

## **Living in the World**

### **Titus 3:1-2**

What are your expectations as you come to church week by week?

- Great music?
- Good singing?
- Short sermons?
- Delicious morning tea?

The question was too wide – let me narrow it down a bit. What are your expectations in relation to what you're taught? Do you expect to learn something new each week? Should you expect to learn something new?

The two verses we're looking at this morning begin with the word *remind*. Remind the people certain things. Let me remind you of where we're up to in the book of Titus.

- In the opening verses, Paul reminds them of the great plan God's put into effect.
  - It was a plan God developed a long time ago – indeed, before the beginning of time.
  - It was a plan God brought to light by sending Jesus into the world.
  - It's a plan that's made known to others by people preaching about Jesus.
  - It's a plan these people on Crete are caught up in as they respond positively to that preaching. It's a plan we're also caught up in as we respond to the gospel.
  - It's a plan that's to do with hope of eternal life.
- We've seen our response involves faith and knowledge – we trust God and know the truth about God. And, as we grow in that faith and knowledge, so that's expressed in godly living – behaviour that

corresponds to the truth we know.

- In the next section of the book, we've seen that Titus was instructed to appoint leaders who hold firmly to that message. This was crucial for the ongoing life of the church.
  - These leaders must encourage others by teaching sound doctrine.
  - These leaders must refute those who oppose the truth and twist and distort the gospel of God.
- In chapter 2, Paul tells Titus to teach what's in accord with sound doctrine. He again reminds him what that sound doctrine is at the end of the chapter – but most of the chapter deals with various groups in the church and the attitudes and behaviour they should be taught.
  - They need to be taught sound doctrine.
  - They need to be taught the godly lifestyle that flows from sound doctrine.

The beginning of chapter 3 continues on with that – when you understand the truth and when you trust the truth, this is the behaviour that corresponds to that. The difference from chapter 2 is that he's no longer talking to just one particular group in the church – he's now talking to all of us. It doesn't matter whether you're old or young, male or female, slave or free – this applies to you.

Yet, it's put in terms of *remind* them of these things. This isn't something new. Paul's taught them this stuff before. So why's he need to go over it again? Quite simply, it's because we forget.

- Now, it's not that we forget at the head level. If Titus had asked these Christians on Crete what Paul had said about their attitude to governments, I

suspect they'd all have been able to tell him. They may even have been able to quote Paul word for word. That's not the issue.

- The problem is we forget at the practical level. We don't bring it to the front of our minds at the right time. We blissfully go about our everyday business and something comes up about the government. Instead of stopping ourselves and asking: "Now, how am I supposed to react to that now that I know the truth about God and trust Him?" – we simply go ahead and react the way we've always reacted.

It's a spiritual problem we have – it's called our sinful nature. That nature's not really interested in God. It's not really bothered about what God wants. It's quite happy not to remember. It'll do all it can to help us forget:

- Provide a distraction.
- Present a counter-argument.
- Invoke a habitual response.
- Simply make us too busy and rushed.

It's one of the reasons we gather regularly – to remind ourselves of sound doctrine and the lifestyle that flows from it. We're to keep this truth before us.

And so, when you come to church each week, should you expect something new? Not really.

- Sure, every now and then you may come across some attitude or behaviour you haven't thought of before.
- Every now and then you may get a new slant on some wrong habit you've had for years.

But, by and large, church is about remembering. It's not about inventing something new – that's what the false teachers do. It's about going over what's in this book.

Remember the greatness and majesty of God. Remember the magnificent things God's done for you. Remember what that means in terms of godly living. Combat your tendency towards amnesia.

### **Obey Authorities**

The first thing he reminds them is *to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient*. I know that looks like two things the way the NIV has translated it, but I think it's really one thing in the Greek. It's a bit hard to tell, because he puts two nouns next to each other, followed by two verbs next to each other. You could separate out the final verb – but then you're stuck with the question: Be obedient to whom? I think the four words all belong together.

Who are the rulers and authorities? They're humans in positions of earthly power. For these people, it was the Roman Empire – the emperor, the governors, the military forces – all those various elements that went to make up the political structure under which they lived. For us, it's the Federal Government, the State Government, Local Councils, the judicial system, the police force – all those elements that go to make up the very different political structure under which we live.

Now that I've come to understand the gospel – now that I have a growing knowledge of God and trust in God – how am I to relate to these rulers and authorities? How is godliness expressed in this area of my life? I'm to submit to them and to obey them. I'm to recognise the authority they have over me. I'm to respect their position.

That sounds fairly radical, doesn't it? After all, what's the

attitude of the average Australian towards governments and the various law-enforcement agencies? Cynicism, lack of confidence, a certain level of suspicion, bending the rules they don't like. Some suggest it's part of our national convict genes. Others suggest it's our national cultural spirit. The source doesn't really matter. It's there – and it's fed by our media.

It means it's very natural for us to ask: Why should we submit to and obey our governments? Why should we give these guys respect? They keep going on taxpayer-funded junkets. They keep making promises they don't keep once they're elected. They keep bending the rules to suit their own desires. Surely Paul didn't mean what he writes in relation to these worthless governments we have to put up with today. Except the Roman Empire was far worse than any of the modern governments we whinge and whine about – our governments look like tame pussycats compared with it – and still Paul told these Christians to submit and obey.

Now, Paul's not naïve. He knows governments aren't perfect. He knows that any government in this world will have some level of corruption – because all governments are made up of sinful people. That remains the same no matter what political system's invented. Paul doesn't want us to be naïve.

- Governments aren't beyond criticism. There's a place for that when it's done properly and with the right attitude. As you read through Acts, you find Paul occasionally points out the errors of those with authority.
- And sometimes governments claim powers beyond what they should claim. You see that in Revelation

13. There's a government that wants to ban the worship of God. We're not to submit to a ruler when he tells us to disobey God – at that point we obey God rather than the ruler.

Yet, that's not an excuse for general insubordination. Recognise and accept the authority they have over you. As Paul says in Romans 13 – that authority is God-given. It's part of the way God's set up the world. Society can't function without these structures – we'd have anarchy. As Christians, we know something about how this world operates.

- We know that God rules and works His purposes.
- We know that governments are established by Him.
- We know that the problems and injustice in this world won't be solved by politicians and rulers – not even by political systems.
- We know that God's purposes centre around Jesus – around His death – in His time He'll fully establish God's kingdom where the problems and injustices will be put right.

And because we know all that we'll do two things:

- We'll put our hope in God, rather than political systems or earthly rulers.
- We'll show our hope's in God by submitting to and obeying the authorities we're under – by having a godly attitude towards them.

So, is this something you need to be reminded of? Do you just mindlessly follow the attitudes of everyone else around you? Are you just swept up by the way they think about the governing authorities and the way they relate to them?

- When the talk turns to politics, do your words

support and encourage the general negativity and simmering rebelliousness around you?

- When people get away with putting one over the government, do you rejoice? Do you join them in trying to get away with it?
- Do you faithfully pray for our rulers and ask God to help them be people of integrity and make wise and godly decisions?
- How do you feel about those numbers in the red circles by the side of the road?

And I don't think it's just an external thing – outwardly submitting, while inwardly rebelling. It's having the right attitude – having a heart that's willing to submit because it's already submitted to God.

How far does the idea of rulers and authorities extend? After all, our independent spirits wouldn't want to submit to someone we didn't need to submit to.

- Should it just be our elected officials – or should it be all the bureaucrats who derive their authority from them?
- Should I pay attention to the mayor and obey his instructions – but not bother with what his secretary tells me to do?
- What about ticket collectors on the train station?
- What about teachers – should I submit to ones in the state system because they're appointed by the government, but I don't have to worry about the ones in the private system because they're simply appointed as part of a commercial enterprise?

Our sinful natures have this rebellious streak at their very core and – given the opportunity – will resist submitting wherever possible. As soon as you tell it "don't", it wants to do. The gospel teaches us to submit – first of all to

God and His supreme authority, and then in service of others.

### Ready to do Good

The second thing Paul wants Titus to remind them about is that they *be ready to do whatever is good*. Now this could still be in relation to rulers and authorities – or it could be more general.

- At the beginning of verse 1, Paul's definitely talking about our relations with human authorities.
- By the beginning of verse 3, he's talking much more generally – this is what they too used to be like and it's not very likely they were all rulers.

The question is: when does he change? When does he move from talking about our relations with human rulers to our relations with humans more generally? No one really knows. However,

- given the nature of God and the breadth of grace God's shown to us, and
- given that these attitudes and behaviours Paul's talking about flow from the impact of God's grace in our lives,

I'd suggest it's wise for us to err on the side of generosity. Instead of trying to limit our readiness to do good – saying this only relates to our relations to rulers and authorities – let's broaden it as far as possible.

As Christians, we've grown in our knowledge of God. We know God is good. He's light. There's not even a hint of darkness in Him. God does good – and He does good to all humanity. As Jesus says:

*He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.*

That's the sort of God with whom we're in relationship.

This isn't simply an avoidance of doing evil – of saying no to ungodliness and worldly passions (as important as that is) – it's actually getting out there and doing good for others. Now, some people in their sophistication may want to focus on the word *ready* – I only have to be ready to do the good; I don't have to get around to actually doing it – but I suspect that interpretation won't really cut it with God. Christians should be known in the community as those who do good.

If you look back at the history of the church, you can find plenty of examples of Christians doing this sort of thing.

- Who promoted the education of the masses?
- Who founded hospitals?
- Who fought for the abolition of slavery?

Christians were often at the forefront of these sorts of activities and many more like them.

What part should these sorts of things have in our lives today? Do we need to lift our game in this area?

- Now, I know many of us support orphans through organisations like Compassion and World Vision.
- Many of us respond to humanitarian appeals for money in times of crisis – like the cyclone a couple of months back in Burma.
- Some of us work as volunteers in charitable organisations in our community.
- Many help out with individuals they know who have specific needs – often quietly coming alongside them without anyone else knowing.

There is stuff we're all doing.

Yet, now Paul's given us this reminder, it's worth pausing

to take stock.

- For me, I feel much of my doing good is at a distance – giving money to those suffering overseas. That's a good thing to do and I wouldn't want to be thought to discourage it in any way – but should I be looking for more "hands-on" ways of doing good to add to it?
- Should we as a church look for some community project where we could do good together?
- As an individual, do you need to look for more opportunities to do good?

### **Slander no one**

The third area of reminder is *to slander no one* – to speak ill of no one. My observation is that people have a tendency to say bad things about others.

- It's the bad things people do that we remember more readily than the good things.
- We're quicker to pass on bad stories about others rather than good stories.
- We enjoy hearing bad things about other people.

Why? A significant part of it has to do with our competitiveness. We try to push ourselves forward – to gain some benefit for ourselves.

- Maybe a promotion at work.
- Maybe a move up the social chain.
- Maybe a better reputation.

We want other people to recognise us. We want others to give us the due honour we think we deserve. One of the tried and tested methods of getting ahead is to pull others down.

- If I can show the poor quality of their work, mine looks better by comparison.

- If I can tarnish their reputation, I think my own will somehow benefit from their loss.
- If I can make fun of them, you'll think well of me because I've made you laugh.

And so I pass on bad stories. The stories may well be true – or mostly true. That's not the point. I'm doing it from a self-centred reason. I'm doing it to hurt them – or, at least, not to do them good.

The gospel sets us free from that sort of competitiveness. My status is: citizen of God's kingdom and adopted heir of God.

- How did I get that status? Did I have to compete for it? Did I have to climb over others in order to achieve it for myself? No. It was God's gift to me.
- Can I improve on that status? If I try a bit harder, can I become more of an heir of God? If I put in a bad word for you, will I somehow leapfrog over you in the heirs order of merit list? No. I remain an heir on the basis of God's grace.

So, I have no need to put you down. I have no need to speak ill of you. I have no need to push myself forward. I'm no longer insecure – because my security's guaranteed by God's word.

Now, again, we're not to be naïve. This isn't an absolute. There are times when we are to highlight the evil others do. Paul himself did this back in chapter 1. He warned them about the false teachers. He did so in quite strong language. In 1 Corinthians he writes about the evil of a man within the church sleeping with his stepmother. He wants the church to discipline the man. There is a time and place for dealing with the wrong actions of people. But the motive isn't self-centred. It's not a desire to push

myself forward. It's love for other people.

### **Be Peaceable and Gentle**

The fourth reminder is to *be peaceable* – uncontentious, not quarrelsome – *and considerate* – reasonable, gentle, patient. I think these two go together because of the way the Greek's put together – but some people treat them separately.

Some people love to pick fights. No matter what you say, they want to disagree with you. And they've got an opinion about everything – and, of course, their opinion's right and everyone else is wrong. You even agree with them – and still they want to disagree with you. That's not godliness.

A lot of our quarrelling also comes from our competitiveness. We want to prove ourselves. We want to push ourselves forward. We want to be shown to be right. We think we can make great gains for ourselves in this way.

- I can get a reputation for being knowledgeable and on the ball and always right. I'm the sort of person people will fight for to have on their team for a trivia night.
- I can get a reputation for being aggressive at work and getting the job done. People will learn not to cross me and to jump when I tell them.

As Christians, we no longer have to prove ourselves. That's not why God accepts us. He accepts us because Jesus died for us. And so it doesn't matter if I can always get my own way in dealing with people. It doesn't matter if I can always win an argument. Because I'm secure in my relationship with God, I'm free to act for the other

person's good – not what I think is my own good.

That doesn't mean I'll never have disagreements or arguments. People will disagree with me about all sorts of things. Non-Christians will disagree with me about the gospel. Some disagreements will be very important. Yet the way I approach them has now changed. My attitude has changed. It's no longer about me and my ego. It's now about gently serving the other person.

### Show True Humility

The fifth reminder is *to show true humility to all men* – at least, that's how the NIV translates it. Other versions:

*showing all meekness towards all men* (ASV)

*to show perfect courtesy toward all people* (ESV)

*to show a gentle attitude towards everyone* (GNT)

When we have a proper appreciation of who we are, so we can relate properly to others.

- As a Christian, you are a child of God. Thus, you can hold your head high. You're on speaking terms with the Creator of the universe. No one can stop that. No one can change it. No one can take it away.
- Yet, it's not holding your head high in a superior sense – there's no room for arrogance or pride. You're not a child of God because of what you've done. You haven't earned this position. You're given it on the basis of God's kindness – God's grace.

And so, you don't think highly of yourself – you think of yourself as a sinner saved by grace.

On that basis, you relate to others – all others. You've

given up trying to use others for your own ends. You've given up trying to show you're better than them. You've given up playing life by their rules. You know what life's about – you've found true life in Jesus. And so you can relate to others the way Jesus did – not threatened by them and not threatening them in return. You know the grace of God and long that they too may know that.

### Conclusion

John Stott sums up these two verses like this:

Here, then is a very brief delineation of Christian behaviour in public life. In relation to the authorities we are to be conscientious citizens (submissive, obedient and cooperative), and in relation to everybody, irrespective of their race or religion, we are to be conciliatory, courteous, humble and gentle.<sup>1</sup>

Pretty straightforward, isn't it?

Except we struggle to do it. We know that too often we forget who we are. We do play by their rules. We want to push ourselves forward. What's the answer? Remind ourselves of the gospel. Keep growing in your knowledge of the truth about God and what He's done for you. Hang onto that truth. Believe it. Trust it. Resist the temptations to go back to the wrong thinking about having to prove yourself on this world's terms. Believe what God says is important. Believe what God says He's done for you and given to you.

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<sup>1</sup> J.Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus* (BST; Leicester: IVP, 2004) 200.