



4. Setting the Example Titus 2:9-3:1

9 Slaves are to submit to their masters and please them in all things. They must not answer them back 10 or steal from them. Instead, they must show that they are always good and faithful, so as to bring credit to the teaching about God our Saviour in all they do.

11 For God has revealed his grace for the salvation of the whole human race. 12 That grace instructs us to give up ungodly living and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this world, 13 as we wait for the blessed Day we hope for, when the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ will appear. 14 He gave himself for us, to rescue us from all wickedness and to make us a pure people who belong to him alone and are eager to do good. 15 Teach these things and use your full authority as you encourage and rebuke your hearers. Let none of them look down on you.

1 Remind your people to submit to rulers and authorities, to obey them, and to be ready to do good in every way. (Good News Bible)

You're being watched – CCTV is everywhere, isn't it. Wherever you go, whatever you do someone's watching you. We are a nation obsessed with watching one another. Channel 4 has Big Brother emblazoned all over its channels at the moment. You can even tune into the Big Brother House at 4 in the morning and watch the contestants fast asleep! How daft is that?

Watching other people is rather like distraction which I preached on this morning. Most people can't help watching one another and comparing themselves to others. We slip into it so easily. It can be very rude to look at others. We all doubtless have a story about neighbourhood twitchers – people who watch neighbours out of a crack in their curtains – rather like a birdwatcher; also known as a twitcher.

But watching and being watched can be very good. We learnt all our best habits as well as our worst ones from someone else. And then there was that inspirational teacher at school.

In fact we can learn good things from bad examples. Someone falling foul of something sets us an example not to do it ourselves. There was an amazing report this week from an OFSTED inspector who said that it was a good thing for pupils who had a bad teacher at a primary school as they learnt to coping mechanisms for dealing with useless work colleagues later in life!

As God's people, we are being watched and it is from our testimony that people make judgements about the Christian faith and therefore by implication, about Jesus. In this section of his letter to Titus, Paul tells Titus to teach the Cretans about the positive example that they need to set. You'll remember from last time that it was the responsibility of the older people to be the right example to the younger people and how important it was for the younger people to live self-controlled lives and how important it was to do that which was good. Similarly he talked about older women helping younger wives to act in a way that would not malign the word of God.

There were called to set examples in personal relationships and in family life. Now Paul applies similar words to slaves: *9 Slaves are to submit to their masters and please them in all things. They must not answer them back 10 or steal from them. Instead, they must show that they are always good and faithful, so as to bring credit to the teaching about God our Saviour in all they do.*

The idea is the same. The older people set the example for the young but it is the responsibility of all God's people in a more general sense to act in a manner that brings credit to our God and Saviour as Paul puts it in these verses.

Many people have a problem with Paul talking about slavery in this way. They either find this confusing, or look how they might make some sort of rule that might apply to employment as that is the way in modern society we get to do things. Actually before the abolition of slavery, people used Paul's non-condemnation of slavery as a justification to practise it. The only problem is that slavery practised in North America and Western Europe from about 1700 onwards was a brutal and dehumanising form of forced slavery where people used the Christian faith as an excuse to practise acts that were just plain evil.

Roman slavery was sometimes like that in relation to conquered peoples, but more often was like nineteenth century service, where people bonded themselves to their employer who fed and housed them. Roman slavery's successor was European feudalism what had disappeared from England by 1600 but persisted into the twentieth century in some places in Europe and is still common in other parts of the world. People were bonded workers - that's what a *doulos* is. Rather than being paid, they are fed, housed and cared for by the master or lord. Some were better than others. Sometimes people were allowed to return to being free people by being contracted, or by buying their freedom, or just being freed by their master. In the Roman world, probably most people were bonded. I supposed employment is the natural successor, in fact 100 years ago employers did have a much more feudal attitude to workers than they do now.

Here we see Paul encouraging slaves to act towards their masters in an honest and honourable manner. But before we try to make up some law about how we should act in employment, I don't think that is Paul's intent. I'd link what Paul says about slaves to chapter 3:1 *Remind your people to submit to rulers and authorities, to obey them, and to be ready to do good in every way.* What Paul says here underlines it here. We are called to be model citizens - and example to all. Therefore in our relationships with one another, we are self-controlled. We are people that should have a good example of family life. In our dealing with others in the community, we are honest, and act in a way that honours God.

What about rulers who are corrupt? Paul says nothing about that here because he is specifically applying his words to the situation on Crete. Remember these were people who had a reputation for laziness: *Cretans are always liars, wicked beasts, and lazy gluttons.* Never try to stretch a passage beyond what the writer was trying to say. He was encouraging the people of God to be good examples in a world where the pressure was to be dishonest, selfish and lazy. They were to be examples of the fact that God's way is a better way.

Paul helpfully gives us some pointers as to what God's way is in the intervening verses. Whereas the words to the Cretans in one way are specific to their idle wide-boy society, they give us underlying moral principles that would apply in any society:

◆ How we act should reflect God's grace

For God has revealed his grace for the salvation of the whole human race.

How did we get to be the people of God. We didn't earn it, we didn't buy it - we got it because God decided to show us mercy because of His love. The purpose of God's grace was aimed at the whole human race. Therefore as people who have been shown grace we show that grace to other sin the human race so that they may also believe.

◆ How we act should reflect God's holiness

That grace instructs us to give up ungodly living and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this world

And how do we do that. The words here are similar to the tone of the rest of the passage. By not living like the world. By not acting like the world. We live to the beat of a different drum. We need to live like God has called us to. That is a real challenge in a world where Christians have already sold themselves to a different morality and think it's OK. That was Crete in the first century - a place where being selfish, lazy and corrupt was regarded as OK. It may have been nearly 2000 years ago but it all sounds so familiar! Paul is presenting it to us as making an

important difference to the society in Crete. How much more true is that today!

◆ How we act should reflect our eternal hope

we wait for the blessed Day we hope for, when the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ will appear.

But there's more to this than just honouring God with holy lives. The grace of God has resulted in us having an eternal hope. I'm going to preach on hope in a couple of week's time. Our hope isn't something that's an aspiration - it's presented in Scripture as a promise of God - so it's a certainty. Let's live like we are preparing to live with God for ever. One area we hear very little preaching about today is on that expectation that Jesus is going to return - so our lives should be as much as a preparation for eternity as they are a witness to the world now.

So as we come to Communion this evening, we reflect on our need to live lives of integrity towards the world in which we live in. Why? Here's Paul's words again: *He gave himself for us, to rescue us from all wickedness and to make us a pure people who belong to him alone and are eager to do good.* NIV (Jesus..) *gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.*

As we remember the broken body and shed blood of Jesus again this evening, we remember how He died to

- rescue us from all wickedness
- to make us pure people who belong to Him

We are reminded again of the high price that was paid. It wasn't a price paid just to have us, but to redeem us from all wickedness. There was an intent. God never intended us to be whoever we like - or just be like the world from which He's saved us. God never intended us to live like the world - we have been reborn, redeemed to be a pure, holy people. That's why we need to live lives of integrity - because that's our destiny - a destiny that starts with a gracious God.

That's brilliant! God in His grace has rescued us in Christ so that we can be holy and upright in the way we live. He's saved us to be that. So let's rejoice as we come around the Lord's table this evening. But there's one more thing from this passage as I've missed a phrase out of verse 14. Let me complete it: *He gave himself for us, to rescue us from all wickedness and to make us a pure people who belong to him alone and are eager to do good.*

- We have been saved to be eager to do good. Within us should be an eagerness to be like Christ and do good. And that is the example we should show to others, whoever they are - to the young believer, to our boss, to our neighbour. It doesn't matter. We should be eager to do God because that reflects the one who gave Himself for us. In fact we have been saved to do that. Let me take you back to verse *11 For God has revealed his grace for the salvation of the whole human race.* How we live and who we are needs to show Jesus. If it doesn't then we are not doing what we are saved for.

We are saved to be living demonstrations of the grace, holiness and goodness of God. So often people say to me how they can't possibly witness to other people about Jesus. Remember, even if the words of witness never come out of our mouths, our lives speak volumes about us. What is your life saying? What's mine saying?

Let's allow God to challenge each one of us as we come around the table this evening. People see our lives and draw their own conclusions what conclusion do they draw about us?

Let's come in confession before God.