

Wax Free . . . Sun Tested

Remarkable Christianity, Part 7

Titus 3:12-15

Several years ago I read an article written by a woman about her mother's jar collection. Over the years her mother had collected more than 200 different kinds of authentic antique glass jars – they came in all kinds of sizes and shapes and colors.

She wrote that in her mother's collection, no two bottles look exactly alike. Uneven seams and bubbled glass are marks of distinction and age and value.

The largest piece in her collection is a glass jug crafted from Eastern Europe; the smallest piece in her collection was a beautiful handcrafted bottle that once held perfume. Her mother had actually dug it up as she searched the ground around an area that had once served as stopping place for stagecoaches – the little bottle still held the faint aroma of perfume even though it was more than 100 years old.

If you've ever watched one of those antique shows, you've been amazed at all the different kinds of clues that prove whether or not something is a genuine antique or a recent imitation.

Looks can certainly be misleading.

This woman wrote that her mother used a simple test that helped prove genuine antique glass. She set it out in the sunlight. A genuine antique bottle would change color when exposed to direct sunlight over a period of several weeks. The glass in objects more than 100 years old often contained a high level of manganese – a metallic chemical added to make the glass a

little more clear. The sun's rays caused a chemical reaction and a pale green glass, for example, would turn into brilliant shades of purple.

The authentic antique was revealed when examined, as it were, by the light.

If you traveled back to the days of the Apostle Paul, the people of his day used pottery for just about everything. And they used a similar test to determine the authenticity of well-made pots and cups and bowls and so many more objects.

Dishonest potters would cover up cracks and flaws in their pottery by filling them with wax; for the person shopping there inside that indoor shop, it could go undetected.

It was normal for people to take that piece of pottery outside and hold it up to the sunlight. As they turned it, any place covered or filled with wax would show up as a lighter color.

Evidently, this was such a problem in these days that honest merchants would actually stamp their pottery with the Latin words, *sine cera*.

Sine means *without* and *cera* is the Latin word for *wax*. My pottery is without wax. Even still, you might want to test it to make sure.

Sine cera became our English word, *sincere*: without wax; without any effort to appear to be something you're not.¹

To be real . . . authentic . . . genuine. Which is the opposite of a put on . . . superficial . . . fake. In line with this analogy, to be without wax means to be open and honest about the

cracks and the flaws but then you work it out rather than try and cover it up.

This is authentic Christianity, without wax . . . light-tested. . . what a wonderful resolution for every believer and the entire church.

As we wrap up this series entitled, Remarkable Christianity – which also brings us to the closing verses of Paul’s letter to Titus, it’s only fitting that the characteristic of authenticity shows up.

What does authentic spiritual character look like? What does a genuine heart for God really look and act like?

How can you tell if it’s the genuine item?

What I want to do is go through this final paragraph with you and simply point out four ways to determine authenticity. Let’s take Paul’s life and hold him up to the light and let’s see what we can find out.

Notice *verse 12 of Titus chapter 3. When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, make every effort to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there.*

Now this verse is a sermon all by itself . . . there’s so much here.

But I’m determined to finish these four verses today. Because I want to begin a brief study of the life of Daniel and get to the prophetic vision of Daniel by December 16th to show you why the Mayan calendar predicting the end of the world isn’t going to happen that following Friday; and then on the next Sunday – Christmas Sunday, the 23rd, I want to show you that Daniel was the first believing Wise Man – the first believing Magi – who trained his colleagues so effectively that the gospel was handed down and centuries later you have Magi traveling to Bethlehem to worship the Messiah. They were spiritual descendants of Daniel.

All that to say, I’m going to finish Titus today . . . and all the people said . . . not so loud.

Now as we begin, there are people – authors – supposed Bible scholars – who think the Apostle Paul was a know-it-all . . . a dogmatic, unfeeling, unsmiling, never uncertain, leader.

Nowhere is that proven more untrue than in the way Paul finishes his letters.

They exude warmth and kindness and grace.

And they also reveal the marks of an authentic life.

The first of four is this:

1. Authenticity is revealed through honest dilemmas

Was Paul unfeeling? Was Paul always sure of himself? Was Paul this kind of leader that he never stopped to question himself?

This verse answers all of that . . . first of all, notice again – *when I send Artemas or Tychicus to you . . .*”

Wait, what did he just reveal?

I’m so grateful for that little English word “or”. In the original language, this is an indefinite clause (hotan with the subjunctive) which means Paul hasn’t made up his mind – he doesn’t know.ⁱⁱ

When I send Artemas or Tychicus . . . which means Paul is admitting in total transparency that he wasn’t sure.

And instead of couching his lack of certainty at the moment into more spiritual language, like “Titus, there are two excellent candidates for the pastorate that I’m currently evaluating;” he actually spells it out . . . without any wax to smooth it all out or make the decision seem any less difficult than it was.

For those of you who lead a ministry or a movement or a school or a household – isn’t it wonderful to hear Paul say, “Titus, I’ve got two possible men to take over for you there on the Island of Crete, but at this point, I’m not sure which one is the best candidate.”

I don’t know yet . . . implied, I’m thinking about it.

Which implies, “I’m still praying about it.”

Listen, the Spirit of God is inspiring His text of scripture through the Apostle Paul and embedded within inspired scripture is Paul’s admission that God hasn’t led him clearly in every area of his ministry.

Paul, do you really want to let that out?

Yes, I think I will . . . Titus, I don’t know where I’m going to land yet . . . God hasn’t filled in all the blanks.

This was so encouraging to discover here in this letter.

I've had people coming up to me asking, "What book are we going to study next?" "I don't know." I get this look . . . like, "I thought you were a year ahead in your planning." Are you kidding? I'd like to be a month ahead . . . I'd like to be a week ahead . . . sometimes I'd like to be . . . well, never mind . . . let's just say I'm so encouraged by this!

Maybe you're wondering,

- which class do I take next . . .
- in fact, which college do I go to . . .
- which house do we buy . . .
- which way will we educate our children . . .
- which guy do I marry . . .
- which job do I take . . .

Let's admit it to our friends and say, "We're not sure which way to turn!" . . . that's honest authenticity.

And with this kind of admission comes immediate prayer support – Titus would obviously have begun praying for the Lord to give Paul wisdom to choose which man to send to Crete – the implications would be tremendous to these churches on the Island.

They needed the right man at the right time.

Now what do we know about these two candidates, Artemas or Tychicus?

Artemas is a name derived from the name of popular goddess of fertility, whose feminine name was Artemis – with an "is" ending.

His name more than likely meant, "Gift of Artemis"; which means he was born to parents who considered the birth and life of their son to be a gift from the this goddess.ⁱⁱⁱ

So they named him in honor of her.

What this tells us is that Artemas was born into a Gentile, idolatrous home; but he evidently came to faith later in life.

You can only imagine the drastic changes in his life – we don't know anything about his parents or really his past, but we do know that this Gentile young man, named in honor of a goddess is now one of the trusted assistants of Paul in the early church.

The other candidate mentioned here in *verse 12* is *Tychicus*, whose name means, "Fortunate". He also is a Gentile who came to faith in Jesus Christ.

While Artemas never shows up anywhere else in the New Testament, Tychicus shows up several times. Paul refers to him in *Colossians 4:7 as his beloved brother, faithful servant and fellow slave in the Lord*. He's called a *beloved brother and faithful minister in Ephesians 6:21*.

He even delivered Paul's letter to the Colossian church and accompanied Paul on one of his missionary journeys (*Acts 20*).

He's obviously one of Paul's closest companions.

You can see why both men would be candidates. Like Titus, they are Gentile believers, well trained to carry on the ministry among these descendants of pirates on the Island of Crete.

You don't have to study the mind and ministry of Paul before you discover him constantly on the search for godly men to invest in and appoint.

E.M Bounds would write about this focus when he said, "The church is always looking for better methods; God is looking for better men. What the church needs today is not more machinery, but more men whom the Holy Spirit can use; and the Holy Spirit does not flow through methods, but through men. God does not anoint plans – He anoints [people]. He wrote that in 1880 – and the truth remains today.^{iv}

If you put the clues together you discover that Paul ended up sending Artemas to take the place of Titus because we find Tychicus sent to relieve Timothy in Ephesus (*2 Timothy 4:12*).^v

The point I want to make here is this mark of authenticity that could be easy to miss.

Paul openly confesses that at this moment, he doesn't know which man to send. And he even admits as much in this inspired letter which will be read all throughout Crete and Cary, 2000 years later.

Paul is just real!

He has refused the pedestal that fully expected him to always know what was right, never admit to uncertainty, never come across as indecisive . . . here he does just the opposite by adding this phrase that reveals he doesn't have everything figured out in advance.

Authenticity is revealed through honest dilemmas.

2. Secondly, authenticity is revealed by personal deference

Notice *verse 12 again – When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you – notice this – make every effort to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there.*

In other words, I haven't decided which man to send to Crete, but I have decided to spend the winter at Nicopolis.

But get this – this paragraph will surprise Titus from out of blue.

Everything else about this letter refers to what Titus has been doing – organizing the churches, appointing elders, challenging every age group toward maturity and a demonstration of remarkable Christianity.

Oh, and by the way, Titus – in this last lines of this letter . . . you're not going to be there for much longer.

“Wait . . . what? Did I miss something?”

Titus could have argued, “I'm totally invested here . . . Crete has become home; I've been through power struggles, and I've taken on false teachers . . . the churches now have appointed elders and fruit is just now beginning to bud . . . whaddya mean you're sending Artemas or Tychicus to take my place?”

This is home!

This letter was a bombshell to the plans of Titus . . . his plans were entirely interrupted.

From what other passages tells us, Titus will be sent to Dalmatia – another rough mission field – but he will go without complaint as the Apostle informs him that his ministry there will soon come to an end.

Hold Titus up to the light and you discover an authentic believer, who will defer to the authority of the Apostle Paul – and God's direction through him.

He's willing to be interrupted.

Listen, God not only orders the steps of His children; He orders their stops, too.

In fact, what Paul doesn't know is that plans are about to change for both of them!

Did you notice where Paul expected to spend his winter? *In Nicopolis*. Nicopolis was on the southern side of Greece – it was a city founded by the first Roman Emperor Octavian to celebrate his victory over Marc Antony and Cleopatra.^{vi}

By comparing Paul's plans here in Titus with his plans revealed to the believers in Rome, Paul intended to winter in Nicopolis, then travel to serve with the believers in Rome before quickly moving on to serve Christ in Spain. (*Romans 15:23-28*)

Spain was considered the end of the civilized world. It was producing some of the greatest minds of his generation, like Seneca, the prime minister of Rome was from Spain; Lucan the poet was a Spaniard.

Paul couldn't wait to get to Spain.

“I may not be sure who to send to the Island of Crete, Titus, but I do know that I'm going to spend this winter in Nicopolis and then on to Rome and finally to Spain.”

And God said, “Not quite.”

Artemas did arrive in Crete and Titus did leave for Nicopolis, but while he was on his way, Paul's plans were about to be interrupted too – because Paul will be arrested either on his way there or after arriving.

He'll be taken to Rome, not to the church, but in chains . . . and he will never make it to Spain.

In both Titus and Paul – men who put their entire lives into their plans and their ministries – they were both interrupted.

Hold them up to the light and notice the mark of authentic, remarkable Christianity – neither one of them did anything but defer to their highest Authority – their Sovereign Lord as He ordered both their steps and their stops.

Tony Snow, a believer who served as the press secretary for President George W. Bush, battled cancer before passing away just a few years ago. When asked what spiritual lessons he was learning from his battle with colon cancer, he replied with a smile, “We want to live lives of predictable ease – smooth even trails as far as the eye can see . . . but God likes to go off-road.”^{vii}

Does He ever.

Paul will be arrested the final time, and Titus will have his winter plans changed and then on to an entirely new ministry in Dalmatia. And listen, all of this is going to change for them in a matter of months – they just don't know it yet.

Isn't that Christianity? I mean, real Christianity?

Smooth roads and clear pathways and then a quick turn and before you know it, God has you off road . . . there's no paved roads . . . no map . . . no GPS . . . no Cracker Barrel in sight.

How bad can it get?!

What's on your list of expectations?

- Well, I've got three things I plan to do this year;
- There are two things I never expect to go through;
- I plan to retire from my job in 5 years – or 10 – or 15;
- I'm planning on graduating and beginning a career in this particular field.

There is nothing wrong with planning . . . Paul and Titus were neck deep in it . . . but their plans were written in pencil and when God moved in to erase something here and rewrite something over there . . . they deferred to the wisdom and plan of God.

When we say we are following a sovereign Lord, we need to understand that it means we will follow Him . . . even when He takes us off-road . . . even when He evidently doesn't owe us an explanation for any of the steps . . . and any of the stops.

That's authentic Christianity.

It's revealed through honest dilemmas;

It's revealed by personal deference

3. Thirdly, authenticity is revealed by selfless deeds

Paul writes in *verse 13, Diligently help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way so that nothing is lacking for them.*

Now Paul surprises the church by calling for a special offering.

Zenas and Apollos are evidently the couriers for this letter . . . they both are on their way to other ministry locations.

Paul wants Titus to use this opportunity to teach the church how to give to someone we might refer to today as a missionary – they are serving Christ somewhere else.

This might not have been in their budget.

And besides . . . who is *Zenas*? We don't know. He isn't mentioned anywhere else in the Bible.

His name is Greek, so we know he's a converted Gentile.

Did you notice that Paul happens to add a reference to the fact that he's *a lawyer*; Paul uses the typical Greek word for an attorney at law.^{viii}

Which means he is the only Christian lawyer mentioned in the New Testament; which does not mean there's only one lawyer who ever got saved.

Don't go there.

What it does mean is that a believer who practiced law just so happened to be committed to the gospel to the point that he built into his life what we would call a missions trip.

He used the benefits of his career to aid the spread of the gospel.

What a blessing it is to me to have lawyers in our own church family doing the very same thing – using their skills and their connections to help other believers and further the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And I'm not just saying that to get back on their good side; although that's where I really want to be.

Paul also mentions *Apollos* here. He's already well known to the Christian community.

He was the gifted orator and apologist of the first century church.

In fact, Paul rebuked the church in Corinth for dividing into four factions: there were those who were saying, "I'm following Paul" where others said, "We're following Apollos"; still others said, "We're following Peter" and the really spiritual ones were saying, "Oh, we're just following Jesus".

But look, any way you slice it, these were the leaders that everyone knew and followed.

And Apollos is not only in the list, he's listed right next to Paul – he's getting equal billing.

Here's the mark of Paul's selfless actions . . . he tells the church to help Apollos and Zenas every way they can . . . encourage them along."

Not one word about all those petty factions back in Corinth; not one disparaging comment about Apollos.

Authentic Christianity is:

- revealed through honest dilemmas;
- revealed by personal deference
- revealed by selfless deeds

4. Authenticity is revealed through unified disciples

Notice the next verse where Paul writes, *Our people must also learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful.*

Part of an authentic life is selflessly serving others, meeting pressing needs.

And Paul adds this wonderful incentive here – when you live for others you'll never have to wonder if you've lived an unfruitful life.

Engaging in good deeds refers to a selfless lifestyle, not a momentary flash of service.

Which means you don't count out loud – okay, that's one good deed . . . okay, I just did another good deed . . . I need to get one more in before supper.

Have you ever thought about the fact that God never designed a peach tree to count its peaches? One, two three . . . 300. I'm good for 300 . . . that's it for me this year.

No, they just bear fruit.

Paul effectively says to the church in Crete, "work together . . . pull together . . . serve together to meet pressing needs . . . that's the way to fruitful living."

Paul is also implying here that our most fruitful service just might be in helping someone else bear fruit.^{ix}

And this is not going to come naturally – did you notice his comment here that doing good deeds would be something the church would need to *learn* how to do.

We've got to *learn* how to engage in good deeds; your children are going to have to *learn* how to engage in good deeds.

You don't get this automatically when you turn 6 or 16 or 21 or 40 or 60.

Authentic Christianity is something you *learn* – and relearn – and then practice . . . and then practice some more.

I don't know . . . it seems to me that Paul comes to end of Titus and asks the question, "Who cares?"

Who cares?

- Who's going to care for somebody else?
- Who's going to care for those serving Christ who come through town?
- Who's going to care for young men preparing for ministry like Artemas and Tychicus?
- Who's going to care for people inside the church and outside the church?
- Who's going to meet pressing needs of others.

Who cares?

Obviously the answer is – authentic believers will care; authentic churches will care.

Paul ends with *verse 15* where he commends the body with his customary greetings and grace. *All who are with me greet you. Greet those who love us in the faith . . . grace be with you.*

Let me summarize these four characteristics of authentic Christianity with four brief statements:

Here's what Paul is communicating to the church then and now:

Number 1: None of us should occupy a role with a sense of permanence.

None of us.

We're to live with a mental suitcase packed and ready, should God choose to change our world and require change.

Number 2: None of us are beyond needing helpful assistance.

None of us.

Even the Apostle Paul wanted help and company during the long winter at Nicopolis. If he wanted assistance, certainly every one of us can ask for it too!

Number 3: None of us should avoid being intentionally generous.

None of us.

Generosity should mark the life of the believer. Engaging in good deeds – and learning how to do more of them – is one of the commands of Christ through Paul to the believers in the 1st Century, and 21st Century.

Number 4: None of us can make it without the goodness of God's grace.

That's right – Paul says – none of us.

Which is why Paul ends with his typical blessing – ***Grace be with you.*** Did you notice that he added the word ***all.***

Paul began this letter by sending grace to Titus . . . he now ends this letter by a blessing of grace on the entire church.

The text reads, ***Grace be with you all.*** The word ***you*** is plural – if Paul was from North Carolina he would have said, “Grace be with ya’ll.”^x

That's the Revised Southern translation

And what a wonderful point to make – no one is left out – grace is extended to ***all.***

And why would grace be extended to everyone?

- Because none of us will ever pull off this letter without God's grace.
- We'll never serve each other without grace;
- We'll never submit to authority without grace;
- We'll never pursue godly maturity and humility without grace;
- We'll never establish homes that honor Christ without grace;
- We'll never take the heat and stand up to false teaching without grace;
- We'll never stay focused on the truth without grace;
- We'll never live with a longing anticipation of the coming of Christ . . . without grace.

Authentic Christianity is *impossible* without the work of God's grace in our lives. Without God's grace, this letter will be *impossible* to live!

No wonder Paul writes . . . ***Grace be with you all!***

And with that we say – thank you Paul – thank you Spirit of God through Paul – thank you for describing an impossible life of genuine authenticity *unless* we daily surrender to the grace of God.

And to the blessing of our study of this wonderful letter, we close by saying from the depths of our hearts . . . Amen.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 11/4/2012 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Sam Gordon, *The Genius of Grace: The Message of Ephesians* (Ambassador, 2003), p. 377

ⁱⁱ D. Edmond Hiebert, *Titus and Philemon* (Moody Bible Institute, 1957), p. 77

ⁱⁱⁱ Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus* (Zondervan, 2010), p. 317

^{iv} E. M. Bounds, *Power Through Prayer* (Moody Press, 1979), p. 9

^v John Phillips, *Exploring the Pastoral Epistles* (Kregel, 2004), p. 167

^{vi} John MacArthur, *Titus* (Moody Press, 1996), p. 167

vii Tony Snow, *"The Up Side" Guideposts* (January 2008), p. 20

viii William Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus and Philemon* (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 266

ix John A. Kitchen, *The Pastoral Epistles for Pastors* (Kress Christian Publications, 2009), p. 568

x Swindoll, p. 318