

Titus 24-07-21b

We return to our study of the epistle of Paul the Apostle to Titus as it's labeled in my New King James here. Qualified elders, verse 5, for this reason I left you in Crete that you should set in order the things that are lacking and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you. It's an interesting turn of phrase in light of our study not long ago in Paul a bond servant.

In some roles, Paul is a doulos, a slave of God. In other contexts, he is an apostle of Jesus Christ and as such has apostolic authority to command pastors. And this authority is not Paul's personal charisma or the force of his personality or his character.

It is part of God's order. God gave some apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers for the work of the ministry to build up the body of Christ. So it is important to recognize when our role changes.

When we are in a servant role, we should not be trying to command. We don't tell God what his plan ought to be. We don't tell God that his order is out of order.

And this is the problem with what we face today in the Christian world is people have decided that they don't like God's order and so they're going to dismiss it. They're going to explain it away. They're going to change it.

I don't really encourage a whole lot of political entanglement for us as believers. We need to be aware of politics. We need to be not ignorant, but there is a limit to our personal investment in social and political events, world events.

But as an illustration of the dangers of a seared conscience that we saw in our Timothy study, if you look at reactions to recent events, if you look at reactions on the left to the assassination attempt on former president Trump, if you look at the unkindness on the right toward our ailing current president, who is in fact ailing and isn't entirely responsible for some of his problems, if you look at reaction to the GOP vice presidential nominee and criticisms of him in terms of a book he wrote back, I think in 2016, 2015, somewhere in there, the hillbilly LJ and real hillbillies writing horrific critiques and tear down articles that he's not from Appalachia, he's from Ohio, and he's characterizing people in the hills unkindly and improperly and casting aspersions. There is so much acrimonious, bitter, blinding hatred and people making videos and sorrowing over the fact that the bullet missed its mark a week ago yesterday and hoping that someone will try again. And the comments under articles that are critical of either side, our current president, our former president, vice presidential nominees under both of them, or sitting vice president.

Look, people can have obvious flaws. I've got them. You've got them.

People in public office have them. People aspiring to public office have them. But the politics of personal destruction is toxic and ungodly.

No believer should be guilty of politics of personal destruction, hoping for something bad to happen to someone with whom you disagree is satanic. It is demonic. This is Pharisee thinking.

Let's find the resurrected Lazarus and kill him. This Jesus, we disagree with him on religion and politics. And he's endangering our relationship with Rome.

He's endangering our social standing. Let's kill him. And these guys are believers.

We should not walk but run away from this kind of thinking. I endeavor to never talk about any public figure, past or present, president without prefixing their last name with Mr. or President. Respect the office.

Respect the order. God's order is human government. The human government has the sword, the power of capital punishment, the power of national defense.

And whoever is occupying the office, if you are junior in the military and someone senior that is worthy of a salute comes by, you render the salute not because the individual is personally worthy of respect and honor, but because whatever they're wearing on their shoulder or on their cover designates them as someone who is higher than me in the military rank system. And when I see gold, I salute gold. When I'm wearing lieutenant bars or captain bars and I see a major or a light colonel or a colonel or a general, that hand flies to my brow and I render the snappiest, best, most properly configured salute that I can.

It is immaterial how much I may disagree even if it is a colonel or a general and I know that their policies are horrific in my own mind. I'm not wearing the eagle on my collar. I'm wearing lieutenant bars or captain bars or a major's leaf.

And there is respect for the order that transcends the individual. And one of the laws of the Navy that I learned, plebe summer, and it is a biblical and godly principle. These are the laws of the Navy, unwritten and varied they be.

And he who is wise will observe them going down in his ship to the sea. For as not may outrun the destroyer, so it is with the law and its grip for the strength of the ship is the service and the strength of the service, the ship. You skip down a few verses.

The thing is long, but the pertinent verse that I'm thinking of is take heed what you say of your seniors, be your words spoken softly or plain, lest a bird of the air tell the matter and so shall you hear it again. In other words, whether in public or in private, be careful about being critical and bitterly personal against those who are higher than us in the order. This can be children about parents.

This can be wives about husbands. This can be husbands about pastors, any commingling of the two, employees about employers, servants about masters. We all ought to be cautious because to encourage bitterness and division and carping and this vicious toxic hatred, the fringe elements in our periphery are inspired to feel justified in becoming violent.

If you rail long enough about privilege and domination in society, people are going to incite and perpetrate riots and destruction and feel vindicated because they have heard from everyone, well, this is so wrong, only violence will solve it. This person is so bad for the country. I will do anything to stop it.

And if you label someone a threat and must be stopped at any cost and should be targeted for stoppage, there are people who are going to take that literally. And it is ungodly and unbiblical to incite, to support, or in any other way to encourage a breakdown of that order. To submit is to go along with things that we sometimes have disagreement with.

We don't think it's best. We don't think it's right. We don't think it's proper, but it is not our place.

There is a place for communication. There's a place for dissent. There is a place for disagreement, but always outweighed and outprioritized by submission to God's ordained authority structures.

And we need to be very careful in criticism, whether it is near at hand or in society or in the world. We don't have the facts. Very seldom do we have enough facts to really make a good judgment.

I can't tell you the motivations. I can't tell you who is actually pulling the strings at some levels, what the real causes and concerns and successions and relations are. What I do know is God is in His heaven, and the only things I can affect and change are those within my bursting radius.

Who do I talk to? What do I say? How much of God's glory reflects off of me? I am here to represent Jesus Christ, not to achieve a political outcome, not to right the wrongs of the world. I am here as a member of the body of Christ, and I commend to everyone's attention. I don't think we have a problem in our group, and I doubt anybody outside our group ever hears this, but I'm going to say it anyway.

The Lord Jesus Christ never criticized Rome. There is this huge movement in the progressive circles to reinterpret Revelation as this great umbrage against Rome and empire. Don't be subservient to empire and oppose it and speak out against it.

Jesus subverted the empire, and so should we. Rome and Babylon are metaphors for the U.S. of A., and Christian nationalism is the bane of existence. Having any interest in good

laws and Judeo-Christian norms and ethics is a support for Christian nationalism, and boo on that.

All of this flies in the face of the example of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. What did Jesus never say? None of Jesus' recorded words ever criticized Rome. He never calls out the Caesar in a critical way.

What's the one time Jesus mentioned Caesar? Render to him what is his due. Pay your taxes to the oppressive centurion Roman army government near and far. Don't resist.

Don't subvert. Don't criticize. Don't carp and whine.

If someone asks you, this is an indirect reference to the Roman army, they ask you to carry their pack a mile, carry it too. That's the opposite of resistance. That's the opposite of bitter hatred, fostering, fomenting, and reflecting animosity and the kind of bitterness that is not a fruit of the Spirit.

It is aligned with the agenda of the evil one. Believers should let no bad word proceed from our mouths ever. It's not our place.

It does no good. It only does harm. We are representing the Lord Jesus.

We're not here to align with a party or to defend a candidate or to criticize a candidate. I can observe, I can draw conclusions, I can decide how I'm going to vote. If somebody asks me a reason for my vote, it ought to be based on policies.

It ought to be based on issues. It ought to be based on a biblical worldview that lets people make their choices as long as that does not harm or inhibit other people making their choices. I am not here to legislate morality or endeavor to get others to do so.

I am here to practice morality, to reflect morality, to shine as a light, not to be a laser beam cutting and chopping things at a distance. We are largely passive examples of righteousness. We are active within our personal sphere of contact.

We don't try to push society in any given direction. It's pointless and fruitless, and it is a distraction to the extent that we're occupied with that. We are not founded on truth.

We are not listening to the guiding voice of the Holy Spirit. We're not looking at the light on our path. We're busy measuring by outcomes and superficial results, and we are wrong.

That's why this emphasis on order and structure within the household of faith. Notice in Timothy and Titus, Paul never says, get involved in your local politics. See if you can influence the ruler of the synagogue.

See if you can get next to and become friends with the Romans that are in the area. See

if you can get them to go easy and be less oppressive. See if you can make a difference in the civil government and in the social fabric.

See if you can go out there and wreak change and encourage people to be more moral. It's never ever there. It is to influence by example, become, be, think, act, pursue faith, hope, love, grace, mercy, and peace.

Events, evidence, manifest qualities that draw those who are at all influenceable. If anyone has a heart that will repent, they will be drawn by the light of God. You cannot push them into repentance.

You cannot push them into change. God's power draws, and those who are susceptible will be drawn. But the Lord Jesus Christ as an issue and as a person is not bringing peace, but a sword, and it is going to divide households.

So the side of the household that is for the Lord Jesus and for relationship with God the Father has to stick together and not be dragged down to the level of those who are against and use their tools and their rhetoric and their divisive and poisonous kinds of rhetoric. Don't be drawn into the world. Draw those who are drawable from the world into the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

And you're never going to do that talking like the world and acting like the world. We are called to represent the Lord Jesus. We are called to be different.

And I'll tell you one of the biggest ways you can be different right now is to not engage in toxic conversations about politics or about world issues or social issues. That will distinguish anyone in this day of hate and bitter vicious dialogue. And if you sample some of what is being said on both sides of the political equation, there's no other word for it.

It's vicious. It is the worst kind of hate and it is blind hate. And here's the reason people feel justified in doing so.

Their conscience tells them they're right. Their conscience has been seared with a hot iron. Many of these people are believers.

But if your conscience tells you, well, this guy's a threat, this guy has got this policy and this attitude and has said this and has done that, and he's an agent of evil, so anything I say about him is fair game. All is fair because these people need to be taken out. They need to be eliminated.

They need to be suppressed or oppressed or removed. They need to be canceled. They need to be silenced.

We can't have this. And it is that forget the issue. It is this blind sense of I am right,

therefore, because my cause is right.

Anything I do to further my cause is also right. It is the biggest satanic lie and it completely subverts and destroys Christian life, Christian purpose. You will be cut out of the vine and the branches system.

And even as a believer, you're going to end up in the darkness, which is outside. You will be weeping and wailing and gnashing your teeth because in that outside darkness, they still won't understand. They'll still think they're right.

That's why they can't be rehabilitated and brought into the light or become citizens of the New Jerusalem. That cannot be us. Do not forfeit wonderful blessing and opportunity, grace, mercy, and peace in this life for these momentary, meaningless, in many ways, issues and forfeit your birthright for a mess of pottage, forfeit citizenship and dwelling in the New Jerusalem, opportunities for service, to walk with the Lord Jesus in white and all of the other wonderful overcoming blessings, to partake of the hidden manna, all of it denied, all of it at a huge distance, over the horizon, just looking at the glow of the city instead of dwelling in the city and being a part of God's eternal order, a functioning part, a fruitful part, a useful part.

Frittered it away because of an election, because of a social issue, because of a legislation or a court decision you don't like. Tragic myopia, tragic spiritual blindness, and most believers are caught up. Win America back for God.

You can't win America back for God. I have a hard enough time winning my soul to God, winning my own personal example and fulfilling my own responsibilities in a way that pleases God and glorifies Jesus Christ. Forget America.

America has no holy unction. We're not anointed by God. This is where we live.

If we were in France, if we were Grace and Truth Bible Church of the Tuileries or something, in France, we'd all be invested in France. If we lived in Spain, we'd be for Spain. If we were in Venezuela, we'd be hoping that something good would happen in Venezuela.

It is a wonderful thing that this country was founded by men who understood biblical principles and our government in some ways and in some cases reflects those values. But God can brush this nation aside as quickly as it was created. It's not about the nation.

It is about citizenship in God's heaven, heavenly citizenship. We are members of the body of Christ. That's our identity.

We've served in uniform. We're proud to be Americans, but it's not a defining rule of faith and practice. I would be patriotic in whatever country God put me, and I would hope the

best for that country, figuring God had a reason for putting me there.

My country, may she always be right, but my country, right or wrong? If my country's wrong, I'm not really for the country. And there's a lot not to like about current day America. We support the things that are good.

We eschew the things that are evil. But our identity is spiritual, not political, not national, not even cultural. And I will quickly identify with anybody from any country, from any party, from any ethnicity, from any background, if they love the Lord Jesus, if they want a foundation of truth, if they recognize the glory of God the Father, that's my brother and sister.

Remember the Lord Jesus? Even physical relationships. His mother and brothers are standing outside, and he said, you who are listening to my word and responding to it, you are my brother and my mother, my sister. You're my family bonded by truth.

That is first and foremost. Family relationships may be good and they may be bad. National relationships may be good or bad.

Cultural, social, political, whatever else. The order that Paul is emphasizing here is don't infiltrate the Cretan island structure or the cities in Crete and try to make them better from the inside, work from within. Establish order.

There is a lack of Christian spiritual structure, order, leadership, and function in this area. Fix it. And in order to fix it, there are spiritual values and spiritual qualities.

If a man is blameless, if he's a one-woman man, what does this tell you? He is personally dedicated to God's order of right and wrong and is pursuing the right and eschewing the wrong. He recognizes God's order in marriage, and he has found a wife and is dedicated to her and to her alone. He has faithful children who are not accused of dissipation or insubordination.

These are children that are in the home. You can't control them once they're out. The children in the home are prevented by parental authority from being a danger to themselves and others.

They are not dissipated. They're not let loose without authority, without consequence. They don't run the home.

They don't do whatever they want. These children are not accused of dissipation or insubordination. Notice, orientation to authority.

The parents in the home ensure that the children obey. Children obey your parents in the Lord. This is right.

And children are enjoined to submit to the authority of their parents, and parents are

enjoined to ensure that their children are not insubordinate until they leave the household. Once they are independent, man leaves father and mother. He's on his own.

Now it's on him. You can advise and consent, but you cannot exert authority outside your own roof, in the same way that a pastor doesn't exert authority beyond the meeting, the instruction period, the time of fellowship where everyone is present. The pastor has authority.

As soon as you scatter back and get back to living your own life with your own family, the pastor has no authority to tell you how to run your house. Only the Word of God has that authority. The pastor just communicates it.

An overseer must be blameless. Notice verse six, blameless. Verse seven, blameless.

As a steward of God, as a steward of God. This is an interesting word. This is oiketes.

And in our study of servanthood, different kinds of servant, it's very interesting because oiketes is a word that is used and it is often translated officer. I don't have time to take you there, but there is a scene where Peter is going to go warm his hands. The Lord Jesus is under trial.

Peter comes to the courtyard. There's a fire. And I believe it's in Luke where it says that there were officers and servants warming themselves by the fire.

Those two words are oiketes and doulos in the plural. And other places where it says that when Jesus says, reconcile with your enemy quickly, lest you be handed over to the officers and the officers hail you off to prison, that word is oiketes. These are servants of the law.

They have masters who send them to perform these functions. They are themselves under authority, but they exert authority. That's what pastors are.

Paul is under the authority. He's a slave of God, a bond servant of Jesus Christ, but he is an oiketes in the sense of his relationship to pastors, the apostolic witness. What are we saying here? We recognize our place in the order.

The centurion understood this, and this is why Jesus said, I haven't seen this kind of faith anywhere in Israel. The man says, I have those who are in authority over me. And I am in authority over those to whom I say, come and they come and go and they go.

I'm a man under authority. I also exercise authority. I know my place in the order.

And the centurion says, Lord Jesus, I know your place in authority and that you can speak a word and it will be carried out. You can heal my servant without coming under my roof. Heal my son.

We have to be sensitive to and constantly mindful of our place in God's order. Am I a child? Am I a wife? Am I a husband? Am I an employee or an employer? This is masters and slaves. Slavery has gotten a bad word.

You are someone who performs functions at the behest of someone who is in charge. Our view of slavery has become so poisoned by the horrific abuses that took place in this country with shipping people from Africa over here and horribly oppressing them. And Native Americans and Asians and many others, even indentured servitude from people of Europe could be horrific at times.

There is always the potential for abuse in any authority relationship and don't limit it to slavery. There is horrific abuse. Why do you think the labor unions formed? So the point is, God calls us, commands us to be aware of the order.

The order is everything because the order is defined by truth. This truth is not an abstraction. It's not a magic elixir.

It's not a potion or a magical presence. Truth has content. And a great part of that content is it is true that God has organized humanity in an authority structure.

And we need to be aware of it. This is the foundation. The church is the ground and foundation of truth because it is an order.

There are widows who are cared for. There are families that are in fellowship and looking out for each other and looking out for those in the broader fellowship. It is a spiritual family that has spiritual leadership, all looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.

And his submission, voluntary submission to the will of the Father, the key to function, the key to fruitfulness. If you're looking at your situation and saying, well, I'm not real sure what I should be doing here as a believer. I'm employed.

I'm out from under my parents' roof. I'm young. I'm old.

I'm here. I'm there. I'm healthy.

I'm unhealthy. Look for the order. Where do I fit in the order? You are a functional and vital, important, and cherished member of this fellowship.

That is definitional. You have a family to a greater or lesser extent. That is definitional.

There is horizontal family relationship. There is vertical family relationship. Just as in the church, there is horizontal relationship and there is vertical.

Those who are elder in the faith have the opportunity to gently and lovingly counsel those who are younger. We have a responsibility for separation. We have a responsibility

to be a good example.

That's what blameless means, both inside and outside the fellowship. And we saw this in 1 Timothy. Those who are outside should consider someone above reproach.

You can be reproached if you've got a vicious tongue and a bitter attitude. That's reproachable. That's not blameless.

All of us should cultivate blameless, curbing our instinctive need to criticize, to bad mouth, to raise ourselves by pushing down someone else. It's a part of our nature, but we have a new nature. We have a new presence and we should be examples.

People should marvel at the hope that is in us and ask us about it. How can you be hopeful? Look at the situation. Look at what's streaming into your phone and your TV from the news and the media and all of these carping, just very negative influences in the world.

And look at you. You don't seem overly concerned. Where do you get this hope? Why are you optimistic? Why are you cheerful? Why are you positive? I can't remember you saying anything bad about anyone.

How is that possible? All I can see is the bad. It seems like all you see is the good. That is what draws people to God because God emphasizes the positive.

The first advent of the Lord Jesus Christ and our representation of Him is the suffering servant. We do not represent Jesus as the conquering king or the kingdom builders or kingdom people in any sense. We look forward to a kingdom where righteousness is at home.

But when the Lord Jesus left and designated us and assigned us and authorized us to represent Him as His body, this is the first advent body. That's why we are in fallen flesh. We are in earthly bodies.

He came in an earthly body. We are not here to dominate. We are not here to command.

We are not here to conquer. We are not here to wield a sword of judgment. The Lord Jesus is going to do that, and those of us who qualify will accompany Him in those future functions.

But one of the things I loved about training at the Naval Academy is in your first summer or two, you learn what it is like to be under authority. You go on a ship and you stand enlisted watches. You berth with the enlisted sailors, or you go out with the enlisted Marines, and you do their jobs.

You chip paint. You paint over what you chipped. You polish what you can't paint.

You salute what you can't paint or polish. You do these underling. You find out what it is like to be subservient.

The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many. He left. We are His body fulfilling that function now, and it ought to be done in humility, in love, but also with discretion and discernment.

Jesus was not indiscriminate. He didn't just love everyone, and He did not accept everyone. He was clear about what was unacceptable.

Read the woes to the Pharisees. He accepted those who came in repentance, in faith, in interest in the truth, to set free those who responded to truth. That is our role.

We are First Advent Body of Christ. Second Advent comes later, but we've got to serve the enlisted watches. We've got to learn what it is to serve and to give our lives sacrificially the way the First Advent is our example.

We look forward to the Second, but kingdom talk obscures that. Kingdom people, King Jesus, that's future. It's future for the Lord Jesus and certainly future for us.

So, in conclusion, when you read the qualification for elders, remember this qualifies us for service and function. As we adopt this example in our own lives, discipline ourselves, discipline our tongue. If you can control the tongue, you've brought your whole body into subjection, into submission, into service.

To be an oiketes, a steward, an overseer must be blameless as a steward of God, an officer of God. In some cases, you're responding to higher authority. In other cases, you're exerting authority and controlling things that are within your purview.

We have ourselves under our purview, so we need to be an oiketes, one who exercises authority as well as responding to an authority, a steward of God. Paul says, I've been made a steward of the mysteries. A man who has a stewardship needs to be found faithful.

This is our opportunity, and it begins with us personally. Bring ourselves into subjection. Recognize our opportunity not to be served, but to serve and to offer our lives in service to God.

This is how God can bring others into relationship with himself and spread his grace and mercy and peace through the Lord Jesus Christ and eventually through us. What an opportunity. Well, we have more to say here in the first chapter of Titus, which we'll see this coming Wednesday, but we'll close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for the opportunity, the wonderful privilege we have of standing in the place of the Lord Jesus to serve, to be agents of your will and purpose, to be reflectors of

your glory, to show others the opportunities and the way, the truth and the life. We pray that as we reflect on these things that the Holy Spirit will show us clearly how we can improve our witness, our stewardship, our service and function in this life as we await the glorious day when you send the Lord Jesus in the air to call us to himself and present us before your throne. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.