Missionary Theologian*, Mentor, 2000, p248-249.

But there is a particular problem to be avoided when trying to cultivate the correct Christian mindset. On the one hand, we need Scriptural truth in the form of information. Information is essential. Paul, for example, says that he prays that Christians would increase in knowledge. So for example, in Eph 1:15ff he says this:

¹⁵Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: ¹⁷that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, ¹⁸the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power ²⁰which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,...

We definitely need knowledge and information. But there is a catch. There is a certain kind of knowledge that is counterproductive, and won't produce the mindset required for good works. Look at what Paul says in 1 Cor 8:1-2:

¹Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. ²And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.

Paul is saying that there was a problem with the knowledge that the Christians in Corinth had about food offered to idols. The problem was not the accuracy of the knowledge, but the use of it. When Christians think about knowledge in terms of *something which I know, and which if you don't know makes you a bit silly*, it takes us away from the mindset that makes us abundant in good works. When *superiority in knowledge* is our aim, it will make us dangerous. It doesn't matter whether that knowledge is accurate as far as it goes, or whether it is totally false. If we seek knowledge with a superior attitude, we will be unfruitful. Some Christians in Corinth had an accurate perspective on food involved in idolatry, but they used their knowledge to injure their fellow Christians.

This attitude of pride and superiority takes any knowledge, accurate or inaccurate, and makes it harmful. You can imprison someone by locking them in a cage of gold, or by throwing them into a stinking hole in the ground. You can do bad works with accurate Scriptural knowledge as well as with the fables and false doctrines doing the rounds in Crete.

Of course, accurate Scriptural knowledge is essential. The advantage of accurate Scriptural knowledge is that it is intended to produce a fruitful mindset; the myths and fables cannot do that.

So if we need accurate, Scriptural knowledge, how should we receive it properly to have the right mindset? The answer is that we must always see Scriptural truth, not only in its individual statements, but in the light of the character of God revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Knowledge is given to us in Scripture, not to outdo others with the right answer, or to gain a reputation for scholarship, but to behave in the right way.

The right way to absorb the information in Scripture is to see it as training us to behave like the Lord Jesus Christ, or like Paul imitating Him. If we don't see Christ in Scripture, we can become puffed up with knowledge. If we do see Christ in Scripture, if we are aware of Him, if we have a reverent attitude towards Him as we read His word, the knowledge we gain will issue in love. Then we will be fruitful. Then the works we produce will be good.

Let me reinforce this point. Consider Phil 2:1-8:

¹Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, ²fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. ³Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. ⁴Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. ⁵Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

As you read that, do you get the idea that Scripture should be sifted for information to be used to compete with each other in a sanctified Trivial Pursuit? Of course not. There are times when it's better to keep quiet, even if you have 'the right answer.'

Of all people, Paul had a profound knowledge of theology. He gave us a great deal of what we have. He knew the doctrine of Christ inside out, the doctrine of the sovereignty of God, the doctrine of sin, and so on. What did this

knowledge do to him? In the language of Winston Churchill, it led him to brace himself to his duty to be Christ-like. Look at Phil 3:7-11:

⁷But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. ⁸Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; ¹⁰that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, ¹¹if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

This is what theology ought to do to a man, to a woman, to a young person. This is the effect that Scriptural knowledge ought to have. But sadly, it seldom has this effect. It is so much easier for us to use knowledge simply as *answers* rather than as *love in action*. The mindset that produces abundant good works is one that is responsive to the example of Christ. Knowledge is essential, but it is only the first step. An abundance of fruitfulness in a people devoted to good works depends on an impassioned response to the truth of Scripture as we desire to imitate the Lord Jesus.

Paul isn't the only one who says so. Look at the progression in 2 Pet 1:5-8:

⁵But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, ⁶to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, ⁷to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. ⁸For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Peter wants diligence, just like Paul. We must be careful to maintain good works. And knowledge is involved: Peter mentions that early on too. And as knowledge is held correctly, it brings about the response that it should, which is being neither barren nor unfruitful. Peter too is talking about a people devoted, who have a diligent, responsive mindset, and they are abundant in good works.

So this mindset is essential. People must be careful to maintain good works. Paul had this mindset himself. It involves knowledge, but that knowledge doesn't end as intellectual content in a display cabinet: it is received in appreciation of Christ, and it creates a loving response and a likeness to Christ. It ends in an abundance of good works.

How do we use this strategic information?

I want to give directions about using this strategic information in our personal lives, and then about using it in our congregational life.

First, our personal lives. As we consider the necessary mindset to be abundant in good works, we are coming to a vital area for all of us. Up till now it may have been easy for us non-Elders to feel that our fruitfulness is the responsibility of the Eldership. Of course the Elders do play a vital role. But the only thing that Elders can do is maintain an environment in which fruitfulness can occur, in which we have no excuse if we are unfruitful. So Elders ought to be removing any undermining teachings, and they ought to exhort us to behave appropriately in the light of our rescue by the Lord Jesus, and they ought to ensure that their own behaviour doesn't provide us with excuses to ignore them. These things are all true.

But ultimately, an abundance of good works either happens on the inside of Christians or it doesn't happen at all. You can be in the soundest environment and still be unfruitful. On the other hand, you can be in a very marginal setting, and you can rise above it. In the words of Winston Churchill, if *you* don't brace yourself to your duty, your duty won't be done properly.

Here are Paul's words again: *those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works*. Yes, he wants us to be told that: that is the duty primarily of the Elders and those who minister from the word. But his goal is that he wants us to be careful – that is an inner disposition and commitment – to maintain good works.

Here is a pivotal passage for us to consider: Eph 4:11-16:

¹¹And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹²for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, ¹³till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; ¹⁴that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, ¹⁵but,

speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

Let me pull out some vital points for us. People are made fruitful and mature by the ministry of the word of God. There are some church key roles here: first, those who produced the word of God, and second, those who use the word of God. So we read about foundational producers of Scripture such as apostles and prophets, and then about ongoing applicators of Scripture such as pastors and teachers. And the effect of these ministries on the body of Christ is exactly what we have been talking about. This ministry – if we receive it correctly – imparts an understanding, and equips us, and leads to a fruitfulness. The rescue by the Lord Jesus makes us zealous for good works, and the ministry of the word shapes that zeal and directs it into the correct channels.

Now where do you get this ministry from? The *apostles and prophets* part is easy to answer – we get it from Scripture. So, do Bible study. (And please read Ryle’s chapter on Bible Study in his *Practical Religion*.)

There is another part to this ministry: pastors and teachers. Where do we get them from? You can get them from the present of course. Churches employ people full time to provide this ministry. But don’t limit yourself to the present. And I say this for several reasons:

1. If you limit yourself to the present, you will receive teaching only twice or perhaps three times a week. But you can read something like Matthew Henry’s *Commentary* every day, and get some excellent teaching.
2. I am not giving away any secrets when I tell you that those of us who minister in this local body do not exhaust the best that church history has to offer.
3. All of us have our areas of strength, our eccentricities, our imbalances, and simply our styles and approaches.

There is great richness in the deposit of teaching gifts that the Lord Jesus has placed in the church across time and across nations. The English language is blessed with a vast and excellent Christian literature. If you ask around in congregations you are sure to find people who love and own Christian books, and who would be delighted to suggest and to critique authors.

Choose those authors who insist that the knowledge you are getting must issue in fruitfulness. Avoid those authors who use Scriptural knowledge purely to embarrass their opposition. There is a real danger in becoming an expert in everyone’s sins but your own, and there are many books and teachers who will help you do that. If someone makes you concerned about the shortfall in your own holiness, and helps you to do something about it, he is your friend.

So, seek and cultivate that mindset that is essential, so that you are careful to maintain good works.

That was the personal application of the strategic information. What about our congregational life?

In our congregational life, it means that we will focus on the kind of preaching and teaching that puts Biblical truth into its proper Biblical context. Every truth in Scripture can be handled in two ways. First, it can be handled superficially, where the truth is communicated with little or none of its significance for Christian living. Or second, it can be handled in a holistic Biblical manner, where it is seen in its relationship with God’s Person, Christ’s work, and our loving response to His salvation. Indeed the act of preaching and teaching itself should be part of a nourishing relationship between the Head of the Church and His body. Let me give you an example from over 100 years ago. Note the contrast between the two English preachers mentioned:

During the 1880s a group of American ministers visited England, prompted especially by a desire to hear some of the celebrated preachers of that land. On a Sunday morning they attended the City Temple where Dr. Joseph Parker was the pastor. Some two thousand people filled the building, and Parker’s forceful personality dominated the service. His voice was commanding, his language descriptive, his imagination lively, and his manner animated. The sermon was scriptural, the congregation hung upon his words, and the Americans came away saying, “What a wonderful preacher is Joseph Parker.” In the evening they went to hear Spurgeon at the Metropolitan Tabernacle. The building was much larger than the City Temple, and the congregation was more than twice the size. Spurgeon’s voice was much more expressive and moving and his oratory noticeably superior. But they soon forgot all about the great building, the immense congregation and the magnificent voice. They even overlooked their intention to compare the various features of the two

preachers, and when the service was over they found themselves saying, "What a wonderful Savior is Jesus Christ."⁵

This should be our aim when we preach, and when we invite preachers, and when we pray for our preachers. We need the kind of preaching and teaching that makes us grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ.

I have heard that public speaking is the number one fear among businessmen. Apparently, some of them fear it more than death. Those of us who preach are not subject to this fear. We are able to occupy pulpits and connect words together for extended periods. And there are many things that we can aim at as we occupy the pulpit. But the one thing that is necessary, without which we fail, and with which we succeed, is that we communicate the thoughts of the Head of the Church to His body, so that the body is more closely connected to the Head. You can be spectacularly gifted like Spurgeon, or you have speech impediments like some other great ministers had. But this is what we should desire for the overall tone of our gatherings.

It also means that we will focus on the great central truths of Scripture. Other things, even those things that are necessary, must make way for the great truths of redemption and holiness and the gospel. Remember that the diaconate in Acts 6 was formed precisely because necessary things would have distracted the Apostles from the essentials of prayer and the ministry of the word.

I made the point earlier that although we are a people rescued, and that although that rescue makes us a purified people, zealous for good works, we don't automatically reach a full state of maturity and fruitfulness. If we did, much of the New Testament would have been unnecessary.

What is taught and how it is taught have a huge influence on how a congregation conducts itself under the ministry of the word. I have seen pastors with so-called polemic ministries. From week to week they confront the errors of others, ranging from actual heresy to alternative opinions among genuine evangelical brethren. When I was younger I used to love this sort of thing. I'd learn about the cults, and about Roman Catholicism, and about Arminianism, and about the Charismatic Movement, and about infant baptism, and about evolutionists, and so on. And it is useful information; we need to know about it. But this kind of attacking ministry was the staple fare, from week to week.

As I look back, I can see the downside of this imbalance. I remember one little congregation, far away in South Africa (I was never a member). It stayed small, like a birdbath in the hot Perth summer, topped up but evaporating. The people heard a great deal about the errors and sins of everyone but themselves. There would be periodic trouble when some used their newly learnt hostile skills to assess their own situation. Then the pastor would get upset that they were untrusting. These aggressive assemblies are like political parties; they have an unwritten rule: never praise the opposition, never criticise your own group.

The church exists to praise God and to serve Him, and to bring the message of salvation to those who do not yet praise God and serve Him, so that they *may* praise Him and serve Him. And we continue our praise of Him in heaven. That is why we exist. We do not exist primarily to occupy ourselves with doctrinal error. Yes, of course we deal with error when we have to; error undermines our very foundation. But if all error were to disappear – as it will in heaven – the church on earth should not suddenly find ourselves with nothing to do. There is a real danger of a congregation finding its sole reason for existence in condemning error.

There is great wholesomeness in being able to appreciate the things that we have in common with all genuine Christians. For eternity, all that we will have is a Saviour in common with all other Christians, and a life in common with Him – and with them. And no one will use Scriptural knowledge then in a way that puffs up.

That's how to use the strategic information about when good works are abundant. We must maintain the right mindset, and see Scriptural truth in its context in the Lord Jesus.

Conclusion

Well, over these three sessions we have worked our way through Paul's letter to Titus. We have looked at three strategic pieces of information in that letter. And today we have considered a *people devoted to good works*.

⁵ Dallimore's *Spurgeon: A New Biography*, Banner of Truth, 1991, p216.

We thought about what a people devoted looked like. We remembered the famous speech by Winston Churchill when he called upon the British People to brace themselves to their duty, and to put aside everything that could hinder them. And then we considered the situation when good works are abundant.

We thought first about the person writing to Titus. We considered Paul, and the example he set. In considering Paul, we are really considering the life that Christ supplies to His members. Paul shows what is possible for redeemed humanity. When we are like Christ in this life, we are like Paul.

We saw that Scriptural knowledge is essential for abounding in good works. So we thought about the mindset we should have. We saw that it is possible to be puffed up even by Biblical knowledge if our mindset is wrong. The correct mindset is a loving appreciation of Christ. With that, we will have a passionate response to Scriptural truth that will issue in Christ-likeness – which means an abundance of good works.

Then we asked how we should use this strategic information in our churches. We should seek accurate Scriptural knowledge, but with a particular attitude, and in a particular context. We need to study Scripture with the right attitude. And we need to seek out preachers and teachers who love the Lord Jesus and make the connection between Scriptural truth and His will and how it should influence our behaviour. If those preachers and teachers have gone to glory, look for their books. If they are still alive, try to listen to them. For those of us who preach, let us strive to preach and teach like this. And pray for preachers and teachers like this to be raised up.

Today was the story of the Lord Jesus Christ in His members, and what the church should be because of the life He imparts to it by His Spirit and His word. That was our third and last piece of strategic information: when good works are abundant.

Now, finally, I want to wrap up the whole series using a story with an Australian connection.⁶ William Bligh was the governor of New South Wales from 1806. It is well known that he had been the Commanding Lieutenant of a ship named the *Bounty*, on which a famous mutiny occurred in 1787.

The mutineers had become attracted to the leisure and immorality of Tahiti. They took over the ship, sailed back to Tahiti, and persuaded some Tahitian women to accompany them (they may even have kidnapped them). They arrived at Pitcairn Island. They looted the ship and sank it, and then abandoned themselves to their passions. They found out how to make alcohol from the plants. Some were drunk for days or weeks. Fighting broke out and people were killed. Eventually only two of the men were left. At one stage the women and children were so frightened that they barricaded themselves on a section of the island. Clearly, they were a people *incapable of good works*. This is what we considered in our first session.

Then one day, one of the two survivors found the ship's Bible. One of the men could read. When they were sober, he read the Bible to the other. They began at Genesis. They realised that God was holy and they were sinners. The Bible started to change their lives. The one who could read died, but by this stage the other one had learnt to read. He came to the New Testament, where he read about the Lord Jesus. He said that he met God and the burden of his sin rolled away and he found a new life. He was *a person rescued*. This is what we considered in our second session.

This one remaining man taught the Bible to the women and children. In 1805, 18 years after the mutiny, a ship from Boston in Massachusetts visited the island. When the captain got back to Boston, he reported that he had never met a people who were so good and gracious. They were a people *devoted to good works*. This is what we considered in today's session.

I pray that this brief series has been useful. I hope that it not only provides you with accurate Scriptural knowledge, but that the knowledge comes with a deep appreciation of the Lord Jesus, and leads us to behave like Him: to be *zealous for good works*, and to be *abundant in good works*.

⁶ I got the account from Benton's *Straightening out the Self-Centred Church: The Message of Titus*, Evangelical Press, 1997, p137ff. I have used it somewhat differently.