

In His sermon on the Mount, Jesus said:

Matthew 5:43-48 (ESV)

⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸ You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Now, if you 'get' what Jesus said there, then you're going to well understand what Paul is telling Titus in today's reading.

We've had a very quick journey through Titus. There's only 3 chapters, and we've been covering a chapter a week, and so we're going to finish it up today.

What struck me in today's reading, is there's 2 very distinct contrasts.

1. The first contrast, is between a believer and an unbeliever – between a Christian and a non-Christian. We are **so** different to each other. Mind you, it is also the contrast

between what we ourselves once were, compared to what we have now become in Christ.

2. The 2nd contrast, is found within the church gathering itself. It's the contrast between the Godly, and the heretic.
 - Those who live in Godliness and their good works, are described as **excellent** and **profitable**;
 - While the divisive heretic who rejects the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles, and follow man-made religious rules, are described as being “**unprofitable** and **worthless**”

Two very strong contrasts...

So, let's see how they play out:

Over the years, as we've been studying the Scriptures, a message that keeps coming through, **loud** and clear, (and it's something that we ourselves experience) – it's about the special relationship that exists between Christians. As Disciples of Jesus, we:

- love one another;
- care for one another;
- When one is in need, we give our brothers and sisters in Christ what they need (food; clothing; practical acts of service; fellowship; friendship; love)

As the family of God – as brothers and sisters in Christ, the bond of what makes us one, is incomparable to any other relationship.

But, having said that, how (as Christians), should we relate to unbelievers? Because let's face it (and this **is** a generalisation), for a Christian, many **non**-Christians can be pretty offensive, and quite difficult to live with.

In V3, Paul describes how we once were, before we were saved. (this is what characterises an unbeliever, and don't forget, this is what **we** once were).

And he lists off some not very nice traits:

- foolish (doesn't mean "they couldn't pass exams" – it's about not having spiritual understanding);
- disobedient (disobedient to: God; The Law; Parents)
- led astray;
- slaves to passions;
- slaves to pleasures
(basically it's about pursuing the natural base desires of life as our chief purpose);

And an unbeliever passes their days in:

- Malice;
- envy;
- being hated by others;
- hating one another...

(Picture of a Soap-Opera). It's a picture of the broken world. It's pretty awful... (don't forget, that is what we once were. There's no room for pride here).

But the thing is, it doesn't seem so awful when you're caught up in it yourself... If I am the same as everyone else around me, it just seems normal.

It's the dog-eat-dog world that we live in...

- focused on pleasures;
- focused on passions;

- totally oblivious toward God;
- holding deep-seated resentment or animosity toward others;

Yuck!!!

But I thank God for V4:

⁴ But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, ⁵ he saved us

And that's why "That's what we once **were**". It's not what we are any more.

As the children of God, by the grace of God we've been saved. By His Holy Spirit, we've been:

- washed (baptised – The blood of Jesus has washed our sins away);
- regenerated (rebirth/new beginning);
- renewed

He has poured His Holy Spirit out upon us, making it possible for us to now live by the Spirit of God...

And this is why, when you become a Christian, all of a sudden, what we once were, is "Yuck" "I don't want to have a part in that any more".....

So, from then on, how do we relate to unbelievers?

- Do we cut ourselves off from them? Many do...
- Do we condemn them and judge them? Many do...

- Do we antagonise them and watch them suffer in their brokenness???

Well, as Disciples of Jesus, there's 7 things Paul says that we need to be reminded to do, and they're all to do with how we relate to unbelievers:

1. **be submissive to rulers and authorities...** And often, the rulers and authorities, are not godly... But even so, it's the **ungodly** who do not submit to the authorities.

In Romans 13, we're told that "**whoever resists the authorities, resists what God has appointed.**" Now of course there are limits to that, and we've talked about this before. If the authorities order us to directly do something that is against God's Word, then of course we don't do it. But in all other matters, if they are not commanding us to do something that is sinful, we are to **be submissive to rulers and authorities;**

We're reminded to:

2. **be obedient;**
3. **be ready** for every good work;
4. **to speak evil of no one;**

(That's not saying not to correct or rebuke etc... Paul does that often. Basically what he's saying, is we don't repay evil for evil. If somebody says something bad about me, it doesn't mean that it's right for me to then say something bad about them);

We're reminded to:

5. avoid quarrelling;
6. be gentle; and
7. to show perfect courtesy toward all people (But what if they're not courteous toward me? It doesn't matter. This is not a partial courtesy. We are to be **fully** [complete; mature] courteous to **everyone**)

But here's the thing: If the unbelieving are generally:

- hateful;
- spiteful;
- malicious;

(If you've ever been in a larger workplace, you see this coming through all the time)

- against God;
- against Christians;
- ignorant of spiritual things...

It's really hard to show the sort of love that he's talking about to an unbeliever...

To be:

- gentle (when they're not gentle to me);
- loving;
- kind;
- peacemaker;
- courteous;
- submit to the authorities....

It's really hard... It might even grate on us... NO!!! They need to be a bit nicer to me, before I am loving and gentle and kind to them. I have to teach them a lesson...

But this is why I started with those words of Jesus about loving our enemies...

Matthew 5:48 **You therefore must be perfect** [complete; mature], **as your heavenly Father is perfect.**
And that is exactly what Paul is teaching us here...

When he gave that horrible description of what the unbelieving are like, he did it in the context of **“That is what we once were”!!!**

But here's the thing:
It's not because “that's the way we were”, that we should be gentle and loving and kind and courteous to unbelievers...
It's not about “I used to be that bad, and so they've got an excuse”... It's because of **what we now are!**

We're not that way anymore... God saved us; and totally transformed us, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit...

Why????

V⁷ so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

True heirs, express their Father's character. What is our Heavenly Father's character? Jesus explained it **Matthew 5:45** so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.

For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. And then in V⁴⁸ You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. And there, Jesus was talking about loving our enemies – doing good for people who hate us.

What's our Heavenly Father's character like? Well Paul explains it to Titus: It was while we were despicable and Godless; and hateful and envious, that God showed to us His goodness and loving kindness. That's what God is like...

Are you with me??? Our Heavenly Father loved us when we were the picture of sin, and He was merciful and kind toward us. We had no righteousness of our own. What He did, was because of His own mercy...

And so, not because of what we once were, but because of who we now are... We have been transformed to become more like our Heavenly Father. True heirs express their Father's character. And so, many unbelievers may well be horrible, despicable people... But we love them, and we do good for them; and we're kind and courteous toward them, because that is the very character of the goodness of God...

So, in V8 he says: ⁸ The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things

What saying? All of Vs1-7 – all of what we've just been talking about... Because of this, **insist** that all believers be like their heavenly father. **Insist** that **those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.**

Righto, so we've seen the **1st** contrast – the contrast between the believer and the unbeliever – the contrast between what we once were, and what we now are – the contrast between having a worldly character, and being an heir of our Heavenly Father, and by His Holy Spirit, **His** character becoming our character... — That's the first contrast.

And now we come to the **2nd** contrast:
Being heirs of the Father, and doing good works (even for those who don't deserve it), is **excellent** and **profitable**...

But those in the church, who fixate on **foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law** — that's all **unprofitable** and **worthless**...

Now, in Crete (where Titus was), there were those who were known as “The Circumcision Party”, or “Judaizers”, who were trying to force these Gentile Christians, into the Jewish religious mould... And rather than focusing on the grace and mercy of God, they got all tangled up in man-made

controversial teachings that did nothing for Godliness, and all it did was tear the church apart...

And we still see similar stuff coming through in the church today... Some people get no greater delight, than to bring something completely useless but thoroughly controversial to discussion. And you know what? The only thing it does, is it rips a church apart.

- Recently we've had the whole pandemic thing, and some folk have made vaccines and face-masks a matter of faith. It's a foolish controversy;
- *Some will insist that the only version of the Bible that is the word of God is the King James version of 1611 (or whatever other version one might pick), and everything else is blasphemy...* It's a foolish controversy
- Some will insist that unless you have one particularly spiritual gift, then you're a deficient Christian.
- Some will be deceived by "bible codes" and false prophecies, and teach as "fact", things that are controversial nonsense.

That's the sort of stuff that's being described here as **unprofitable and worthless.**

And Paul will not allow that sort of division to continue in the church. If anyone stirs up that sort of division, 2 warnings is what they get, and then after that, if they're still dividing the

church with their controversies, they're not welcome in the church any more.

have nothing more to do with him, ¹¹ knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.

He's been warned; It's been by his own choice that he's continued dividing the church with controversies. He has to be gone.

So, that's pretty much the letter to Titus. It finishes off with some final instructions and greetings, but he returns to the main topic with V¹⁴ **And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful.**

When it comes to helping others, where do we draw the line? Some don't do any good works. Paul would call them "unfruitful". Some would say, "There is no line.", but there is. We are to help those who have an urgent need. It's about "stepping up, to help out in cases of necessary need".

I have to make these decisions all the time. When the price of fuel sky-rocketed, some felt that the Pastor of the church – he's the one who's going to fill my fuel tank up for me... You know what, that's not an urgent need. But if a family has no food, very willing to give them a loaf of bread.

Devoting ourselves to good works, is a matter of helping cases who are in urgent need, and not turning a blind eye to them.

Let's finish up:

I suspect the biggest challenge (for many of us), is we're more Godly than we once were, but our Godliness still has a ways to go.

- I used to do evil, be a part of evil, and it didn't bother me in the least;
- But then the mercy of God came to work in my life, and He saved me, and renewed me. And so now, what didn't used to bother me, I don't like it any more. I've become Godly enough to hate what is evil and not want to be associated with it...
- And so the renewal / the regeneration of God gets us to that stage... And that's where some of us stop. We're not spiritually mature yet...
- And so, if I don't love, and if I'm not kind towards unbelievers because I find them vile, that's telling me that there's more renewal and more regeneration to happen yet.

If I am to become fully like my heavenly Father, I will **love** the sinner, and be kind and respectful and helpful to the sinner, even though they sin and even if they are hateful towards me.

That's what it means to be Godly.

V¹⁵ All who are with me send greetings to you.
Greet those who love us in the faith.

Grace be with you all.

Let's pray,

Heavenly Father,
We thank You that You have been so merciful to us.
It is while we were still sinners;
It is while we were vile, despicable people,
that You showed Your loving kindness,
and Jesus died on the cross
to save us from our sins.

And we thank You.
We know it was not through our own righteousness,
because there was none.

But we thank You that You have regenerated us,
and made us holy in Your sight.

Lord, we ask that You would continue to
renew us by Your Holy Spirit.

Complete us / perfect us,
Make us true heirs of the Father,
that Your character would become our character.

Help us to love and to be kind,
to those who are not loving and kind toward us.

Help us to do good,
to those who do evil to us...

Because this is where Your character is displayed.

in Jesus' Name,
Amen.