Such Were Some of You
Titus 3:1-3

Self-Righteousness Breeds Judgmentalism
"Christians can be so judgmental." Ever heard anyone say that? Is it true? The answer is yes. Christians *can be* judgmental. But sometimes we're called *judgmental* simply because we uphold to God's standard, and people don't like it. So it's a deflection from accountability to God. "You're just judgmental," is a mask for, "I don't like that you pointed out my sin."

BUT another reason Christians are called *judgmental* is not merely THAT we uphold God's standard, but HOW we uphold God's standard. Do we do it in a *humble* way or a *haughty* way? In a *sassy* way or a *sympathetic* way? In a *comparative* way ("Look at the difference between you and me"), or in a *compassionate* way ("I'm no better").

Sometimes we as Christians can uphold God's righteous standard in a way that boosts ourselves up and has no compassion on those who can't meet God's standard.

Compassion Towards Enslaved Sinners
Paul wrote Titus 3 to obliterate such pride and cause us to love non-Christian around us. He reminds us that we were once no different.

I want you to see this because vv1-2 sound like a general call to be kind to all people. **[vv1-2]** When the Bible uses the word ***all***, it rarely means every single person who's ever existed. Usually, it refers to ***all*** within a particular group.

*If I said to my church staff, "Is **everyone** here for the meeting? Are we missing **anyone**?" I don't mean, "Is every single person in all the world here?" I mean, "Are all the staff of Kinney here?" There's context to the word **everyone** that clarifies its meaning*.

So who's the ***all people*** in v1 to whom we must show perfect courtesy? We get a hint from **[v3]**. Why must we show perfect courtesy to ***all people***? ***Because*** we were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, etc.

What's he describing? He's talking about who we were ***before*** we were saved! So the answer to the implied question, "Why show courtesy to all people?", is this: "***Because*** we were just like them at one point." ***All people*** refers not to people in general. It's unbelievers!

We must show kindness to non-Christians because we used to be one too! Put another way: *Be gracious to enslaved sinners because you were once enslaved just like them*. And why aren't you anymore? We'll get there, because that's key to Paul's argument.

Let's break down this point into two parts, beginning with the command to…

1) Be gracious to enslaved sinners.
Look again how Paul describes the kind of disposition Christians must have towards non-Christians in **[v1]**. ***Them*** refers to the believers on Crete…those to whom Titus must teach sound doctrine and model sound living. They need to be reminded to…first and foremost, be *submissive to rulers/authorities*.

He’s talking about governmental authorities. Do know who that was at that time? Rome ruled by Nero, who was not the nicest guy! He allegedly had his own mother assassinated, he poisoned his step-brother (who was just a teenager) because he saw him as a threat to the throne, he killed his pregnant wife in a heated argument, and he blamed and killed Christians for a fire that he started in Rome.

It’s hard to know how much of that is embellished, but it reveals the kind of reputation Nero had. He was not a good ruler. And yet, Paul says to Titus, “Remind the Christians to be submissive to him.” Why?

Romans 13 says, “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.” God’s ultimately in charge. He sets up kings and removes kings (Dan. 2:21). “The king’s heart is like a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he wills.” (Prov 21:1)

Our obedience to governing authorities is obedience to God! Of course this is not an absolute obedience! There are times when civil disobedience is obedience to God, but we shouldn't be primed and pumped for that!

We shouldn't have a bent, like the many of the Cretans did, towards insubordination. Paul says in 1:10, "there are many who are insubordinate," and such insubordination crept into the church. Christians need to be different. We are called to be good citizens, primed and pumped, not to disobey, but to… WHAT? **[v1, *ready for ever good work*]**

This is a call to good citizenship. Be ***ready*** for ***every*** good work. We're not just to ***do*** good to build up the society in which we live, we must be ***ready*** to do good. Anticipate… look for opportunities. Be intentional.

Here's a consideration: Vote! Ask yourself: In our context, is part of what it means to be a good citizen (be ready for every good work) to bear the responsibility of voting for people and policies that promote human flourishing?

That's the point of government according to Gen. 9. (Listen to the sermons I preached on this.) But you might say, "I can't vote in good conscience for anyone running." I get that! You might leave most of the ballot blank out of thoughtful conviction. But don't NOT vote out of laziness. Be a faithful citizen in this world ruled by non-Christians. That's the call of v1.

Then he broadens the scope in **[v2]**. The phrases ***no one*** and ***all people*** imply he's broadening the scope FROM obedience to governing authorities TO all unbelievers.

We are to ***speak evil of no one***. The word is ***blaspheme***...sometimes translated ***slander***. This is not talking about how you TO unbelievers, but how you talk ABOUT them to others. Don't speak evil about them.

Of course, that doesn't mean you never call out evil when you see it. But there's a difference between calling out evil and speaking evil of people. ***Gossiping*** about your unbelieving coworker to other coworkers who have no business of knowing his business.

Watch how you talk ABOUT unbelievers. AND watch how you talk TO unbelievers. **[v2, *avoid quarreling*]** That translates the word ***to be peaceable.*** Don't start an argument over politics. Don't be a curmudgeon about your lawn. Don't be a jerk as you debate religion.

I remember talking to a co-worker years ago about evolution. The conversation got heated, but I didn't let up. When we went on break, the Lord convicted me, not because of what I said, but because of how I said it. I put my arm around him, "I'm sorry for shoving my thoughts down your throat." And he said, "Yeah I was about to punch you in the face." I said, "I'm glad you didn't."

You won't get anywhere by arguing. Be peaceable. Similarly, he then says ***be gentle*** (v2). This is an interesting word. Sometimes it's translated ***yielding*** or ***tolerant***. Listen to the Greek dictionary definition: "not insisting on every right of [the] letter of law…" (BDAG, 371) In other words, don't be overly scrutinous and meticulous about what you think are ***possible implications*** of God's law.

Know anyone like that? They insist on rules that are not clearly connected to the teaching of Scripture. Know what that person's called? A Pharisee! When Paul says, "Remind the people to be ***gentle,*** he's saying, "Remind them not to be legalistic, self-righteous, overly judgmental Pharisees."

Now, we need to be careful. Some might take this to mean that anyone who just follows what the Bible says is overly scrutinous. Or anyone who calls for holiness according to Scripture is judgmental. That's silly.

We're talking about those whose made-up rules become the focus of conversations with non-Christians. Don't do that! *Don't argue with them over whether they should celebrate Halloween*. Talk gently about the main things. Be gentle, and that will lead you to ***show perfect courtesy towards all people*** (v2).

The word *perfect* just translates the word *all* or *every*. Every kind of ***courtesy***. Now that's an interesting word, as well. It carries the idea of behaving towards people in a ***meek*** way.

Again, listen to the dictionary definition: It's "the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one's self-importance." (BDAG, 861) That's why it can be translated ***meek***.

Show that to your unbelieving family member. Don't put off vibes of self-righteousness to your coworkers. Don't have a holier-than-thou disposition to your neighbor. Kill any inkling of an "I'm-better-than-you" attitude that's seen in the way you carry yourself towards the non-Christians in your life.

When I was in middle school, a group of friends were talking about their dating relationships and how much they loved their boyfriend/girlfriend. And I said, "You don't know what love is." One guy responded, "You act like you know everything. You're talking like a 40-year-old." As if that's old.

I think I was right, but I also wanted to make sure they knew I was right. It came across super demeaning. Not only that, they didn't even ask my thoughts. I just inserted myself into their conversation!

We must…have a disposition of submission to unbelieving governmental authorities,…be obedient,…be pumped and primed for good works to be a good citizen,… NOT speak evil or start arguments or be legalistic, but be meek.

That's a lot. But here's the kicker: Paul is not merely saying, "Be gracious to non-Christians ***in general***." He's saying, "Be gracious to non-Christians ***even in their sin***." Don't love the *sin* they're IN but love them IN their *sin*.

When you see them acting a fool, disobeying they Lord, deceived by falsehood, pursuing passions, full of malice and envy and hate…you still need to be gracious to them.

Where do we see that? In v3, Paul provides sin-filled descriptions of what WE were like when we were non-Christians: foolish, disobedient, slaves of sin. Why would he say that unless he's describing the current state of the people we're called to love in vv1-2? This is not a call to be gracious to non-Christians in general. This is a call to be gracious even when they are acting a fool!

Of course, you do not condone sin. Of course, you there are times to confront. But you must ALWAYS have compassion on them. *This is why I caution us from listening to some political talk show hosts, with whom we might agree on policies/ethics, but who talk about those with whom they disagree in ways that are so demeaning and degrading*.

I remember listening to one who described his political opponents as animals. They're not animals. They humans made in the image of God who are still slaves of their own sin… which should compel us to have compassion. Why? Because…

You were once enslaved too. [v3]
The word *also* is in the original language. So it reads "For we ourselves ALSO were once foolish…" The phrase *we ourselves* is emphatic. Paul includes himself in this! "Titus, you…me…all the Christians you're ministering to on the island of Crete…we ourselves were also were once …"

WHAT? The first word is *foolish*, which means we lacked sense. Prov. 15:21 says, “Folly is a joy to him who lacks sense, but a man of understanding walks straight ahead.” We are also *disobedient*, one who defies authority; we didn’t listen to those in charge of us.

We were *led astray*, meaning *deceived*. We thought we knew what was right and true, but we didn’t. We thought we were on the right path, but we were heading for destruction. We were led astray…BY WHAT? **[v3, *passions*]** *Various* means *manifold*…*all kinds* of passions/pleasures we were slaves to! That’s strong language? Slavery is bondage, being owned, having no freedom. Someone or something was in control of us. What was it?

Not difficult circumstances. Not other people. Not even Satan. We were controlled by our own ***sinful cravings***. It was a ***willing*** slavery. *It wasn’t like being tied down to a chair. And when we were told get up, we wanted to but couldn’t. No, we couldn’t up because we didn’t want to. We found the chair of our sinful life far too pleasurable. That’s what bound us.*

So we wasted away our precious God-given lives. See that? **[v3, *passing our days*]**. We spent our lives on our sinful passions, two of which are ***malice*** and ***envy***. We wasted so much time being angry/envious of others, that we couldn't enjoy life! We were so consumed with what I don't have that others had. Which resulted in relational conflict. **[v3, *hated and hating*]** Our relationships were broken.

Now this is not a pretty picture of who we used to be as a non-Christians. You might think, "Was I *that* bad?" *I became a Christian when I was 11! Is this an accurate description of one who never did drugs or even cussed?* It is…because…whether you became a Christian when you were 5 or 50, you had a bent toward self. That's the DNA of all sin!

Now, I need to say a word to you who may not yet be a Christian. Verse 3 is talking about who you currently are. I wonder how that makes you feel? *I listened to a podcast of a guy who suffered from horrific abuse and resorted to deep drug addiction. And he took on the* ***identity*** *of victim.*

*He WAS a victim in many ways. But that became his **main identity**. Not sinner, but victim. And he said the first time a Christian shared the gospel with him—told him he's sinner who needs to repent and trust in Jesus who came to save him from his sin—do you know how he responded? Violently. He literally tried to beat them up! Why? He was offended that anyone would call him bad, especially in light of all the bad done to him.*

I wonder what your response is to v3? Does it make you angry to be described in this way? Most of us think, "I'm a pretty good person." And I would ask: To what standard are you comparing yourself? When you look at your life/heart/motives/thoughts/desires in light of the absolute purity of the God who made you, you can't help but say, along with Paul in Romans 8, "Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"

That's the key question! NOT, "Am I really *that* sinful?" but "I am! So how can I be rescued from slavery to my sin?"

And that, Christian, is what you must reflect on if you'll have any compassion on your non-Christian friends. "How was I rescued?"

The Only Reason You're No Longer Enslaved

The argument of vv1-3 carries only so much weight: *Be gracious to those enslaved to sin because you used to be enslaved too*. To know our past slavery that we're now free from *does* create some compassion to those still slavery.

Let's use the analogy of drug addiction. Those who found freedom from drug addiction often have compassion on those who are still in it. Why? They know how enslaving it was.

So if you don't know how enslaved you were to your own sin, you WILL NOT have compassion on those who are still slaves if it. You gotta recognize the utter helpless state you were in before you became a Christian. Otherwise, you'll have no pity on those still in that place!

BUT that's not enough. There's nothing distinctly Christian about the argument of vv1-3. Knowledge of my past slavery to sin cannot

(in itself) compel me to be gracious to those who are still slaves of it. Why? BECAUSE if I freed *myself* from such slavery …if I made *myself* better…if I broke the chains of my sin with *my own* righteousness/ good works/ effort…if I got out of that sinful state because *I'm* smarter/ more spiritually sensitive/ attuned to the things of God…

If I freed MYSELF from slavery to my sin, THEN my compassion for those still enslaved to their sin can only go so far. I might even feel contempt, disdain. I might be frustrated, impatient, rude, judgmental. (The ways some of us sadly treat non-Christians around us.)

This is how we act when we think we're better …when we think WE did something to get us out of where we were. Or even when we think we just had ***some help***, pride will still linger.

Think of the addiction analogy again. If I freed myself with the HELP of friends or doctors or programs, that might grow my compassion, but there remains an element of, "I did something! I got help but I helped myself."

If you think you just got help from God to get out of spiritual slavery, you will not have the sustaining compassion on unbelievers the way this passage calls us to. It is only when we know, “I didn’t just get some help… I was raised from the dead!”…THAT’s when we’ll have the compassion this text calls us to.

And that’s exactly where Paul goes next. **[vv4-7]** We are compelled to be gracious to those enslaved to sin not *merely* because we used to be as well…but because the only reason we’re not is ***sovereign grace***! That’s the only way any of us in here are Christians. Sovereign grace! God did it!

God graciously saved you by opening your eyes to the horror of your sin. You were a slave and you didn’t even know it until the light turned on: “I’m in bondage! And my chains are my own sinful passions for things God hates!”

And that’s when God showed his Son to you when you heard the **[Gospel]**, and you said, “I need Him! I need Jesus!” And God broke the chains and followed Christ.

As the hymn “And Can It Be?” puts it: ***Long my imprisoned spirit lay, Fast bound in sin and nature's night; Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray, I woke, the dungeon flamed with light; My chains fell off, my heart was free; I rose, went forth and followed Thee.***

Doesn’t that kind of grace make you wanna be gracious to those who are still bound in sin? Were it not for sovereign grace, we’d all be in the same place. Here’s how 1 Cor. 6 puts it:

“Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ***And such were some of you.*** But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

Go be gracious this week. Be a good citizen. Love the unbelievers God has put in your lives. And adorn the gospel of grace that saved you.