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“But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine,” Titus 2:1.

Sustenance

Lesson Aim: To emphasize that it is the believer’s duty to sustain the teachings of Christ — not to inaugurate teachings

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Topic: Church Covenant; Doctrine; Faith: Defense of.

Covenant: “We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit . . . to sustain her worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines . . .”

Have you ever known a time when there was such a rash of new doctrines, and re-interpretation of old doctrines, as in recent years? There is both a wholesome and dangerous element to the popular interest in Christian doctrine.

It is healthy that Christians examine their beliefs. It is well that they understand what they believe and why they believe it. Current emphases have turned many to the Word of God. That is good.

There is a danger, however, abroad in the land. There is a danger that believers may be led astray by a desire for novel doctrines. There is a danger that the enemy of souls, Satan, may deceive people into believing falsehoods. There is a danger that the zeal of teachers of half-truth might lead the unwary astray. Christians should be aware of those dangers as they follow Christ.

It is the privilege of the believer to stand by the truth believed and taught by their fathers in the faith. It is the privilege of the believer to be taught by the Spirit the new applications of divine truth in view of the current cultural and religious need. Truth is always the same and yet ever new. One should know the truth, believe the truth, and obey the truth. That way, he will be a blessed and happy Christian.

Today's study examines the Christian's spirit, his experience, and his duty in view of Titus 3:1-11, 14. It points out that it is the believer's duty to sustain the teaching of Christ, not to inaugurate new teachings.

I. THE CHRISTIAN SPIRIT (Titus 3:1, 2)

“ . . . Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of, For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them,” Luke 9:55, 56. Jesus spoke those words to His disciples when they wanted to retaliate because of rejection by certain Samaritans by calling down fire from heaven to destroy them. Do you know of what kind of spirit you are? Titus 3:1, 2 reveals the Christian spirit to be one of humble submission, active obedience, and gentle relationships.

A. Humble submission — **“ . . . Be subject to principalities and powers . . .,”** verse 1. The Christian is not to be a man of violence. Rebellion against duly constituted authority has no place in the life of one of God's children. Even if one objects to the government he is under, he is not to rebel. Humble submission is the Christian spirit.

Submission to human authority is a part of submission to divine authority. The same spirit which causes one to curse the ruler of the people causes one to revile God (Exodus 22:28). The Apostle Paul apologized for speaking harshly to the Jewish high priest, even though the priest was in error. **“ . . . It is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people,”** Acts 23:5. The Christian is under God's command. **“Let every soul be subject unto the, higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God,”** Romans 13:1. The Christian spirit is manifested in this manner: **“Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king,”** I Peter 2:17.

B. Active obedience — Christians are to be “ready to every good work,” verse 1. That is how they let their lights shine before men that men who see their good works may glorify God (Matthew 5:16). In all things the Christian is to show himself a pattern of good works (Titus 2:7). Not content just to be actively obedient himself, he is to be constantly on the alert that each believer he meets is encouraged to live in love and good works (Hebrews 10:24).

Good works (active obedience to the commands of Christ) are proof that a person is saved. As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith which

does not produce good works is also dead (James 2:17, 26). It is the privilege of each believer to live in such active obedience to Jesus Christ that those who would speak evil of Christians will rather be constrained to glorify God in them (I Peter 2:12). One ought to prove his faith by his works.

C. Gentle relationships — Here is the Christian standard: **“To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men,”** verse 2.

The spirit in one man will stir up a kindred spirit in another. **“A wrathful man stirreth up strife: but he that is slow to anger appeaseth strife,”** Proverbs 15:18. As coals kindle fire, so contention kindles strife (Proverbs 26:21).

The Christian should be **“Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,”** Ephesians 4:3. That is why he should be filled with the “fruit” of the Holy Spirit — love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance (Galatians 5:22, 23). God's principle is plain: **“The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men . . .,”** II Timothy 2:24. Paul set the example by ministering to the Thessalonian Christians **“. . . as a nurse cherisheth her children”** I Thessalonians. 2:7. A meek and quiet spirit is, in the sight of God, of great price (I Peter 3:4). Believers should cultivate that kind of spirit. **“. . . The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy,”** James 3:17. Church folk ought to cultivate that attitude. It is the Christian spirit.

II. THE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE (Titus 3:3-7)

Every Christian has a “past.” He once lived in the B.C. (“before Christ”) darkness, but the same God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness shined into his heart to give him the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ. That experience of meeting God personally made the believer in Christ a new creation. For him, old things passed away and all things became new (II Corinthians 5:17). His “past” is forever past.

A. Change needed — How does one describe people who are without Christ? Paul included himself in this description: **“. . . We ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating, one another,”** verse 3. If that description seems too harsh, it is only because one does not know the depravity of the human heart.

Man needs to be changed. He is “dead in trespasses and sins,” Ephesians 2:1. Only by being resurrected to new life in Christ can any man truly live. That is why Jesus said, **“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,”** John 3:3. All humans need to be changed by redeeming grace.

B. Change wrought — In Christ, the believer is made a new creation (II Corinthians 5:17). The change is so tremendous that it is described in Scripture as birth, resurrection, and creation. Consider how it is described in Titus 3:4-6.

(1) Motive — What made the great spiritual change possible in a man? The Bible answers, **“... The kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared,”** verse 4. That means that it is **“... not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us ...”** verse 5. God's grace, not man's goodness, is the explanation of how a sinner is saved. The initiative rests with God. Men were the rebels, but God drew them near to Himself, not for punishment but for pardon. Have you recently knelt and thanked God for His grace which made possible the forgiveness of your sins?

(2) Method — How does the great spiritual change occur in man? The testimony of Scripture is plain: **“... By the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour,”** verses 5, 6. “Regenerate” means to give new life. “The washing of regeneration” suggests that the old life of defilement is taken away and a new life of spiritual purity is given in its place. How does it occur? The “renewing of the Holy Ghost” speaks of the life-giving work of the Spirit when He ministers the miracle of the new birth in a believer.

C. Change experienced — How is that spiritual change related to Jesus? It is provided by and flows through “Jesus Christ our Savior,” verse 6. The work of the Spirit in salvation in no wise detracts from the place of the Son. Salvation is in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit simply applies to the believer the redemption provided by the Father by placing the believer in the Son. The believer in Jesus is forgiven, cleansed, given a new life and nature, is a child of God, and enjoys an inheritance in heaven. What a change!

III. THE CHRISTIAN DUTY (Titus 3:8-11, 14)

Each believer should learn to be what he has become. He ought to learn to make his conduct match his new nature. The “old things” of his unregenerate life should be dropped. He ought to live like the “new creature” he is in Christ (II Corinthians 5:17). It is the Christian's duty to live like a

Christian!

A. Do good works (verse 8). Be careful at this point! Good works do not secure salvation. Good works testify of salvation. One does not do good works in order to get saved. He does good works because he has been saved.

What kind of good works testify of salvation? Some are negative; they are simply refraining from what is wrong. A Christian is doing good as he disciplines his life to keep it clean from sin. That is a good testimony of his new life in Christ. Other good works are positive; they are the things one does in the name of Jesus Christ simply because he belongs to Him and wants to minister His grace to others. Check the good works in your life by asking two questions: (1) From what improper action, word, or thought have I kept myself today just because I belong to Jesus? (2) What good have I done today, that I would not otherwise have done, because I belong to Jesus? Many people do good things. The Christian is to so live that his good is related to his faith in Jesus as personal Saviour.

B. Refrain from error (verse 9). Some things are “unprofitable and vain.” Even some religious discussions may be described in that manner. Those are the things from which the man of God should refrain.

Early Jewish Christians had a great problem with some who wanted to debate with them about the law, to question them concerning genealogies and theological puzzles. Paul admonished Titus to “avoid” such things. Have you known a person whose delight was to argue about the Scripture? Do not do it. It contributes nothing to knowing Jesus personally or ministering to spiritual need. Christians should refuse to enter religious discussions which do not exalt Christ.

The Christian can stumble into error in two ways: (1) He can practice a course of conduct, speech, or thought which is contrary to spiritual things. (2) He can engage in religious matters which do not exalt the Lord Jesus or minister to human need. God's faithful child ought to avoid both errors.

C. Use judgment in witnessing (verses 10, 11). God commands each Christian to be a witness to the gospel of Christ. Only in that way will it be brought to the hearing of every person in the world. God also commands each Christian to use judgment in presenting the gospel.

Not all men will receive and obey the Word of God. Some will be a heretic, subverted, and condemned of himself. To persist in witness to such an one will be like casting pearls before swine (Matthew 7:6). Whether one should persist in his witness to a particular individual will be determined by the leading of the Holy Spirit. The Christian must be subject to His direction. He should admonish that man who is “an heretick.” He ought to admonish him once and again; but if he persists in rejecting the admonition,

he should not waste his time on him. He may turn to more fruitful fields — to persons who will receive the message of Christ and respond in obedience and faith. Church folk need to concentrate their efforts upon people who will receive the Word of God, not upon those who reject it.

D. Be fruitful in serving (verse 14). God never intended for the Christian life to be static. Over and again, the Bible speaks of the Christian's growing from infancy to manhood, from ignorance to full knowledge, from milk to meat of the Word. Growth is the evidence of life; fruit is the evidence of mature life.

Jesus said that there are three levels of fruitfulness. (1) A believer may produce fruit (John 15:2). (2) He is “purged” by the Father that he may bear “more fruit,” John 15:2. (3) That purging and cultivating work continues that each child of God may bear “much fruit” and so glorify God (John 15:8). At which level of fruitfulness are you living?

How can the Christian bear fruit? One needs to take care of his spiritual life. He ought to give all diligence to cultivate faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and divine love. “. . . **If these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ,**” II Peter 1:8.

Someone, invited a person to attend Bible study, explaining that he could learn God's will there. He replied, “I already know it better than I obey it.” That is the tragic plight of many people. It is important to know, but it is not enough just to know. One must both know and do God's will in order to please Him and have peace of mind.

Apply the lesson to your life as it relates to your church. What are you doing, as a member of the body of Christ, to sustain and spread the teaching of Christ? How are you strengthening the members of the body? How are you being used of the Spirit to lead people to faith and membership in the body? Are you a functioning member of the body, or are you just hanging on? Resolve to be a blessing to your church.

Questions

1. Why is doctrine important?
2. What are the major doctrines of your church?
3. How can you help sustain those doctrines?
4. How does good citizenship help sustain them?
5. How does a gentle spirit help?

6. What change in a believer causes him to want to sustain them?
7. How did salvation come to you?
8. By what good works can you manifest your salvation?
9. How can you be a better witness?
10. How can you be more fruitful in God's service?