

PROPER REMINDERS  
TITUS 3:1-8

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

You may not have noticed, but there are a few people around us who have strong political feelings in this election season. I learned this week about two neighbors here in town who used to be good friends. However, they found out that they support different presidential candidates, and now they don't speak to each other. That is unfortunate.

There are supporters on both sides of the political divide who use rhetoric which is not helpful. I heard one cable news network anchor recently who claimed that if Donald Trump is elected president he will execute his political opponents. That seems to me to be pretty irresponsible language for a cable news anchor to use. It contributes to an atmosphere that is conducive to the attempted assassination of Donald Trump last weekend. It think that it is the grace of God for both political parties and for the country as a whole that the former president was not killed.

Most of us have found things in the last eight years in the presidential administrations of one or both leaders which have upset us. What is our responsibility toward government when its leaders promote values and policies which are contrary to our own? I did a sermon series on a Christian's responsibility toward civil government a couple of years ago. I can only briefly deal with that subject this morning. But it is a key issue in the passage before us.

We have seen that the Apostle Paul wrote this brief New Testament letter to his coworker Titus, whom he had left on the island of Crete in the Mediterranean Sea. His job was to strengthen the churches which had been planted there. So in this letter Paul tells Titus to appoint elders in the various churches. He lays out the basic qualifications for men who would serve in this role. He talks about the need to confront false teachers who are not clear about the basic Christian message. He talks about how to deal with a culture which is hostile to Christian values. He encourages the practice of Christian virtues. Last week in our look at the passage at the end of #2 we saw that Paul told Titus and his other readers to always keep in mind that Jesus is coming back some day. Christians can always be encouraged that righteousness will prevail in the end and that they will have a great eternity. In today's passage the apostle provides practical reminders about how Christians should live in an often hostile culture.

I.

In the first two verses of Titus #3 he says that we should **BE REMINDED OF OUR DUTY TO SOCIETY**. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. BE REMINDED OF OUR DUTY TO SOCIETY) He writes, **"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 toward all people."**

So the basic general responsibility of Christians toward government seems to be clear. We have all encountered government policies and government leaders that bother us. Apparently we Christians are not to immediately take up arms against the government. We might initially suspect that the Apostle Paul has a too rosy view of government and its leaders. Maybe he did not have to deal with the same things that we have had to deal with.

To keep things in proper perspective we need to consider the kind of government and political leaders whom he encountered in the first century. The scholars think that Paul's letter to Titus was written about 66 or 67 AD. The Roman emperor at the time was Nero, who ruled from 54 to 68 AD. He came to the throne at age 17 and died at age 31.

Nero seems to have started his rule well. He had a concern for his image among the masses, and he tried to do what he could to keep most Romans happy. A historian by the name of Joshua Levine writes, "**He was no snob and remembered the names and faces of people up and down the social ladder. All in all, he comes off as a fairly likable young fellow.**" (*Smithsonian* magazine, October, 2020)

Nero dabbled in a number of hobbies. He participated in athletic competitions. He raced chariots. He wrote poetry, and he took up singing. At one point he put together a musical show and went on a tour of Greece. He participated in several musical competitions there. Somehow he never lost in anything in which he competed. Wise citizens thought that it was always best to make sure that Nero won.

But then family problems began to intrude. He had an arranged marriage at a very young age. He acquired a mistress and dumped his first wife. Nero had a brother whom he did not like. He had him killed. His mother was a dominant personality. He had her murdered when she objected to his marriage to a woman named Poppaea. Nero came home late one night after chariot races. Poppaea, who was pregnant, expressed mild objection to the lateness of the hour. Nero kicked her in the stomach. She and the baby both died.

Nero had real remorse about that. He saw a teen age boy some months later who reminded him of Poppaea. Nero had this boy castrated and had a formal marriage ceremony with him and proceeded to treat him as a wife. How is that for Christian values?

The thing most of us may remember about Nero is that he fiddled while Rome burned. Nero was not in Rome when this famous fire started on July 18, 64 AD. He did not start it, The evidence is that he returned to Rome and initially led relief efforts to help the citizens. But one day before the fire was out witnesses saw him playing his lyre and singing a song written about the destruction of Troy. That story got spread around, and Nero got some unfavorable press. Rumors floated around that he started the fire. Nero responded to this by blaming the Christians for the fire. He rounded up several Christians and had them burned to death in his garden.

This happened a couple of years before Paul wrote this letter. He knew about it. He had already been arrested once and hauled in to the Roman authorities because people were upset at his preaching. In spite of all of this Paul says that the basic responsibility of Christians is to be obedient to government and government officials.

Paul is not the only Christian leader who said this. Church tradition says that Peter was persecuted by the Roman authorities and executed for his preaching of the gospel. Yet he told Christians this in his first epistle (1 PETER 2:13): **“Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, (1 PETER 2:14) or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. (1 PETER 2:15) For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.”** Christians are supposed to obey laws and pay their taxes.

Are there no limits or exceptions to this? Later in the first century a Roman emperor established a loyalty test whereby Romans were required annually in some places to take a pinch of incense and proclaim, “Caesar is Lord.” Christians would not do this. They knew that this was not just a loyalty test but also an admission that Caesar was god. As a consequence some Christians were executed. (PROJECTOR OFF)

The question of limits to this general obligation of obedience to government arose very early in the history of the church. In Acts #2 Peter and John were involved in the miraculous healing of a lame man in the temple in Jerusalem. They used the occasion to preach about Jesus and to remind the crowd that their religious leaders were responsible for His crucifixion. The religious authorities called them in for a chat. (PROJECTOR ON--- ACTS 4:18) According to Acts #4 vv. 18-20, **“So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. (ACTS 4:19-20) But Peter and John answered them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.’”**

So here is some indication of the limit to obedience. When government says that we cannot say anything about Jesus, we can disobey. It would seem that when government or government officials tell us to do something that violates clear commands of God, we should also disobey. But the example of Paul and Peter and the other apostles did not mean that such disobedience should extend to rebellion. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Of course we are blessed to live in a democracy. We have some say over the leaders we have and the policies which they adopt. We also have certain political rights which we can claim. In the Book of Acts we see that Paul at certain times would claim his rights as a Roman citizen when doing so appeared to support the cause of Christianity.

At the end of v. 1 and in v. 2 we see that Christians have a broader responsibility to society than just obedience to government. Paul says that we are to be ready for every good work. These guys were Jews who knew the Old Testament well. They knew the

story well about how their people had often lived in hostile cultures. At a certain point their ancestors had been sent off to Babylon as a result of God's punishment for their sin of falling away from Him. In Jeremiah #29 v. 7 (PROJECTOR ON--- JEREMIAH 29:7) the prophet told his fellow countrymen, **"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."**

So the reminder here to us is that we should not just lock the doors, get a good security system, and stock up on ammo. We Christians should be on the lookout for how we can help our neighbor, where we can volunteer in the community, or how we can bless others through our church involvement. We Christians should be known as great citizens. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Part of the problem is that we live in a society which so often encourages us to focus on ourselves. Life is about fulfilling our dream, about finding ourselves, about seeking self-fulfillment. I read this week what a sociology professor by the name of Thomas Hendricks has to say. (*Psychology Today*, 6/24/2021) He writes, **"...American society encourages people to pursue their dreams with an individualistic spirit. We are to look out for ourselves and perhaps for a small circle of friends."** The Bible says that life should be about serving others. Ironically this also the route to real fulfillment and satisfaction in life.

II.

The Apostle Paul speaks about a second reminder in v. 3. He says that we Christians should BE REMINDED OF OUR FORMER CONDITION. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. BE REMINDED OF OUR FORMER CONDITION) According to v. 3, **"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."**

It may be easy for us as Christians to look at the world around us and notice how much is bad. We can respond by having a superior attitude and being critical. As Christians we should be wise and discerning and aware of evil around us. But Paul reminds Christians that we should always maintain a certain humility. We should remember who we were before we became followers of Jesus.

Back in #1 v. 12 Paul cited one of the ancient writers from Crete who said that his own people were liars, evil beasts, and lazy gluttons. At times we may recognize that our culture is not all that different.

John Newton was a pastor in England in the 1700s. He not only had a talent for preaching but also for writing hymns. He is the author of the famous song "Amazing Grace." He had Deuteronomy #15 v. 15 inscribed on the mantle on the fireplace in his office. (DEUTERONOMY 15:15). That verse in the King James translation reads, **"And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the Lord**

**thy God redeemed thee...**" The reference is to the fact that the Jews were once slaves in Egypt.

John Newton had worked on slave ships earlier in his life. At one point he had been forced to become a slave himself. Eventually he became the captain of a slave ship. But then he found Jesus, or Jesus found him, and he gave it all up. He became a pastor. Deuteronomy 15 v. 15 was a regular reminder of what he once was. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Such is the reminder which we need. We are often tempted to think that we are not so bad. We like to think that we are better than others. But by God's standards we are all sinners deserving of hell. There was a Welsh pastor by the name of Martin Lloyd-Jones who wrote, **"In order to measure the love of God you have first to go down before you can go up. You do not start on the level and go up. We have to be brought up from a dungeon, from a horrible pit; and unless you know something of the measure of that depth you will only be measuring half the love of God."** (*God's Way of Reconciliation*, p. 201)

III.

In vv. 4-7 we encounter a third reminder. Paul says that we need to BE REMINDED OF OUR SALVATION. (PROJECTOR ON--- III. BE REMINDED OF OUR SALVATION)

Paul begins a sentence in v. 4: **"But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared..."** We are not ready for a Savior until we recognize a need to be saved. Notice that it is God who is taking the initiative in seeking us. It is not we who are seeking Him.

Notice also that there appears to be a reference to the Trinity in these verses. "God our Savior" appears to be a reference to God the Father. The goodness and loving kindness is the appearance of God the Son. Verse 6 speaks of Jesus Christ our Savior. Verse 5 specifically mentions the Holy Spirit.

God's motivation in sending us His Son is his *philanthropia*. (PHILANTHROPIA) That is the Greek word which is used. It is a compound word consisting of *philos*, or love, and *anthropos*, which refers to mankind. It is the love of mankind. In English we get the word "philanthropy."

There are many references in the Bible where humans are compared to sheep. (PROJECTOR OFF). My cousins raised sheep. I spent enough time with their sheep to recognize that they are pretty dumb animals. Sheep do not look for a shepherd. It has to be the shepherd who seeks out the sheep.

In v. 5 the Bible says, **"...he [God our Savior] 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..."** Other religions, and some twistings of Christianity, say that we must bring something to the table before God, or the gods. We have to bring money, or good works, or animal sacrifices, or rituals, or complete

dedication. But the apostle stresses here that this salvation deal is His doing. It involves His mercy. It is not something deserved or earned.

Our only responsibility is to believe. Thus it is that the Bible says in Ephesians #2 vv. 8-9 (PROJECTOR ON--- EPHESIANS 2:8-9), **“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”** The object of our faith must be Jesus, the Son of God who became a human being and who died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins.

The additional Person in the Trinity who is at work here is the Holy Spirit. (PROJECTOR OFF) Reference is made to the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit. There is some debate among the theologians about whether washing of regeneration and renewal are the same thing. The Holy Spirit is said to be involved in this renewal and regeneration.

Many of you are familiar with the story told in the Gospel of John in which Jesus uses similar terminology. Nicodemus was a Jewish religious leader who was a member of the high council of Judaism in Jerusalem. He saw the miracles which Jesus did and was impressed. He came to Jesus one night and told Him that he knew that no one could do this stuff unless he was sent from God. He asked Jesus what the deal was.

In John #3 v. 3 (PROJECTOR ON--- JOHN 3:3) Jesus told the guy, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”** So here is this regeneration thing. Nicodemus is confused about it. He doesn't understand. Jesus proceeds to make a veiled reference to His coming crucifixion. Then in v. 16 of #3 (JOHN 3:16) He declares, **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”**

So here is a simple statement of the human responsibility. If we believe in this Jesus, we get eternal life. God the Father sends the Son Jesus who dies on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. The Holy Spirit works in our lives to regenerate us. He opens our hearts to believe. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Verse 6: **“...he [the Holy Spirit] poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.”** Perhaps Paul has in mind what happened to the early Christians at Pentecost. Jesus told His followers to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit. On the Jewish feast day when Jews from throughout the Roman Empire were gathered in Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit came upon those first Christians. They suddenly began speaking in various languages. Peter preached a sermon and these Christians spoke out boldly. These formerly bumbling, stumbling disciples became brave and bold. Empowered by the Holy Spirit this church deal took off.

Verse 7 in our passage identifies two additional factors involved in this salvation deal. Paul says, **“...so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”** The pronoun “his” refers to “Jesus Christ our

Savior.” He is gracious to us because Jesus provides us with justification. What is justification? It is a legal term that refers to our situation of guilt before a holy God. “To justify” is to declare righteous. We humans are still sinners. But because of what Jesus did on the cross, and because of our trust in Him, we are declared righteous. The case against us is dismissed.

One of the many political things that happened this week was that there was a major decision in one of the criminal cases against Donald Trump. The Florida judge in the classified documents case dismissed the charges against the former president. He may be guilty of having classified documents that he should not have had in his possession. But because of other legal situations involving the prosecution, the charges against him were dismissed. He was legally justified. He was let go. That case may be appealed. But in our situation the sovereign God of the universe has declared us righteous. We don't have to worry about any further appeal.

The other promise found in v. 8 is that we Christians are made heirs of eternal life. We get to go to heaven. We have the assurance of a meaningful life now. In 1 John #5 vv. 11-13 (PROJECTOR ON--- 1 JOHN 5:11) we find this assurance from the Apostle John: **“And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. (1 JOHN 5:12) Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. (1 JOHN 5:13) I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.”** Thus we have the reminder of our salvation and its wonderful benefits.

IV.

Finally in v. 8 we are to BE REMINDED OF OUR MISSION. (IV. BE REMINDED OF OUR MISSION) Paul writes, **“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. These things are excellent and profitable for people.”** What is the saying which is trustworthy? Probably what Paul has just said in vv. 4-7, which is one sentence in the original Greek language.

The New American Standard translation puts the verse this way: **“This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently...”** These early Christians did not yet have the New Testament. They had the Hebrew Bible, but they mostly were dependent on the oral teaching which they had from the apostles and their students like Titus about how to be Christians. The encouragement which they are receiving from Paul is to believe what he is saying and what Titus is teaching. They can be confident that this is the truth. So they should be bold. We should be bold, especially since we do have the New Testament today.

Our culture needs to hear this message. We have so many screwed up ideas floating around in our world today. We have school teachers telling kids that they can go ahead and change their gender if they want to. This week Governor Newsom over in California signed a law preventing public school districts in his state from allowing teachers to inform the parents of kids who have expressed a desire to change their gender and

have chosen to use a different pronoun to describe their identity. The state knows better than parents about what is best for their kids.

Paul in v. 8 in our passage says that the effect that God's grace should have upon Christians living in a sometimes hostile culture is to make them better citizens. We should be about loving our neighbors and volunteering in the community and doing prison ministry and helping homeless people and trying to reach kids who come from broken families.

Alexei Navalny (ALEXEI NAVALNY) was a Russian dissident who followed in the tradition of several Christian dissidents, such as Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Fyodor Dostoevsky. He grew up near Moscow and was able to go to college and law school. He got involved in politics when he saw that his country was headed back toward a dictatorship. Because he acquired some popularity, the government officials began to find reasons to throw him into jail. Alexei Navalny formed a group called the Anti-Corruption Foundation. He did a couple of documentaries which revealed the corruption of Vladimir Putin and his henchmen.

For reasons that you can't imagine this led to more jailings. Then in 2020 he got seriously sick. Friends managed to fly him out of Russia to Germany. Doctors there determined that he had been poisoned by a nerve agent known only to be possessed by the Russian security services. Of course they denied all knowledge of it.

About that time Alexei Navalny became a follower of Jesus. He had earlier proclaimed himself to be an atheist. Despite the obvious dangers that awaited him, he decided to return to Russia. He did not go back to lead a rebellion. He went back to proclaim the truth, to encourage his followers, and to warn people about the Putin regime. When he went back to Russia, he was sentenced to prison for violating the terms of his parole. He had flown out of the country without permission to save his life from the poison the government had given him.

At his court hearing in 2021 Alexei Navalny proclaimed, **"The fact is that I am a Christian, which usually rather sets me up as an example for constant ridicule in the Anti-Corruption Foundation, because mostly our people are atheists and I was once quite a militant atheist myself."** After his initial imprisonment in a place near Moscow, Navalny was sent to a remote camp in Siberia. This past February he died there after taking a walk and feeling unwell. He was only 47. In Russian terminology this means that the Putin government killed him.

I tell his story because his life illustrates the principles we have looked at this morning. He was a Christian who lived in an often hostile culture. He tried to do his duty to his society. He kept focused on his mission. He sought to do what was right. In the end his motivation was to follow Jesus. He found confidence in that relationship that enabled him to face death with the assurance that he would end up in heaven. In Alexei Navalny we find an example and a testimony that we can all find worth following. May we all take advantage of the opportunities which we have to serve God.