

# What a Godly Church Member Looks Like

## Titus 3:9-15

Characteristic: Biblical Community

Big Idea: A Focused Firefighter: Too busy rescuing to be arguing.

Introduction:

- A. I'd like to begin my message this morning by asking you to put yourself in a certain situation. The situation is portrayed by this photograph that's up on the screen.

The photograph shows four firefighters working together as a team to carefully and strategically enter a burning building. There are people inside the burning building—people that need to be rescued. All the firefighters know it.

Put yourself in the shoes of one of the four firefighters. What are you thinking? Where is your focus? What are you trying to accomplish? How do you feel?

Now, let's assume that another firefighter, a fifth one, approaches—one who is not shown in the photo. It's obvious that he isn't really into the rescue. But he starts asking you some questions, and he has a bit of an attitude.

1. He says, "Excuse me, but when was the last time you guys waxed the fire engine? You know that red paint is going to

fade in this Arizona sun if you don't keep a good coat of wax on it. And faded paint would sure be dishonoring to the Department. Do you realize that?"

2. Then he says, "You guys may have gone a little overboard with all the chrome on the fire engine. I mean, they don't give that stuff away. Those are hard-earned tax dollars shining on that truck. Don't you think we should be a little more responsible?"
3. Then he says, "I need to talk to whoever was driving the fire engine. Can you tell me who that was? He was weaving all over the place. It made me queasy. And do you know how much fuel is wasted with those jackrabbit starts?"

"And another thing. This is a just a crack house. Nobody but homeless druggies and prostitutes hang out in there. The fire is probably God's judgment. So maybe this isn't worth it. Ever think of that?"

As one of the four original firefighters working to enter the building, how would you respond to the fifth firefighter who's asking the questions? Wouldn't you be angry? Wouldn't you feel like torching the fifth firefighter? Not only has the guy lost sight of the rescue himself, but he is also inhibiting the rescue attempts of others, thus putting lives in jeopardy. It's a case of

four who are focused versus a fifth who is factious. To be factious means to be divisive or distracting.

- B. I have just presented a metaphor or picture of the church. The firefighters are the members of God's family, the church. The rescue is the primary job God has given us to do on earth. Therefore, the question every firefighter or believer must ask himself or herself is this: Am I focused or factious? Am I contributing to the rescue, or am I inhibiting it? And how can I tell?
  
- C. All this relates to what a godly church member looks like. That's what we're considering this morning. What does a godly church member look like? I'm using the term, "church member" in a universal sense to describe a person who has believed in Jesus Christ for eternal life. You may not be an official member of any local, "little-c" church. But if you believe in Jesus, you *are* a member of the universal, "big-C" church, and that's the sense in which I'm using the term, "church member" today.

Because believers are members of a spiritual family, this message is about biblical community. That's our key characteristic of completeness this morning. If we want to become complete in Christ we must learn to operate in community, as a team with other believers. Firefighters work best as a coordinated team with a common goal.

And while I'm laying the groundwork for the message, I might as well tell you what the big idea is right up front. I've framed it in the language of our metaphor. Here's the big idea: a godly church member is a focused firefighter—a focused firefighter who is too busy rescuing to be arguing. I'll spend the rest of our time unpacking what I mean by this.

- D. Our biblical text is Titus 3:9-15. It's the conclusion of Apostle Paul's letter to his ministry partner, Titus.
  
- I. In the firefighting metaphor, what is the rescuing all about? What is our goal as believing firefighters? What are we trying to accomplish as church members? Let's look for some clues in the first verse of our text. In Titus 3:9, Paul says godly church members ought to avoid unprofitable stuff. He says,

<sup>NAU</sup> **Titus 3:9** But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law, for they are unprofitable and worthless.

- A. This is Paul's way of saying, "Don't be distracted by factious firefighters. Don't be drawn into unproductive arguments that detract from your mission. You're too busy rescuing to be arguing." Now, Paul is specifically addressing Titus as a leader of the church, but this also applies to all of us.

This tells us not to be distracted from the rescue. But it doesn't tell us exactly what the rescue is.

- B. One little word provides us with a clue, however. It is the first word, “but.” “But” signals a contrast. This list of unprofitable stuff in Verse 9 is in contrast to something presented previously, which is the profitable stuff that’s at the heart of our rescue efforts. What is it? Let’s back up to Verse 8. There Paul says,

<sup>NAU</sup> **Titus 3:8** This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men.

This is tantalizing but not completely satisfying. Twice Paul refers to “these things.” He says “these things” are profitable, so “these things” are in contrast to the unprofitable things he mentions in Verse 9. We’re on the right track. And, he says we should speak confidently about “these things.” That’s good to know. To speak confidently is to firmly assert or to give special emphasis in communicating something. This tells us that our rescue mission involves speaking or communicating something. “These things” are to be our message. But we still don’t know what “these things” are.

- C. We have to back up some more to find out what “these things” are that define our rescue effort. We find “these things” in Verses 3-7. The message of Verses 3-7 lies at

the forefront of our rescue mission on earth. This is the “trustworthy statement” that we are to communicate. Paul says,

<sup>NAU</sup> **Titus 3:3** For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. <sup>4</sup> But when the kindness of God our Savior and *His* love for mankind appeared, <sup>5</sup> He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup> whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup> so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life.

1. There are a lot of big theological words in this statement. I’m sure Paul and Titus had talked at length about the ideas behind all these big words, so that Paul could now use the big words as a kind of shorthand in reminding his partner what our mission is as firefighters. Let me try to restate and amplify this, incorporating all the data from the passage.

We were trapped in our own sin—in a building burning with disobedience, deception, lust, and hatred.

But God our Savior, motivated by His kindness, love, mercy, and grace, appeared to us as a man in the person of Jesus Christ, and He saved us from a horrible death. He came to offer eternal life to all who will simply believe Him for it.

He backed up His offer by dying on a cross and rising again in payment for our sin—the sin that separates us from Him and got us into trouble in the first place. His rescue—His gift of eternal life is offered by grace alone. And it is to be received through faith alone in Christ alone, not on the basis of anything we do to earn it.

The moment we simply believe in Jesus for eternal life, the Holy Spirit is poured out within our hearts. Our hearts are renewed. We are regenerated or born again. We are saved from the penalty of our sins. We are justified or made right with God. We are adopted as God's children and become heirs to all his blessings. And we receive eternal life in exchange for a fiery death. And because our hearts are renewed, we have the God-given capacity to bear fruit by doing good deeds and loving others the way Christ loved us.

In a nutshell, Jesus cared so much about us that He pulled us from the burning building of our own sin. That's the good news of Jesus Christ. Jesus came to save us from the

fiery penalty of our own wrongdoing. And He uses firefighters to do it. If you are a believer today, God used somebody to crawl into your burning building and rescue you with the good news.

2. Our rescue mission, then, is to go and save unbelieving people just as we ourselves have been saved. They're trapped inside the burning building. They're disoriented. They can't see. They're about to be overcome by the weight of their own guilt. They need to hear the good news, and we need to do our level best to get it to them. That is to be our focus. That is our priority.

Our stated mission at Moon Valley is to love God in a way that reaches another generation. Another generation is trapped in that building. We need to *reach* them where they are, and help them to safety and security by showing them how they too can be saved.

- II. If our focus is to be on rescuing people, how do we know when we're beginning to lose our focus? How can we become distracted? When are we in danger of becoming factious and not focused? When are we in danger of becoming the factious firefighter who inhibits the rescue? Let's look again at Verse 9. Paul says,

<sup>NAU</sup> **Titus 3:9** But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law, for they are unprofitable and worthless.

Basically, what Paul is saying is that we ought not to be distracted by spending precious time arguing about stuff that is not really important or helpful to the rescue. Let me briefly explain the unprofitable items in Paul's list. Then I'll relate them to our current situation.

A. (Explanation of the list)

1. Paul says we are to avoid "foolish controversies." Controversies are not necessarily bad. Sometimes healthy debate and investigation are very needful. It's *foolish* controversies that are problematic.

What's the difference? We always need to ask the question: What does this have to do with the rescue? What does this have to do with loving God in a way that reaches another generation? If we're debating and strategizing about how to be better rescuers, that can be very good, as long as we don't stop rescuing. On the other hand, if we are constantly arguing about stuff that does not have anything to do with the rescue, we become useless.

2. Paul also says "genealogies" are to be avoided. This sounds weird. What is he talking about? We don't know for sure. Some have speculated that "genealogies" is a reference to the Gnostic idea that we are the product of a chain of spiritual emanations or genealogies from God that culminated in human beings, and that we must work our

way back up the spiritual chain. That's certainly not biblical, and it's not the good news of Jesus Christ.

Others have speculated that the genealogies refer to an ancient Jewish practice of making up imaginary and glorified stories associated with genealogies in the Old Testament. Speculation about such genealogies may have resembled the modern practice of Kabbalah. It's reading into the Old Testament your own hidden, mystical meanings. That's certainly not biblical, and it's not the good news of Jesus Christ.

Whatever the case, a focus on nonbiblical genealogies is not profitable; it doesn't contribute to the rescue.

3. Paul also says we are to avoid "strife." "Strife" refers to selfish rivalries and quarreling. He doesn't say exactly what we're not supposed to quarrel about. He doesn't need to. Sustained quarreling of any kind interferes with the rescue. Even if two people are quarreling about two different ways to rescue people, chances are either way would be better than never getting to the rescue because you're quarreling. It's not necessarily wrong to disagree or debate. It's needful at times. But for strife to prevail as an ongoing pattern is counterproductive. It interferes with the rescue.

4. Paul also says we are to avoid “disputes about the Law.” “The Law” refers to all the commands given to Moses and recorded in the first five books of the Old Testament. Jewish scribes would spend hours speculating about what could and could not be done on the Sabbath, and what foods were and were not clean (Barclay, *Titus*, p. 303). Paul characterizes such pursuits as worthless for the rescue.

B. What are our modern distractions that correspond to the “foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law?” The list is endless. Political views, parenting styles, worship styles, preaching styles, management styles, fund-raising, speaking in tongues, and church buildings can all become the center of controversy. And not one of them is important apart from the rescue.

It also occurs to me that many believing firefighters in America seem to be more interested in the comfort of the fire station and the appearance of the fire truck than in the rescue of people from burning buildings. Fire stations and fire trucks are only the means to an end. A godly church member is a focused firefighter—focused on the rescue.

C. How can you become more focused? Keep asking yourself the questions: What does this have to do with the rescue? What does this have to do with loving God in a way that reaches another

generation? Am I contributing to the rescue? Or am I just drawing off resources? Or worse, am I interfering?

- III. This raises another question: What if you're focused on the rescue, but another factious firefighter is trying to distract you? What are you supposed to do? Paul gives us an answer in Verse 10. He's pretty blunt. He says

<sup>NAU</sup> **Titus 3:10** Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, <sup>11</sup> knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.

I think Paul is talking about a professing believer who is factious. This is an important point. Paul is talking about a fellow firefighter, not a person in the building to be rescued. Problems in the fire department don't come from people we're trying to rescue. Problems come from factious firefighters.

If a factious believer attempts to draw us away from the rescue, we are to warn that person twice. And if he doesn't listen, we are to reject him. To reject basically means to "shun, avoid association with, [or] have nothing to do with someone" (Friberg). Isn't that what an effective and focused member of a firefighting team would do with a guy who's sabotaging the rescue?

Now, I don't want you to misunderstand what Paul is saying. Paul is not calling for *uniformity* in which everyone looks and thinks alike. Neither is Paul calling for *unanimity* in which everyone is in complete

agreement all the time. Paul is not saying we ought to avoid people who ask questions or disagree with us. Questions are good. Disagreement is inevitable. We are to learn from questions and disagreement. Good reforms can come from good debates. It may come as a surprise to you that the leaders of this church don't always agree on everything. We debate. On things that are nonessential, sometimes we agree to disagree agreeably. That's fine.

A line is crossed, however, when a person becomes factious and thus threatens the *unity* of the team. A factious person seeks to divide and distract and dilute the rescue team by promoting his own selfish agenda. The factious person loses sight of the rescue, and seeks to satisfy his or her own personal desires. Every manager and every coach knows what I'm talking about. The attitude of a factious person on a team is cancerous. Better lovingly confront the guy and let him know that he's hurting the team. And if he doesn't listen, ignore him. You've got better things to do. You're a focused firefighter. You're too busy rescuing to be arguing.

Dr. Paul Brand, physician, author, and believer says this:

*Using the analogy of the human body, there are some diseases that can spread infection throughout the body of Christ. The mind can become swollen with pride. The heart can grow cold and indifferent because of sin. The digestive system can get clogged by sterile theory and unapplied theology, so the body can't digest what needs to be turned into energy or eliminate what needs to be*

*released. When that occurs we start to fight among ourselves or we lose our equilibrium and find ourselves unable to stay balanced. . . .*

*Sometimes a dreaded thing occurs in the body—a mutiny—resulting in a tumor. . . .*

*A tumor is called benign if its effect is fairly localized and it stays within membrane boundaries. But the most traumatizing condition in the body occurs when disloyal cells defy inhibition. They multiply without any checks on growth, spreading rapidly throughout the body, choking out normal cells. White cells, armed against foreign invaders, will not attack the body's own mutinous cells. Physicians fear no other malfunction more deeply: it is called cancer. . . .*

*Because I am a surgeon and not a prophet, I tremble to make the analogy between cancer in the physical body and mutiny in the spiritual body of Christ. But I must. In His warnings to the church, Jesus Christ showed no concern about the shocks and bruises His Body would meet from external forces. . . . He moved easily, unthreatened, among sinners and criminals. But He cried out against the kind of disloyalty that comes from within” (Brand & Yancey, *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*, quoted by Swindoll in *The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart*, p. 597).*

We are to reject the cancer. After a first and second warning, have nothing to do with the factious firefighter.

IV. In contrast to the factious firefighter, focused firefighters work together as a team to rescue people. Paul gives us a glimpse of this in his closing remarks.

A. In Verse 12, Paul says,

<sup>NAU</sup> **Titus 3:12** 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.

Artemas and Tychicus were ministry partners with Paul. Paul says he's going to send one of them to Crete. When either Artemas or Tychicus arrives, Paul's request is for Titus to then leave Crete and join him at Nicopolis, which is on the western coast of Greece, some 400 miles away by sea. It may seem odd to us that Titus, perhaps a first-century version of a senior pastor, is to be replaced by Artemas or Tychicus so that he can join Paul at Nicopolis. It may seem that such a change would be unsettling, especially to a relatively new church. But Paul is not terribly interested in maintaining the status quo. The church is not something to be cast in concrete and institutionalized. It is to be fluid and adaptive to the mission. Paul is interested in the rescue of people from burning buildings. And you get the impression that he's willing to trade sacred cows for saved people any day.

Nicopolis was known for its harsh winters (Larson, *Titus, Holman New Testament Commentary*, p. 387). Why would Paul want to winter there and have Titus join him in miserable weather? We're not told. But I suspect it's all about the rescue. Maybe Nicopolis needed a spiritual fire department, and Paul set out to mobilize one. He's a focused firefighter.

B. In Verse 13, Paul says,

<sup>NAU</sup> **Titus 3:13** Diligently help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way so that nothing is lacking for them.

Zenas and Apollos were probably the ones to deliver Paul's letter to Titus. Zenas was probably a Jewish lawyer before his conversion to Christ (ISBE). As a Jewish lawyer, Zenas would have been an expert in the Mosaic Law. We know nothing else about him.

We know more about Apollos. According to Acts 18:24-25, Apollos was a Jewish Christian who was eloquent, biblically knowledgeable, fervent in his commitment to Christ, and accurate in teaching the Scriptures.

It is no coincidence that Paul sent two knowledgeable Jews, Zenas and Apollos. They would have been able to speak authoritatively

against the worthless “genealogies” and “disputes about the Law” that Paul mentioned in Verse 9.

Paul commands Titus and the church in Crete to diligently help these guys on their way. Give them all provisions they need for their journey. Spare nothing. Again we have a beautiful picture of the interdependency of a team of focused firefighters.

Firefighters are there for one another. Mutually supportive. Looking out for one another. Helping each other in the rescue.

C. In fact, Paul says in Verse 14,

<sup>NAU</sup> **Titus 3:14** Our people must also learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful.

Focused firefighters are sold out to the rescue, and they’re sold out to supporting one another, helping one another, loving one another as an integral part of the rescue.

The love and support of firefighters for one another earns the trust and openness of those who we’re trying to rescue. In our culture, when someone comes through your door and says, “I’m here to rescue you,” you likely to think, “Yeah, right. What do you really want from me? You want me to refinance my home? Is that how you’re going to rescue me? You want me to schedule an appointment for an air conditioning check-up because you

just happen to have a truck in my area? Is that it? You don't care about me. What do you really want?"

But when you see the would-be rescuers' great, unconditional love for one another, when you see an extraordinary unity and compassion they have for people, you get to thinking, "Maybe they do care. Maybe they love me like they love each other. Maybe they do have my best interest at heart. Maybe there's something to this Jesus. After all, this building is burning. Maybe I should trust Jesus to save me."

Engaging in good deeds that meet pressing needs builds the trust firefighters need to rescue people.

- D. Finally, Paul signs off with the warm greeting of one focused firefighter to another. In Verse 15, he says,

<sup>NAU</sup> **Titus 3:15** All who are with me greet you. Greet those who love us in *the* faith. Grace be with you all.

#### Conclusion:

A godly church member is a focused firefighter—focused on the rescue—focused on saving people from the burning building. Nothing is more important. Nothing is more fulfilling.

This month I got an email. It is the most encouraging email I have ever received. Focused firefighters live for news like this. It was from a

person I barely know—a person who recently came to Moon Valley and heard the good news of Jesus Christ. She writes,

“I am interested in becoming more sound in the faith. I have recently trusted Christ and I am ready for the next step. . . . Thank you for making the next step so accessible.”

That’s a focused firefighter’s dream: to save. And to have the one that is saved turn and gratefully say, “Now, I want to grow to be a focused firefighter.” That’s what it’s all about.