

Titus 3:1-8

Countercultural Living

Forty years ago America went through the most radical transformation in our nation's history. It was the 1960's. A time Robert Bork in his book "Slouching Towards Gomorrah" calls "The vertical invasion of the barbarians."

Robert P. George of the department of Politics, Princeton University writes, of the fallout from the 60's, "The ideological triumph of liberalism among American elites- far from bringing the individual and social enlightenment it promised-has produced unprecedented moral decay."

Much of the Sixties philosophy of radicalism was codified in June 1962 at the AFL-CIO camp at Port Huron, Michigan.

Port Huron was an early convention of the SDS, the Students for a Democratic Society which would later become the violent Weather Underground and then morph into the even more bizarre Yippies.

That Port Huron Statement became the most widely circulated document of the Left in that decade and brought the SDS to national prominence. It was a utopian statement.

In almost 26,000 rambling words that document proposed a kind of kingdom of God on earth, but without God.

It said, "We regard men as infinitely precious and possessed of unfulfilled capacities for reason, freedom, and love."

In other words, people are inherently good. We just need to change the structures in society that keep them from fulfilling their potential.

Unfortunately, the 60's went down in flames because people are inherently selfish and will ultimately lived totally self-focused lives without God.

Our culture today, with it's denial of absolute truth, open sexuality, do it yourself religion, and almost total self-absorption is a mirror of societies all down through history who have tried to build a utopia without God.

Today the fallout just keeps coming: The removal of any mention of God from the public sector.

The ongoing battle to redefine and reshape the definition of marriage.

Abortion and debates on cloning, "designer babies", and research from the stem cells of fetuses.

What's really funny is that Tom Hayden and the other founders of the SDS actually thought they were being countercultural. The truth was they weren't any more countercultural than Puff Daddy, M&M, R. Kelly, Blink 182 or any of the latest incarnations of rap or rock and roll.

They're just examples of the way the culture's always been going. They're just outspoken sinners who in the end aren't any different than sinners have always been.

There's nothing radical about cursing, swearing, drinking, and sleeping around.

The truth is that the real countercultural people are the ones that go against the cultural flow.

That's ultimately what the Bible is all about, going against the cultural flow.

We've been study the book of Titus now for several weeks and we've come to the third chapter. **Open Bibles Titus 3 pg 1059**

We call this The Book of Titus, but a better name would be The Letter to Titus because what we have in our Bible is actually a first century letter written by an apostle.

The apostle's name was Paul and God was using him to spread the good news of Jesus Christ all over the Roman Empire. Titus was a young co-worker of Paul's that he had left on the island of Crete.

There were fledgling churches on Crete but there was also a lot of confusion. Titus had the job of kind of getting things on the right track spiritually in these congregations.

Crete at this time was not the easiest place to live like a Christian. In fact it had a lot of similarities to today.

So Paul was giving some much needed instruction to Titus.

Here's how to be different. Here's how to live in a way that is really revolutionary.

I. The Way To Go Against The Flow Is To Practice Real Humility

Read vs 1-2

Crete was under the occupation of an alien culture and authority. Crete had a history dating back to the Minoans in 2600 BC. But the Romans came in about 69 BC and took over.

The Romans were running this island with an ancient heritage and the Cretans resented it.

It would have been a temptation for these Cretans believers to be angry about this foreign Roman rule over them, and yet here we have Paul saying to the Christians in Crete that they are to respect those who rule over them in government.

Not only that, but they're to relate to their non-believing, pagan, immoral, neighbors with kindness and humility, with genuine care and compassion.

See the fact is that God's people in any age are outsiders.

Hebrews 11 lists the great heroes of the faith of the OT and then says "*they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.*"

Peter writes to the Christians of his day and says, '1Pe 2:11 "*Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.*"

We're not people who claim this world and this life as our permanent possession. Believers should be people who recognize the truth that we're just passing through. That we don't really fit it.

To these Christians on Crete they were on the outside morally because they're culture was so immoral, and just like everyone else on the island they were on the outside politically. Under foreign occupation.

The culture was going THIS way and God was saying to them. "I want you to swim upstream. I want you to go against the flow."

That's always where God calls us to be. But that's a tough position to be in and a lot of Christians struggle. And sometimes when it seems like we're the only one at work or in the classroom or out of our neighbors that is trying we just give up.

We wonder what's the use? Maybe I'm too extreme here. Maybe I should lighten up a little bit. Or we just get tired.

Going against your prevailing culture is hard work. The only way to be successful is to be in it for the long haul.

What about us? What does it mean to be subject to your rulers and be ready for every good work?

From the President to city officials, Christ's followers are to respect authority. Romans 13 teaches that God Himself established human government for society's overall benefit and that officials get their authority from God.

Paul himself always showed respect for the laws of Rome and those who enforced them. Remember, he even did that when Nero was emperor. Nero was a despicable guy who did despicable things including slaughtering Christians. Nero would eventually give the order to behead Paul.

But he instructed us to pray for our leaders. (1 Tim. 2:2) *Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior.*

So we're to obey our government even when we don't agree with all it's policies. But our interaction with society doesn't end there. The phrase, "ready to do whatever is good" means "cooperating in those matters that involve the whole community."

Just because we are citizens of heaven doesn't mean we don't have responsibilities while we're still citizens on earth.

The Bible doesn't teach that we're just to sit on the sidelines and criticize our culture for its faults. Being a critic is easy. We're called to get in the game!

The list is endless for all the little and big ways we can offer hands-on help to people in our culture. Literacy programs, free babysitting for single moms who need a half-day to run errands, providing transportation, abortion alternatives,...the list is as endless as the imagination.

We find a need to find a way to contribute to the needs of our culture in a positive, beneficial way.

And we need to do it humbly. Christians ought to stand out in society by the way they don't try to stand out! We shouldn't be trying to draw attention to ourselves. Our aim for attention should be pointed toward our Lord Jesus.

I. The Way To Go Against The Flow Is To Practice Real Humility

II. The Reason To Go Against The Flow Is Rooted In God

Read vs 3

Christianity isn't about judging others - its about understanding others.

Back in the early 70's "I'm OK, You're OK" was the pop psychology best seller.

I think this one's more accurate, "I'm Dysfunctional, You're Dysfunctional."

Apart from God's grace any of us could find ourselves slaves to self-destructive lifestyles. So, instead of being judgmental, we need to ask ourselves how we would want to be treated if we were still without Christ.

The culture's image of Christians is often the stereotypical legalist who's pointing his finger and telling everyone they're sinners who are going to hell.

The truth is, we're all sinners and without forgiveness we're all going to hell. But rather than blasting people and appearing self-righteous, God's called us to be humble.

I mean, God's lifted some of us out of some pretty nasty backgrounds. We were once foolish and disobedient but then God's grace knocked us off our feet and gave us a new life.

The problem is the culture has no idea what grace is. They only know works. So if we say we know we're going to heaven, people think we're saying we're better than they are.

If we talk about the destructiveness of sin they think we're just judging them.

But, verse 4, when the kindness... (Read 4-7)

Why should we be countercultural? Why should we go against flow? Why keep knocking our heads against this seemingly intractable wall of ungodliness in our age?

Because of the amazing grace that God has shown to us.

God's plan of salvation is all here in these few verses. It explains what moved God to save us - his kindness, love, and mercy.

We get so wrapped up in ourselves. It's really tough for us to understand that not only don't we deserve God's kindness, we deserve just the opposite.

Because of our sin, the righteous God of Creation would be completely just in wiping us off the face of the Earth. The only thing we deserve from Him is His wrath.

The Bible says: Isa 5:16 *But the LORD of hosts shall be exalted in judgment, And God who is holy shall be hallowed in righteousness.*

It says the angels around His throne cry out: *"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!"*

God is holy in the purest sense of that word. And out of His holiness comes a sacred hatred for sin.

That means that our sin is in the focal point of His judgment. The Bible says, "Our God is a consuming fire."

But here's the astonishing part, in the wonder of grace, God aimed all his wrath at sin at His only begotten Son Jesus Christ. The searing wrath of God's awesome judgment didn't come down on the ones who deserve every bit of it.

His judgment came crashing down on Jesus at the cross.

God did all of that to glorify His own name for all eternity. God used the cross to demonstrate His character once for all to men and angels.

Out of the cross comes our forgiveness. In grace God forgives us, not by works we do, but by Christ's once-for-all work at the cross.

The word that Paul uses for “love” in verse 4 is *philanthropia*. It’s a compound of *philos*, which means “love,” and *anthropos*, which means “man.”

That’s a pretty interesting way of thinking about God, isn’t it? He’s a philanthropist. The dictionary defines “philanthropist” as “A person who seeks to promote the welfare of others.”

God not only provides for our welfare here on earth but cares for us beyond the grave. He does that through the forgiveness of sins that he gives us through his Son, Jesus.

How can we be certain that all these amazing blessings really belong to us? Paul explains, “He saved us through the washing of regeneration, which means rebirth, and renewing of the Holy Spirit.

Here’s where it really gets exciting! We can be certain that forgiveness, eternal life, and confidence for this life are ours because we have the promise of God.

Verse 7 we’re justified by His grace. The word “justified,” *dikaioo*, is a legal term used in the courts of Rome to mean, “pronounced not guilty.”

We tend to think of ourselves as pardoned sinners. You know, guilty but set free. But the word “pardon” isn’t even used in the New Testament.

God doesn’t say “You’re guilty but I’m letting you go.” He declares us not guilty and out of that we become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

And notice the word “hope” here is a noun not a verb. We don’t hope we’re going to live forever with our Lord, we have a hope. In other words we’re sure. We have confidence.

Jay Adams writes, “Living in light of the hope of an eternity with Christ, where all wrongs will be righted, where all suffering will be ended, and where all doubts, fears, and tears will be banished, makes a great difference in how one chooses to respond to problems in the present. That focus on the future is altogether important. One who anticipates inheriting a fortune in the future lives differently today than the one who has no such hope.”

“The believer is heir to eternal life! Reemphasizing this to people who are struggling - especially when they have their nose pressed hard against the present - can make all the difference in how one responds to difficulties, losses, and trials.”

So verse 8 begins, *"This is a faithful saying..."* that's "faithful" in the sense of trustworthy.

In our changing, uncertain world there's something we can hang onto. God's promise of our future with Him.

See, if all were looking at is the immediate, what's going on right now, we could totally miss the big picture.

The other day Sandy and I were able to take a run up to Lancaster to the Sight & Sound theater to see their presentation of the story of Ruth. They do excellent presentations and this one was no exception.

What really gripped me though was being confronted with the human emotion of the story. Sometimes it's easy to read some of the narratives in the Bible you just kind of pass over the human element because years of a person's life are described in a brief paragraph or two. But seeing it in a play puts a different dimension to it.

What struck me was the sorrow that Naomi experienced. She was Jewish but had to live in pagan Moab. During her time there her husband died and her two sons who married Moabite women passed away.

Naomi finally returns to her home in Israel, aged, empty, and heartbroken. Her old friends greeted her...

But she said to them, *"Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the LORD has brought me home again empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?"*

She was a broken woman. And I have to believe she would have said, "There's no way any good can come out of this." And if you would have been there at the time and she asked you what good could possibly come out of her suffering, you would have been speechless.

She had no way of knowing that her Moabite daughter-in-law, Ruth, who returned with her would marry Boaz and would be an ancestor of Jesus Christ. The greatest honor any Israelite could imagine was to be in the Messianic line.

Now see, we get the whole story. She didn't.

Have you ever been through what seemed like senseless suffering? There was no redeeming quality. There's no way you could make sense of things?

I'm sure we all have. This is a trustworthy promise. God's way bigger than we ever imagined. God's got an amazing future planned for us because of His grace.

And when we're in that future the stuff that we don't understand now will make perfect sense. The sure promises of the future based on the fact of God's redeeming love in the past motivate us to keep walking and worshipping today.

See, not only do we have hope for today but what God's done for us in Christ is the whole reason for living in the opposite way of the culture. How could we not live for a God who would redeem us with the death of His own Son? How could we fail to obey a God *who demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* (Rom 5:8)

God has poured out His love and His mercy. God has done the work of salvation. It's not by works of righteousness which we have done. In fact there's only one thing we can do in response to God's grace.

That's receive it. Have you believed? Have you trusted Jesus Christ as Savior the best you know how? Is your hope for eternity in Him?

You say, "Ed, I'm kind of neutral with this religious stuff. I'm not for God. I'm not against God. I'm just living life."

If that's your approach to spirituality listen to this: I John 5:10 "He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who doesn't believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son."

To not believe is to call God a liar because He says His Son is the Savior. That's pretty heavy, isn't it?

And I have to tell you, I didn't make that up. I didn't write those words. I just got up this morning and there they were in the Bible.

This isn't about Christians making judgments about other people. This isn't about me making any assumptions about you. This is between you and God.

You can believe Him or you can call Him a liar. That's your choice.

I. The Way To Go Against The Flow Is To Practice Real Humility

II. The Reason To Go Against The Flow Is Rooted In God

III. The Result Of Going Against The Flow Is Always Good Works

Read vs 8

God's grace doesn't free us from obedience: it frees us to obedience. The grace of God which saves us doesn't free us from obedience, it frees us for obedience, so that we can say 'we delight in Your word, O Lord. How I love Your law, O Lord.'

That's the real expression of Christian freedom. Christian freedom isn't doing whatever we delight in. Christian freedom is delighting in doing whatever God delights in. The essence of Christian freedom isn't being able to sin or to obey...whatever we want to do, because we're saved by grace. That's not Christian freedom. Christian freedom is delighting to do what God delights in.

Here it is. If we've believed in God. If we've rested and trusted in Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the gospel, we will be careful to engage in good deeds.

Now listen closely to what the Bible has said here. It doesn't say if we will be careful to do good deeds, we will be justified, we will be forgiven, we will be accepted, we will be acquitted by God.

It doesn't say that. It says that God has saved us by His mercy. His saving of us isn't based on our being good, it's based on Jesus.

But having been saved by God's mercy through Jesus' work, we are saved in order to do good deeds. They are the consequences, and the result of the work of God's transforming grace in us.

What I believe are the two most significant verses in the new Testament, Ephesians 2:8-9, *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast*, are followed by verse ten, *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*

God could just instantaneously take us out of this world the moment we trust Christ as Savior. In an instant, (bang) no more sin, no more struggles, no more heartache. But He hasn't done that. Why?

He's left us here for a purpose. And that purpose is clear. So that we would live out His life in front of a watching world.

Why? Because men aren't infinitely precious and possessed of unfulfilled capacities for reason, freedom, and love.

Because people aren't inherently good and we just need to change the structures in society that keep them from fulfilling their potential.

God has left us here to live out His life in front of a watching world because it's the only way people are going to see the invisible God.

Let's leave here with a commitment this morning to be countercultural. To be people whose lives are shaped by God's amazing grace.