

Christian Conduct in the World

Titus 3:1-7

I have had the privilege over the last five or six years to coach basketball at South Shore Christian school.

Over the years I've coached a variety of teams and each team has been a different mix of personality and skills level, each with its strengths and weaknesses.

Some years we have won almost every game, some years it been a fairly even split, and some years we ended up with more losses than wins.

I have to confess I like to win and I have found that most of the kids that I have coached feel the same way.

As much as I like to win, I have always tried to emphasize character far above performance.

I ask the players to consider 1Corinthians 10:31 which says, "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

I ask them, if we are supposed to do everything to the glory of God how do we play basketball to the glory of God?

Most of them know the right answers. They will say, "Play by the rules, have a good attitude, be a good sport, try your best, be respectful to the other players, coaches, refs, and so on."

I try and instill in them that their character and attitude is far more important than anything else in basketball.

I have found that everybody is pretty on board with those lessons before the season starts, but once the games begin it gets tougher.

That was certainly true one year when I coached a co-ed team.

That year we had enough players to put two teams into the tournament.

In order to make things as even as possible the two best players in the school were put on different teams.

The team I was coaching had already earned their spot in the championship game, and the other team was playing in a semi-final game for a chance to play against us in the finals.

It was a close game, but in the second half the best player was getting frustrated and lost his cool on the ref and got kicked out of the game which resulted in the team's loss.

As it happened, one of the players on my team got hurt and couldn't play in the finals and the tournament organizers allowed us to bring a player in from the team that had just lost.

Who do you think the team wanted? They wanted the best player.

They all knew that if the two best players played together they would almost certainly win.

I would have loved to be able to put him in the game, but there was no way I could do that after how he acted with that ref.

I reminded the team that character is more important than winning and so someone else would be joining our team for the final.

We lost by a two or three baskets and the season was over.

It was a sad day for sure, but if I had to do it again I would make the same decision because those kids all needed to see that how we conduct ourselves as Christians in the world is far more important than winning a game of basketball.

[We know that is true for all of life don't we? Christian character has been a strong theme as we have worked through the book of Titus and this morning's text continues on with that. Much of Paul's focus has been on Christian conduct as it relates to the church and to the home and now in chapter three he turns his attention to how believers are to carry themselves in the world. This morning we are looking at verses 1-7 in chapter three which give us four important lessons concerning our conduct in the world. Lesson one is that...]

Point #1 – Christian conduct reflects faith in a sovereign God. (Verse 1)

If we really believe the LORD is ruling over every atom in the universe every second of every day it will make a difference in how we live.

Once again we find a command regarding submission.

To submit to someone means to willfully place yourself under the authority/will of someone else.

Our natural reaction is to resist that command. Oh we might do it out of fear or self-interest but take those things away and we would rebel.

The Christian is called to willfully embrace this command.

As I mentioned the previous two times this command has come up in Titus, the command to be subject to another human being always falls under the ultimate authority of God.

With that in mind let's look together at **verse 1**.

"Rulers and authorities" here refer to the civil government.

For the first readers of this letter that meant living in submission to the local magistrate, the governor, and every other official all the way up to the emperor.

Whatever they asked which is not contrary to God's law is to be obeyed and more than that the Christian is to "be ready for every good work" likely meaning that the believer is to be both willing and eager to serve those in authority over them.

Why is that? Romans 13 tells us. It is because ***"...there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God."***

Why is the emperor of Rome the emperor of Rome? Because God put him there? Why is the governor, or magistrate, or centurion in charge of what he is? Because God put him there?

Our submission to mayors, MPPs, MPs, premiers, or prime ministers is based on the belief that the LORD of all creation has placed them in the office they hold and we are putting our trust in His ultimate rule over everything.

Of course there is one major difference between our 'rulers and authorities' and those in the Roman Empire.

We live in a democracy rather than a military dictatorship. We actually have a small say in who rules over us.

We should take that responsibility very seriously as Christians and seek to vote for the best possible candidates, but when the voting is over we have to accept the results as the sovereign will of almighty God.

We do not despair over elections, we trust the LORD.

No doubt someone will ask, "If God is the One Who decides rulers and authorities why are ours so godless?"

The answer to that is judgement. God for the time being, brothers and sisters, is giving our society over to the evil that it has pursued.

Their evil, however, does not remove our obligation to submit wherever we can because God is still in charge.

This is still important when we are obligated by God's law to disobey human authority.

What does submission look like when we must disobey? It looks like being willing to suffer the consequences in faith.

[Look at the apostles beaten for preaching the gospel! What does the Bible say? It say they rejoiced for being counted worthy to suffer for Jesus. Paul and Silas beaten and put in jail, what do they do? They sing praise to God.]

Are we willing to lose anything for the sake of obeying God?

Are we angry and bitter people wanting to stick it to the government whenever possible or are we people of faith who trust in the sovereign rule of our glorious God?

[It is easier to hear submit to rulers and authorities when they are doing what is good and right. It is a good deal harder and takes great wisdom and courage to obey this command when our rulers live and lead in darkness. We need to remember that no matter how dark things may appear God is the One Who is truly ruling and reigning and He calls His people to be sources of light in the darkness.

That is true in how we relate to rulers and authorities and it is true in how we relate to other unbelievers as well. That is what the apostle shows us next about Christian conduct, that...]

Point #2 – Christian conduct reflects compassion for unbelieving people. (Verses 2-3)

It is very easy in a godless world to let anger, disgust, and disdain drive our behaviour, but the scriptures call us to the opposite and for good reason.

Having given instructions about how believers are to act towards ‘rulers and authorities’ he speaks about how Christians are to act towards people in general in verse 2.

Look with me at the beginning of **verse 2** (stop at “no one”).

Some translations say ‘slander or malign’ instead of evil.

These are words that are used to tear down and hurt people, words that bring death instead of life, and words that are deceitful or at best misleading.

This, I believe, is a real challenge especially in a culture that is plunging itself deeper into darkness.

It is a challenge because we have to be willing to say what it true.

We have to be honest with people about what God loves and what He hates, but we have to do it out of a desire to be life giving rather than insult or injury.

We should all think carefully about how we talk about people and strive to speak ‘evil’ of no one.

Next he says we should ‘avoid quarreling’, the NAS says ‘be peaceable’.

We don’t go looking for fights with people.

Again it is important to qualify this. It would be a mistake to think that this means we compromise the truth for the sake of avoiding conflict.

Telling people about the gospel is the best way to be a genuine peace maker, this command is about being unnecessarily contentious.

We don’t fight for the sake of fighting and we don’t fight over unimportant things.

Next it says ‘to be gentle.’

It is important to know the difference between being gentle and being weak.

Weakness is a lack of power or strength.

Gentleness is being in control of one’s power and strength to keep people safe.

Lastly he tells Titus to remind the Cretans to “show perfect courtesy toward all people.”

The idea there is to put other people before yourself in all that you do.

Christians should be people who offer up a seat on a bus to someone else, let others go ahead in a checkout line, open the door for people, and alike.

Why? Why should we be acting with this kind of compassion towards unbelievers? (**Verse 3**)

We should have compassion for unbelievers, because when we lived in unbelief we were just like them.

If we fail to see that, then we will find it much easier to have disgust for people rather than compassion.

[Jesus told a story once about two men who went to the temple to pray. A Pharisee and a tax collector. The Pharisee prays, “God I thank you I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.” The tax collector prays, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” Jesus says, the tax collector prayed rightly. Why? What is the Pharisee’s problem? His problem is that he doesn’t see his own problem and that both keeps him from the LORD and it keeps him from having compassion for sinful people.]

Listen, it is absolutely right to be troubled by the increasing rebellion against God that we see in our culture!

It is right to feel a sense of righteous indignation over the indoctrination of children with evil philosophy.

It is right to hate things that destroy people, but we also need to remember that these people are blind, slaves to their sin, filled with hatred, and objects of the wrath of God.

Should we not feel compassion for people in such a state?

Do we easily forget that we were once just the same as them?

[No doubt someone is thinking, “I was never like that!” If you are thinking that way then you have never really appreciated who you are apart from Christ. We don’t come to people thinking we are better than others. We come to people recognizing that we were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, slaves to our passions, malicious, envious, and hateful, but something changed. We are told what changed for the believer in verses 4-6 and from that we learn this third lesson about Christian conduct, that...]

Point #3 – Christian conduct is produced by the kindness and power of God. (Verses 4-6)

Those of us that belong to Jesus think and act differently than we did before because God the Holy Spirit lives in us because Jesus died for us.

We see the kindness of the LORD in verse 4 and the first half of verse 5 (stop at mercy).

This may be one of the hardest things for people to accept or understand about the gospel.

We are saved by God according to His ‘loving kindness’ and ‘not because of works done by us in righteousness’.

Generally speaking we want to think of ourselves as good people who deserve good things from God.

That is why every other religion in the world is based on works.
Every other religion is about people earning their way into heaven.

Believing that you can make yourself right with God by doing good things results in one of two things.

It either leads to despair or foolish ignorance.

If you have any sense of the Holiness of God and that His standard is absolute perfection and that even the smallest offense against His infinite glory creates a debt that we have no capacity to pay, then trying to do enough things to pay that debt only leads to despair because you realize it can never be done and you are only ever going deeper in debt.

On the other hand if you think you can actually make it then you have no concept of the Holiness of God or the seriousness of your offenses and you are expecting God to be happy with your good works which are stained with your imperfections.

If you think you can make God happy with such things you are showing contempt for His kindness and despising the death of Christ.

To build yourself up like that and think so little of God is both foolishness and ignorance to the highest degree.

We can only be saved because of the loving kindness and mercy of God.

We are saved because Jesus came into the world, perfectly pleased God in everything He did, thought, and felt, took His earned righteousness and offered Himself to die in our place and pay the debt that we can never pay, and His rising from the dead proves that His sacrifice can in fact rescue everyone who trusts in Him for the forgiveness of our sins.

He didn't do all that because we deserve it, or because He can't live without us.

He did it because He is kind and merciful.

There is more to being 'saved' than the forgiveness of sins. (Verses 5-6)

Some commentators think that verses 5-7 were part of a baptismal hymn in the early church which explains the word 'washing' used here in verse five.

Getting plunged beneath the water in baptism represents dying and being brought up again represents rising to new life.

The word 'regeneration' means the Holy Spirit taking someone dead in their sins and making them alive in Christ.

We also have here the word renewal.

Donald Guthrie points out this word can be taken in two ways. One way is as a restoring of something that already existed like putting on the fresh coat of paint or polishing something that is tarnished.

Another way to take this word is to bring something new into existence that did not exist before.

The second meaning, I believe, is the apostle's intention here.

2Corinthians 5:17 says, "If anyone is in Christ he is a **new creation** the old has passed away; behold, the new has come."

The Holy Spirit does something far greater than make a slightly less bad human being, He makes an entirely new creature for the eternal glory of God.

It is because we are new creatures that we desire the things of God.

It is because we are new creatures that we strive to submit to authority, speak evil of no one, avoid quarreling, seek to be gentle, and show humility before people.

[How can we be anything but humble when it is the kindness of God in Christ and the power of God the Holy Spirit at work in us that makes the Christian life possible? We should never think we are better than anyone, but instead point people to the incomprehensible goodness of God in Christ. That brings us to one more lesson from our text this morning. Christian conduct reflects faith in a sovereign God, reflects compassion for unbelievers, it is produced by the kindness and power of God, and fourthly...]

Point #4 – Christian conduct reflects the hope of eternity. (Verse 7)

It makes zero sense for people who are looking forward to living with God forever to live as though the things of this world are what matter most.

Verse 7 explains the goal of the kindness and power of God being exercised in the lives of believers.

Look at the first words of the verse! It says, "so that!"

God made known His goodness and loving kindness and saved us according to His mercy by making us alive and new through the work of God the Holy Spirit who has been poured out richly into the lives of believers through the work of Christ "**so that...being justified by His grace we might become heirs.**"

I don't know about you but when I hear the word 'heir' I think of someone you gets the money, stuff, or position of someone who has passed away.

We are conditioned to think that way because we have only ever known what it is like to live in a world where things are in a state of decay.

The word 'heir' taken by itself has nothing to do with passing things on from one generation to the next, but instead it refers to someone who receives a promise.

When we think of what it means to be an 'heir' in the kingdom of heaven it means that we are recipients of the promises of almighty God.

Let's listen now to the whole verse. (Verse 7)

The promise of God to His people is that we would live with Him in the light of His glory. We would live with Him in the light of His glory in a new creation with new bodies that are completely free from the corruption of sin and death.

This is a far better inheritance than any other promise we could possibly imagine because we receive this promise 'in the hope of eternal life.'

Inheritance in this present world lasts for a few decades at the most and then it gets passed on to someone else and who knows what they will do with it.

Inheriting the promises of God lasts forever.

To see the full glory of this we need to understand exactly what eternal life is.

Some people have taught that when God gives us a new body and we are living on the new earth that we will live forever because that will be the nature of our new existence.

That idea is more in keeping with Greek philosophy than it is with the Bible.

Only God exists in and of Himself for all eternity, every other creature depends on God to exist.

Our hope for eternal life is that God will continually choose to sustain us in the light of His glory forever.

He will never grow weary of keeping His promises, He will never get bored of sustaining our lives, but He will keep us forever for the sake of His Son Jesus.

Now, if we can wrap our mind around that even just a little bit it will have a big impact on how we conduct ourselves in the here and now.

Just think for a moment! Think back on this past week, if you can go back a month, or a year, or a far as you can and think about all the times you have done something displeasing to the LORD.

How many times were those sins committed over temporary things?

Why are we disrespectful towards those in authority over us?

Why do we speak evil of others?

Why fight with people?

What keeps us from gentleness and humility?

More often than not I would suggest it is because we are clamoring after things that don't last.

[It's like two children fighting over a balloon. They yell, punch, kick, and call each other names. If they both manage to get a hold of it and pull hard enough the balloon pops. Even if one manages to possess it how long does it last? That's why right thinking parents come along and ask, "What are you fighting about? It is only a balloon!"]

In light of eternity, even the most valuable earthly things are worth about as much as a balloon.

While I believe there are many things we can enjoy in this life to the glory of God, there is not a single thing in this world that is worth acting like an unbeliever for.

I have to wonder how much would change in the way we behave towards people if we could loosen our grip on temporary things and instead hold fast to the eternal promises of God.

Do we believe in a sovereign God today?

Do we have compassion for people living under the schemes of the devil?

Do we have any sense of the kindness and power of the LORD?

Do we have much confidence in the hope of eternal life?

If we do then it will have a powerful impact on how we conduct ourselves in the world.

So, ***“whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”***