

Set in Order – Sermon 14 – A Portrait of Grace in a Political World – Titus 3:1,2

Intro:

1) Politics have no place in pulpits!

- a. Comes from the writings of a 1700's philosopher Edmund Burke
 - i. Expressed this view in his 1790's work "Reflections on the Revolution of France"
 - ii. Actual quote – "Politics and the pulpit are terms that have little agreement"

2) Today this statement gets expressed often in pulpits across the USA

- a. Many Christians see a vast divide between the world of politic and the influence of the church
- b. Rather than seeking to inform the people of God on their obligations as saints, they avoid the topic as though it doesn't exist
- c. Word picture – Ostrich
 - i. Bury their head in the sand to avoid difficulties
- d. Yet – when you search Scripture, you are constantly confronted with people whom God used in redemptive history that played significant role in the politics of their day
 - i. Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Judges, Esther, the Kings, Nehemiah, Isaiah, Daniel, and more

3) Begs the question – what is the Biblical stance on the Christian's interaction with government and politics?

- a. How do we live out our faith in the arena of legislation and rule?
- b. Today – this question could not be more pressing and needed

4) Fascinating – In his letter to Titus, Paul sought to instruct Tit and the Cretan believers on how, as recipients of God's grace, they should conduct themselves in regard to their government

- a. Tells us 2 things
 - i. This is part of living a "set in order" life that is aimed at spiritual growth
 - ii. This is an overflow of a grace-filled life (2:1-15)

5) In Chapter 3 Paul moves from the conduct in the church to the conduct towards the culture

- a. "The Christians responsibility in a pagan society" – J Mac
- b. "The Church and the World" – Knute Larson
- c. "Priorities of grace" – Kent Hughes
- d. IOW – Here's how you interact with culture, society, and the political structure of your day

6) Paul wanted these believers to know – here's how a believer is to live under earthly rulers, but still represent the Heavenly King

- a. Truth – Even though our citizenship is in heaven, our conduct on earth still matters
 - i. That's what is addressed in the passage today
- b. Sermon – A Portrait of Grace in a Political World
- c. Text: Titus 3:1,2

The Example

1) Sentence – Christianity does not teach a withdraw from society, rather it teaches righteous participation within society

- a. What we have in the text before us is a command of cultural and political engagement through good works

2) We see the Reminder – V1a

- a. Textual Insight
 - i. Put them in mind – to remind, bring to remembrance
 - ii. In its 7 NT appearances, this word often refers to suggesting something to one’s memory
 - iii. The verb used here means “to call to mind what is already known”
 - iv. Phrase carries the idea of this being a subtle reminder
 - 1. Subtle + to remind
 - 2. IOW – take pastoral care in reminding them of this
 - v. Present imperative – a command of repetitious or continual action
 - 1. Persistence is emphasized
 - 2. IOW – make it a habit to remind them of this
 - 3. Implication – Paul rightly assumes the church needs constant reminding about their civil duties
 - a. May come on the backdrop of false teacher’s teachings
- b. Q – why is there this great need for such a reminder?
 - i. We face the temptation to rebel against authority unbiblically
 - ii. We face the temptation to retreat from civil responsibility
 - iii. In this passage – Paul corrects both temptations
- c. Truth – Christianity is not escapism from society; it is engagement with society under the Lordship of Jesus

3) We see the Reality

- a. The cultural backdrop with which this passage is written remind us of the reality of our biblical engagement
- b. Reality - This epistle was written to believers living in a culture known for its corruption
 - i. 1:12
 - ii. Historically – Crete had a poor reputation in the Roman Empire
 - 1. Dishonesty, piracy, immorality, political instability
 - iii. Yet – in the sin and sensuality of the times – Paul instructs Christians to engage with culture in a Godly manner

- c. Why is this important?
 - i. This Christian conduct would look radically different and stand predominantly out from the culture they live in
 - 1. Remember – many of them would be fresh converts from a pagan background filled with sinfulness
 - ii. The way they lived among their culture and neighbors mattered
 - 1. IOW – all eyes were often on them
 - 2. Illustration – Store camera – act different because someone’s watching
 - iii. This passage reminds us of the reality that our conduct testifies either for Christ or against Him
 - 1. This is what is stressed here – Christianity is lived in front of an audience

4) We see the Responsibility

- a. This text reminds us – believers have earthly responsibilities even while possessing heavenly citizenship
 - i. IOW – our heavenly citizenship does not eliminate earthly duty
 - ii. Truth – Christians are citizens of heaven, but ambassadors on earth
- b. Here in the text Paul expounds on the great need to live a life set in order – specifically in the context of society, culture, and government rule
- c. Modern push back – Christians should only be focused on living as citizens of heaven
 - i. Meaning – avoid any involvement in the public/political spheres
 - 1. Hold back on vocal and physical involvement in modern society and politics
 - a. Either in affirmation of disapproval
 - ii. Truth – a citizen of heaven will seek to display heavenly truths while still here on earth
 - 1. Another way to say it – in principle, a good Christian will be a good citizen
- d. Scripture
 - i. Rom. 13, 1 Pet. 2
 - ii. Lord’s prayer – Matt. 6:10
 - iii. Lord’s teaching – Matt. 5:16
 - iv. Jesus’ high priestly prayer – John 17:15
- e. WWW – “Our heavenly citizenship does not absolve us from the responsibilities as citizens on earth”

The Edification

1) In this passage, Paul clearly lays out the attributes and dispositions that should always characterize a believer's life when living in a pagan culture

- a. Paul is outlining here the proper Christian posture toward government and rulers
- b. This edification is not a philosophical or ideological charge of political rhetoric
 - i. Each phrase here builds a portrait of Christlike civil conduct
- c. Emphasis – it is in this way of living which sets the Christian apart and puts on display the Lordship of Jesus
 - i. Paul mentions 7 Christian duties which apply to believers at all times in all cultures
 - ii. We can place them in 4 general categories

2) Respectful Submission

- a. Textual insight
 - i. Subject – hupotasso – under + order, to submit, to arrange in order, to line up under
 - ii. Principalities – beginning, denoting someone at the top, one who is in charge specifically expressing some sort of government rule
 - iii. Powers – denotes authority, one who regulate what is allowed
 - 1. Stems from the impersonal verb – existi – it is lawful, it is allowed
 - 2. Meaning one who delegates authority
 - iv. Obey magistrates – obey + rule, to obey one in authority
 - 1. Lit – to be persuaded by authority
 - 2. Implies a willingness to recognize lawful authority structures
- b. Historical insight
 - i. These words were common political terms in the Roman world at the time
 - 1. It is a reference to the difference layers of the Roman authority structure
 - a. Imperial governors
 - b. Provincial rulers
 - c. Local magistrates
 - ii. Crete had become a Roman province by 67 BC, so by Paul's day, it was readily governed by Roman administrators
- c. What Paul is emphasizing here it – even under a pagan government (like Rome) Christians were expected to be law-abiding citizens
 - i. To be subject – present tense – NOW and repeatedly
- d. This is highly relevant to the 1st Century church
 - i. They was growing accusations by Romans that Christians were political subversives due to their refusal to worship Ceasar
 - ii. Although multiple passages in the NT would forbid Imperial worship, we are also edified to respect governmental authorities
 - 1. Rom. 13:1 – “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers”
 - 2. 1 Pet. 2:13,14 – “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors..”

3. Matt. 22:21 – “..Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s..”
- iii. IOW – Christians are not called to be political anarchists
 1. We are called, in principle, to be model citizens whose conduct reflects the Gospel
- iv. Submission does not call a believer to blind obedience, it edifies us to respect God-ordained authority

3) Ready Service

- a. Textual insight
 - i. Ready – hetoimos – prepared, closely associated with the word “preparation”
 1. Idea is an active readiness
 2. Tense – present infinitive – stresses a continuous action w/o reference to time
 - a. IOW – always be ready
 - ii. Every good work – all + beneficial/prosperous + labor/task
- b. “Paul is not speaking of reluctantly doing what we know we should do in society but of willing and sincere being ready and prepared to perform every good deed toward the people around us that we have opportunity to do.” – J Mac
- c. This edification does not mean to simply avoid crime, but actively contribute good to society
 - i. Christians are to be known for consistent aggressive goodness, don’t not merely out of duty, but out of love for Jesus
 - ii. This type of action directly contrasts the lifestyle of the false teachers – 1:16
- d. Further – the goodness done here is not to achieve a relationship with God, but rather it flows from a relationship which already exists
 - i. This is goodness anchored in grace
- e. Application – look for opportunities to do good -God will open doors
 - i. Be sure to give Him glory

4) Refined Speech

- a. Textual insight
 - i. To speak evil – blasphemeo – English “blaspheme”
 1. To hurt + reputation/name
 2. Speaks of slander, defamation, speaking in a manner which damages the reputation of another
- b. Historical insight
 - i. In the Roman world – public insult and verbal attacks were extremely common
 1. Philosophers and political speech would often attack their opponent with ridicule and insult
 2. “Public slander was almost a sport in Roman politics”
 - ii. Roman society had professional satirists who would make a living mocking and humiliating public figures

- c. Here Paul edifies believers to be different
 - i. We are to abstain from such unrefined speech and ridicule
 - ii. IOW – Christians should be known for clean speech
 - iii. Even when we disagree politically, believers should avoid:
 - 1. Slander, malicious gossip, character assassination
- d. So important was this, it was addressed multiple times in the NT
 - i. James 4:11, Eph, 4:31, 1 Pet. 1:21
- e. Q – Does this mean as a 21 Century United States Citizen, I am not supposed to speak out against or stand publicly against decisions and policies I disagree with
 - i. No
 - ii. The unique government structure we live afford us the protected rights to religion, religious expression, speech, and protest
 - iii. As a Constitutional Republic, our speech for or against something is protected
 - iv. When an official takes a position, they are taking it willingly and knowingly of these rights
 - 1. Actually – to speak publicly for or against something is submitting to your government by exercising the very rights that are protected
 - v. What we need to remember is to do so with God-honoring speech

5) Reserved Spirit

- a. Textual insight
 - i. No brawler – no + battle – denotes one not disposed to fight
 - 1. Not physically combative or quarrelsome
 - 2. With the other character traits mentioned, this refers to one who seeks to live peaceably
 - a. Rom. 12:18
 - b. Prov. 20:3
 - ii. Gentle – carries basic idea of something moderate, fair, or forbearing in regard to treatment of others
 - 1. “sweet reasonableness”
 - 2. Denotes an attribute that does not hold grudges but seek to give the benefit of the doubt
 - 3. Historical insight
 - a. In Greek legal settings this word refers to a judge who did not rigidly enforce the letter of the law, but showed mercy
 - b. Aristotle used this term to describe one who “knows when it is appropriate to relax strict justice”
 - 4. Phil. 4:5 – moderation

- iii. Meekness – closely associated to the previous terms, this term means an attitude of humility
 - 1. Meekness does not mean weakness, it is power under control
 - 2. Refers to controlled strength
 - 3. Historical insight
 - a. Greek literature used this term to refer to a broke horse
 - i. Power brought under control
 - 4. This is a character trait of Christ
 - a. 2 Cor. 10:1
 - b. Matt. 21:5 – triumphal entry
 - c. Matt. 11:29
 - 5. This is the spirit we should have in regard to the broken world around us
 - a. 1 Pet. 3:15
 - b. 2 Tim. 2:25
 - c. Col. 3:12

6) In a world which people act and speak out of jealousy, malice, and political agenda, Christians are called to be different

- a. We are to rise above, put on Christ, and do what is good

The Exemptions

- 1) **Even though Scripture here commands submission – it is not commanding blind, absolute submission**
 - a. There are Biblical limits to being subject to governmental leaders
 - b. The Christian is to obey the government until the government contradicts God
 - c. Special note – the exemptions are still to be handled with the attitude and spirit mentioned in the text

- 2) **Sinful Commands**
 - a. When the government commands corruption, Christians must remain Biblical
 - b. Acts 5:27-29
 - c. If the government enacts a law which is in clear violation to God’s Word, the believer is not under obligation to submit
 - d. The church does not derive its message or authority from Ceasar, but from Christ
 - e. When government commands sin, compliance becomes compromise

- 3) **Silence is Commissioned**
 - a. Acts 4:19-20
 - b. Many governments have sought to silence the spread of God’s Word and His glorious Gospel
 - i. We do not subject

- 4) **State idolatry is enacted**
 - a. Dan. 3
 - b. There are times when governments have asked allegiance over Christ
 - i. COVID Rules – churches non-essential
 - ii. We cannot subject – Ex. 20:3

- 5) **Slaughter is legislated**
 - a. Ex. 1 – Pharaoh’s order to kill babies
 - i. Notice – Ex.1:20 – God blessed their disobedience
 - b. Matt. 2:1-12
 - i. Notice God had them disobey the local magistrate

- 6) **The Christian SUBMITS to earthly authority, but he/she only SURRENDERS to the Heavenly Authority**

Closing

- 1) **A good citizen of heaven will be a good citizen on earth**

- 2) **Be salt and light**

- 3) **Text reminds us of our Ultimate Authority who is over all other “authorities”**