

Transforming Power of Kindness

Titus 3:1-15

I. The Christian's relation to human society 1:1-3

A. Relation to government authorities

Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, (verse 1) .

1. Subject yourself to the legitimate authority of the government

Compare this to Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2:13-15. Paul (here) emphasizes that our submission is to be at all level of authority: from principalities to magistrates. Peter had a similar message to obey all level of authority in that he used the king, the governor and those sent by the governor. What they are telling us is that it should not matter if the person in authority is the President or the Dog-catcher, we should respect all legitimate authority of those in such positions. As Christians, we may do a better job of this with civil authority than we do with authority in the local church. Most members of our churches barely recognize the pastor's authority and certainly not the elders or the deacons as having any authority. They usually show little or no recognition (read that as respect) to Leaders of ministries or committees. Such rebelliousness and disrespect is understandable for non-Christians since they are rebels by their very nature. Christians have a new nature that is not subject to the demands of the world's way of doing things. So one might ask why is such an attitude of rebelliousness present in churches today? (That's a discussion for a different time.)

2. Beyond mere subjection, contribute positively to the general well-being

Paul's word are "be ready to every good work" or as the NIV renders it "to be ready to do whatever is good." In this verse, Paul encourages us to not only follow the letter of the law (to be obedient) but also the spirit of the law. If we go all the way back to the giving of the Law (as in the Decalogue) we find that with regard to relationship with others, the Law simply requires that we "do no evil." I can follow the letter of the law simply by not hurting you and I do not have to give any consideration to helping you. That is NOT what God intended as we see from the teaching of Jesus who summed up the essence of the "horizontal" (human interaction) part of the law as "love your neighbor as you love yourself." Unless we are plagued by some abnormal psychological problems we will intend to "do good" for ourselves. (Unfortunately, what we intend to be good does not always work out for our ultimate good. Example, drinking alcohol might give us temporary pleasure but it can harm us by leading to impaired capability or addictive compulsions.) Therefore, the spirit of the Law would be that we should also intend to do good for our neighbors or to contribute positively to the general well-being of our culture.

Peter also added this admonition in a somewhat different way in 1 Peter 2:16 where he tells us "Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God." This somewhat paradoxical statement that addresses being free and yet being a "bond slave" encourages us to realize that God is good and, therefore, his servants would (super)naturally do what is good.

B. Look at everyone (those in authority, the saved and the lost) with compassion

To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men. (verse 2)

1 Do not be malicious in your talk about other people

Not only are we to be obedient to those in authority and to do what we can for the common good; but also, we need to avoid saying things that would harm a person's reputation

(speak evil of no man). We sometimes think that those in public office (powers and principalities) are “fair game” for criticism and caustic remarks. We criticize those who are positioned higher on the socio-economic scale (magistrates) as being “snobs” and “high-falutin,” while those who are perceived to be lower on this socio-economic scale are said to be “lazy” and “good-for-nothing.” We talk about our supervisors at work, some families have broiled pastor for Sunday dinner, and mother-in-laws are always catching it. Some good advice can be found in the movie Bambi when the character Thumper is admonished “If you can’t say something nice don’t say nothing at all.”

2 Be careful how you come across to others

The way we interact and communicate with others is a learned or developed “behavior pattern.” In our fallen-nature world in which we operate, we are (as most everyone else) trying to exercise control of (or over) the various situations in which we find ourselves. We typically will gravitate to an interaction style that produces a level of control with which we are comfortable. Some interject foolish remarks into a conversation to attempt to gain control or attention. Others simply interrupt and change the subject so as to control the way things are going. Many will use sarcasm or direct criticism of others to gain an upper hand in interactions. Paul’s advice was to not be a “brawler.” That term conjures up visions of someone physically fighting. In our more civilized and genteel environments we are not likely to be involved in fisticuffs but in mental and emotion strife. We have tried to legitimize the striving for position and control by calling it “competitiveness.”

The Greek word that is translated as “no brawlers” is *amachos*, or “not macho.” In our culture, being competitive and being macho are viewed in a somewhat positive light. Some are even proud of being that way. It was probably viewed that way in the culture in which Titus was living and being a pastor (bishop) to the Cretans. People are not likely to change (read that repent) from bad behavior if it is viewed as an attribute.

The way to change the culture in which we live is not to adopt the methodology of the culture but to take a different approach.

3 Instead, seek to infiltrate a brutal society with redeeming qualities

We are not going to change our culture by a frontal assault on the problems that exist if the majority of the people view the root causes of the problems as virtues rather than vices. If a frontal approach does not work, then one alternative is to infiltrate the targeted area and create a change from within. One way people learn to do what is right is by having a good example to follow. We can be “salt and light” in our sphere of influence by being good examples of what true Christianity is all about. Paul focused on two related qualities (gentleness and meekness) that are contradictions to the competitive (be in control) macho attitude the world sometimes values.

Unfortunately, Christians do not have a good understanding of the good characteristic qualities we should be presenting to the world as good examples. Take the word “gentle” for example. Typically we think of synonyms such as “soft” or “mild” which brings up visions of bland and boring. A better translation in today’s English would communicate the idea of being forbearing or patient with others. One could think of this as the “granting of clemency” to those who have committed offenses. In a court room environment, the one who grants clemency is the one who is really in control in that setting. If control is the basic issue, then do it the right way.

When we hear the word “meek” most of us have a vision of “Casper Milktoast” We know that if people who come on like “Casper Milktoast” or some silly, limp-wristed wimp, nobody will ever pay any attention to anything they say. Jesus was described as “meek” but we don’t think of Him that way. Humility is sometimes used in place of meekness and understanding that quality

will help us understand the idea of meekness. Humility is not making ones self small when he is really great. Instead it is thinking little of ones self, because this is (in a sense) the right estimate for any human being, however great. Meekness goes beyond humility and is an attitude of mind and behavior (coming from humility) that allows a person to graciously receive whatever may come to him from others or from God. This quality is achievable when we realize that God is really in control and that He loves us supremely and whatever He allows to come to us is used to transform us into the image of His Son.

When dealing with others the patience and graciousness we exhibit not only set good examples, but we also are demonstrating an understanding that “those characteristics that offend us” are common to most people and to realize that “but for the grace of God” is where we would be.

C. Recognize the common root of sin

For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. (verse 3)

1 Our minds were without understanding – “foolish”

Many times people will do things that are harmful to themselves and to others, not because they are malicious or mean but simply because they do not have proper understanding of the cause and effect relationship of actions and reactions. This is a good reason for us to not speak ill of others, or to be disobedient to magistrates who make “foolish” rules. If we were without proper understanding that comes from knowing the Lord and having His word, then we, too, would be doing similar “foolish” things. In face, if we are honest with ourselves, we can think of many situation prior to our salvation that seem awfully foolish to us now.

2 We did not submit willingly to authority – disobedient or obstinate

We sometimes lose patience with people and shake our heads in disbelief at those who defy the law (or even common sense) that is for their benefit and, as a result, suffer terrible consequences. Yet, we used to be that way also – maybe not to the same degree or in the exact same area of defiance, but just as guilty of breaking the law as the more blatant offenders.

3 We rejected as false what was true and accepted the false as true – deceived

It is truly amazing that people (you and I included) will be gullible enough to believe cleverly designed stories or theories that seek to hide the truth. From the obvious false premises of evolution to the ridiculous idea that Jesus married and fathered children and on to arguments that the last week of the 70 weeks of years mentioned in Daniel did not immediately follow the 69th week, we have multitudes of people validating the claim that people will believe anything if it is presented by someone who purports himself to be an expert. It is not just those who are “lost” who are in the company of the “deceived and deluded,” many in the church believe things about God, about salvation, about the return of Christ, about whatever you can image that just are not based on truth.

4 We once sought fulfillment in worldly pleasure, not eternal joy

We live in a hedonistic culture and we have watched it get worse over the course of our life time. What we are seeing is more openness in hedonism and less cultural rebuke of such life styles. This is becoming a perceived virtue rather than a vice. Consequently, such seeking of finding meaningfulness in life in “grabbing all the gusto” and “pleasing ourselves” is ever increasing. We look for instant gratification and do not give a second thought to long term consequences – certainly not to eternal consequences. From Paul’s comments to Titus, we see that this false sense of priorities is not a new thing. Unfortunately, in our world today, this

description of what is happening is equally accurate for those who call themselves Christians as for those who are unbelievers.

5 All personal relationships were adversarial and antagonist

The law presumes an adversarial relationship between buyer and seller and between employer and employee. We have let such a presumption creep into parent-child relationship, husband-wife relationship, teacher-student, pastor-deacon, etc. We often lament that we live in a litigious society where people are apt to sue one another over the slightest perceived offense. Such a culture is a result of a lack of love for people. It stems from envy and covetousness. It leads to violation of all the interpersonal commandments. Those who are without Christ are stuck in this system and they really have little choice as to how they engage such a culture. Christians do have an alternative that “saves” us from such a lifestyle. Our lives should give testimony to the difference that Christ makes in the lives of those He saves.

Summary:

Paul pointedly reminds us that our mission field is the world. Our deeds and service should send a message “to all people” (v. 2) and, particularly, to the governed society around us (v. 1). We grieve over the declining moral standards of our society, and Christians have every right and responsibility to be politically active by exerting a godly influence on public policy, lawmaking, and elections. Still, our highest calling is not to force the culture to be like us externally, but it is to minister to those in our sphere of influence that they want to be like us (as we are like Christ) internally. Our opportunity for impact opens or closes in reaction to “how we treat people.” It is an awesome spiritual task to maintain high Christian standards, while also maintaining our high sense of duty to minister to the society around us. Remembering what we were before salvation will help us remain on task and stay sensitive to the needs of lost people (v. 3).

II The Christian’s rescue from the fallen condition

But after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (verses 4-7)

A. In contrast to our life of hate God intervened with kindness and love

1 Though consistent with his justice, the appearance of Christ was an expression of the infinite love and kindness of God

2 Appearing must refer to Christ’s appearing cf. 2 Timothy 1:10

B. His kindness operated to accomplish salvation for us

1 Notice that the appearance is particularly for salvation and attributes the saving activity to God—He saved us

2 To emphasize the aggressiveness of God and the unilateral nature of this action, Paul puts the negative, “not according to our righteousness”

3 Stated positively, salvation is according to his mercy

4 Its effects come to bear in experience only by the operation of the Holy Spirit

5 The Holy Spirit is received only by the completed work of Christ

6 Justification comes by grace

7 We receive the hope of eternal life promised in the eternal covenant. (Titus 1:2)

Summary:

In our devotion to “every good work,” it is essential for us to remember that only God can change lives. This is the message of verses four through seven. The only reason we Christians are different and can serve others on behalf of God is because “He saved us” (v. 5). A believer can take absolutely no credit for or pride in personal salvation and a changed life. God has done it all according to his mercy and through the sanctifying work of “the Holy Spirit” (vv. 5-6). We do not “serve to get saved,” but we are “saved to serve.”

III Affirm the edifying things, avoid that which is profitless 8-11

A These things concerning salvation Titus is to teach with confidence

This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men. (Verse 8)

1 His statement about salvation appears confessional 1 Tim 1:15; 3:1, 16; 2 Tim 2:11

2 Titus must not be brushed aside in his commission to teach these things

3 Good deeds are consistent with a belief in the God of mercy and salvation

B Matters of mere speculation cause unnecessary division 9

But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain. (Verse 9)

C People that insist on such dispute must be excluded

A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject; Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself. (Verses 10-11)

1 Two warnings should be sufficient to discern a man is teachable

2 His own resistance to truth excludes him

Summary:

Just as God expects “all people” to benefit (be blessed) from the ministry of Christians, He also expects all Christians to devote themselves to good works (v. 8). “Everyone” (every Christian) is charged with this responsibility. Again, our good deeds must bear the testimony of a “changed life.” To serve well, we must avoid foolish debates (v. 9). Any debates Christians participate in better be worthy because the world is watching. The church must learn how to deal with the issues that divide them without being “divisive” (v. 10). “Divisive” people usually have self-willed opinions above and beyond revealed truth. They are a law unto themselves with no biblical foundation for their arguments. If we intend to effectively minister to nonbelievers, we must show a nonjudgmental and redemptive spirit when differing about the nonessentials. Those who seriously desire to serve God may even have to break with divisive, professing Christians (v. 10).

IV The Christian’s relations to the larger church 12-15

A Titus should see that Christians displaced for the cause of Christ are cared for

B Titus should visit Paul at Nicopolis 12

C The church in Crete should be ready to help meet these needs 14

D Love in Christ creates bonds of genuine concern 15

Summary:

We will never serve the world well if we have not learned to serve one another within the church. Devotion to “good works” enables us to be even more fruitful and productive (v.14). As we serve, we aid the fruitfulness of others and fruitfulness in ourselves (v. 14). You could say, “Devotion produces more devotion.” The story of Paul’s life cannot be written without listing the names of those who he served, who served him, and who served with him. Paul served these Christian friends with such a passion and devotion. He likewise wanted the Church at Crete to “make every effort” (v.12), “diligently help,” (v.13), and, once again, “learn to devote themselves” (v. 14). You can be sure you are moving toward maturity when your Christian life becomes more about others than self.