

Titus 3 – Practical Truths, Setting Things in Order

In our prior messages from the book of Titus, we've found that Paul was wanting Titus to set things in order in the churches, bringing them up to speed on how they should live, work, and worship. He gave instructions on the selection of elders to lead the churches, dealing with insubordinate people, and teaching sound doctrine. Believers were to be trained to renounce ungodliness, to live self-controlled lives, and be actively waiting for the return of Christ. In chapter 3, he continues the list of things that Titus was to ensure were taught in the churches.

The first thing mentioned is to be submissive to rulers and authorities. What does it mean to be submissive to rulers and authorities? The word was previously used in reference to wives and husbands, and it means to rank under, or to be placed in a designated position. It is in the middle voice, indicating we are to place ourselves in this position, not be forced there by another. You might say that we are told to take a step down, to lower our own self-importance. Paul gave similar instructions in Romans 13:1-7, where he states that they are in place by God's decree, and to resist them is to resist God. The intent is that we willingly place ourselves under the rulers and authorities God has set in place. This may not set well with some of us, because we disagree with the morals or the political actions of those in power.

I find it interesting that nowhere in the New Testament do we find Jesus taking action against secular authorities, nor does He comment on political matters. Looking at the writings of Paul, Peter, and James, we find the same thing. They all had strong words for corrupt religious leaders, but refrained from political talk. In fact, when Paul is brought before the Roman governor Felix in Acts 24, he speaks very cordially and respectfully to him. Paul did speak clearly about righteousness, self-control, and judgment as he spoke about his faith in Christ, but that was regarding an individual need of salvation, not about political reforms. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said "you never find the apostle Paul or any other apostle commenting upon the government of the Roman Empire." Here in America we have gotten accustomed to speaking out and being involved in political activity, and I think that is a good thing. As Christians, however, we need to be careful how we go about it. 1 Peter 2:17 tells us "Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor." Disrespecting someone does not honor God. Peter's instruction comes right after telling us to "be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people."

Paul continues in Titus 3, "to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people." This continues the previous thought of submitting to rulers. Christians should be known for obeying the law; we should be model citizens, ready to do good at any moment, in any situation.

Our speech is once again in focus, as we are to refrain from slandering or speaking evil of others. The word is actually blasphemy, which we usually think of with reference to God, but it applies to people as well. We should also avoid quarreling, which often starts with words. In contrast to these things, we should show "perfect courtesy" toward others. What does this mean? Vines Dictionary says "the meaning of *prautes* is not readily expressed in English, for the terms meekness, mildness, commonly used, suggest weakness and pusillanimity to a greater or less extent, whereas *prautes* does nothing of the kind. ...*prautes* describes a condition of mind and heart". The idea here is to be completely courteous and soothing with others. Why? Because we ourselves used to be just like them. (v. 3)

What changed us? “But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he 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, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” That is one long sentence, and I’m not going to try and unpack all of it today. Suffice it to say, in connection with the previous command, we should be kind and loving to others, even though they don’t deserve it, because God was kind and loving to us when we did not deserve it. It is the goodness and kindness of God that leads us to repentance, according to Rom 2:4. In the same way, our courtesy, our goodness, our gentle submission, ought to lead others to the God who caused those qualities to live in us.