

Living Redemptively in a Pagan Culture (Part 1)

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Preacher: Don Coleman

[0 : 00] Chapter 3 of Titus, this wonderful letter to Pastor Titus.

! I think a very important kind of introduction to the subject matter, and then we'll just kind of get into verse 1 and 2, actually, tonight.

But I want to go ahead and read the text, the entire text that we're going to be dealing with tonight, and then we won't be meeting here next Wednesday night because of Thanksgiving.

There will be the one after that that we'll get back to this passage. But I want you to look at the first eight verses of Titus, Chapter 3. Let me go ahead and read it to you, and then we'll spend a little time kind of introducing the subject and really making an application of the subject here before we actually look at the text.

All right, so starting with verse 1, remind them, as Paul commanding, actually this is in the form of a command, a command to Titus, 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.

[1 : 50] For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.

But when the kindness of the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy, he saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by his grace, we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works.

These things are good and profitable to men. So it really is a marvelous passage of Scripture. It is just a chock full of some very important doctrines, though not everything in this passage is doctrinal. Some of it is very practical. But, you know, Paul, in every one of his letters, always put the two together, the practical and the doctrinal.

[3 : 11] And here he's giving us, you know, by way of Titus to the believers on Crete, and then to us, some very practical instructions on how we are to live.

Very timely instructions, actually, in light of current events. And, you know, we turn on the TV, maybe turn on one of the news networks on cable or whatever we like to watch, whether it's one of the, you know, one of the major networks or others.

And we see, you know, these video, videos of protesters at colleges and some of the major cities.

And then we also see some of the violence that's taking place and this civil disobedience.

And though I wouldn't necessarily characterize these people as Christians, some of them no doubt profess to be. But the issue that we want to deal with from this passage really pertains to the context of Christianity in this area of obeying our rulers and authorities and all of the things that Paul mentions here in these first couple of verses.

Now, the title, kind of the subject that I want us to consider from this passage, and you see that on your notes, living redemptively in a pagan culture.

[4 : 52] Now, absolutely, Paul was writing to Titus, who was living, of course, and ministering on the island of Crete.

Certainly, Titus was living, living out his Christianity in a decidedly pagan culture. And you could say the same about everywhere in the known world of the day in which Paul lived and Titus lived and ministered and so forth.

And so the title certainly, the subject certainly applies to the day in which this letter was written. And basically, I can say that Titus, or rather Paul, was conveying through Titus to the believers there on Crete, conveying to them this command to live redemptively.

To live with the goal of bringing people to faith in Christ, living redemptively in a pagan, very pagan culture.

Now, I wonder if you would agree with me, though, and this is where you can kind of get to your notes, that the dominant culture in America is pagan.

[6 : 08] Okay, I got one witness back there. You know, it's very difficult to argue the contrary. That the dominant culture in America is paganism, or pagan, whichever word you want to put in the blank there.

And yet, if we were to characterize the dominant culture in America, say, I don't know, 20, 25 years ago. I'm not sure, you know, it's a little fuzzy on just how far back you'd have to go back.

But the dominant culture in America, say, 25 years ago, was what we might call Christian. Or Christianity.

I really prefer that term. You know, I think that would become clear as we go along here, why I would say Christianity. You know, usually when you add an -ism on the end of a word, it usually is not good.

Not a good thing. Paganism, Christianity. I think we could maybe all agree with that. Because nearly every one of us in this room were alive 25 years ago.

[7 : 19] Right? Now, Ryan, I'm not sure about you, how old you are. Okay, five years. So you weren't necessarily conscious. But anyway, I think the rest of us remember what our culture was like 25 years ago.

And, you know, I think there'd be a consensus among us that you could characterize it as Christian. Christianity.

Or maybe another term would maybe be better here, and that would be a cultural Christianity. You probably have heard me even use that terminology.

A kind of cultural Christianity. A culture, a society, a culture that is dominated by Christian principles. Christian principles that are taught in the Bible.

Not, and when I say that, I'm not talking about or saying or suggesting that the majority of people in America were born again Christians. That that's ever been the case, necessarily, in America.

[8 : 30] That the majority, the vast majority, are true or were true born again Christians. But rather, what I'm talking about is that the majority of people in America lived according to Christian principles.

It's brought up that way, learned that way, as part of the culture. It's not necessarily identifying a heart condition, necessarily, of everybody.

I mean, you can have a heart that's not Christian, that is, in the sense of being a believer, a true bornified believer, and still live according to Christian principles. And that pretty much, I think, identifies what our culture once was, whether it's 10 years ago, 20 years ago, 25.

I don't think you could characterize it as Christian even 10 years ago. Maybe we'd have to go back even further. But there's a difference, you see, between those two things.

To say, on the one hand, that the majority of Americans, 25 years ago, were truly born again Christians, which I don't believe. Or saying that, really, the majority of people in America lived according to biblical Christianity, which I think was true.

[9 : 50] There's a difference between those two, because living your life according to principles revealed, and taught, and even mandated in the Bible, that doesn't make you a Christian.

Okay. Now, I run into this all the time when I travel outside of the USA, and especially in China.

Because I'm asked this question nearly every time. And a conversation will kind of go along, and I'll understand where this person is coming from, this Chinese person is coming from.

And that is that, you know, the idea, the thought that it's a false assumption that all Americans are Christians. Because the word, the term Christian has become used, you know, in a sense of identifying culture rather than a spiritual, true spiritual condition.

You know, and so the questioning will kind of go like that. You know, America is a Christian nation, and they say, you know, so they say, therefore, all Americans are Christians. But it's not true, is it?

[11 : 06] We all, we know that, don't we? It's not true. It's not true. And actually, that has never been true. Ever been true. That all Americans were true Christians.

Never been true. Years ago, that may have seemed to be the case. Maybe as we were growing up, as children and young people and even young adults. It may have seemed to be that way. But it's not. Most Americans lived and looked like Christians, you know, a few decades ago. But what about today?

Today, America barely even looks Christian. Now, it's a little, you know, a little, maybe difficult for some who, say, live in the Bible Belt.

And we're right on the buckle of it, I think. A little difficult for some to have a view of America that goes beyond just, you know, the kind of the surroundings that they see in their world.

[12 : 18] Because still in Oklahoma, although not as much as maybe some people are deceived into thinking. Still in Oklahoma, a lot of people live according to biblical principles.

And that's somewhat the case with many people in the so-called Bible Belt. But that's just Christianity.

There's a difference. Christianity is not really Christianity. Cultural Christianity is not real Christianity.

Because real Christianity is something that is true in the heart. It's a spiritual condition that is defined by the Bible and not defined necessarily by the way a person just naturally lives.

And so the culture of Christianity that has existed in America, and we, again, have to go back a few decades to really see it and remember it.

[13 : 22] But that cultural Christianity has now, that we've enjoyed, has now practically dissolved. In fact, I really would say that it is all but completely gone in America, sadly.

And herein lies my point. As true Christians, as the true church, how should we respond to that? You know, as we have, you know, we've bemoaned the fact. I know that we do, because I've had conversations with some of you and other believers. We've bemoaned the reality that our culture is not as Christian as it once was.

In fact, it barely even looks Christian. We're saddened by it, sickened by that. And so, again, I come back to the question, what should be the response, our response?

The response of the church in America. And I think it's a good question. And there really are two answers to that question.

[14 : 33] Maybe some variations in between, but two primary answers to this question. Or I might put it this way. There are two courses of action that Christians might take or the church might take in response to this disintegration of cultural Christianity in our country.

Two. Two responses. Three responses. Although I would say that there's really only one that is the correct response. According to the Bible, that is.

And it's not necessarily the response that we see that seems to be dominant in the Christian community today. So, the first response might be, fight.

Fight it. I mean, you look around and now for a couple of decades and we've been living through it and seeing it.

And bemoaning the reality of it that we're seeing, you know, almost the complete disintegration of Christianity or a culture of Christianity in our nation.

[15 : 51] And so, one response would be to fight that. Fight against that. And I would say that, by and large, that has been the response of most evangelical conservative Christians in America today.

Fight it. And you just think about it. Fight it. As you just kind of evaluate what many who would identify themselves as conservative Christians, what many, especially those who are in places of leadership, what many are doing about it.

What is the approach? And, you know, Christians who are alarmed. I'm talking about Christians who are alarmed, and we all ought to be, alarmed by our country's very, very clear move away from biblical standards of morality.

I mean, you can't deny it. It's just all around us. Turn on the TV and you see it. Read the paper, you see it. You know, just go to Walmart or go somewhere in the community and you see it.

Everywhere, it's everywhere. You can't escape it. And we're all alarmed by this very, very rapid, in fact, probably in the last ten years, even more rapid move away from biblical morality.

[17 : 16] You know, the removal, I mean, you can go back to the, what, the 60s or before. But you look back at the removal of prayer and the Bible from our schools.

In fact, some say, you know, you can go back to that decision. And that is kind of a landmark decision.

And, man, it's been downhill ever since. Even going back to that decision to remove those two things from our schools and really, albeit from the entire public forum, you know, you can go back to that and explain why all this other has happened since.

And so we go back and look at that. Or the legalization of abortion. And now, basically, abortion that, on demand, in any way, any place in the pregnancy, even in some cases, partially birthed abortion.

And we look at that, we're, I guess, alarmed is probably too tame a word to use to describe how we feel about those things.

[18 : 33] And now even, you know, just of late, the advance of the homosexual agenda in many different areas. An agenda, really, that has now found legitimacy in our nation, in our culture, through legalizing gay marriage.

And most recently, the transgender issue. You know, and even going into our schools, schools, where our children are.

And, you know, the whole bathroom issue and all of that. And, of course, much of this being accomplished by both elected leaders of our country as well as, of course, appointed.

Of course, it's always the elected leaders that lead to the appointments of people in our government. Presidents, senators, appellate judges, Supreme Court justices, that whole issue. And I'm not, you know, I'm not saying anything to you that you don't already know and haven't already been concerned about. This is what's been going on for a while.

[19 : 42] And so what's our response to that? What has been the, I really think, the dominant response from the Christian community to those things?

And it has been primarily to fight it. Fight it in one way or another. And so many Christians have come to that conclusion. We must fight fire with fire.

Fire. That's the way to take care of it. Join in the political process. Which in and of itself is not wrong at all.

But really more than that, use the, maybe perhaps use the same tactics as our enemy. You know, those who are promoting contrary biblical morality.

Really coming up, really forcing on us a new kind of morality. So let's just use the same tactics and fight the battle from within the current political process or system.

[20 : 41] You know, stand up for our rights. Declare war against anti-Christianity. You know, form new parachurch organizations. There's been a proliferation of parachurch organizations that have come on the scene for the last, you know, say, couple of decades.

You know, to give the church, this is the idea, to give the church a political voice, you know, in our nation.

You know, and publishers of magazines and books and, you know, and broadcasters over TV and radio, whole programs all designed to connect, you know, Christianity with the political process.

So that we can fight against this, you know, decay of morality and biblical morality in our nation. And we see this stuff coming.

And now with the, you know, with the internet, blogs and Facebook and all the social media outlets and other ways to, you know, to get a Christian voice in there.

[21 : 48] And to affect change, to fight against this move away from morality. And on and on the list goes, you know, elect conservatives to public office.

You know, big movement to do that for now a number of years. Lobby senators on Christian issues, you know. Join the ranks of some of the other lobbyists who are looking out for, quote, special interest groups.

And form PACs, you know, political action committees to try to persuade lawmakers and such to do the bidding of Christianity.

We're fighting against this thing here. This has been the approach. Get conservative Supreme Court justices. I mean, that's a big one. And an important one.

You know, get them appointed. Protest around abortion clinics, you know. Boycott businesses. Or, you know, some of the other methods that are used.

[22 : 56] Sue educational institutions for what they're teaching. Sue teachers, you know, who might be teaching an anti-Christian type of message. Indoctrinating our young people.

You know, we're all concerned about some of these things. And so what is the approach? Well, we just have to get in there and fight. Right? And we might want to say, amen. Right? That's what we need to do. But if we win the battle using that approach, then, and by the way, that's a big if.

If we win that battle. What do we get? Well, we get perhaps a superficial, kind of superficial Christian America.

Which is what we really had before. And that's not what we've been called to do. You know. All right. So if we could win the battle, get in there and fight, be a part of the political process.

[23 : 59] And get, you know, quote, the right presidents, end quote, elected and right senators. And, you know, all those people.

And, you know, full complement, nine justices on the Supreme Court who are conservative. And we'll rule according to biblical principles and morality.

And we get all of that done. And really move our culture back away from the direction that it's been going now for 20 some odd years.

We could do that. But we have. We'd have an America full of moral citizens. Who are ultimately going to die and go to hell.

But they're moral. That's what we would have. But actually the truth, I think, is we won't win the battle. We really won't.

[24 : 57] It's an illusion. That we could win that battle and return our nation back to biblical morality. That is, win that battle by this method.

Get in there and fight for it. And use the same tactics that the other side uses. We won't win that battle. I'm sorry to say that, but I think it's true.

If our response is to fight, to fight, that is to force social and moral reform. If that's our response, we'll never win.

We'll never win it that way. In fact, we'll lose more than just the battle. We will lose the opportunity to do what God has called us to do.

And that is to win people to faith in Jesus Christ. To evangelize our world. I want to quote John MacArthur here.

[26 : 01] And I think he really hits the nail on the head. He said, when Christians become political, sinners become the enemy instead of the mission field.

That's a pretty poignant way to put it. That we actually drive a wedge between us and the non-believer.

Because of our kind of hatred and because of our anger and being belligerent and so forth.

Defaming. We actually draw a wedge. And the very people that were to win to Christ become our enemies. And we have then no opportunity to win them.

So, there are two courses of action the church might take in response to the disintegration of our cultural Christianity in America. Two approaches.

[27 : 01] One, fight. The other, we might call faith. Faith. And this is really the only response supported by God's word.

The only, I mean as you read the Bible and look at the Bible. The only, actually the only divine mandate that has been given to us as the church.

Is to evangelize the lost. It's the only divine mandate that we have. Not make a Christianized society. As much as we would like to have that.

And, actually, most of us, not all that many years ago in terms of time. Most of us enjoyed, experienced a Christianized society.

Which was a good thing. A wonderful thing. And that's why we're so disturbed that we've lost that. Because we know what it used to be like. But our mandate from God has never been to make a Christianized society.

[28 : 11] Not in, at least not in this approach of forcing that politically. Politically. And the only reason why we can have this kind of discussion here is because of the uniqueness of America.

I mean, Christians who live in other countries, this kind of stuff never even occurred to them.

They're not expecting a Christian society.

They're not even working for one. They've never known one. And yet we have. And so we know what we have lost.

And somehow, because we're just kind of in a bubble, so to speak, in our lives, somehow we have grown not only used to that, a Christian kind of culture, but we've even come to the conclusion that we should always expect that.

And that it should always be that way. And if it's not that way, we better get in there and fight and make it that way. It's just not biblical. It's really not. And so, you know, we're not here, not given a mandate to Christianize our society through the political process that would favor Christianity or through legislation of moral laws.

[29 : 38] I mean, these are all positive things, but that's something we've been called to do. Or, you know, the big one, the courts, you know, the Supreme Court and such.

All right, so it begs the question, though, and maybe you're already thinking about it, should Christians want a pro-Christian society? Should that be something we desire?

Is it wrong to desire that? Well, certainly not. I mean, it's all right to want and desire a society that is, you know, culturally Christian.

I mean, we can't help but want that and desire that. And so should Christians engage in the political process to promote something like that? Well, it's kind of a difficult question to answer.

I think I would say, should we exercise our privilege as Christians to vote? And absolutely we should. And to be informed when we vote and to vote according to our convictions and to vote according to biblical morality and that that would be the supreme thing that guides our vote and not necessarily our pocketbook and other things that might benefit us.

[30 : 57] Absolutely. We have a responsibility, Christians, to do that. Not just to vote, but to vote in a way that honors God and His word in the best possible way.

Now, we don't always have those choices when we vote. I'm a little shaky on my choice this last time. Should Christians run for public office?

Well, yeah, you can run for public office if that's your poison. I would want to do it. But is it all right for Christians to hold public office? Sure.

And would it be all right to seek such a thing? Yeah, nothing wrong with that. Is it okay to express your biblical convictions in the marketplace with your pocketbook?

That is, you don't shop certain places or buy certain products. There's nothing wrong with that. That's one voice that you have.

[31 : 56] In fact, that's a very valid voice to have. If you want to sell that kind of stuff, then I'm just not going to shop here. Now, that's different than going and holding a sign and picketing in front of a store and say, don't shop here because these people are evil people.

That's not okay, I think, from a scriptural perspective. But it's all right for a Christian to be involved in political process through voting, holding office if they want to, supporting candidates that are Christians, express your voice with your pocketbook at stores and businesses.

Yes, it's all right. Even to express, I mean, if you're a student in an educational institute, even if it's in public school, is it okay for a Christian to express his or her public views and convictions?

Sure. And even though it's becoming very, very hard in our nation, it is still, last I checked, protected by our Constitution.

Of course, not many are protecting the Constitution as they once did and living in open violation of it, but it's still all right for a Christian to express convictions, biblical convictions and views.

[33 : 21] My son, Matthew, is working on a military, what's it called, military history degree at ORU.

And he has a course this semester, kind of a political science course, taught by a teacher that's certainly not friendly according to his views, to his views, not Christian views, as well as his own personal political views.

And in that class, he's very, very outnumbered by those on the other side of this perspective. And in fact, one of their assignments was, this was given before the election, was to make a prediction about who would win.

And he was the only one who said Trump. And so he had class yesterday, and the teacher announced that there was only one person in the class that predicted that Trump would win the election.

And he said, everybody in class looked over at him. So, you know, it hasn't been ugly at all in the class.

[34 : 35] But in some places it is. I mean, depending on your view, whether you're allowed as a Christian to express your faith. And in some places, you know, they're almost forced, or at least

they would like to force you, check your Christianity at the door before you come in.

That's just part of the problem in our culture. It's not whether we should be involved in these things. It's, you know, it's our approach to it.

Whether or not that approach is biblical. See, I don't think, we're not allowed in Scripture to be civilly disobedient.

I don't think that a Christian should be involved in that at all. And we're never, Scripture doesn't allow us to be ugly and hateful and use inflammatory speech and to defame the character of people and those kind of things, which is happening all the time.

You know, maybe not as much verbally as it is in written form. I mean, with the advent of social media and such, I'm just appalled. I'm not on Facebook.

[35 : 49] I'm not a Facebook person. My wife is. And so she's got this vast number of people that, friends that she has on Facebook. And, you know, some of the things that these people write, people who profess to be Christians, that may, in my view, have the right position, but they don't have the right disposition.

And the things that they write about people and say about people and the ugliness is, I don't think we have any approval from God to do anything like that.

And so our biblical mandate, though, putting all that aside, is faith, not fight. That is to respond to our culture with faith. And I'll quote MacArthur one more time.

I think I even put this, I don't know if I put this quote in here. When Christians become overtly hostile to government and to society in general, they almost inevitably become hostile to the unsaved leaders of that government and the unsaved citizens who live in that society.

We cannot become enemies of the very ones we seek to win to Christ. I think it's just right on there about that. And it's a good time to visit that issue as Christians.

[37 : 14] Good time in light of what's happened in the last week or so. And what's our position?

What should be our approach to what is clearly troubling in our culture? Clearly troubling. And that approach matters to God.

All right, so that's a long introduction. That's why I said we wouldn't get very far. In fact, we may not even get as far as I intended to get. But it really ought to prepare us for what Paul seeks to teach us in this passage from Titus chapter 3.

The first thing that we'll see is our Christian manner. What he says about our Christian manner.

What should a Christian citizen in America look like?

It's a pretty important question. And quite frankly, a lot of Christians in our culture today, in their approach to the issue of our day, the moral problem of our day, they don't look very Christian in the way they are responding to it.

[38 : 34] What does Paul say? Well, verses 1 and 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.

kind of apply that, put that up, and use that as the lens to look at some of our Christian leaders today.

And I think it would be difficult to reconcile them, to reconcile how they are approaching our culture, the problems of our culture, and how God clearly describes how we should approach it, what we should look like.

I mean, what should our manner, manner of relating to our government be? What should that look like? And it's kind of interesting, actually, how Paul begins this thing, because he's writing to Titus, this young pastor, that Paul mentored, and Paul has left kind of in charge, there on the island of Crete, kind of an overseer of all the churches, and there could have been many, many, maybe a hundred or more churches on the island.

And so he's writing to Titus, giving him instruction in his ministry to these believers, these churches on the island of Crete.

[40 : 34] And I don't know if you remember, way back when I was introducing this book, the Cretans were really a population of social rebels.

I'm not talking about the Christian population, I'm talking about the general population of the island of Crete in that day. They were, many of them, rebels and deviants, and many of them fled to the island because they were anti-government, anti-nationalism, anti-authoritarian.

Kind of sounds familiar. Some of them descendants, actually, of pirates and criminals that were escaping.

Even though Crete was under the domination, the rule of Rome in Paul's day, it was just loosely under its rule.

It's an island, and so it's difficult, obviously, to really keep your thumb on that, just geographically was the problem. So these people would live there.

[41 : 43] They would flee to this place. They were miscreants from civilization. And they were kind of the quintessential islanders.

They're just a little different kind of culture, a little rougher kind of people. And, again, anti-authoritarian. It's the kind of people who lived on Crete.

So Paul then begins by instructing Titus to remind them, remind the Christians, because these Christians came out of that culture, obviously.

They were saved out of that. And so Paul's instructing Titus to remind them to be subject to the rulers and authorities. Who were the rulers and authorities of these people?

The Romans. Pagan government. Idolatrous. All of that. Cruel in many ways.

[42 : 43] And so he said, remind them. And actually, literally, because of the verb, it means to keep on reminding them. Kind of a persistent reminder of this.

And the word remind, I mean, the very idea of remind also implies something, that they already knew this. They'd already been taught this. So it's not something that was new to them.

You know, it's not something that they had not yet matured in their knowledge of. They knew from the very beginning because Paul, I mean, this is implied here, that Paul had already given them this instruction.

But apparently, that, you know, there were some problems with this. And so he said, Titus, keep reminding them. Remind them and keep on reminding them.

It's kind of constantly remind them of their duty to their authorities, their rulers. So they had to keep on reminding them.

[43 : 41] And I think it's pretty appropriate for today. The Christians today need to be reminded of this. And the reason is because the list of Christian characteristics that he's about to give us here in these two verses, pretty hard to find among many evangelicals.

certainly those who are in leadership of the evangelical movement in America. All right, so, and what I'm talking about is, you know, I don't really like the designation, but the Christian right. The Christian right. I mean, that's really a term that's used more as a, you know, as an insult than anything else. But there are those who are proud to be a part of the Christian right, you know. And the way they're approaching the moral dilemma of our day is not biblical. It certainly doesn't line up with what Paul tells us right here.

So we'll just have to wait until next time to get into that list of things, the manner, the Christian manner, that we should all emulate in our lives.

[44 : 58] And so we'll get into that next time. Thank you.