



## **Zealous for Good Works: Grace Goes Public (Titus 3:1-2)**

**Matthew Williams**

**March 10, 2024**

**KingsWay Community Church**

One of the more helpful benefits of life in the computer age is the ability to receive reminders. Gone are the days of trying to keep every important date on a paper calendar and copying everything over by hand, when a new year rolls around. Whether it's the day your phone bill is due or a friend's birthday, all you do is tell your smart whatever to remind you and you're set! Calendar reminders are incredibly helpful.

Not all reminders, however, feel like blessings. Think the Saturday morning when your parents remind you it's national "clean your room" day (May 10). Or the Monday morning your boss reminds you he's still waiting for a report you forgot to submit. Some reminders feel like killjoys. Maybe you've experienced that on Sunday morning when the church gathers for worship.

When a pastor says something you've heard before, does part of your heart sink? When we sing a song you've heard for twenty years, does part of your mind tune out? "If I were a brand-new Christian, I'm sure that would be helpful. But I've heard that over and over again and I got it the first time." On more than one occasion, a child in our home has commented during family devotions, "I already know that story, dad." When we've heard something before, our desire to hear it again tends to take a hit.

Here's the truth, friends. In the kingdom of God, reminders are not killjoys. They're precious gifts! They are something we desperately need! Why? Because we forget. Awareness dims. Conviction fades. Gratitude dulls. In our heads, we know something is spiritually true. But in our hearts, at the level of our affections, our faith and joy in the truth is on life-support, barely breathing.

We need the Spirit to use God's Word to bring us back to our spiritual senses, so to speak, by reminding us of who God is, what he's done for us, and how we are empowered to live as a result! Let us not be the kind of people Paul encountered in Athens! Acts 17:21, "Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new." Let us be like Asaph in Ps 77:11-12, "I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds."

The Apostle Paul knows we need reminders. He's a good pastor. He wants Titus to be a good pastor. So he charges him in v. 1, "Remind them..." Remind them, Titus. What did



they need to remember? Something we too need to remember. That Christian spirituality is not a private thing, a me-and-Jesus thing. When you come face to face with the good news of all Jesus has done for us and respond to the gospel of grace with repentance and faith, it will radically change in the way you relate to other people. Where grace takes root, grace goes public. All who are saved from the wrath of God are transformed by the grace of God.

It's why Jesus died – to set us free from slavery to sin so we could know the joy of living for the Lord! Tit 2:14, “[He] gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.” Chief among those good works is the way we do relationships. **For where grace takes root, grace goes public, and in a deeply relational kind of way.** So what does grace look like in action?

## **1) SUBMISSION TO AUTHORITY**

The phrase “rulers and authorities” in v. 1 describes governing officials. In Paul’s day, it was the Romans. But the principle applies to all sorts of human authorities God has established in the state the church, the workplace, or the family. He’s not just talking about how you relate to the IRS, immigration, or the Department of Social Services. He’s also talking about how you relate to parents, pastors, and teachers. Let’s break the command down by answering two questions.

First, what does it mean to be submissive? To be obedient? It means we cheerfully do what we are asked to do and not do instead of trying to get away with whatever we think is best. We don’t tolerate authority. We don’t heckle authority. We don’t resist authority. We readily follow, even when it’s hard, even when it costs us dearly.

Being “submissive” requires more than outward compliance. “I can’t believe I have to pay this stupid tax, but oh well, I guess it’s the Christian thing to do.” No. Submission is more than an action. It’s an attitude. It’s an internal disposition of the heart that’s content to do what an authority figure tells us to do.

Obedient submission never means violating an explicit command in God’s Word, but that’s not the sort of situation most of us face in this country. I have absolutely no concern that the Social Security Administration will ask you to do something unbiblical this week. I am far more concerned about the pride that hides behind “protecting our liberties,” the pride that pats one another on the back for paying in cash to avoid taxes, uses a radar detector to drive over the speed limit, or adopts a posture of suspicion toward anyone who’s in charge of anything.

Why is a cynical or insubordinate attitude toward “rulers and authorities” such a big problem? Because of what the Lord teaches us in Rom 13. All human authority comes “from God” and is “instituted by God.” Thus, to “resists the authorities” is to resist what God has appointed and to incur his judgment. The Roman emperor and his minions? The president and his administration you don’t like? They are “ministers of God,” Paul says, “God’s servant for your good.” Your attitude toward them is your attitude toward Him.

But what if they require something that doesn’t seem good at all? Something you think is a big mistake or is categorically unwise? What if they tell Adam Klassen his visa is expiring, and he can’t stay in the US? That you need to register your handgun? Or we need to practice social distancing during our worship services? What then? Surely I don’t have to submit when an authority figure stops doing what is clearly in my best interest or the interest of those I love!

Rom 8:28, 37-39, “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose...For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Christian, when God tells you to submit, he makes a promise. He promises to use even the foolish decisions rulers and authorities make for your good. How do we know that? Because he took the death of his own Son, the greatest act of government-sanctioned evil the world has ever known, and used it to accomplish the greatest act of salvation the world has ever seen. As Joseph reminded his brothers, “You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good...” (Gen 50:20).

God’s perfect and sovereign authority is what enables us to obey Rom 13:7 with joy. “Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.” Note that when Paul refers to what an authority figure is owed, he’s not ultimately talking about what they deserve. He’s talking about what God deserves!

Christian submission to authority isn’t rooted in who they are. It’s rooted in who God is and what God is doing through even corrupt human authorities. Grace goes public through submission to authority.

## 2) READINESS TO DO GOOD

Look at the end of v. 1. “Be ready for every good work...” The word for being “ready” is the same word Jesus uses in Matt 24 or Lk 12 to describe the importance of being spiritually prepared for his return. You know something is going to happen in the future, so get ready now. Make provision now.

At first glance, it can seem like an odd way of describing good works. Aren’t good works something that comes FROM US? Something we decide to do or not do? It almost sounds in v. 1 like they’re coming AT US and we need to be prepared when they show up. That’s exactly right, friend. Why? Because of what God says in Eph 2:10. “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

Christian, when you wake up in the morning, know this. Today, as long as it is called today, there are opportunities to do spiritual good to other people that God lined up and sovereignly placed along the path of your life before you were even born. You are not walking onto a blank canvas tomorrow with God sitting on the sideline wondering, “Hmm, let’s see what Matthew will do with his life today!” No. The whole point of Eph 2:10 is that he has prepared good works for you.

There is a massive difference between a Christian who wakes up and says, “Oh boy, another day where I have to shoulder up under a crushing list of all the things I’m supposed to be and do,” and a Christian who wakes up and says, “Thank you, Lord, that today I can participate in the work you graciously planned for me. Help me to see what lies before me as coming from your wise and sovereign hand, not disgruntled customers or upper management.” There’s a faith, a joy, a confident expectation reserved for those who believe Eph 2:10.

So how do we get ready? How do we prepare today when we don’t know all the good works God has prepared for us tomorrow? **First, strengthen your ability to PERCEIVE good works by meditating on God’s Word.** A huge part of being “ready for every good work” is knowing how to recognize them, which is ultimately about learning to perceive where God is already at work in people around you.

Why does one husband listen to his wife and hear nothing but “She’s got issues,” and another husband listen to his wife and hear, “She needs the encouragement God provides in Ps 37”? Because the second husband read Ps 37 that morning! By REVEALING God’s works, Scripture trains us to RECOGNIZE God’s works. It teaches us

to be really good at playing, “I spy a good work,” because we’ve already spent time listening to God’s description of what his work is like!

**Second, strengthen your ability to PARTICIPATE in good works by storing up God’s Word in your heart.** When a sister says, “I had another miscarriage this week,” your ability to speak the truth in love is directly tied to your knowledge of what the God of All Comfort says to her in her affliction. And if you already memorized Ps 34, for example, you’ll be ready to do her significant spiritual good!

Instead of tossing out some advice from the well of personal experience, you’ll pray: “Lord, you have said, that when the righteous cry for help, you hear. Deliver my sister by comforting her broken heart! You’ve promised you are near to the brokenhearted. Make her deeply aware of your presence. Lift her soul when she is crushed in spirit.”

**Third, set aside money in your checkbook and time in your calendar for good works.** On the financial front, 1 Cor 16:1–2 is delightfully practical! “On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.”

Storing up money so you have something to share with anyone in need requires a plan. For example, my wife and I set aside a percentage of our tax refund in the spring and use it over the next 12 months to care for people and support gospel ministry in various ways. We don’t know exactly how we will use it when we set it aside. But we want to be prepared!

The same goes with your time. Does Tit 3:1 require a father to take their teenage daughters out for breakfast once a month? No. But could being relationally “ready” for every good work look like taking her out to breakfast so you have a deep well of trust and friendship before you have to have unforeseen conversation about her boyfriend? Absolutely. Grace goes public in a readiness to do good.

### **3) REFUSAL TO SPEAK EVIL**

What does it mean “to speak evil”? It means using my words to tear someone down, especially in the hearing of others, by saying what’s not true or only presenting part of the truth. The Lord’s putting his finger on the wickedness of slander, situations where we are talking TO someone who’s hurt us or ABOUT someone who’s hurt us out of a heart that’s filled with bitterness and anger, not love.

It includes our desire to get revenge by convincing mutual acquaintances (or online followers) to embrace an unfavorable opinion of someone you don't like. But what if they really hurt you? Friend, there's a world of difference between sharing a hard experience with a trusted, mature Christian so they can help you to honor God in the way you respond to a conflict and seeking to win someone over to your side.

How do we do that? By airing my grievances so that people agree I'm the victim and the person who hurt me is the enemy, despite the fact that they have no firsthand knowledge of the situation. That kind of gossip and slander destroys friendships, destroys families, and destroys churches.

George Knight's observation is helpful. "Paul is not saying by this admonition that Christian must be naïve and never correctly evaluate or speak about the evil that they see in anyone, since this is what he himself does in 1:10-16. Rather, he is urging Christians to restrain their natural inclination to say the worst about people."

Why is that a problem? Because God does not speak evil about us, brothers and sisters. Satan does. But God does not. What sort of Word has God spoken to us in response to all the ways we have sinned against him? Jn 3:17, "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

In response to our sin, Jesus speaks forgiveness. In response to our evil, Jesus speaks restoration. Ps 103:12, "As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us." What gives us power to cover over an offense instead of recruiting a posse of sympathizers is the incredible fact that God has not repeated our transgressions to the world. He has buried them in bottom of the sea!

The principle in v. 1 goes deeper than not speaking words that tear down. It requires speaking words that build up, for that is the very Word God has spoken to us in Christ! Eph 4:29, "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear." Grace goes public in a refusal to speak evil.

#### **4) THE PURSUIT OF PEACE**

The two commands in the middle of v. 2 – avoid quarrelling and be gentle – are governed by one infinitive because they are two sides of the same coin. Together, they describe the way believers who have experienced the joy of peace with God through the gospel pursue peace with others.

What does the world say? No justice, no peace. Until you give me what I deserve, I will continue to make you suffer. What does Jesus say? Matt 5:9, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” The defining mark of adopted sons and daughters of God is the way we pursue what makes for peace in our relationships. Why do we live that way? Because that’s exactly what the eternal Son of God did for us at the cross.

I like the way the NIV translates Tit 3:2, “Be peaceable and considerate.” Don’t be a person who is easily provoked, a relational landmine, or a balloon waiting to pop and spew venom on people. Why not? Because our God is slow to anger and abounding steadfast love and mercy.

The word for “gentle” or “considerate” literally means “not insisting on every right of letter of law or custom” (BDAG). In other words, grace goes public by transforming people who would naturally fight for their rights into a people who willingly lay down their rights to “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3). It’s not because Christians are “nice.” It’s because we’ve been brought into a living union with the Savior who laid down his rights for us.

Phil 2:4–8, “Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

If your relational t-shirt of choice says, “Pay what you owe or else,” you have yet to encounter the sacrificial love of Jesus in the gospel. Mind you, being peaceable doesn’t mean being relationally passive or immune to the hurt of sin. It means that instead of fighting for vindication, you labor for peace. Sometimes that requires gently confronting one another in love. But even then, our words are filled with compassion because we know it’s God’s kindness that leads to repentance!

So consider, friend, do you make it easy or hard for people to live at peace with you? Are you prickly or a peacemaker? Do you make your spouse or children jump through every hoop, dot every i, cross every t, before you stop holding them at arm’s length relationally? Or are you quick to overlook, quick to forgive, refusing to hold grudges, and eager to work for reconciliation? Grace goes public by pursuing peace.

## 5) CONSIDERING THE NEEDS OF OTHERS

The phrase “perfect courtesy” in v. 3 is easily misunderstood. It’s about more than being a decent person. By all means don’t litter or speed through crosswalks. But that’s not the heart of what the Lord’s getting at here. What does it mean to show “every consideration” or “all courtesy” to all men? Here’s the underlying attitude. It’s “the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one’s self-importance” (BDAG). That’s what makes someone courteous and considerate.

Paul’s talking about a heart that considers other people’s needs “more significant” than your own. Showing “every consideration” means I’m more focused on how I can help you than how you can help me. It means thinking carefully about how your words and deeds might impact others before you speak or act. It means giving thought to other people’s needs before they arise, anticipating them in advance, and marshalling all your resources to honor and care for them.

In a word, it means unselfishly laying down our lives for others because we know the key to joy and life is not self-care, at least as the world defines it. The path of joy and life is the path of sacrificial service. Mk 10:43-45, “But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

We naturally default to looking out for number one. We naturally evaluate every situation through the lens called “How is this affecting me?” We need the Spirit’s help, the Spirit’s power to have humble hearts and loving eyes that primarily see, “How is this affecting others?” I feel my own weakness in this area.

Last week, I tried to switch my cell phone from one plan to another. After four visits to the store and four phone calls, it’s still not done. During my last phone call a gentleman picked up who didn’t know how to fix the problem and was having trouble transferring me to someone who could. Whenever he tried to transfer me, the system simply kicked me back to his phone line.

I think he was embarrassed, so he started asking me questions. He knew I had been on a business plan and asked who I worked for. I told him KingsWay Community Church. Then he asked if the business was closing. I said no, the church is alive and well. Then he launched into a series of questions about what kind of church it was, who it was connected to, etc. And the entire time, I’m struggling to keep my composure because I have literally spent half my workday trying to transfer a phone number and I did NOT





call customer service to provide a 411 on our church or to talk about anything spiritual. I don't want to share the gospel. I just want you to fix my phone!

And then it hit me – which is the Spirit's work, not mine: “Lord, you order my days. You're in charge. You knew who would pick up my call at customer service. Help me to love this stranger who is no stranger to you. Help me to not relate to him, especially in his weakness, as if I am the most important person on the planet.”

I think that little phrase “all men” at the very end of the verse is the most challenging part. Really, Lord? Every consideration to ALL men? What if the person I'm talking to isn't returning the favor? What if they seem VERY impressed by a sense of their own self-importance? What if they're treating me like an enemy? Do I still have to show them every consideration? Yes, because that's exactly what Jesus has done for us. Rom 5:8, “But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

A considerate person has a singular focus: how can my words and actions do spiritual good to everyone around me? In a nation that sees fit to shout down opponents justify harsh speech under the guise of “saying it like it is,” we should stand out as the people of God by extending to other the same consideration we have received from the Lord.

## **CONCLUSION**

The five relational categories in Tit 3:1-2 are not optional, brothers and sisters. There's an urgency, a forcefulness that's easy to miss in English. A literal translation of v. 1 goes like this: To rulers? To authorities? Be subject. Be obedient. For every good work? Be prepared. The Risen Christ commands us to display the life-changing power of the gospel in the way we do everyday relationships.

The Christian faith is not a private thing. Where grace takes root, grace goes public. May the Spirit empower us to honor God in the way we do relationships, KingsWay, all for Jesus' sake.