

## Citizens and Neighbors

Not a day goes by that I don't see some kind of heated, negative interaction between Christians and non-Christians. I don't think it used to be like that, but with the advent of social media, we all think we should get our say. Sometimes, what we say doesn't sound very nice. Because we are upset at the degrading state of our society's morals, many of us believe we should come down hard and respond in kind to those who blast us. However, look at Paul's instruction in Titus 3:1-7.

First, remember where Titus was doing his work (cf. Titus 1:5). Titus was teaching and preaching during the reign of the hideously immoral and anti-Christian Nero. He was doing his work in Crete which had a bad reputation of immorality even by Roman standards. Now that is saying something.

How do you think Christians should behave in such a society and relate to the rulers and neighbors who behave in such ways? Prepare to be shocked. Paul tells Titus to remind his brethren "to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarrelling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people" (Titus 3:1-2, ESV).

If you are like me, this is a shock. But even more shocking is the reason we are to behave in this fashion. "For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another" (Titus 3:3, ESV). That is, when we want to react caustically to those around us who are foolish, disobedient, and led astray, we are doing so to people who are just like we have been. We have no right to belittle them as if we are any better. We have been exactly where they are.

"But we have changed," we cry. "They should become more like us." But what gave you the power to change? Did you accomplish that because of your awesomeness? No. Paul goes on to say that the power to change didn't come from within us. God did not save us because of our works done in our righteousness. Rather, we were saved by the goodness and lovingkindness of God. We were saved by His mercy and grace through the righteous work of Jesus Christ on the cross. We are regenerated and renewed by the work of the Holy Spirit. Of course, we surrendered to the Lord, but the difference between us and those who are still in their sins is not our righteousness, but God's grace.

Of course this doesn't mean we ignore sin and act like everyone is alright. But it does govern how we address that sin. We don't respond with arrogant belligerence. We don't respond with Pharisaical self-righteousness. We don't respond by wagging our fingers in their faces, screaming rebukes at them, and picking fights with them. We share the gospel in gentleness and perfect courtesy. No doubt, many will still respond in horrific ways, but that is on them.

No one ever lost their soul for being yelled at, ridiculed, mocked, and belittled. But let us be careful. If we treat the world the way the world treats us, we may find that we have returned to the world and have abandoned Christ.