

Ungodliness - Actions
Desires - Attitudes
Sensibly
Righteously
Godly

TITUS

STUDY NUMBER SEVEN

THE PROOF OF GODLINESS - Titus 3:8-11

TEXT:

INTRODUCTION:

Confrontation Conflict provide opportunities to deepen a relationship.

In this series of studies in the book of Titus, we have noted together Growth Toward Godliness. In our first study, we saw the Process of Godliness, which is from Faith to Food to Fruit. In the second, we saw 15 characteristics of the godly person, in the Picture of Godliness. In our third study, we noted together the Perversion of Godliness and what happens when a person turns away their ears from the truth. We saw those who were dishonest, selfish, and unmotivated. Those who were detestable, disobedient, and denying the Lord by their deeds, and as far as every good work is concerned, dissatisfied. In the fourth study, we noted together Godliness in Relationship, as we saw the parish and godliness, what godliness looks like in the pew.

In our fifth study, we saw the Platform of Godliness. It is as a result of God's grace that we are born again by the Spirit of God and into the family. And then we noted together, that it is that same grace that disciplines us in the godly lifestyle. In our sixth study, we discerned together the Path of Godliness, as we noted the fact that it is seen by submission to authority and it is a result of God's work in our lives.

We now come to these four verses in the heart of the third chapter and we'll be seeing the Proof of Godliness. How the godly life manifests itself.

Here we are considering the question, How does it act? What is the Game Plan for the Island of Crete? How are we going to get results that are real?

Waite points out by way of summary, "Paul lays down certain definite commands as the basis for Christian conduct for the Cretians in view of error."

1. They are to keep aloof from or to shun stupid inquiries, fictitious Old Testament genealogies, wordy wrangling, and contentions about the law of Moses.
2. The preceding things were both profitless and void of any worthwhile goal or purpose.
3. One who holds views contrary to the Scripture after the first or second thorough talking to was to be avoided.
4. The heretic holding as does views contrary to the written Scriptures is turned aside from the truth constantly sins therefore and is condemned by his own conscience."

In paraphrasing the section, Lock points out, "this saying is worthy of entire faith and on all these points I wish you to insist, in the hopes that those who have put faith in the message of God may set themselves to make honorable deeds the very business of their life. These truths

Miracle of Salvation is All God's doing
what we were - Rebels
He did - Salvation
we are - Holy

Too often
Totally Unprepared
in the real
stuff like
throws at us

Isolation
Relationship

Submission
to
His will

Obedient
To
His word

Available
For
His work
In & Through

His Kindness
Love & Mercy
Are uncond.
& unchanging

Honey, I think I'll keep you. it would take too long to train somebody else...

Behind A deepening relationship is A Training Process... "By Grace"

Process
Picture
Perversion
Parish
Platform
Path
Proof

Can't's -> Won't's

Read: Psalm 119:129-136 November 12 — Wednesday

A CONSTANT COMPANION

Direct my steps by Your word.

Psalm 119:133

WHEN my wife and I are preparing for a trip, one of the first things we do is get out the road atlas. We study it intensely to learn the best routes, determine the number of miles we'll have to travel, pick out interesting places to visit, decide how far we can get in a day, and estimate expenses. On the journey, the atlas is our constant companion, and we consult it many times a day. We couldn't get along without it.

For Christians, the Bible is an atlas for their spiritual journey, but it is much more. It is described as:

- sweeter than honey (Psalm 19:10; 119:103)
- a lamp (Psalm 119:105)
- rain and snow (Isaiah 55:10,11)
- a fire (Jeremiah 23:29)
- a hammer (Jeremiah 23:29)
- water (Ephesians 5:26)
- a sword (Ephesians 6:17)
- solid food (Hebrews 5:12)
- a mirror (James 1:23)
- milk (1 Peter 2:2)

Like the highway traveler, we as Christians are on a long and sometimes hazardous journey. We face many decisions and will have many needs on our pilgrimage to paradise. The Bible has been given to us to help us make those decisions and to meet those needs. It should be our constant companion — studied diligently and consulted often along the way. We can't do without it. — D.C.E.

*I have a companion, a dear, faithful friend,
A union of blessing that never shall end;
Till Jesus returns with His saints from on high,
We'll travel together, my Bible and I.* — Anon.

The Bible is like a compass — it always points the believer in the right direction.

¹²⁶It is time for you to act, O LORD,
your law is being broken.

¹²⁷Because I love your commands
more than gold, more than pure
gold,

¹²⁸and because I consider all your
precepts right,
I hate every wrong path.

D Pe

¹²⁹Your statutes are wonderful;
therefore I obey them.

¹³⁰The entrance of your words gives
light;
it gives understanding to the simple.

¹³¹I open my mouth and pant,
longing for your commands.

¹³²Turn to me and have mercy on me,
as you always do to those who love
your name.

¹³³Direct my footsteps according to your
word;

let no sin rule over me.

¹³⁴Redeem me from the oppression of
men,

that I may obey your precepts.

¹³⁵Make your face shine upon your
servant

and teach me your decrees.

¹³⁶Streams of tears flow from my eyes,
for your law is not obeyed.

Y Tsadhe

¹³⁷Righteous are you, O LORD,
and your laws are right.

¹³⁸The statutes you have laid down are
righteous;

they are fully trustworthy.

¹³⁹My zeal wears me out,

for my enemies ignore your words.

¹⁴⁰Your promises have been thoroughly

TOPIC	REF #	TEXT
Surrender	849-01	<p>Do you view your eyes as God's servants? Do you look at your hands and feet as holy instruments of the mighty Creator? Do you offer your ears to be constantly in tune with God's instruction? Does your heart beat with God's passion, and your mind think God's thoughts? Is your body a living, breathing center of purposeful passion, pointing toward the risen and reigning Christ who works so powerfully within us?</p> <p>Are you "holy available" to him?</p> <p>p. 24</p>
Suffering	849-02	<p>In short, we miss out when we insist on self-absorption, affluence, and ease rather than pursue a deeper walk with God. We miss out on an intimacy heralded by previous blessed generations, a fellowship of labor, suffering, persecution, and selflessness. Of course, it doesn't sound like much fun initially; but those who have walked these solitary roads have left behind a witness that they have reached a glorious, invigorating, soul-satisfying land. These women and men testify to being radically satisfied in God, even though others may scratch their heads as they try to figure out how someone who walks such a hardship-filled road could possibly be happy.</p> <p>The fact is that in a broken, fallen world, we have only two real choices: mature friendship with God, or radical disillusionment. The new groundwork that needs to be laid is an authentic faith that is based on a God-centered life. Rather than the believer being the sun around whom God, the church, and the world revolves to create a happy, easy, and prosperous life, God becomes the sun around which the believer revolves, a believer who is willing to suffer, even to be persecuted, and lay down his life to build God's kingdom and to serve God's church. This is a radical shift—indeed, the most radical (and freeing) shift known in human experience.</p> <p>If you find yourself hovering on the precipice of disillusionment, ask yourself: What am I living for really? Friendship with God and service to the king, or a life free from hassle?</p> <p>p. 29</p>
Surrender	849-03	<p>M. Basil Pennington described it this way: "I sometimes think that god, as he sees us rushing abOut in all our doing of good, says to himself: If only they would stop for a few minutes and give me themselves!"⁵</p> <p>p. 31</p>

are excellent in themselves and full of profit to others. But as for foolish speculations and genealogies and strife and wranglings about the Jewish law, give them a wide berth for they are profitless and lead to nothing. If a man is self-willed and factious, warn him once, warn him again, but then avoid him knowing that a man of such a character is perverted and sins, being condemned by his own action."

Proof:
① Word
② Commission
③ Transferred Relationship

VERSE EIGHT: "Trustworthy is the word, and concerning these things I am desiring you to be speaking confidently, in order that those who have believed God may be careful to engage in good works. These things are good and profitable to men."

God said
I believed
That settled
it will do what it says
it will do.
Baylor-Incarnancy

The apostle Paul begins this verse with the phrase, "Trustworthy is the word". **Count on it! Stake your life on it! Settles the Future!**

1 John 5: 11-12 "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."

Not one jot or tittle left unfilled. 4/5 Fulfilled

One is reminded of Chapter one and verse nine, clinging to the trustworthy message, which is in accordance with the teaching in order that he may be able both to be exhorting in sound doctrine and refuting those who are contradicting.

one's Attitude
Toward the
Word deter-
mines progress
toward Godliness.
Key to
Satan's program
of opposition is
to destroy
Confidence
in the Word

→ **Satan's program ① doubt it ② deny it ③ disobey it ④ destroy it**

Throughout our study we have discerned the fact that the word of God is the central instrument in Growth Toward Godliness. It is our relationship to Divine revelation that determines our progress toward the godly lifestyle. **Satan Has been casting doubt on God's word since the Garden: "Yea hath God said;..."**

We noted this back in Verse One when Paul says that he is a bond-slave of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God's chosen out-ones and the knowledge of truth, which is according to godliness.

CHAPTER ONE, Verse Three: "But in his own seasons he made known His Word in a proclamation with which I was entrusted in accordance with the commandment of God Our Saviour."

Paul once again reminds Titus, that this message that he is giving is trustworthy. Now what the Lord has promised, He will also be faithful to fulfill. He can depend upon it and so thus be faithful in his exposition of the Word. Because it is going to be this Word that is going to bring about a change on the Island of Crete. Trustworthy is the word and concerning these things I am desiring you to be speaking confidently.

Tim 4:2
Preach the
Word; be
prepared in
Season & out of
Season; Correct,
rebuke & encourage with
great patience & careful
instruction...

"These things" obviously refers to everything in the epistle so far, but more specifically the foundation for salvation that he has just given in the previous verses. That we are saved 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, whom he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ Our Saviour. In order that having been justified by His grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

II Tim. 2:15

Josh. 1:7,8

Psalms 1

119:9,11

its God's word

"Nobody is ever going to call me a quitter." -3-

← Terry Fox - always too soon to quit.
Don't Quit because of opposition. A man who pushes to his limits.

Speak w/

① Authority

② Assurance

③ Accuracy

It is Paul's desire that Titus recognize the trustworthy nature of the message which he speaks so that he can speak with confidence not wavering simply because he will be facing opposition.

The purpose behind this first part of the verse is seen in the next clause. Why is the word trustworthy and why is he to be speaking confidently? The purpose is "in order that those who have believed God may be careful to engage in good works." Fruit From Food!

As the message of the Word of God is faithfully expounded, and the believer's on the Island of Crete are submitting themselves to this message, they are going to be those who have already believed God. They have already put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, single condition of salvation and as a result of the intake of the Word of God, they are going to be sensitized to be careful to engage in good works.

He concludes the verse by saying, "these things are good and profitable to men." I Tim 4:8 For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things holding promise for present life & for the life to come.

These things evidently refers to belief in God and the intake of the Word of God which produces the good works. All of these things are good and profitable to men, the reason being they are not only good and profitable in the here and now, but also the life hereafter.

VERSE NINE: But be avoiding foolish controversies and genealogies and contention and strife about the law (legal battles). For they are unprofitable and worthless. Satan wants to destroy God's words & God's way.

+ v. 8
- v. 9 Whereas we have the positive things that are to be done in verse eight, and that is speaking confidently the Word of God to those who have believed, so that they will be challenged to good works by the results of the godly processes in their lives. On the negative side, there are four things that he wants them to be avoiding.

④ Rocks in the path of the godly.
First, be avoiding foolish controversies. "distractions from the goal of godliness."

There had been much controversy with the rebellious men and empty talkers and deceivers referred to back in Chapter One, Verse Ten, that are especially those of the circumcision.

Foolish controversies have to do with what it takes for a man to come to salvation, and whether faith plus nothing is totally adequate to secure a man's eternal destiny.

Rh. In his book, Balancing The Christian Life, says, "That a complaining attitude comes from self not the spirit who wants to make us thankful always, and this harmony at home or at work is not of the Lord but of self."

With the complaining attitude also goes the controversies that come forth that are producing a great deal of the problem on the Island of Crete. And they are foolish in the sense that there is more heat than there is light that comes from this conflict.

Mormonism

Leviah's Witnesses

Cults; Unity; Xian Science

Common denominator of All of them is Controversy

Good works
Are A Normal
Result of
Taking in truth

Flowing out of
My life will
be evidences
that I am
His Child &
Feeding on His
Word...

Good works Are
The Fruit of A
Deepening relationship.

What would
you like
best!
A hour or
cont. or
w/ Lord.

- 4-
- ① Controversies
 - ② Credentials
 - ③ Contention

I'm Asian —
Parents, Country
Church.

Heritage
Phil. 3:

2nd

They are also to be avoiding genealogies."

These who were in conflict with the ministry of the apostle Paul were constantly engaged in genealogical discussions. Whereby, they were proving their right to speak and to lead because of the tribe they were from or the family to which they had been born. And, number 3, contention.

3rd

1st Contention

As a result of the foolish controversies there is a drawing up of sides, a real disention or battle taking place. — drawing swords; I am of Paul, Apollos, Christ

4th " And strife about the law or legal battles."

This was the real issue at hand with those who were fighting for godliness to be produced by the performance of legalistic requirements, demanded by those of Jewish persuasion.

The apostle has already hit hard upon this back in Chapter Two when he spoke of the fact that it is the grace of God that disciplines us the denying ungodliness and worldly desires we should live sensibly and righteously and godly in the present now age.

→ Convict, Condemn

It was the function of the Law to bring us to Christ, to pronounce us guilty and in need of a righteousness which was not our own made available through the gift of Christ. Once this is received by faith, then grace takes over impowers us to live the godly life by training us in specific areas.

Now the reason is given for the fourfold command to be avoiding controversy, ② genealogies, ③ contention, and ④ strife about the law. This is actually a two-fold reason for they are unprofitable and worthless."

Phillip's translates this, "They settle nothing and lead nowhere."

We have already learned back in Study Number Three that they are upsetting whole families, teaching things which they should not for the sake of dishonest gain. And Paul calls to mind that they are Jewish myths and commandments of men, and they are turning themselves away from the truth.

VERSE TEN: "Be rejecting a factious (divisive) man after a first and second warning."

Whereas the apostle tells them to be avoiding the battles that can take place with those who are divisive because they are unprofitable and worthless, he now tells them to be rejecting a factious or divisive man.

This is to be done after a first and a second warning.

3John Verse 9 "I wrote to the Church but Diotrophes who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. So if I come I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us, not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church.

2:11,12

Law has nothing
to do w/ godliness
Can't Give
Life except
Life in Prison

doubt
divide
destroy

Rom 12: Ryne: "This is the road of spiritual life — a
dedicated life that is disciplined, dependant &
developing."
I Cor. 9:27 Gal. 5:16,17
II Pe 3:18

Fred Grimes.

→
Lou

Been so busy being religious
I haven't had time to hear him knockin.

One is reminded of Matthew 18, verses 15-17, "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault just between the two of you, if he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen take one or two others along so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them tell it to the church, and if he refuses to listen even to the church treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector."

VERSE ELEVEN: "Knowing that such a man is perverted (twisted, turned inside out) and is sinning, being self-condemned."

The reason they are to be rejecting him is because such a man is characterized in two ways: first, he is perverted, and secondly, he is sinning being self-condemned.

Phillips paraphrases this, "You can be sure that he has a moral twist and he knows it!"

He is twisted in a sense that he is self-willed or stubborn and unwilling to listen to reason and wisdom.

By his rejection of his brothers who are approaching in this manner, the apostle says he is guilty of sinning, being self-condemned.

New International Version says, "You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful, he is self-condemned."

One is reminded of Chapter One and Verse 16, when the apostle speaking about those who have perverted godliness, "They are confessing to know God, but by their deeds, they are denying him, being detestible and disobedient and with reference to every good work disapproved."

The opposite of this man characterized here in Verses 10 and 11 would be someone who is bringing about unity and is sensitive to the approaches and criticisms of others. He is a person who has good judgement and who is not sinning because he is sensitive to the need for unity in the body of Christ.

CONCLUSION:

What are some of the lessons that we can learn from these four verses?

Lesson Number 1 The Word of God is trustworthy, and you can have confidence in it.

Lesson Number 2 Rightly relating to truth after coming to faith, produces good works.

Lesson Number 3 Avoid controversy and contention, because they are unprofitable and worthless.

Lesson Number 4 When you are standing on the truth of the Word of God you can reject the divisive man.

Lesson Number 5 One's Attitude toward the word determines progress toward Godliness.
Lesson Number 6 how has Nothing to do with godliness

So often want
to Avoid this
Type of Action
Joshua At Ai
Ananias &
Saphira

Don't Confuse
Me w/ the Facts
My Mind is Already
Made up...

T.V.
✖ ✖

TOPIC	REF #	TEXT
Laziness	852-08	<p>The great Puritan Jonathan Edwards was as blunt as a man could be about this: “We are nothing if we are not in earnest about our faith, and if our wills and inclinations are not intensely exercised. The religious life contains things too great for us to be lukewarm.”⁷ He takes it one step further when he adds, “If there is a fight to be fought, or a race to be won, then it must be done with utmost earnestness. Without this there is no way of traveling the narrow road that leads to life. Sloth is therefore as damning as open rebellion.”⁸</p> <p>I mention this because many will say getting in shape physically, changing the way they eat, making time for exercise, being disciplined to work out even when they don’t feel like, is too much effort. It sounds like works-righteousness. It might even lead to legalism. And since laziness and overeating don’t seem like scandalous sins, we let them slowly but steadily steal our health away.</p> <p>7. Jonathan Edwards, <i>Religious Affections</i>, ed. James Houston (1746; repr., Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1984), 8. 8. Ibid., 168. pp. 105-6</p>
Laziness	852-09	<p>Laziness is like pride—we can’t turn it on and off. It becomes a part of who we are. If we coddle laziness in one area of our lives, we’ll succumb to it in other areas too. Sins are, by nature, self-reproducing. Selfish people are selfish in every way. How they drive, how they spend their money, how they talk, and even how they serve is marked by selfishness. In the same way, if we become lazy with our physical health, we are likely to become lazy with our spiritual health. The reverse is also true. Cultivating discipline in physical fitness can make us more apt to be disciplined in spiritual fitness.</p> <p>p. 106</p>
Laziness	852-10	<p>Lorenzo Scupoli warns that “from the slothful, God by little and little withdraws the graces He had bestowed upon them, while to the diligent He gives more abundant graces and permits them at last to enter into His joy.”¹⁰</p> <p>10. Lorenzo Scupoli, <i>The Spiritual Combat</i> (1589; repr., Manchester, N.H.: Sophia Institute, 2002), 61. p. 108</p>

74
**When I die, I want to go peacefully
like my grandfather did, in his sleep, not
screaming like the passengers in his car!**

45
75
**My Husband is losing his memory
but I can't complain because I have had
three birthdays this year?**

76
**Be Nice to your children, They are the
ones who are going to choose your nursing home.**

KILLER HORSE

BY SKINNY ROWLAND

I'm a bronc buster buckeroo, I'm a rip snorter of a hand,
now I ain't braggin' you see, I'm just the best in the land.

Well things went bad for me, in this little Montana town,
as I went up into the air, my good reputation came down.

I climbed atop this outlaw, after all the bets were placed,
never guessing at the time, of this terrible danger I faced.

You know about the strawberry roan, twisting on a dime.
this one spun every which way, all at the same darn time.

I thought this was my end, atop this high jumping buckner,
just as a K-Mart manager, jerked the plug on that sucker.

TOPIC	REF #	TEXT
Aging	321-11	My husband is so old that he remembers Eve when she was just a rib. p. 90
Aging	321-12	You know you're growing old when you're finally able to resist temptation, but it doesn't come around much anymore. p. 106
Aging	321-13	I had a terrible experience last week. I enrolled for a memory course and forgot why. p. 127
Aging	321-14	Middle age is when you're willing to get up and give your seat to a lady—and can't. p. 132
Aging	321-15	Most elderly women were born in the year of our Lord only knows. If you think a woman can't keep a secret, ask a woman her age! p. 160
Aging	321-16	An old fellow fell in love with a lady and got down on his knees and said there were two things he would like to ask her. She replied, "Okay." He said, "Will you marry me?" She replied, "Yes," then asked what his second question was. <u>"Will you help me up?"</u> p. 239

67

TOPIC	REF #	TEXT
Aging	321-04	<p>He washed his hair this morning and forgot where he put it.</p> <p>He keeps his hat on with a suction cup.</p> <p>My hair's getting thin, but then again, who wants fat hair?</p> <p>He's so bald that his head keeps slipping off the pillow when he sleeps.</p> <p>There are three ways that men can wear their hair: parted, unparted, and departed.</p> <p>Sure he's getting bald. People were certainly right when they said he'd come out on top.</p> <p>p. 39</p>
Aging	321-05	<p>What a wife said about her bald-headed husband: I love to run my fingers through his hair because I can make better time on the open road.</p> <p>p. 41</p>
Aging	321-06	<p>A lot of people don't know this, but last week he quietly switched from Head & Shoulders to Mop & Glo.</p> <p>p. 43</p>
Aging	321-07	<p>One couple lived together for 60 years without a single argument. Their secret? They shared the same hearing aid!</p> <p>p. 71</p>
Aging	321-08	<p>Many people are like the famous Liberty Bell—old, heavy, and slightly cracked.</p> <p>p. 80</p>
Aging	321-09	<p>He's so old that when he orders a three-minute egg, they ask for the money up front.</p> <p>p. 86</p> <p>—Milton Berle</p>
Aging	321-10	<p>Old age? That's the period of life when you buy a see-through nightgown and then remember you don't know anybody who can still see through one.</p> <p>p. 87</p> <p>—Bette Davis</p>

Aging

The Lost Cow

Phil Kennington

Now Jed had lost his hearing
And he'd also lost his cow,
And he'd hunted hill and hollow,
But he'd lost his trail somehow.

So Jed, he asked the preacher
To recruit some help at church.
The preacher said he'd ask for men
To help him with his search.

So Sunday from the pulpit
Came the call for volunteers.
Jed told 'em that his cow was black
With white around both ears.

Said, "Ya could spot her easy
'Cause both her horns turned up.
She'll answer when she hears her name--
She's called ole 'Buttercup'."

Then Jed described her, horn to tail,
His picture left no doubt,
And they organized a big cow hunt
To start when church was out.

The preacher had one more concern
Before his Sunday text,
And he checked his church agenda
To determine what was next.

He announced a brand new member,
Widder Jones was asked to stand.
Then the congregation offered
Widder Jones a welcome hand.

And several stood to testify
They'd heard that Widder Jones
Could sing a fine soprano,
That she even played the bones.

Some claimed they'd heard she even preached,
That she was full of fire,
And with open arms they welcomed
Widder Jones into the choir.

Now Jed, he thought that they wuz
Still a-talkin' 'bout his cow,
And he remembered some things
He'd forgotten up 'til now.

And so he stood again,
And everybody held their breath,
And Lula Hawkins claims what happened
Next was worse than death.

Jed said, "She ain't much fer purty,
She won't make no record books--
With boney hips and fat thick lips,
She's older than she looks.

"Her favorite food is watercress,
She'll slobber when she eats,
'Cause her teeth are chopped and broken
And she's got more fat than meat."

He said, "She's frothy at the mouth,
And her breath gets pretty bad,
And she's noisy when she's drinkin',
And she bellers when she's mad."

Now the church was deathly quiet,
Not ONE amen could be heard,
And everyone was hopin'
Jed had spoke the final word . . .

The deacon whispered in Jed's ear
When the congregation froze.
For all it solved he might as well
Have whispered in his nose.

Well, Jed appeared to understand;
He turned and faced the crowd.
And since he couldn't hear himself
His voice came harsh and loud:

"She likes to run in sagebrush
And when she's wet she's smelly."
~~Her left ear's split and she's lost one tooth.~~

pp. 94-96
(41-67)

Her ^{right} eye's gone
Her ^{left} eye's torn And Her
right eye's gone

Aging

It's February. Morning. Cold, gray, windy, wet.

Winter conditions outside and inside. A morning to crawl back into bed, pull up the covers, and wait for something better to happen. Like spring, for instance. Instead, I am in a doctor's waiting room in a small-town hospital. In a state of nonspecific ill health. Miserable in body, soul, and mind. Don't know why. "You're going in for a checkup," says my wife. So here I am. Fix me.

Across from me is an aged couple, sitting side by side, holding hands.

Neat and clean, washed and pressed. In her white hair, the woman wears a flowery arrangement--holly with red berries and some red poinsettia leaves. Odd.

The old man catches my eye, breaks into a grin, and says, "Merry Christmas!" My automatic pilot shoves "Merry Christmas!" out of my mouth at the same time that my brain wakes up and asks, "What, what, what . . . ?"

The old man sings softly: "Oh, you better watch out, you better not cry, you better not pout, I'm telling you why: Santa Claus is coming to town." He finishes the song, chuckles to himself, and again addresses me with a cheerful "Merry Christmas!" His wife smiles.

Just then the nurse sings out from behind her desk, "Merry Christmas, Uncle Ed. The doctor will see you now." From down the hall, the doctor shouts, "Merry Christmas, Ed! Good to see you."

(Right. Maybe it's me. Maybe it really is December instead of February. Mind is going. I knew this would happen someday. Why now?)

The nurse and the old man pass down the hall to an examination room.

Uncle Ed's wife crosses over to sit by me. A bit embarrassed, she apologizes, pats me on the knee, and explains:

"I hope he didn't upset you. The doctor says he's had a minor stroke or two and may be in the beginning stages of Alzheimer's. But in our family we know it's just that he's getting old and feeble. He's eighty-eight, and his wiring's coming loose. Most of the time he's OK, but every once in a while something a little crazy happens. Like this Christmas thing. A couple of years ago he shouted down from upstairs something about how he'd forgotten it was Christmas Eve and hadn't we better get the ornaments out and the packages wrapped. I didn't know what to think. Because it was March. But we didn't have anything else to do that day, and I thought I might as well humor him. So we spent the morning getting ready for Christmas. I called the girls--we have three grown daughters--and they came over for lunch and helped untangle the lights and wrap some packages. We sang carols and made cookies and had a wonderful time.

"When the girls left, he asked me to tell him about Christmas when he was a boy--because he was having a hard time remembering. Now I've know this man all my life. He had a terrible childhood, father was a drunk--beat him and his mother all the time. His father ran off with a woman from the drugstore, and his mother took sick and stayed home in bed most of the time. Ed never had a Christmas when he was a child. Well, how could I bring all that up again? I just didn't have the heart.

"We've been married sixty years. And I've never lied to him, ever. But I decided I'd just make up some good memories for him. What harm would it do? So I told him about the year he got a tricycle, and the year there was a wind-up train under the tree, and the year he saw Santa Claus, and the year he got to be in the Christmas pageant at church. It made him very happy--me remembering the Christmases he never had but always wanted.

"You know, we never did get around to Christmas that march. Just Christmas Eve. Because by evening his mind was back in the present. Christmas Eve and good memories seemed to be enough.

"But four months later it happened all over again. I heard him singing carols upstairs one morning, and here came Christmas down the stairs. MERRY CHRISTMAS! Again in July. Also in October--instead of Halloween. Twice in December. And now in February.

"Every time, he wants me to tell him about his childhood again, and I do. I'm getting so good at lying about how wonderful his Christmas used to be that I half believe it myself. I call the girls each time, and they come over to help out. They're really into it now. They bring him presents and sing carols and bake cookies. And twice we've even got as far as putting up a tree. They love to do it. See, they don't think of it as Christmas anymore. They think of it as Father's Day."

Just then the old man comes shuffling back up the hall. He and the nurse are finishing off a last chorus of "Jingle Bells." They both shout "Merry Christmas!" at me, and I shout "Merry Christmas!" right back at them.

The old lady patted my knee again, smiled, and rose to leave with her husband. He gallantly held the door open for her, and they went off into another day, hand in hand.

I didn't have time to ask her what they did when other holidays came up.

But I guess every day is Valentine's Day for them.

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