

Doctrine and duty in the world

Titus 3

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We're having a short series on Paul's letter to Titus.

This is the last of three weeks.

In our first week,

we looked at what instructions the apostle had for the church.

It was focused in

on what kind of elders he wanted appointed in the church.

They need to be able to teach sound doctrine and live godly lives.

Last week we were looking at the instructions in the home.

Chris was preaching, I wasn't actually here.

But I imagine that he was telling you

that no matter whether you are a man or a woman,

no matter whether you are older or younger,

or even whether your place in the household is as a slave,

that the life of the Christian is to be marked

by self controlled godly lives.

That is what will make the teaching about the Lord Jesus attractive.

Self control is actually a word that appears in both chapters 1 and 2.

In Paul's letter to the Galatians,

it is part of the fruit of the Spirit.

And it's a very interesting word to think about

in relation to the world that we live in.

Have you noticed that self control

is not looked upon as a virtue in our society today?

If you go to the local primary school,

they have in big letters up on the wall

the key virtues they want the kids to adopt.

The current buzz words are things like respect and resilience.

If you look at the popular phrases that mark our culture,

then we hear things like,

"You do you."

"Be true to yourself."

And people are lauded for being 'very brave'.

What does it take to be 'very brave'.
We it's not about doing your duty under enemy fire
as it might have been in a previous generation.
You are brave if you look inside of yourself
and find some costly way that you can be true to who you are.
So the 'very brave' man,
is the man who looks inside of himself
and discovers that he's actually a woman trapped in a man's body.
So he leaves his wife and children
and embraces the new reality of what it means to him,
which is actually now referred to as her.
That's bravery.

We live in a culture searching for authenticity.
If you look inside and see that your outward persona
is not reflecting what is truly in your heart,
and you fail to act on it,
then you are 'living a lie'.
It's not authentic.

And a little bit of reflection on the first couple of chapters of Titus
shows us that our culture's desire for authenticity
doesn't sit well with Paul's desire for self control.

What is authenticity?

It's acting out your understanding of who you want to be.

What is self control?

It's deciding not to act out urges from inside of you.

Can you see that the two are almost opposites?

'You do you' is authentic.

You choose not to do you

because you have decided

that you need to say no to the urge inside of you.

That's self control.

The call for a godly life is at odds with the spirit of our age.

And so we move to the call for a godly life in the world.

If chapter 1 was a godly life in the church
and chapter 2 was a godly life in the home,

chapter 3 is a godly life in the world.
How should the Christian behave
towards those in the community in which we live?
And once again,
the focus is not on 'you do you'
be true to whatever you want for yourself.
The focus is on giving priority to others
even if it's not what you want for yourself.
Christian godliness in the church, in the home and in the world
is about self control.

But the instructions for how we are to behave in the world are short.
It's just verses 1-2.

"Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities,
to be obedient,
to be ready to do whatever is good,
to slander no one,
to be peaceable and considerate,
and to always be gentle towards everyone."

This is just such counter cultural instruction.

We are accustomed to being inherently suspicious
of anyone in authority.

We believe that they are there to feather their own nests most often.

We don't like the rules they make,
and we only take notice if we think they can enforce them.

The closest thing I can find to a counter example is the queen.

Because she had politicians who made and enforced all the rules.

And she was absolutely at arms length from the process of government.

And she really only appeared to comfort people in times of tragedy
or celebrate with them on special occasions,

and her presence at these occasions was always gratefully received,
she would have to be the person in authority

least likely to generate push back.

And yet even the queen had plenty of people bucking her rule.

Why should one family be rulers simply by virtue of their birth?

It's a fair question.

And yet if the queen is as close as it gets to a counter example, what about the rest of the rulers and authorities?

Look I examine my own heart.

What does it mean for me to be subject to say Daniel Andrews, the ruler who I have the most issues with?

I mean my issues are as long as your arm.

I am fiercely opposed to his anti Christian agenda - the stripping of Christian schools

having the right to hire according to their beliefs; the removal of RE from schools.

I oppose his rainbow agenda -

constant attempts to indoctrinate children with homosexual and transgender viewpoints and behaviours.

I was appalled by the heavy handed way

he treated those who wouldn't go along with his vaccine mandates.

And look, I'm just getting started.

I haven't mentioned corruption in the contracts for the hotel quarantine, the collaboration with the Chinese Communist Party.

Maybe when Paul is telling Titus

about being subject to the rulers and authorities, he doesn't mean rulers

who are quite as anti Christian as Daniel Andrews?

Well actually it can't be that.

You see, Paul is living in a time when Roman Emperors were just as anti Christian as anything we might experience.

Emperor Nero did frame Christians for fires that he started in Rome.

His persecution of Christians

was not just the restriction of freedom we experience, it was full on physical violence and death.

And yes Nero was Emperor around the time Paul wrote this letter.

So how are Christians expected to be subject to Nero?

Here are some thoughts.

1. You are in fact very rarely

going to be dealing with the actual man in charge.

Nero in the first century and Daniel Andrews in Victoria

have an awful lot of people working for them directly or indirectly.
Those people can be treated with respect and courtesy.
Many of them will not be ideological zealots
but just normal folk who are doing a job.
They are not at fault for the worst excesses of the people they work for.
So they can be treated without suspicion
and given the respect due to their office.

2. Even when you face blatant injustice for following Jesus,
if you cop it with good grace,
that's a powerful witness to the gospel.
You can read books like 'Forgive me Natasha'
about guards in Communist Russia,
who became Christians
when they saw how well the Christians they persecuted
bore up under the persecution.

3. In a democracy, being subject doesn't mean losing your voice.
We are always allowed to advocate for what we think is right.
But we can do it in a gentle and peaceable way.
We can advocate for what we believe
without saying inflammatory things about those who oppose us.
That means not making personal attacks on them.
It also means ascribing them with the best possible motives
for doing what they are doing.
It is possible
that some people who are pushing the rainbow agenda in our schools
are doing it because they want to destroy the nuclear family
so that the state can gain control over children.
But many of them are motivated by a desire to care for the marginalised
and look after those who are bullied for being different.
It's far more gentle and peaceable
to presume that you are dealing
with people with honourable motivations
until they give you concrete reasons to believe otherwise.

In fact this kind of attitude is very counter cultural.
Someone like Jordan Peterson
who Christians would agree with on many issues would call it weak.
There is no equivalent commandment in the Koran for Muslims.
Nothing like it.
We are to be subject, obedient,
not slandering, peaceable, considerate and gentle.
The world's way is to stake out your ground
and protect it with all the energy you can muster.
Why are we not to be like that?
We follow Jesus.
Jesus exemplified that kind of life.
That's God's way.
And so we follow.
In 2 Cor 10:1, Paul says,
"By the humility and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you."
The words translated humility and gentleness are the same words
that are translated considerate and gentle here.
Jesus is humble or considerate and he's gentle.
We need to be too.

Why are Christians to adopt this humble and gentle way?
3:3 tells us "At one time, we too were foolish, disobedient,
deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures."
Why do we operate in a gracious way
with people who we disagree strongly?
Because we were once like them.
If it were not for God's work in our lives,
we would still be like them.
The be hostile towards someone
because they are controlled by their sinful nature
is failing to recognise that they are a captive.
They are in bondage.
The devil has them in his grip.
Only God's action can set them free.
So we just be patient and wait on God to free the captives.

There's no point arcing up.
Sometimes I see Christian brothers and sisters
getting really angry with the likes of Dan Andrews.
There's no point.
But for God's Spirit in our lives,
we would be in the same position.
Just be peaceable, considerate and gentle,
and don't nudge an inch from what you believe.

Paul's reason why we ought to live in this way
depends entirely on the gospel.
This is in fact
one of the more complete statements of the gospel in the NT.
The gospel statement goes from verse 3 to verse 7.
It starts with our need of the gospel.
"At one time, we too were foolish, disobedient,
deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures.
We lived in malice and envy,
being hated and hating one another."
Today Christians rarely talk about being 'saved'.
It's got a bit of a flavour of over the top about it.
But when we realise where we came from,
we will have no problem with saying we are saved.
It can be hard for people like me to recognise
that we were foolish disobedient, deceived and enslaved.
I've owned the Christian faith for myself since I was about 3 years old.
These descriptions of pre Christian life don't resonate for me
in the same way they would have for the Christians on Crete.
But this is actually my problem,
not the problem of the Christians on Crete.
But for the grace of God, I would be living in that description:
foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved.
That fact that the grace of God reached out and grab hold of me young
doesn't make it any less true.
After the our need of the gospel, Paul moves to the source of the gospel.
3:4 "But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared,

he saved us".

Note that.

The source of my salvation is nothing to do with me.

It is nothing that I have control over.

The source is the kindness and love of God.

After the source, Paul moves to the grounds for our salvation.

3:5 "He saved us not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy."

What provoked the kindness and love of God into action to save me?

Did he look at me and think,

"He's trying very hard,

he probably deserves a little bit of help,

I'll save him"?

No!

It's was not because of anything good I had done.

It was only because of his mercy.

His kindness and love were prodded into action by his mercy.

He looked at me and thought,

"If I don't save Tim he's lost.

And I like seeing lost sinners getting saved."

After the grounds of our salvation we move to the means.

It was his mercy that was the reason he decided to save us,

but when he saved us,

how did he go about it?

3:5-6 "He saved us through the washing of rebirth

and renewal by the Holy Spirit,

whom he poured out on us generously

through Jesus Christ our Saviour."

It's like in Acts 22, Paul is preaching to a crowd

and he describes his own conversion.

Ananias said to him,

"Now what are you waiting for?

Get up, be baptised and wash your sins away,

calling on Jesus' name."

We don't from that take it
that there is something magical about baptism.
Frankly it disturbs me
when people think they are going to be saved
just because they have been baptised.
Why is Ananias calling on Paul to get baptised?
Because Jesus has appeared to Paul,
in his mercy he has reached out to Paul.
And now Paul is ready to respond to God.
His response is to be baptised.
And that baptism is the sign of a life given to serve the Lord God.
No one should take false comfort from their baptism,
their kids' baptisms or their grandkids' baptisms.
What Paul is telling us is how God goes about saving people.
When people are genuinely saved,
God has them baptised
and that baptism is a sign that they've been born again inside.
That's what 'rebirth' means.
They've been born again.
And if someone is born again,
then God will renew them by the Holy Spirit.
That means he will change them from the inside out
to make them more like Jesus.
That's how God goes about saving people.
Baptism is part of it.
Because God has decided there should be a sign that the world can see
of what he is doing inside someone's heart.
But unless God because of his kindness and love
prompted by his mercy
reaches out to save someone
by making them born again
and renewing them by the Holy Spirit,
then baptising them is not going to do anything.
How does God save us?
By rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

What's the goal of our salvation?

3:7 "So that, having been justified by his grace,
we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life."

Only now do we get to eternal life.

Once we are born again.

Once the Holy Spirit has invaded our lives
and occupied us like a successful army occupying territory,
then we become heirs.

Heirs are those who inherit.

Our inheritance is the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God lasts forever.

We inherit eternal life.

Hope in the Bible is not something uncertain.

The hope of eternal life is something God has promised us in the future.

God always comes good on his promises.

So this is a sure and certain hope.

Too often today the gospel is presented
as if the goal is fixing up my life.

You name the problem.

Trust in Jesus and God will make your problem disappear.

That's not the gospel.

You Christian faith may address some of your problems.

But the goal of the gospel is eternal life.

Who knows?

Going to a counsellor may address some of your problems.

Working hard at school and choosing a positive group of friends
may address some of your problems.

These are not the gospel.

The goal of the gospel is the hope of eternal life.

And only the gospel offers that hope.

We've had the need, the source, the grounds, the means,
the goal of our salvation.

Now finally the evidence of our salvation.

If you've been renewed by the Holy Spirit,

that is going to result in some changes in your life.

Notice where good works fit in.

He saved us, not because of the righteous things we'd done.

But,

3:8 "I want you to stress these things,

so that those who have trusted in God

may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good."

Good works don't get us saved.

But if we are saved,

the evidence that it has happened will be the fruit in our lives.

Now clearly this was a big issue on Crete.

Remember that Cretans are always liars, evil brutes and lazy gluttons.

That's not something Paul made up,

that's their own poet Epimedes.

Life on Crete was crying out for the evidence of salvation.

Indeed this whole letter has been about encouraging Christian character.

Think about the qualifications for elders in chapter 1.

It's all about character.

Think about Paul's instructions for living in the home in chapter 2.

It's all about good character.

2:11-12 "For the grace of God has appeared

that offers salvation to all people.

It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions,

and to live self controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age."

You could take those verses as a summary of the letter.

And even though the goal of salvation is eternal life,

good character matters.

Why does it matter so much?

We will be made perfect in the next life.

Why struggle so much now?

2:10 Good character "makes the teaching about God our saviour

attractive."

It matters not just for now but for eternity.

People will have or not have eternal life because of our character.

That's a sobering thought.

What sort of character are we to have in the world?
Subject to the authorities, not slandering, peaceable, gentle.
Why should we treat them that way?
Because Jesus did.
Because we were once like they were.
Because we have been saved by a gospel that is all God's work -
God's kindness and love, God's mercy,
God making us born again, God renewing us by the Holy Spirit.
And the evidence that God has done that work is our good character.