

Living in the City of Man

Remarkable Christianity Part 1

Titus 3:1

Planet earth is home to two very real worlds.ⁱ

And the Christian happens to be contact with both of them.

Augustine referred to them as the city of man and the city of God. The city of man is the physical world around us – a world we engage through sight, touch, taste, hearing and smelling.

But at the same time, the Christian is very aware of another world – an invisible world – which is altogether just as real . . . in fact, it is eternal.

It's a world we connect to, not by means of our senses, but by means of the Spirit.

The designer and creator of both worlds is the same person – our Creator God.

Now, most of my world would agree with everything I've said so far – except that last statement. They believe in something more out there . . . just don't talk about a Designer or a Sovereign Creator.

William Irwin Thompson likened our unbelieving world to flies crawling across the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, blissfully unaware of the magnificent shapes and forms and colors and design that surround them.ⁱⁱ

Oblivious to spiritual reality; they might even deny it exists. Certainly the sweep of evolution has

gained the majority opinion that there is no designer to the creative paintings that surround us.

Some even take the time to study the complex patterns of the painting but then deny it ever had a painter – someone outside their world of flies and insects who actually designed and painted that incredibly beautiful mural.

Educators are busily washing off the walls of history and science any reference to Him; the politically incorrect crime of our generation is to state with any sense of certainty that He's even around, much less responsible for the painting.

And if you really want to shake things up, suggest that it's not only His painting, but His ceiling – His chapel – His ground underneath – His earth and His universe too, while you're at it.

We have watched over the last several decades especially, the concerted efforts of our world to remove the signature of the Painter from the mural of His universe.

I read just this past week of one case brought before the U.S. Court of Appeals. Just this past May, the court ruled against a town in New York for opening its town council meetings with prayer. And you automatically think, well, we knew that was coming. But what makes this ruling so bizarre is that the town had already tried to be politically correct by inviting a variety of religious leaders to open in prayer – they tried – they had even brought an atheist in – who evidently didn't know why he was

praying to begin with. They had even invited a Wiccan priestess to pray. But the court wrote in its conclusion – and I quote – “The town’s prayer practice had the effect of affiliating the town with Christianity.” Even the concept of prayer was just too Christian and it had to be abandoned.ⁱⁱⁱ

If I were God I would not have remained quiet this long. I would have at least started writing messages in the sky, “Hello?” “Excuse me”.

I’d make it rain pink or, I’d send skittles falling from the sky so everyone had to admit at least there’s someone up there!

God evidently isn’t intimidated by unbelief – with being ignored, or disrespected.

But we are. In fact, we can become infuriated and resentful and bitter.

One author wrote, In reaction to the rapid and pervasive escalation of immorality and ungodliness, believers have become both saddened and angered. Hostility among some of them has been intensified still further when they learn that their taxes are being used to fund ideas and practices that only a few generations ago were condemned even by most secularists. They fear for their children and even more for their grandchildren because of the kind of world into which they will be born, educated and have to live.^{iv}

There is a growing antagonism to government; there is a growing pessimism toward institutions, there is a growing movement of isolation among believers where they abandon culture entirely and basically heads for the hills.

“This city of man is going to hell so I’ll just give my attention and time and money and energy to the city of God.”

Has it ever occurred to you that the reason Jesus Christ did not take you immediately to heaven after your salvation is because He wants you to live in the city of man, demonstrating the reality of the city of God?

And the greater the difference between the two worlds, the more remarkable your demonstration becomes.

And by the way, the world, which you might be resenting or becoming angry with is not your enemy, it is your mission field.

And it’s not doing anything we shouldn’t be expecting it to do.

So what do we do about it? How do we live in the city of man, while we wait for the city of God?

The believers living on the Island of Crete might have wondered the same thing.

What’s next, Paul?

I mean, you told us how to act in church, in Titus chapter 1; you told us how to relate to one another, in Titus chapter 2.

Is that it? Is that the end of our responsibilities and obligations while living temporarily in the city of man?

Well, hang on to your hat, because Paul is about to inform them that Christianity does not remove the Christian from society, it makes the Christian a productive member of society;

Christianity doesn’t make you an isolated citizen, it makes you a better citizen; Christianity doesn’t relieve you of civic duties, it enforces them.^v

Are you serious?

Get ready dear flock . . . in fact, I’ve entitled our series, **Remarkable Christianity**, because we’re about to discover that Christianity should make every one of us remarkable standouts in the city of man, as we ultimately represent the city of God.

Responding to Rulers

And the first area where Christians show remarkable distinction is in their response to rulers.

Notice verse 1 of Titus chapter 3. [Titus] Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient.

The opening verb is in the present tense, by the way, so that Paul is telling Titus, “Listen, I want you to keep on reminding the believers of all these issues.”

And first among them is their response of respect and obedience to their civil authority.

See, if you traveled back to the island of Crete, you'd discover a people whose had earned an empire wide reputation as a dissatisfied, disgruntled people; they were always involved in some sort of plotting and some kind of conflict; and they hated Roman ruler.

Plutarch, the 1st century historian who lived at the same time Titus was serving on the Island of Crete wrote that the Cretans were always on the verge of revolting.^{vi}

And the large Jewish population wouldn't have hesitated to lend a hand.

Keep in mind that the Island of Crete had been a haven for Pirates.^{vii}

It was an island that reveled in a swash-buckling self-serving independent lifestyle that answered to nobody.

We've already learned that the word Cretan had become a nickname for *liars, evil beasts and lazy gluttons (Titus 1:12)*; not exactly the kind of people that respond well to authority.

So Titus, remind these believers and then keep on reminding them that they're not to act like their forefathers. They may have pirate blood in their veins, but they are now new creatures in Christ and they should stand out remarkably different in their attitude toward authority.

In the original language, Paul uses two infinitives and two nouns squished together so that it can read, *be subject, be obedient to rulers to authorities.*

Here's a radical thought – Christians are not above the law.^{viii}

We can't say, "Hey, we belong as citizens to the City of God so phooey on you people in the city of man."

Not quite.

If we went over to Paul's fuller explanation in Romans 13, you discover several mind-changing principles related to the issue of secular government.

The first thing you discover both in Romans and here in Titus is that obedience to governmental rulers and authorities is not an option, but a command.

You don't get to pray over whether or not you'll pay your taxes, meet city codes for buildings, operate your business according to state regulations, pay your employees minimum wage, get your car inspected and pay the registration fee and stand in that line at the DMV forever.

Christians don't get a free pass.

Paul also informs us that the **institution of government is the creation of God.**

Paul wrote to the Romans in chapter 13 and verse 1, *"For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God."*

In other words, every civil and political power has actually been appointed by God.

The Apostle Peter wrote it this way, "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by Him . . ." (1 Peter 2:13)

While we engage in due process as citizens of this country, gladly voting and speaking our conscience, we can rest with complete confidence that God's purposes are never thwarted – he has every office under His control; every Judge is a minster of His providential direction and the heart of every king is in the palm of His hand.

There is never a reason for the Christian to panic. Fear, and resentment about the culture around you may be an indicator that you don't think God is keeping up . . . that He's letting things slip out of His control. And what is He thinking?!

I'm giving up!

Oh no . . . maybe you're supposed to run for office; maybe you should write a gracious, informative

letter to the editor; maybe you should serve on the education board or volunteer in some capacity in the community?

Take your candle there and shine the light in the city of man, and demonstrate remarkable Christianity as you ultimately represent the city of God.

Which lets us uncover another principle in our response to rulers: **the Christian is to obey civil authorities regardless of their attitude toward the gospel.**

Don't forget that when Paul wrote these letters, Nero was on the throne and society was as depraved as ever. There were no sexual norms – heterosexuality was considered prudish by society; the emperor was bisexual; pedophilia, adultery, idolatry, abortion, prostitution and drug addiction were not only empire wide – they were legal and absolutely acceptable.

And this was the century in which Jesus Christ planted the living church . . . and the church exploded into existence.

Why? Among other reasons, because Christians were so remarkably different than everybody else.

They had a respect for authority – even when that authority hated the very ground they walked upon.

Rome would eventually demand that Christians express their allegiance to the city of man – to Rome – by annually offering a pinch of incense and declaring, “Caesar is Lord.” And Christians would die as martyrs rather than attempt to overthrow the Emperor . . . they simply refused to deny that Christ alone was Lord.^{ix}

So is it ever right to disobey the law? Yes – whenever the will of the law demands that you violate the word of God, you must stand with the Apostles who were told to stop declaring the gospel of Christ and say, **“We will obey God rather than man.” (Acts 5:29)**

Rather than mount an insurrection or instigate a plot to overthrow Nero, Paul is actually telling them the shocking news that they were to respect the authority of the land and keep the law of the land unless . . . even to the point of dying for faith.

And the Christians sang on their way to execution . . . they had served the city of man and they knew they were now about to enter the city of God.

And the world could only shake its head in wonder at those remarkable Christians.

What's your attitude toward the authority in your life? We are all under the authority of someone in the city of man. What's your attitude toward the authority of:

- your parents . . .
- your teachers . . .
- your supervisors . . .
- your pastors and elders . . .
- your town council . . .
- the IRS as you fill out the forms . . .
- when you meet your hunting or fishing quota
- when you write out the check for property taxes?
- that police officer who pulls you over . . . I really didn't want to go there! ☺
- what do you do at a red light at 1:00 o'clock in the morning and nobody else is on the road?

Some of you are thinking . . . were you there?

I watched one television show some time ago where young children, one at a time, were put in a room with toys and a plate of fresh homemade cookies and were told that they couldn't eat the cookies until the adult came back into the room. Then the adult left the room and the camera began to roll . . . the agony was terrible. Some kids immediately walked over to the plate and just stared at the cookies and stared . . . some just started talking to themselves, “Don't eat the cookies, don't eat the cookies.” One kid went over to the corner and stood there banging his head against the wall.

The truth is, the camera is actually rolling . . . people are probably watching . . . but even if they aren't, what does your spirit and heart communicate about your attitude toward authority?

Anything remarkable?

Well, okay, okay . . . I'll knuckle under . . . the Bible is clear enough . . . I need to get with it and obey the law.

That's great, but I've gotta warn you, the Apostle Paul is just getting started.

You'll notice that he not only has something to say about how we relate to rulers, he has even more to say about how we relate to others.

Relating to others.

1. The first thing he says, effectively, in relating to others is to go the extra mile.

Notice the last part of *verse 2*. ***Be ready for every good deed.***

In other words, Christianity is more than knuckling under . . . it's more than begrudging the letter of law.

Paul says – here's how to reveal remarkable Christianity there on the Island of Crete and everywhere else – ***be ready – be eager*** to go out of your way to serve your community leaders and the people that surround you in this city of man.

Be ready to do good deeds means that our Christianity doesn't allow us a free pass from society.

Again, this attitude would be remarkably different from the status quo. The Jewish community on the Island of Crete – in fact, throughout the Roman Empire – urged separation from local culture. They all huddled together.

In the first century, Jews living outside Israel formed tight-knit communities whereby nobody got in and nobody went out. They were slow and reluctant to submit to local laws and authorities; they felt they were above it; one author wrote that they treated the people around them with thinly veiled disdain. ^x

Rather than live among the people and demonstrate the glory and character of God, they kept to themselves and did nothing at all in what they would have defined as “secular society.”

You don't mix with the pagans.

Maybe you're thinking, “Well, Paul is telling the church to do good deeds to one another.”

Certainly that's a Biblical principle – ***“do good to all men, especially to those of the household of faith”*** (*Galatians 6:10*).

But Paul here is going to end his sentence in *verse 2* with the clarification that we're to do these things ***to all men*** – not just believers.

Do I have to?

You see at any moment, on this occupied Island, a Christian could feel the touch of the flat of a Roman spear on his shoulder, and know right away, that according to the law he was compelled to carry this soldiers gear for one mile.^{xi}

Everyone despised the practice, especially the Jewish population and no doubt believers who wouldn't want to interrupt their schedule or go out of their way or even help their enemy.

A Roman mile was considered a thousand steps. And so the person would undoubtedly pick up the gear and begin counting out loud as he walked along. 1 – 2 – 3 – 54 – 76 – 989 – 999 – 1,000. Plop . . . there's your gear . . . I'm outta here.

But Jesus Christ preached in His sermon, recorded in ***Matthew 5:41, He said, “Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.***

Can you imagine the surprise of the Roman soldier if you were to say, “Hey listen, I know I've already walked 1,000 steps, but I'm willing, because of my obedience to Jesus Christ my Savior, to carry your gear another mile;” which is, by the way, where we got our phrase, “going the extra mile.”

That Roman soldier and everyone who witnessed that, would scratch their heads and whisper, “Those Christians are remarkable people.”

You want to demonstrate remarkable Christianity? Go the extra mile!

2. Secondly, avoid the grape vine.

Paul writes further in verse 2. Malign no one

This verb is from the Greek word blasphemeo (βλασφημεω) which gives us our word, blasphemy. Only this context refers to slandering another person.^{xii}

And note that Paul doesn't add the loophole – **malign no one** if it isn't true. But if it's true, let it rip.

No; simply put, malign no one.

And his directive for the believer couldn't be clearer. We can't abuse or insult with our lips. We can't run down politicians, fellow believers, colleagues at work or family members and ever hope to elevate the reputation of the gospel.^{xiii}

Because this kind of activity is what they're all about in the city of man. It's a dog-eat-dog world out there . . . they know how to swing the sword and cut a path to the top.

One historian said of Crete and the 1st Century culture – verbal slander was practiced as a fine art.^{xiv}

This verb is subordinate to the opening command, which implies the Christians were involved in it . . . Paul says, "Titus, remind them and remind them and keep reminding them that remarkable Christianity doesn't run other people through the mud.

Take words out of your vocabulary like "stupid" – "jerk" – "fool" . . . you're never going to impress anyone of your Christianity when you yell that at another driver or talk that way about your professor or boss or colleague.

I'll never forget talking to a man after a service – who since left the church years ago and moved away; his family had evidently been waiting outside and didn't know where he was; the auditorium had just about emptied when his middle school aged son spotted us and ran up to his dad and said, "We've been looking all over for you, you idiot!"

I started turning purple . . . thoughts of capital punishment crossed my mind.

Yet as I silently stood there, I watched with amazement as this man never even corrected his son or rebuke him – or say what my father would have

said – something like, "We're going to have a talk when we get home."

And it occurred to me that more than likely this was the language of the father at home . . . and it never even registered.

We happen to be living in a crass, vulgar, rude society where we can demonstrate our Christianity with remarkable distinction.

**Go the extra mile;
Avoid the gutter of the grape vine;**

3. (don't say – Remarkable Christianity doesn't swing back.)

Next, Paul writes in *verse 2*, "**be peaceable.**"

It's a word that literally means, a no-brawler – a no-fighter. Paul was a fighter, but he wasn't a brawler.^{xv}

He wasn't dropping his gloves whenever offended. Let me put it a different way – and this is Paul's third point in regards to relationships with others . . .

Remarkable Christianity doesn't swing back.

Even if you have what many would consider "good reason" to take a swing, don't do it.

Consider the Apostle writing this letter to Titus. Roman governors through pride and incompetence; they'd kept him in prison for years; Roman authorities had illegally bound him, beaten him with rods, delayed hearing charges against him, and when the charges were presented, left him under house arrest for several more years.^{xvi}

If anybody had a good reason to write a letter, it wouldn't have been to Titus, it would have been to the Roman senate.

He could have growled at every changing of the guard in his cell. He could have demanded better treatment as a freeborn Roman citizen, yet he sits in a jail called the Rat's Nest and writes, "**In everything give thanks.**" He witnessed to these soldiers and they no doubt said to each other, "That man is absolutely remarkable . . . there's gotta be something to his Christianity."

I recommend to my seminary students the small biography of Robert Chapman, the pastor of a small church in 19th century England. He was single his entire life; pastored a small church his entire ministry, yet made a deep impact on his community. Charles Spurgeon called him the saintliest man in England.

But not everyone liked Robert Chapman. A grocer in the community hated him; he would become so infuriated by Chapman's open air preaching, that one more than one occasion he walked past him and as he did he spit on him.

For a number of years, the grocer would verbally attack Chapman as he came around. Chapman never retaliated – he never struck back.

Then, on one occasion, some of Chapman's wealthy relatives came to visit him. Since Robert was single, they insisted on buying the groceries and cooking the meals while they stayed with him for a week or so. He agreed.

They asked him where he would recommend they go to purchase a cartload of groceries and Chapman insisted they go to grocery of this man who had insulted him for so many years.

They didn't know anything about that drama, but Chapman was insistent that they travel to the other side of town and do their shopping. So off they went. They ended up purchasing more food than they could carry and they asked that it all be delivered to the home of the Reverend R. C. Chapman.

The stunned grocer asked them to repeat the address and then told the visitors that they must have come by accident to the wrong shop. No, they said, "Mr. Chapman insisted that we come here." When the grocer arrived with the delivery and Chapman answered the door, he broke down in tears and Chapman ended up leading that man to faith in His Lord that very afternoon.^{xvii}

That's a demonstration of remarkable Christianity.

It goes the extra mile
It avoids the grape vine
It refuses to swing back

4. Fourthly, it stays the course.

Paul writes in verse 2, to malign no one, to be peaceable – now notice – to be gentle.

That word doesn't quite translate the depth of character bound up in its construction.

It's an adjective found only 5 times in the entire New Testament and it refers to someone who is patiently steadfast. It refers to someone who is able to submit to injustice, disgrace and maltreatment without hatred or malice, trusting God in spite of it all.^{xviii}

That's why Paul is saying, in our vernacular – Remarkable Christianity stays the course – and you could add, sweetly.

Easy for Paul to say!

Paul uses this same word again from the dark, cold interior of the Rat's Nest – a prison designed for hopeless cases who would probably never see the light of day, and he writes, "*Let your gentle spirit be known to all men.*" (*Philippians 4:5*)

The Apostle Peter used it when he wrote, "*Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have* – so you can let 'em have it." Oh, that's the modern Christian translation – "Always have an answer, so you can stick it to 'em."

No, Peter writes, "*Always be prepared to give an answer . . . but do this with gentleness and respect.*" (*1 Peter 2:12*)

You see, how do you respond when you're questioned? When your faith is ridiculed or challenged? How do you react to insult and debate?

Here's a taste of our culture today. One journalist writes, "Reasoned discourse is now imperiled. It is giving way to in-your-face sound bites; playing hardball is the dominant metaphor for American [dialogue]. Our interchanges are confrontational, divisive, and dismissive. Balance and fairness are casualties on evening shows as two, three, and sometimes four voices contend simultaneously for

dominance. Volume and stubbornness are the new civic virtues.^{xix}

Which is good news only in that remarkable Christianity can be all the more distinctive.

5. And one more command from Paul to Titus here: Don't play favorites.

He concludes verse 2 by writing, showing every consideration for all men.

Let me give you the literal translation of that Greek word translated "all" in your text. Ready? It means, "all".

In fact, it can be expanded to mean, "every kind of..."

You could translate it, "all kinds."

Regardless of race . . . religion . . . political leanings . . . even if they're leaning left – and you're tempted to go on and push 'em over . . . regardless of social status or salary or education or age or ethnicity.^{xx}

Be humbly considerate toward them all! If they have a need – it doesn't matter who they are . . . be eager and ready to meet it.

How remarkable is that?!

George Whitefield, a spiritual leader in the 1800's learned of a widow with a large family, whose landlord had recently taken all her furniture away because she couldn't pay the rent.

Whitefield immediately rode the long distance out to her village with a friend. They arrived at her home and much to her surprise and gratitude, he gave her five pounds (or \$5 dollars in American money; depending on the exchange rate); it was enough money back then to pay her rent and get her furniture back. In today's economy, Whitefield's gift would have been comparable to a gift of around \$500 dollars.

As they rode home later that afternoon, Whitfield's friend chided him that he really didn't have that kind of money to give away. Whitefield responded,

"When God brings a need before us, it is that we may relieve it."

The two men were suddenly startled when a robber rode his horse up and confronted them, demanding their money. Whitefield of course didn't have any, but his friend did, and the robber took it all.

After the thief rode away, Whitefield turned the tables on his friend, and reminded him how much better it was for the poor widow to have his money, than the thief.

They continued on their journey, but suddenly, the robber returned, and demanded Whitefield's coat. Whitefield actually graciously agreed but asked if he could at least have the bandit's tattered old coat in exchange, since it was very cold. The robber agreed and after trading coats, he rode away once again.

After some time, if you can believe it, they spotted the robber galloping towards them as fast as he could and now, fearing for their lives, they spurred on their horses, and fortunately arrived at some cottages before the robber reached them.

The thief had to turn away and, Dallimore records, was no doubt mortified at what had transpired. For when Whitefield took off the man's tattered coat by the fire, he found in one of the pockets, his five pounds, and nearly 100 more!^{xxi}

Which means in today's economy, Whitefield gave the widow \$500 dollars and received \$50,000 dollars in return.

Now that's my kind of Christianity . . . sign me up!

But how many would give money to a stranger in need; and graciously give a thief their coat and face a winter future in a tattered old coat.

These are the attributes of a remarkable Christianity.

- Go the extra mile
- Avoid the grape vine
- Refuse to swing back
- Stay the course.
- And don't play favorites along the way.

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- ii Ibid
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- iv John MacArthur, Titus (Moody Press, 1996), p. 137
- v D. Edmond Hiebert, Titus and Philemon (Moody Bible Institute, 1957), p. 65
- vi James Burton Coffman, Coffman Commentary Series, Volume 9 (ACU Press, 1986), p. 325
- vii John Benton, Straightening out the Self-Centered Church (Evangelical Press, 2009), p. 147
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- x Swindoll, p. 305
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- xiii Swindoll, p. 93
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- xvi Coffman, p. 325
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- xix Ronald J. Kernaghan, “*Speaking the Truth in Love*,” *Theology, News & Notes*, Winter 2003
- xx Adapted from Swindoll, p. 306
- xxi Arnold A. Dallimore, George Whitefield, Volume 2 (Cornerstone Books, 1980), p. 94

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