

## ***“Reality Check”***

**Titus 3:3-11 Ezekiel 36:25-29**

July 9, 2023

Mary Lu, Andrew, and I left Cook's in 1990. There wasn't anything major wrong. We didn't get mad about something and leave. Our biggest concerns were spiritual matters. We felt like we weren't being spiritually fed here. That is certainly not true about our church today. We are happy to be back with you. So, when we left, we joined a Baptist church. We stayed there until we moved to Greensboro in 1999. We found a great Presbyterian church up there. We moved back down here in 2004 and tried different churches. There was another Baptist church that we really liked, and we stayed there a while. And there were some other churches that we tried in those 30 years until we came back home to Cook's in 2020. I mentioned these 3 churches for a reason. These 3 churches all had something in common. They all 3 were made up mostly of people that genuinely loved Jesus. And in doing so they had a natural love for each other. There was a vibe or attitude that you could feel when you walked into the building. It was, and is, the presence of God the Holy Spirit. And these 3 different churches were also having significant growth during this time frame. You felt at home when you walked through the doors. Now look, don't get me wrong, we needed this paint job back here in the hall. We desperately need a new sign out front. We needed the great looking sign in front of the church office building and all the other fixing up projects are vital to our growth of course. We're excited about the ongoing work of our Vision Committee. Because in these modern times "everything speaks" of who we are. So, I am in no way saying that all these efforts are not important. But what I will say is this spiritual growth within this church is critical to the overall ministry of the church and of course church growth. So, a "Reality Check" on our spiritual condition is a great way to approach our mission and overall health. And where there is spiritual growth there is love. Think about it this way. What is the difference between a house and a home? A house is a dwelling place that provides shelter for the occupants. A home is a place where there is also love. Love between the occupants of the home and love for visitors as they come to call. Why can't we think about our church campus here the same way?

Let's look at the Apostle Paul's letter to Titus to see an example of instructions for a reality check for the church Titus was pastoring. Titus was a Greek and he was on his own at a church plant on the Island of Crete. He had traveled with Paul. He had seen the power of the gospel change people's lives, and even carried a letter from Paul to the church at Corinth. He had been a trusted companion to the Apostle Paul, but now he was by himself. I am sure Titus had many questions. Paul addressed his questions in this letter. If you have your Bibles or a pew Bible turn to Titus chapter 3. That is page 1182 in the pew Bible. I know the bulletin says verses 3-11 but let's pick up with verse one to give a little more insight. (read vs 1-11) (The Word of God, for the people of God, Thanks be to God.) There are three important ideas Paul is sharing here. 1) The gospel keeps us from looking down on others. 2) The gospel reminds us of what is possible; and 3) The gospel points us to the future.

There were very few Jews on the Island of Crete. So, these people had little or no knowledge of God and His law. And you can imagine Titus having a bad day and asking himself "what in the world am I going to do with these heathens? One of Paul's loving answers to part of the problem is found in verse 3. A modern translation might say: "Hey wait a minute young Jett..." (verse 3). It's true that we may have not committed all the sins listed here. But before we were saved by God's grace everyone's life was characterized by such sins as these listed. We're all sinners and before we met and accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior we were living for the next worldly thrill. We were trying to fulfill ourselves with worldly pleasures and material things. When we pause and remember that we are no better than those we are seeking to welcome to our church, then we will look on others with compassion rather than judgement. It's kinda like we need to figure out why we are doing church before we figure out the details of what needs to be done. We go to church because people need the Lord and we need to grow spiritually. So, the gospel message keeps us from looking down on others.

It's the Gospel message that reminds us of what is possible with our church. Look more carefully at verses 4-5. Paul reminded Titus that all of us, if we are Christians, have had a moment in our lives where we totally trusted in the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. After that moment, everything was different. We still sin. We're not sinless. But we do sin less and we are sorry for our sins. Second Corinthians 5:17: *"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed*

*away; behold all things have become new”.*

And then verses 6-7 point us to the future. Thanks to the gospel, we all have a sure hope in the future. We are destined for eternal life if we have trusted Jesus as our Lord and Savior. We might not be as welcoming to visitors as we could be because we may still have a temporal view of life. Friends, need to internalize this eternal perspective concept. Welcoming others to our church might require us to step outside our comfort zones. But when people’s eternal destiny hangs in the balance our temporary discomfort is trivial. Because people need the Lord, Amen?

So, verses 3-8 deal with the past, present, and future of our lives. Notice Paul placed the gospel right in the middle of this great advice he’s giving to Titus. Jesus saves us. The Holy Spirit sustains us, for eternity. And we do not want to overlook the last part of verse 8. Paul tells Titus and us:

*“And concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God may be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for everyone.”* True, faithful, and joy-filled ministry flows out of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We do good works because of what God has already done for us. It’s the new normal after we dedicate or rededicate our lives to Christ. And unsaved people and visitors to our church, they pick up on this. They will know that we are different. And we pray that they will stick around long enough so we can show them what makes us different. Amen?

We also do not want to overlook the warning that Paul gives Titus at the end of this passage. We would love to overlook controversy in the church, but when we do overlook controversy, it normally makes things worse. Most of us are old enough to have witnessed controversy in churches. But one thing that was extremely popular in ancient times was false teaching within the church. False teaching is still alive and well today of course, but normally we don’t have people to come in and start teaching false doctrine in a Bible believing fellowship like ours. Today, sadly enough, there are plenty of churches that heretics can attend and be right at home with like-minded people. I haven’t seen any foolish debates or quarrels since we have been back home (at Cook’s). Instead, I have witnessed the fact that we love each other here. And that love wins out over the small debates almost every time.

Nevertheless, conflict in the church needs to be resolved just like conflict in a marriage relationship. So, the Lord’s advice when it comes to conflict, is right there in verses 9-11. For reference it’s also found in Matthew 18:15-17 where Jesus gives specific instructions on church discipline.

In closing, the Biblical strategy is to perform a reality check on our own spiritual condition first. Then pray, pray, and pray more for our outreach efforts. Think about a reality check for our church and pray about that part as well and let’s see what happens.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen