

TITUS 3:1-8

CHRISTIAN COURTESY IN A POLITICALLY CORRECT WORLD

“Remind [the believers] 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. 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. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour 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 Saviour, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. 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.”¹

Have you ever heard someone say something like “I’m sick of political correctness”; and then, attempting to prove the point, the same individual uses hurtful epithets to describe other people? Or perhaps you have noticed that those who often decry what they call “hate speech” are the first to label someone else a “bigot?” So very often, those who claim to be most offended by others are quick to label others using hateful names, such as “racist,” “sexist” or “homophobic.” It leads me to ask, “Whatever happened to courtesy? More correctly, perhaps I should ask, “Whatever happened to civility in public discourse?”

That is the question Gina Dalfonzo explored in an article, “The Lost Virtue of Courtesy,” that can be found at *Christianity Today Online*.² In that article, Ms. Dalfonzo noted that in **Mere Christianity**, C. S. Lewis described courtesy as the idea “that no one give any kind of preference to himself.” She noted that Lewis wrote “Courtesy is one hallmark of a fully Christian society.” Seize that thought, *Courtesy is one hallmark of a fully Christian society*. A society that lacks courtesy cannot be said to be Christian. For some years, secularists and modernist ministers have insisted that we now live in a “post-Christian” era. If the fact that people take themselves far too seriously and if generalised rudeness witnessed on a daily basis is any indication, then we would be hard-pressed to claim that ours is a Christian society.

I fear that the attitudes that now characterise this dying world have been adopted to a distressing extent by the professed people of God. We have made violence our entertainment and biting sarcasm our amusement. We have become so touchy that every niggling slight, real or imagined, ignites our outrage. We no longer teach our youth to ignore slights and we permit youth to throw temper tantrums to get their way. Universities and colleges no longer challenge students to think critically or to listen to differing views. Rather, these institutions have forsaken the mandate to provide higher education, becoming glorified nursery schools where students are indoctrinated and treated as precious snowflakes. The anonymity of social media permits us to slander and castigate everyone, even those deserving our respect. Tragically, Christians are increasingly undifferentiated from the fallen world in which we live. We act this way despite being cautioned against such actions in the Word of God.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² Gina Dalfonzo, “The Lost Virtue of Courtesy,” *Christianity Today*, December 16, 2010, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/decemberweb-only/59-42.0.html>, accessed 16 April 2017

COURTESY IS A CHRISTIAN VIRTUE — “Remind [the believers] 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.” When the Apostle writes, “remind the believers,” he indicates that we should already know what is coming. Christian courtesy should be taught from earliest days in this holy Faith.

Christians should be godly in speech and in conduct. Throughout the New Testament are multiple admonitions for how Christians are to conduct themselves before the watching world. Our deportment and our speech reveals the reality of the work that the Spirit of God is doing in our lives. I refer you to what was written to the Colossian believers, an extended passage that exemplifies expected conduct and speech for believers. Paul instructs the Colossian Christians, “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

“Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

“Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” [COLOSSIANS 3:1-17].

Another well-known instance of such moral instruction is found in the Ephesian Letter. There, the Apostle writes, “Be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

“But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore, do not become partners with them” [EPHESIANS 5:1-7].

Admittedly, New Testament usage of the word translated “courtesy” [*prautēs*] is infrequent. The word is sometimes translated “meekness” or more frequently, “gentleness.” This gives us some understanding of what Paul envisioned when he wrote this passage. It is essential that we understand that the Apostle is more focused on the attitude of believers than he is focused on their actions. *Attitudes dictate actions!*

TITUS 3:1-8
CHRISTIAN COURTESY IN A POLITICALLY CORRECT WORLD

In the passage, Paul issues several specific commands that detail expectations of believers. Believers are “*to be submissive to rulers and authorities.*” Writing the saints in Rome, Paul taught, “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God” [ROMANS 13:1]. No Christian should ever be guilty of slanderous speech against those who govern. We are to honour the Prime Minister, the Premier and the Mayor. They may be scoundrels and wastrels, but they rule with God’s permission. Remember, Nero was the Emperor at the time Paul wrote the passage cited from the Letter to Roman Christians.

Consequently, this teaching complements what Peter has written to Jewish Christians scattered abroad by persecution. “Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people” [1 PETER 2:13-15]. Christians are taught, and they are expected “to be submissive to rulers and authorities.”

Christians are “*to be obedient.*” Surely, Christians are to be obedient to those whom God appoints to direct the congregations. “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” [HEBREWS 13:7, 8]. That eighth verse is not often quoted in concert with the seventh; however, the intent of what is written is to remind readers that it was the Master who appointed our leaders. Thus, Christians are to respect His appointment and to render respect to their leaders.

A similar verse is provided soon after this previous verse. “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you” [HEBREWS 13:17]. It is honourable to render obedience to Christ through showing deference to those whom He appoints.

The obedience that shows courtesy extends to those who are permitted the rule in civil affairs and to those who oversee our work. Christians are to be obedient, until those who lead attempt to move into realms that are immoral, unethical or ungodly. At that point, the child of God has a higher obligation to honour Christ the Lord. At that point, we who follow Christ must stand, as did Peter and John, declaring, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard” [ACTS 4:19, 20].

When we cultivate a spirit of obedience before the Lord, we will fulfil the admonition of the Apostle to the Gentiles. “If anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work” [2 TIMOTHY 2:21].

Then, we are reminded that Christians are “*to be ready for every good work.*” In context, this would appear to mean that Christians should keep the civil law. Christians should be the best citizens any community can have. They are to be engaged in the process of governing, if possible. They are to be supportive of sound government, encouraging participation where possible. They are to encourage good governance, commending those who lead when they act in commendable fashion and holding them accountable when they act contrary to good order. The intent of the verse likely extends far beyond this, however, meaning that we must do good whenever possible to our neighbours. We are to be kindly disposed to all people, seeking opportunity to do good.

The Apostle shifts attention to the broader aspects of society when he reminds us that we are “*to speak evil of no one.*” We will do well to recall the instruction provided in the Letter to Ephesian Christians. There, the Apostle writes, “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you” [EPHESIANS 4:31, 32].

The speech characteristic of this fallen world should never come out of the believer’s mouth. We see the multiplied examples of slandering those with whom we disagree politically; no Christian can in good conscience engage in such slanderous speech. Recall the words Peter has given to all who would follow the Master. “To this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly” [1 PETER 2:21-23].

Grounded on this example, Christians have received the command, “Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. For

‘Whoever desires to love life
and see good days,
let him keep his tongue from evil
and his lips from speaking deceit;
let him turn away from evil and do good;
let him seek peace and pursue it.
For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,
and his ears are open to their prayer.
But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.’”

[1 PETER 3:9-12]

Earlier, I referred to a passage from the Ephesian Encyclical. Look at one verse read previously, EPHESIANS 5:4, taking that verse to heart. “Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.” We neither glorify God, nor will we change evil hearts, by adopting the language of this dying world. We must speak the truth in love, seeking to turn those who hear to righteousness.

Christians are “*to avoid quarrelling*” and they are “*to be gentle.*” Elders, ideally examples of Christian maturity, are expected to be “not violent but gentle” and they are to not be “quarrelsome” [1 TIMOTHY 3:3]. *At issue is the need for Christians to be aggressive with love, rather than being passive with a desire to avoid evil.* We are not to be slanderous or malicious. We are, however, responsible to speak the truth, doing so with love.

This is the point which may serve to generate hostility from the world. To avoid combative speech does not mean that we must be silent concerning evil. Neither can it mean that we are to permit the world to define what is acceptable and what is unacceptable in speech. In our broken world, people wish to identify themselves by lifestyle choices; they are resentful of those who do not agree with their choice. Consequently, Christians are often accused of being mean-spirited, of deliberately attacking sinners, because they will not agree that the choices are innocuous or even good. We are told with increasing frequency that the Bible is “hate literature” because God pointedly condemns sinful conduct as hurtful and destructive.

How should we respond to such hurtful, deliberate attacks against our conscience? Surely, if we love people we cannot ignore behaviour that is destructive to the individual? Surely, if we care about our culture we cannot ignore behaviour that leads to cultural disintegration? If you were experiencing difficulty breathing, and the condition became so severe that you visited a family doctor who ordered tests, scans and x-rays, you would be comforted in the hope that the physician was going to give assurance that your health was fine. However, after reviewing all the data, imagine that the physician said, “Everything is fine! Go home, take two aspirin and check back in a couple of months.”

Nevertheless, you knew everything was not fine—your breathing was becoming more laboured, you were coughing up blood and the pain was becoming unbearable. This would lead you to contact another physician, who likewise ordered tests, scans and x-rays. After examining the results, this physician solemnly warned, “You have an aggressive cancer. We must perform surgery immediately, after which you will undergo chemotherapy and radiation therapy.”

Which physician exhibits concern for your health? Which of the two physicians is your friend? Which physician is correct? The first made you feel good about yourself, though you were dying. At least you didn’t feel bad about your condition, except you knew you were ill. The second was less concerned about your feelings; but this physician was intent on keeping you alive and giving you a cure. The second physician told you the truth, even though the truth hurt you and would require many adjustments on your part. Yet, we live in a world in which many have decided that if a Christian does not agree with their self-destructive behaviour, he is hateful.

To persist in such attitudes, lashing out in rage at anyone who disagrees, demonstrates that individuals have nothing in common with God who is gracious. It is as though we are witnessing the conditions that prevailed in Israel during the dark days of the Judges. You will recall that, “Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” [**JUDGES 17:6; 21:25**]. Increasingly, jurists and community organisers appear to have taken lessons from Ahab, King of Israel. You will recall that when Jehoshaphat asked if there was a Prophet of the LORD in the land, Ahab responded, “There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the LORD, Micaiah the son of Imlah, but I hate him, for he never prophesies good concerning me, but evil” [**1 KINGS 22:8**]. The one man who would speak the truth was hated and his warning rejected. That seems to presage this day. Nevertheless, the Christian must “*show perfect courtesy toward all people.*”

The admonition to mature saints and the encouragement to younger Christians is still, “Pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will” [**2 TIMOTHY 2:22-26**].

SELF-CENTREDNESS MARKS THE WORLDLY LIFESTYLE — “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.” Before we castigate the various groups that appear intent on destroying society as we know it, consider where we were before Christ found us. Christians who adopt the attitude and actions of this fallen world demonstrate that they haven’t moved very far from where they began. Christians who destroy others with their tongues are acting as if they were never redeemed.

Asaph described the attitude of unredeemed people when he wrote,

“Pride is their necklace;
 violence covers them as a garment.
Their eyes swell out through fatness;
 their hearts overflow with follies.
They scoff and speak with malice;
 loftily they threaten oppression.
They set their mouths against the heavens,
 and their tongue struts through the earth.”

[PSALM 73:6-9]

Ouch! That is not a very wholesome image if applied to one professing to follow the Saviour! The description may speak of those identified as belonging to the world, but Christians shouldn't be characterised in this way.

Before his death, Church Colson wrote, “In our post-Christian society, ‘me first’ means ‘everybody else second.’ When people become their own gods, they naturally end up giving *all* the preference to themselves and none to others. They place a higher value on self-expression than on kindness to others, because they believe their own opinions and feelings matter more.

“Today's political correctness has become a sort of secular alternative to the old Christian virtue of courtesy. But this political correctness is being promoted and practiced for the most part by the same people who desire to expel Christian values from the public square. So, we end up with a strange dichotomy: a society full of folks who condemn hatred in one breath, and spew hatred with the next.”³ Colson exposed a fatal flaw in contemporary society. What is worse, he exposed attitudes that are becoming commonplace among the professed people of God. It is not necessarily the case that more unconverted people are occupying the pews, though such may be the case. Rather, it seems that the attitudes of this dying world have thoroughly infected the professed people of God; they are bringing the attitudes of the world into the churches!

Whenever I hear a Christian decrying the degeneration of speech in contemporary society, and then hear that same Christian hurl epithets at those with whom she disagrees, I cannot help but think of the Words James wrote to Christians among the earliest churches. “How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water” [JAMES 3:5-12].

What do we say about other churches? How do we speak of other Christians who don't measure up to *our* standard, despite God's obvious blessing? I've encountered quite enough professed saints who seize every opportunity to exalt themselves by tearing down others. We have a culture that is best described as tribal. Unfortunately, the identical tribalism characterises an increasing segment of the community of Faith in this day late in the Church Age.

³ Chuck Colson, “Embracing Courtesy, January 7, 2011, <http://www.breakpoint.org/bpcommentaries/entry/13/16153>

TITUS 3:1-8
CHRISTIAN COURTESY IN A POLITICALLY CORRECT WORLD

Like savages, intent on destroying a neighbouring tribe, modern Christians segregate into separate tribes from which they fling verbal missiles at one another. I'm not suggesting that we should play the Rodney King act, wistfully whining, "Can't we all just get along." Instead, I admonish all Christians, and especially those participating in this particular assembly, to "make every effort to be found at peace with [Christ] without spot of blemish" [cf. 2 PETER 3:14, HCSB]. This is nothing less than applying sound theology to daily life.

What I mean is that we who know Christ should recognise that each individual is created in the image of God, what theologians speak of as *imago Dei*. This, of course, flows from the earliest verses of the Word of God. You will recall what is written in the first book of the Bible: "God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'

"So, God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

"And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth'" [GENESIS 1:26-28]

It bears repeating that each person has worth; each individual deserves to be treated with dignity and to be accorded respect. The reason this is true is because each individual bears the image of God. Christians, of all people, should recognise the truth inherent in this position. Do not say that you cannot see the image of God in an individual, for by the mere virtue of existence, each person *does* reflect the image of God. Christ died for people, and not for angels. For this reason, we refuse to condone the slaughter of the innocent *in utero*. For this reason, we demand that people be held accountable for their sinful behaviour. Though we must never condone sin in any individual, we still insist that each individual deserves respect as a person. All sin is reprehensible; however, Christ died for sinners, and that includes each of us.

It is tragic to note that we Christians too often are influenced by the toxic culture in which we live. Thus, we begin to behave just like the rest of the world. We desperately need God's grace in order to do better, and we must do better. If we will recover the lost virtue of courtesy, we must again apply the biblical truth that each individual is created in the image of God. When we do this, we will provide an example that is woefully lacking in our broken world and an example that is desperately needed to change what we have become. We must not imagine that our children will be distinguished from the inhabitants of this darkened world until we ourselves are convicted and change our behaviour.

TRANSFORMING POWER IS THE CHRISTIAN HERITAGE — "When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour 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 Saviour, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. 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."

TITUS 3:1-8
CHRISTIAN COURTESY IN A POLITICALLY CORRECT WORLD

Long before the advent of Twitter or Facebook, Confucius voiced a concept that has proven truer in this Internet age than at any time in the past. He wrote, “to see and listen to the wicked is already the beginning of wickedness.”⁴ Something about the anonymity of the Internet entices otherwise good people to cast inhibition aside, acting without restraint. Living in the solitude of a virtual social world, people exhibit the appalling decay of morality and courtesy. I am not suggesting that the Internet is evil, but I am cautioning that the ability to hide behind a virtual masque entices each of us to fall into sin. Consequently, people who would otherwise speak respectfully and act with kindness often assume a crass, even a wicked persona, to write the vilest slanders concerning others who are not of their tribe.

Increasingly, we witness evil streamed live, until we unconsciously accept it as normal. On Easter Sunday, in Ohio, a man streamed live on Facebook the murder of a grandfather returning home from Easter dinner with his family.⁵ This was the latest in an increasingly common live broadcast of wicked acts including child abuse,⁶ torture of a mentally handicapped young man,⁷ murders,⁸ the murder of a child and suicide,⁹ attempted murder,¹⁰ a growing number of incidents of sexual assault and rape¹¹ and terror attacks.¹²

⁴ <http://iheartinspiration.com/quotations/to-see-and-listen-to-the-wicked-is-already-the-beginning-of-wickedness/>, accessed 29 April 2017

⁵ “Easter day slaughter’: Cleveland cops search for alleged killer who broadcast murder on Facebook,” FoxNews.com, <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2017/04/16/easter-day-slaughter-cleveland-cops-searching-for-alleged-killer-who-broadcast-murder-on-facebook.html>, accessed 29 April 2017

⁶ Alan Yuhas, “Ohio mother who taped son to wall on Facebook Live faces charges,” The Guardian, 20 January, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/jan/19/facebook-live-video-mom-tapes-son-wall-arrest>, accessed 29 April 2017

⁷ Emanuella Grinberg, “Chicago torture: Facebook Live video leads to 4 arrests,” CNN, January 5, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2017/01/04/us/chicago-facebook-live-beating/index.html>, accessed 29 April 2017

⁸ Chris White, “Facebook Live Stream Video Appears to Show Drive-By Shooting Death,” Law Newz, June 27th, 2016, <http://lawnewz.com/video/facebook-live-stream-video-appears-to-show-shooting-death/>, accessed 29 April 2017

⁹ “Thai man murders child, kills himself on Facebook Live,” Digital Journal, Apr 25, 2017, <http://www.digitaljournal.com/news/world/thai-man-murders-child-kills-himself-on-facebook-live/article/491092>, accessed 29 April 2017

¹⁰ Patrick Clarke, “Suspect Sought in Facebook Live-Stream Shooting Amid Chicago’s Soaring Murder Rate,” ABC News, Apr 4, 2016, <http://abcnews.go.com/US/suspect-sought-facebook-live-stream-shooting-amid-chicagos/story?id=38135898>, accessed 29 April 2017

¹¹ Mike McPhate, “Teenager Is Accused of Live-Streaming a Friend’s Rape on Periscope,” NY Times, April 18, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/19/us/periscope-rape-case-columbus-ohio-video-livestreaming.html?_r=0, accessed 29 April 2017; Aarti Shahani, “Live-Streaming of Alleged Rape Shows Challenges of Flagging Video in Real Time, NRP, April 19, 2016, <http://www.npr.org/sections/alltechconsidered/2016/04/19/474783485/live-streaming-of-alleged-rape-shows-challenges-of-flagging-video-in-real-time>, accessed 29 April 2017; “Facebook Live ‘broadcasts gang rape’ of woman in Sweden,” BBC News, 23 January 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38717186>, accessed 29 April 2017; Elizabeth Roberts, “Three arrested in Sweden over ‘gang rape’ on Facebook Live,” CNN, January 24, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2017/01/24/europe/sweden-rape-facebook-live/index.html>, accessed 29 April 2017; “3 men convicted in Swedish rape livestreamed on Facebook,” Toronto Sun, April 25, 2017, <http://www.torontosun.com/2017/04/25/3-men-convicted-in-swedish-rape-livestreamed-on-facebook>, accessed 29 April 2017; “Gang rape of 15-year-old girl on Facebook live described as ‘pure hell,’” Global News, March 22, 2017, <http://globalnews.ca/video/3326865/gang-rape-of-15-year-old-girl-on-facebook-live-described-as-pure-hell>, accessed 29 April 2017; “Chicago Facebook Live gang rape: Suspects sought as family speaks out,” FoxNews, March 22, 2017, <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2017/03/22/chicago-facebook-live-gang-rape-suspects-sought-as-family-speaks-out.html>, accessed 29 April 2017

¹² Tim Hume, Lindsay Isaac and Paul Cruickshank, “French terror attacker threatened Euro 2016 in Facebook video, source says,” CNN, June 14, 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/06/14/europe/french-policeman-terror-attack/index.html?iid=EL>, accessed 29 April 2017

I warn Christians against feasting the eyes or the mind on dishonourable spectacles such as these mentioned. I say this because such spectacles wound the soul and induce the child of God to grow coarse in speech, in attitude and in what will be tolerated. Roman religion did not combat the public cruelty of the gladiatorial shows. These bloody spectacles were entertainment for the ancient world, much like crime dramas and murder mysteries are entertainment for modern Canadians. For instance, at the dedication of the temple of the deified Julius Caesar in 29 B.C., Augustus staged eight gladiatorial shows, with 10,000 fighters. At the dedication of the temple of Mars in 2 B.C., 260 lions and 36 crocodiles served the pleasure of the spectators.¹³ In the gladiatorial shows, hundreds and thousands killed one another or were killed by wild beasts for the amusement of spectators. In the eyes of Romans, the life of a barbarian, or even of a Christian, was of no other use than to serve the cruel amusement of the people. The people enjoyed vicariously, in the quietness of their homes, the martial blood-shedding of the frontiers.¹⁴

The effect of such violent blood-shed on ancient Christians, and by extrapolation the impact of bloody spectacles on contemporary Christians, is revealed in a striking example provided by Augustine in his Confessions.¹⁵ His friend Alypius, afterward bishop of Tagaste, was induced by some friends in 385 to visit the amphitheatre at Rome. Alypius went, resolving to close his eyes against the bloody spectacle. He would not watch, but when one gladiator fell, the wild shouting of the multitude excited his curiosity. He opened his eyes, though prepared to despise and resist what he imagined he would see. However, he was stuck with a more grievous wound in his soul than any combatant received in the body. When he saw the blood, he immediately imbibed a love for the spectacle; he could not turn away. He fixed his eye on the bloody scene before him, caught the spirit of rage and vengeance; and before he was even aware of what was happening Alypius became drunk with bloodthirsty frenzy. He looked, shouted, applauded, burned and carried with him the frenzy which would draw him back, even taking others with him. It was only through the intervention of the Risen Saviour that he was at last delivered from this wickedness. To watch these games was wickedness.

Christianity finally succeeded in closing the amphitheatre in 404 A.D. It was the heroic self-denial of an eastern monk by the name of Telemachus, who journeyed to Rome specifically to protest this inhuman barbarity that at last struck the conscience even of the pagans. He threw himself into the arena, separated the combatants, and then was torn to pieces by the populace. Thus, Telemachus became a martyr to humanity.¹⁶

I say these things to make the case for us as followers of the Prince of Peace to consider most carefully what we feed our souls. If we feed our mind on sarcastic retort to every slight, real or imagined, we will soon jettison courtesy as a virtue. If we feed our souls on violence, it should follow that we will grow more violent in our own response to any action or attitude with which we disagree. If we feast our eyes on pornography, we will shortly degrade even our spouse and our children, reducing them in our minds to objects to be used rather than individuals created in the image of God who are to be loved and cherished.

¹³ Hubert Cancik, "Roman Religion," (art.), in Erwin Fahlbusch and Geoffrey William Bromiley, **The encyclopedia of Christianity**, 2005 (Logos)

¹⁴ Philip Schaff and David Schley Schaff, **History of the Christian Church, vol. 3** (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, NY 1910) 123

¹⁵ Saint Augustine Bishop of Hippo, **The Confessions of St. Augustine**, Conf. 6.8, trans. E. B. Pusey (Logos Research Systems, Inc., Oak Harbor, WA 1996)

¹⁶ So relates Theodoret: Hist. eccl. l. v., c. 26.; See Schaff and Schaff, op. cit., 124; "Review of the Union of Church and State in the Nicene Age, and Its Effects upon Public Morals and Religion. An Historical Essay," The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review XXXVI, no. 1-4 (1864): 32-33

TITUS 3:1-8
CHRISTIAN COURTESY IN A POLITICALLY CORRECT WORLD

Followers of the Risen Christ will do well to heed the admonition of the Apostle to the Gentiles. Writing the Philippians, Paul instructed Christians, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things” [PHILIPPIANS 4:8, 9].

Before responding to a comment, delivering a riposte or scorching some poor soul, we should discipline ourselves to work through these suggestions. “Is what I am about to say true? Is it honourable? Is it just? Will my speech be recognised as pure? As lovely? As commendable? Am I seeking out what is excellent? Is my attitude worthy of praise?” Then, if all these items are worthy of a child of the Living God, ask, “Am I following the example of the Apostles? Is this what is taught in the Word?” Much of what we want to pass off as Christian, though it is often more closely identified with the world, will soon be forgotten as we focus on exhibiting Christian courtesy. We will begin to embrace courtesy as a virtue, and we will enjoy greater power with mankind because we will be walking in the power of the Living Christ.

It was in demonstration of divine goodness and loving kindness that we were saved. Therefore, our lives must be marked by the smile of Heaven if we will honour our Saviour. Christians, we who are transformed through the regeneration of Christ our Master, must devote ourselves to good works. The good works that are expected include refusing to speak evil of others, avoiding quarrelling, being gentle—in short, God’s holy people are to demonstrate Christian courtesy toward all people. Let it begin today; let it begin with us.

We are sinners, and though redeemed, we still fall short of the glory of God. We must never permit the comfort of tribalism overrule the spiritual virtue of common decency. Though we may have failed to exhibit courtesy in the past, our prior failure does not mean that we may abandon all attempts at decency and courtesy. Let each child of God resolve to be an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity [see 1 TIMOTHY 4:12].

There is scant possibility that unbelievers will receive this message, they do not have the Spirit of God living within. The unsaved do not have His transforming power to resist the spirit of this dying age. Yet, the message to all such individuals remains, “You must be born again.” Christ Jesus died because of man’s sinful condition. Jesus was buried, though He broke the bonds of death, rising from the dead on the third day. He showed Himself to those whom He chose before ascending into the heavens. He is now seated at the right-hand of the Father, from whence He is coming again to bring salvation to those who are looking for His return. And that includes you, if you believe this message of life. The Word of God promises all, “If you openly agree with God, ‘Jesus Christ is Master,’ believing with all your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be set free. It is with one’s unreserved commitment that he believes resulting in a right standing with God and through open agreement with Christ’s resurrection that he is set free.” The Word of God promises, “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord shall be saved” [see ROMANS 10:9-13]. Believe this message; receive this promise and be saved. Do it now. Amen.