

Dual Citizenship

Week 3 | Titus 3:1–11

Lisa Scheffler, author

For generations, the Jewish people waited for their Messiah. They looked for a savior and ruler who would free them from oppression, restore their land, and bring them to a place of prosperity that they had not seen since the days of King David.

When the Jesus, the true Messiah came, he brought the offer of freedom and restoration to the whole world. Through his death and resurrection, he defeated a much bigger enemy than any occupying nation. All who put their faith in him and call him Lord will be redeemed now and experience their final victory over sin and death when he returns.

According to Paul, believers should be joyfully giving thanks to God the Father, because through Jesus, he “has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” (Colossians 1:12–14). Paul also insists that our citizenship is heaven (Philippians 3:20), and in our lives now, we are ambassadors for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20). Therefore, our home is with Jesus, and our ultimate allegiance is to him.

In our “Dual Citizenship” series we’re considering what it means for followers of Jesus to be citizens of earthly nations. How does our heavenly citizenship affect the way we view our country’s leaders and laws? How does it shape the way we think about politics?

What we’re discovering is that kingdom citizens are free to be a blessing to everyone. We aren’t restricted by geography, nationality, or political ideology. Our call is to love and do good for all people. We’ll explore this idea more in Titus 3:1–11

Day 1

The passage we are looking at this week comes from Titus, a letter Paul wrote later in his life to a trusted coworker ministering on Crete, a large island in the Aegean Sea, near Greece, that was under the control of the Roman Empire. Through Paul, Titus had become a gentile convert to the way of Jesus. He is mentioned numerous times in Paul’s letters, was present at key events during Paul’s ministry, and is clearly someone the Apostle trusted and relied. In the greeting to this letter, Paul calls him a “loyal child in the faith” (Titus 1:4).

As he does in almost all his letters, we'll see in Titus that Paul has a way of expertly marrying the theological and the practical. In his instructions to churches, he not only tells Christians *how* to live, but he tells them *why* they should live that way in light of the gospel. He encourages people to think deeply about how the commands he gives reflect both the character of Christ and the transformed identity of those who have put their trust in him.

In the chapter before our central passage, Paul has included a “household code” — instructions to each member of a household as to how they should relate to one another. In Titus 3, he reminds the believers in Crete of their responsibility to the government and to one another in the family of God. Notice the reasons he gives for why.

Read

Titus 3:1–11 (NIV)

3 *Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, ² to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone.*

³ At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. ⁴ But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. ⁸ This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

⁹ But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. ¹⁰ Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them. ¹¹ You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are self-condemned.

- What do verses 3–8 tell us about why should Christians behave the way verses 1–2 and 9–11 say?

Reflect

Here Paul calls Christians to act according to who they've become in Christ. They are to leave behind their old ways and embrace the changes the Spirit has made in them.

In Colossians, Paul appeals to the church as “God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved” and likens these changes to ridding yourself of sinful behavior and clothing oneself in compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience — all traits that resemble Christ (Colossians 3:12). In Ephesians Paul describes these changes as “walking in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called” (Ephesians 4:1). Here in Titus, Paul reminds believers of the rebirth and renewal they’ve encountered through the Holy Spirit.

Something marvelous and glorious happens to us when we trust in Christ and it affects every facet of our being. We are reborn and renewed and placed on a journey toward greater and greater Christlikeness. Thoughts and behaviors that would have seemed completely alien to us before we knew Christ are not only possible, but expected. Paul’s message throughout his letters is something like, “be who you are.”

There is no aspect of our lives that we can wall off from our relationship with Christ. We can’t separate our church-self from our work-self from our vacation-self. We can’t seek the transforming power of the Spirit to change who we are as a spouse or parent, but not as a boss or an employee. And we certainly can’t ask him to draw a line around our role as a citizen.

God wants all of us, because he loves us. It is best for us to do what Jesus told us to do and “give to God what’s God’s” — our whole life. (Matthew 22:21)

With that as our premise, we’ll dive further into Titus 3:1–11 tomorrow.

Respond

- Why would someone who has experienced rebirth and renewal through the Holy Spirit be a good citizen of an earthly nation?
- Pray and ask God to search your heart. How much thought do you give to being a citizen of your nation? Is that an area of your life that is under the control of the Spirit? Or are you more influenced by the culture around you?

Day 2

Modern storytelling is full of anti-heroes. These are people who thwart the system, break the rules, and work outside the established guidelines. They’re loveable rogues like Han Solo, or vigilante super heroes like Batman. They’re doctors like Gregory House who defy the medical establishment to heal the patient or detectives like Sherlock Holmes who circumvent police procedure to get the bad guy. These characters are fun to watch because they dance on the edge of chaos and you never know what they’re going to do next. They flaunt the rules, but they get results, and that makes them fun to root for, at least in a fictional story meant to entertain. Yet, what would our society be like if these people were the norm?

In real life, in a real crisis, we want people who know the established wisdom, follow protocols, and selflessly work for what’s good. While we’ll applaud an innovator who creates something new, or someone who questions established practices if they might be in error, we

don't want a doctor who uses us as a test subject or a detective who makes up their own laws and procedures. For the most part, we accept that the rules are there for a reason, even if we'd like to see them wisely challenged when needed.

Doing the right, good, or expected thing may not make a compelling hero on screen, because it's not big, flashy, or outlandish. But those who are good, dependable, and consistent are the heroes we count on in daily life. It's also the behavior that Christians are called to.

Read

Titus 3:1–2

3 Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, ² to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone.

- List the commands in this verse.

Reflect

A follower of Jesus should never be a rebel without a cause or without consequences. As we saw last week when we studied Romans 13:1–7, as far as it depends on us, Christians are to live at peace with all people, and that includes their governments. If obeying the government would mean disobeying God, we obey God and accept the consequences. In everything else, we should obey the governing rules and authorities.

If we think a law is unjust, unwise, or is being applied unfairly, the blessing of living in a democracy is that we can exercise our right to speak out and affect change. In fact, we should do that as part of our commitment to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God (Micah 6:8). Advocating for a more just government could be part of what it means for us to “be ready to do good” (verse 1). But when we thumb our noses at authority simply because we don't like a law, or because it inconveniences us, we are not acting in accordance with what Paul commands here.

In the New Testament, doing good is often associated with the observable manifestation of the Holy Spirit. ¹ It's a tangible way to see his activity at work. Being peaceable, kind, and gentle toward others also demonstrates the presence of Christ and brings honor to his name.

As those who follow the risen Lord and invite others to join us in his Kingdom, we want to represent him well. As Peter says, “For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people” (1 Peter 2:15). Throughout history, people have been drawn to Jesus because Christians do good in their communities. They are trustworthy and people of integrity, they care for the poor, sick, and marginalized, and they do what's right,

¹ Philip Towner, *1–2 Timothy & Titus*, vol. 14, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), Tt 2:15.

even when there is no expectation of getting anything in return. That kind of behavior silences those who want to dismiss and defame Christ and those who serve him. We would never want the opposite to be true — for Christ’s reputation to suffer because we were blatantly and regularly contradicting his character.

Which brings us to one more command in this list, “to slander no one.” To slander is to spread false information. It’s what as the ten commandments call “bearing false witness.” These are divisive times in America. The social fabric has been severely damaged by abusive speech, lies, and contentious rhetoric. I wonder if, as Christians, we might help set a different tone by going beyond the minimum, basic requirement of not lying when it comes to our speech.

Consider how the Westminster Larger Catechism, written way back in 1647 could apply to us in 2020. Look at how it explains what it means to follow the ninth commandment, “do not bear false witness”:

“The duties required in the ninth commandment are, the preserving and promoting of truth between man and man, and the good name of our neighbor, as well as our own;

appearing and standing for the truth; and from the heart, sincerely, freely, clearly, and fully, speaking the truth, and only the truth, in matters of judgment and justice, and in all other things whatsoever;

a charitable esteem of our neighbors; loving, desiring, and rejoicing in their good name; sorrowing for and covering of their infirmities; freely acknowledging of their gifts and graces, defending their innocency; a ready receiving of a good report, and unwillingness to admit of an evil report, concerning them;

discouraging talebearers, flatterers, and slanderers; love and care of our own good name, and defending it when need requireth;

keeping of lawful promises; studying and practicing of whatsoever things are true, honest, lovely, and of good report.”

What would it look like we took this teaching to heart? If in our speech, both in person and online, we not only avoided slander and lies, but we demonstrated “a charitable esteem of our neighbors,” even those with whom we disagree? What if we were quick to acknowledge their “gifts and graces”? Or defend the innocence of our political or social opponents when they are mistreated? What if, when they did something right, we were happy to receive a good report about them? What if we refused to play “gotcha” by gloating over and sharing a bad report?

Could it make a difference in our country’s public discourse if Christians not only kept themselves from slander, but tried to speak peace and act with gentleness and kindness even toward those we oppose? How might that reflect the beauty and goodness of Christ to those who desperately need to know him?

Respond

- What is your knee-jerk response to being told to obey your government? Are there laws that you routinely break?
- In this political season, how could you act with greater gentleness and kindness? Should you alter the way you speak? What you like, share, or post?
- Pray over these issues knowing that the Spirit is with you and wants to transform you for your good and God's glory.

Day 3

There is nothing better than the gospel. We've been pondering some challenging issues over the last few weeks as we consider how to live as dual citizens of heaven and earth. And current events haven't let up in their gravity or intensity, or in some people's desire to use them to spark fear, panic, and rage. Yet as Christians, we know we should lift our eyes beyond the divisions and disagreements to the Savior King who reigns eternally.

Today, rejoice in what God has done for you through Jesus because that's what it's all about. Come what may, we have Jesus. He is our guide in all things – including politics!

Read

Titus 3:3–8

³At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. ⁴But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. ⁸This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

- What happened when the “kindness and love of God our Savior appeared”? What has changed?

Reflect

It's not easy to resist the pull of your culture, and that's especially true today. In a strong and rapidly moving river, it's hard to plant your feet. In Titus 3:3–8, Paul is not only giving the Christians of Crete instructions on the way they should be living, but explaining how it is possible to live out the way of Jesus.

The gospel changes everything. It makes what was impossible, possible. Its source is the kindness and love of God. God's grace reaches out to us in our rebellion and breaks the enslaving chains of deception and addiction. It frees us to discover what it really means to be humans created in God's image. Sin not only distorts our individual identity, it corrupts our relationships, infiltrating them with suspicion, envy and hatred. This was not who God created us to be or how he wants us to live.

In order to live differently, we need more than a set of moral laws to follow. It's not a question of knowledge. You can't teach a flightless creature to fly — you'd have to give them wings. They must be transformed. Likewise, we need the rebirth and renewal that only the Spirit can bring. In Christ we are given the Holy Spirit, who is poured out on us — generously. God is not stingy. He gives us what we need to live for him. We are new creatures in Christ and even our lineage has changed. We are heirs of God, children of the King, and citizens of his kingdom. In Christ, a brand new identity has been graciously given to us. And he has done this, not because we're worthy, but because we're loved.

Our salvation not only transforms us, it can transform our communities. The outward expression of changed lives should be a devotion to doing good. We look to Jesus as our example and treat people as he did — with love, compassion, and respect. We choose forgiveness over vengeance and justice over exploitation. In all kinds of ways, we do what will make the lives of those around us better. We do good.

Isn't the news that these changes are possible in Christ worth sharing? We don't have to be carried along by the cultural current into the turbulent waters of fear, hopelessness, bitterness, despair, or rage. We can put our feet down and stand on the promises of God in Christ. Our life's mission doesn't have to be an endless quest for peace, security, or fulfillment, because those are already ours in Christ. Our faith doesn't have to be in governments or institutions that will sometimes fail us, because our ultimate faith is in the One who never fails. Day by day, we can focus on loving Jesus and loving people. No worry. No fear.

Respond

Take a moment and rest in the gospel message. Spend time with the Father, and find the peace and grace you need for today in what Paul has said here. Know that you are loved, and that the Spirit is with you. Take all your concerns and fears to Jesus and leave them at the cross. Ask him to give you a better vision for doing good that flows from the kindness and love of God your Savior.

Day 4

Consider this dispute from American history:

“Michigan and Ohio might now be known their longstanding football rivalry, but the two states once nearly went to war over a border dispute. The argument began in 1803, when the newly formed state of Ohio took ownership of a sliver of land containing the town of Toledo. Michigan territory later disputed Ohio’s claim on this ‘Toledo strip’ in the 1830s, launching a heated debate that teetered on the edge of violence for several weeks. In what became known as the Toledo War, both sides wrestled for political control of the territory, and both raised militias to defend against a possible invasion by the other.”²

President Andrew Jackson was able to bring the two sides to a compromise, but decades before the American Civil War, two U.S. states almost took up arms against each other over a strip of land.

Disputes have a way of escalating. Arguments and debates can become quarrels and fights. They can destroy relationships, fracture communities, and even lead to violence. It’s not that there aren’t some ideas and principles worth fighting for. It’s that we should be very careful about which disputes we choose, and how far we go to win them.

Read

Titus 3:9–11

9 But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. 10 Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them. 11 You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are self-condemned.

- Paul talks about a divisive person. How would you define “divisive”? What kinds of behaviors do you associate with a person who is divisive?

Reflect

Some people love to argue, and they’re good at it. Maybe they were the captain of their high school debate team and now argue cases in front of judges and juries. Maybe they’re politicians who advocate for a particular point of view as a means of shaping public policy.

² Evan Andrews, “6 Wars Fought for Ridiculous Reasons” *History* <https://www.history.com/news/6-wars-fought-for-ridiculous-reasons>

There's nothing wrong with having the ability to convincingly argue your point. The danger comes in motive, intent, and the lengths to which you'll go.

Here's a statement that should shock no one: Christians will disagree. We will disagree over how a church should organize itself and what a church service will look like. We'll disagree over how and when to baptize or serve the Lord's Supper. We'll even disagree over how Christians should interact with their government and what candidates, ideas, and policies they should support. And with some important exceptions (when the gospel of Christ is a stake), that is okay.

As Christians we must learn how to disagree, even strongly, and still love our brothers and sisters in Christ. We can appreciate diversity while maintaining our unity. Divisive people who relish controversy and enjoy quarrels are a threat to that unity.

Paul speaks strongly against the divisive person. What are the characteristics of someone who is divisive? I think Proverbs 16:27– 28 can help us sketch a portrait:

*²⁷ Scoundrels create trouble;
their words are a destructive blaze.*

*²⁸ A troublemaker plants seeds of strife;
gossip separates the best of friends. (NLT)*

It might be stating the obvious, but a divisive person sows division. They use their words to destroy and start trouble, they encourage strife and separate friends.

Having a strong opinion doesn't make you divisive. How you present that opinion and the lengths to which you will defend it might. In Paul's day, there were those who loved to stoke controversy over interpretations of the Jewish Scripture. Apparently, in Crete, these revolved around genealogies and the Jewish law. Paul sees no benefit in these endless debates and quarrels. He calls them foolish, useless, and unprofitable. They weren't bringing clarity, they were fueling division. They weren't bringing light to these issues — just heat. By sucking all the oxygen out of the room, they were starving the gospel mission.

Times haven't changed all that much. Unfortunately, there are still Christians who'd rather engage in an endless series of debate over some minor doctrinal issue than do the hard work of helping people find and follow Christ. Of course, there are Christian beliefs that are clearly defined in Scripture and lie at the heart of Christianity. We must preserve and defend these even at the risk of conflict, because to abandon them is to abandon Christ himself. But a lot of the hot-button issues that people fight over are not essential. They might even be foolish controversies. Endless arguments that go nowhere are harmful to the body of Christ. People who fire at their own because they're treating non-essential issues as hills to die on are being divisive.

Leaders in the church should confront those who are habitually divisive. We should love the divisive person and remind them of the beauty of the gospel that Paul so eloquently describes in the previous verses. But if they refuse to change, Paul says the community of believers

should have nothing to do with them. Don't engage. Why? Because the body of Christ is vital to Christ's mission and its people are beloved by its Head. Surely part of what it means to do good is to build up the church, not tear it down. It must not be hobbled by fights over minor issues when it has so much good to do.

Respond

- What kinds of things do you hear Christians arguing over? What criteria could you use to determine if a debate is “foolish,” “unprofitable,” or “useless”?
- What kinds of issues do you think are worth debating? How can you do so in a way that shows love to others and honor to Christ?

Day 5

Happy Friday! Take some time today to spend with your Father. Reflect on all he has done for you and invite him to shape your thoughts and actions according to his will.

Reflect

Read through Titus 3:1–11 one more time. What is your biggest takeaway from this passage? How is it challenging your current thoughts or actions? How does it reveal God to you in a deeper way?

Connect

“so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good.”

Titus 3:8

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

Ephesians 4:1-3

When we trust in Christ and commit to following him, we are changed. We aren't who we were. We are on a journey, that by the power of the Holy Spirit, will bring us closer and closer to the image of Christ. That is our calling. To know him, to proclaim him, and to resemble him. We need to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which we've been called.

When it comes to how we interact with our government, we must do so with humility and a willingness to submit to our rulers and authorities. When it comes to how we interact with our

fellow citizens, we are to be honest, gentle, kind, and patient. In how we interact with our fellow Christians, we must bear with one another in love and maintain unity in the Spirit. In all kinds of ways, we are to do good for all kinds of people, even if it requires us to sacrifice on their behalf.

“Devote yourself to doing good.” Imagine if every Christian really did that — in every interaction and with every person. In the way they did their job, raised their kids, loved their neighbors, served their communities, and interacted with their government? In these difficult days, when people are full of frustration and fear, what are ways we could do good?

Respond

Our identity is in Christ and by doing good for those around us, we reveal his goodness and invite more and more people into his kingdom. In prayer, consider the following questions. Ask the Spirit to guide you.

How will you apply Titus 3:1–11 this week? In your relationship to your “rulers and authorities”? How can you be ready to do whatever is good? Avoid slander? And be peaceable, considerate and gentle?

How can you avoid being divisive? Are there useless or even foolish controversies that you spend too much time on? In person or online, are you engaging in or promoting quarrels that fail to bring clarity or unity, but instead fuel confusion and division?

How can you rejoice in your salvation today? In the kindness and love of God? Spend some time praising him for his goodness!