

Remember What You Were

Titus 3:1-3 (10/07/18)

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Titus 3:1-3 Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, 2 to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men. 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.

How does a Christ-loving believer live in a pagan world, a world like 1st century Crete, full of liars, evil beasts and lazy gluttons? Or a world like 21st century American, a pagan nation where practical atheism and moral relativism pretty much rule in the hearts of most citizens? What is a pagan culture? A culture full of false religions, godless philosophies, and no fear of the true and living God. How do we live here?

If ever there was a place for Paul to lay out an agenda for the church on how to change our culture and overturn the paganism, this would be it. Here he would tell us how to organize resistance groups against the moral insanity of the world, how to march against the state that has legalized so many things that Christians abhor, like abortion and same sex marriage, or how to reform government and work to impose Christian standards on the nation.

How does a Christian live in a pagan world? How do we go about changing the culture to reflect biblical morals and teachings? We don't, at least not directly. What did Christ teach us about the church's calling in this world? He said three things. First, He is going to build His church right at the gates of hell in enemy territory. Second, He assured Pilate that if His kingdom was of this world, then His servants would fight. But Christ also told Pilate His kingdom was not of this world, so they won't fight, just like Christ did not fight. Pilate didn't know what to do with Him. He's not a rebel. He's not a protester. He's not a subversive. Pilate finally says, "I find no fault in Him." Thirdly, Christ commissioned His people to go into all the world preaching the gospel, making disciples or followers of Him, and teaching them everything He taught us. Read the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. What did He teach us? Not just love your neighbors, but love your enemies. We are to forgive, have mercy, return good for evil. The church is called to be like Christ in this world.

What did Paul do? That's the question to ask when we see movements devoted to changing the culture and marching and resisting and protesting and all the rest. Paul did none of this. In 1 Corinthians 2:2 he declared his mission and the mission of the church, "I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified!" Preach the gospel. People in this world, whatever their human identity or ethnicity or gender or economic status, need to know one thing – how to be saved from their sin. And that's what Paul did. He went from town to town preaching Christ, often suffering persecution. They said he turned the world upside down teaching another king than Caesar, Jesus. In Athens, the hotbed of pagan philosophies and religions, what did he do? He didn't even rail against the false gods. He said, "I notice you have an altar to an unknown god. I'm here to tell you who He is. He created everything, your life and breath are in His Hands, He is Lord of the universe and commands everyone everywhere to repent because He has fixed a day in which He will judge everyone in righteousness through a Man whom He raised from the dead." This was a shocking message for these arrogant intellectuals. Some mocked. Some said, "We want to hear more." But some joined him and believed. Paul preached Christ.

God never called the church to rebel and become seditious, even though they accused Jesus and Paul of stirring sedition against Rome. But those were lies and trumped up false charges. Neither Christ nor Paul, or Peter, ever encouraged sedition or any acts of aggression against the state or the false religions. In fact, they did just the opposite, and that's where we come in Titus 3:1-3. How does a Christian live in a pagan society? God gives us two simple points that apply today just like in Crete. Live submissively and humbly in a pagan world.

The first way to honor Christ and beautify the gospel in a pagan society...

GOD SAYS YOU AND I MUST LIVE SUBMISSIVELY AND RESPONSIBLY UNDER ALL AUTHORITIES IN OUR WORLD – vv. 1-2

Titus 3:1-2 Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, 2 to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men.

We need to be reminded of this. The church didn't listen to Paul and did some pretty insane things through the centuries. There is always that push to change the mission of the church from preaching the gospel to changing the culture. Here's the reality. You can try to change the culture and get everyone living like a Christian, but it won't last. You can't force unbelievers to live like believers; they won't tolerate it. And you can't go on a holy war to kill the enemies of God in Jerusalem or foment revolution against the state. The world is the world. It needs to hear the gospel. That's exactly what Paul says in First Timothy 2. Pray for your authorities so the gospel will have the freedom to go forth. This doesn't mean the church isn't to call sin, sin. Paul exposed the rebellious, idolatrous heart of man in Romans one. Some fear if we name sins, it will push people away. We hope, on the other hand, that it will push people to the cross.

Paul didn't mount a campaign to Christianize the Roman world and he tells Titus to remind these Cretan believers to live submissively in their world. How?

First, be subject to all rulers and authorities, regardless of their pagan and evil ways. And they were evil. Paul died at the decree of Nero who apparently burned Rome down and then pinned it on the Christians. In Romans 13:1 Paul says the same thing – Submit to your governing authorities, because there is no authority except from God. Do we like all authorities and what they decree? Does God call us to submit to evil authorities? Yes, until they require us to disobey God. Then we must obey God rather than man. Remember Daniel under Nebuchadnezzar and Darius when the hateful bureaucrats attacked him. He refused to obey the decree not to pray and spent a night with some really big fluffy pudgy tats. Be subject to rulers. Do not march against them, resist them, or attack them in any way.

Second, be obedient to whatever authorities are over your life. God wants His people to beautify the gospel by obedience to the social structures you find yourself in. You may be falsely accused. Joseph was, and went to prison for it. But God was with him. Be the best citizen you can be. Thank God for our freedoms and Constitution. Go vote. If your guy gets in office, thank God. If not, trust God. Rather than resist a policeman, thank him today for risking his life for your sake every day.

Remember when the Jewish rulers sent spies to trick Jesus (you can never trick Jesus) by asking him a trick question about taxes?

Luke 20:20-25 So they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, in order that they might catch Him in some statement, so that they could deliver Him to the rule and the authority of the governor. 21 They questioned Him, saying, "Teacher, we know that You speak and teach correctly, and You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth. 22 "Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" 23 But He detected their trickery and said to them, 24 "Show Me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?" They said, "Caesar's." 25 And He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

You've got to love that! Paul said the same thing in Romans 13:7, "Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor."

Third, be ready to love your neighbor as yourself, ready for every good deed. 1 Peter 2:12 says, "Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles." When you see someone in this world needing a hand, give it. Help that older lady trying to load those pavers or bags of potting soil into her car. Tell that checkout girl how much you appreciate her sweet spirit. Give an extra dollar every once in a while to the

drive through gal trying to eke out a living. Maybe invite her to church at the same time. What does God say? Be ready for every good deed.

Fourth, don't badmouth people. Be careful. How easy it is to give a piece of your mind you can't afford to lose. I'm not a social media nerd, guru, or expert. It took me a while to figure out what a "platform" was, thinking it was something you stand on. I don't twitter, tumblr, snapchat, instagram, pinterest, youtube, vimeo, or periscope. I'm not on LinkedIn. I do have a FB page, and do you know how many rants I've deleted before posting? You just want to let the whole world know what you think about that politician or atheist or whatever. Some of that is probably okay, but pray about it before posting it. Does God say don't malign anyone except those who oppose your ideas? Malign, slander, or revile whom? No one! Don't go on Facebook and rant about all the stupid drivers out there. I know, you want to and maybe you have. Makes you feel good, right?

Fifth, don't argue with people. Learn when to just stop talking. Romans 12:18, "As much as lies in you, live at peace with all men!"

Sixth, be gentle, approachable, kind, sweetly reasonable. Don't be an arrogant know-it-all.

Seventh, be courteous (ESV). Show every consideration to some people? Or some courtesy to all people? You need the power of the Spirit for this. Being committed to showing every consideration to all people is godliness in action. This is how God says we are to live in a pagan Crete-like world, a politically charged angry culture like America where everyone seems to be angry at everyone. Live submissively under authorities and in the society and the culture in which God has sovereignly placed you.

The second way to honor Christ and beautify the gospel in a pagan society...

SECOND, LIVE HUMBLY WITH THE LOST PEOPLE ALL AROUND YOU – vs. 3

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.

Look closely. The wording is emphatic. "We ourselves, yes, we, were once foolish..." Before we dive into what we were before God's grace poured into our lives, let's take a whiff of what a self-righteous, arrogant, smug religionist looks like.

Luke 18:10-13, Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' 13 But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'

Does that reek or what? Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote, "I would say that the greatest sinners in the world are the self-satisfied, self-contained, good moral people, who believe that, as they are, they are fit to stand in the presence of God." Jesus went on to point out who was a true believer. Only sinners can become believers. Jesus didn't come to save righteous people; He came to save sinners. And that's what you and I are, sinners of every stripe and kind and depth. Some of us were way down in the depravity pit and others not so much, thanks to God's good kindness, but we were all sinners and unable to save ourselves. And that's why God says that you and I as His redeemed people must live humbly with the lost people all around us, even the scoundrels and our enemies. That's what God did. He loved us while we were still His enemies, remember? John MacArthur recently said, "The most God-like thing you can do is love your enemies."

So what were you and I before God saved us? Here are seven descriptions that pierce right through the thin veneer of sophistication and expose the depravity of the human heart.

We were foolish, just like the rest of humanity. We thought we were right, we thought we could live without God. We thought we could escape the judgment of God. We were fools in our depravity, our innate corruption due to original sin.

We were disobedient, like the rest. We did it our way. We didn't love God with all our hearts.

We were deceived, like all lost people. We thought we could see, but we were blind to our spiritual blindness. The great Deceiver had us under his spell. We thought we could get away with sin and doing things our own way, or that we were pretty good, our good outweighed our bad. "I'm not as bad as other people." We listened to voices that assured us we were okay.

We were enslaved or addicted to our own lusts and pleasures. James 4:1 tells us our selfish pleasures ruled our hearts. We lived to please ourselves. We were spiritual adulterers. We considered sports, money, family, health, comfort, anger, resentment, refusing to forgive others, and taking vengeance more important than God. All were idols of our wicked hearts! We were enslaved to other people's opinions and living to please others rather than God. Some of us were addicted to all kinds of things that pleased our lusts and pleasures, including alcohol and drugs and other people's praise, or respect, or attention, and others were enslaved to sex and pornography, never satisfied, always wanting one more video, one more experience, in so deep now you can't get out.

We were passing our days full of nasty thoughts toward others and despising what others had, wishing harm would come to people who offended us, wishing God would send fire down from heaven on them. We envied others who outdid us or got the praise we wanted. Remember Tanya Harding and the attack on her competitor, Nancy Kerrigan? We're not a lot different. We secretly found great pleasure when our competitor suffered great loss. Oh, sin makes us into very little, ugly things! If you want a peek into raw depravity, read the anonymous comments online following certain new articles. On the other hand, don't read them. I have read enough to see that my heart has possibilities of depravity that are actually frightening.

Before God saved us we were hateful and hating one another. People hated us for our sick attitudes and words, and we hated them in return. The feelings of hatred were mutual. We held them in disgust and when given a chance, we let them know it with our words, law suits, and weapons of injury and murder.

So how do we live as believers in this pagan, godless world? Submissively and with great humility. John Bradford, an English Reformer in the 1500s, saw criminals being marched to the gallows and said, "There but for the grace of God goes John Bradford." Do you believe that? John Newton, author of the song Amazing Grace, wrote in a letter to a friend, "Whoever is truly humbled—will not be easily angry, nor harsh or critical of others. He will be compassionate and tender to the infirmities of his fellow-sinners, knowing that if there is a difference—it is grace alone which has made it. He knows that he has the seeds of every evil in his own heart."

Paul confessed in First Timothy 3:15, "Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." We have no business getting up on our high horse and arrogantly looking down our holy noses at lost people, regardless of their condition. If God saved us, who were like the people in verse 3, then God can save anyone. Verse 4 begins with "but." There's the hope. God's grace and kindness in the gospel makes all the difference, which we'll see next week.