

Titus 3:1-11

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[0 : 00] Well, the conditions for Christians are challenging. Immorality is not just tolerated, but it's celebrated at all levels of society.

Idolatry in many forms is widespread. Religious pluralism is the status quo. The exclusive claims of Christians are hated.

There are wars and unrest in the Middle East and the lands that we read of in the Bible. The leader of the world's greatest military power is an unpredictable narcissist who craves popularity with the masses and whose personal morality is far from exemplary.

Meanwhile, the Britons have risen up recently to declare that they want to rule themselves. That they don't want to be part of some great united Europe.

However, despite all this, the church is growing in places where the gospel hasn't been heard before. And many first generation Christians are having to work out what it means to live as Christians in an at times hostile world.

[1 : 19] But I'm not talking about life for Christians in the 21st century. But rather for those in the mid-first century. Living in the Roman Empire under Nero.

Because that is the context in which today's passage was written. In many ways for us things are similar. I intentionally made that introduction ambiguous.

And yet there are so many things that are so different. Whereas our government is essentially benign. If not always wise. Theirs was ruled by a powerful dictator.

Backed up by a powerful army. Whereas we can vote our government out every few years if we don't like them. Their dissension was likely to involve a public, painful and humiliating death.

Whereas the worst persecution we are likely to experience is essentially psychological. Real though that may be. For them, again, it might well involve a painful death.

[2 : 34] And it's into those circumstances that Paul writes his instructions for Titus to teach the Christians in Crete how to respond. And his instructions are possibly quite surprising.

There may be not what we would have written if we were thinking, How should you live in that situation? So let's read the passage together.

And see what he has to say through Titus. To the Cretans. And indirectly to us here. Today in 21st century Edinburgh. Titus chapter 3.

And starting at verse 1. Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities. To be obedient. To be ready for every good work.

To speak evil of no one. To avoid quarrelling. To be gentle. And to show perfect courtesy towards all people.

[3 : 39] 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. But. When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour 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 Saviour. So that being justified by his grace. We might become heirs.

According to the hope of eternal life. 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.

[4 : 42] These things are excellent. And profitable for all people. But avoid foolish controversies. Genealogies. Dissensions. And quarrels about the law.

For they are unprofitable. And worthless. As for a person who stirs up division. After warning him once. And then twice. Have nothing more to do with him.

Knowing that such a person is warped. And is sinful. He is self-condemned. Quite challenging words there. For those of you who like such things.

I have four main headings. For those who don't care about such things. Ignore them. Firstly. Challenging circumstances. Secondly.

Radical responses. Thirdly. Magnificent motivation. And finally. Divisive distractions. So.

[5 : 42] Having already covered. The first point. The challenging circumstances. Let's move straight on. To see. The radical responses. That Paul instructs.

Let's read again. That first couple of verses. Remind them. To be submissive. To rulers. And authorities. 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. Towards all people. In the circumstances.

They live in. He tells them. To essentially. Do two things. Submit. And do good. And it was important. For us to remind ourselves.

At the beginning. The context. This was written in. This is not written. To people. Living. Under a good. Righteous. Christian. Government. And yet.

[6 : 38] Paul doesn't tell them. To resist. He doesn't tell them. To subvert. To protest. But rather. He tells them. To submit. To obey. And to get on.

With doing good. Paul expands. On this idea. In a. Much fuller passage. In Romans 13. Where he says. There is no authority.

Except from God. And those that exist. Have been instituted. By God. Therefore. Whoever resists. The authorities. Resists. What God has appointed.

And those who resist. Will incur judgment. It seems. That there was. Rising rebellion. Among the Jews.

At the time. Who were seeking. To free themselves. From the shackles. Of the Roman Empire. And it's probable. That this movement. Was being encouraged. By some of the. Teachers.

[7 : 34] Within the church. And yet. Paul teaches them. To act. Completely differently. But this isn't. Just a one-off passage.

We see there have been. A similar situation. Before. Most of us know. The well-known verses. In Jeremiah 29. Where God declares.

That he knows. The plans he has for us. And yet. The context. That they were written in. They were written. To the Jews. In exile.

In pagan Babylon. And there have been. False prophets. Telling them. That it's okay. They'll be going home soon. Everything's fine.

But God instead. Delivers the message. That no. They'll be there. For a long time. A lifetime. Very few. Of those. Who.

[8 : 29] Were taken there. Will ever see Israel again. And yet. What they're told. To do there.

Is. Build houses. And live in them. Plant gardens. And eat their produce. Take wives. And have sons and daughters. Take wives for your sons.

And give your daughters. In marriage. That they may be. Your sons and daughters. Multiply there. And do not decrease. But. Seek the welfare. Of the city.

Where I have sent you. Into exile. And pray to the Lord. On its behalf. For in its welfare. You will find your welfare. They're not just to grin and bear it.

Instead. They're to actively seek. The welfare. Of Babylon. The enemy. The pagan empire. That has sacked Jerusalem. And destroyed its temple.

[9 : 29] But of course. Our prime example. Of how to live under oppression. Must be Jesus himself. In particular. How he acted.

In the time. Around his arrest. And when he was before Pilate. We were reminded recently. In our small group. Of the verses. In Isaiah 53.

That. Under oppression. He didn't resist. He didn't protest. He went. Quietly. But yet.

At the same time. He so clearly. Wasn't a doormat. It was very clear. Even in his humiliation. Who was in control.

Because he rebukes his disciples. When they try to. Fight. And prevent his arrest. When he says. Do you think I cannot call in. To my father.

[10:28] And he will at once. Put at my disposal. More than 12. Legions of angels. Or to Pilate. He says. My kingdom. Is not of this world.

If it were. My servants. Would fight. To prevent my arrest. You see. The first reason. They are not to fight. Is because God. Has everything under control.

He has all the power. That he needs. And he knows. What he's doing. And the second. Is because his kingdom. Is not an earthly kingdom. And as such.

It cannot be defeated. Nor can it be victorious. By earthly means. As Paul will later teach the Ephesians. We wrestle not against flesh and blood.

Our battle is spiritual. The weapons we must use. Are also spiritual. And as he would go on to remind Pilate. Pilate. Or any other.

[11:25] Earthly ruler. Has no power. Unless it's given to him. From above. God is. Still on the throne. But.

Like most New Testament. Practical teaching. It isn't quite. That simple. Because there are always. Exceptions. There are always times.

When one instruction. Will trump another. Because in fact. We see there's quite. History. Of civil disobedience. In the Bible. First case.

We probably read of. Is the Hebrew midwives. In Egypt. Back in Exodus chapter one. Where. Pharaoh has commanded.

That they kill. Any. Baby boys. Born to the Hebrews. But it says. The midwives.

[12:23] However. Feared God. And did not do. What the king of Egypt. Had told him to do. They let the boys live. Then the king of Egypt. Summoned the midwives.

And asked him. Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live? The midwives. Answered Pharaoh. Hebrew women. Are not like Egyptian women.

They are vigorous. And give birth. Before the midwives arrive. So God. Was kind to the midwives. And the people increased. And became even more numerous.

And because the midwives. Feared God. He gave them families. Of their own. So we read here. That. The midwives.

Disobeyed Pharaoh. Because. They feared God. More than that. They lied to Pharaoh. About what was going on. And rather than.

[13:19] Being condemned by God. They're praised. And rewarded by God. Both by making. The people. Even more numerous. And by giving.

The midwives. Themselves. Families of their own. Another key example. We get. Is Daniel. He was one of those.

Israelites. That was taken. Into exile. Daniel. An old children's song. Says. Dare to be a Daniel. Dare to stand alone. And we think.

Of those famous. Famous situations. Where Daniel. Did. Indeed. Stand alone. Particularly. When he refused. To stop praying. Was thrown.

Into the den of lions. And how God. Miraculously. Rescued him. From there. But before. We start. Taking Daniel. As a role model. For how.

[14:14] To stand up. Against oppressive. Authorities. And he is that. We need to look. At the rest. Of Daniel's life. As a godly.

Young Jew. He and his friends. Were taken. Into Nebuchadnezzar's. Palace. To be educated. And trained. In the language. And literature. Of the Babylonians.

And rather. Than refusing. To learn. This. Pagan. Teaching. Instead. God.

Gave them. Knowledge. And understanding. So that. When tested. They were found. To be ten times. Better. Than all the magicians. And enchanters. In the whole. Kingdom.

In fact. He did so well. That a few chapters. Later. We find him. As chief. Of the magicians. Sure. A strange job. For a good.

[15:08] Jewish man. And later. Under Darius. He has become. A much respected. Administrator. That Darius. Planned to put.

Over. The whole. Kingdom. And what's interesting. Here is that Daniel's. Not just grudgingly. Doing the minimum. He can get away with. To escape.

Nebuchadnezzar's wrath. Instead. He's actively advancing. He's getting involved. In the running. Of this great. Powerful. Pagan empire.

Doing the best. He can. To seek. The welfare. Of the city. Into which. He's been sent. And it's against. This background. That he.

On a few occasions. Draws a line. In the sand. And says. No further. And I think. We can see here. Essentially.

[16:04] Where the boundary lies. We're told. To submit. And to obey. The authorities. That God has put in place. Right up. To the point. Where obedience.

To them. Is disobedience. To God. And then. We are called. To dare. To be a Daniel. To like the apostles.

Declare. That we must obey God. Rather. Than men. But they're not just told. To obey. Not just told.

To submit. But they're also told. To be ready. For every good work. We're. Not called. To rebel. We're not called. To resist. But we're told. Called to be active. In good works. We're not. To keep ourselves. To ourselves. In some holy huddle.

[17:02] But rather. We're to get involved. And get our hands dirty. In all the brokenness. Of the groaning world. That we live in. What that means.

To each of us. Will be very different. Just heard. A bit about. What it means. To Andy and Emma. In their lives. Each of us. Will have different.

Circumstances. That we live in. But as evangelicals. We tend to seek. To avoid. Two errors. Regarding good works.

Firstly. That our good works. Can in some way. Make us righteous. Can balance out the wrong. They can. Make us acceptable. To God. God. And secondly.

That our mission. Is to transform the world. By our good works. That here. We can make. All things new. And as we resist. Those arguments.

[18:01] Very often. I think. We fall into the error. Of acting. As if good works. Are some sort of. Optional extra. That the Christian life. Is basically.

A matter of. Trying our best. To avoid. Blatant sin. Striving to have. Good quiet times. Getting involved. In church things.

And maybe. If we have some time. Left over. Might think about. What else. We can. Get involved in. Certainly. I think. I fall into that trap. And even.

By that definition. I feel. Pretty. Comprehensively. But. I think. Here. From what Paul is saying. We see. That we're called. To something.

Far. More active. I think. It's important. For us. To consider here. That good works. Are not. Instructed here. As a means.

[18:56] To an end. But because. They're by definition. Good. And in. And of. Themselves. We should not. Need.

Any ulterior. Motive. To do them. I'm not saying. For a moment. That if. Opportunities. Arise. To give more.

Than practical. Help. We should not. Take them. Not even. That we should not. Be. Seeking. To find. Those opportunities. But.

That our motivation. To. For example. Feed the hungry. Should be. They are hungry. We have food. Our motivation.

To share the gospel. Is. They are lost. We have hope. I don't think. We need to. Get the two confused. We need to do both.

[19:51] But. Here. We are being called. To do good works. In our society. Because. Good works. Are good. And yet. Our works. May well. Open up. Opportunities. There's an interesting. Response. To the good works.

Of the Christians. That comes from. A pagan. Roman Emperor. Julian. Apostate. This was at a time. Following Constantine. When. The empire was.

Going back and forwards. Between being. Christian. And being pagan. And. This was one of the pagan emperors. And he complains. Why do we not observe.

That it is the Christians. Benevolence to strangers. Their care for the graves of the dead. And the pretended holiness. As he calls it. Of their lives. That have done most.

[20:48] To increase. Atheism. I. Unbelief. On the pagan gods. For it is disgraceful. That. When no Jew. Ever has to beg.

And the impious Galileans. As he called the Christians. Support not only their poor. But ours as well. All men see. That our people.

Lack aid from us. Surely there must be some. Impact. When Christians. Are doing so much good. In the world. That a pagan emperor. Is embarrassed.

But the key thing. To realize here. Is that what we are called. To do. Should be a natural. Outflowing. Of the work. Of the spirit. Within us. Is not something.

Distinct. And separate. As Paul writes. To the Galatians. The fruit of the spirit. Is love. Joy. Peace. Patience. Kindness.

[21 : 44] Goodness. Faithfulness. Gentleness. Self-control. Against such things. There is no law. All Paul is teaching. Here in Titus. Is that this fruit.

Should not just be displayed. Inside our churches. In our families. In our private interactions. But should be displayed. As we live. In the world. Around us.

But before moving on to. Next. Main section. I just want to bring up. A few areas. Of application. And for most of these. I don't want to give any answers.

If anything. I want to raise questions. The one thing. They should make clear. Is that in every situation. We must work out for ourselves.

Where that line in the sand lies. Where the boundary. Is between. Obeying man. And obeying God. I'm happy to discuss.

[22 : 42] My thoughts on these issues. Off the platform. But where the Bible. Gives no clear teaching. I don't want to claim. That my speculation. Has any authority.

So for us. Unlike. The situation. That. The midwives. Daniel. Paul. Titus. The Cretans. Lived in. We are governed. By a parliamentary democracy. Which means. Our interactions. With the government. Are very different. So they raise.

A different set of questions. And yet the issues. Are essentially the same. The first question is. Should we vote? And how should we vote? Should we be.

Getting involved. In choosing a government. When ultimately. It's God. Who raises up. And takes down governments. Is this a situation. Of a. Soldier. Getting involved. In civilian affairs.

[23 : 43] Or in our. Government set up. Is this part. Of what it means. To live peaceably. Under the authorities. To submit. To obey. To do good. To carry out.

Our civic duty. And if. We should vote. What issues. Should be top of our list. As we consider. Who to vote for. Is it the questions.

Of morality. Of foreign policy. Of how. The most disadvantaged. In our society. Are helped. Or what about.

Should Christians. Be involved. In protest. Should we be. Marching. Or. Standing outside. Parliament. With placards. About the issues. That we care about. Is this.

Resisting the. Authorities. Put in place. By God. Or is this. Part of the privileges. Of living. In a modern democracy. Where we have. The opportunity.

[24 : 38] To make our voice heard. Should we be. Getting involved. In challenging. The government. In the courts. Should we be. Getting involved.

With groups. Such as the Christian Institute. That stand up. For Christian moral values. I don't know. How should we.

Respond to. Illegal immigrants. And. Failed asylum seekers. Living among us. Should we be. Accepting. The government decisions. Or should we be.

Willing at times. To break the law. And shelter those. Who need our help. Possibly. Especially. Our Christian brothers. And sisters. Who may face.

Real persecution. If they are sent back. To their home countries. To their home. To their home. To their home. To their home. But of course. While the issues. We have to deal with today. Are real.

[25 : 35] There are those. That arise. Living. In peace. But not all Christians. Today. Live. In that situation. And there's no guarantee.

That we. Always. Will. There are Christians. Living today. Under authorities. That are probably. At least as brutal. As those.

Pagan. Ancient empires. North Korea. Under the Islamic State. And many other. Oppressive regimes. But.

As has to be done. I will invoke. Godwin's law. That all discussions. Eventually. Get to Hitler. So. How.

Would we respond. To Hitler. If he was today. I think there's five. Key. Ways. That Christians. Did respond.

[26 : 33] At the time. The first response. Was that. Of many of the mainstream. Churches in Germany. Who quietly. Submitted. Some came to an agreement.

With the Nazis. That they would not get involved. In politics. If the Nazis. Stayed out of religion. Didn't quite work. But. That was the agreement.

They came to. The second response. Was of. Those like. Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Who got involved. With the German resistance movement. Ultimately.

With the plot. To assassinate Hitler. Hitler. And. He was executed. For his involvement. In that. The third response.

Was that of many. Like the Ten Boom family. In occupied Amsterdam. Who were involved. In the Dutch underground movement. There. That sheltered Jews. In hidden rooms.

[27 : 30] In their houses. It's believed. That at one point. There were up to. 300,000. People. Hidden. In the Netherlands. During that occupation.

The Ten Booms. Ultimately. Ended up. In a concentration camp. And it was only. Due to a clerical error. That Corrie Ten Boom. Escaped the gas chambers.

And was released. To tell her story. The fourth response. Is that of many Christians. Living in Britain. Who when called up.

To serve. Willingly. Obeyed. The orders. Of their government. And went to fight. And die. For their country. And then the fifth.

And final response. Was of those. Who did not consider. Fighting. Compatible. With their Christian faith. And conscientiously. Objected. I have my thoughts.

[28 : 30] About which. Of those. I think. Were some of the best decisions. And I may have betrayed them. A bit with my words. But. The important thing is.

All of these people. Made different decisions. But all of them. Were trying. To serve God. In the situation. They found themselves in. The issue is not.

Were they right. Or wrong. The issue is. What will we do. But. Why should we care about this?

Why should we be doing all this? Going out of our way. Living potentially difficult lives. Paul. Paul. Actually uses. Most of his words.

In this passage. And it's okay. I'm not going to use. Most of mine. To detail. The magnificent. Motivation. That the people.

[29 : 30] Must have. While essentially. Titus. Is a letter. Of practical teaching. Paul never. Separates. Practice. From doctrine. Instead.

One. Always. Flows out of the other. If he was just. Teaching good works. On their own. This. Would be pure. Moralism. But without.

Any reason. To care. What he says. Or. Any power. To be able. To follow it. He seems. To use. Two types. Of arguments.

Through Titus. There's the. First type. That's the. If you do this. Then. This will happen. And the second one is.

Because of this. Do this. Hope that. Makes sense. But in. In the first half. Of chapter two. We saw various reasons.

[30 : 25] Of the first kind. Given. In verse five. That the word of God. May not be reviled. Verse eight. So that an opponent. May be put to shame.

Having nothing evil. To say about us. To say about us. Verse 10. They may adorn. The doctrine. Of God. Our savior. All of these.

Talk about the effects. That the people's lifestyle. Will have on the people. Around them. How it will affect. People's attitude. To the word of God.

God. But in the second half. Of the chapter. That Mike brought us. Last week. There was a second. Type of argument. Here we read.

That because the grace. Of God has appeared. In the past. And because you hope. For the glory of God. In the future. Therefore. Live self-controlled. Upright.

[31 : 19] And godly. Lives. Now. Here in chapter 3. Paul uses a very similar argument. First. He reminds us what we were.

In verse 3. He says. For we. Ourselves. Were. He describes what we were. And essentially. Says that we were like. Those around us.

Like. Those rulers. And authorities. Like. Those false teachers. Like. The cretins themselves. And it's not. A pleasant description.

We don't like. To be described. As foolish. We think. We're quite wise. Really. We can make. Fairly good decisions. By ourselves. And.

We like. To think. That we have the power. To carry out. Our decisions. And yet. He tells us here. That no. We couldn't even.

[32 : 18] Make wise decisions. But. We were slaves. To our passions. We were not. Just messed up. But we had absolutely.

No power. To change. And that is. Exactly. What the world. Around us. Is like. And the people. That rule over us. And so we cannot.

Fix. This groaning world. Just. By preaching. Good living. The golden rule. Of love your neighbor. As yourself. Would.

Completely. Reform society. If we weren't. Completely. Unable. To carry it out. receive. but then Paul reminds us of what has changed, that the goodness and loving kindness of God, our Savior, has appeared.

He has saved us by his mercy, not by our works. This is a very important thing for us to remember as we interact with the society around us, to remember that good works can ultimately never save us nor our society.

[33 : 31] As Albert Moeller writes in the Gospel Coalition blog, the theological temptation of moralism is one many Christians and churches find it difficult to resist.

The danger is that the church will communicate by both direct and indirect means that what God expects of fallen humanity is moral improvement.

In so doing, the church subverts the Gospel and communicates a false Gospel to a fallen world.

This, I think, is a particularly strong temptation if we are to take up Paul's exhortation to live a life of getting our hands dirty involvement in society.

But Paul reminds us how it happened in us by regeneration, by being made new, and by ongoing renewal by the Holy Spirit.

By a once and for all radical change and by a continuous process of transformation, we have been and are being made new. We did not just try a little harder.

[34 : 48] We didn't pull our socks up and get our act together and we mustn't imply to those around us that that is what's needed. And then he goes on to remind us of what we will be.

That having been justified by his grace, we might be heirs to eternal life. That this work of transformation that has begun in us will be carried through to completion.

That the kingdom of God, which we now live as citizens of, will finally be fully revealed. That the kingdoms of this earth will be brought to an end.

that all will be made new. That all will be put right. That the groaning of this world will end.

And that the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.

And so, having reminded us of what we were, of what has been done for us, and what we will be, he then, in verse 9, I think it was, yes, he then exhorts us to devote ourselves to good works.

[36 : 20] We couldn't do this in the state we were in. And even if we could, doing it would never have changed us. But now that we have been redeemed, that have been reborn, renewed, we must live out the new creation that is within us and which we look forward to in all its fullness.

We are citizens of the kingdom of heaven, but we are sent as ambassadors into this fallen world.

And then finally, having reminded us of the magnificent motivation we have, Paul warns against divisive distractions.

He tells them to avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, arguments and quarrels about the law.

Does he mean we should stop watching Who Do You Think You Are?

that we should delete our subscriptions to Ancestry.com, stop caring about whether our great-great-great-great-grandfather came from Ardreshegg or Ireland?

While that might at times be a distraction, I don't think that is what he's talking about. And, unfortunately, I don't think it's terribly clear what he is talking about.

[37 : 57] the commentaries all seem to have slightly different ideas of what these arguments might be. It may be something to do with people claiming importance due to who either they were descended from or maybe who they've been baptized by.

Like the arguments at the beginning of 1 Corinthians, I'm of Paul, I'm of Apollos, I'm of Peter. it could be that, they're saying, this is my heritage and that's greater than yours.

Or maybe it has something more to do with some of the Jewish myths and controversies that now seem to be lost in the mists of time. But whatever exactly the arguments he's talking about, and I'm sure the arguments that we have now are probably very different ones, he contrasts with the good works.

The good works, he says, are excellent and profitable, whereas these are unprofitable and worthless. It's quite probable that they were arguments about what was right.

The arguments that I was carefully trying to avoid earlier, of the specific details that the Bible does not tell us. It may be that this was to do with the Jewish Mishnah and the oral traditions where layer after layer of commentary and interpretation is put on top of each other, each one interpreting and reinterpreting.

[39 : 32] And so you get, ah yes, Rabbi so-and-so said that Rabbi so-and-so said this about this commandment and yet Rabbi so-and-so took a different view on it.

He said that. that. And Paul's saying this is unprofitable. Worse than being unprofitable is useless distraction and worse than that is divisive.

But I think the main contrast we see here is the contrast between getting out there and being obedient or sitting inside and arguing about what obedience means.

Francis Chan tells a story, I assume made up story, of if he told his daughter to tidy her room, then goes up a bit later to check on what she's doing.

He wouldn't really be happy if his daughter was to say to him, yep, I've memorised exactly what you told me to do. I've been studying it word for word.

[40 : 44] In fact, I've arranged I'm going to meet up with some of my friends and we're going to discuss together what it might look like in our lives if we were to do this.

No, clearly nonsense. What he wants is for her to get her act together and tidy her room. And so how are we going to respond?

in light of the gospel, of who we were, of what has been done for us, of the glorious hope that we look forward to, are we going to have a nice chat after the service about how we might respond in hypothetical situations?

Or are we going to get out there and look for the opportunities God has given us to get our hands dirty in the situations he has placed us in?

That, I believe, is a challenge that we are given here. here.