

How Shall We Now Live?

Titus 2:15-3:2

ABC 2/21/21

45 years ago Francis Schaeffer asked the question, *How should we then live?* in his book of the same name. The relevance of that question hasn't changed. If anything, it's become more urgent for believers living in the 21st century. *How shall we now live?* Paul addresses that in his letter to Titus. If you've experienced God's grace through Christ at the cross, you're a changed person. You can't receive God's gift of forgiveness & eternal life & go on living as you formerly lived. His grace makes you a different person than you were before. But, at the same time, there are forces at work trying to get you to revert to your old ways. The world floods you with its false messages that promise satisfaction. The flesh tempts you from within, promising you fulfillment. & the devil lays his traps, enticing you to sin. All these make us tend to forget what God's done for us by His grace. We need to be reminded again & again of how God's grace has changed our lives. In our text this week (Titus 2:15-3:2), Paul speaks as a father in the faith, giving Titus & the believers in Crete some reminders of how God has changed their lives. His concern is their witness in their pagan world, which is very relevant for us today. There's a growing dislike against those who hold to biblical standards. How do we respond? While there's a legitimate place to seek to pass laws that uphold biblical standards, that's simply putting a Band-Aid on cancer. What our sinful society needs is the gospel, which alone can change human hearts. But how do we gain a hearing among those who mock God & His people? Paul's answer is that we must live lives of good works that display God's grace through us. The changed lives of Christians provide the platform for the verbal witness that points others to God's grace in the gospel of Christ. How are we to live now so as to impact our culture? Paul gives us 2 answers today. The 1st is by...

1. Lifting Up Scripture Courageously Every part of the church has been addressed in 2:1-14. Now Paul summarizes the role of Titus, & by application, all Christians. Paul ends chpt 2 the same way he started it, by repeating the command he gave Titus, saying, **speaking the things which are fitting for sound doctrine** (2:1). Look now at vs **15**.

These things include everything Paul's said in chpt 2, if not the entire letter. It's **these things** that make an impact in a pagan society. Therefore, Titus is to **speak** to them. He's to talk of them & proclaim God's Word. **Exhort** means to come alongside to help, encourage, & positively admonish. As Paul tells the Thessalonians, **We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone** (1 Thes 5:14). That's the idea. Puritan Richard Baxter has written,

Speak appropriately, & therefore differently, to each one. To the dull & the obstinate, be blunt & earnest. To the tenderhearted & the fearful, be gentle, & insist on the need of their spiritual direction. To the young, lay more stress on the enticements of sensual pleasures & of the great need to have control over their passions. To the old, prepare them for death & for the need to withdraw from the foolish ways of this present world. To the young, be free; & to the old, be respectful. To the rich, preach self-denial & the deceitfulness of prosperity. To the poor, show the glory of the Gospel. Note, too, the temptation of each group, each sex, each profession, & each one's employment. Be as simple & humble before them as you can. Give them scriptural evidence for all that you may say. Then they will see that it is not just you, but God who is speaking to them.¹

Reprove is rebuking or refuting error in doctrine or living. God's Word both comforts the afflicted & afflicts the comfortable. Paul wrote to Timothy,

All Scripture is inspired by God & profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. I solemnly exhort you in the presence of God & of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living & the dead, & by His appearing & His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season & out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience & instruction (2 Tim 3:16-4:2).

That's a command based on God's authoritative Word. It's because God's Word is inspired by God that Paul can tell Titus to **speak, exhort, & rebuke**. Each of these are present tense commands. Titus is to do this habitually & **with all authority**. This word for **authority** was used in that day for kingly authority. This means we are heralds or ambassadors for the King & when we give His message there's inherent authority & power with it. The **authority** we have is not our own, it's from God & His Word. We're all to speak with **authority** when we share the truth of God & say with full conviction, *Thus says the Lord*. There's no reliability or authority in ourselves or in mere experience. Our feelings, emotions, or experiences don't carry the **authority** of God's Word. Jesus Himself said, **All authority in heaven & on earth has been given to Me. Go, therefore, & make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them ... teaching them to follow all that I commanded you** (Mt

¹ *The Reformed Pastor*

28:19-20). As spokesmen for Christ, we're to teach others to obey everything Christ taught, & we're to do it courageously, fearlessly, & without hesitation. We're to herald the Scriptures even though the world doesn't want to hear it & may **disregard** us because of it. Paul says don't be put off if someone disregards, despises, or disrespects you. Keep proclaiming God's Word. A sin-confronting, Christ-centered message with **authority** isn't always popular or well-received. Paul says don't be deterred by that. Speak the Scriptures clearly, compassionately, & courageously. What Philips Brooks said in his 1877 *Yale Lectures on Preaching* is still a much-needed warning.

If you are afraid of men & a slave to their opinion, go & do something else. Go & make shoes to fit them. Go even & paint pictures which you know are bad, but which suit their bad taste. But do not keep on all your life preaching sermons which say not what God sent you to declare, but what they have you to say. Be courageous.²

Authority wasn't popular on the island of Crete. Paul already said there were many rebellious people there (1:10). Today there are those like them who need to be refuted by us proclaiming the truth of Scripture with authority & courage. We must be like the prophet Jeremiah who couldn't stop speaking God's Word even under opposition, it was like a fire in his bones that he had to get out (20:9). We must be like Paul who said, **I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes** (Rom 1:16). This isn't just for preachers. It's for all Christians. We're all to **speak** the gospel with courage & without compromise. It's only the Word of God & the power of His gospel that can change society, one heart at a time. The solution isn't political. We don't need a revolution. Instead, God wants to use you as you **speak** God's Word in your circle of influence. There's a 2nd way Paul gives us here that impacts our society. How shall we now live?

2. By Living as Submissive Citizens 3:1

Submission to government authority isn't popular. But government comes from God (Gen 9:5-6) & we have obligations to it, pagan or not. When we live as God tells us to, the Holy Spirit uses our lives to draw sinners toward God (1 Pt 2:12). Paul clearly says in Rom 13 that we should view government as a gift from God, something that brings us benefits. Although individual politicians

² *Lectures on Preaching*, p 59

& governments can do evil, government itself is something good. It's a benefit that flows to us from God's love & wisdom. Governments are doing good as they carry out their God-given work. This means, in general, we should view them as something that's good according to God's Word. Yet many Christians think they don't have to submit to their government because it's ungodly. But compare our situation to Nero being in charge. Which was more ungodly? Submission to God's government over us applies no matter the government over you. We have it far better than Paul did when he wrote this to Titus.

Let's apply this in one simple way that's current. While I've not met anyone who enjoys wearing a mask, I've met many who don't. Some say they can't wear them as a result of their Christian conscience. Most resistance to wearing masks falls into one of these 3 categories:

- *A scientific objection:* masks are ineffective
- *A political objection:* masks represent unjustified government restrictions
- *A moral objection:* masks represent a false narrative (the seriousness of COVID is overblown & to wear a mask is equal to lying)

The truth is, wearing a mask isn't a moral or conscience issue. It may be a health or political objection, but it's not a moral objection supported by a biblical understanding of our duty. Masks are required by the executive order of our governor. If you go to the grocery store, get a haircut, or go to church, you need to wear a mask. If someone maintains, based on their conscience, that they won't wear a mask to come to church, but wear one to buy groceries, they're inconsistent. Think about the biblical examples. If it's a sin for you to eat meat (it violates your conscience), then you can't just set this aside if you get hungry. That isn't how it works. If it's a sin to wear a mask, then it's a sin whether you're at church or the deli. As Christians we're commanded to submit to & honor the governing authorities. This submission is God's will for us (1 Pt 2:15). Failing to do so is a sin against God. Disobedience to the government is reserved for when we're commanded to do something God forbids or when they forbid something God commands. It's impossible to argue that masks fall into this category. For many wearing a mask is a reasonable way to love other people & protect them (Mt 22:39). I'm so thankful for our elders. From the beginning they've understood that we're to submit to authority over us unless we're told to do something unbiblical.

Not all churches have done this. One church I know of didn't require masks & social distancing. When their community & neighbors found this out they were seen as unloving & not caring about the people around them. They're now trying to rebuild their relationship with the community that they truly desire to reach with the gospel. Most of us will probably never face the need to obey God & disobey our government. Nearly always it will be God's will that we obey those in authority over us. Submission to governing authorities is the biblical norm & noncompliance the exception. As a church, we must obey our **rulers & authorities** when they don't demand we disobey God. I'm so thankful for our elders for being biblically wise & leading us in a way that honors God. Regardless of the unjust & ungodly failures of governments, we're to pray & seek to influence the world for Christ by godly, selfless, & peaceful living under that authority, not by protests against or disobeying it. **3:1-2**

These 7 Christian duties apply to all believers at all times. They're the attitudes & actions that should always characterize our lives among those who don't belong to God. Paul says to Titus, **remind them**, which means to call to mind what's already known. These weren't new truths to the Cretan church. They'd already been taught these things. But, as a loving father, Paul felt the need to **remind** them of these basic ways that they needed to live in relation to this godless world. William Barclay writes, *The Cretans were notoriously turbulent & quarrelsome & impatient of all authority. Polybius, the Greek historian, said of them that they were constantly involved in 'insurrections, murders & internecine wars.'*³ Submission to authority is something Christians don't always do well. Some think because their ultimate allegiance is to God they can disregard the authorities God has put over them. In other words, some think because our citizenship is in heaven, we can disregard our citizenship on earth. Paul says to **remind** them of their duty to government, & he uses the terms **rulers & authorities** to cover every level of it.

A. Be Subject To means to put yourselves willingly under the authority of, to submit or subject yourselves to the human **authorities & rulers** over you. Paul didn't say the government must be free of corruption before these principles apply. Paul didn't say his commands only apply if you

³ *Letters to Timothy, Titus, & Philemon*, p 258

live under a godly government. The only time Christians are to disobey their **authorities & rulers** is when they command us to do something that would require us to disobey God. At that point, **we must obey God rather than men** (Acts 5:29) & expect to suffer punishment from the government because of it. Paul didn't call for the overthrow of Nero to protect the Christians who were being killed for their faith. So, except in very rare situations, we should submit to our government. We aren't anarchists or rebels. We don't subvert or disobey the government unless it brings us into direct conflict with God's commands. But even then our disobedience is respectful & we willingly accept the consequences of our actions. This submission is evidence of submission to & trust in God Himself (Rom 13:1).⁴ There's always the temptation to think that because the authorities aren't reasonable, our obligation to submit to them is annulled. Many think they have a responsibility to submit to authority only as long as they agree with it or as long as it's fair in their eyes. Ultimately, a church community that doesn't submit to governing authority undermines the authority of the Word of God. We're picking & choosing what parts we'll listen to & obey & which ones we'll ignore. No wonder Paul places such a high priority on teaching submission to authority. Christians should never be scofflaws; we aren't to flout the law by saying it doesn't apply to us.

B. Be Obedient We're called to obey everything Jesus commanded us & also **to be obedient** to everything our governing authorities command. Our willing obedience to human authority demonstrates to the world that the ways & workings of this world aren't our major concerns. Our work is in this world but not of it because our citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20). Our focus is to be on holy living & on sharing the gospel of Jesus, who Himself came **to seek & to save that which was lost** (Lk 19:10). Our government doesn't always honor God but our only reason to disobey is if they command us to disobey Him. As an example, in the prior vs (2:15) we're commanded to **speak** God's Word. In the book of Acts, some Jewish rulers commanded the disciples not to speak of Jesus anymore. Their reply was that they had to **obey God & not men** (Acts 5:29). Disobedience isn't to be the norm or our default setting. We may not agree or like the laws we're under but that doesn't give us the right to violate them. Paul says we must be obedient to our government. **To be subject**

⁴ Daniel L. Akin, [Living Doctrine: The Book of Titus](#), ed. Craig G. Bartholomew & David Beldman, p 56

to & to be obedient are similar but **to be subject to** has more to do with attitude & **obedience** deals with actions. **To be obedient** gives the visible demonstration of the attitude of submission. Rom 13 is the classic text on this. There Paul mentions 7 reasons why all people, especially Christians, are under divine obligation to **submit to & obey** human government. 1st, **the governing authorities... which exist are established by God** (1). 2nd, **the person who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God** (2a). 3rd, those who oppose such authority **will receive condemnation upon themselves** (2b). 4th, government is designed to restrain evil & is therefore **not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil** (3). 5th, it's divinely designed to promote the good of individuals & of society. It's **a minister of God to you for good** (4a). 6th, it's divinely empowered to punish wrongdoers **by the sword as an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil** (4b). 7th, for Christians **it is necessary to be in subjection to government not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake** (5). & then Paul says, **because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. 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** (6–7). Paul makes it clear that the Christian's obligation to respect & obey human government doesn't rest on its being democratic or just but only on its being the God-ordained means by which human society is regulated. Therefore, those who resist & oppose human government, resist & oppose God Himself.⁵ We need to remember what 1 Tim 2 says to us in our day of complainers & critics about governing authorities. Paul told Timothy,

I urge that entreaties & prayers, petitions & thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings & all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil & quiet life in all godliness & dignity. This is good & acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, why? Because He desires all men to be saved & to come to the knowledge of the truth (1-4).

We should desire all types of people be saved, including those in authority who may make our lives difficult. We should be thankful for & pray for our leaders, as the early church did. Clement of Rome prayed the following prayer near the end of the 1st century, no doubt thinking of the ongoing persecution:

⁵ John F. MacArthur Jr., [Titus](#), p 142

Guide our steps to walk in holiness & righteousness & singleness of heart, & to do those things that are good & acceptable in Thy sight, & in the sight of our rulers ... while we render obedience to Thine almighty & most excellent name, & to our earthly rulers & governors. Thou, O Lord & Master, hast given them the power of sovereignty through Thine excellent & unspeakable might, that we, knowing the glory & honor which Thou hast given them, may submit ourselves to them, in nothing resisting Thy will. Grant them therefore, O Lord, health, peace, concord & stability, that they may without failure administer the government which Thou hast committed to them. For Thou, O heavenly Master, King of the ages, dost give to the sons of men glory & honour & power over all things that are in the earth. Do Thou, O Lord, direct their counsel according to what is good & acceptable in Thy sight, that they, administering in peace & gentleness with godliness the power which Thou hast committed to them, may obtain Thy favor.⁶

Justin Martyr, the 2nd-century theologian wrote this to the Roman emperor over him:

Everywhere we (referring to Christians), more readily than all men, endeavor to pay to those appointed by you the taxes both ordinary & extraordinary, as we have been taught by Jesus.... Whence to God alone we render worship, but in other things we gladly serve you, acknowledging you as kings & rulers of men, & praying that with your kingly power you be found to possess also sound judgment.⁷

During a time when Rome was especially hostile toward Christians, Tertullian wrote,

Without ceasing, for all our emperors we offer prayer. We pray for life prolonged; for security to the empire; for protection to the imperial house; for brave armies, a faithful senate, a virtuous people, the world at rest, whatever, as man or Caesar, an emperor would wish.⁸

Are our prayers like this for our rulers? We're to live in submission & obedience to those in authority over us.

C. Be Ready for Every Good Deed Christians shouldn't only be law-abiding citizens, but in both actions & attitudes, we should seek to be salt & light in the world & show Christ by doing **good deeds**. **Every good deed** may refer to anything done in obedience to Christ out of love for others. But in the context, it means we're to be *prepared & willing to participate in activities that promote the welfare of the community. We must not stand coldly aloof from praiseworthy enterprises of government but show good public spirit, thus proving that Christianity is a constructive force in society.*⁹ We should take the lead as Christian people doing good works as a witness to our world. Paul isn't speaking of reluctantly doing what we know we should do but of willingly & sincerely being **ready** & prepared to perform **every good deed** toward the people around us as we have

⁶ Cited in F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, p 235

⁷ "The First Apology of Justin," chapter 27 in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson, ed. p 168

⁸ "Apology," chapter 30, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol 3, p 42

⁹ D. Edmond Hiebert, *Expositor's Bible Commentary* ed. by Frank Gaebelein, 11:443

opportunity. This is a loving eagerness to serve others. No matter how hostile the society around us may be, we're to be good to the people in it whose lives intersect with ours. What's next?

D. Slander No One Slander means to speak evil, to discredit, damage the reputation of, insult, or speak against. This cannot be done with a righteous motive. This doesn't mean we aren't to condemn sin, but we must not detest or defame the sinners themselves. They need God's grace not our **slander**. We aren't to engage in hateful speech against the God-appointed rulers over us or anyone else. It's easy to get frustrated with those over us & then misrepresent what they said or did. But that's to malign them. In our politically divisive times, many Christians have fallen to doing this. Don't be one of them. Or, if a neighbor wrongs you in some way, the human tendency is to build your case against them by running them down when you talk to others. But you won't win that neighbor to Christ if you alienate him by bad-mouthing him. Our concern isn't a personal animosity towards government or individuals, because our enemy isn't flesh & blood but the spiritual forces of evil that blind the unbelieving, which we used to be (Eph 6:12). We aren't to malign people, but instead to magnify God's truth by speaking it in love. Unlike the original readers of this letter, we live in a society where we can vote & have a say in many things. We aren't to curse or revile. We should take our concerns about sinners in our world to the Lord in prayer rather than slandering them. We must restrain our natural inclination to say the worst about others.

E. Not Contentious means not disturbing the peace, avoiding quarrels, & not being combative. Ever met a **contentious** Christian? Ever been one? Our only offense should be the gospel we preach, not the conduct we display. Some people will be upset by the message. We know & understand that. But we don't want it to be due to our pugnacious manner or prideful arrogance. In an ungodly & immoral society it's easy to become angry with those who corrupt it, condemning them & writing them off as hopeless & beyond the pale of God's grace. But we have no right to become **contentious** when unbelievers act like unbelievers. If God so limitlessly & unconditionally loved the world that He sent His sinless Son to redeem it, how can we, as sinful recipients of His redeeming grace, be angry & loveless toward those who haven't yet received it?

F. Instead we're to be **gentle** meaning reasonable, fair, forbearing, conciliatory, & courteous. We're not to stand up for our rights when to do so would hurt a relationship. There are situations where to stand on your rights would cause such damage toward an unbeliever that he'd never want to hear about your Savior. It's far more important to absorb the wrong & keep the door open for your witness. Being **gentle** has been referred to as *sweet reasonableness*, an attitude that doesn't hold grudges but always gives others the benefit of the doubt. Paul then summarizes all the above with the phrase...

G. Showing Every Consideration for all People. **Consideration** has been translated many ways, including *perfect courtesy* (ESV), *all meekness* (KJV), *all humility* (NKJV), *true humility* (NIV), & *always showing gentleness* (HCSB). Who are we to be this way with? **All people**, meaning all types of men, not just civic leaders & governing authorities. This is our obligation to **all people**. In 2:11 it says God's grace appeared to **all men**. The implication is since God's grace is extended to **all men** we must extend grace to them as well by showing them **every consideration**. It's been said, "Showing *some* mildness toward *some* people might not be so difficult. Nor showing *all* ... mildness to *some* people, or *some* mildness to *all* people. But to *show all* mildness to *all* people, even to all those Cretan 'liars, evil brutes, & lazy bellies,' was an assignment impossible ... apart from God's special grace."¹⁰ As followers & imitators of Jesus, our calling isn't to fight for our rights or privileges against the ungodly. Rather, as we live in this corrupt world in subjection & obedience to human authority, doing good deeds, maligning no one, & being uncontentious, gentle, & meek, we will demonstrate the gracious power of God to transform sinners & make them like Himself. Peter helps us see the reason for all this when he writes,

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers & the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. Act as free men, & do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king. Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good & gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin & are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right & suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you,

¹⁰ Knight, p 334

leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; & while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously ... Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness & reverence (1 Pt 2:13-23, 3:15).

The gospel is very much at stake in the way we live in this fallen world. Jesus said we're to be the salt of the earth & the light of the world so the world may see our good works & glorify our Father who is in heaven (Mt 5:13-16). 1 Pt 4:11 tells us,

Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory & dominion forever & ever. Amen.

The world understands & expects rebellion & back-stabbing, but what wins the gospel a hearing from unbelievers is a different pattern in us. As Christians, we're to model peaceableness & **consideration**. When Christians become hostile to government & society in general, they almost always become hostile to the unsaved leaders & citizens who live in that society. With that kind of attitude, we'll never reach out to them in love with the gospel. It's our humble attitude & righteous conduct that make us not only pleasing to God but appealing to the unsaved as well. It's righteous living that makes the saving message of the gospel believable to the lost. If we claim to be saved from sin but still live sinful lives, our witness is likely to fall on deaf ears. Heartfelt consideration to all people is foundational for our Christian walk in an ungodly society. Our duty, as we relate to an increasingly ungodly culture, is to continually remember Paul's instructions to Titus & live them out as we seek to demonstrate His power & grace that saves sinners. Changing people's hearts one person at a time is the only way to bring meaningful, lasting change to our communities, our nation, & to our world.