

Introduction:

As we begin our study today, it is valuable to understand some background of the situation the churches in Crete faced. As you may know, the church in Crete lived under the rule of the Roman government when Titus would have received this letter. The Roman government was a pagan and morally corrupt government that often subjugated the rights of those it conquered. It was oppressive, unjust, and even brutal at times. Sin was celebrated and society was rampant with it. It was a far cry from our democracy, and even farther from being a government operating on biblical principles. The relationship of Cretans to Rome was also notoriously hostile. Early Greek historians note that Cretans did not particularly appreciate Roman rule, and were often involved in “insurrections, murders and wars with groups within the country.” It is into this context that Paul gives the next charge for establishing the church in Titus 3:1-7, for Titus to remind believers of how they should live in that kind of society. We, as God’s people today, are having to wrestle with how we should live in society, and under governing authorities, in ways that we haven’t had to before. When I was mapping out this series on the book of Titus, I had no idea we would land here in God’s word following the election, but I believe that God, in His goodness, has us here for a reason. And I am praying God the Spirit will use it to guide us in how to live lives that magnify the gospel in the days, weeks, months, and even years ahead as we walk in this world God has called us to be in, but not of. When working through this passage, it is helpful to understand its flow before beginning to unpack what we see. Notice that verses 1-2 give Paul’s charge to Titus to “remind them” to walk forward in a series of actions. Verse 3 opening with “For,” reveals that what follows are the reasons believers should walk forward in the actions of verses 1-2. When we follow the flow of thought, we discover that verses 3-7 are one main thought, with verse 3 showing what “we ourselves were,” and verses 4-7, opening with “But,” showing by contrast that a significant change has taken place. This flow puts the weight and importance on verses 3-7 for embracing the calls in verses 1-2. To help us embrace the truths we will see, we will start by briefly considering the main idea of verses 1-2, then focus on the reasons Paul gives in verses 3-7, before circling back to carefully observe the calls to action in verses 1-2, in light of those reasons. Here is the main idea of verses 1-2. God’s purchased people, are called to,

LIVE IN PEACE AND COMPOSURE WHEN ENGAGING WITH THE WORLD

Look at charge of verses 1-2, Paul says, 1 Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, 2 to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. Paul opens by showing these are not new teachings. They are things to remind the people of. We are forgetful people who easily forget and fail to walk forward in these ways, especially when we consider the realm of life Paul is focusing on. Notice that, in verse 1, he calls for ways of engaging with governing authorities. Then, in verse 2, he refers to “no one” and “all people.” When noticing how this passage mirrors chapter 2, having encouragements followed by reasons anchored to the gospel, we can note that chapter 2 focused on how believers live within a household, and these verses focus on how believers live in society, or the world, as the Bible often defines it. In these 2 verses, Paul gives a series of 7 actions that should be understood as repetitive and continuous actions, saying “continually be these things.” We will unpack each action later, but for now, consider the main idea behind them. Verse 1 shows how we should live in peace under governing authorities, and verse 2 how we should live in composure when engaging with the world. The critical nature of this counsel is magnified when we understand the reasons given in verses 3-7, which are built on the contrast of verse 3 with verses 4-7.

Look there with me again. Notice how Paul centers his reasons on, verse 3, what “we ourselves were,” contrasted with what God did, verse 4, “But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared.” Hopefully your mind is still lingering on Titus 2:11-14 covered last week, causing you to pick up on Paul’s use of the word appeared. This links verse 4 here with Titus 2:11, where God’s grace appearing was the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ in his first coming. Paul brings our hearts and minds again to the gospel as reasons for his charge, but this time, his focus is on all that God the Father accomplished through the gospel for us. Your translation may say “kindness and love of God.” “Goodness” points to the way God relates to us in kindness and forbearance. “Loving kindness” is a Greek word for love, philanthropia. This term is used only one other time in scripture and used only here to describe God’s love. This is God’s love for humanity that inclines him to bless. Essentially, Paul is saying, we were one way, but God’s goodness and loving kindness changed everything. Let’s work through verses 3-7 to see 2 aspects of how God astonishingly changed everything. First, consider how,

WE WERE HELD CAPTIVE BY SIN, BUT GOD MERCIFULLY SAVED US AND MADE US NEW

Pay attention to the contrasts in verses 3-6, starting with the litany of condemnation. 3 “We ourselves were foolish.” We lacked the sense to behave rightly, or even comprehend divine things. 3 “We ourselves were... disobedient.” The term carries the idea of a hardness or stubbornness against behaving rightly. 3 “We ourselves were... led astray,” deceived into thinking we were right and doing ok. Paul goes on, 3 “we ourselves were... slaves to various passions and pleasures.” Our enslavement to our flesh is a truth we need to be reminded of often if we want to truly marvel at the gospel. Due to the fall of Adam and Eve, sin is part of the very nature of humanity. No one is free apart from Christ, we are in bondage to our sin nature, slaves to our passions and pleasure. And, Paul still isn’t done, he says, 3 “we ourselves were... passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.” Maybe you are tempted to say, “well, that wasn’t me. I didn’t hate other people, I didn’t have malice and envy towards others.” I think if we are honest with ourselves, we can see how these traits really do characterize our flesh apart from Christ. Paul is not mistaken, this is the truth of who we all were, and would still be, had God not intervened. And boy did he intervene. Just consider all He did. Look at verse 5 again. 4 “But... 5 He (God) saved us.” And Paul ensures we understand exactly how, starting with a negative statement to reinforce the positive statement that follows. It was 5 “not because of works done by us in righteousness.” God’s saving grace wasn’t based on any act you completed in righteousness. Remember, you were foolish, disobedient, and led astray. You were slaves to the flesh. You were passing your days in envy, malice, and hatred. You were held captive by sin, but God. Look there at verse 5 again, we weren’t saved by our works, 5 “but according to His own mercy.” Our salvation is entirely based on the mercy of God. You and I brought nothing to the table. But God, being rich in mercy, saved us. And we saw last week that this salvation came through a great price, the very life of God the Son on the cross to pay the redemption price for our salvation. Yet, there is more, God mercifully saved us by making us new. Verse 5, 5 “he saved us... by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.” This verse is packed full of powerful language. Paul links two acts to the work of God’s spirit, “the washing of regeneration and renewal.” Regeneration and renewal are almost ways of saying the same thing. Regeneration is a compound term from words that mean again and to be or become. The term is used in Matthew 19:28 to refer to the new world that comes when Jesus returns. Renewal is also a compound term from words that mean again and new. Washing and renewal are both aspects of regeneration, pointing to a new birth, a new genesis if you will. There is a cleansing, or washing, power of the Holy Spirit and a renewing power that happens in the new birth. You see, for us to be saved, we needed to be made new. Sin was holding us captive, so we needed a new heart, new life. Pay attention to verse 6, as this really struck me during my study. The Spirit hasn’t been given to us in a small measure, but look there, it has been, 6 “poured out on us richly.” I think it is so important to see in this passage. Church, God lavished you with the washing and renewal of the Holy Spirit. This is why you are no longer who you were.

And this is all “through Jesus Christ our Savior.” Through the work of Christ on the cross and faith in Him, God richly pours out His Spirit on you. Do you feel the significance of this? We must see this truth, as one of the reasons for walking forward in the calls of verses 1-2. We would still be held captive by sin, if God had not mercifully saved us through Christ. But we are not held captive. We would be just like the world, but we are not. True salvation brings a drastically changed life. We were held captive by sin, but God mercifully saved us and made us new. This leads to other astonishing change to consider, how,

WE WERE ESTRANGED FROM GOD, BUT GOD MADE US HEIRS

Consider all that God changed in verses 3-6, and then pay attention to the purpose in verse 7. Verse 7, 7 “so that being justified by His grace” Justification is the act of God declaring us righteous before Him. Sin estranged us from God. It caused enmity between us and Him, demanding God to be just in punishing us for it. Yet, through the gospel, we are justified because of the grace of Christ. Christ exchanged His righteousness for our sin. He bore the just payment for our sin, and gave us His righteousness, so that, we who believe in Him are declared righteous and reconciled God. Oh, but we don’t just receive the declaration of being righteous, look at verse 7 again, we 7 “become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” The term for heirs is loaded, pointing to the inheritance a first-born son received. Just think about what this is showing, we were living in envy, malice, and hatred of others, and we were completely estranged, disobedient, disloyal, and hostile to the God who owns everything. But God, through Christ, made us heirs. All His promises are ours in Christ. Every inheritance ours. No longer should we live in frivolous pursuits, we are blood bought children who will inherit the world and the satisfaction of the full glory of Christ, as our true hope. Do you see all the amazing ways God has changed your situation? Those are the reason to strive to live in the ways verses 1-2 call us to live, to magnify this glorious gospel. Only if this change has taken place, and as we seek to understand it fully, can we then walk forward in the calls of verses 1-2. Let’s look at those again and unpack them as calls for us to heed today. Here was the main idea we considered. As God’s purchase people, we should,

LIVE IN PEACE AND COMPOSURE WHEN ENGAGING WITH THE WORLD

Look at verse 1, as it provides 3 of the seven rapid fire calls to action for living in peace under governing authorities. 1 Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient. Paul starts with a reminder to be submissive and obedient to rulers and authorities. This is the same kind of submission he mentions in chapter 2, of placing oneself in proper order under governing authorities. Now, there is a temptation we immediately face, to go straight to the exceptions. While there are exceptions, which we will consider, take note that Paul doesn’t give any. The exceptions are understood and implied, but Paul wants the weight of this call to land on hearts. The first question should never be, what are the exceptions, but how can I lean into this call? There is an overarching truth that we need to understand this call, that God is consistently concerned with our response to governing authorities, because God is sovereign over them and employs them to serve his purposes. Consider the following testimonies of scripture. When Pontius Pilate asked Jesus to speak because Pilate had the authority to release or crucify him, Jesus responded, in John 19:11, 11 ... “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above.” Luke, later, records a powerful prayer of believers in Acts 4:27-28 confessing, 27 ... in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, ... both Herod and Pontius Pilate, ... 28 to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. And Paul writes in Romans 13:1, 1 Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Paul goes on to call governing authorities God’s servants in Romans 13. Because God is over all human authorities, we can have peace when submitting and obeying governing authorities.

And look at how Peter drives this home, in 1 Peter 2:13-17, saying, 13 Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, 14 or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. 15 For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. 16 Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. 17 Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. There is a strong call from scripture to live in peace submitting to and obeying governing authorities, as those instituted by God. Consider, next, how Paul continues in Titus 3:1, saying, 1 ... to be ready for every good work. This theme of excelling in good works runs throughout all of Titus. We saw last week how Christ purified us to be zealous for them, and we will hone in on them next week. This verse shows how living in peace under governing authorities leads to us to being ready to participate in every good work that we can. Before going to the exceptions, ask yourself at this point, are striving to submit and obey governing authorities as God calls you to? Let the truth here land properly. Now, let's address the exceptions to our submission and obedience. I think Acts 5:29 provides the basis for the exceptions. To set the context, Peter and the apostles had been preaching the gospel, and they were brought before the Sanhedrin, the governing authorities of the Jews. They were beaten, imprisoned, and at their release charged not to speak the name of Jesus anymore. Acts 5:29 says this, 29 But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men." This response is consistent in scripture. In Exodus 1, the Hebrew midwives disobeyed Pharaoh's edicts to kill the firstborn males of Israel because they feared God. Moses repeatedly disobeyed Pharaoh in Exodus 7-12 because it went against God's commands. In Daniel 3, we see Shadrach, Mechach, and Abednego refuse to follow the decree to worship the king. And Daniel continued to pray to God despite the king's edict to cease in Daniel 6. Each exception was because the commands and edicts would have caused them to disobey God. So, when the government calls us to disobey God's word, we don't submit. We don't submit and obey when it would mean disobedience to our true king. Even with those exceptions understood, though, let's lean into submission and obedience to governing authorities as often as possible, because the gospel has freed us to live in peace, living lives that magnify the gospel. The calls don't stop there. Look again, focusing on verse 2. We are, 2 "to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people." Oh, how we need to hear these in our day. These calls to action deal with our speech and actions when engaging with the world around us. "Speaking evil of no one" would be not using any words of insult, slander, abuse, or defamation towards a person you hold in contempt. This doesn't mean we don't evaluate and speak against the evil we do see, but we are careful in our speech to fight the inclination of our flesh to say the worst about someone and attack the person we disagree with. How much can we work on this in our day? The slander we speak of those we disagree with is often so ugly church. We have far too often lost our filter and harm the witness of Christ's glory in that. We need to let James 3:9-10 cut to our hearts, saying that with our tongue, 9 ... "we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God." And as James says so pointedly, 10 ... "these things ought not to be so." We should strive to speak evil of no one. Look back at verse 2, as Paul continues. We are called to "avoid quarreling" and "be gentle." Avoid quarreling is the idea that we aren't contentious toward others, but we are peaceable, ready, and willing to defer to others. We are not out to win a fight but to woo, seeking to guard the relationship with our words. The term gentle carries the idea of forbearance. We are willing to relinquish some of our own rights for the sake of others, rather than fighting tooth and nail for them. The final trait seems to be a summary, "to show perfect courtesy toward all people." Most translations differ on the translation of the word courtesy. It is translated as gentleness, humility, courtesy, considerateness, and meekness. In 2 Corinthians 10:1, Paul speaks of entreating the Corinthians, "by the meekness and gentleness of Christ." This courtesy, this meekness, is not weakness, but the true humility Christ has birthed in our hearts to regard others as more important than ourselves.

Conclusion:

Oh church, are these calls challenging you? I know they constantly challenge me. Consider these calls as you are responding to the world around us. Let's consider these calls particularly as we respond to some of the sad decisions made recently in our state. God in Christ has poured out His Spirit on you so that you can walk in these ways. Know that, ultimately, though we do want to influence our society with godly wisdom and righteous governance, those things will not save the lost and dying world around us. Only the gospel of Jesus Christ can save. God has saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, so our engagement with this world will point to the glory of His gospel that transformed our lives. We can live in peace and composure when engaging with the world, because we have been mercifully saved and made new, and blessed as heirs of all things. So, speak the truth with your neighbor, participate in society, seek to transform culture, pray for change, peacefully protest when needed, but let's do all this in the ways verses 1-2 call for us to live, so the gospel is magnified as the glorious truth that it is. Let your peace and composure in this world build bridges to open doors for sharing the hope of gospel, as people see, through your response, that Christ is your living hope.

Would you stand as I pray this over us?