

Obeying Civil Authorities and Being Good Citizens

Titus 3:1-2

Titus 3:1-2 - *“Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men.”*

Background Notes

The theme of Titus could be, “Adorning the Doctrine.” This phrase is taken right from Titus 2:10: *“That they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.”* In other words, believers should not only be sound in doctrine, but a believer’s life and lifestyle should conform to that doctrine. It should “adorn” the doctrine. The believer’s life should attract others to the believer’s doctrine!

So “Adorning the Doctrine” could be the theme of the letter to Titus. This theme could be stated another way: “Making Christianity Attractive.” And finally, it could be stated a third way: “Be What You Believe.” A believer should be sound and orthodox in doctrine, and his or her life should conform to that sound doctrine. Remember, what you really believe will determine how you live your life.

The apostle Paul wrote the letter to Titus to his fellow worker, Titus, who was serving the Lord on the Mediterranean island of Crete. The apostle reminded Titus that he was to help build up the churches by appointing elders and by refuting false teachers.

In addition, Paul reminded Titus to instruct the Christians to live more godly lives - particularly in view of the ungodly nature of the Cretan culture from which they had come, and that still surrounded them. The ungodly lifestyle of the Cretans was well known. In fact, the apostle Paul quoted one of their own native prophets, Epimenides, who described his fellow Cretans this way: *“Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons” (1:12).*

The citizens of Crete were also known for their rebellious spirit, so in chapter 3 Paul told Titus to be sure to remind the Cretan Christians that they must obey the governing authorities. The pagan Roman Empire was in power, and Nero was the emperor at this time.

Do you see the implications of this background note? If the apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, could write that the Cretan Christians were to be subject to the civil authorities while pagan Rome was in power, we too should be subject to the governing authorities - regardless of who is in power.

Remember, the book of Titus is not just a 1st century letter to the Christians on the island of Crete. It's the Word of God for us today!

Doctrinal Points

1. Godly believers are good citizens.

Verse 1: *"Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work."*

Romans 13:1-2: *"Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God."* These verses in Romans were also written when pagan Rome was in power, and the cruel emperor, Nero, was on the throne. These verses clearly teach that all authority finds its source in God - even when humans abuse or misuse that authority, or even when it is directed against God Himself.

God has chosen to channel His authority down to us in four differing lines or structures of authority. God has ordained these four lines of authority: the authority structure in the home; the authority structure within the church; the authority structure in the area of labor; and the authority structure of civil government.

Government is the line of authority that is under discussion in Titus 3:1-2. Believers are to be subject to civil authorities and obey the laws, whether federal, state, or local. This includes tax laws and traffic laws - whether we like them or not, or whether we agree with them or not. Sometimes the laws are difficult to obey, but we are to obey them - whether it's in reference to our income taxes, or even the traffic laws. (By the way, I'm so glad that the State of Pennsylvania raised its interstate speed limit from 55mph to 65mph. It used to take forever to get from Chicago to Rhode Island!)

The only time Christians must disobey civil authorities is when the civil authority issues an edict that is directly contrary to the teaching of the Word of God. For example, if the government were to pass a law that says we can no longer be Christians, we would have to disobey. We would not deny our Lord! We would follow Acts 5:29: *"We ought to obey God rather than man."*

However, if a situation should ever arise in which we must disobey the authorities, we're not to shoot the government officials who come to arrest us. We're still subject to the civil authorities, so we would go to jail, if need be. In an extreme situation we might even lose our lives, as martyrs for the sake of Jesus Christ. Some Christians in other countries are undergoing this kind of governmental persecution right now, and we need to remember to pray for them.

In addition, we are told to pray for governing authorities. That's exactly the point in 1 Timothy 2:1-2: *"Therefore I exhort first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in*

authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.” The point is not that we should pray for civil authorities so that we can make more money, or so that we can have more pleasure, but so that we’ll be able to lead quiet and peaceable lives that are characterized by godliness and reverence.

The end of Titus 3:1 says that believers are *“to be ready for every good work.”* In the context, Paul was not talking about serving at the church, but about but serving in community projects. This Scripture doesn’t say that we *must* be involved community activities, but it’s saying we should be open to that possibility. My mother is a good illustration. When I was growing up, my mother was always involved in some kind of community project. As a result, she was a great testimony for the Lord in our community.

Verse 2 says that we are to *“speak evil of no one.”* We are not to badmouth the president, or the governor, or our local officials. It doesn’t say that we must keep quiet about evil, and it doesn’t say that we ignore sin if public officials are involved in wrongdoing. But we’re not to engage in personal verbal abuse or slander. The word that’s translated *“speak evil”* is the Greek word from which we get the word “blaspheme.”

So, there’s quite a bit of practical teaching in our first doctrinal point! Godly believers are good citizens.

2. Godly believers are good neighbors.

Verse 2 extends beyond civil authorities to all men: *“Speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men.”*

If we’re peaceable and gentle, we won’t be contentious. We won’t pick fights or be quarrelsome. We won’t insist on our own rights. We won’t retaliate, and we certainly won’t take revenge if we are wronged.

When I was in college, I had a summer job installing wooden fences, and there was one job I’ll never forget! One set of neighbors wanted an eight-foot-high stockade fence erected because they didn’t like their next-door neighbors. (In the fence business, eight-foot-high stockade fences are called “spite fences”!) Obviously, the other set of neighbors didn’t want that huge fence put up, so they did everything they could to stop it. One night, they left a couple of garden hoses running so that the water would run along the line of the fence, turning the soil to a soggy marsh. By the next morning, the fence had completely toppled over and we had to start the job all over again. On and on it went - retaliation and revenge.

Now in this illustration, the neighbors were not Christians. Unfortunately, however, I've known some Christians who can't get along with others, and they have stooped to doing or saying some pretty mean and nasty things. They were certainly not following Titus 3:2 - *"be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men."* Remember - godly believers are good neighbors.

Practical Application

Has anyone asked you lately, "Won't you be my neighbor"

As you probably know, this line comes from the song, "It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood!" It's the theme song of the children's TV show, "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood." The last line of the song is the question, "Won't you be my neighbor?"

Has anyone asked you lately, "Won't you be my neighbor?" If we're the kind of people that Titus 3:2 calls us to be, then we should hear that question more often.

For several years we lived next door to a wonderful Jewish family, and we became very good friends with them. A few weeks ago they called us. After chatting for a while they said that they wanted us to start looking for a duplex town house in our new town - so that they could buy the other half, and we could be next-door neighbors again! We don't know whether this is what the Lord has in mind for us or not, but we were certainly excited and joyful to know that this Jewish family thought enough of us as Christians to say, "Won't you be our neighbor again?"

That's the way it should be. We should be such good neighbors that people who are not Christians will say to us, "Won't you be my neighbor?"

When the Lord told the story of the Good Samaritan, He taught us that our neighbors are not just people who live in the house or apartment next door. Being a good neighbor extends further than that. A neighbor is anyone who is in need – anyone we can help in some way.

So - once again the question. Has anyone asked you lately, "Won't you be my neighbor?"