

How well are you? You might feel well but how healthy are you really? If you wanted to find out you could have a health check: weight, blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar, kidney function, bone density, heart monitor and so on. There are all sorts of specific tests that can give you an accurate picture of your health.

But if I asked how good are you? What would you say? You might feel pretty good. How would you know if you really are living a good life or bad?

In hospital they come round often to take temperature, and check your blood pressure. They measure your health but we don't have a "goodness meter" they can stick on you. How do we know how good we are?

Most people are very concerned about their physical health. People spend time at a gym or doing some other exercise. Magazines are full of information on diets so we eat right. People are concerned about their weight. People go to doctors and have health checks. They spend lots of money of medicines of all sorts. A lot of time, effort and money is spent on health.

How concerned are we about living a godly life, about our moral health?

Today we begin a short series of sermons on Paul's letter to Titus. It is a letter that emphasises being "devoted to doing what is good."

Background

Paul and Titus have been working on the island of Crete. Paul has travelled on and left Titus there to continue work. *"The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you."* (1:5)

Paul writes this letter to encourage Titus in his work. So Titus is to continue teaching himself and to appoint suitable elders who will lead the church.

1. Devoted to doing what is good

We need to see this main theme of the letter. In 3:8 Paul says, *"I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good."* At the end of the letter Pauls sums up the message with, *"Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good."* (3:14) In 2:14 he says the very reason Jesus died was *"to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good."* (2:14) The theme is taken up in other verses: 1:8, 16; 2:3, 6; & 3:3. Much of the letter spells out what it means to do good.

So checking our lives against this letter is a helpful way of giving ourselves a "goodness check." And it shows us how we can improve our moral health.

Paul begins the letter: *"Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness."* (1:1) He says his whole ministry is to *"further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth,"* that is to preach the gospel, and this preaching of the gospel *"leads to godliness"* (doing what is good).

We need to see that the gospel is not just about how we get to heaven, but about what God has done, *“to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.”* (2:14) We are not just forgiven but changed so we are *“eager to do what is good.”* The message of the gospel when properly understood will lead to transformed lives.

If I came to you and said, “You must get up at 4am and go and swim till 6am, then have breakfast and this is what you must eat; then you have to go to the gym and work out for two hours. This is the diet you must eat and you must be in bed by 8pm every night.” You would probably say, “No. I’m not going to do that. Why?” But if I said, “You have been selected to represent Australia in the 400m swimming event at the Olympics.” Then it would all make sense. The lifestyle would fit that of an Olympic athlete. You would understand the training requirements and be motivated to do them.

It is important to see that the gospel is the foundation for our moral behaviour. A godly life is not just keeping a lot of rules: dos, and don’ts but living in the light of the gospel, in the light of our new identity in Christ

Paul gives two great statements of the gospel in this letter to show how it should transform our lives: 2:11-14 & 3:4-8. We’ll see this in the next two sermons. So Paul preaches the gospel so people will live godly lives. Titus is to continue that ministry and he is to appoint elders for the churches on Crete who will do this also and be examples to the church.

2. Appointing godly leaders (1:5-9)

At HAWK one of the games was follow the leader. One child would lead. Whatever they did everyone had to do: clap, walk, jump, etc. That’s just a fun game. Many children wanted to be leader but some ran out of ideas when they were in front. Some weren’t good leaders but that didn’t matter. It was still fun however good leadership in the church is vitally important. Under God it shapes the whole life of the church. Only suitable people should be appointed.

a) Leaders must preach the truth

Because the truth of the gospel is the foundation for godly lives Paul says a leader *“must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.”* (1:9) They must hold to the truth of the gospel, be able to teach it effectively and to correct those who reject its message.

The preaching and teaching ministry of the church is vitally important to make the gospel clear. It is the foundation for everything else.

b) Leaders must set a godly example

Paul lists many qualities that elders must have to be chosen. It is not enough for people to be good speakers and not just be people who have passed all their theological exams. They must set an example of godly living, of what a transformed life looks like. If we are all to live godly lives they must lead us by example.

Here Paul lists qualities people must have to be elders. Ordained ministers must have these qualities but so must those who lead in other ways. A church must be careful in appointing Bible study leaders, children’s ministry team, wardens and so on.

I'll just comment on a few of these qualities.

- "Blameless" *"... must be blameless"* (1:6 & 7) What does this mean? It doesn't mean perfect. None of us are perfect. It means beyond reproach. Someone that no one can point the finger at and accuse of wrongdoing.
- They are to be faithful as husbands and fathers. *"...faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient."* (1:6) In the next chapter we see that our home life is central to doing good so elders must set a good example in their home life.
- Leadership is a servant ministry as all ministries are. A leader is to serve the people, not be in it for himself, *"... not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain."* ⁸ *Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good."* (1:7-8) They need to have a servant heart.
- *"self-controlled"*: five times in Titus Paul says leaders and all of us must be self-controlled. Think of a puppet. It is controlled by the strings. It does not control itself but is controlled by someone else. What pulls your strings? What influences your behaviour? Is it your desires or emotions? Is it other people and their opinions? Are you just seeking please others, to be accepted by the crowd? Is it self-interest or love for others?

John Stott says to be self-controlled is to make sensible judgements (make our own decisions based on God's word), and to have a disciplined lifestyle (to make plans and stick to them to be regular in Bible reading, prayer and worship; to keep our promises to God and to others; to look after our bodies.) How disciplined are you? Be self-controlled.

These are things leaders need to set an example in but they are qualities we all need to develop. We need to reflect on these things.

3. Correcting rebellious leaders

¹⁰ *For there are many rebellious people, full of meaningless talk and deception, especially those of the circumcision group.* ¹¹ *They must be silenced, because they are disrupting whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach – and that for the sake of dishonest gain.* (1:10-11)

Paul says there are many who seek to lead people astray. They are disrupting whole households. Their teaching leads to ungodly behaviour.

He refers to the "circumcision group" and in 1:14 to Jewish myths. Back then it was probably a group of converted Jews who had not really understood the gospel. Today the issues will be different but there are still people in churches who reject the truth, who deny Jesus' resurrection, or virgin birth, or that the Bible is really God's word. There are bishops who appoint clergy who don't live by God's standards of marriage.

Paul doesn't say, "That's OK. Everyone can have their own opinion." He says, *"They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything"*

good." (1:16) These are people who do not do what is good. They are not suitable to be leaders and should be rebuked and corrected, *"so that they will be sound in the faith."* (1:13)

Paul quotes Epimenides, a 6th Century BC poet from Crete. *'Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.'* (1:12) In other words some of the bad behaviour in the church reflects the lifestyle of the community around them.

The danger for us today is that we may reflect the failings of Australian society in which we live. It is easy to be blind to the evils of our own society. You know the experiment of the frog in hot water. It is unaware of the danger. The frog changes with the water and doesn't feel the heat. In the same way we can be unaware of how far our society has drifted from God's values and can be just the same as the people around us.

We need to reflect on the greed, individualism, materialism and living for pleasure that shapes the lives of those around us so that we live a life that is shaped by the gospel not by the values of society.

How are we going to improve in godliness?

We need to deeply understand the significance of the gospel.

We need to be constantly exposed to its influence by reading our Bibles.

We need to listen to godly teachers.

We need to look for godly examples.

So we will live a godly life, being devoted to doing what is good.

How concerned are you about your godliness?

Are there things that need to change?

How can you do better?