



Christmas is for Cretans

Titus 3:1-8

What God wants us to do

Titus 2 & 3 are very similar in the way they are organized. In both Titus 2:1-9 and Titus 3:1-2, Paul tells us very clearly how it is God wants us to live. If Christianity doesn't have any impact on the way we live—our relationships, decisions, lifestyles—then what makes it any different than any other religion? Ultimately, the quality of our lives, marriages, morals, and character—these are what's so attractive about Christianity. So—as far as it depends on us—what God wants is for us to have healthy relationships in our families (2:1-9) and healthy relationships with those in the world (the government and our fellow citizens). The best family members (Titus 2) and the best citizens (Titus 3) ought to be the Christians!

Why we can't do it

Nearly a century ago G. K. Chesterton asked “what's wrong with the world?” His answers included the usual suspects among the universal “isms,” especially socialism, feminism, capitalism, and imperialism. But his first and last answer was always the same: “I am.” That's Paul's conclusion in Titus 3:3. We're selfish, foolish, insubordinate, misled and enslaved. We trample people trying to get into Walmart so we can buy more stuff. We lie in order to save face. We say, “Mistakes were made,” instead of, “I was in the wrong; and I sinned.” We want liberty without responsibility. Moreover, we take good things—career, love, material goods, our family relationships—and twist them into ultimate things. “Our hearts deify them as the center of our lives in a desperate attempt to squeeze from them significance and security, safety and fulfillment—things they were never meant to give. Things that only God can give. In the end, we make them into gods and we become their slaves. The human heart is an idol factory.” (Keller 2009, *xiv-xv*)

How God did it

“*But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared . . .*” (ESV) Paul is restating what he previously wrote in Titus 2:11. So Titus 2:11-14 & Titus 3:4-7 go together. His point is this: Christianity is foremost about *good news*, not good advice.

The heart of most religions is good advice, good techniques, good programs, good ideas, and good support systems. These drive us deeper into ourselves, to find our inner light, inner goodness, inner voice, or inner resources.

Nothing new can be found inside of us. There is no inner rescuer deep in my soul; I just hear echoes of my own voice telling me all sorts of crazy things to numb my sense of fear, anxiety, and boredom, the origins of which I cannot truly identify.

But the heart of Christianity is Good News. It comes not as a task for us to fulfill, a mission for us to accomplish, a game plan for us to follow with the help of life coaches, but as a report that someone else has already fulfilled, accomplished, followed, and achieved everything for us. (Horton 2009)

Titus 3:4 is imperial language. It was commonly understood in Paul's culture that Rome was the light of the world; that Rome's "goodness and loving kindness" (brought about by her legions) appeared as savior of the world. The Emperor was often addressed as "Our Great God and Savior." Paul knew better. Nero was a farce. Jesus is Emperor, "Our Great God and Savior." He came armed—not with chariots and legions—but in the power of goodness and love. A love that led him to death on a Roman cross where He saved us from the life described in Titus 3:3. Salvation is not just "getting in heaven." Salvation is "transformed wholeness"; resurrection to a new life; one that is purified and empowered by God himself—God the Holy Spirit. (See Ezekiel 36:24-27)

The result is not merely that we are forgiven of our sins—justified. It's more! We become *heirs having the hope of eternal life!*

In both Titus 2:15 and Titus 3:8, Paul told Titus to stress and teach these things!

How, through Him, we can do it

It's on the basis of Christ's work that we can now live the way God wants. Jesus himself becomes the means by which we conduct ourselves as heirs of His kingdom. Faith means living the way Christ has already said we are. Now that we belong to His family, His concerns become ours! "This is who you are," Jesus says, "Now on that basis, here is how I want you to live."

Just as the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared (in first century Israel) in the person of Jesus Christ; God continues to want His kindness and love to appear today. And He wants these appearances to occur in the most unlikely and unwanted places. Those places include difficult places, unpromising places (like Crete), ungodly places—men's halls, secluded worlds like the women's quarters in domestic households (estates), harsh places where slaves toiled and suffered indignity and heartlessness. There is no place beyond the reach of Christ's love and kindness. There's no place Christ's love and kindness can't change. Where will the kindness and love of Christ show up in your world?

If we are deeply moved by the sight of his love for us, it detaches our hearts from other would-be saviors. We stop trying to redeem ourselves through our pursuits and relationships, because we are already redeemed. We stop trying to make others into saviors, because we have a Savior." (Keller 2009, 45)