



## Biblical Foundations Reminders

by Chuck Gianotti

*Studies in Titus —Part 8 (Titus 3:1- NASB)*

The task of the Bible teacher is to simply teach the Word of God in its purity and power, according to the need of the people he is instructing. To be sure, new Christians need the basics, just like an infant needs milk. More mature Christians need “meat,” that is, more involved, advanced teaching. In fact, the writer of Hebrews thinks his readers should be astute enough to understand the intricacies and nuances of Melchizedek’s significance. This is key understanding Christ’s superiority to the Levitical priesthood (Heb 5:11-14). Some churches pride themselves in the deep teaching, but may inadvertently leave young Christians to learn the basics for themselves. Other churches never get beyond the milk, and drive older Christians away to better teaching churches.

### Remind (1-2)

However, in most local assemblies of God’s people, many Christians have been under sound Bible teaching for years. In addition to deeper teaching, they need to be reminded of things they already know. We are such a forgetful people! That is how Paul begins this section of his letter to Titus.

The Christians in Crete, where the apostle’s protégé was presumably located when he received this letter, were relatively new believers, their churches only recently having had elders appointed (1:5). Yet there were already things of which they needed to be reminded: Christians ought to be law-abiding citizens, subject and obedient to the rulers and, by extension, the laws of the land (Titus 3:1). Certainly in our time of skewed moral values and self-seeking power-brokers in political leadership, we Christians need constant reminders of this instruction (see also Romans 13:1-7).

We also need continuous prompting to act respectfully toward all people, not just Christians (Titus 3:2). In our efforts to assert our personal rights or to protect our pride, the fallen nature of the human heart tends to “forget” this truth as well. We need unrelenting reminders that the testimony of the church is displayed not so much in our words as in our behavior toward unsaved people. When we avoid maligning people, but instead act peaceably, gently and considerately

toward others, this unusual and unique behavior speaks well of our faith (see 1 Peter 3:16).

### Reason (3-7)

The reasons given for attention to our relational behavior have to do with the gospel itself. Our lives before other people should reflect the consummate grace of God toward us (Titus 3:3-4). In other words, we should be gracious toward others because God has transformed us by His grace into grace-giving people. We simply have no platform for telling others about the gift of God to them if we are not acting out the grace of God toward them. To show this, Paul launches into a concise but eloquent outline of the gospel, and

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includes sin, God’s love, kindness, salvation, mercy, regeneration, renewal, grace and hope (5-7). We once were completely unworthy of God’s graciousness to-

ward us. The description of our pre-regenerate condition is put quite tersely in verse 3. We were “foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.” But is this true of all Christians? Can we all relate to this? My wife came to saving knowledge of Christ at age 6, and she had done very little of what Paul describes.

There are two ways of viewing this. First, not all of these attributes of being unsaved are *equally* descriptive of everyone. My wife was, in fact, cognizant of her sin, even at a tender, young age. Indeed, she came strongly under the conviction of the Spirit, knowing that she was disobedient as a child and had experienced childlike manifestations of the other characteristics mentioned. The expression of her sinfulness, of course, is not the same as that of someone who lived a decadent life as a teenager or adult before coming to Christ. For is it not true that all have sinned, and indeed, all are born into sin?

Second, apart from regeneration, all of us would go on to live reprobate lives, and give fuller expression to what Paul writes here. In reality, before God, there is no difference between us and the worst sinner who ever lived. While the social consequences of our sin may vary, the foundation truth is the same. We were all sinners! Let us not ever forget that!

But in coming to Christ, we have been

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# Practical Ministry

## Elders as Worshipers

by Jack Spender

Christians have always enjoyed the beautiful scene set in heaven, pictured in Revelation 4 and 5. It falls between the letters sent to the seven churches in Asia (Rev. 2, 3), most of whom had their struggles and failings, and the judgments of God about to break out on the earth (Rev 6). The apostle John shares a brief glimpse of the glories of heaven, and the occupation of the redeemed, a record for the encouragement of God's people.

The fact that "elders" appear throughout the section reminds us that church elders today are both worshipers themselves and involved in preparing believers to be intelligent about their worship in this life. They are aware of the important place of worship in the life to come. The Lord Jesus referred to the difference between ignorance and enlightenment on the subject in John 4:22 when speaking to the woman at the well, "You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship ..." (John 4:22).

How good it would be if every Christian considered the following question: "When I get to heaven and participate in the scene pictured in Revelation 4 and 5, will I be shocked at how different the nature of worship in heaven is from that which I called worship on earth, or will it be a grander and more glorious continuation of what I had always enjoyed on earth?"

Because the Lord clearly stated that the Father is seeking "true" worshipers (John 4:23), and because local churches seeking to follow the New Testament example devote significant time each week to worship (see Acts 2:42), the subject is worthy of serious consideration.

### Observations from the Text

A quick reading of the two chapters provides some insights to help us get started. The scene is in heaven, the setting is God's throne, and the occupation described is worship which includes a number of different individuals and activities.

Seated on thrones or seats around God's throne, were elders. The number 24 is probably representative, since the people of God in Old Testament times belonged to one of 12 tribes in Israel, and Christ chose 12 apostles to become the foundation of the church He was about to build.

The actual worship begins with heavenly beings called "living creatures" and the elders then respond in worship. Chapter 4 is mostly descriptive until the last verse (vs. 11) which records the actual words spoken in worship. But in chapter 5 attention turns to the Lamb "in the midst" (vs. 6) and we read of the prayers of the saints (vs. 8), and the new song (vs. 9), and then the angels join in (vs. 11), and finally all the creatures (vs. 13).

### Thoughts of Possible Interest for Elders

It is interesting that the worship begins with a few and progresses toward

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a great climax in which all are involved. Note that the first beings of earthly origin to participate in the worship are the elders (4:10). Further, there is a progression in thought from worship given to God for His work in creation (vs. 11) to His great work of redemption in chapter 5.

Further we note that throughout the passage worship is corporate and follows a theme; in no way is it "every man doing his own thing." In 5:9 we hear the elders singing in direct address to the Lamb. Translations differ on the exact wording of these verses because of variations in ancient manuscripts, but the substance of what the elders say is unaffected and the suggestion is reasonable that they precede the worship of the multitudes coming later.

The whole scene pictures a time of great reverence, and in both chapters we find the elders bowing ("fall down" 4:10; "fell down" 5:14), and casting their crowns before the throne (4:10). It is interesting that no mention of praise is found in the book of Revelation until chapter 19: "Praise our God, all ye His servants, and ye that fear Him, both small and great," in retrospective praise of the mighty work completed in the judgment of the earth.

Finally, as might be expected, this is one of many Bible passages in which all three persons of the Godhead are mentioned; the One sitting upon the throne (4:2,3), the Lamb (vs. 6), and the seven Spirits of God (vs. 6 this is a reference to the Holy Spirit).

### Some Applications

Certainly we should avoid dogmatic assertions where Scripture narrates a scene. But knowing that the entire book of Revelation is called from the outset "the revelation of Jesus Christ," it seems reasonable to meditate on how such a sublime picture might suggest truth to the spirit of any believer, and especially to church elders.

Surely elders must consider that, as in all other aspects of life, they are to be examples to the believers. One elder complained to a visiting servant that the men of the assembly were reluctant "to enter into the holiest." The old brother

wisely replied, "My dear brother, if you want men to enter the holiest, then you must lead them in by example; they will follow." Sheep sense the difference between mechanical acts of "worship," and the voice of the Shepherd which they recognize and will follow (John 10:27).

Then, too, in a growing assembly, there will be believers in all different stages of spiritual development. Harsh words in response to imperfect participation - either in timing or in content - can cause great injury to young believers. Further, we would do well to notice that the subject of worship in chapter 4 is expressly stated to concern God's work in creation. To censure remarks because they are not directly related to the cross of Christ is not only unkind, but also unbiblical!

I remember as a young man searching my Bible for the phrase which I was sure must be there somewhere, as I had heard it so often: "We remember the Lord in His death," only to discover that no such phrase occurs in the Bible. Rather, His words were that we break the bread "in remembrance of me." Thus, any thoughts, which direct our hearts toward Him, either in His Person or His work can be helpful in our worship.

Other points may yield fruitful discussion for elders:

- If worship in heaven centers around inspiring themes, we can anticipate worship on earth to do so also.

- As the public expressions of worship in Revelation 4 and 5 were mostly brief, so ought ours to be. Lengthy prayers are better reserved for the closet.

- There is a fine line between teaching and warming the heart through the Scriptures, but wise elders will know and cultivate the difference. This is important

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## Elders as Worshipers (continued from page 2)

so that worship does not turn into simply another time of teaching.

- Contrary to those who say worship can only be directed “to the Father,” we see that expressions of worship “to the Lord Jesus” are in order and should be honored as a legitimate form of worship.

- A spirit of reverence and respect characterizes the worship in heaven and should do so on earth also.

## Reminders (cont. from page 1)

changed, and all because of God’s kindness and love (vs. 4). Certainly the fear of hell and damnation have a role in motivating us to repent, but the greater motive is found in God’s heart toward His image-bearers. To the Romans, Paul wrote: “Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?” (Rom 2:4). Thus elders should teach the people to demonstrate the kindness and love of God in their lives as they look for opportunities to share the gospel verbally.

Our dealing with others should not depend on their treatment of us. That would put the lie to the gospel’s power to change lives. For God did not love us dependent upon our behavior toward Him, did He? While we cannot make the non-believers perfect, in the sense of God’s “washing of regeneration and renewing,” we *can* seek to build others up, not gloating over their sin, or seeking to reveal their “darker side” or seeking their failure in the life. There is enough in the world to tear them down; through us they need to see that there is a God who desires their good. The “Love Chapter,” 1 Corinthians 13, has much to say about this: “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (vs. 7). Non-Christians should go away from us richly blessed by God’s presence in our lives—is that not the example of our God whose Spirit He “poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior”?

### Resolve (8)

To be sure, the gospel is well explained in verses 4-7, but did you notice *why* it was explained? The gospel is the *basis* for verses 1-2, how we should behave. Salvation without the works of righteousness, that is, a change in our outward behavior, does not commend itself to non-Christians as worthwhile or relevant. Verse 8, like a bookend, brings us back to this, with emphasis, “This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning

- Believers may be reminded, that just as worship was not limited to spoken words, but also the act of casting crowns before the Lord, so too, our worship can continue into the week as we honor the Lord in practical ways.

### Conclusion

In Titus 2:10, Paul uses an interesting word to describe the opportunity of believing servants to “adorn the doctrine of God our Savior,” by using a word

from which our English word “cosmetic” (to make beautiful) is derived. Elders too, have the privilege, by their example to adorn this important aspect of church life.

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these things I [Paul] want you [Titus] to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men.” In other words, Christians should make a mark on the world, not just by our verbal witness of the truth, but by our loving reflection of God’s kindness in how we treat others. This is not a social gospel of salvation by works, but a spiritual gospel of salvation by faith through grace that *produces* good works (see Eph 2:8-10). We need to resolve to live our lives before people so as to exhibit God’s character. As elders of God’s people, we need to teach this in the assembly!

### Resist (9-11)

Rounding out the teaching about relationships, there are things we need teach people to avoid. (Engaging in these things does not take away from our salvation, of course, but they are none-the-less important). We should “avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law...” Why? Because “they are unprofitable and worthless” (Titus 9)! The Word of God is like a sharp double-edged sword (Heb 4:12), but using it for endless, fleshly debates dulls the blade. Where this is common, people wonder why there is no life change even though the Bible is ostensibly being preached. This would include arguments about secondary and tertiary things, such as the length of men’s and women’s hair, appropriate attire for Sunday services, the style of music (which is highly subjective, and which the Scripture says relatively little about). There are more significant things for the church to be caught up in, like the purity of the gospel, the exaltation of Christ and discipling others to maturity.

Paul reminds us to reject the “factious man” after suitable warnings (10). For the sake of unity, some people

must absolutely be censured—those who cannot leave an issue alone, but continuously turn minor things into major controversy. Elders, in particular, must be bold in confronting disruptive individuals who love controversy, for their desire is to selfishly draw attention to themselves—this is sin (11). Their attitude is, “Look everyone, I have the spiritual insight to see that this is a significant issue, and I alone am standing for the truth.” Such behavior is “unprofitable and worthless” at best, and perverted and inherently self-condemning, at worst.

### Conclusion

In this 8-part series on Paul’s letter to Titus, we have seen instruction on the qualifications for elders, warning about false teachers and the need for elders to be doctrinally faithful. The letter has touched on the behavior of the servant of God toward others in the church, the role of older women, the humbleness of younger men, and the life characteristics of every Christian leader. Finally, we have seen how this relates back to the gospel of grace in our lives. Let this be our example as leaders of God’s people as to the kinds of things we should be teaching others.

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## From the Q-File

David Wells writes: “No one has abducted theology [in evangelical churches] ... The disappearance is closer to what happens in homes where the children are ignored and, to all intents and purposes, abandoned. They remain in the home, but they have no place in the family. So it is with theology in the church. It remains on the edges of evangelical life, but it has been dislodged from its center.” “*Elders in the Life of the Church*” by Newton & Schmucker,

In speaking about Diotrophes in 3 John 9-10, “While he might have masked his motives with orthodox words, he was self-centered and full of pride, seeking to use the church to fulfill his own lust for power.” “*Elders in the Life of the Church*” by Newton & Schmucker, p. 128.

# Wives' Corner

## Learning to Help

by Mary Gianotti

**A** cry in the middle of the night reached my son's ears. Warily he made his way down the hall. Crouched and shivering on top of a pile of blankets, his daughter sobbed, "Daddy I'm cold." With the heart of a loving father he calmed, comforted and tenderly showed her how she could stay warm.

After a short time of knowing the Thessalonians, Paul describes his relationship with them as a parent "who loved you so much" (1 Thess 2:8). Sometimes, though, people who are new to our fellowship are difficult to love. It seems safe to hold them at a distance, waiting before we invest too much of our precious time unnecessarily. We can also become hardened to the troubles of our sisters in Christ whom we have known for years. This Sunday morning try reviewing the people in your fellowship asking, "Do I love these people or am I just putting up with them?"

Like a father responding to his crying child, Paul helped them in three ways. He encouraged, comforted and urged them to live lives worthy of God (1 Thess 2:12).

Encouragement is the first thing we can do. By listening carefully and asking questions we discover how to effectively encourage others. It may require spending time with the sick, making meals, praying

on the phone or writing a note. The goal is to gently turn a person's focus from her difficulty to the One who can be her strength. (2 Thess 2:16, 3:3)

Attending a funeral comes to mind when we hear the word comfort. This second way to help others is far more than that. Recently I heard a young

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mom refer to how old her miscarried baby would have been. An older woman commented on the continual loss of relationship caused by Alzheimer's. A couple spoke of how difficult it was when friends chose to move to another church. People tend to mask their grief or anxiety; loving questions can give them freedom to share. Our privilege is to comfort. What a blessing this can be. Scripture speaks of "... the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received" (2 Cor 1:4).

Thirdly, we are to help people "live

worthy of God." Pain, tragedy and difficulties always have a reason. To only say "that is terrible" or "I will pray this goes away" is not good enough. Pointing a person to live life worthy of God involves sanctification. Part of the process is helping them put life's circumstances through the filter of God's Word. When this hap-

pens, attitudes and behaviors become more like Christ's and faith grows. Paul's desire for the suffering Thessalonians was to strengthen and encourage them in their faith, so they would not become unsettled by the trials. (1 Thess 3:2-3) What a joy to see people growing in their faith. "You became imitators of us and of The Lord... You became a model to all the believ-

ers ..." (1 Thess 1:6-7).

I suspect in a couple of years my granddaughter will know how to pull the blankets over herself in the middle of the night. For this she will no longer need her Daddy. Maybe someday she will teach her younger sister how to keep warm. And maybe the Christians we help now will someday be helping others. Now, that will be a joy!



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