

## Paul's Pattern for Interpersonal Relationships

Paul had left Titus in Crete to put what remained into order (**Titus 1:5**). That began with appointing elders in every town on the island. But then Paul continued to encourage Titus regarding who and what he was supposed to teach. He was supposed to teach older men to be sober-minded, dignified, and self-controlled (**Titus 2:2**). He was to teach older women to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to wine. Instead, they were to teach what is good (**Titus 2:3**). He was to encourage the older women to teach the young women to love their husbands and children properly, managing their homes with kindness, purity, and submission (**Titus 2:4-5**). He was to teach the young men to be self-controlled (**Titus 2:6**). Titus was himself to be a model of good works and sound speech (**Titus 2:7-8**).

But then Paul talks about how everyone is supposed to treat everyone else in **Titus 3:1-7**. Within these verse we find a plan for interpersonal relationships.

First, notice the guidelines for these relationships:

Remind them 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 quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people (**Titus 3:1-2**, ESV).

Paul addressed our relationship with those who are in authority over us. This includes governing authorities (**Romans 13:1-5**), congregational authorities (**Hebrews 13:17**), and family authorities (**Ephesians 6:1-3**). We are to be submissive and obedient. Obviously, if we are told by one of these authorities to disobey God, we should obey God rather than man (**Acts 5:29**). However, I'm often amazed at how we deal with the authorities God has placed in our lives when they disagree with us. Instead of recognizing that we are only truly submitting to these authorities when we do so even though they disagree with us, we tend to think they have no right to be in authority if they disagree with us. Instead of recognizing that in general, those who are wiser than us end up rising to authority and therefore we should listen to them, we think they must not be wise because they are not advising us to do what we wanted to do anyway.

Paul goes on to say we should be ready for every good work. Of course, that readiness comes from being in the Bible consistently and completely (**II Timothy 3:16-17**). Notice some good works that Paul listed for Timothy in **I Timothy 5:10**—bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the saints' feet, caring for the afflicted. In **Titus 2:14**, Paul says Jesus died for us so we would be zealous for good works. And he ends this letter in **Titus 3:14** by saying we must devote ourselves to good works so we can help in cases of urgent need and so we won't be unfruitful.

Then he strings together some similar statements about how we should treat others in **Titus 3:2**. We should speak evil of no one, avoid quarreling, be gentle, show perfect courtesy to all. We are not to speak evil of others. That is we must not malign them. This same word is used in **I Peter 4:4** to describe how non-Christians will treat us. We should not do the same to them or to each other. We must avoid quarreling. The Lord's servant is not to be quarrelsome. This is the same point made of shepherds in **I Timothy 3:3**. This doesn't mean we don't stand for the truth. Rather, it means we aren't in the discussion in order to argue. We don't get pleasure out of the argument process. We are to be gentle. In **I Timothy 3:3**, this gentleness is contrasted with violence. In **I Peter 2:18** it is contrasted with injustice. We are to be equitable, fair, reasonable, meek. Finally, we are to show perfect courtesy toward all people. In **I Corinthians 4:21**, this courtesy is contrasted with harshness. In **Ephesians 4:2** and **Colossians 3:12** it is tied to kindness, humility, patience, compassion, love, and forbearance. In **I Peter 3:15**, it is coupled with respect.

What high standards of treatment. How are you doing with this?

However, what strikes me more than the plan for our relationships with all people is Paul's reason for this plan. In his reason, he demonstrates the extent of what he means by "all people." We don't have a problem doing all these things for people who have acted in these ways toward us. Our problem is with folks who are sinning, hateful, foolish, disobedient. Surely we can treat them differently.

Notice what Paul said:

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).

Why should we treat all people with humility, respect, gentleness, and courtesy? Because we too have been really, really stupid. We too have been really, really wrong. We too have been really, really mean. We've all been there. Whatever it is that person is doing or has done to us, we've done similarly to others. Here is a practical application of the Golden Rule. Treat others the way you want to be treated (**Matthew 7:12**). How do we want to be treated when we are wrong? Do we want people to be mean, hateful, vengeful, harsh? Or do we want them to be forbearing, forgiving, encouraging, gentle, loving?

"But it's just so hard," we say, "I mean, after all, I quit acting like that. I've outgrown that. When will they? Why can't they be better like I've gotten better?" How easy it is to forget why we are better, to think the fact that we are no longer hateful, slaves to passions, foolish, disobedient is because we are somehow great. Paul's greatest stroke in this passage is the concluding section.

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life (**Titus 3:4-7**).

Why are we doing better now? Because we are so good? No. We are better because of God's goodness. We are better because of God's loving kindness. We have grown because God has poured out His Holy Spirit on us in Jesus Christ. Paul specifically points out that we aren't any better because of what we have done in our righteousness. We have grown because of God's grace not because of our awesomeness. So, if we really are doing better than someone else, we don't deserve the credit, God does.

We need to remember where we came from and how we got where we are now. When we do that, we'll follow Paul's plan for interpersonal relationships.

-Edwin L. Crozier