



Relating To The World

Things were going badly wrong in the churches on Crete and Titus, left there by Paul to set things in order, has been getting his instructions from the apostle. First he was told to see to it that elders were appointed in every church. Next he was told to teach the believers to be the kind of people believers ought to be. Now in Titus 3 we have come to the third strand in Paul's programme for sorting out the problem on Crete. It concerns how believers are to be taught to relate to the unbelieving world around them.

Jesus has taught us that the world is and always will be a hostile environment for His followers. We know we will always feel opposition at some level. We know to expect injustice. Persecution, Jesus said, will come and keep coming. We should not be surprised by any of this; the world, after all, is full of sinners but we are in the world and we cannot avoid it so how are we to relate to it?

Christians And The Powers That Be

First, with regard to rulers and civil authorities, we are to be subject to their authority and obey them: keep the law, pay our taxes and generally do as we are told. In his letter to the Romans Paul says much the same thing but gives more explanation.

"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. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. 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. 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. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour."

Romans 13:1 – 7

In his letter to Timothy he reminds us that we ought also to pray for those who rule over us.

"Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour."

1 Timothy 2:1 – 3

Is there ever a time when a Christian should disobey the civil authorities?



By listing obedience to the authorities first Paul appears to give it high priority. Why do you think this might be so important?

But here in Titus 3, Paul would have the followers of Jesus go further than mere obedience to the powers that be; he says they should also be ready for every good work. In other words they should take whatever opportunities come their way to do good for the communities they live in.

What kind of activities do you think Paul might have had in mind here?



Is there any limit that should be imposed on a believer's involvement in government and community matters?

Getting Along With Sinners

So much for the civil authorities. How should a believer relate to his neighbours: the ordinary sinners he meets from day to day? Paul has four things to say.

First we should speak evil of no one. Some translations use the word slander but that is misleading for slander is just one particular type of evil speaking. I think what Paul would have us take from this is that a believer should be the kind of persons who never has a bad word to say about anyone — no matter how evil that person is.

What kinds of evil speaking do you commonly encounter?



Second, we should be peaceable. The original Greek word used here puts this in a negative way — we should be the kind of people who avoid quarrels.

What are some of the ways in which Christians commonly pick quarrels with unbelievers?



Does avoiding quarrels have anything to say about how we respond to the sin and injustice we see around us?

Paul says elsewhere

“If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.”

Romans 12:18

Sometimes there is a price to be paid for avoiding contention: the forgoing of a right, the acceptance of an injustice. How far should a believer be prepared to go in that and how should he or she cope with the feelings it provokes?



Third, we should be gentle. A better translation for this word might be considerate for along with gentleness it has the idea of having regard to the other person: his desires, thoughts and feelings. It also includes being patient and fair.

Fourth, we should be humble. In fact Paul says we should show all humility to all men. Humility is the attitude that enables us to receive with gentleness whatever may come. It is not making ourselves small when really we think we are great, it is thinking little of ourselves because that is a right estimate. To be humble then is not first of all about changing your behaviour; it starts with a fundamental change of attitude.

In what ways do we sometimes think of ourselves as superior to the unbelievers we know?



How can that attitude be changed?

A Timely Reminder

Cretans had a reputation for being rebellious troublemakers and the churches in Crete had been influenced by “insubordinate” people (1:10) so they needed to be reminded of these things. But these are good reminders for us too. The natural tendency of anyone under threat is to become first defensive and then hostile and it has been an oft repeated thing in the history of the church for it to do just that in relation to the world.



What are the consequences when churches, or indeed individual believers, become defensive or hostile with regard to the world?