

## Daily Devotions with the Dean

### Our Affections Change

By [The Very Rev. Dr. Reggie Kidd](#)

*Wednesday – 9/18/2024*

For these two weeks, we are taking a thematic approach to Paul's Pastoral Epistles, his letters to Timothy and Titus. First, we are looking at the way the apostle addresses our deficits in faith, hope, and love. Second, we will take up the way Christ teaches us godliness, temperance, justice, and courage. Finally, we will think about what Paul describes as the positive aspects of faith, hope, and love in these letters.

### Flawed Love in the Pastorals

One of the reasons Paul thinks it is important that we maintain a posture of "hope," refusing to delude ourselves into thinking that we have arrived in the final state of blessedness, is that in this "not yet" period our "loves" can become confused. In the paragraph that begins at 2 Timothy 3:1, Paul characterizes his (and by extension our) times as "the last days." In these "last days"—the final period of apocalyptic struggle (see, for example, Ephesians 6:12's "we battle against principalities and powers")—, Paul sees people losing sight of what it is that they should love: "For people will become lovers of self, lovers of money ... not-lovers-of-good ... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (2 Timothy 3:2–4, my translation).

Our loves—our affections, our appetites, our inclinations—make us what we are. "What the heart loves, the mind justifies, and the will chooses," offers contemporary theologian Ashley Null, summarizing the theological heart of the architect of the English Reformation, Thomas Cranmer. Read that again: "What the heart loves, the mind justifies, and the will chooses." Or as philosopher J. K. A. Smith puts it, himself crystallizing a basic insight of Augustine of Hippo, "You are what you love."

When we have settled in and made this world our home, our affections will be set here as well. But those loves—self, money, pleasure—they are too small.

### Repaired Love in the Pastorals

God counters with big love. Paul says that he found love “in Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 1:14; 2 Timothy 1:13). He explains what he means by that in Titus 3:4, a passage rightly read on Christmas Day in lectionary-churches: “But when the kindness (hē chrēstotēs) and lovingkindness (hē philanthrōpia, lit., “man-lovingness”) of God appeared, he saved us....” The lectionary’s instinct to make this a Christmas Day reading is sound. Paul’s term for “kindness” (chrēstotēs) would have sounded something like “Christ-ness.”<sup>1</sup> And his term for “lovingkindness,” is the Greek word from which we get the English “philanthropy.” Jesus Christ is the embodiment of God’s love for and his beneficent bearing toward humans.

Paul’s language here is unique and extraordinary. This is the only time Paul calls Jesus God’s philanthrōpia, literally “love for humanity,” “love for mankind.” What is worth noting, I think, is that the normal word for “love” in the New Testament is not this one. What Paul says he finds in Christ Jesus in 1 and 2 Timothy is agapē. In John’s gospel and in his letters, what moves God so much that he sends his son is agapē (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9–10). The lexicons depict agape as a deep, considered, volitional kind of love. But the stem that communicates the “love” part of philanthrōpia is the simpler phil-. This term the lexicons describe as a lesser kind of love, more like “friendship-love,” more like “fondness” and “affection.” It’s more tender, less volitional, closer to natural affection. And sometimes, less is more. As my friend Steve Brown of Key Life Network (<https://www.keylife.org/>) likes to say: “God doesn’t just love you. He is rather fond of you, and likes having you around.” Perhaps that’s why this stem underlies Paul’s critique of wayward loves in 2 Timothy 3—the terms there connote something more like “fondness of self,” “an appetite for money,” “lack of caring about the good,” “a taste more for pleasure than for God.”

Remarkably, to my mind, God’s counter to the waywardness of our affections and appetites is his own fondness of the human race, his philanthrōpia. So he sent his Son to save us. The hero of Aeschylus’ Prometheus Bound is tied to a rock on the side of a mountain, with a bird eating at his guts. Why? Zeus is mad at him because Prometheus brought fire to humans, showing too much philanthrōpia—too much affection for the likes of you and me.

The Christian story is different: God’s amazing grace shows up in a stable in Palestine. And rather than a narcissistic deity sending a bird of prey after our Friend from heaven, the God of grace sends the dove of the Holy Spirit to wash, to regenerate, and to renew us (Titus 3:5). As a result, our affections change, our loves become obedient rather than transgressive—we become lovers of God (2

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<sup>1</sup> A word play that Paul exploits in his letter to Philemon, where he refers to Onesimus (whose name comes from a Greek word that means “useful”) as achrēstos (a word meaning “useless” that would have sounded like “Christ-less”) prior to coming to know Christ, but as euchrēstos (a word meaning “useful” that would have sounded like “well-Christ-ed”) after coming to know Christ.

Timothy 3:4), lovers of strangers (Titus 1:8; 1 Timothy 3:2), lovers of goodness (Titus 1:8), lovers of family members (Titus 2:4).

In these first three devotionals on the Pastoral Epistles, we have seen how our lack of faith gets overridden; how our misplaced hopes get redirected; and how our love for wrong things is compensated for by God's love for us.

In the next four devotionals, we will see how Paul understands God's grace imparting a new life of godliness, justice, self-control, and courage. First, in tomorrow's devotional, we will look at godliness, the relationship between faith and truth.

Be blessed this day,  
Reggie Kidd

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