

# Was It A Good Year

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## SPEAKERS

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The end of a year can generate lots of different emotions. For some people, it's probably regret. I look back and regret things they've said, things they've done. Maybe for others, there's a sense of relief, finally over the new year before us, and I think for many, it's a time of reflection, or something about getting to the end of the year that makes you sort of look back and reflect somewhat. So I thought it'd be profitable to deal with a question this morning on this last Sunday of 2019. would be Was it a good year? Now you may be thinking I'm asking you, did you have a fun year? Did you have a good year Your life, we healthy. But that's not what I'm asking you what I'm asking you Was it a good year? Based on our memory verse? Was it a year that you could reflect back on and say, you know, what I did individually devote myself to doing what was good, what was pleasing to God. And then also as a congregation, could we respond the same way and said, Yes, looking back on this year, it was a good year, because I was devoted we were devoted to doing good. So I want you to direct your attention to Titus chapter three. And maybe this will be a new tradition on the last Sunday of the year. We'll go back and look at the memory verse that we started with. And there's three words I want to have stick with you this morning. evaluation, explanation, and exhortation. So I hope these three things terms will resonate in your thinking, evaluation, explanation, and exploitation. So let's begin with the first one simply the thought of evaluation. Paul's writing this letter to Titus, who is a pastor, a leader in the church, Paul's left Titus in Crete, for the purpose of planting churches, and appointing elders and leaders in those churches. This is a daunting task, because we know that this area of Crete was a difficult area. It was a culture much like our

own today. Many people not interested in the things of the Lord, and then compound that with just the general sinful nature of humanity, that Titus would find himself dealing with, as he sought to establish a church and teach its people to be devoted to doing what is good. How would Titus know if his words and his teaching is effective? How would Titus know himself? If he's devoted to doing good? Well, that would lead to the fact that you must have an objective standard, because evaluation assumes there's a standard by which you're being held up to. So that's why we're looking at here in this chapter, what is the objective standard, the means by which evaluation should take place? As I want you to look, first of all at verse one, because in this chapter four times, Paul uses the phrase either to do to do something, or to literally do good. He's assuming there's action. He's assuming. Here's the standard you should know. As Olivia, verse one, we see the first of three behaviors that every believer should be pursuing. First one says for my The people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient to do whatever is good. He says every believer has this goal or should as an objective evaluation. are you growing in your willingness to obey those who are over you? This is a difficult thing for any people to do, but especially people and create your Roman colony, but you're under the Roman authorities. And you know, the character of some of those authorities and emperors from history, cruel individuals who abuse their power. And it says, here's a behavior that will tell you if you're devoted to doing good you willingly obey them, not to the point of disobedience to God, but you willingly recognize God's sovereignty and your response to those is over you only need to do is look around us today and realize there continues to be a lot of corruption in authorities and powers that are over us. We find ourselves in the midst of impeachment hearings and things like that, and wherever you may fall, and that is just a reminder, what what do people tend to do when they have power? They abuse it. It speaks of our sinful nature doesn't speak of a particular political party, it speaks of our sinful nature. As well Paul reminds Titus and says Titus, here's one standard, one behavior that every Christian should be pursuing. And then he goes on in verse two, and says, positively, every believer should strive to be peaceable. To demonstrate the opposite of stirring up strife. Again, think of what Jesus said. Blessed are the peacemakers. makers, those who don't not compromise the truth, but but speak God's truth in such a way that brings restoration and healing in lots of people who are good at stirring up strife. Paul says as a believer devoted to doing good means you're marked by a peaceable spirit. Evidence of the fruit of the Spirit, God's work in your life. But then it goes on and says not only peaceable, but you are considerate. This word means serviceable. In other words, how we conduct ourselves is of benefit to those around us. There are some people I've heard the expression in life are joy, suckers. They just sort of rob the joy out of your interaction with them. We're not to be like that, as believers were to be marked by by we are serviceable people. We bless and benefit the those around us by our conversations by our godliness by our actions. So you see these objective standards that are timeless, doesn't matter if you're living in Crete or you find yourself living in Canaan. But then he also mentions in

verse eight, sort of a broad definition and says at the end of verse eight, these things, everything has just been talking about are excellent, and profitable for everyone. So there you have the embracing, he's talking to you. He's talking to me, for a follower of Christ. He's saying here, here is part of the evaluation. Here's the behavior that I'm talking about. When I say be devoted to doing what is good. But with any evaluation, it's always helpful to know well, what should I avoid? What do I want to distance myself from? So Paul reminds Titus, he says, Yes, there are certain things as a believer, you must make every effort to distance yourself from. And you see this again looking closely at verse to the very first part of that verse, he says, to slander, no one. The word slander there means to blast fame to hurt the reputation of another. And there is a way that Paul certainly wants Titus to defend the truth. But at the same time, you can defend the truth while being respectful of those who are disagreeing with you. And I think this is probably an area we sadly seen our world today, where Christians are often very negligent, we often come down to the level of those who are attacking our faith in Christ. Jesus says do not slander or blasphemy, yes, refute false teacher. expose it, bring it right out there. But at the same time, remember the person who is doing that needs Christ. They don't know Christ, and they're set against the truth. And so notice this is a behavior and action that as a believer would be the opposite of being devoted to doing what is good, how easy it is in the workplace for us to get caught up in criticism, or gossip of others. someone makes a comment and we quickly kind of join in. Whereas we need to distance ourselves from that. But notice in verse three, he pairs together a series of other descriptions that we should avoid. In verse three, he says, We too, were foolish, disobedient, and deceived. I was interesting that he would pick on these three because if you look back at Titus one Paul mentioned something about the cretins actually a statement that cretins used of themselves, Paul's using it with somewhat a sense of irony, but but there's a great truthfulness to this. And so when verse 12 of Titus chapter one, Paul says, even one of their own prophets has said, cretins are always liars, evil brutes, and lazy, gluttonous. And their own words, they kind of indict themselves by their actions. Paul says here as a believer, you are not to be caught up in acting foolishly, speaking foolishly, that if this characterizes your words, there's something wrong that we all sin. We all say things we shouldn't we confess that and deal with this. But Paul's dealing with a general characteristic that defines who you are. edition of foolishness he says, to not be marked by being disobedient, not just disobedient to the authorities over you, but ultimately talking about disobedience to God, opposing God. And then he mentions deceived. Now we'll get to this part soon. But notice he says at one time, this was what we all were. So there's an interesting distinction that Paul's going to build on here, that these are behaviors you should avoid as a believer. Why? Because you can speak of those as being dead to sin now, that that should not define you anymore. But you see in that third verse, he also continues on with some others. He says, We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. And it's that first phrase We live. In other words, this is how we walk.

So as a Christian, yes, we can at times wrestle with bitterness and anger. But it's not that we walk in that we should be convicted by that. And wanting to turn from that as quickly as possible is an indication of being devoted to doing what is good. Paul says here if you're saying you, you live this way, you walk this way, that this is what people think when they think of you. That that is a part of the evaluation that should say something is not right, spiritually, with what you're professing, and what you're actually living like. And then he gets down to verse nine. And verse nine, he says very directly, but avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law because they are profitable and useless. I can't help but when I read that the Think of how often Christians can get caught up in debating discussing things that really are not central to our faith. That there's other things we should be focusing on. And he's reminding them here there is a segment among some of the cretins where these false teachers are focusing on Jewish genealogies, connections, their writings outside of Scripture, and they want to draw others into that debate and that discussion. And that could be very enticing. And policies, you know, it's steer, steer clear of that. Yes, refute teaching that's being challenged directly according to Scripture. But there are other issues we don't need to get involved in. They're not central Defending the faith. They're taking in many ways, I would say our eyes off of making disciples. So here is the objective evaluation that Paul puts before Titus. This is our believer should behave. This is what a believer should strive to avoid. But every evaluation requires an explanation. Because you can kind of read this and say, well, Paula, that's pretty high standards. Is that really reasonable? Is that just that you would hold such high objective standards that God has for believers? And is that the same now? You know, you could read this and say, Well, he's talking to Titus. Titus is a pastor. So that's true for him, but is it true for me? And the resounding answer comes back, it's absolutely true for you because you get The second word that I want you to stick in your mind, not just the thought of evaluation. But now explanation. Paul gives a theological basis for why that standard applies to you and me. And that comes out in verses four through eight. The very first word in verse four is bought. And you know by now, but it's a conjunction that says, This is the opposite of everything I just talked about. That this is how someone who doesn't know Christ behaves, but I'm not talking about them. I'm talking about you who know Christ. And so you see in his explanation, his basis for that evaluation is very straightforward. He says, first of all, as a Christian, you have been saved and justified by grace. Look at Verse for what he emphasizes the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared. He saved us not because of righteous things we had done. But because of his mercy says, This is what I'm talking about it now you are a Christian. Here's this dramatic change that has taken place. And it's taken place by grace, God's kindness, His love and His mercy. But then he goes on and verses five and six and speaks about you have been washed, the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. That word washing in some translations is rendered labor. So if you think of in the temple, there's different labor's means by which you'd go up to and wash yourself that

some have argued the thought here is not so much the utensil but the means by which that washing is taken place. I think would fit well here he's emphasizing you been declared righteous based on what Christ has done for you. Therefore, you're not the same person. I love the story of Augustine who in his confessions, where he talks about his own sinfulness up until around the age of 30, where he acknowledged Christ as Lord and Savior. He tells the story of living with another woman having an illegitimate child, and then repenting of that and devoting his life to Christ. And he writes about how he's walking down the streets and he hears that woman literally calling him and saying, Augustine Is that you? And he stops and he replies, it is August the but it is not me. Or what he was saying was, yes, that is who I am, but I'm not the person in you, because of Christ. And so you have Paul saying, Titus, you need to get this right in your thinking, and then teach it to your people. Teach them that they have been justified and saved by grace. And then you notice verse seven, just the opening line in that verse, so that having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs having the hope, of eternal life. And I hope as you said, that verse you realize that part of this is saying, your salvation is not complete yet. In other words, we should be able to say like Paul to Titus, you have been justified by grace, but you are still being saved, and you will one day be saved completely. In other words, now we're dealing with our second ification and growth in Christ. So because of knowing Christ, there are certain behaviors and actions that no longer should define us. But now we are in that process of being shaped and molded by His Holy Spirit. Like how the hardest Ross puts it when he talks about this process of becoming more and more like Christ. He said, his gracious work of God by the Holy Spirit, in which the believer is being renewed by degree in his whole nature, the thought of by degree and so when I asked you Was it a good year? I don't expect any of you to say it was perfect here. Every day I devoted myself to doing what was good. I feel fulfilled. Everything Titus was told here by Paul Because none of us are sinless, but I would hope you'd be able to say, you know what I have been increasing in my love and knowledge of God, I have been growing by God's grace, one degree at a time moving closer and closer being conformed to his image. And Paul repeats that in many other letters in Second Thessalonians. He, he says the same thing to the believers reminds them you have been saved. And yet the process of growing in Christ is continuing. And so that is the explanation for why the evaluation and the standard applies to all of us. So we've looked at the thought of evaluation. We've looked at the explanation, the basis of that in Paul's perspective, and now we come to the third word exhortation because you can't read a passage like this without realizing there's a call to action. And what does it mean then to be devoted to doing what was good for you see Paul strings and weaves together throughout this whole chapter, five quick exhortations. So notice in verse one, the first excitation is simply remind the people remind yourself of this teaching. Word remind a verb to to put into your thinking. We recently received as a Christmas gift, Alexa. And basically you just say to Alexa, remind me of this, and she should do it. Well, you know, I can't help but think as believers we need constant

reminders of God's goodness to us, of what it means to be a follower of Christ. Those reminders come through reading the scriptures every day through prayer, through accountability to one another. So Paul's expectation is, Titus put this into their thinking, put it into your thinking. And Paul, I think is these rights that is saying, I need to remind myself of this. But then you go on to verse eight, verse eight gives us a second exhortation. This is a trustworthy saying, and I want you to stress these things. The word stress there can mean I want you to pray for these things. It can also refer to, I want you to state these things, to verbalize them to talk about them. And I can't help but think how important is not just to talk about it. But do we make this an object of our prayer? That we pray that God help me equip me to be devoted? behavior that reflects you two attitudes that are behind that behavior that honors you. Verse nine, we touched on briefly but you have a third exhortation there, and that is to avoid foolish controversies and genealogies. In other words, have thought being here act decisively when it comes to matters of the faith. A lot of times we don't act decisively. we entertain certain things maybe that we shouldn't in our thought life in our management and handling of time, Paul saying, you know, act decisively. You know what God desires. You've been in church long enough. You probably know enough about the scriptures. To Lisa Yeah, this is something God would want me to think about. would want me to act on this is something he wouldn't realize. Upon his spirit to help you notice four very strong admonition warn a divisive Person of the word warn their means instruct them, seek to correct them in Scripture, but I like what John Calvin says, and it may not be that popular today. But based on this passage, he says, here's what you need to do as a church. Need to draw in those who are teachable. Draw them in, who have questions. They're hungry to know who is this God? What does the Bible teach? But then he adds to that, not just drawing those who are teachable, but drive out those who oppose true teaching. In other words, confront them. If they're challenging God's word, so much so that they will lead because they feel as if they cannot establish roots with the truth strong word. As Paul says, This is what every Christian needs to do. We've kind of fallen prey to the false thought that somehow we're to become friends with the world. And friends with those who have opposing teaching, now not saying we are not to love them, we are to respect them. But we've never ever been commanded to become friends with false teachers and false teachers. We were to warn them and to do it in a decisive and compassionate way. But then if they continue to oppose, Paul says, Titus, Titus, you need to drive them out. Because that is not what marks being devoted to doing what is good. And then in verse, verses 13 through 15, as Paul gives his final greetings He mentions what he hopes they do for Artemis zenus, these other servants of the Lord, and the importance there is, he says, I want you to actively meet the needs of other believers. That's what it means to be devoted to doing good. reflecting back on this year have we individually and corporately sought to make the most of every opportunity to respond to the needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ, to come alongside them when they rejoicing and to come alongside them when they are hurting,

to also correct them when they are wrong, when they are drifting away from God. These are all evidences of what it means to be doing. What is good. So at the heart of Paul's letter to Titus is evaluation is explanation and as exploitation, as I say this that you might reflect and take some time today to think about Was it a good year? And then it'd be praying as we anticipate introducing a new verse next week, for the year that our goal is not merely to memorize scripture, but it's to understand it and apply it and live it out. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, you have spoken to us once again through your word. And I pray that your spirit would take these words and burn them into our thoughts that we would wrestle with them until we are willing to submit to them in obedience and willing obedience to You. Lord, may we be a people devoted to doing good All the time. I pray this in Jesus name Amen