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Behave Your Beliefs

Titus Chapter 1
(Part 1)



“Behave Your Beliefs”

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What do we mean when we say, “*Behave* your beliefs”?

We are saying that the great truths of the Word of God that we cherish and believe must come alive in our everyday actions if we are to have any impact on the world around us.

Do you know people who live that way?

Maybe not many, but there are a few. They demonstrate in their uncomplicated lives the transformation of formal, objective truth into warm and outgoing personality - to the glory of God and the benefit of people. Thank God for Christians like that!

But there is also a negative side to this matter of behavior.

For illustration let me give you an example.

The chief character in this story passed away long ago, so no one will be hurt in the telling. Over fifty years ago a then young Christian whom I know well was traveling on a train from Chicago to Los Angeles. In the same Pullman car was another woman, a leader, with her husband, in a highly respected missionary organization, often cited for strong missionary zeal and loyalty to the Word of God.

On the train, this lady was very vocal about a number of things. She mentioned her leadership status and she voiced her dislikes in no uncertain terms, complaining about such things as the porter’s slowness in making up the berths, the distance to the dining car and the annoyance of heat and noise and cinders all before air conditioning, of course.

Near the end of the journey the conductor happened to be sitting in one of the unoccupied seats. My friend sat down beside him. Conversation opened up quickly and in a few moments mention was made of her Savior, Jesus Christ.

The trainman’s attitude changed instantly. “You talk about Jesus,” he said. “The woman in Stateroom 10 probably does, too. Well, if she’s an example of what believing in Him can get you-count me out!”

My friend was not able to go on from there.

Behavior had ruined any presentation of the truth.

Important to Paul and to Us

The Apostle Paul was deeply concerned about this matter of believers' living out their Christian beliefs in their everyday lives. This yearning of his shows up especially in the Epistle to Titus.

What do we know about this young man?

Titus was part Gentile (his father was a Greek). Thus in a personal way he knew the truth of the universality of the gospel.

He was precious to Paul who had led him to Christ. Together they enjoyed a choice relationship: *"Mine own son,"* Paul wrote, *"after the common faith"* (Titus 1:4).

On different occasions Titus was Paul's companion on missionary journeys, his helper and his messenger.

As an indication of his spiritual maturity, Titus was put in charge of the church on the island of Crete - a difficult assignment because of the political and religious bias of the people there. As a young pastor, Titus stood in need of both instruction and challenge. Paul's letter gave him both of these elements. But it does more. In a larger sense, the advice provided here relates not only to Christian leaders pastors, evangelists, Sunday-school teachers, missionaries, etc. - but also to everyone of us as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As we study these verses together we shall see particular application to Christian leaders. But we shall find also pertinent lessons for every Christian, all of them in Titus, chapter 1.

See how Paul begins.

Be Blameless in Reputation

Blameless (v. 6).

The word "blameless" applies to reputation; the way you are perceived by your peers. You have heard me say this often: Over an extended period of time - say twenty years - the appraisal that people make of your character will be precisely the truth. If you are to lead in any sense, people must believe in you, and with reason.

Where are you seen, and with whom? What is your practice with regard to telling the truth or trimming the facts under pressure?

Do you talk about praying, or do you actually pray?

Do you profess to trust in God, or do you worry about what might happen?

Blamelessness does not imply perfection; we all make mistakes. But we can be credible. And we must be if we are to influence others.

I need to ask myself often (and you do, too):

Can the onlookers in my life accuse me, with reason, of behavior that is unseemly, or dishonest, or unchristian or carnal?

What is the next advice that the Apostle Paul gives to young Titus and to us?

Be Consistent in Home Life The husband of one wife, having children not accused of riot or unruly (v.6).

As one reads this passage the first deduction is probably that a Christian leader - a pastor in particular - ought to be married. It is true that if this person is a family man he will, by the very fact that he has a wife and children, be spared certain prickly situations. But that is not to say that a single person cannot be used of God, and mightily, in a position of leadership.

Actually this letter was written at a time of terrible looseness in morals. The possession of multiple wives, or of mistresses or concubines, was uncensored practice. Does that sound familiar today? I think the word "only" could well be inserted here: The husband of only one wife." In other words, we Christian leaders especially should pay strict attention to those areas of life where affection should grow and where adherence to the Scriptural standards should be continually manifested.

Now Paul turns his attention to the young people in the home. *"They are to be faithful children, not accused of riot or unruly" (v. 6).* Another version speaks of *"children who believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient."*

The Parents Part

Is there a relation between your children's behavior and your own effectiveness as a Christian leader?

This is a touchy and often painful subject and I approach it with caution.

It seems all right for us to observe someone else's children (the pastor's) if they are misbehaving and to say, "Oh, isn't it terrible what So-and-so's kids are doing!" But when our children are involved, the case is different, isn't it?

If the pastor's children are "wild and disobedient," whose fault is it? There is of course no pat answer. You and I know that throughout this land of ours there are perhaps hundreds of ministers' households where the father is busy "in the ministry," with practically no time to listen to his children, or to understand and instruct and encourage them. We must not blame the child, therefore, for unacceptable conduct if he must grow up in an environment in which his individual needs are not met.

At the same time it must be remembered that in the plan of God, every individual is responsible for his own behavior from the age of accountability on. This solemn fact ought to be impressed on young people at a very early age in a manner they can grasp and respond to. And it needs to be repeated often. Some children -like older individuals - respond only with rebellion.

There are devout parents - pastors and others - who have done everything humanly possible to nourish their children in spiritual matters, but their offspring have responded only with disobedience. Those dear parents deserve our love and support, not any holier - than - thou censure.

The Children's Part

Let me say a word to the sons and daughters of Christian workers, pastors in particular. Yours is a very difficult situation. You are expected to be better than other kids, and yet you are quite human. That state of affairs must irk you. I know it was difficult for our own two older daughters when I was in the pastorate because they knew, young as they were, that they were in sort of a show case, on display. It was a hard assignment.

Please listen to me, young person, as your friend. I know in part at least the pain and frustration you are feeling. I think you will be helped a lot by remembering some things.

First, if your father is a pastor, you are the child of a special person. (You are saying, "But what about me?" I'm coming to that.) Your father holds one of the highest positions in all the world,

higher than any political figure, or community leader, or even ambassador to a foreign country.

You are the child of a parent who has been divinely called to represent Almighty God. You have the exalted position of having been born into a family where the father has been highly placed and you are a part of that ministry.

Instead of saying, "I have to be good because I'm a preacher's kid," you can begin to realize that you are a part of all that God is doing through your father.

I had a delightful time in the growing-up years of my children. They would pray in their childish way "that God would bless Papa..." help him to preach ... give him some souls" that's the way they would put it. When I would return from a meeting away from home they would meet me at the door and say, "Papa, did anybody get saved? We prayed for you."

I tried to impress upon them day by day that they were - and still are, bless their hearts - a part of everything that God may be doing through their father.

Oh, dear young person, instead of rebelling I urge you to begin appreciating the fact that God has made you a part of what He - God Himself - is doing through your father and mother. If you can get hold of this it will nullify, to a large extent, the criticism you may have to face.

What else did Paul advise young Titus?

"Be Trustworthy in Business Blameless, as the steward of God" (v. 7).

In olden times a steward was an executive who had charge of his master's estate. He was concerned with investments, maintenance, planting and harvesting, hiring and firing of servants and other similar tasks.

The chief requisite of a steward was faithfulness, greater even than skill or experience. Paul made this point in writing to the Corinthians:

"It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful" (1 Cor. 4:2).

When we speak of the pastorate, or of any other so-called "full-time Christian work," there is usually the accompanying desire for success in that field. Now it certainly is not wrong to plan for success in the accomplishment of whatever God has called us to do. In fact, He wants us to do a good job, and He provides enablement.

“In everything ye are enriched by him, in all utterance and in all knowledge” (1 Cor. 1:5).

But the real perspective for the work that you and I do as servants of our blessed Lord goes beyond human accomplishment. It involves the faithful handling of the “estate” with which God has entrusted us, whether or not success, as it is generally viewed, is ever achieved.

Not only does stewardship relate to the individual but also to the management of the local church. This calls for the very best business judgement, but, sadly, this is not always exercised.

I sometimes say that if the average board of deacons used the same approach to their business as they do to the affairs of the church, they would go bankrupt. This ought not to be the case.

Brother, sister, if you have formal training in business (perhaps you have a degree) or if you have come through the school of hard knocks so that you “know your way around” in the marketplace, I urge you to use your business sense to the full in the work of the Lord, combining it of course with the exercise of faith in the One who has thus gifted you.

Small thought here: If you have reached so-called retirement years and have been successful in business, have you thought about going to a mission field and donating your time and expertise there? You would not be going to tell those dear overworked missionaries how to improve their methods or criticize the ones they have; you would be going to lift a burden. In all probability you would become a “steward” greatly beloved.

Now the apostle lists negative qualifications for Christian leadership at the local church level and in Christian work generally.

“Be Cooperative in Attitude Not self-willed” (v. 7).

Self-will implies: My way is the best way; I’ll accept no other.

Let me ask you something. Can you stand to have someone disagree with you without retaliating or pouting? Do you feel rejected as a person if the idea you are advancing is turned down? That is almost never the case. It is the concept you are insisting on - not you yourself - that is being spurned. Remember that.

Now a word about concepts:

In this matter of effective leadership I have often said to students of The College,

“Make a list of those things for which you would be willing to be shot dead at five o’clock tomorrow morning. It will be a very short list, I assure you! And it will grow even shorter as you think about it.

How many objects are there, really, that are of eternal significance, important enough for you to die for them?

There are, of course, certain verities that must never be sacrificed. They include the divine nature of God, the means of salvation only through the Lord Jesus Christ, the absolute trustworthiness of the Scriptures and similar cardinal truths. They are to be held and upheld at all costs.

But in the church, in the home, and wherever people live and work together there are areas in which a measure of yielding is highly desirable if we are to “adorn the gospel in all things.

We are talking about leadership, remember? Years ago I came across a book entitled “The Successful Executive”. It treated the subject we are discussing. One chapter in particular fascinated me. It was called “The Law of Errors.”

The gist of that chapter was this: As an executive, you instruct your worker carefully. You make sure he understands what is wanted, in his frame of reference. Then you leave him to do the task in his own way . You allow him the glow of achievement or, conversely, you give him the luxury of making his own mistakes. Only if his action threatens to sink the ship or bankrupt the company do you step in. You don’t ever say, “Now what did you do that for?

You say, “Next time, why don’t we do it this way?” and you show him how, again. You have made constructive moves without fixing blame.

You have taught, but you have also done some-learning yourself: “Not self-willed. Mr. Know-It-All is often also Mr. Angry Man. The apostle speaks of the necessity of self-control.

Be Controlled in Emotions

“Not soon angry” (v. 7).

Do you have a short fuse? Do you blow up easily? Most of us rationalize about our faults. We say, “That’s just the way I am,” and of course that may very well be true. But that is no excuse. If you grant that people are different by nature, and most certainly they are, then you must see the need of all of us is the control of emotions that only God can supply.

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance” (Gal. 5:22).

“Temperance,” in your Greek New Testament is translated “inner strength.” It is strength to be quiet when otherwise you would be yelling, strength to resist when otherwise you would demand revenge.

How about your reaction to everyday frustration? Let us say you have to deal with people who seem actually to put thought into being impossible. What is your response to that sort of thing? Are you, under those circumstances and all others, allowing the precious Spirit of God who indwells every believer to do His work in bearing the fruit of “gentleness, meekness, and inner strength” in you?

By the way, it is possible to be angry and at the same time maintain an icy outward calm. I recall having a lengthy conversation with an individual. Many different subjects came up, and everyone of them was greeted by this person with a sharp response. Yet she seemed perfectly calm.

Drawing, as we say, a bow at a venture, I said quietly, “You’re very angry, aren’t you?” She sat upright and flashed a condemning look at me. Her eyes snapped and she replied. “You’re absolutely right ... I’m good and mad!”

I never found out what brought that on, but there it was! No wonder Paul says, “Let not the sun go down on your wrath.” I urge you: Don’t incubate your anger. Husbands and wives, mothers and dads, children, fellow workers: if you disagree, let the Spirit of God heal those wounds - always before the next morning.

Be Watchful in All Things

Now the apostle lists three subjects of practical interest in that day and in ours.

ADDICTION. Not given to wine (v. 7). “Given” has the force of “enslaved by.” Here again we have a touchy subject and there is not space for lengthy discussion. It is not God’s plan that His children should be enslaved by anything. We are clearly told to:

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free ... Ye have been called into liberty, only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh” (Gal. 5:1, 13).

At the same time we are enjoined to:

"Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service ... Your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you, which ye have of God" (Rom. 12: 1; 1 Cor. 6:19).

DEMONSTRATION. No striker (v. 7).

There are, as we have said earlier, certain issues that we as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ should defend at all costs. But violence is not the means to accomplish that end. Every time you get violently opposed to something, even a good cause, you lose something in the credibility of your testimony. An arm-swinging demonstrator is a poor advertisement for the grace of God.

AVARICE. *"Not given to filthy lucre"* (v. 7). That is, "not greedy for money" (LB).

What is in view here is that quality, as we might say, of being "hooked on money." It is one thing to want to pay your bills, to provide for your family and yourself with realistic attention to the future. I think that as Christians we should do that. It is quite another thing to live with the obsession of making money - more and more of it - just for the sake of having it.

The book of Titus was written to a young minister, so it is not out of order for us to observe that when a pastor gets into some sort of business venture, very frequently people cease to listen to his preaching with any degree of enthusiasm.

The point I am making is this: If people know that your first concern is serving God, not making money, they will trust you with their attention. I'm not advocating any mendicant style where you go around begging and looking shabby and expecting people to feel sorry for you. I think God wants us, as ministers and as individuals, to do a good job business wise, but He wants us to be so given to Jesus Christ that HE is our first object of interest.

The advice to Titus takes us now to emphasize some positive aspects of Christian living and leadership.

"Be Gracious in Hospitality Given to hospitality" (v. 7). "USE hospitality one to another, without grudging" (1 Pet. 4:9).

Hospitality is that quality in you that enables someone else to feel at ease in your presence, in your home. It is much more than a duty to be discharged thus: "We owe the Browns a dinner."

A friend of mine lives in a cooperative apartment in Philadelphia. He told me the manager was a woman with a violently anti-church attitude. My friend lit upon the idea of using hospitality as a tool for evangelism.

He called a lady whom he knew to be an outgoing Christian. "I'm inviting Mrs. So-and-so for dinner," he said, "and I'd like you and your husband to come too. If you can come, please remember this: Not one word about religion while you are here."

"But that's the very reason you're inviting her," the neighbor said in utter surprise.

"Never mind-just stick to the rule," she was told.

The apartment manager, when she came, was very wary at first. But the conversation proceeded on a friendly level, with no hint of religion. Toward the end of the evening this guest admitted, "You know, I expected you to attempt to convert me, but you didn't, and I appreciated that. I'd really like to know more of what you believe. Do you think we could get together again?" I don't know whether my friend ever was able to lead this woman to Christ. But I do know that his use of hospitality opened a door to an otherwise fast-barred personality.

There are other instructions that the Apostle Paul gave to Titus. But we come now to a rule that, in a sense, embraces them all.

Be Adamant in Loyalty to the Scriptures

"Holding fast the faithful word" (v. 9).

What does it mean to "hold fast" the Word of God? On the negative side, it does not call for a slavish adherence to the text as a matter of routine. While it is extremely important that we memorize and use the Scriptures in daily life, it is boring and nonproductive to listen to someone who quotes the Bible - sometimes in large segments - as a means of proving whatever point he is making.

The following positive attitudes are important for us to consider.

Value The Word Of God.

It is the ultimate source of knowledge and wisdom. In it God reveals Himself to each of us, and reveals us to ourselves and other people. There is no other book like it.

Don't Tinker With The Word Of God. There are some things that must not change, ever. We do not tinker with the laws of mathematics, or science, or navigation, or sterile procedure in surgery. Likewise, the Word of God is "forever settled in heaven," and must not be altered. It is completely and always authoritative. It is the last court of appeals for any question.

Obey The Word Of God. In these days people have the habit of saying, "Yes, I know that is what the Bible says [about some question under discussion], but we live in a different day now, so of course there must be a different application."

This intellectually dishonest idea came along a good many years ago. It was called Higher Criticism then; it is Humanism today. Actually this is the most ancient fallacy in human history. It was proposed in the Garden of Eden by Satan who insinuated to our first parents, "You can do lots better for yourselves by being 'on your own,' ignoring God's commands." Let us consciously reject Satan's argument that we live in a different age and under different circumstances than obtained at the time the Word was given. Let us "hold fast" that blessed Word. Then,

Use The Word Of God.

How is this to be done? Two words in verse 9 indicate the course we are to follow, especially in dealing with opposition. They are "exhort" and "convince."

The word "exhort" has in it the element of pleading, of compassion, of comfort. It speaks to the heart. The thought is that we are to present God's truth so lovingly and with such concern that the objects of our attention will be melted by its power.

The word "convince" carries not only the thought of acceptance but also subsequent action. We are to apply God's Word with such assurance that people will accept it and move ahead in a different course of action as a result.

Here is a tremendous thought: If you love the Lord Jesus Christ, if you are mastering the truths of the Word of God and sharing them with others lovingly, that action on your part actually will make a difference in the way other people think, speak and act.

What a tremendous concept that is!

If we are to "hold fast the faithful word," LOVE must be the motivating force: love for the Lord Jesus Christ and love for the blessed Word of God.

Let me give you an illustration from my own life, one that you may have heard me speak of

or write about before.

My father was blind the last several years of his life. He lived in our home. He was approaching his eightieth birthday when, one day, I went quietly to his room upstairs and found him sitting in his favorite chair, holding his big Thompson Chain Reference Bible to his heart and rocking back and forth saying softly, "Old Book, how I love you! I can't see to read you any more, but I love you."

I shifted my weight momentarily and he became aware of my presence. "Is that you, Boy?" he asked.

"Yes, Pop," I told him, "I'm here."

"Well," he continued, "I've just been sitting here rocking ... and thinking ... and loving this Book. It tells me that some day I'm going to have a new pair of eyes. And when I do, I'm going to look up your Mom in Heaven, and we'll walk down the streets of Glory together." His beloved Daisy had died a few months after I was born.

My father lived in anticipation of being "forever with the Lord." In the meantime he loved the Word that revealed that Blessed One to him. He set for me an example of how to "hold fast the faithful word."

We do it by LOVE - love for the Author ... love for His perfect plan ... love that is translated into our everyday lives so that everyone we meet may be aware that we do indeed BEHAVE OUR BELIEFS.

