

## I. Introduction

A. Around 66 AD the Apostle Paul sent a note to Titus, one of his understudies. He wrote to encourage him in the work Titus was doing at a newly formed church in Crete.

B. As you may know, Paul was the first one to take the assignment seriously. The last thing Christ said was, “go tell everyone about me – who I am and what I’ve said and done. Go and make disciples of all nations.” But that’s difficult. Few people do it. Paul did. He lived on the road, traveling from city to city establishing churches. He’d come into town, preach in the local synagogue as long as they’d let him, and then go to the center of town and preach some more. As people came to faith he’d start a church. After a while he’d turn it over to someone to run while he went to the next town. In this case of Crete, the someone he left behind was Titus. The letter we have called Titus is the letter he wrote to encourage his young understudy and offer advice about leading a church and helping others grow in faith.

C. In that letter he says something quite important that I want to focus on right now. It’s found in chapter two. Paul explains:

1. For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope – the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

D. Theologians recognize two types of grace in the Bible: common grace and saving grace. Common grace is the favor that God gives to all people, it is displayed in the way God provides sunshine, rain, shelter, food, government, laws, general health and the like. Common grace is extended to everyone. Saving grace is offered to everyone. It is the opportunity to be forgiven and reconciled to God based on the work of Christ. This is the grace that leads to salvation, AND, this is the grace that helps us move forward. Not just to step over the line, not just to be adopted into the family, but to be transformed. It teaches us to say no to “ungodliness and worldly passions” – i.e., bad habits, vices. And it teaches us to live “self-controlled, upright and godly lives.” To develop good habits – virtues – while we wait for the return of Christ when all things are made new.

## II. Last week I addressed the last of the Seven Deadly Sins: lust.

A. The series started late this summer with a four week introduction entitled “Change,” which was on spiritual transformation – on the things that we can do to position ourselves to grow. We can’t change our heart – not at the level that is needed. But we can do the things we are called to do with the promise that as we do them – as we seek God, as we seek to follow Christ’s example, as we pray and share our lives, as we yield more and more to the Holy Spirit – He will change us. “He who began a good work in us will continue to transform us into the likeness of His Son.”

B. Well, the four week Change series was followed by an introduction to *Seven*, which was followed by seven sermons, one on each of the Seven Deadly Sins. Today I want to wrap this whole thing up. I want to be sure you understand what happened – or at least what was supposed to happen. We don’t just meet to meet. The church doesn’t meet in order to raise money in order to have a place to meet. There are things that are supposed to happen. And I want to make sure that a few of those things that are supposed to happen – that lie behind our fall series – are clear as we move on.

C. I’m occasionally accused of having an agenda, of being manipulative – of having a secret plan for the church (i.e., for you). When I hear that I say, “Oh, I absolutely have an agenda. But it kills me that you think I’m trying to hide it from you, because I’m doing my best to get you to sign up for it. It’s not a secret. I’m working hard to sell it. But if you don’t get it then I’m doing a bad job.” So, I want to be sure you understand the “agenda” for the church generally, and behind *Seven* in particular. And to do that I’m going to answer five of the questions that I’ve been asked.

III. **Question One: Why did you preach on the Seven Deadly Sins?** How did you decide that this is what we were going to do?

A. Seven emerged out of the intersection of two things: first, our study of Luke, and second, our practice of holding a big fall “campaign.” After I laid out the 2013 preaching calendar (back in August of 2012), I realized that we’d be coming into the fall just after looking at Christ’s temptation in the wilderness.

1. Remember, Jesus was baptized and after that he went out into the desert for 40 days of fasting and prayer to prepare for his life’s work. And while he was out there he was tempted.

B. We do a big fall series. It started with Forty Days of Purpose. Since then we've done a handful of FencePosts. Last year we did *The Life of Jesus Christ*. I was looking for a topic for the fall and I thought, "temptation" would work. As I started preparing it morphed into a study of the Seven Deadly Sins, which is one of the ways the church has understood and organized the temptations we face. (Remember, the Seven Deadly Sins are not the seven worst sins, but they are the seven "first" sins. They are the categories of sins, or the root causes of all the other sins.

C. So, I was looking for a big fall series and Seven is the one that emerged. Of course that begs the next question:

#### IV. Question Two: Why do we do fall campaigns?

A. Why all the hype? Why the book and daily devotions and videos? There are three reasons.

B. First, to get people connected in small groups. We were made for community. The Christian life requires it. Life happens best when we walk through life with others. But we have to be intentional about it. Let me show you a brief video about one of the Seven Small Groups. (RUN VIDEO)

C. Two, a second major reason we have a fall campaign is to provide you with an opportunity to invite others to take a next step, because when that happens both of you win.

1. Times have changed. Increasingly the mission field is our own back yard. On any given Sunday there are about 500,000 people in church in the greater Chicago Metro area. Given that most people attend church every other week, that means there are a million people – out of 8.5M – who are connected to a church. That means that there are 7.5 million people who are not. That's a big number. We want to see those people place their faith in Christ. We want to do all we can to bring it down.

2. The fall campaign is one of those ways. We know that: 1) Most of the 7.5M are interested in spiritual things; 2) Most of them believe in God; and 3) 85 percent of them would attend church if they got a personal invitation.

3. There are all kinds of reasons they are not in a church right now – good and bad. But, let's set that aside for now. The point is, we design a fall series that has a slightly lower barrier of entry and say to you, "go invite others."

4. Some churches design their weekend services for seekers every week. We don't do that. I'm not against that. I want to applaud those who are trying to take the message to others. But we are not a seeker driven church. That is not our style. But we try to leverage the fall and the natural opportunities it brings – when lots of people think, “It's time to get back on track. We need to get on the right path,” – we try to take advantage of that to have a series where it's easy to show up and get plugged in.

D. The third reason we do a fall campaign is to push you to take a next step.

1. I know that you will only go so far in your own relationship with God until you help someone else grow in theirs. And I know that most of you will not take that step unless you are pushed. So we do what we can to make it easy. We try to do all of the work so you can HOST a group.

2. Let me stress here: this is the plan. Not just our plan, it is THE Plan. Christ had a small group with 12 disciples. And he trained them to each go lead their own group. Paul did the same thing. It was a very intentional strategy. Titus was one of those whose faith Paul had been nurturing. So was Timothy. And in his last letter to Timothy – a letter very similar to his letter to Titus – he made sure Timothy got the plan. Paul wrote:

a) **The things that you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others. (MULTIPLICATION IMAGE HERE)**

3. The radical growth of the early church was not fueled by people sitting in rows as much as it was fueled by people sitting in circles. It was one on one and one on four or five and small groups where the messages were passed on, discussed and modeled. And everyone around the table grew – especially the one leading it.

4. By the way, don't miss that Paul was writing to encourage Titus because Titus was struggling in his leadership. And his letter to Timothy is full of even more encouragement to hang in there because Timothy was really feeling unready.

E. So, anyway, that is part of the thinking behind the idea of a fall campaign.

V. **Question Three: Are you happy with the way it went?**

A. I've been asked this quite a bit. And I realized that I am happy that it's over because I was a bit worried that it was getting too harsh. The goal is not to make you happy, but a steady diet of gluttony, sloth, anger, lust, pride and envy can get a bit heavy. So, I'm glad it's over.

B. Am I happy with the way it went? Yeah. One of the joys of this job is hearing from people who are taking steps forward. Who are stepping over the line. Who are falling in love with Christ. Who are being convicted of sin, learning important things about themselves, leaning into God's grace. All of that is fun and that has been happening. So, I'm glad for that.

C. And, this year more than in previous years, more of you stepped up to lead small groups – I believe we added about fifty and had somewhere between 1,300 and 1,400 in small groups for the series. That's up a few hundred from last year.

D. And attendance spiked by a couple hundred, leading me to believe that more of you invited friends. Between the seven services we've been running over 1,800 this fall. We will not hold on to everyone. We'd love to but don't expect to. But it's our hope that many are going to not look back.

E. If you are new to Christ Church – aren't exactly sure how you got here, or how you got into a small group, we're glad you're here! Don't stop now. We are about to move into the Advent Conspiracy and think about ways to have a more meaningful and sane Christmas. And after that, in January, we'll be back in Luke looking at Jesus, who was – and is – the most important person to ever live. There are two series that will grow out of Luke this Winter. In the first we will be looking at the ways Jesus amazed everyone. And then we're going to look at the first six things he taught his followers. We are going to look at what amounted to the first day of class for the disciples. Their orientation. If you are new sit down and strap in. There is some really important material coming your way.

F. If you've been here for a while and are just now understanding the back story to what we've been doing, I'm sorry I didn't make it all clearer before. Don't fret lost opportunities. More are headed your way. In January we'll be offering three different Alpha classes on Tuesday night. Those are designed for you to invite friends. And I'm starting to settle on a topic for next fall, when we do this all again. I am leaning towards something around understanding and preparing for the worst day of your life. We all have one. Are you ready? Is your faith ready? Where is God when bad things are happening? Are you being punished? How should we grieve?

**VI. Question Four: If the Seven Deadly Sins are so important, why hadn't I heard about them before, or never heard anyone teach on them before?**

A. On the one hand, it's a bit odd that so many people who are in the church are not familiar with the Seven Deadly Sins. In my research I found a 13<sup>th</sup> century letter instructing pastors to preach on them four times a year. And they have been a big discipleship tool for 1,500 years.

B. On the other hand, there are at least three reasons why it's not surprising that you'd not heard much about them before. The first reason is because the list is not found in the Bible. All of the sins are identified as sins in the Bible, but the list of seven is not found in one spot. The second reason is because some churches are very quiet about sin. Telling someone they are a sinner is considered a mean, small-minded and intolerant thing to do. Many believe that it's not the kind of thing you talk about if you want to invite people into your church.

1. I disagree. I think many people are growing tired of being told they are good when they know some things wrong. It's actually comforting to have someone say – we've all got some serious issues, we are all broken and you can trace your problems to one of these seven root causes.

C. Perhaps the biggest reason you haven't heard about them is because there is a concern that if we focus on sin – talk about how to avoid it, call people to pursue godliness – we confuse the main message, the Gospel itself. And that is a real concern.

D. When I decided to do this series I talked with a friend who had preached through the Seven Deadly Sins years earlier and I asked for counsel. He said three things:

1. Clap on the off-beat. Work hardest on the sins people are not as dialed in on: namely sloth and gluttony. And that seems to have worked. In the survey you filled out, pride is the sin you think you struggle with most, but sloth is the sin that climbed the most during the series. We had the “pre-series ranking of sins” and the post-series ranking of sins, and sloth jumped the most. Remember, sloth is falling to attend to the things that the love of God requires. And you can be a very busy sloth. Anyway, he said, “clap on the off-beat”

2. Two: Help people see that sin makes them small. God's Laws are not there to protect God. They are not there because he wants to keep us from having fun. They are instructions, directions helping us understand how life works best. The Law also helps us understand that we are sinners and need a Savior. The Law gives us an objective standard to measure our life against. In this as well they are a blessing. But, the Law lights the way. It is a lamp unto our feet, a light unto our path. Sin is bad for us. It diminishes us. It ruins us. It's not the first thing that happens. With the exception of envy, sin feels good for a while. There is bait before the switch. But in the end sin destroys us. My friend said, help people see that God is for them.

3. The third thing was – of course, don't fall into moralism. You have to fight that.

E. Moralism is the idea that the way forward – the way to earn God's favor, deserve his love, secure heaven – is by being good. This is the default assumption most of us operate under. This is the idea found in religion. But, it is not the Good News. It's not the Gospel we are to proclaim. It's not the way things work. We are saved by grace through faith. Salvation is a free gift. We are reconciled to God by confessing our sins and turning to Christ – accepting Him as Savior and Lord. Most people do not get this.

F. A few years ago Christian Smith and Melinda Denton published a book entitled *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. It was based on in-depth interviews with 267 American teens and it sounded a big alarm because it said the de facto creed, especially among mainline Protestant and Catholic teenagers, but also among African American and conservative Protestants is: (Title: *The De Facto Creed of Many*)

1. A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions. (I can live with that.)
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself. (The alarms are now going off. God does want us to flourish. He is for us. He is a loving Father. He wants us to enjoy His Shalom. But, the central goal of life is not to be happy. And seeking happiness first guarantees failure. We are to seek God first.<sup>1</sup>)
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem. (That is the way a lot of people live – including a lot of Christians. There is a lot of practical atheism out there.)
5. Good people go to heaven when they die. (Right, except there was only one person who was ever good. The idea that we can be good enough is not Christianity.)

---

<sup>1</sup> In terms of feeling good about oneself – well, to the extent that we are moving in the right direction we should be encouraged, but what we are really after is an accurate perception of ourselves. And that includes an awareness of our sin and a deep appreciation for the grace of God. A right understanding of ourselves should lead us to humility and a growing love and thankfulness for God.

G. Smith and Denton labeled this set of beliefs Moral Therapeutic Deism. It is not the Christian faith. One of the reasons many steer away from a series like this is because it can reinforce the wrong understanding of the Gospel.

VII. Question Five: If focusing on the Seven Deadly Sins is risky – if it likely reinforces moralism – then why did you do this series?

A. Because we are not simply called to come to faith. We are called to grow in Christ-likeness. Back to Titus 2:

1. For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

B. Men and Women – we are expected to grow! It is commanded. Not so God will love us, but because He already does. When who He is and what He has done for us and what awaits us in heaven becomes clear we are expected to realign our lives to please him. That means saying no to things that lead us away from him and to say yes to the things – the habits, the virtues – that position us to become more like Christ.

C. We cannot change our heart in the ways our heart need to be changed, but there are things we can do and are expected to do, and when we do these things the Holy Spirit works to make us more like Christ.

D. Why risk confusing you with a message that says, “We are saved by grace and our works do not contribute to our salvation, but we are expected to work hard to get better?” Because that is the message.

VIII. Well, I am thankful for a good series. Thanks to those of you who helped make it work. In two weeks we begin a five week series called the Advent Conspiracy, which will run through Christmas Eve.

A. We are joining with thousands of other churches to challenge people to: Worship Fully; Spend less; Give More; and Love All

B. We are going to invite you to join with others in being a bit more intentional about your celebration of the birth of the Savior. Those who want to are encouraged to be a bit more creative in the gifts you give – to not be so focused on buying things and to be more focused on meaningful gifts and handmade gifts. And to take the money that you save and give it to those in desperate need.



C. Next week – before the Advent series starts – we are going to look at the spiritual discipline of gratitude, paying particular attention to what we can learn from the Puritans and the first Thanksgiving.