

Remember!

Remarkable Christianity, Part 2

Titus 3:3-4

About 75 years after Paul wrote his inspired letter to Titus, a church leader and teacher living in Athens wrote a letter to a friend where he described the differences between Christians and unbelievers.

He wrote, “The difference between Christians and the rest of mankind is not a matter of nationality, or language, or customs. Christians do not live in separate cities of their own, speak any special dialect, or practice any eccentric way of life. They conform to ordinary local usage in their clothing, diet and other habits. Nevertheless, they do exhibit some features that are remarkable, and even surprising. For instance, even though they obey the prescribed laws, in their own private lives they transcend the laws. They show love to all men – and all men persecute them. They are misunderstood, and condemned; they repay curses with blessings, and abuse with courtesy.¹

Sounds familiar doesn't it?

He writes, “They obey prescribed laws – Paul writes in Titus 3:1 – be subject to rulers and authorities – be obedient.”

This second century leader writes, “The Christians are misunderstood but they repay curses with blessing – Titus 3:2 – malign no one!

He writes, The Christians respond to abuse with courtesy – Titus 3:2 – be peaceable and gentle or gracious.

He writes, “They show love to all men – Titus 3:2 – show every consideration for all men”

It sounds like the inspired reminder of the Apostle Paul made it from the Island of Crete to the City of Athens.

I wonder if it's made it from the Island of Crete to the city of Cary . . . or Raleigh . . . or Apex . . . or

Holly Springs . . . you're hoping I don't mention your city.

This letter has every one of our addresses on the label.

And you might not have caught it, but right in the middle of this man's letter he basically wrote, “They eat like us, they look like us, they live around us, but they exhibit – note this – some features that are remarkable.”

They stand out . . . nobody does that stuff.

You don't take abuse sitting down; you get up and swing back.

You don't love all kinds of people; you love your favorite kind of people.

You don't allow misunderstanding to go unchecked – hey, hey – you stand up for yourself.

No wonder this descriptive phrase slipped into the letter about believers living nearly 2,000 years ago – all he could say in summary was, “They are remarkable!”

In our last session as we introduce this theme of remarkable Christianity, we went through the list of virtues of Titus chapter 3, verses 1 and 2 and discovered that they do indeed describe remarkable people.

Christians who, if you were with us:

- Obey the law;
- Who go the extra mile;
- Who avoid the grape vine;
- Who don't hit back;
- Who stay the course with sweetness;
- And, who don't play favorites;

Now what Paul does next is interesting. He not only reminds them of what they should be doing, he reminds them of what they *used* to be doing.

Notice verse 3 in Titus chapter 3. For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved in various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.

The verse begins with the connective conjunction “for” – “**for we also**” which basically implies that the believer might be wondering why in the world he would ever treat unbelievers with kindness and love and courtesy and humility and deference.

And Paul anticipates that response and effectively says, “You oughtta act like this toward them because of what you used to be like (**verse 3**) when God in His kindness and love intercepted your life by means of salvation (**verse 4**).

In other words, remember the pit you were dug from . . . remember the slime you swam in; remember the capabilities of your fallen nature that once dragged you through the mud and you loved every minute of it.

Remind them – that’s how this chapter opened. **Remind them.**

And here’s the shocking truth – remind these believers of what makes them so remarkable and then remind them what made them so despicable.

Now there aren’t many counselors or motivational speakers who could keep a practice going if they reminded people of what they used to be like as an incentive to what they oughtta be like.

Can you imagine? You mean I’m supposed to challenge Christians to live for Christ by reminding them how they used to live for the devil?

I mean, what kind of strategy is that?

But that is exactly what Paul is about to do.

Why he does it will become clear only after he takes us back through the pit that emptied us all out at the foot of the cross.

Verse 3 now more carefully – For we also once were . . .

By the way, at this juncture, isn’t it encouraging that Paul shifts from talking about “them” to talking about “us” . . . He goes from “you guys” to “all of us”.

For we also once were . . . listen, even Paul never forgot his past.

The people who never completely gotten over their past are people who never quite get over their conversion.

For we also once were – and now Paul begins to list how we all once were – **we once were foolish.**

1. Biased

For the sake of an outline, I’m going to use the word, biased

That’s the idea here – **for we also once were biased.**

You see, the word Paul uses here, translated **foolish** doesn’t refer to silliness or irrational thinking.ⁱ

He isn’t referring to someone who lacks intelligence.

The word Paul uses here is someone who is intellectually biased against any talk of God; certainly any idea or suggestion of accountability before God.

Paul referred to this kind of person in **Ephesians 4** where he wrote, **they are darkened in their understanding and alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them (note this) because of the hardness of their heart.**

This person literally scorns the wisdom of God, Solomon wrote in **Proverbs 28:26**. The foolish person is literally in a deliberate state of folly – a deliberate state by his own choosing to trust in himself.ⁱⁱⁱ

He is effectively the opposite of **Proverbs 3:5 & 6**, for the biased rebel is determined to trust in himself, to lean on his own understanding and to acknowledge his own will in everything. Paul is saying, “Listen, we need to remember that this is who we once were.”

In fact, now that we’re Christians, we still need the daily reminder to trust in Him, not to lean on our own understanding but in all our ways to acknowledge Him – put Him first.”

An unbeliever doesn’t want to put God first because he happens to be first!

2. Belligerent

So it automatically follows then, here in the list of **Titus 3 and verse 2, that he’s also disobedient.**

I mean if I don’t believe God has a right over your life, why would you ever obey Him?

He’s not only biased, he’s belligerent.

This word Paul uses describes a person who deliberately chooses to rebel not only against the idea of a God, but against the idea of a moral standard created by God.

And this attitude isn't just belligerence against God, but against all authority. They live disobedient lives.

One author wrote that this kind of person chafes under any kind of authority.^{iv}

If there was a description of our culture today, it would be this.

We're watching the authority of our land through courts and laws being passed to try and control a runaway, disobedient, belligerent culture and the culture is not responding.

We've watched in recent years legislative bodies begin to weigh in across the country passing bans on all sorts of things that parent's once weighed in on but have effectively abandoned ship; now there are legislative bans against body piercing on minors; on the sale or rental of violent video games to minors; there are even laws against junk food machines in school lunchrooms; in fact, the lower house in the Texas legislature even devised a ban on overtly sexually suggestive cheerleading [for High Schools].^v

How ironic is that? Texas is trying to ban suggestive cheerleading? Monday night football will reveal they're not gaining much ground.

What's even more ironic is that they and every state in this union would never think of banning or even discouraging sexual activity after the game – just keep the cheerleaders from suggesting it *during* the game.

The truth is, as one author wrote, we now have more and more children who are arriving in the classroom without any moral compass.^{vi}

Frankly, their parents didn't have one to pass along and lawmakers rightly don't even know where to begin to enforce one.

Listen, you cannot watch an argument take place on the floor of a national political party on prime time television on whether or not you even want to mention God, and then expect the next generation to care about Him, much less obey Him.

Here's the progression; develop a personal and cultural bias against God and you will soon develop a personal and cultural belligerence against the boundaries of God.

Which leads to what Paul calls here, a *disobedient* spirit – literally a chafing under His or any kind of moral or ethical authority . . . and it's going to grow more and more obvious.

One report I read recently talked about an incident where 125 Harvard University students

were caught collaborating in groups and on email to come up with answers to exam questions, “violating a no-collaboration policy that was printed on the exam itself.” But – get this – many of the students were shocked by the charge of cheating, claiming they didn't know it was cheating – even though it described it on the exam. Other students have threatened to sue the school over it. One reporter responded tongue in cheek when he wrote, “Are we meant to assume that students who are smart enough to get into Harvard don't know what cheating is? Will the school [need to] offer a course on why it's a bad idea to pour gasoline on a flaming toaster oven?”^{vii}

All these news items and reports simply highlight the simple fact that apart from the Moral Lawgiver you can't have moral guidelines.

Just this past month the country of Brazil became all tangled up when a notary approved the country's first three-way civil union; one man and two women. She claimed that she hadn't broken any law. In fact, she noted, just last year Brazil approved gay marriage. This notary said that there are no laws on the books against polygamy – and the definition of marriage is obviously flexible, and so why not.^{viii}

Indeed, why not?

You dismiss God and anything's permissible, right?

Our world is biased in their folly, they are belligerent in their disobedience, and now thirdly, they are blind.

3. **Blind**

Paul describes our former lives and the current condition of our world as foolish, disobedient and, now, deceived.

You can call that spiritually blind.

Dismiss God, follow your own path and the Bible refers to the fact that you'll only stumble from bad to worse. Why? Because God isn't the only spiritual voice out there.

There's another. While God speaks only the truth, this fallen angel is the father of lies (*John 8:44*); he's called the angel of light (*2 Corinthians 11:14*) who deceives the whole world (*Revelation 12:9*) – he's a master deceiver.

The word Paul uses here to describe our fallen condition is a word that can be translated, “misled . . . literally, duped.”^{ix}

The world thinks it's found some answer, but it has been duped.

Paul warned Timothy that *evil men go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived (2 Timothy 3:13)*.

They look good . . . they sound religious . . . they might even wear a collar or stand behind a pulpit; Paul wrote earlier to Titus to make him alert to those who've actually turned away from the truth and are now misleading people (*Titus 1:10-11*).

They are teaching things that uplift the spirit and perhaps encourage the heart and certainly please the ear; Jesus characterized them as the *blind leading the blind and they're all eventually going to fall into the same pit (Matthew 5:14)*.

The world is rejecting Creator God and is duped – misled – blind – following the wrong spiritual guides.

Here's the description, whether we like it or not: Biased . . . belligerent . . . blind.

4. Bound

Paul writes in the middle part of *verse 3, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures*.

Bound!

The word lusts, here is, epithumia (ἐπιθυμία), for strong desire.^x

Keep in mind that this exists only in the mind and heart. You could call it forbidden fantasies. You can be enslaved to fantasy, according to this letter from Paul here, whether you actually do anything about it or not.

Paul would have something to say to the argument that violent video games or pornography isn't really all that bad because you're not actually involved physically.

It's just a game . . . it's just in the mind.

Paul would say, "No, it all belongs in the same kettle of soup – in fact, its enslavement whether it stays in your mind or ends up all over your hands.

And more than that . . . he's writing this to all of us . . . this kind of stuff - get this – represents your old life, not your new life."

It belongs back there in the pit . . . it keeps wanting to crawl back out. Put every kind of gate you can to keep it there.

You see, here's the warning; since we eventually act out our fantasies, the next word Paul uses is the word, pleasures. This is physically acting out sinful desires.

The word Paul uses here for pleasures is actually the word hedone (ἡδονή) which gives us our word, hedonism.

Hedonism is simply the pursuit of self-satisfaction, whatever it might be.^{xi}

This is the number one religion on the planet.

In fact, notice he uses the word, here, *various* lusts – various pleasures.

It's a word that means multicolored.

And how many colors are there out there . . . just wait you're your wife wants to paint a room in your house and you go to Lowe's. You walk up to that guy at the paint counter and say, "My wife sent me over here to pick up some blue paint." He'll double over in laughter . . . are you in trouble or what?

Let's see, is that

- royal blue;
- teal blue;
- steel blue;
- powder blue;
- aqua blue;
- navy blue;
- baby blue;
- Mediterranean blue;
- cobalt blue;
- Periwinkle blue.

You had no idea there were so many kinds of blue paint.

That's the idea here – multi-colored. You have no idea there are so many ways to sin . . . there are so many kinds of sins.

And notice this – the word for pleasure here isn't just immoral or sexual sin. Paul actually uses it in his letter to Timothy for covetousness.^{xii}

Materialism! Add that one to your color palette with all the nuances of possibilities.

The world, Paul is effectively writing, is enslaved to wanting more. It thinks about it and dreams about it and lusts for it and lives for it – I want that shade – and that shade – and that shade – and that shade – I want that color – no, that color – no, that color . . . okay . . . I want it all.

The world thinks it's free as a bird . . . to think anything, to do anything, to want anything, to pursue anything . . . we're free.

Paul says, "No, you're actually enslaved to what you have; you're enslaved to what you can't have, you're enslaved to what you shouldn't have, you're enslaved to what you don't have.

But it only spirals downward from there – why? Because you'll never get everything you want.

5. Bitter

So Paul goes on to describe the next step with this loaded phrase – notice *verse 3 again – spending our life in malice and envy.*

Literally, passing the time . . . spending one’s life in malice or envy.

It makes sense – if all of life is nursing in your heart and then pursuing whatever it is you want – envy will be a key, driving factor.

Look what they have . . . look where they live . . . look what they wear . . . look where they work . . . look at all their toys . . . man, that’s the life.

But envy is more than that – it adds the feelings of displeasure when someone else has it – when someone else is honored, promoted.^{xiii}

It can’t stand it.

Like the parents in Tennessee who complained that putting up the honor roll “embarrassed” the kids who were excluded – and so, on the advice of the school counsel, the honor roll in that school was entirely eliminated.^{xiv}

The issue was not embarrassment over not being on the list, the issue was the envy of parents because their kids were not.

There this added word, Paul writes . . . *living with envy and malice* . . . malice is a chilling word. It’s a word that means you’ll make someone suffer if they get in the way of what you want.

And it won’t stop at arguing over the honor roll. One father was so angry that his daughter was suspended from the school softball team he took an aluminum bat and put the coach in the hospital.^{xv}

Road rage! Where does that come from? Envy and malice.

You got in his way . . . that’s my spot.

My son told us recently that he was behind a slow moving car – I didn’t ask him how slow. When the dotted line allowed him, he passed the guy. And the guy just came alive and sped up and passed my son and as soon as he got in front of him he slammed on his brakes. Fortunately there were no cars coming and my son was able to swerve into the other lane – he didn’t have time to even put on the brakes. The other guy sped up and passed him again, and my son just slowed down and backed way off and the guy eventually went on.

Infuriated at being passed on the road – a person becomes willing at their own peril to cause a crash and spill blood.

Can envy run that deep? Can a person become that malicious – overwhelmed by malice?

It was envy that led the Sanhedrin to deliver Jesus over to Pilate (*Matthew 27:18*). Envy plus malice led them up to Calvary to mock him and spit on him.

He took our spot . . . he got in our way.

Is it any wonder that Paul ends this list with what would naturally progress . . . notice, he writes, *foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy – now notice – hateful, hating one another.*

6. Bad-tempered.

People are just at each other’s throats.

Think for a moment of the shallowness of human relationships where you work or go to school. Think of how quickly the behind-the-back comments break out whenever someone is not around.^{xvi}

You could outline this progression in three steps downward;

- **First**, Paul describes our attitude toward God – foolish and disobedient or biased and belligerent;
- **Secondly**, Paul describes our attitude toward ourselves – we think we’re smart and free, but we’re really deceived and enslaved; that is, we’re blind and bound;
- Then **thirdly**, he describes our attitude toward others – we’re filled with malice and envy and hatred – we’re bitter and bad-tempered.^{xvii}

And you and I could close our Bibles and admit that Paul has fully and realistically described the awfulness of our sin and the depths of our depravity and he indeed had every right to say that this list includes us all.

We are entirely and utterly hopeless. We are utterly unable to deserve anything but the wrath of God.

And then, you have, one of my favorite words in the English Bible. It appears right when we’ve grown tired of the filth of our world and the foolishness bound up in our own hearts.

Notice *verse 4. But* . . . I love that word . . . *but when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us* . . . not because we weren’t on that bad list – notice, *but according to His mercy.*

He saved us. We surely couldn’t save ourselves.

The kindness and love of God, Paul writes, *appeared* . . . God came looking for us.^{xviii}

Biased, belligerent, blind, bound, bitter, bad tempered – and in His love and kindness, He saved us.

Even though we're in this list of vices and we really want to be living in the earlier list of virtues, Christ saved us.

And that will provoke an incentive to love Christ back – and to live for Him and to serve Him and to make Him our master and Lord.

To make our lives one giant exclamation point of gratitude!

I read some time ago about an old man who lived in Florida everybody referred to as “Old Ed”. Just about every Friday evening, at sunset, Old Ed would walk along the beach to his favorite pier. And he always came carrying a bucket full of shrimp. But the shrimp weren't for him or his friends or family. They were for the seagulls.

He'd walk out to the end of the pier and soon the evening sky would be filled with screeching birds swooping down to catch the shrimp as he threw it into the air.

People talked about how he'd stand out their throwing the shrimp, talking to them as he did. And he was. Within minutes, the bucket would be empty and Old Ed would stand there, deep in thought, watching the birds fly away.

His full name was Eddie Rickenbacker. He had been a captain in World War II and he flew a B-17 with a crew of 7 other men. On one particular mission across the Pacific, they lost their way and eventually ran out of gasoline, gliding down and then crashing into the water. Miraculously, they all

made it out of the plane and into their life raft. They lived for days on that raft, fighting the sun and the sharks and most of all, hunger. The rations eventually ran out and their situation became quite desperate.

Ed remembers – in fact, would write in his autobiography later that he remembers being semi-conscious, his hat pulled down over his eyes, when he felt something land on his head. It was a seagull. That gull meant food – if he could catch it. He slowly reached up his hands – and he caught it. The men made a meal out of that bird – then used some of the leftover for bait. That allowed them to catch fish and repeat the cycle . . . they survived until they were rescued.

Old Ed never forgot. Nearly every Friday evening for years until he died, he would go to that pier with a bucket full of shrimp – feed the seagulls and repeat to them over and over again, “Thank you . . . thank you . . . thank you.”^{xix}

What are those Christians always mumbling about . . . they're talking to God, I guess.

If the world could get close enough to us, might they hear nothing less than our gratitude to God who saved us from our sin and ourselves and a horrible future and a meaningless life?

What an incentive to leaving that old life and pursuing a new life – Paul would say, that's my point! Go out there and say with Paul and these remarkable Christians on the Island of Crete . . . “Lord, we remember . . . thank you . . . we remember who we used to be . . . we remember where we were headed . . . we remember why we needed a Savior and why we need Him now . . . we remember . . . thank you, thank you, thank you.”

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 9/23/2012 by Stephen Davey.
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i James Bryan Smith, *The Good and Beautiful Community* (IVP, 2010), p. 28

ii Robert Black & Ronald McClung, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon* (Wesleyan Publishing House, 2004), p. 254

iii Walter L. Liefeld, *The NIV Application Bible: 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus* (Zondervan, 1999), p. 350

iv Ibid

v Diana West, *The Death of the Grownup* (St. Martin's Press, 2007), p. 67

vi Ibid

vii preachingtoday.com/the-Harvard-cheating-scandal

viii World Magazine, “Brazilian Tangle” September 22, 2010, p. 16

ix Black & McClung, p. 254

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- x Fritz Rienecker & Cleon Rogers, Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament (Regency, 1976) p. 656
- xi John MacArthur, Titus (Moody Press, 1996), p. 149
- xii John A. Kitchen, The Pastoral Epistles for Pastors (Kress Christian Publications, 2009), p. 549
- xiii John Phillips, Exploring the Pastoral Epistles (Kregel, 2004), p. 297
- xiv West, p. 85
- xv Ibid, p. 86
- xvi John Benton, Straightening Out the Self-Centered Church (Evangelical Press, 1997), p. 155
- xvii Adapted from Black & McClung, p. 254
- xviii Charles R. Swindoll, Insight on 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus (Zondervan, 2010), p. 307
- xix Adapted from Max Lucado, In the Eye of the Storm, quoted in Charles Swindoll The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart, Moody Press, Chicago, p. 486