

The World and the Church

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[0 : 0 0] So far in Paul's letter to Titus, we've noticed that in many senses it's like a blueprint for the church and how the church is to function.

We saw that the knowledge of the gospel should lead to godliness in different situations. We saw that in chapter 1, the need for godly leaders.

Then in chapter 2, we saw the need for the church to display godliness as they go about their lives and how they interact in their homes, but also how we disciple each other well.

And then finally, we come into chapter 3. And here, as we begin, I want us to kind of have this question in our mind of how should the church relate to the world?

What is the relationship between the church and the world? That's our big question. For this morning. Throughout history of the church, there's been many examples of individual Christians or of groups of Christians withdrawing from society.

[1 : 0 7] Deciding that life in the world, it just wasn't for them. Presumably because they thought the world was too broken, too full of sin.

And so they wanted to hide away from that reality, setting up their own communities. I heard about a Christian community in England. I'm not sure if they're still around or where exactly they were located.

But they were that strict about having nothing to do with the world. They were that committed to not engaging with the world. That even if there was to be post delivered to them, the post would leave it at the edge of their community.

And once they had gone away, they would go and pick it up and they would distribute it themselves. And I'm sure most of us here are thinking that these Christians are completely ridiculous. We know the Bible teaches that we are to engage with the world.

Jesus himself engaged with the world. With sinners. With those in the society that were looked down upon. We're to be in the world. But not of the world.

[2 : 1 3] But just for a moment, I want us to see that maybe it's not quite as ridiculous as it first seems. There's maybe good reasons that people have been tempted to withdraw from society.

To create those exclusive Christian societies. We're all aware here that the world so often can be an awful place to live.

It's so often filled with awful things. Evil people. Especially today as we see our world departing further and further away from the teachings of the Bible.

Withdrawing into a Christian bubble in some senses would make living as a Christian easier. We wouldn't have to engage with people who aren't of the same thinking as us.

That some of us here probably find bringing children up in the faith tough. Because of the influence that the world has on young people. Maybe it would be easier if we just withdrew from the world.

[3 : 19] We'd just be surrounded by other Christians with the common goal of growing in faith, hope and love together. Although I'm sure an exclusively Christian society would come with many of its own problems.

But in a sense, when we think about what the island of Crete was like. The kind of people that it was filled with. Remember in chapter 1 we read there that Cretans were known as liars.

They were known to be evil. They were lazy. And so knowing what they were like. That might make us unsurprised if Paul at this point told the Christians to simply have nothing to do with those who were rejecting the gospel in Crete.

If he told them to just simply avoid them. Having nothing to do with them. But in this chapter, the apostle Paul, he does the very opposite.

He instructs Titus on how the Christians in Crete should engage with those who haven't yet believed the gospel. And so now in chapter 3, Paul explains the need to interact in a godly way with a godless world.

[4 : 31] And that's the big idea of this passage this morning. The need to interact in a godly way with a godless world. We're going to look at the first eight verses of Titus 3.

And so if you've got a Bible, please do have it open at Titus. I think it was page 998 in the church Bibles. And so our first point this morning is engage with the world.

And we see that from verse 1 and 2. Engage with the world. Paul says there, Paul begins here by speaking about how we engage with rulers and authorities.

The need for us to be obedient and submissive to them. The Bible elsewhere portrays governments and authorities as a gift to us from God.

Telling us that any authority given to them has been delegated by God himself. So this means, of course, that our loyalty is first to God himself.

[5 : 48] And so long as our governments and rulers don't put anything in place that goes against God's word, then we are absolutely to submit to it and obey it. Because that's what the Bible commands of us.

So in a sense what Paul is doing here is saying that as Christians, we should be setting an example in our societies and how we respond to our government. We think about this year, there's going to be a general election.

And so this passage here is telling us that even if who we vote for, even if who we want to get in, if they don't get in, that we're not then exempt from submitting to them and obeying what they put in place.

But actually, as Christians, we're called to set an example to those around us. That even if it's those we don't want to get in power, we'll still submit to them and we'll still obey them.

It doesn't mean that we have to be sheep who are kind of blindly just doing everything that they say without even having an opinion or thinking about it.

[6 : 53] But there's been a couple of things in there. There is processes in place that when there's things going on that we don't like or agree with, we can contact our MPs, we can speak to local counsellors, we can seek to try and make these changes as we continue to submit to the things that have been put in place.

And what we don't do is we don't go around speaking to other people and slandering those who are in these positions of authority. We don't speak about them.

We go and we try and speak to them. We set an example also in that regard. We're to be obedient. We're to be ready for every good work, speak in evil of no one, avoid quarrelling, be gentle and show courtesy to all people.

These qualities, I think, are to be in relation to how we speak and respond to rulers and authorities, but also how we engage with individuals in the world, showing courtesy to all people, not just those in the church, but to all people.

This is where we see how we're to engage with the world. Paul gives us then a list of qualities that are to be lived out before the world. As we engage with the world, we're to do it in a godly manner.

[8 : 13] We're to live out our faith before those around us. Not just when we are in church, or not just when we are hanging out with other Christians. We are to be actively engaging with the world, seeking to live faithfully as God's people, as lights in the darkness.

And to do that, we need to ensure that we are engaging with the world, that we are interacting with the world out there. And sometimes we have to be proactive in that.

It's easy sometimes to kind of get stuck in our Christian bubbles, our Christian lives. It's easy to neglect that duty that we have, to be engaging with the world.

And so sometimes we have to actively look for ways in which that we can engage with the world, so that we're not withdrawn into our Christian bubbles all the time.

And so depending on what age and stage we're at, our engagement with the world might look a little bit different. For some of us it might look like going along to toddler groups within the community and meeting people there, being an influence there.

[9 : 19] Or making friendships at the school gates, joining a local book club or a sports club. That's just a few examples, but it's worth thinking about what could each of us be doing to be out in our communities, building relationships, and set an example of godliness before them.

There's lots of ways that we can be present in our community, but unless we're intentional about that, so often it can be something that we don't do well.

What is the relationship between the church and the world? Well, we're absolutely to engage with the world. We are to set an example to the watching world as we submit to our government, as we obey them, and as we engage with those of the world.

We're to remember that the gospel can change the world. That's our second point. The gospel can change the world from verse 3 through to verse 7.

These verses here, I think, are here to remind us of the power that is within the gospel. Paul reminds the Christians in Crete, and by extension us that are gathered here this morning, that before we came to know Jesus, we were just like those of the world.

[10 : 46] Verse 3, The good news of Jesus changed us, and therefore it can change anyone.

Now verse 3 is here, and it should cause us to be a humble people, because it reminds us that we did absolutely nothing to deserve God's grace.

We were no different to those of the world. So this means that we should never look down on other people because of how they live. If it wasn't for Christ choosing to break into our lives, then we would still be unchanged.

We would still be slaves to various passions. Christians are often accused of thinking that they're better than other people. And sometimes that's a false accusation, but in many cases it can be accurate.

We can begin to look down on other people and view ourselves as morally superior. But Paul here, he wants us to avoid falling down that trap as he reminds us in verse 3 that we're not always like we are now.

[12 : 12] He says, Remember, for we ourselves were once. And then he lists those characteristics that we each had before being transformed by the gospel.

And that doesn't mean to say that today we sit here as a perfect people who have made it, but it does sit here to say to us that there should be a clear and obvious change, a transformation if we've truly come to know the gospel.

We're not to forget what we were once like. Yes, we're forgiven for how we once lived and the things we've done, but we're to remember that we were once slaves to various passions so that we know that we're not better than other people.

We're also not to hide what we once were, to try and pretend that we were never like that. I hope we are living godly lives now. I hope we are pursuing godliness. But in that, we have to remain humble and remember that it was only the grace of God that's changed us.

We're to be humble and recognize that we're not morally superior. We are simply recipients of God's grace. And we're to love those around us well, to be an example of godliness, to hold out the reality that there is a better way of life.

[13 : 28] There's a way of life that offers life in all of its fullness. And we're to hold that truth out with confidence because we know that the gospel can change anyone because it's changed us.

And our confidence in that, it comes from verse four through seven. We read there, but when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

He's reminding us that what we are now is purely down to the grace of God. We've not worked anything out. We've not lived in a certain way to earn salvation.

He's saying that we were once like those of the world, but God himself stepped in. Verse five, he saved us, not because of works done in righteousness, but according to his mercy.

And so as we humbly embrace who we once were, it's a powerful part of us then sharing our faith because it allows people to see that we weren't always as we are now.

[14 : 56] It allows them to know that we were once like them, but that the gospel of Jesus Christ has transformed us because there is power in the gospel, in the good news of Jesus.

It's the change in us that gives us confidence that the gospel can and does change others. Not to be proud of what we were once like, but we're not to hide it.

It doesn't mean we go around shouting from the rooftops, proclaiming our many shameful acts, but we shouldn't allow non-Christians to think that we weren't once like them. When I was helping at our free church youth camp last summer, I remember one of the children was speaking to me about peer pressure from friends and getting up to things that he shouldn't have been getting up to.

And then I almost burst out laughing at the point that he said to me, you wouldn't understand. He just saw this kind of reasonably nice Christian guy who's a leader at a Christian camp and just thought I had no idea what the real world was like.

And not that I then went into detail about my past or about things that I still continue to struggle with now, but I was able to speak of some of the things that he was struggling with to let him know that I've been there before, that I know what it's like, I get it.

[16 : 18] But I could also share with him confidently that there is complete forgiveness available when we trust in the Lord Jesus and repent of our sin.

As we remember what we were like before the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, we're also reminded of the immeasurable power that is vested within the gospel.

The gospel has changed us and so as we engage with the world, we can have the utmost confidence that it can also change those of the world. So as we engage with the world, we do so with humility, recognizing that our salvation is a gift from God that we did not deserve.

And we then share the gospel with confidence, knowing that it has the power to change anyone. And this is what causes us to be a blessing to those in the world, which is our third point.

We can be a blessing to the world from verse 8. We read there, 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.

[17 : 39] These things are excellent and profitable for people. I think verse 8 here acts as a helpful summary of this chapter and in fact, probably of the letter as a whole.

Paul is instructing Titus to insist on these things. These things presumably referring to what Paul has just said about us being saved by God.

Titus is to insist on these things with the goal that those who have believed in God will be careful to devote themselves to good works. to godliness.

Now why is it crucial that we insist on these things and devote ourselves to good works? Well it's because these things are excellent and they are profitable for people.

There's no room here to compromise. We're to insist on the truths of the gospel and the reality that God's people should devote themselves to good works.

[18 : 42] In chapter 1 verse 13 Paul wrote there saying about the Cretans, he said, this testimony is true regarding them being liars, evil beasts and lazy gluttons.

Now here he's contrasting that idea of what is true. He says, the saying is trustworthy. The gospel message itself, that is true and trustworthy and it is good and it's true that it transforms lives so that we pursue godliness in contrast to those living in Crete who the Christians were to engage with.

because we've believed the truth. We are to be shaped by it and it is the truth and our good works that are profitable for all people.

We're to insist on these things because it's how we bring blessing to the world as we speak of what is true, as we speak of the great hope that we have in and through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

we're to hold that out as we interact with the world. We can't be truly saved if it's not visible through our actions and how we conduct ourselves with those around us.

[20 : 01] Faith without works is dead, says James in his letter. And it's our privilege to be a blessing to others through how we live so that they might hear the truth but also that they might see the truth lived out in our lives so that they too then might have the opportunity to respond to the significance of the Lord Jesus.

It's our privilege to insist on these things that we may grow in our faith and so that those around us may encounter the living Lord Jesus. Engage with the world, with humility and with confidence knowing that the gospel can change the world and that by insisting on the truth of the gospel we can indeed be a blessing to the world.

I don't have time to really unpack verse 9 through to the end but I just want to mention a couple of things just from verse 9 before we finish our time in Paul's letter to Titus.

I think verse 9 is here to give us some realism living godly lives and all these different spheres of life that this letter is touched on it's not going to just be a breeze it's not going to be easy but it is so worth insisting on the truth and living it out.

Verse 9 tells us that there will be foolish controversies there will be disagreements but that often they will be unprofitable they will be worthless and so as we do encounter difficult situations as we do encounter hard times we need to pray for wisdom from the living God so that in all of those situations we know how to act well we know how to display godliness and it's only through receiving that wisdom from God that we will truly know how to respond in those different situations and so that's a big thing for us all to pray for as we pursue godliness also that God in his kindness would grant us wisdom on how to act in these different situations how to act in the best way that we might hold out the gospel to those around us.

[22 : 28] The letter to Titus has largely been about God's picture of the church how we should function how we should live as Christians how we should display godliness in those different spheres of life and to put Paul's letter to Titus in a nutshell we've come back to it time and time again but the gospel leads to godliness so when we truly come to know and trust in the gospel which is the reality that there is forgiveness for all who trust in the Lord Jesus as their saviour there's knowledge of that all that he's done for us that we've not earned that we don't deserve once we know that our desires should change and we should desire to live a godly life as a response to God's kindness to us in the gospel as we focus on the gospel we will see our lives becoming more and more marked by godliness in every area as we live out our faith it is our absolute privilege as God's people to be used by God to be a blessing to those around us let's pray together let's pray Father God we thank you so much for the gospel for the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ for who he is and for all that he's done for us we pray you would again even now impress the great truth of the gospel upon our hearts that by the work of your Spirit in our lives you would increase our desire to live godly lives to respond to your kindness by seeking to live how you've called us would you grant us wisdom and how to do that well would you help us to interact with the world well would you help us to live godly lives in this godless world and we ask that in all that we do that you would receive all the glory all the honor and all the praise amen