

## **Public Behavior Challenge**

### **Titus 3:1-11**

This is the closing sermon on our series on Titus – a series about transformation in our lives – transformation that makes an impact on the people around us. We live in a world of growing resistance to God and Christianity, how are we supposed to make an impact for Christ? Preaching louder? Posting more boldly? Shouting about the need for people to repent and turn to Jesus? Probably not. Based on what we've seen in Titus, I don't think that's what Paul would say. But you know what I do think he'd say? Transformation. Godliness. Becoming the kind of people Christ wants us to be. People who are winsome and noticeably different than the rest of society. Adorn the gospel so you can open doors to sharing the gospel.

Throughout our study of Titus we've seen how Paul was calling them to be different – that their faith and knowledge of the truth must be in accord with godliness in their lives (sermon 1). That their spiritual leaders should be godly husbands and fathers who demonstrate kindness, goodness and self-control (sermons 2 & 3). That the false teachers who were promoting the idea that they could live however they wanted to, were wrong, and that their behavior must be different than the people around them because that kind of behavior was the outflow of God's grace in salvation – and part of why Jesus gave himself for them. Godliness and transformation – it's not only important, it's necessary and must happen in our lives (sermons 4 & 5).

I hope this series has been helpful for you. I hope it's stirred you up toward love and good deeds. And now we have one more chapter and one sermon left. Titus chapter 3 is a perfect way for us to end this series because it summarizes everything we've been talking about. But it's also a chapter that's going to be very challenging for many of us because it feels like we should do the opposite of what it's telling us to do. It has to do with our behavior in public – the way we treat people in our society and the way that we act towards our governing authorities, especially when we disagree with them.

We live in troubling times for Christianity in America. From a Christian perspective, we're headed the wrong direction. Our nation is quickly turning away from God, the Bible, and biblical morality and it appears that many of our governing leaders are leading the way. We can see the likelihood of growing persecution. We can see that we could lose some of our freedoms and our

preferred way of life. And things could get really bad in our country if our leaders don't turn things around. What are we supposed to do in our situation?

A lot of the things I've seen Christians doing do not line up with what we're going to see in Titus today. I think we want something good for our nation and our children and grandchildren and I think we are afraid that's not going to happen with the way things are currently going, but I think we've allowed fear and anger to cause us to do things that Jesus would not want us to do in a desperate attempt to turn things around. What many Christians have been doing is not going to work but will lead to a greater sense of hopelessness and accomplish the opposite of what we want it to – closed doors and greater opposition.

But there is a divine alternative – a divine direction that brings hope and shows us the way we should go, if we will trust God and stop trying to do it our way. I honestly don't know that it will turn things around for our earthly nation, but I do believe it will make a difference for our heavenly one – the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom that we belong to as of first importance. And that's what we're going to look at today in Titus chapter 3.

Before we read it, I want us to think about what things were like on the island of Crete. We think things are getting bad here... let me describe a little bit of what the Christians in Crete were dealing with. We already know from previous sermons that Crete was a rough society. People were evil and nasty. There were no filters and seemingly very little holding back from terrible behavior. This was a pre-Christian society. They weren't coming from a history of biblical morality that helped hold things in check like we have in America, they had no biblical influence or morality. It was a pagan society.

And their governing authorities were no different. They were evil, just like everyone else. And I truly believe the people would have hated them. They were put in place by the Roman Empire – an empire that had forcefully taken over their island many years earlier. The people who were left were the descendants of pirates and mercenaries who fought against them and died. So theirs was a heritage of resistance and rebellion to rule. And I believe that's the way they treated their rulers.

But now some of those Cretans had become Christians. What should they act like in such a wicked society? How should they act toward people who were evil? How

should they act toward governing authorities they disagreed with? Paul tells Titus what they should do.

Titus 3:1-2

*Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, <sup>2</sup> to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.*

Just think about how difficult and different that would be, both then and now... There's really no need for me to interpret anything here. It's very straightforward. I guess I can throw in the caveat of "unless they command you to sin" for the first part, but unless their rulers were commanding them to bow to an idol or visit a temple prostitute, or do something to directly violate God's moral law, this was the way that new Cretan believers were to act when it came to their behavior in public. And this would have been drastically different than the way people normally acted. I think this would have been a really hard change for these new believers to make, especially in regard to their rulers and authorities that they had hated for so long.

But Paul doesn't just give them these commands, he also gives them a reason. The first part is in verse 3...

Titus 3:3

*<sup>3</sup> For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.*

So he reminds them what they were like – they were like everyone else. "Don't forget. You used to be foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing your days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. You used to be just like them. But then something happened, and this is why you need to be different..." Paul continues...

Read Titus 3:4-7.

*But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, <sup>5</sup> 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, <sup>6</sup> whom*

*he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,<sup>7</sup> so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*

“Don’t forget what God has done for you! I know you hate what’s going on in your society and I know your rulers are corrupt and wicked, but you used to be just like them and look what God has done for you.”

Even when the Cretan believers were lost in wickedness and sin, Paul points out God showered them with goodness and loving kindness and he saved them. Not because of anything good they did – he saved them because of his own mercy. He saved them by the washing of regeneration – that cold, dead, heart of sin and wickedness that led them to all those wicked behaviors was washed away and replaced with a new heart alive to God. He saved them by the renewal of the Holy Spirit – who was poured on them by Christ to dwell in their hearts and lead them to repentance. And he did all that – he justified them, declaring them to be righteous and forgiven – so that they would become heirs of eternal life.

“Don’t forget!” They were wicked and rebellious, but God had mercy and did all of this for them. And for that reason, they were to treat the wicked and rebellious people and governing authorities in their society with respect, goodness, gentleness, and courtesy. “Treat them that way because that’s how God treated you when you were lost in your wickedness and sin.”

And Paul continues...

Titus 3:8-11

*<sup>8</sup> The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people. <sup>9</sup> But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. <sup>10</sup> As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, <sup>11</sup> knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.*

Cretan believers were to be devoted to good works in their sinful society because that would be profitable for the people around them. It would make an impact for Christ. It would demonstrate the gospel. They were to avoid all the controversies and arguments and quarrels that everyone was involved in because those were

completely worthless. And those who refused, should be warned, and if they continued to fight and argue and stir up division just like everyone else in their society, they should be removed. They are warped, sinful, and self-condemned. The Spirit of God is not in them.

The public conduct of the new Christians was a matter of utmost importance to Paul because of the influence it would have for Christ, his kingdom, and the gospel on their society. The way they treated their rulers and authorities and the rest of the wicked people around them was highly important. In his commentary on Titus, Donald Guthrie says, *“Here the apostle evidently fears that the turbulent Cretans might too readily implicate the church in political agitation which could only bring the gospel under suspicion.”*

Paul did not want that to happen. He knew their tendencies would be to behave like they used to, but he wanted them to do the opposite, so they would “adorn the doctrine of God our Savior” like he wrote in chapter 2. He shares this same desire when writing to Timothy in 1 Timothy 2:1-4: *“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, <sup>2</sup> for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. <sup>3</sup> This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, <sup>4</sup> who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”*

Christian resistance and quarreling destroys the work of the kingdom. But when Christians pray for their leaders and their communities and live peaceful and quiet lives, dignified in every way, it opens the door for the gospel and the truth to shine forth. That’s what pleases God our Savior. The kingdom of heaven must come first.

Peter wrote about this in 1 Peter 2:13-17: *“Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, <sup>14</sup> or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. <sup>15</sup> For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. <sup>16</sup> Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. <sup>17</sup> Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.”* Public behavior is extremely important for demonstrating the truth about the gospel and our Savior.

So, going back to Titus 3, Paul opposed resistant, rebellious, and quarrelsome behavior and commanded them to do good works instead – even under godless governing leaders. That’s the way God treated them and that’s how they were to demonstrate the gospel to the onlooking world.

I want us to think about some of the turmoil we’ve been through in the past few years – mask mandates, stay at home orders, uncontrolled rioting 50 miles away, a controversial election... Our rulers and authorities made decisions that many of us strongly disagreed with. How well did your public behavior reflect what we just studied in Titus 3?

What about right now? There’s heated public division about the direction our country should be going. Decisions are being made that seem so foolish and godless and like some of our leaders are bent on destroying America. There’s fear, anger, and all kinds of emotions and opinions. How well does your public behavior reflect Titus 3 right now? When it comes to people in our society who are living wicked and disobedient lives, how are you acting toward them? Does it look like what we just read?

We’re coming up on another election year. An election that many will say is our last chance to turn things around. What will your behavior look like? What will your social media posts look like? Will it represent Christ, or will it fit in with the rest of society?

I think we need to grapple with these questions because when I look what the new believers were facing on Crete, I really don’t see a reason why Titus 3 shouldn’t apply to us in our situation. We’ve been called to be different, even when evil things are happening in our society that we disagree with. Now, in our nation, our government has given us the rights to free speech, the rights to disagree publicly, the rights to peaceful protest... I don’t know if the Cretan believers had those rights, but we do, and that’s a privilege. But along with that privilege comes the responsibility of how we exercise those rights. People should see a difference in how we speak, how we disagree, and how we protest.

We shouldn’t agree with evil or harmful decisions or laws. We shouldn’t be silent about evil practices or injustice or crimes against humanity, we shouldn’t conform to wickedness or insanity. But we do have to be careful that our responses to people and to governing authorities aren’t exactly the same as the unbelievers

who happen to agree with us. As important as our citizenship is on earth, our citizenship in heaven must come first. *We should not be doing things that destroy the work of Christ's kingdom in a desperate attempt to preserve our earthly one.* We are not to overcome evil with evil, we are to overcome evil with good.

Christians should be different. Our attitudes should be different, our public comments should be different. Slander, gossip, hatred, crass language, resistance, rebellion, stirring up division should not be linked with the people who belong to a God who has shown us mercy, forgiveness, loving kindness and salvation even when we were in rebellion against him.

People should see that even when we disagree with our rulers and authorities and the direction of our society, we are submissive, obedient, ready for every good work, gentle, and courteous to all people. We should be respectful citizens. We should pray for our leaders and put our trust in God. We aren't controlled by anger and fear like everyone else. We have a God who we believe is in control, even when bad things are going on. By this, people will know that we are sons and daughters of our Father in heaven. They will see Christ in us.

I am sorrowful as I watch the foolishness and demise of various governing institutions and the consequences it's having on our children, families, economy, and nation. It would be easy to turn the corner and give in to fear and anger. But if I do, I turn into a person who doesn't represent Christ anymore even though I bear his name. So I promote a false version of Christ and Christianity that will lead people to believe that's what he's really like. In my attempts to save the nation I ruin his reputation, I ruin my witness, I create huge barriers to the gospel for unbelievers, and I give a reason for there to be persecution for me and my children.

We have been called to be different so that by the way we live our lives people will see Christ in us and we can make an impact for him – different in our homes, different in our workplaces, different in our schools, and different in our community. We need to loosen our grip on our worldly home as we take a firmer grip on our heavenly one. That's how we make an Impact through Transformation... I hope this book and this series has helped you see the importance of these things and now may God give us the grace we need to walk in obedience to him.