

Bible Text: Titus 3:2
Preached on: Sunday, November 10, 2013

Truth Community Church
4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

I want to start this morning's message a little differently than normal. I want to simply, as it were, hand the stage over to our Lord Jesus Christ for our introduction and if you would do this for me, if you would turn to Matthew 18, beginning in verse 23, we're going to let Christ set the tone from his word here this morning. In Matthew 18:23, Jesus teaches a lesson on forgiveness that has a broader impact in terms of the way that we respond to our salvation. In Matthew 18:23, Jesus tells a parable and he says, "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he had begun to settle them, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him," which was an immeasurable sum of money.

Verse 25, "But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.' And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.'" This was a much smaller amount of money, maybe 3 months of wages compared to the innumerable debt that he had been forgiven.

Verse 28, "'Pay back what you owe.' So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.' But he was unwilling and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?'" Let's look at that verse again, verse 33. That's really the point of all of this, "'Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?' And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."

Now, here's the point of this parable, we're not going to expound that parable, I just wanted something to kind of set the tone from the lips of our Lord. We're going to speak

to each other as Christians here this morning primarily and as Christians, there is something that's true of each one of us: we had an infinite debt of guilt before a holy God. The holy, holy, holy God of whom we sang was a God against whom we had sinned, broken his law in countless ways, our spiritual lives were shattered, our debt was unpayable, our guilt was infinite and yet here we stand today. God, if you're a Christian, God has forgiven us in our Lord Jesus Christ. Our debt has been erased. Even more, the merit of our Lord Jesus Christ has been placed into our spiritual account. Our guilt is gone and in its place is a totally undeserved righteousness that secures our place before God forever. We are reconciled to a holy God because of his gracious initiative in our lives.

Now, that has meaning. That has vast implications for the way that we think about life, the way that we think about the world in which we live and the way that we respond to it because what Scripture teaches us repeatedly is that we who have received grace and mercy vertically undeserved from God, are morally obligated to extend that kind of grace to others. That mindset helps prepare us for today's text. We should be so overwhelmed by the thought of mercy given to us that we would naturally under a glad sense of free compulsion, extend that kind of grace and kindness to others.

Turn in your Bibles to Titus 3 now as we continue our study of this letter of Paul. Titus 3. I'm going to read verses 1 and 2. We covered verse 1 last week and we're going to pretty much pick it up in verse 2 now. Paul in these 2 verses, the Bible in these 2 verses, God in these 2 verses, is giving us direct instruction on how to live in the midst of a fallen world. As Christians, how do we live and interact with the unsaved people that are all around us? How do we live and interact with the sometimes ungodly authorities that have a prerogative over us in the plan of God? Well, Titus 3 verses 1 and 2 give us clear instruction on what we are to be like, what our character is to be like, how we are to respond to people who are unsaved like you and I used to be. That's the key. Chapter 3, verses 1 and 2,

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.

Let me remind you of what led us up to this point. In Titus chapter 2, Paul had been addressing the matter of life within the church and talking about the relationships of older men to younger men, older women to younger women, and he had gone through life in the church in great detail. He had talked about how slaves were to respond to their masters and he ties it all into the purpose of Christ in redeeming us. Look at chapter 2, verse 14, he said, Christ, "gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds."

Now, Christ bought us at the price of his own blood. He bought us with a purpose. He bought us that we would belong to him and the Bible says very plainly that he bought us so that we would be zealous for good deeds. Well, here's the question: what do those good deeds look like? What does the Apostle Paul have in mind when he's writing these

good deeds that we are supposed to do? Well, it's very interesting. He doesn't talk about going out and feeding the poor or alleviating world poverty or turning the Roman empire over into a Christian nation by force of what was utterly impossible, political will from the people of the church. No, it wasn't anything like that. It's not what we typically think about good deeds being when our minds are not fully informed with the Scripture. He goes to the nature of our character and he goes to the nature of the way that we respond to this unsaved environment that we find ourselves in and he's very direct. It's contrary, it cuts against so much of what we're told and what passes for the evangelical church today and I just want you to see with clarity from the Scriptures that God has made this very clear and we need to conform to it. These are the kinds of deeds that he saved us for.

Look at chapter 3, verse 1 again, "Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed." You see, there it is. He's linking these things together. The redemption of Christ and the good deeds which we are to live and it's tied together there under the umbrella of living a life of submission to our existing rulers. So last time we saw that we are to submit to civil authority as part of our expression of the Christian life that we've been called to live. Christians should not be known as political rabble-rousers. That is not our calling in this life. We're passing through and it's not our job to try to overturn civil authority and to rebel and buck against it. It doesn't matter if we like it or not, the Bible calls us to submit to it and that's part of the way that we respond to the work of Christ in our lives. We remember, as we saw last time, we remember God's sovereignty; we remember that God has established these civil authorities for this time in our lives, and we honor Christ by submitting to the rulers that he has established. That's what we saw last time. Sometimes a little bit hard to apply, perhaps, sometimes but not that difficult to understand. The text is pretty clear about what it has to say to us.

Now, here's what I want you to see: in chapter 2, we talked about life within the church. As he opens chapter 3, he's talking about life under the authority of civil government. Now what he is doing is he is expanding it more horizontally and saying: how is it that we live, what kind of people are we to be as we interact with the unsaved world around us? He's broadening his instruction to tell us how to live with unsaved men in society and I think, as I think about what the future probably holds in light of the moral collapse around us, we need this instruction very clearly because we are prone to fear as we see this collapse going around. We're prone to fear. I go through these emotions myself thinking, "What kind of world are my children and eventual grandchildren going to grow up in when evil is declared good and good is declared evil?" which is right where the sweet spot of where we're living. How are we to interact with that? And you get a little bit uptight and you feel like you need to go out and fight it and fight the people that are behind all of it. Well, this is why it is so important for us to have our minds in Scripture. This is why it is so important for us to go through God's word verse-by-verse and just let it speak to us and show us what God has for us in this kind of society. If anything, the Roman society in which Paul was writing, the context was far worse back then than it is in our day today and so under worse conditions than what we're facing now, Paul writes this instruction and therefore he continues on and it's what we are to see for ourselves today.

Here's what he does, keeping in mind that parable from Matthew 18 that we opened with: Paul, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, paints a picture of Christians with gracious character extending a gracious demeanor even to a hostile society. We are not to be the enemies of these people in the sense that we are personally hostile to them and Paul explains this with clarity to us. He's speaking directly to us and so let's listen carefully. Paul gives us kind of a contrast and then we're going to build the message around this contrast. He tells us what to avoid and what to advance in terms of what we should not do and what we should do; here in verse 2, he lays it all out for us. What is it that we avoid? Well, Christian living, you see this throughout Scripture, Christian living means that there are some things that we are to put off and other things that we are to put on. Things of the remnants of our sinful lives that we consciously separate ourselves from and aim our minds and purpose towards the things that God has revealed in his word.

This verse, chapter 3, verse 2, is exactly like that. Look at what it says here in verse 2, it says, "to malign no one," and what he's saying here, this is a continuation of the command from the beginning of verse 1, "remind them." And so he tells Titus, "As you're speaking to these Christians on the island of Crete, remind them of this: remind them to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men." Now, what I want you to see from the beginning as we just kind of look around and see what the environment is here in this text that we're looking at this morning, I want you to see how broad and comprehensive this verse is. This is a comprehensive approach to the way that we are to live in an unsaved society because he says, "malign no one." That's pretty exhaustive. He says at the end of the verse, "show every consideration for all men," and so what he's cultivating here is a fundamental disposition about the way that we think and interact with the people that are around us in this world. This is to be the defining mark of our character is what he has laid out here and it's not a character of hostility.

What is it that we avoid as we interact with our unsaved world? First of all, he tells us to avoid what I'm going to call destructive lips. Avoid destructive lips. Watch what comes out of your mouth and make it so that it is appropriate in interacting with the unsaved people that are around you. Look at what he says there in verse 2, he says we are "to malign no one." Malign no one. This is the word that we get our English word "blasphemy" from is the word that he uses here. In relation to men it has the idea that we are not to slander or speak insultingly about others or toward others or to others in our interactions. What he is doing here is he is restraining our natural inclinations to speak harshly about people or to show them contempt. When we see people living degraded lives about them, we are not to look at them and think that we're in a position where we should speak down to them and insult them and condemn them with the things that we say. That is just not Christian demeanor. That is not the way that we are to be. We need to repent, you and I personally, individually. We need to repent of any angry demeanor that we might have toward the unsaved. That is not righteous living. Scripture says that the wrath of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. It's very clear about that. These unsaved people, what Scripture is teaching us and we're going to see more here, these unsaved people should be the objects of our kindness, of our grace, of our mercy, not our

animosity. They are not our enemies, they are our mission field and Scripture is clear about this.

Turn over to 1 Peter. You'll need to go to the right in your Bibles, past the book of Hebrews and past the book of James. 1 Peter 2. I never had my mouth washed out with soap when I was a little kid, a fact for which I am very grateful to my mother for but you know the idea that when dirty things come out of your mouth in the older times, they sometimes would wash their kids' mouths out with soap to teach them not to do that. Did that happen to you? No, okay, you just remember the principle. Well, here's what I want you to think about, beloved, is that instead of God physically washing our mouth out with soap, what he's doing here is he is cleansing our heart by the washing of his word so that our hearts would be properly oriented so that what comes out would be naturally in fulfillment of this verse that Paul has given to us. We are not to be people of destructive, angry lips toward the unsaved people around us.

1 Peter 2:12, he says, "Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation." Now watch this, so he's talking about our behavior among the Gentiles, among unsaved people and look how he builds on that later on in chapter 3, beginning in verse 8. He says, "To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. For, "The one who desires life, to love and see good days, must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit. He must turn away from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it." So as an aspect of living an excellent Christian life among the Gentiles, there is this peaceful, sympathetic, kindhearted spirit that animates what we say and what we do.

Now, let me just turn into a cul-de-sac here. We'll go in, turn around and come right back out. Paul is not forbidding spiritual discernment here. Earlier in the book of Titus, he spoke honestly about the evil character of the Cretans in chapter 1. He's not telling us to just turn off the antenna of spiritual discernment here. He's not talking about that, he's talking about the disposition of your heart. He's talking about the way that you interact with unsaved people on a day-to-day basis. He's not talking about how we address false teachers here, he's talking about how you live with your unsaved neighbors, your unsaved coworkers, the people that you meet on the street, that whole interaction which expresses the reality that we are Christians living in a non-Christian world. What is our attitude to be about it? This is what he's saying, he says, "Watch your mouth and don't malign. Don't slander. Don't insult people as you're going through life like that. That is inappropriate. It is not fitting for a Christian to be like that." So, just building on that thought as we come out of the cul-de-sac here, it's one thing in the teaching of a church to expose false philosophies and to address that and to refute them. That is a perfectly natural and compelling duty that we have to do that. That's one thing. That's not what this passage is about. It's a completely different thing for us as individual Christians to call other individual men idiots or fools or to just speak in such demeaning ways about them, even if they are openly hostile to who we are and what we believe. That is not the calling of us.

Paul says, "malign no one. Insult no one like that when you're living your life." So he tells us to avoid destructive lips as we live in this world.

Now, this aspect of avoiding destructive lips comes from something even bigger that we avoid and we'll put it this way: we're talking about what to avoid and we said to do avoid destructive lips. I don't know if that includes stumbling lips but, you know, whatever. Avoid destructive lips and he goes on and shows us to avoid a combative spirit. A combative spirit. Go back to Titus 3:2 where he says "to malign no one, to be peaceable." To be peaceable. That's our word. It's a word that has the sense of, "Don't be disposed to fight. Don't be disposed to fight. Don't be someone that is just carrying around a smoldering sense of anger at the unsaved world and the wrongness that you see around it. Don't walk around with a smoldering sense of anger that's just ready to be lit and once your fuse is lit you're going off on a confrontational combative approach with the people that are around you." This is not the way that we are to be as Christians.

Now remember, Paul is addressing our personal demeanor as Christians. He's not talking about the inherent offense that the Gospel brings. The Gospel will offend people. People will react against the Gospel. That's not what he's talking about here, he's talking about you and me. He's not rebuking the world here in terms of this passage, he's talking to us and so we need to pay attention to what God says in his word here and if God's word convicts us here, we need to let it convict us. We need to let it sift through our mind because this is addressing our personal demeanor as Christians: who we are, what we do, what we are like.

Beloved, here's the point: we don't get to justify ungodly reactions to the world around us in the name supposedly of upholding righteousness. If, I say this gently, if you and I are really concerned about the principle of God's righteousness being manifested on earth, if that's really our concern about, "I love my holy God. I want to see his righteousness honored on earth and that is the defining thing in my life." Hey, amen. Good. I'm glad you feel that way. I want to be that way too. Understand this: that if that is what you say is the defining ambition of your life, understand that where it starts in application is not out there but in here, inside your own heart and it's your own responsibility to pursue your own personal righteousness as the defining priority of your life and you don't get a pass on all of the sinful things in your heart, your sinful attitudes and angers and bad attitudes toward the people around you in life. No, don't worry about what their unrighteousness is like, deal with your own. Love Christ enough, have enough personal integrity to say, "The real issue of righteousness in my life is my own," and start there. As we've said, we must be discerning and we must confront error, sure. That's why we're called Truth Community, but on a personal level with who you are like as an individual man or woman, boy or girl, the disposition of your heart should be against personal combat with unsaved people in your lives. That is just ungodly and it is totally the wrong approach to life and so we have to sort through all of this. It doesn't matter that they are advancing things that you may be opposed to, that they are living in ways that you think are wrong. In terms of what your demeanor is toward them, be peaceable it says.

Look over at Matthew 5 to reinforce this. Matthew 5:43. This is not an isolated principle in Scripture. This is fundamental to living in an unsaved world, in a fallen world, in a hostile world as we said from 1 John repeatedly. Matthew 5:43, "You have heard that it was said, 'you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'" That's what the Pharisees taught. Sure, love your neighbor but if you have an enemy, hate them. Jesus says, "No, I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." God is indiscriminate in the dispensing of his common grace. Unsaved people get to enjoy a beautiful sunset, they get to enjoy good meals, all coming out of the gracious, magnanimous character of God who is good to everyone on earth, saved and unsaved alike. What Jesus is saying is that you and I are supposed to be like that: indiscriminate, generous with our kindness, generous with our grace, generous with the sweet words of reasonable character that should be the mark of a Christian. This is what we do. This is who we are. It comes out naturally because we have been born from above by a God who is like that and so we are to be like him. Wow, you see a sunset and you say, "Oh, okay great. Praise the Lord." Well, think for a moment about the fact that your unsaved neighbor gets to see and enjoy that same sunset. God doesn't hide his goodness from them in that way. This is what you are to be like.

Verse 46 of Matthew 5 as Jesus continues to have voice here this morning. He says, "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?" He says, "The sinful despised tax collectors will greet their own. Gentiles will greet their own and be kind to them. If we only showed kindness to one another, this would not distinguish us at all to show kindness to like-minded people who are in sympathy with us." Jesus says, "No, you go way beyond that. You love your enemies. You pray for those who persecute you remembering all the while that this is the way that God has been, this is who God is." He shows that indiscriminate goodness to all. So what Paul is telling us is that Christians should be peaceable citizens as we go through this world.

Now look, I'm not trying to be blind here to the realities that we face. We understand that our motives are going to be twisted. We understand that people are going to speak evil against us. We understand that throughout the centuries righteous people who loved Christ like we do have been butchered at the hands of the unsaved people around them under the authority of wicked, despotic rulers. But understand that that doesn't change who we are. We don't meet that evil with our own anger and wicked responses. We understand that we're going to be twisted and misrepresented. Here is why and the more that we're like this, the more likely it is that we're going to be distorted and twisted. It's because a righteous holy life convicts them of their own sin but how they respond is irrelevant to the Christian because we're just looking up and saying, "Lord Jesus, you who redeemed me, you who bought me with a price, what do you want out of my life?" As it were he says, "I have spoken in my word. Here's what I want you to do: I want you to malign no one. I want you to be peaceable. I want you to remember that when I was on the cross, the ultimate victim, so to speak, of the hostility of man against me, my prayer

was, 'Father, forgive them for they don't know what they're doing.'" So bring it into the 21st century and see the wickedness, the unrighteous things that come to our lives and we look to Christ. We look to our Father and we say, "Wow, Father, forgive them. I don't want to be angry. I don't want to combat them. I want to be like you. You give rain and sunshine to evil men who will never praise your name. Christ, you prayed for those who crucified you from the cross. Do you know what? All I want to do, I just want to be like that. I don't want to take my cue from perhaps well-intentioned but angry teachers who convey a spirit that always seems to get me agitated. I don't want to be like that, Lord. I want to be like you and what you say, what you call me to is to malign no one and to have this peaceable, non-fighting spirit about me in my personal relationships with the people around me. Lord, help us to be like that," is our prayer.

Now, you see, Scripture calls us to something different and Paul points to this in terms of we've looked at what he says to avoid, and now what do we advance? What do we pursue? What do we put on? Go back to Titus 2 here. It's one thing to say, "Don't malign people. Don't insult them with your words. Don't fight." Well, what is it that we are to advance? What are we to put on? Well, notice that Paul calls us to a kind and peaceable spirit and this is not the kind of teaching that people are going to really rally around in big numbers. If you follow anything on the internet, people who blog, you know that the quickest way to get an audience is to be controversial and to attack someone. That's just the spirit of our age. It's just the way that it works. Well, Paul calls us to something completely different. Instead of being self-appointed boxers against everything that's around us, he says, look at what he says there in verse 2, "malign no one, be peaceable," here we go, "gentle." Gentle. "Showing every consideration for all men." To be gentle here has the idea of to be fair and reasonable. It speaks to a gracious tolerance with a world that does not share our spiritual commitments.

Look, we don't approve of sin but we understand that we cannot compel people to stop sinning. Legislation has never worked to try to make people stop sinning. Prohibition failed. The effort to outlaw sin is a denial of the Gospel because the Gospel tells us that men in sin cannot stop sinning unless God intervenes, unless God is gracious and merciful to them. So to establish laws in the name of establishing righteousness, well, you have to be aware you're going to deny the Gospel with that pursuit. What changes sinners is the Gospel, not government legislation that is supported by the evangelical right.

So, instead of trying to compel people to stop sinning, we extend kindness to them instead of carrying a severe spirit toward them. You know, you come across people whose lives are a moral wreck, start with kindness and see where that goes. Gentle, peaceable, gracious interaction because you can know no matter what you see on the outside, you can know that what Scripture says is true, "The way of the transgressor is hard. It's difficult to live a sinful life. The consequences are painful over time." So because we know that, because some of us have tasted that personally from our own sad experience say, "Oh, that is so bad. You know what? I just want to be merciful. I just want to show some kindness knowing the spiritual consequences of the way that you live." I just want to be kind to those in that slavery and bondage. Not a severe spirit.

Beloved, if you have any question about whether this is right or not, let me ask you to look back on your own testimony. Look back on those of you that became Christians a little bit later in life. Look back before you were a Christian. Who was it that had an impact on your life for the Gospel? Was it an angry person? Was it someone who was severe on you with their arms across their chest? Or was it someone that showed kindness to you at a business lunch? Was it someone that showed kindness to you when you were arrogantly dismissive of what they said but there was something disarming about the gentleness that they showed to you as a person and it stopped you short and you said, "Wow, that's different. That's different." I dare to say that most of us were wooed to Christ through the kindness of a pastor or the kindness of a preacher or Christian friend who overlooked the sinfulness of our ways and showed this kind of kindness to us. It's true in my life. Those were the people that brought me up short in my anger and arrogance and I said, "Wow, I can't deal with that. That's something different." It convicts their conscience and that's what we care about, not to be the one who stands in spiritual judgment of them.

Look over in Matthew. I'm glad I remembered this. Look over in Matthew 7. In terms of where our focus will be and the way that this impacts us, in terms of starting with our own sense of repentance over our own sin, Jesus said in Matthew 7:3, "Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."

Look over at Galatians 6 along the same lines. I realize that some of these passages are talking about life in the church but they manifest a greater spiritual principle of examining ourselves first and letting the recognition of our own sin and rebellion soften our hearts toward those who are still in their own sin and rebellion. Galatians 6:1, "Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted." Look to yourself. Examine your heart. Realize that you're subject to sin and temptation too and let that change, soften, diminish the severity with which you would otherwise deal with people and let the fact that a gracious God has forgiven the infinite debt of guilt that you had. Have such a powerful motivating influence in your own heart that you say, "Of course I'm going to be gentle to you. You're just like I used to be and God was gracious to me therefore all I can do is be gracious to you too."

Go back to Titus 3. We'll just touch there for a moment before we bounce off into a couple of other passages I want you to see. Titus 3:2, he says, "showing every consideration for all men." For all men. Every consideration. This is restraining our natural impulse toward retaliation in the face of insults. We want to fight back. We want to bite back if we get bitten. Paul says, "No, no. Show every consideration for all men." Obviously that's going to include men who are unkind to us, whose lives of which we don't approve in one level. Paul says, "Show them kindness. Show them peaceableness. Show them consideration. Make that the defining mark of your Christian character."

Look, we are going to have to take our cues as we look to the future down the road a few years in our country and in our world, we're going to have to take our cues from Scripture because there is not going to be anything to reinforce this kind of attitude in our lives otherwise. It's going to get worse. It's going to get more hostile toward us and for months and months and months, I've been kind of thinking about this and this passage has brought a lot of clarity to my mind. You know, the question is as you're trying to build a church to stand the test of time, a church that will thrive and prosper for decades, not just for the next year and a half and then everybody moves on to something else. How do you prepare people, how do you prepare young people in their teens and in their 20s who are entering into a world that is going to be more openly hostile to Christianity than anything that we've ever known in our lifetime experience? How do you prepare them for that? Do you prepare them and teach them political action? Do you tell them that they've got to fight every inch of the way? Is this how we fight for Christ? Is that how we advance the purposes of the kingdom of God?

Look, Scripture is telling us right here: your character going forward, your character going forward, the Bible says as you live in the midst of a hostile world, "malign no one, be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men." You start with your understanding of who God wants you to be and you let him sort out the consequences of how his providence unfolds in world history. Our starting point is the kind of people that we are; that's the one thing that we have control over. We can't control anything else but we can respond in righteous submission to what God says, "This is what I want you to be like." You know, the more I think about it, the more this actually takes a big burden off my mind. I don't have to fight every bad piece of legislation that comes up. I don't have to fight every homosexual that comes down the road. I don't have to fight against it all. I don't have to fight because the Lord has called me to peace.

We don't compromise righteousness as we teach the Scriptures. We'll teach and we'll confront sin as we go through Scripture verse-by-verse but on a personal level what we're talking about here on a personal level in our demeanor, in our interactions one-by-one with people, here you go: be peaceable, be gentle and remember that. I don't know the answer to this question but I'm very confident about it: to help fuel and reinforce your convictions along those lines, remember that it was a kind person sharing the Gospel in one way or another that had the impact on your life. You didn't pay attention to the angry ones. It wasn't the angry preachers, was it, buddy? It wasn't the angry preachers that affected your life for Christ, was it? It's not the angry men that turn us toward godliness. Okay, okay, it wasn't an angry person that really impacted me for the Gospel. It's not angry preachers that motivate us to be like Christ who said he was gentle and humble in heart. Well, let's look at that and learn from it, then. Let's look at Scripture and say, "Okay, I see the principle. Now, you know, I look back at life and I observe life and I say, 'Ah, this is the way life in the kingdom of God works. This is where the power and influence is.'"

I've got a few extra minutes. This has never happened. Go back to the Beatitudes, Matthew 5. One day we'll go through the Sermon on the Mount verse-by-verse and that's going to be a wonderful time for my life. I can't wait to do that. But look at Matthew 5.

Jesus made this a defining principle. In Matthew 5, he is showing the marks of a truly repentant person. He is explaining and expositing the character of those who truly belong to the kingdom of God, those who have truly repented, who have truly been born again. What do they look like? What kind of people are they? Matthew 5:3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Verse 4, "Blessed are those who mourn," morning over sin. Verse 5, "Blessed are the gentle." Verse 6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." Verse 7, "Blessed are the merciful. Blessed are the pure in heart. Blessed are the peacemakers." This is not the picture of a militant, angry Christian, is it? It's not and so let's define what Christian life should look like, not by the problems that we see in society around us, let's go to God's word and let it define us and then say, "Yeah Lord, that's what I want to be like." This is throughout the New Testament.

"Blessed are the gentle." Look at Philippians 4:4, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near." Go over to the book of James 3. At some point as a preacher, you just become embarrassed by the multitude of texts that reinforce the point of one particular verse. James 3:13, "Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth." If you're jealous, selfishly ambitious, arrogant, James says, verse 15, "This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic." Look at this. Look at this and try to deny that this doesn't rebuke the spirit of some things that are in Christendom today, "For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing." Verse 17, "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

We can argue about how this applies in any particular situation that we may face. What you can't argue with without just raising yourself up in opposition to the whole tenor of Scripture is that Christians are to be peaceable, gentle, reasonable people. This is what we are to be like. Collectively, that should be the testimony of Truth Community going forward. Individually, it's what we should be known as as believers. They may hate our Christ and they may persecute us because they can't get to us but there should be such an evident kindness that marks our response to all of that, that objective people, more importantly our all-seeing, all-knowing Lord says, "Trying to be like my Son. Trying to be like my Christ, the Son that I sent into the world, trying to be like him who was silent like a sheep before slaughter." This takes a lot of pressure off of life when we realize this and I want to say this: when it comes to personal interactions on a day-to-day basis, we're not talking about doctrine at this point, we're talking about what our demeanor and character is like as Christians.

You are in James, right? Look up at James 3, I just remembered this, verse 8. He says, "But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way." We ought not be like that. When it just comes to our personal

demeanor, we can show and we should show kindness to an atheist as much as we are willing to show kindness to a celebrity pastor. We should be happy to open the door for an atheist woman to walk through just as a mild expression of gentleness rather than quickly shutting it in front of her and hoping that she walks in and conks her head. We show patience to those who are outside the church as well as those who are inside it. We don't justify a harsh demeanor because someone opposes what we stand for. I say it again: if Christ could pray for those who crucified him and say, "Father, forgive them," we who are his disciples can do no less, can we? Can we?

So, Christian people are defined by humble kindness. That's Paul's point here in Titus 3:2. This impacts us. This impacts how we treat political opponents. It affects how we treat people of different races. It affects how we treat fast food workers. We're so humbled by the grace that we have received that we are eager to share that around us. Look, this isn't natural. I get that but we can live this way as we remember who we once were and the mercy that Christ showed to us.

Go back to Titus and we'll wrap this up. Ultimately, beloved, everything that we've said today is simply the outworking of Christian theology, good biblical Christian theology and remembering who you were, who I was and what was done for us. We will look at this passage next week but I want you to see, let's read it in its full context here. I want you to see where and how Paul grounds this call to gentle Christian character, what he grounds it in. Chapter 3, verse 2, "malign no one, be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men." Verse 3, "For," here's his explanation. "Paul, why should I be that way? God, that isn't really the disposition in my heart right now. I get kind of angry at all this stuff. Why?" Remember who you were. Verse 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." Regardless of the degree in which you manifested that before you were a Christian, this is what was true of you. Every one of us. This is what we were like. We were foolish. We were disobedient. We were deceived. We didn't know the truth and we weren't even looking for it. We were enslaved to lusts and pleasures. Don't try to deny it. We spent our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. Someone would cross our paths and we reacted against it. This is what we were like.

Verse 4, "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." We find ourselves as Christians in this sphere of mercy and grace and kindness, not because we worked our way into it. No, no, we were slaves to our anger and our lust and God overlooked it all and showed kindness to us of eternal, infinite value when he brought us by the power of his Spirit to the cross of Jesus Christ. In a spectacular, eternal act of undeserved mercy and grace, God overlooked all of your hateful malice toward him and toward others and said, "I will claim you as my own. You come to Christ now. You belong to me."

Well, if you're a Christian, that's what's true. A true Christian doesn't talk about, "You should know the aisle that I walked. No, you should know the God that reached out and

saved me in my lost and miserable condition. I was hateful and envious." I'm speaking first person, autobiographically. "Hateful. Angry. And God showed me grace." Now, let's just expand that out. If that's true of what we were, then how can we be in response, angry and hateful to those who were just like what we used to be? We're like the man in Jesus' parable who was forgiven an infinite debt as we walk through this life now in an unsaved world. The question for you to answer, the question for me to answer is: as we see unrighteous people around us, as we see them threatening our political and financial interests, are we going to reach out and grab them by the throat and choke them and oppose them and be angry about all that stuff? Or right as we're starting to grip our angry fingers around their throat to say, "But wait just a second. Wait just a second. What about the grace that was shown to me when I was just like that? What about this greater grace that God has shown to me eternally and I am worked up over these temporal issues that are going to be forgotten when I go to the grave? What about the kindness that was shown to my life? What about the mercy, undeserved mercy from a God who overlooked my sin in the sense that Christ paid for it and he didn't hold it against me and now I'm looking forward to the blessed hope of the coming of my Lord Jesus Christ? What about that? What about this eternal bliss that's going to be mine throughout all of eternity? All undeserved. No. No. I would raise these hands up against people who are just like me and cut them off. Cut off my hands before I do that. I just want to remember the grace that's been shown to me and rather than thinking that it was something that I deserved, viewed as something that was undeserved and that I now am a privileged ambassador to take out in spirit and in word the same gentleness that was shown to me in my lost condition." This is how Christians should think about living in an unsaved world. That will distinguish us. That will glorify our Christ.

Beloved, it all boils down to this: having received grace, we extend it. Having benefited from mercy when we didn't deserve it, we show it to people who have no claim on it in our own lives. And we're glad to do it in the name of our Christ and as we do it, we remind ourselves one more time that to be a Christian is to live the most noble life there is.

Bow with me in prayer.

Father, we realize that this challenges us, convicts us and the questions of application are so multiplied and varied that we could only ask your Spirit to help us sort them out and apply them as we should. As the world gets more hostile, all the more important it is for us to look at your word and say, "What do you want us to be like?" Father, an angry, insulting Christian is a contradiction in terms. An angry, insulting Christian to the world around him is someone who hasn't really grasped grace as he should and so we pray that you would be gracious to us, gracious to change us, gracious to help us embrace this, gracious to have wisdom to live it out, Father, to balance that sense of speaking the truth in love. Today we focused on the love aspect of it and we pray that you make us just as faithful to that as we would be to speaking the truth. Father, help us to find the balance that would please you. We thank you for the opportunity to know Christ and we pray in his name. Amen.

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