

Keynotes from Pastor Tim's am Sermon on 23/1/2022

Titus 2 v 15 > 3 v 15

Series: "Living Godly lives in a godless culture"

Part 9 "Christian responsibility in an unchristian culture"

Scripture references - ESV

Titus 2:15-3:15 Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you.

3 ¹Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, ²to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarrelling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. ³For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. ⁴But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, ⁵he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, ⁷so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. ⁸The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people. ⁹But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. ¹⁰As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, ¹¹knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned. ¹²When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. ¹³Do your best to speed Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way; see that they lack nothing. ¹⁴And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful. ¹⁵All who are with me send greetings to you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all.

In the Old Testament, we read how the Babylonians defeated Jerusalem in 597 BC, and took many of the young people back to Babylon as captives. God was disciplining his people because of their sin in ignoring him. The young people lived as exiles in Babylon, far away from home and family. The prophet Jeremiah told

God's people that they would be in exile for 70 years and they needed to settle into life in Babylon, submitting to the cultural differences. They were to marry and have children. They were also commanded by God to find ways to bless the culture in which they now lived (**Jeremiah 29:7** see p4). Even under the painful discipline of exile, God's people were to be concerned for the mission of God and to show those around them what it means to live as God's people and the blessing of living under God's rule.

As Christians we are in a similar situation. We are exiles who live away from our true home. We are not first and foremost citizens of any earthly nation.

We are citizens of heaven

However, at the moment we live away from that home in a culture that generally doesn't know, love or obey God.

What does that mean for how we live? As exiles in a culture that feels alien, we can respond in one of two ways.

1. **We can despair**, becoming critical and judgemental. This can lead to us finding fault with those around us for not living according to Christian principles, and then trying to find political ways to influence our culture. Sometimes this is the right response, as the work of William Wilberforce, which eventually led to the abolition of slavery, shows. **OR**
2. **We can exercise the hope that God may change our culture.** This may be a less glamorous route but it is likely to be the more effective one. With confidence in God to change people by the power of the Gospel,
we can look for ways to seek the welfare of the communities where God has placed us.

Paul calls Titus to teach this second response to the believers on Crete.

**They are to live out the Gospel in such a way that Christ is seen to be real,
leading to cultural change as people come to put their trust in him.**

Previously we have seen that Paul gave instructions for how Christian households were to live, but here he extends his instructions out to cover community life so that all people will benefit (**3:1-2, 8** above). As the Christian ethic is

lived out, it will be profitable for 'all people' not just believers. This text teaches us that

when believers devote themselves to doing what is good and right, the whole of society benefits.

Though we may be exiles, we are still called to live normal human lives - to buy a house, plant a garden, enjoy marriage and raise children. At the same time, we are to seek the welfare (both physical and spiritual) of those around us, always remembering that we are only able to lead the Christian life ourselves because of the grace of God at work in our lives. We hope that God will be merciful and save individuals, and as he does so, and brings them under the authority of King Jesus, then our communities will be transformed.

What does it look like to live Christian lives in the public arena?

1) Seeking the welfare of our community means living a life of submission (2:15-3:1 above). The pastor's work is to declare what Jesus Christ requires of his people, teaching them the life of godliness that flows out of a heart that has been changed by God.

He is to do this in a way that encourages obedience to Jesus, and to rebuke them when they don't obey Jesus. Authority is given to pastors and teachers of the Bible, but it is an authority that rests in the teaching of what Jesus, the head of the church, requires with a view to the concern and care of the eternal souls of God's people. Because of that, the church is called to submit to the message they preach. (2:15). Pastor and church alike need to obey Jesus.

As Christians we must be submissive to the message of Jesus Christ as it is preached by the pastor.

Following on from this (3:1), and repeated elsewhere (Romans 13:1-7, 1 Peter 2:13-17 see p4) we see that:

As Christians, we must be submissive to all governing authorities.

When he was on earth, Jesus expected his followers to obey both the religious and civil authorities. (Matt 22:21, 23:2-3 see p4). God, in his mercy, has appointed governing authorities for the good of society. We have political governments, police,

parents, husbands, school teachers and bosses at work, all of whom have been given by God so that there will be order in society rather than chaos. As Christians, we are to be known as those who submit to the governing authorities and who obey them because we are obeying Christ.

There may be times when we can't obey governments because they are commanding us to do things that are against what God commands. The early church were told by Jewish leaders to stop preaching Jesus but they would not do this (**Acts 4:19-20** see p4). They refused to submit, not because it was inconvenient or their preference, but because it was a genuine Gospel issue. Today, most of us don't face that. We may suffer inconvenience because our human freedoms have been curbed, but as long as it isn't a gospel issue, we must submit.

We submit because of a desire to obey Jesus and for the welfare of our community.

2) Seeking the welfare of our community means living a life of love (3:1). Christians are to be a people who are always prepared to meet needs, whether social or religious. They ensure that they always keep resources available to do good when the time arises. To love is an action (**1 John 3:18** see p4).

True love reaches out to the community with acts of love, and that love extends to how we are to speak (**3:2** above). As Christians, we are **not** to

- slander anyone, not even our enemy. We are not to discredit anyone, or damage their reputation.
- be argumentative or quarrelsome

Rather, as Christians we are to be gentle and show humility and respect. We may not be respected by other people, but that doesn't mean we don't have to be respectful.

We may be hated by people, but that doesn't mean we need

to hate back. We may be spoken to with harsh words, but that doesn't mean we need to respond with harsh words.

We can choose the way of love

We can do this because the God of love lives in us. This life of submission and love is the life of Christ.

- **Jesus lived a life of submission.**

After the feeding of the 5000, the people wanted to make Jesus their king. He clearly had divine power that could be used against the authorities, but Jesus is set on a different agenda. (**John 6:15** see p4) He is not a political revolutionary but has come to serve humanity by laying down his life. Jesus submitted to the will of his Father. Yet he also submitted to his culture. He spoke out against the abuses of the religious establishment but he worked within the constraints of the existing political system, even when it was corrupt.

- **Jesus lived a life of love**

He was always ready to seek the welfare of those around him. He fed the hungry, healed the sick, raised the dead, defended widows, blessed children and taught the ignorant. He showed love in the way he spoke. He never slandered anyone. Instead, he prayed for his enemies even asking his Father to forgive them as they hammered nails into his hands and feet. The greatest act of submission and love came as he submitted himself to the greatest enemy of humanity – death, even death on a cross to secure our salvation from sin.

It is this same Jesus who dwells in us by his Spirit and enables us to live lives of submission and love

so that we are ready for every good work and able to show kindness in speech.

How do we apply this to how we live in today's world?

We live in an era when there is suspicion of authorities, sometimes with reason. However, underlying this is a desire to break free from authority and to do as I please. Our culture is all about me and what I want, regardless of how it will affect anyone else, and this applies to all of us in ways that we may not even realise.

That is all the result of sin.

Sin always turns us in on ourself, so that we become our own masters, shaking our fist in the face of God and saying we won't let him rule over us just as Adam and Eve did in the very beginning. Yet the freedom we think we have is actually slavery to sin so that we can't break free from trying to make life all about ourselves and thereby behaving towards others in ways that are, at the very least, unkind.

The gospel is the good news that Jesus has come to set us free.

Not only are we free from the guilt and condemnation of sin, but we are free from the power of sin that has enslaved us. True freedom is the freedom to willingly submit to authority, to be ready to use our resources for every good work and to show kindness in our speech.

That is the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us when we turn to Jesus and live in dependence on him.

When we refuse to act like our culture, but instead

- submit to authority for the good of all people
- are more concerned for the needs of others than for our own needs
- bless rather than curse

then we will truly be seeking the welfare of our communities. We will be showing that there is hope of true freedom.

It might just be that God will use that to bring about far greater change in our society than we could ever imagine or could ever be achieved through other means.

Jeremiah 29:7 But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

Romans 13:1-7 Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

² Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. ³ For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, ⁴ for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. ⁵ Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. ⁶ For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. ⁷ Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honour to whom honour is owed.

1 Peter 2:13-17 Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution,^[b] whether it be to the emperor^[c] as supreme, ¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. ¹⁵ For this is the will of God, that by

doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. ¹⁶ Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants^[d] of God. ¹⁷ Honour everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the emperor.

Matthew 22:21 Then he said to them, "Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

Matthew 23:2-3 "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, ³ so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice.

Acts 4:19-20 But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, ²⁰ for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."

1 John 3:18 Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

John 6:15 Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.