

FAITHFUL LIVING IN OUR COMMUNITY

Introduction

1. **“Responding to God in Faithful Living”** is to happen in our personal lives, in the family, within the church, but also in the **community**. When I speak of community, I am thinking specifically about responding faithfully to God in the context of the unregenerate community where we live and work and go to school. As believers, how are we to respond so as to please and honor God and at the same time make some advancement into enemy territory? How shall we live if we are to be counted faithful?
2. Once again let's review the foundational passage for faithful living in 1 Corinthians 4:1-2. ***This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy (faithful).***
3. Being servants and stewards of Christ does not stop at the front door of our homes or at the front door of the church. We are still servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God in our neighborhoods and workplaces and schools and any other place where we rub shoulders with the unconverted. We do not check our Christianity at the door when no longer surrounded by believers! But how are to act? What constitutes faithful living among those who do not have life in Christ?
4. Turning again to Titus, we get a glimpse of how to respond to God in faithful living while we live and move in the real world. Listen to Paul's words (Titus 3:1-8).
5. **1 Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, 2 to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. 3 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. 4 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 5 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, 6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. 8 The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist**

on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.

6. The key idea in this text is a call to remember. Paul was reminding Titus of several things. He reminded him of what believers are to be, of what they used to be before they believed the Gospel, what has changed since they believed and what remains to be done if they are to impact their world for Christ. Let's get started.

I. REMINDER OF WHAT WE ARE TO BE (1-2) I will have more to say, but in one simple description, if we are to respond to God faithfully while in the midst of an unbelieving community, we are to be **godly** people. There ought to be a noticeable difference between the world and us. In case we have forgotten, here are the specifics of what it means to be godly in a lost world.

A. Submissive and obedient to those in authority

1. We deal with authority everywhere. God calls us to be subject to those authorities, being obedient where we can.
2. The only qualification or limitation here is in relation to good work. There are a handful of times recorded in the Bible when God's people defied civil authority. When the authorities interfered with prayer, Daniel prayed anyway and accepted the consequences. When authorities interfered with worship, the three friends refused to bow down to a false god and were thrown into the fiery furnace. When the authorities interfered with proclaiming the Gospel, Peter and the other apostles affirmed their commitment to obey God rather than man when the supreme authority and assigned authority clashed! In each case, the believers responded to God in faithful living, acting as good servants and stewards of God.
3. The best citizens in a community ought to be those who belong to Christ. Our heavenly citizenship does not absolve our earthly responsibility. So generally we should be submissive and obedient to those in authority over us.

B. Careful with our mouth

1. Of all people, we must guard our tongues. We dare not speak evil of others.
2. This does not mean that evil is to be ignored. We are to expose the darkness, but we can do so without maligning, slandering and injuring others in the process. Responding faithfully to God in community means putting a guard over our lips.

C. Peaceful and considerate in our demeanor

1. To “avoid quarreling” means, “don't be a brawler.” We must not be hot-tempered, always insisting on having our own way. Such behavior does not bring about the righteousness of Christ.
2. Instead, if we respond to God in faithful living, those outside of Christ will see us as reasonable, gentle people. I can be firm, unrelenting, dogmatic, insistent, and still be nice! We will not likely be able to share our message with the world if we are always quarreling. And if we are able to share it, what we share will appear quite different from what they see in us.

D. Humble in our assessments

1. “Show perfect courtesy toward all people.” When we do this we show many things to the people around us. Among them is “power under control.” That is essentially what humility or meekness is.
2. Please put away forever the idea that meekness is weakness. Commentator Guy King used to say, “Meekness is not weakness. If you think meekness is weakness, try being meek for a week!” There are some people who seem to know how to push our courtesy override button. And when they manage to do so, our message is compromised. Remember, we are representing the King. It is important to show proper courtesy. (Illustrations of neighborhood phone calls regarding youth group noise, snow piled too high, church people parking in front of people's homes, etc. When we are blasted, we are tempted to blast back, but we must be courteous. Story of Howard Hendricks and a well-known preacher out for dinner) – You get the point. In the world we are to be wise as serpents and gentle as doves! If you accept the call to respond to God in faithful living, you must be godly before a watching world. The testimony of your Savior is riding on it. I have failed at this point more times than I wish to admit. It is not pretty and it accomplishes nothing good. (Daughter in the Dr.'s office). That kind of negative behavior is foolish, and by the way, is how we used to act **before** Christ changed our lives! Do you remember what you used to be?

II. REMINDER OF WHAT WE USED TO BE (3)

- A. Senseless – ESV says “foolish.” This is without spiritual understanding. It describes what we were prior to God quickening our hearts. Paul nails the definition in Ephesians 4:18 – ***They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of***

the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. That was true of us before Christ. That is true of those around us now. Don't be surprised by it. Remember that you were there once too! That is not a good place to return! We were also once...

- B. Disobedient – We were obstinate, un-persuadable. We had wandered far from the truth and had no desire to go anywhere close to it. We had no interest in the will of God, only in what we wanted to do! We were...
- C. Deceived – We could not be persuaded because the evil one had convinced us that we already possessed the truth. Do you remember being like that?
- D. Slaves – We were enslaved by our own desires and finding some pleasure in them. The real nature of the pleasures of sin is bondage to those sins without the ability to escape on our own. The desires keep increasing as the level of satisfaction diminishes. We become slaves to the very things we thought brought us happiness and fulfillment. We also used to be...
- E. Envious and malicious – This is the inevitable result of slavery to sin. In our misery we begrudge others any good fortune they may experience which will likely lead to the desire to end that good fortune. One writer said, "If my life is involved in satisfying my desires and pleasures, then the greater my desires, the more questionable my methods in obtaining them...my character will increasingly become more evil." As this cycle continues, the unredeemed sinner becomes to others and even to himself...
- F. Detestable and filled with hatred. Sin breeds mistrust and envy and malicious thoughts and actions designed to put others down in order to raise us up. That is what we were once like. Now maybe you have never gone that far, but it was there ready to blossom under the right circumstances, but the Lord rescued you. He spared you from all of this. When we look around and see all of these things, it may keep us from being so critical, and cause us to be more concerned and caring toward those outside of Christ. By the way, what do we expect from pagans? We would have remained in that state as well, except something marvelously changed!

III. REMINDER OF WHAT HAS CHANGED (4-7) In the midst of all of that junk...I love this...there was...

- A. The appearance of love and kindness – The only reason we are morally and spiritually better off is because God intervened. In the words of John Piper, "**We were slaves to desires and pleasures that were so powerful we could not taste and see that the Lord**

was good. So far as our ability to know and trust and love God was concerned, we were dead.” ○ but His love and kindness did appear through His Word by His Spirit and **He saved us...**and we received...

- B. The extension of mercy – Paul uses a bold contrast here – ***not because of works done by us*** (emphatic) ***in righteousness, but according to his own mercy...*** The works we do outside of Christ are not seen in high esteem (Isaiah 64:5-6). We were powerless to do anything to change. But God had a plan for that and it did not depend on us.
- C. The power of regeneration – We are washed by the Word and we are given new life. To regenerate something is to quicken it, to make it live when it is dead. That is what God did for us. And that is what we desire (at least I hope this is so for us) that He do for those with whom we rub shoulders in our community.
- D. The promise of renewal – We are renewed day by day by the Spirit who was poured out on us richly by Christ Jesus. Why is faith not mentioned here? The reason is because the emphasis is on what God has done! And now we are heirs, sharing in this new order of things. In the words of Paul (v. 7), ***...that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*** “Having been justified by His grace” is the qualifier. The realization is found in our hope of eternal life. We have confidence assurance of eternal life because the God of grace has declared us righteous and promised us that we are heirs with Him! When Paul says “being justified by his grace we might become *heirs according to the hope of eternal life,*” he means that we become **“heirs of everything included in that eternal life—new heavens, new earth, new body, new perfected relationships, new sinless sight of all that is good and glorious, and new capacities for a kind of pleasure in God that will exceed all your dreams”** (from Piper, 2008 sermon on Titus 3). We are new creations in Christ. Everything has changed for us spiritually. It is about time our behavior matched our position! So what remains for us to do in our community if we are to respond to God in faithful living there?

IV. REMINDER OF WHAT REMAINS FOR US TO DO (8-10) We must be involved in a...

- A. Confident affirmation of God's Word – How do we affirm God's Word? We speak often of His Word and we practice His Word before a watching world. It is really no more complicated than that. It is not easy to do, but it is not complicated to understand. Affirm His Word. It's true. It works. We can trust the Word of God because we can trust

the God of the Word!

- B. Continual application of good works – Christianity was never intended to be hidden. We were never supposed to be “secret disciples” of Jesus. There were some in the Gospels like Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus who tried for a time, but they were unable to remain secret. We are lights in the world. Lights are to illuminate and to expose, not to hide and extinguish. One of the ways we “let our light shine” is by doing good works for others. Good deeds puzzle the unregenerate. They want to know our angle. They want to know our motive, what we get out of it. When our motive is just to do good for them, they don’t get it. When they press and we say it is to bring glory to God, they really don’t get it! But they can’t get it out of their minds.

Conclusion

1. Let’s put this all together. We have come to the conclusion that we have the assignment as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God to be faithful (trustworthy). We are to respond to God in everything, in every way, in faithful living. On the personal level, when we are alone and no one else is watching, we are to respond to God in faithful living. In the context of our family, we are to do the same. Whether as a sibling or a parent or a spouse or a son or daughter, we remain servants of Christ and stewards of all that God has entrusted to us, so we must be faithful. The responsibility widens as we are placed into the context of people of like-precious faith. God designed the church to be an extended family and a place to grow and develop and encourage and love one another. This is God’s family. He is the head of the family and we belong to Him because He both quickened us and purchased us. As members of His family we are to be faithful to Him. And that faithfulness to Him is fleshed out in our love for one another. But what about the world where we live, the community in which God has placed us?
2. We were not called to get in our holy huddle and never leave. We were given the assignment to live in the world, rubbing shoulders with those who hate Christ as well as those associated with Christ. It can be uncomfortable, sometimes dangerous, maybe even deadly, but we are to represent Christ – responding faithfully to Him as His ambassadors of good will in an ungrateful and unholy community. If we fail to be faithful to Him in our community, we are being disobedient children. But how can we fulfill this assignment?

3. The answer is right here. God has told us what we are to be and He has and continues to work on us to make us what we need to be. And if we think the assignment is impossible, that no one will ever respond to our proclamation of His gospel, we need to think again. You see, we did! We were once where these in our community are now. But God did a work in you, didn't He! Let's listen very carefully one more time to Titus 3:4-7 - **4 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 5 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, 6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.** Is that your testimony? Then let it be known.
4. But what if they won't listen? Verse 8 says - **The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.** We keep doing good works. We keep showing the wonder of God's changing power in our lives. For whom are these things excellent and profitable? Everyone! We profit because our lives are modeling Christ, who went about doing good. We profit because we are responding in faithful living and that pleases God and that brings me joy because I find my satisfaction in Him. And those around me profit because they are exposed to the glory of God and the mercy and grace of His redemptive power! And God may draw them to Himself. They may trust Christ and be saved! But even if they continue to reject the Savior, He is glorified because we are being faithful to that which He has given to us to do.
5. There will always be temptations and distractions to turn our heads away from Christ, away from faithful living – that's verses 9 and 10, but God is able to keep us on the path toward faithful living!
6. Don't forget what you are to be and what you used to be and what has changed. And please don't forget to affirm the word as you do good works for the glory of Christ to those around you so that you might adorn the Gospel so that our community might know the true treasure found in Christ as it is seen in His people as they respond to Him in faithful living!