

Embodying Grace & Peace | How to Be the Church

“The World We Reject and Respect”

Titus 2.11-3.11; Romans 12.9-13

7.17.22

Titus 2.11-3.8 *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, ¹² instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, ¹³ looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus; ¹⁴ who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.¹⁵ These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you. ¹ Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, ² to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men. ³ For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. ⁴ But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, ⁵ He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. ⁸ This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men.*

1 John. 2.15-16 *Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.*

Romans 12.14, 17-21 *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse... ¹⁷ Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. ¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. ¹⁹ Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord. ²⁰ "BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

We've been looking at how to be the church – when the Good News of what God has done by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is applied to a life by God's Spirit and received by trust (as we saw in Romans CH 8), “The love of Christ compels us...” God's Spirit motivates us to love ...one another. (2 Cor 5.14).

And we've seen, in Romans CH 12, a description and a prescription of that LOVE: what does it look like to live in a grace and peace saturated Body, being compelled and liberated to use our varied gifts to nourish and build up the whole organism that the church is?

Today we hope to look at the Church's relationship to outsiders, especially as those outsiders may actively oppose the Church – might offer resistance in the way the world believes, speaks and does things against us.

How to deal with opposition from the world-system in a way that's in keeping with and even promotes the basic principles and beliefs of the Church? Whether the pushback is verbal or even physical? Are we to love the world or abhor (Rom 12.9) ... hate the world?

I'll ask two questions of our passages, today:

- 1) What IS the relationship between the church and the world? And how does that present a tension?**
- 2) How can we live not moderately but dynamically within that tension?**

The same writer who said, "Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you" (1 Jn. 2.15 NLT), he, the Apostle John, also recorded the words of Jesus saying, "for GOD so loved the world..." – So what IS it? To love the world (as God does) or to hate the world?

And there's the tension...an apparent contradiction: in some way, God loves the world and in other ways, God opposes the world...and commands us to separate from the world and even to resist the world.

And what the Bible is doing here is not a self-contradiction but God is forming this dynamic tension and calling us to live within it.

Now just to insure we appreciate this tension, let's look at the way the NT describes the Church and its war with the world. There's a whole long list of warnings against loving/trusting the world. Jesus Christ will tell His disciples just before His death, "If you were of the world, the world would love you; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you." Nothing moderate about that!

Then Paul, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places." As if the followers of Jesus Christ are in this cosmic struggle, a fight to the death between the world-powers and the Church.

Or THIS from the 2nd Corinthian Letter, "Do not be bound together with unbelievers; what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?" As if there's nothing in common between Christians and non-Christians, like the ancient Letter to Diognetus where Christians in the Roman Empire are described as a "third race".

And then Paul speaks in several places of Christians in armor and using weapons in this cosmic struggle (not, btw, physical weapons and in fact that seems to be the point – the Gospel IS the weapon and the armor; it's a way of looking at life that subverts all other systems of thought and other worldviews.) 2nd Cor. 10 (4) "the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses."

And we could go on and on – so many NT texts depicting the Christian life as a contest, a struggle, a war and that the world is somehow to be resisted. And there can be no truce...no peace... no moderate position of compromise. "The Church Militant" is what the old writers called it... And sadly some have terribly misunderstood this emphasis and disregarded that this IS not and never CAN be a physical war

e.g. attempting to take back the Holy Lands as in the Crusades – today, virtually all Christians see that as the most blatant departure from the NT writings.

But still...the Bible is clear: there's an irreconcilable hostility between the Church and the world!

And I haven't even mentioned that last book of the Bible... where it's all represented in symbols...war in the unseen world. First Century Christians would make sense of the distress that faced them job-loss, discrimination and eventually a general persecution and they would see it all through the pages of The Revelation. A dragon seeking to devour a pregnant woman and consume her new-born Child: war in the heavenlies being played out in the persecution of the Christians.

And Christians are taught throughout the Bible that the world – not the created realm but the world, as the expression of humanity's revolt against God, – the world in that sense is animated by misdirected desire (the over-desire of the body, depending on physical stuff, food and drink and merchandise to fill a vacuum that only God can fill) and fostering discontent with our own situation (the lust of the eye – “the grass-is-always-greener complex”) and a deeply ingrained assumption that the way to be fulfilled and significant is to get up on other people:

“For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.”

And while the Christian must hate it, hate the world in that sense...must oppose it and EXpose it and never be at peace with it...he's also aware that God so loved the world that He gave His only Son to save it. God has held out an Olive Branch to this beleaguered and belligerent planet: “The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men...” God has somehow reconciled the irreconcilable! He invited the world to sink its fangs into Him and He absorbed the venom...

By Jesus Christ, God entered into time and space, and He lived to fulfill His own commands; Jesus Christ did my part of the bargain – as a fully human person, He lived up to the will of God. He totally reversed the way of the world – totally lived by the law of love rather than the law of the jungle. He lived absolutely delighting in God the Father and did it for the benefit of others. He enjoyed the gifts of God as they were intended (i.e., as gifts to be enjoyed in the presence OF God – not as a substitute FOR God).

He was completely content with what God assigned Him and never jealous or competitive toward others. His sense of fullness and significance was never dependent on the applause of others or even on how He felt about Himself. He was unflinchingly joyous always because He knew the love of the Father. He was so secure in that – that He could give Himself away in order that rebels could be reconciled!

And whoever finds his or her significance in what God did, through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ...that person is made new. He becomes a new creation. He looks like an ordinary person. He may even look (from the world's perspective) like a loser...

That person has breaks with the world and enters the will of God... He exchanges one system for another. He was of the world but now he's accepted the terms of the Peace Treaty. He makes no

bargains with God. He takes the reconciliation on God's terms. The God "who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds."

The Christian sees himself as a reconciled rebel: "For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy."

And because of all this...the Christian becomes, at once, opposed to the world and committed to serve the world...because he, like Jesus Christ and like God the Father... so loves the world.

So, in order to genuinely love the world as God does, the Christian will "be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all people". We're privileged to show the world that "The Deal" is still offered.

We are THE CHURCH, in a sense, the continuation and the extension, the Body of Jesus Christ (Eph. 3.21) and we are continuing the mission of Jesus Christ: serving the world, giving our life for the world and for one another and extending the Offer to a rebellious world. Not that we're any better. In fact we know that selfish, rebellious impulse too well. We remember when it was our main principle of life (that was not really life!) and we feel it even now. As we saw last week – we too often succumb to it!

And because we're positioned this way, Paul tells the young pastor Titus, "Look, tell the people to live as if they were guests here... refugees in a country that's not their own! (It's one reason we sort of naturally love immigrants – because we ARE immigrants!) Be zealous to serve others. Be subject to the rulers and their rules."

Don't be in any way malignant...don't speak ill of the people who govern "the world". You Christians should be very careful of complaining about the government and people in power because YOU know how it is to be in the world and ignorant of God and His ways. (Titus 3.3)

Well, wait Paul are we at war OR are we in love? A: You're enlisted in the revolution of love. You're not simply NICE but actually loving to those who don't deserve it and hoping that genuine love will bring the pain of redemptive shame into their lives... leading to repentance and LIFE!

Now, six practical ideas for living in this paradox – passionately loving the world and vehemently hating the world:

#1) There are two systems for becoming a whole and complete human being. One system excludes God and ends in frustration and death: The World. The other is born out of self-sacrifice and it leads to and functions on that basis: the way of Gospel, or grace, of the Kingdom.

A life that's (quote) "a good life" even if it's a moral or virtuous life – IF it's not a life intentionally reconciled to God by Jesus Christ and through trust in Him, that "good life" without Christ is "OF the world". You may think that your life is good because you don't get high or have affairs or embezzle from

your company but... if you don't take "the Deal" that God offers, you're "on the wrong side of history" and your good deeds only point to ... YOU.

When you receive the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior you enter the new creation and the old criteria for judging life and success and for judging others begins to die. While in this life, we live between the "present age: and the "blessed hope" (Titus 2.12-13).

#2) The GOSPEL-system is the alternative to The world-system AND just as the world incites and stirs up people to do and speak and think in certain ways, SO the grace of God is an animating force. It moves you. The Gospel IS the power of God for salvation to all who believe it (Rom 1.16)

"For the grace of God has appeared...INSTRUCTING us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age" (Titus 2.11-12)

This means that when I'm receiving grace, I can expect help, expect to be trained how to conduct myself while in this uncomfortable tension of opposing the world and healing the world. It's not easy – hating the system that says, "It's up to me to make myself a somebody...and better than the nobodies!" – hating that system and yet loving the people who are in the system. We get instructed and as we receive the grace of God ...we get formed both to will and to work for His good pleasure (Phil. 2.13)!

AND, Class, how does one GET this grace of God? A: By repenting and believing in Jesus Christ again and again. It's as we stay close to Him, humbling ourselves and believing, that we are instructed how to be a resisting the world and showing all consideration to all people (Titus 3.2).

#3) The Mid-Terms will start to heat up after Labor Day so be careful about saying malicious and malignant things about our governing officials. We don't have to agree with all their policies. But those who are being instructed by the grace of God will repent when they malign people. (3.1-2) So repent if you're doing that, because if you ARE doing that, you're not opposing the elected official but the God who put her or him in position. After Romans 12 comes Romans 13!

#4) I hope you're beginning to see that so many Christian truths are learned in the form of paradox...what some have called the "dialectic" – two apparent opposites and the truth emerges NOT from dulling or diluting or softening either pole AND NOT by resorting to some middle but by living IN the tension.

Is Jesus Christ God or Human? Yes. Ah so you mean He's like half-god and half-man? NOPE! 100% God and 100% human.

Is the Bible written by God or by people? Yep. So it's sometimes from God sometimes a human invention? Nope!

Is God totally in control of all things, even my thoughts and actions, OR am I morally responsible? Yep! Oh, so sometimes God takes His hands off the wheel, and I have free-will and sometimes God controls things, in which moments, I'm not responsible? Nope!

U2 sang, “if you want to kiss the sky better learn how to kneel” (both/and NOT either/or). G.K. Chesterton was brilliant on this idea. He said most if not all heresies in the history of the Church come from some seemingly brilliant attempt to resolve the apparent contradiction and leave the tension – but it then ceases to be Christian. Chesterton wrote: “The real problem is – Can the lion lie down with the lamb and still retain his royal ferocity? That is the problem the church attempted; that is the miracle she achieved.”

#5) Rediscover vocation. When you go to work whether in a cubicle or under a car or in a classroom, KNOW that you are there as an agent of God to bless people. “Be zealous for good deeds”. It will change the way you see your job. It will be a holy calling and... an adventure.

God goes with you on to that construction site or office or in your home. Be that (v.14) “people for God’s own possession” that God calls you to be. Be the extension of Christ...even if you don’t talk about spiritual things. Remember, Jesus Christ was a carpenter for many years before He was a preacher.

Last, we’re in this together. We’re not lone soldiers but ...an army... and a hospital. But neither of these can happen if we are disconnected individuals. We’re called to exhibit in our relationships the new way of life, the alternative to the world, a city within the city where we value one another not for what we can get but because we are united in Christ.

If you want to kiss the sky, better learn how to kneel

— Adam Clayton, Paul Hewson et al; “Mysterious Ways” from
the 1991 U2 album, *Achtung Baby*

I’m very concerned that our society is much more concerned with information than wonder, in noise rather than silence. How do we encourage reflection? ... Oh my, this is a noisy world.

— Fred Rogers, interview with Charlie
Rose (Sept. 20, 1994)

(Christianity) separated the two ideas and then exaggerated them both. In one way Man was to be haughtier than he had ever been before; in another way he was to be humbler than he had ever been before. In so far as I am Man, I am the chief of creatures. In so far as I am *a* man, I am the chief of sinners... Here, again in short, Christianity got over the difficulty of combining furious opposites, by keeping them both, and keeping them both furious. The Church was positive on both points. One can hardly think too little of one’s self. One can hardly think too much of one’s soul.

The real problem is – Can the lion lie down with the lamb and still retain his royal ferocity? *That* is the problem the church attempted; *that* is the miracle she achieved.

— G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (CH 6: “The Paradoxes of Christianity”; 1908)