

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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HOW TO CHANGE A SOCIETY FOR THE BETTER

Titus 3

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My three points to today's sermon are:

- The call to virtue from vice.
- The call to live out the virtues of Christ.
- Avoid those without Christian virtues.

INTRODUCTION: A quick review of the letter from Paul to Titus shows us that Paul left Titus to choose church leaders and disciple people on the island of Crete. Paul followed up by writing this letter of instruction to Titus.

Paul provided a foundation for church leadership and a social order. He introduces what he did at other places, a social order that creates a unique Christian culture that got the world's attention. Throughout the Bible, people left various backgrounds to join this Christian culture. We have stories of thieves, prostitutes, sorcerers, pagans, and people of other religions who came to faith and knowledge of God and joined this culture of believers. In the Old Testament, the Israelites had a culture that was recognized all over the known world. Over time, they went from slaves to wanderers to a settled people, all the time gaining strength and respect as a nation. Occasionally, others joined this family of faith.

Then we have the creation of the Christian church, this New Testament phenomenon that expanded the parameters of the family of faith even more. And we have this history in the New Testament that tells us of all the people of different backgrounds that came together to form this new Christian culture. These were people who once were enemies, or at the very least, who previously refused to

associate. Now, in this new civil, Christian culture, they ate together, fellowshiped together, and worshipped together. No doubt the world took note.

Now, on this island of Crete, Christianity was facing a tough foe. And that was the Cretan culture itself. They were known for being liars. As I told you, about 600 years earlier, one of their own people wrote that all Cretans were liars. And in academic circles, that's created a discussion called the Epimenides Paradox which goes like this: If a man from Crete says all Cretans are liars, then he is a liar, too, and his words cannot be trusted.

We won't argue about the philosophical paradox this morning, but what I do want to point out to you is that Christianity is founded on truth. So the very idea that a Christian church was founded in Crete is in and of itself very curious. But if you think about it, the very idea that a Christian church is found anywhere is rather curious. The fact that God left a perfect heaven and came as human flesh to this sinful earth is the most curious thing of all.

1-A CALL TO VIRTUE FROM VICE

SCRIPTURE: Titus 3:1-3

Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, ² to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone.

³*At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.*

EXPLANATION: When a person is saved, that person has a whole new reason for living and it should affect every area of that person's life. II Corinthians 5:17 says, *If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come.*

But as believers we have a huge predicament. We are to live out these Christ-like virtues even though we live in a fallen world that is not interested in Christ-likeness.

Let's look at a nation's culture for a minute. I believe these scriptures give us good insight. The Cretan culture was on the verge of reformation. It was about to undergo change because following Christ forged a new way of interacting with one another. It provided a new and better way of respecting government leaders. If you have any knowledge of even a handful of nations in our world today, it's easy to note that the more intolerant a government is toward the church, the harsher that nation is on its citizens.

The question is whether the government defines the culture or whether the culture defines the government? Is a nation defined by the top down or the bottom up? In the letter to Titus, Paul's challenge to the people to clean up their act was a bottom-up strategy. Paul believed if the people of God – who made up the church – got their acts together, then the culture would be impacted.

We always want the government to fix things, but as we know, the government is not too good at that. Instead, fixing things and changing a situation for the better must come from the individual. You might say that sounds idealistic, but really it's not.

The Christian predicament is to live out verses 1-2 -- *subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, ² to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone.* -- in a world that lives out verse 3 -- *foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures.... malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.*

Verse 3 identifies what the world is like. Verses 1-2 tell the Christian to live the opposite of the way the world lives. I believe in verse 3 Paul described the Cretan culture which led the residents to be a people of deception.

Those Cretans who joined this new Christian culture said goodbye to the old way of life. They would be hated, they would be rejected, and they would learn they could only lean on each other because they left the old life behind.

Jesus said in John 15:19 *If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.*

The way ahead for churches in the New Testament would not be easy. They would be creating a life for themselves that was the polar opposite of the world they were in. I doubt any of the New Testament churches would have received any five-star ratings.

ILLUSTRATION: A few years ago, someone pointed out to me that our church received a poor rating on YP.com. I forgot why we got the poor rating. I called YP.com and told them we never asked to be a part of their organization. I said we had specific beliefs that others may not like and might therefore result in low ratings. The representative went to talk with his manager. When he returned, he said they could remove the rating, but we would have no presence on YP.com. I said that was fine with me.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is not considered good news to all people. Telling people to repent of sin is not going to result in the church getting a five-star rating.

Living out the virtues of verses 1 and 2 would not be popular in a verse 3 world.

APPLICATION: It's the same today. When Jesus calls you to follow him, you are called away from your way of living to a new way of living. This new way of living brings with it a heavenly perspective on things. God calls people with different backgrounds and various sins. Some might be hardened sinners and others may not be. With both groups of people, he gives a transcendent perspective, a new way of living, a new way of thinking. And this new life is directed by the Holy Spirit. So we have a call to virtue from vice. Next, we have:

2-A CALL TO LIVE OUT THE VIRTUES OF CHRIST

SCRIPTURE: Titus 3:4-8

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. ⁸ This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

EXPLANATION: In verse 5, the Greek word Paul uses for love is *philanthropia*, which is where we get the word *philanthropy*. This means *love for people*, or *love of humanity*. What Paul is saying is that God's expression of love, or his philanthropy, to people is Jesus Christ.

Verses 5 and 6: *He saved us through washing of rebirth and renewal. He poured generously the Holy Spirit through Jesus.* First, we have washing and then pouring. I have the mental image of a cleansing wash followed by rinsing.

Verses 7: *We are justified by his grace*, not works. There it is again, yet another reminder that we really can't do anything for ourselves in the spiritual realm.

And we are heirs. We have an inheritance. And that inheritance is eternal life.

Verse 8: Why does he say *This is a new trustworthy saying*? Look back in chapter 1, verse 2: *In the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time...* Paul said that God does not lie and this saying is trustworthy. He was confronting this engrained culture of lying.

We have right before us the Biblical basis for living the changed life. And the result will be leading people to good living which will benefit all people.

ILLUSTRATION: Immanuel Kant talked about the Law of Universality. This idea makes everyone answer the question *If everyone did what I am doing, what would be the result?* If a person cheats, lies, steals, deceives, and so on...what would be the result if everyone did it? If the answer is harmful to society, the action is considered by Kant unethical.

If we take Kant's Law of Universality and apply it to how Paul tasks Christians, then we'll ask *What if everyone did good?* The result would be the last sentence in verse 8: *These things are excellent and profitable to everyone.*

- A call to virtue from vice.
- A call to live out the virtues of Christ.

3-AVOID NON-CHRISTIAN VIRTUES

SCRIPTURE: Titus 3:9-11

But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. ¹⁰ Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them. ¹¹ You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are self-condemned.

EXPLANATION: Verse 9 references foolish controversies – we all know what those are. Fake scandals, trumped-up charges, and other things. I remember when I was a boy, a church was divided over which pest control company to use. Even then, I knew the exterminator was not the issue.

The “genealogies” statement – here's what that means. It is believed that people tried to trace their lineage back to Abraham and claim some type of superiority because of it. We know from other New Testament scriptures that God is not concerned with one's ancestry but whether a person has repented of sin and trusted Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Arguments and quarrels about the law – these were people who referenced the Law of Moses. Titus was a Gentile and didn't know much about the Law of Moses. With Christ, he did not need to. Even today, there are people who complicate the message of Christ with the Law of Moses. Paul's letter to Titus warned against such people.

In many churches today, people get caught up in discussions and meetings that lead nowhere. With divisive people, a church might warn people once, then twice, then three times, then four, then eventually the person isn't warned anymore, and the person is tolerated forever while damage to God's church continues.

Paul closed the letter with some instructions concerning individuals.

And his last words are *grace be with you all*.

The title of this message is “How To Change A Society For The Better”, and this has been a summary of how to do it. Titus tells us how to live out the virtues of Christ as individuals and as a church.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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