



Titus 3 Living Together in Peace

Two weeks ago Madeleine and I took off with the kids for a family reunion in Colorado – a week in the mountains with her extended family. It was beautiful. There were absolutely stunning views, amazing wildlife: we saw deer, the kids caught snakes and baby squirrels, my daughter got to pet a falcon, Chris and I were chased by a bear – no joke, true story. But as most of you know, anytime you get the extended family together you have the potential for great memories, but you also have the potential for great conflict among all those kids, cousins, and even adults.

Even on vacation in the middle of God's glorious creation or at some resort or theme park that's supposed to be "the happiest place on earth," you've still got kids crying and adults disagreeing and people getting bitter and frustrated and awkward conversations and moments.

Things aren't suddenly perfect just because you took the time to get away and while it's all melting down there's something in each of us that says, "This isn't how it's supposed to be."

Well, you're right. This isn't how it's supposed to be. It's a reminder that we live in a broken world among broken people and what we long for, what we truly long for, will only be found in Heaven where all our good desires will be fulfilled and all our bad desires will be taken away. We will live in peace with God and peace with other people, we won't struggle with addiction, depression, or anger, and our bodies will be completely healed and restored to God's original plan. All of our questions will be answered and we will find durable, everlasting peace.

Until then though, we are told to seek as much of that here and now, as we possibly can. As much as it depends on us, we are told to live at peace with people around us. And as we will see this morning in the third chapter of Titus, that means attempting to live peaceably with people both inside and outside the church, avoiding unnecessary conflict wherever possible and resting in the knowledge of what God has done for us and what lies ahead.

So read with me in Titus 3, beginning in verse one as Paul gives instruction to Titus the pastor. He says:

Titus 3:1 Remind them (that's the church) to be subject to rulers and authorities (that's civil authorities – those outside the church), to obey, to be ready for every good work, 2 to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men.

Now, to be honest, pastors aren't always the greatest example of this, though they should be. Sometimes you hear pastors make political jokes or put down a particular politician or

leader. They should not do that. The pastor should be reminding the congregation, through his own example and admonition, “to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey.” And notice: there’s no exception clause here, “unless they happen to be of a different political party.” No.

Friends, the Bible is very clear: Christians are to be good citizens. We’re told to obey the laws of the land. Peter makes that clear in:

1 Peter 2:13 Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, 14 or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and *for the* praise of those who do good. 15 For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men— 16 as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. 17 Honor all *people*. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

We’re told to pray for leaders. Paul writes to Timothy

1 Tim 2:1 Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. 3 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

We’re told that civil authority actually comes from God:

Romans 13:1 Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. 4 For he is God’s minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to *execute* wrath on him who practices evil. 5 Therefore *you* must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience’ sake.

And here’s the thing: don’t just assume that this is all quaint instruction for an earlier day and simpler times. Remember this was written to Christians living in the Roman Empire. This was written at a time when our religion was not socially, culturally, or even legally acceptable. This was the time of “Caesars, occupational armies, and coliseums.”¹ Polybius, a famous ancient Greek historian, tells us that the people on the island of Crete, the people

¹ R. Kent Hughes and Brian Chapell, *1&2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit*, 355.

Titus was sent to as a pastor were, “constantly involved in insurrections, murders and [self-destructive] wars.”²

So here’s the point: if that was the world of the first people to read and receive this instruction, and it applied to them, then it also applies to us today; even when it’s not easy to obey, even when you don’t personally like the leader and their politics or policies.

If you remember, we were in the book of Ephesians before the book of Titus, and there, as well as here, we saw this command to submit, to be subject to someone else. We don’t like that very much. We want everyone to be equal. We want everyone’s opinion to be as valuable as the next person. We want to collaborate and we want everyone to be involved. But God says there are hierarchies. There *is* positional authority and it comes from Him.

Now, that doesn’t mean leaders or authorities are inherently better people – we’re all the same at the level of the soul, but some people are entrusted with positions of leadership, positions of influence, positions of responsibility. And again, that’s based on a structure created BY GOD. So it’s not just man’s ideas, it’s not just sociological or political theory. It’s not what’s culturally relevant.

The Bible says God created the family and gave structure to it. He creates nations and gives power to them. And He has created the Church and gives power to it. God establishes who is the head of the family, who is the head of the church, and even who is the head of a nation. Now again, to be clear, that doesn’t mean they’re better human beings than the people they lead, it doesn’t even mean that they’re always good human beings. But God appoints a hierarchy, and in almost all circumstances, He wants that hierarchy to be respected and accepted.

Titus 3:1 Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, 2 to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men.

So, no matter who is in control, no matter who is the head of our nation, or even our school, or our department, or our team, we should, as far as it is possible be subject to them, and be ready for every good work.

Now, that’s important, because this is telling us, don’t just avoid the negative – that’s not enough. Do the positive. Be an influence for good. The Bible is full of examples of people who did good works at every level of society and station of life. From doing good for your family and neighbors and community to the examples of men like Joseph, Daniel, and Mordecai who rose to the highest ranks of office – men who were the equivalent of cabinet members in their governments and used their position to do good.

² Polybius, quoted in Barclay, *The Letters of Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*.

And yet each of them served a foreign government. Each of these men were Jews serving a non-Jewish government. In fact, in each case, they wound up in the nation they were serving under less-than-desirable circumstances.

Brothers and sisters, if it was possible for them, if it's commanded by the Scriptures, then it is possible for you, to guard your tongue, speak evil of no one, and seek to do good.

But, you ask, what if the leader isn't noble or admirable or good?

It's still no excuse; they're just an unsaved person acting like an unsaved person. What do you expect? And even if their conduct is miserable, God isn't going to simply let you off the hook and say, "OK, well, in this situation, never mind." Paul is about to make the point that God came to us when there was nothing good about us, and He showed us favor, offered us forgiveness and saved our souls. He writes:

Titus 3:3 For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.

In other words, foolish, self-centered, ugly, unprofessional behavior is no reason to write off your responsibility to be submissive and to guard your mouth from slander and jabs and jokes. Remember, without Christ you're no superstar yourself. But...

4 But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, 5 not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

We were a mess when God found us. Or, if He got ahold of you early in life and has kept hold of you all these years, you know what a mess you would be without Him. And God doesn't save us (vs 5) because of "works of righteousness which we have done" because we had our act together like we wish our President, or Vice Secretary, or Assistant Undersecretary, or Congressman, or Senator, or Dean, or Principal, or Commander or Captain, or boss would. No, God saved us "according to His mercy." The same mercy He's asking you to show to your leaders.

And noticed what happened when God's mercy hits our life: we are washed and renewed and it all happens abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior.

Friends, this is the gospel. This is the good news. This is what the Christian life is all about. This is what we believe. We believe that without Christ we are dirty. We are broken. We are offensive to God. By nature we tend to live a life that does not put God at the center. We tend to live a life that does not make a priority out of worship. Without God in our lives, we tend to be self-focused, self-determined, self-interested. And all the while He's saying

that the greatest commandment is to love Him, to put Him at the center of our lives, to see the world the way He does, to honor Him and prefer His ways, and He's telling us to love others. Not to bash them with either our tongues or our fists, but to sacrifice for them, to prefer them, to esteem them.

The Bible says that when we choose to do things our way instead of God's way, or even when we try to do good things but they're not good enough, that's sin. God's standard is absolute holy perfection. He doesn't grade on a curve. It's a hard, rigid, flat line and you either make the cut or you don't. And since none of us is perfect, all the time, everyday of our entire lives, we all fall short. The Bible calls that sin and says we're all guilty of it.

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

And sin is like muddy feet on a white carpet – there's no where you can go, nothing you can do that's going to make it better. When we sin we break something that we cannot fix on our own.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death,

The death spoken of here is separation from God, eternal punishment in a place the Bible calls hell. We all know we've done wrong, every human alive is willing to admit they've done bad things at times or they haven't done all the good they wish they had. No one struggles to accept that, but we don't like to accept the consequences for our failures. We think we should be able to write some things off. And God says, "No. There's no way you can write things off. But, I'll write them off for you, by allowing My Son, Jesus Christ, to pay the penalty for your imperfections."

That's what happened on the cross. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, took your place, paid your debt, accepted the penalty you deserve for all your shortcomings, and offered you His perfection in exchange. If you will accept it.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Or as Paul is telling Titus to tell the people of Crete:

according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

So here's what this means: if you are not a Christian today, you could be one. God, according to His mercy, is offering to save you. He's offering to wash you, to regenerate you – you know what it means to generate – it's to make something. God is offering to re-generate you, to make you new. And let me ask a question: when God Himself washes you,

how clean do you think you will be? Do you really understand the freedom and forgiveness that come with this?

And then, day-by-day, as you live out the rest of your time here on this earth, as a Christian, He offers to re-new you through His Holy Spirit. If you're a Christian already, this is something you really need to zoom in on. God is promising to re-new you through the Holy Spirit, perpetually, continually, daily.

Do you believe that? Are you living that way? Are you accepting this by faith? Do you begin each day asking God for this renewal, for baptism in the Holy Spirit, for filling of the Holy Spirit, whatever terminology you use, do you regularly, consistently, turn to God and acknowledge and request this?

It's my regular pattern, each morning, before my feet hit the floor to turn to God and say, "Father, I need the power and guidance of your Holy Spirit today, I need to know and experience You in my life. And so, before I do anything else, right here, right now, I'm asking for Your presence to be dominant in my life. I'm inviting you to take the lead. I'm declaring my need for renewal." And then I get up, turn on the coffee maker, and open His Word.

Christian, we face a lot of challenges in this city. Life is hard. There are a lot of things that come at you and I can't promise that life is ever going to get any easier. I don't know exactly where we're all headed or how the economy or world politics are going to play out. I don't know whether the things you're scared of or hoping in are going to come to pass. But I do know this – you don't have to face it all alone. If you are in Christ, if He has washed you clean and regenerated you, He is also living within you and renewing you day by day through the Holy Spirit.

Do you know that? Do you depend on that? Is that your hope?

How does this truth affect your daily life? Maybe you need to talk with God, maybe you need to pray and ask – "God, would you please renew me in a way I can understand and know? Father, I feel empty, I feel dry, I feel insufficient. I need to be renewed by You. I believe Your Word is true, so I believe this can and does happen, but I'm saying right now, I need this today. Renew me Lord. Pour out Your Spirit in my life and bring refreshing."

Christian, put yourself in that place of dependence. Live life connected to God. All day, every day, things are going to try to disconnect you. But live by this truth: if you are a Christian, or if you become one today, God promises to justify you – that is to declare you innocent, holy, entirely pure spiritually, and to do it all by grace – that means you don't earn it, you don't deserve it, it's His gift to you.

He promises to be the source of power, equipping, and enabling for you every single day, sufficient for you to face every single issue that arises. And after this life is done, you have the hope of eternal life with Him, when everything is right, everything is the way you know it really ought to be.

All of that is offered to you.

Titus 3:8 This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.

As your pastor I am supposed to affirm these things constantly. Why? Don't you think that's interesting? Why should I have to keep saying the same things, over and over? It's because although God never changes our lives and circumstances and daily headlines do. And we need to remember that no matter what has just happened in our lives, God is still God. Nothing has changed in Heaven. The God who brought us through everything in the past will continue to bring us through what we're facing today. And when something else comes up tomorrow, He'll be there too.

Our lives change, but He never does. So have confidence in your God. Trust in Him. Be conformed to Him and no matter what you face, or who you work for, no matter who is elected or appointed or promoted, keep on doing good works.

And notice the connection here – notice the flow. God promises to keep renewing you, through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, *and* He says you're supposed to maintain good works. He keeps filling and You keep going. That's the way it's supposed to work. His mercies, the Bible says, are new every morning.

9 But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless. **10** Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, **11** knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.

Here's where we're called to live at peace with people in the church. We're told, don't take up every argument or conversation someone wants to have. There are things you should just let go. And if the person won't let it go, and they want to make a big deal out of their pet issue, you might need to send them along to someplace else. Major on the majors and don't get caught up in unprofitable debates and conversations.

And now Paul closes with a few admin details:

12 When I send Artemas to you, or Tychicus, be diligent to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. **13** Send Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their journey with haste, that they may lack nothing. **14** And let our *people* also learn to maintain good works, to *meet* urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful.

That's the third time in this short chapter that we're told Christians should be doing good works – in other words, serving God in a way that is helpful to other people. That might be through your professional work or through giving financial or material gifts – but you see a need and you meet it. And in the process you live a fruitful instead of a selfish life. Oh, and

chances are, whatever you gave, will often be replaced for you as God renews you day by day. No man becomes truly impoverished by giving to the Lord.

But now pay attention to how this all ends, because this is important:

Titus 3:15 All who *are* with me greet you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace *be* with you all. Amen.

After all this talk about doing good works, after all the admonition regarding how we are supposed to behave, it's possible you could walk out of here thinking about the weight that is on you and what you need to do to straighten up and fix things and yet, the final word isn't "now get going and make it happen." The final word is Grace. **Grace be with you all. Amen.**

Friends, these two truths exist simultaneously – God has great things for you, great expectations of you, great things that He wants to see happen in your life and yet, He also knows you're entirely incapable of doing them all by yourself. There's no way you're going to live the life He has for you without entering into it by grace, living out each day by grace, and looking forward to His eternal grace.

But it's there – and it's boundless, it's unending, there's a greater supply than you could ever consume of grace, grace, God's grace, Grace that will pardon and cleanse within.

So what do you need to do now? You need to watch your mouth. Perhaps you need to take a minute and ask God to forgive you for things you've said about leaders, jokes you've told, things you've thought about leaders in your home, your workplace, and government. Maybe you need to consider shutting off the things that get you so fired up and tempt you to speak or think that way.

And maybe you need to ask for forgiveness not only of that sin, but of all your sins. Maybe you need to receive Christ today and become a Christian. If so, there's nothing else you need to do but confess your sins to God and receive Him as your savior – there are no magic words or formulas, you can do it right now in your seat or you can see one of the pastors after the service but you really can be regenerated and washed clean by the holy hand of God this morning.

I think for most of us, we need to take a minute and talk with God about this whole renewal thing. We see what we're facing in life, what's coming up this week or this Fall, or even later on today. And we need to ask God to give us His strength, so that we might do well, be pleasing to Him and helpful to others; that we might maintain, or perhaps even begin to perform good works by the power of His Holy Spirit in us.

And all of us, every man, woman and child in the room or listening in, we need to see, appreciate and marvel at God's abundant and generous grace that makes it all possible.

Let's pray.