

Christ's Purpose for the Church

By Don Green

sermonaudio.com

Bible Verse: Titus 1:1-2
Preached on: Tuesday, September 21, 2021

Truth Community Church
4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

With all of the continually new people that the Lord is bringing to us, I wanted to take an opportunity to just refresh our minds, for some of you this may be new for what you've heard from our pulpit anyway, and remind ourselves of Christ's purpose for the church, and I'd invite you to turn to the book of Titus 1. We're going back to a passage that we first looked at maybe eight years ago, time really flies here, but in Titus 1 we see a passage that speaks to the purpose of the church and it's good for us to continually remind ourselves of why we do what we do and to ground it in Scripture, not simply by tradition because that's the way that things have always been done. And maybe to frame things with an opening question, young adults frequently face a common question from well-intentioned friends and family: what are your plans for marriage, or what are your plans for your career, or for your education? What purpose are you going to pursue with your life and with your time? Well, a church has to answer similar questions. Why is it that we exist? What is it that we do? What is it that we are going to do? And I believe that we find good instruction on answering that question in the opening four verses of Titus 1. Let me read those to you as we begin.

Titus 1, beginning in verse 1,

1 Paul, a bond-servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness, 2 in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago, 3 but at the proper time manifested, even His word, in the proclamation with which I was entrusted according to the commandment of God our Savior, 4 To Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

Paul here in these opening verses describes the commission that he received from the Lord in terms of what he was to do as an apostle of Jesus Christ, as an authorized, a directly authorized representative of Christ, authorized to speak on his behalf and to be used in the building up of the church.

There are no apostles today contrary to what people in Redding, CA may tell you. There are no apostles in the church today. It was a limited office. It was only for a short duration. These men were given the ability to do signs and to be agents of the direct

revelation of God. There is no one like that. The apostles had to be a direct eyewitness of the Lord Jesus Christ himself and ever since the ascension of Christ, there are no new people that can come up to be eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ. He is in heaven beyond our sight and so there are no apostles today. However, there is the continuation of apostolic ministry, there are no people, there are no men who are apostles but the task that was given to apostles is the same task that the church is to be doing today and this text tells us why Christ appointed Paul to be an apostle. It was true for all of the apostles and by extension when we study what Christ commanded Paul to do, we find what the church is to do today. Truth is unchanged and it is unchanging and the purpose of Christ in building up his church is the same today as it has always been. So it's important for us to get these fundamental matters right and, as I said, to have a scriptural grounding for them to understand why it is that we do what we do and why we don't do some of the things that other people might choose to do in their own local assemblies.

Now just a word of qualification. This text in Titus is not an exhaustive text by any means of everything that the church is going to do, it is more representative, it is instructive, it is critically instructive in the direction that it points us, and so that's why I feel like it's a valuable text for us to go to this evening. Now as you read this text, as you think through what is said, what Paul describes his ministry to be, let's pause for just a moment and think about it in contrast with what passes for Christian ministry today. One of the things that you will find as you read this text is that Jesus Christ did not appoint Paul to promote the material prosperity of the elect. That has nothing to do with what is said here in this text. He also did not call Paul to produce political change in the Roman Empire. Paul was not given a political mission in order to accomplish governmental objectives. Furthermore, Jesus Christ did not call Paul to entertain non-Christians with motivational messages or things that would help them find their self-esteem or their way in life. None of that can be found in this text where Paul specifically describes the point of his apostolic commission. And so it's very very critical for us to realize that. The church is not free to deviate from the apostolic mission. When the church does that, when the church abandons the things that we see here in the text, it is not too much to say that it has really ceased being a church in the way that Scripture would define a church.

What did Christ call Paul to do? Well, in summary form we could say it this way: Christ called Paul to advance a spiritual work in which Jesus Christ builds his church, in which Christ brings people into his kingdom and builds them up and transforms them and conforms them to his own image. Christ as Lord, following the commission given to him by his own Father, came to earth in order to purchase a people that would belong to him and through his redemptive life and his redemptive death, he purchased a people that would be separate from the world, that would belong to him, and that Christ would accomplish his purposes through them and in them. The church is about the vertical purposes of Christ and the work that he is doing.

Well, then, if we are going to be the people of Christ, then it's obvious that we must align ourselves under the purposes of Christ and not misappropriate his name for something that we want to do in our own human plans and desires. I just never get tired of saying this: we are not at liberty to change the message. We're not at liberty to change what the

church is to do. We are to be obedient faithful servants reflecting and implementing what our Master wants. It's because we love Christ that we approach things this way. It's because we understand that without him we would be miserably lost. And so while we do so imperfectly and we do so very incompletely, our desire is to honor Christ in response to his saving work in our lives, and so that's true individually and it's true corporately as a church.

So we ask the question, then: what must the church do? What are the plans for the church, you might say. Well, in this text we find three clear answers to that question, and number 1, we could say it this way, our first point for this evening is that in the church we lead men to Christ. We lead men to Christ. Here in this text Paul says that he received his apostleship for a purpose, it was so that those whom God had chosen before the foundation of the world would be converted to faith in Christ. In other words, he was to be a human instrument by which and in which the eternal purposes of God would be carried out in time. God does not just zap people and make them Christians, he does so through the ministry of his word, he does so through human preachers.

Romans 10 says, in fact, let's turn there just to make the point. Romans, which speaks dogmatically about the eternal purposes of God, the sovereign purposes of God in salvation, nevertheless recognizes that God accomplishes those sovereign purposes through the means that he has appointed and through the men that he has appointed, men in this context being used as representative of men and women both. So in verse 14 of Romans 10, Paul says, "How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!'" And then down in verse 17 it says, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." What God has appointed is that through the human proclamation of the gospel, the Holy Spirit would use that message to awaken people to new life so that they could come to faith in Christ and be saved and thus achieve the eternal purposes of God. It happens through means. This is what God has appointed; through the preaching of the word, through the prayers of his people for others, God works through those means in order to establish his predetermined plan among his chosen ones.

Well, we see this reflected in verse 1 of Titus 1 as Paul discusses his own apostleship. Look at verse 1 there again with me where he says, "Paul, a bond-servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God." He's saying, "I received my apostleship in order to bring to pass the faith of those that God had chosen before the foundation of the world." And so what is this faith? Well, you could define it in a couple of different ways. The great confessions define faith as a receiving of Christ and a resting in him. In other words, one comes to Christ humbly, repentantly and receives the person of Jesus Christ in a conscience exercise of faith, and then rests in Christ as the one who alone is sufficient to bring reconciliation to God, you could put it that way. Faith receives Christ, it is not a work, it is a receiving and a resting upon the person of Jesus Christ by those who repent when they hear the gospel. And so by faith, not by works, Ephesians 2:8-9, by faith one receives Christ and rests in him and that comes as one hears the

proclamation of the gospel as the Spirit works through the preaching of the word that Christ died for sin according to the Scriptures, that he was buried and that he was raised on the third day, and he was seen by many witnesses. That is the good news that God has sent a Savior into the world like that. His name is Christ and in the name of Christ you can receive salvation and the forgiveness of your sins and that is the message that Paul preaches and it is the goal of his preaching to bring about faith in those that hear. That is the point.

Now you can see this clearly in another passage where Paul discusses his conversion and you can turn to the book of Acts 26 as a cross reference here to verify that we're understanding the passage properly. In Acts 26, Paul is describing to King Agrippa his conversion. We'll look at an extended part of it because the narrative is so wonderful and fascinating. He says in Acts 26:12, we'll pick it up midway, he says,

12 While so engaged [in other words, while I was engaged in persecuting the church] as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, 13 at midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me. 14 And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' 15 And I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.

Now in verse 16 he describes the commission that the Lord gave to him which is what, obviously, we're considering here in Titus 1. He says in verse 16, this is Christ speaking to Saul known as Paul.

16 'But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; 17 rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, 18 to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified [or set apart] by faith in Me.'

So Christ had a people that were waiting for his authorized representative to come and speak to them. It reminds me of Cornelius in Acts 10 waiting for Peter to come. God had prepared Cornelius' heart, he had told him that Peter was coming and so he was waiting for Peter to come in that moment. Well, the people who hear the gospel don't even recognize, they don't know in advance that God has set them apart in order to receive salvation, but from the perspective of God these people have been set apart to hear the gospel. He sends Paul into their midst to preach so that they could hear, Romans 10, an they could believe and be saved in response to the message that they had heard. This is what the message and this was the purpose for which Paul received his commission.

He was appointed to lead men to faith in Christ. It is the most noble purpose that anyone could ever have. Can you imagine being set apart like Paul was in order to be an instrument of bringing eternal salvation to those that would hear, knowing that Christ had appointed you directly for that task, and that Christ was sure to accomplish his purposes through you? This is a great great commission that he has received and it tells us something important about the nature of God, it tells us that God is a saving God. He is a God who has determined to redeem people from every tribe and tongue throughout the world. And so God, while he is a God of righteous wrath against the rebellion of mankind against him, in the midst of that is working out purposes to save some of them in order to establish a people that would belong to his Son and that would be with his Son as his bride throughout all of eternity. The eternal purposes of God are magnificent and the purpose of the apostleship was to lead men to Christ, and by extension the purpose of the church in the apostolic footsteps is to do that same thing.

Look over at 2 Timothy 2 which is the book just immediately prior to Titus. 2 Timothy 2:8 Paul says, "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel, for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; but the word of God is not imprisoned. For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory." He received his apostleship and he endures the hardship that accompanies it for the sake of those who are chosen, those who were chosen by God in order to receive salvation in Jesus Christ and with it eternal glory. That's why Paul received his apostleship.

And let me just note in passing, I hear from people from time to time that want to emphasize the importance of freedom of speech for the advancement of the gospel. Well, Paul was not operating in a realm of freedom of speech when he was imprisoned for what he was speaking but he says, "I'm imprisoned here," in fact, he was facing execution at the time he wrote this letter, but notice what he says, "the word of God is not imprisoned." God is not bound to and God is not limited to the exercise of freedom of speech in the United States. If the freedom of speech was completely taken away, God would still be utterly capable of accomplishing his purposes because the word of God cannot be stopped as God sends it out to accomplish his purposes. And the growth of the church in hard-line Communist countries over the past decades, the growth of the church in the Middle East and in Central Asia, all of these things testify to the fact that government cannot stop the advance of the gospel when the Holy Spirit is at work and we just need to stop thinking in those terms and stop talking as though God's sovereignty was bound by how much freedom of speech the government allows us to have. We will go on preaching the gospel no matter what the government does, and we will trust God to accomplish his purposes even if the government's actions make it difficult for us to do that. Imprisonment was kind of difficult for Paul and it limited him geographically but as you read in the book of Philippians where he was also in prison, a different imprisonment, he said, "The word of God is advancing. It spread throughout Caesar's household. As I've been stuck here, I've talked to the soldiers and people have found out about the gospel through them. And there are others around me who are preaching the

gospel." We just need to set aside however else important our Constitutional rights must be, we must not be so encaptured by the concept of freedom of speech which was foreign to Paul as he wrote this letter, we just need to come back to a recognition that our God is sovereign, God will accomplish his purposes, and his word will never be stopped because God himself will not be stopped. If you take any time at all to read something about the first three centuries of church history and what happened after the apostolic age and the horrific persecution and efforts to silence the gospel made by the Roman Empire and it all failed. It all failed until eventually under the reign of Constantine they gave up, made Christianity, so-called, made it the state religion and people were then free to be able to speak of Christ as they wished. But we just should not allow our thinking about Scripture, our thinking about the gospel, our thinking about the purposes of God be conditioned by what we see happening in our own country around us. We need to see it in exactly the opposite way and have this sense of confidence and certainty in the purposes of God, the power of God to accomplish what he wants regardless of what our government does.

We really need, I'm speaking beyond the walls of Truth Community Church here, we really need to get our minds around that now in the midst of the changes that we're seeing around us. I can't tell you how tired I am of hearing people talk in such fearful tones about what's happening who simultaneously claim to be Christians. I wish they could hear themselves. I wish they could see as Paul did, as Paul saw the glory of Christ on the road to Damascus and saw it brighter than the sun, and saw that manifestation of the glory of God before his very eyes, a blinding glory. Well, if we had any sense of the blinding glory and power of God, we would stop being so fearful and mousy in response to the events that are happening around us. I realize that our lives may be impacted by what happens but our lives are secondary to the advance of the purposes of God, and for a Christian the glory of God and the purposes of God is the reason that we exist and if we are confident in God to accomplish his purposes, if we're confident in the sovereign risen and ascended Christ to be glorious and to be Lord over all, then we really need to start talking differently about current events and thinking about them from a different perspective and view those events through the lens of the glory and power of God, the purposes of God, rather than vice-versa. That change in perspective affects an awful lot of things and it is ours as the people of God, in words that God commanded to Joshua, to be strong and very courageous. Joshua was about to lead people into war. God tells him.

Let's go back to that passage in Joshua in Joshua 1. As you're turning there, on Sundays we've been reading for our opening call to worship Jeremiah 32:27, "Behold, I am the LORD," I am God, "is there anything too difficult for Me?" And under different circumstances God commanded Joshua in chapter 1, verse 6, "Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go." Verse 9, "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go." That is an echo of the words that Jesus said at the end of Matthew, "Go into all the nations. Make disciples, baptizing them and, lo, I am with you always even to the end of the age."

And it's just, you know, we just have to realize that if difficult times have come to our doorstep, that's our call to battle, that's our call to courage, that's our call not to shrink back in fear and in anger and anxiety bubble over whatever is happening in different government centers; to set that aside and say, "Okay, this is the day. This is the moment. This is the age that God has given us to live in and to proclaim the gospel in. He has appointed us for this time as shown by the providence of the fact that we're living in this age." Well, if that's true, and it is, since that is true, maybe we can better state it that way, then just as with Joshua, just as with Paul, just as in the Great Commission, it's time for us to be strong and courageous and not be afraid of the events that are happening around us. We're called to lead people to Christ regardless of the circumstances in which we find it happening.

So what do we do? We preach the gospel. We preach the good news of Christ crucified, risen for sinners, and invite men to him, call men to him to repent and believe in him for their own salvation from sin. And some as we do that in the purposes of God and in the work of the Holy Spirit, some will hear and believe in Christ and God will be using us to advance his purposes. Christ will be using us to build his church just as he told Paul that he would do through him. So what does the church do? What do we do? We lead men to Christ regardless of the circumstances in which we find ourselves. We are less concerned about our personal comfort, circumstances, and Constitutional rights, that alliterated by the way. Our personal comfort, circumstances and Constitutional rights are less important to us than the great and glorious mission that God has given to us to be proclaimers of his great and glorious gospel. That is a lofty noble purpose for Christians to exist and for a church to exist and that's what God has called us to do, and when we understand that, then we understand that the purpose of the church is to advance a spiritual work of Christ. We exist in order that Christ might advance his purposes through us.

That's point number 1: we lead men to Christ. Now secondly, there's another aspect that you find in Paul's description of his apostleship in Titus 1. We could state it this way in point number 2: we teach biblical truth. We teach biblical truth. Paul was appointed not simply to lead men to faith but to also build them up in the knowledge of the truth. Look at verse 1 with me. He says there in verse 1, "I've been appointed an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of those chosen of God and," second purpose, "and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness." He's been appointed to bring the people of God to a greater knowledge of the truth. He was appointed to explain truth. And as you read on in the book of Titus, you find that this is an ongoing theme, it's a repeated theme. Indeed, qualifications, the qualifications for elders depend upon a man, not a woman, they depend upon a man having the ability to explain the truth of God to the people of God. And so you look at the elder qualifications in verse 5, Paul says,

5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, 6 namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife

These are clearly sex-specific terms that are being used about who's qualified to be an elder and who's not and it's men, not women. I made a post on Facebook the other day and said one of the points of discernment for people to exercise is if you see a church with a woman pastor or with women elders, attend someplace else. It's that simple. It's that clear. But that's beside the point that I'm trying to make here so let's move on.

Paul goes on, as you know, to describe the qualifications for elders, their character requirements in verses 6 through 8, and then he goes on and he says this in verse 9 about a man that would be qualified for the office of elder. Verse 9,

9 holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching,
so that he [there it is again] he will be able both to exhort in sound
doctrine and to refute those who contradict.

There is a teaching aspect to a man being an elder. It is not simply a man and not even necessarily a man who is successful in worldly life. It's not simply a man who's been at the church a long time and it's his turn to hold the office, or any other earthly matters that you could think of. It's not a matter of earthly success, it's a matter of character and a matter of having the ability to teach the word of God to the people of God.

Paul goes on and says to Titus in chapter 2, verse 1, he says, "But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine." Titus, what comes out of your mouth when you are teaching in the church, make sure that it is in accordance with sound doctrine. Turning back to 2 Timothy again, Paul says in 2 Timothy 2:15, he says, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth." And you know, when you see seminars and church training things that take place and, you know, the model has been set forth that the pastor of a church is something like a CEO of a corporation and he's supposed to lead in that way. Nothing could be further from missing the point. The beginning qualification for a man to be an elder, to be a pastor, is to somehow be able to teach the word of God at least in private settings in small groups. Not every elder needs to have the ability to stand in a pulpit and preach for 50 or 60 minutes, but somehow has the ability to instruct others in the word of God in a way that they can understand and that builds them up in Christ. This is essential to being an elder. Look over at 2 Timothy 2:2 where you see this teaching function emphasized again where Paul tells Timothy in verse 2, chapter 2, "The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."

So we see this emphasis on biblical teaching and let's go, I alluded to it earlier but let's go to the end of Matthew 28, the end of Matthew's gospel, chapter 28, verse 18, "Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'" Teaching is the function of the church. Not entertainment. Not primarily social work or even secondarily; you could argue the point about where that fits in the purposes of the church if at all. But

teaching, teaching, teaching, teaching. And you know, if you step back and think about it, it's clear that the biblical philosophy of truth is that there is absolute truth. That's why we contend for the faith, Jude verse 3. We contend for the faith because there is truth and there is error and not every belief is equally valid. The Bible is an objective revelation from God that presupposes that it is to be rightly interpreted and taught according to that and things which contradict the Bible are not simply a matter of someone else's opinion that is equally valid to the extent that something contradicts the teaching of Scripture, it is false by definition. So the teaching function of the church tells us something about the very philosophy of a worldview and how it is that we are to think about truth and error. You know, we do not believe that all opinions are of equal value. That's not true, and that if someone teaches A and someone else teaches not A, both of those things cannot be true. Truth is consistent and not contradictory with itself.

Well, let's take this to a matter of kind of personal application here as we've established, I think, the teaching function of the church and just talk about the opportunity that it presents for us to understand what it means for each one of us on a personal level. Some people, I would not lay this description upon any of you that are here this evening, I genuinely would not, but some people are impatient or intolerant of sustained biblical instruction, of opening the Bible week by week and teaching it and just explaining what the Bible means by what it says. I think it's fair to say that the vast majority of the world sees no value in this and probably a predominant plurality of people even within the professing church would question whether it's really necessary to stand up and teach God's word for 60 minutes, "Can't we get this done in 20 minutes so I can get home before the roast burns?" And the answer is, no, we can't do it that way. Some people are impatient with sustained biblical instruction because they don't realize the centrality of the purpose of that in the church and they also don't realize their own need for it, their own need to grow in the word of God.

Let me just take you to a couple of passages in the letters of Peter that make this point and then we're going to have a matter of practical application here that is quite unsettling, really. 1 Peter 2:1 says, "Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander," 1 Peter 2:1, I hear some of you still turning your pages and that's great. I'll slow down for you. Verse 2, "like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord." Peter says, "Purify your life so as to prepare your heart to receive the ministry of the word so that you could grow by it." We are commanded to do this. It's good for you to be here this evening, you are here in obedience to a command of God to grow in respect to the word of God. That's good. That's what we are supposed to be doing. My point is to show you that the word commands the people of God to be growing in God's word.

I ask you, I ask the world, I ask anyone who will hear my voice: how are people supposed to grow in the word if it's not taught from their pulpits? How are people to grow in the word if it is put alongside such visual atrocities as interpretive dance and things like this, and great big drama productions that appeal to the senses but do not communicate the truth of the word of God in a spoken, systematic, didactic way? How are they to grow

like that? And why would someone who claims to be born of the Spirit of God not manifest in his heart a desire for the word of God which that self-same Spirit inspired? The Spirit of God saves men in order to bring them to the word of God that he, himself, is the author of.

Look at 2 Peter 3:17-18, "You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness," we're called to steadfastness, to consistency. He says don't fall away, verse 28, "but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen."

Now let's pause for a series of illustrations. I don't often do this, as you know, but a series of illustrations to help us have a sense of the importance of regular reading of the word of God and consistent placement of yourself under the teaching of the word of God which is what most of you in this room do, so this is a word of encouragement and affirmation to you and even rebuke to others. Okay, let's think about just the nature of life from a few different perspectives. Think about studying advanced mathematics like algebra or calculus. I had a calculus class in college. I've told many of you this story. I was not a good student. I was not a faithful student. There was an exam that had a total of a possible of 105 points. I got my exam back and do you know what my score was? 9. A 9 out of 105. I realized that my life needed to change and that this was really really bad, and this was really really bad, it frightened me. But just think with me along this. Students will fail a calculus class if they miss half of the classes. Serious students understand that they must be in class consistently in order to master the complex subject matter, and the absences of unfaithful students create too many gaps in their knowledge in order to be able to master the material.

Think about it from another realm. Athletes do not win championships if they skip training. They practice day after day after day going through the seeming monotony of the routine so that the routine has prepared them when the day of competition comes and they're on the field of battle. And the day by day training which at the time might seem mundane, boring, not related, is actually that which prepares them to win a championship when the opportunity comes to them.

Think about it from another direction. Think about the workplace. Employees who consistently miss work with unexcused absences and are dilatory in their responsibilities, employees like that are not promoted, are they? You see the consistent theme that is running through our examples here? In order to master an academic subject, you have to apply yourself to it consistently, faithfully in order to master it. An athlete who wants to win has to train. He has to prepare so that muscle memory serves him in the moment of competition. Employees have to be faithful in order to expect a promotion, and if they're not there half the time, then it's no surprise if they're dismissed or they just flounder in their career.

Well, beloved, why is it that so many people approach the Christian life thinking that they can be successful godly Christians without a similar kind of consistency in the word

of God? How is it that people think that they're growing in grace and actually advancing and mastering anything about the word of God if they read their Bible once a month? If they're in church once a month under the word of God and busy the other three times? "Well, you know, we've got things in our family. You know, we go camping six months a year and so we can't be there then. You know, we've got other responsibilities. We've got other things that our kids do and so we can't be..." Well, at what point, at what point do we just stop and say what's important and how do you expect to grow in grace and grow in the word of God if you're not consistently applying yourself to it? Do you think it just happens by osmosis? Can we use it as a pillow and it just filters through our ear and we learn it that way?

Consistent reading of the word of God, consistent attendance where the word of God is preached time after time after time is essential to growth. And I realize, maybe I should say it this way, I think that there are good-hearted people who just don't realize what they're doing. They haven't stopped to think about it from this perspective and they haven't made the word of God enough of a priority that they apply it to themselves consistently, and if that's the case, they are not advancing in Christ in the way that perhaps they think that they are. And so these are matters of great importance. Part of the function of the church is to teach biblical truth and if that is the function and the responsibility, say, from a leadership perspective to do that, what that implies is that there is a responsibility upon the congregation within the church to be there when it is taught because this is the way that spiritual growth is accomplished. One text, one message, one reading a day time by time and just as you exercise flexing your muscles with weights, so your spiritual muscles grow as you are doing that consistent training of your mind in the word of God.

So these are matters of great importance and what happens as a result of that? What happens as a result of biblical ministry and of a devotion to the word of God like that day by day by day? Well, it produces life change and Paul speaks to this. Go back to Titus 1. I've got to get back there myself. Titus 1 again. "I'm too busy for God's word." Well, you're too busy then. I'm not directing this at anyone, this is an imagined person saying this, not addressing this to anyone in the room per se. "I'm too busy for this. I don't have time." Well, well, why are you living, then? If you are too busy for the word of God, maybe you can't sit down and read it because you're chasing after four or five kids, but can you have it playing on an audio? Is there some way that you can engage the word of God somehow? You're saying there's no time ever? Something's wrong. That doesn't compute. And Paul says, Titus 1:1, he says, "the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness." A biblical ministry produces life change. A mind that is engaged in the word of God is a mind that is leading into a transformation of life.

Look at Titus 2:14. This is part of the purpose of God in salvation. It's not merely to keep someone from going to hell. He saves people in order to change them, to transform them, to speak theologically, to sanctify them. Verse 14, Christ "gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." Chapter 3, verse 1, "Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed." Verse 8 in the middle of the

verse, "those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds." Verse 14, "Our people must also learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful." So the teaching ministry of the word is designed to lead to a transformation of life. We're not simply imparting information when we gather to hear God's word. We're not simply accumulating knowledge about biblical issues, biblical facts, or biblical doctrines. We're doing that but there's more to it than that. The point of biblical teaching is to promote a transformation of life in order that men might be presented to Christ complete in him.

Colossians 1:28, Paul speaks to this, he says, "We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom," there it is again, "teaching every man so that we may present every man complete in Christ." Teaching the word in order that the people of God might be sanctified by it.

So what can we say about this teaching of the word? This teaching of the word is done in order to advance a spiritual work in Christ. We lead men to Christ so as to advance the spiritual work of Christ. As he builds his church, as he adds men to his kingdom through the new birth, the work of Christ is advanced, the church is built up. As the people of God, the people who belong to Christ are taught and transformed, the spiritual work of Christ is being advanced. This is not done through politics. This is not done through entertainment. This is not done through material prosperity promises. It is a spiritual work addressed, first of all, to your mind for your heart to embrace so that your life is changed.

This is the purpose of the church. Those of you that are considering church membership, those of you who have signed up for the membership class, we're greatly glad that you have. Understand that that's what we're doing here, that's what we're signing up for is to say, "I want to be a part of that. I believe that that is the purpose of the church. That's what I want to be a part of also." And in membership we identify with these things.

Point number 3: we proclaim our future hope. We proclaim our future hope. We lead men to Christ, we teach biblical truth and blessedness upon blessedness, we proclaim our future hope. You see, it's not simply a matter of doing the things that God has told us to do, we remember and we remind ourselves repeatedly that salvation comes with it a future hope that is in our interest, that will be to our delight and blessing so that Paul can say there in verse 2 as he's spoken about the faith and the knowledge of the truth, it goes on in verse 2 and says, "in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago."

Salvation, beloved, salvation goes beyond the struggles of this life, doesn't it? You know this. We talk about this often. Salvation is not simply a matter of what we believe here on earth, it's not simply a matter of what we do here on earth, and sanctification, even the sanctification and the change and transformation of our lives is not the ultimate end goal of it all. Sanctification is preparing us for our ultimate glorification when we are in heaven with Christ. So our salvation gives us a hope, gives us a confident expectation that God is going to bless us at the end of this life and throughout all of the ages of

eternity. He has blessings stored up for us that eye has not seen and mind cannot conceive of.

Look at Titus 2:13. Paul says we're "looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus." In chapter 3, verse 7, he says "that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." Beloved, let me remind you, and this is sweet water to drink for a discouraged suffering soul. Let me remind you that the ultimate purpose of God saving you was so that one day you would see Jesus Christ face-to-face. We will one day look into the face of the one who was crucified for us and we will see him in glory. We will see him without the distractions of our sin and the distractions of our culture and society and the wickedness that is around us. We will see him without the temptations of our flesh and the temptations of Satan. All of that will be banished. There will be no more tears. There will be no more fears. There will be no more suffering. We will see Christ and Scripture says when we see him we will be made like him, and that is going to be our condition throughout all of eternity, made perfect, made like Christ, and enjoying fellowship with him around his throne forever and ever without end. And when that day comes, my friend, you will no longer sin, you will not even be capable. You will not have the ability to sin anymore. You will be perfected and made perfectly righteous in a way that delivers you from even the capacity to sin. You will be with the people of God throughout the ages. We will be reunited with our loved ones in Christ. We will be united and see for the first time those that went before us in the faith, the biblical heroes of the faith. Everyone listed in Hebrews 11 somehow one way or another we're going to be with them and we're going to belong there because the same Christ who saved them saved us. We belong to Christ and if we belong to him, then we belong where he is.

I like to tell people that whenever we get to heaven, there is not going to be any sense of strangeness or alienation about it whatsoever. It's not going to be a disorienting experience. When we enter into the presence of Christ, when we have been sealed in righteousness and made perfect and we are like him, to be in heaven with him is going to be the one time in all of your Christian experience where you say, "I am finally home. I belong here. This is what I was created for." You're going to be at home. It's going to be the most natural thing of all because this is what Christ saved you for. And it will be a place of perfect peace where God will bless you forever and, my friend, it will never ever ever get old. It will never be boring. How could it possibly be boring to be in the presence of the eternal God and the Son who loved us and gave himself up for us?

That's our eternal hope. That's what God is moving us along to and this is what we gather together to remind ourselves of, that your temporary life of pain and tears and frustration from living in this fallen world gives way to an eternal life of blessing in the presence of Christ. That's what's ahead for us. And so what is Christ's purpose for the church, what are we to do? We're to lead men to Christ, we are to teach biblical truth, and we proclaim our eternal hope. We, in other words, we advance a spiritual work in Christ while he gives us breath. That's a privilege. That's a blessing to be a part of. And that, my friends, is why Truth Community Church exists.

Let's pray together.

Gracious God, having seen these things from Your word, what can we say except to ask You for the help of Your Holy Spirit. Help us individually and corporately to lead men to Christ. Help us individually and corporately to teach and learn and receive biblical truth. And help us proclaim our future hope and strengthen, dear Father, strengthen all of these dear people who are here, strengthen them in the certainty of that hope so that the things of this world would grow strangely dim in the light of Your glory and grace. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thanks for listening to Pastor Don Green from Truth Community Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. You can find church information, Don's complete sermon library and other helpful materials at thetruthpulpit.com. This message is copyrighted by Don Green. All rights reserved.