

Session 1

September 2, 2018

## REALITY CHECK

Titus 3:3-11

Those who know me know that I am passionate about the local church. I teach my students that “the Kingdom of God is expressed on earth in local bodies of believers called churches.” Associations and conventions are important, but not as important as local congregations! These are the building blocks of the Kingdom, representing the Bride of Christ. While there is a *universal church* in a sense—all believers from all time—the New Testament clearly emphasizes local, community-based congregations, led by local leadership. In the next several lessons, we will see what the Bible says about local church ministry and how to strengthen the church’s influence in the community. Some important starting points from Titus:

**All church members share the same background: sin (v. 3).** According to Titus 1:5, Titus was left by Paul on the Greek island of Crete to appoint leadership in the local churches there. The task was a bit daunting, as the Cretans had a reputation for being particularly unruly and argumentative. Paul quotes the early poet Epimenides (himself a Cretan) with “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons” (1:12). While throughout the letter the apostle instructs Titus to be strict and bold with the new congregations, he reminds him as well to be compassionate; for all of us share the same sinful background (see Eph. 2:1-3). David the psalmist wrote in Psalm 40, “He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock.” I have often said, “Your pit may not be the same as my pit, but we all come from some pit!” Today’s church leaders (and church members) would do well to remember compassion in our ministries. We dare not forget the pit from which we came. We are not sinless...we are forgiven.

**All church members share the same gift: salvation (vv. 4-7).** Paul reminds us in Romans that “God proves His own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). In Titus 3, Paul explains that process in four ways. First, he mentions the *source* of salvation. Verse 4 tells us that our salvation comes from God; a result of His kindness and his love, demonstrated in the person and work of Christ. Second, Paul mentions the *motivation* for salvation. If our salvation was based on the justice of God, no one could be saved! But verse 5 makes it clear: we are saved as an act of God’s mercy. Third, Paul reminds us of the *agency* of salvation: regeneration and renewal wrought by God’s Holy Spirit (vv. 5-6). Fourth, we see the *result* of salvation: we are justified by God’s grace, adopted into His family as sons, and granted the glorious promise of eternal life (v. 7). Regardless of what pit we came from, salvation is the same: God’s gift of mercy and grace.

**All church members share the same goal: unity (vv. 8-11).** Paul points out here that our singular salvation leads to a singular goal: unity. Notice the shift in the text from what we *believe* to what we *do*. Like James, Paul wants the church to remember that faith (what we believe) without works (what we do) is dead! (James 2:20). Careful devotion to the gospel of God produces good works that are profitable for *everyone* (v. 8). The section ends by warning the church what to avoid. *Foolish questions* are those inane questions that have no point, and nothing to gain by asking them. *Genealogies*—those mundane lists of names so often skipped by us

today—were popularly studied for some deep spiritual meaning. *Quarrels* are arguments, and *disputes about the law* were arguments about Old Testament doctrine. In every case, Paul pointed out that such in-fighting served only to divide, being in themselves “unprofitable” and “worthless” for the church body. Paul’s remedy? After harsh warnings, expel such people from the church.