

## HOW YOUR LIFE CAN MODEL THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL

Teaching Through Titus Verse by Verse - Part five

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### NARROWING THE GENERATION GAP - WHAT THE ELDERLY SHOULD TEACH THE YOUNG IN A HEALTHY CHURCH

**Titus 2:1-5** - “But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. [2] Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. [3] Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, [4] and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, [5] to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.”

Of course, the strange thing about those verses is all the virtues listed in verses 2 through 4 don't seem to have anything to do with the doctrine Paul encourages Titus to teach in verse 1. The lesson is the New Testament never approaches **self-control** and **purity** and **kindness** as though they were mere **virtues** to be pasted on to the outside behavior of life. They are to flow from a grasp of God's amazing grace in Christ and the character of the Holy Spirit. They are the **fruit** of the Christian life, not the **source** of it.

Those words, “**But as for you...**”, point to the coming contrast in Paul's message. They make you look back at the previous thought at the end of chapter one. Speaking of the false teachers and those who follow them, Paul says this: **Titus 1:16** - “**They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.**”

So Paul now moves on to prescribe to young Titus how he's to function in this poor environment - “**They** are like **that**. **You** must be like **this**. **You** don't take your cue from **them**.” Just pause there for a minute. This is the hardest part of steadfastness in Christ. Paul is saying it is not **automatic** that Titus **won't** have his life shaped by his peers. Counter-cultural holiness is the hardest, though most rewarding, life of all. We all like to use the lowest common denominator of professed Christian life-style to make a mild commitment to Christ seem reasonable.

There's something about Paul's words here that I love. I'd like to offer this encouragement right at the outset of this teaching. Let me tell you something I've noticed after years of pastoral ministry. There is nothing people use more to excuse their poor spiritual attitude than the disappointment they have with the things they've experienced in the church, or the example they've seen in professing Christians, or the treatment they've received from Christian contacts and associates.

“I've been so let down and hurt because of the trust I've put in Christian people. How can I possibly not be affected by the deep disappointment I'm feeling? My faith has been so marred and undermined. I've already decided it's going to take me quite a while to get over this, and the church is to blame!”

As a young pastor Titus could have been deeply scarred by these professing teachers who claimed to love Jesus but lived like the devil. He could have chosen to sit on his hands and wring out his tears over all the bad experiences he had gone through. He could have played the role of his own analyst and convinced himself he would never get over this difficult start to his ministry. “The church is full of hypocrites. There aren't any really genuine godly people around anymore, and I'm just going to stew on that for a little while.”

Then Paul comes on the scene. “**Titus, that's them. This is you.**” There is immense power and cutting edge excitement in those words: **2:1.... “But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine....2:7....Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity....”**

There is a real gospel with real power. Don't pull away from the genuine just because people you respect don't follow through or live it out. Paul deals very pointedly with this issue of spiritual disappointment and loss of confidence in God in his letter to the Romans - **Romans 3:3** - “**What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God?**”

In this verse in Romans, Paul is dealing with the issue of God's faithfulness to the Jews. His original plan will not be changed by their rebellion. But the point he makes is one that bears applying to us all. Just because **some** people take a stance of unbelief, that doesn't mean God isn't faithful to His promise. **Their** unbelief has no bearing on God's goodness to **you** if you follow Him. Their unbelief doesn't negate God's promise to you. Some **other** person's fall doesn't necessitate **your** failure.

Please allow the loving prompt of the Holy Spirit to awaken your ear right now - “**But as for you....**” Listen, refuse to tie your spiritual life to the Christianity of others. You aren't chained to anyone but Jesus Christ. If their faith isn't genuine, make sure yours is. If they don't live it well, make sure you do. The darker it gets, the brighter you can shine!

Here's Paul's counsel to Titus:

#### 1) **AFTER REFUTING FALSE DOCTRINE (1:13), TITUS IS TO TEACH THE PEOPLE TO LIVE IN SOUND DOCTRINE**

**Titus 2:1** - “**But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine.**”

There's a point here that shouldn't be permitted to escape our notice. Paul doesn't just say, “**Teach the things which are fitting for true doctrine.**” He uses a very specific word - “**sound**” doctrine. The Greek word is *hygiaino* (hoo-gee-I-no). It's variously translated in the New Testament as meaning **healthy, healthful**, or sometimes just **safe**. It's the word from which we get our English word, **hygiene**. Again,

the emphasis on a **healthy condition** is obvious.

And that point shouldn't be glossed over too quickly. Shallow people are always too quick to dismiss ideas as merely **true** or **false**. I'm not denying the crucial importance of **absolute truth**. Not for a minute. But there is more at stake than intellectual accuracy in Biblical truth. That's why Paul chooses that word "**sound**" doctrine. He injects that concept of **soundness** in Christian doctrine. He refuses to leave the impression that ideas are only **mental** things - that they are of no real consequence to **cleanness** or **health** of life - to spiritual **hygiene**.

**All ideas have consequences.** Everything you learn in the realm of faith either brings **health and wholeness** or **sickness and corruption**. Ideas don't just enter your mind. They take your life somewhere. So Paul tells Titus not only to teach the people **truth**, but to teach the people the **soundness** of truth. Teach them to live out, in healthy consistent ways, the content of their faith. Make sure they learn the value - the **cleansing power** of doctrinal truth.

## 2) **TITUS MUST TEACH ALL THE AGE GROUPS TO LIVE UP TO THE TRUTH THEY KNOW**

**Titus 2:1** - "But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine."

Paul will go on to give very specific instructions about how truth needs to be applied to the various age groups, sexes, and the disadvantaged in the church on Crete. But there is one overarching principle behind each specific group. It's not enough for anyone to merely **know** the truth. They are to behave in a way that is **fitting** for the truth. Their lives should be **in sync** with the truth. Their lives should **display** the beauty and power of the truth with consistency and clarity. That's what he's probing at when he adds, "**...that the word of God may not be reviled**"(5b).

Paul uses the word "**accords**" to emphasize this process. It's really incomplete to think of the gospel as something merely to be **believed** or **received**. In North American Christianity we are frequently trained to think of the starting gate as the whole race. **Believing** the truth is vitally important. **Receiving** Christ is absolutely essential. But it's just the starting point. The life of the convert is to be the **setting** for the gospel the same way that the **ring** is to be the **setting for the diamond**.

**Philippians 2:14-15** - "Do all things without grumbling or questioning, [15] that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you **shine as lights** in the world...."

"**Shine as lights.**" Christians must sparkle. Their lives must set the gospel forth in observable brilliance. You don't just **receive** Christ Jesus, you **wear** Christ Jesus: **Galatians 3:27** - "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."

Gucci, Prada, Dior - people don't just **wear** those things because they don't like being naked. They **display** the label. That's what Paul says Christians must do with their life in Christ Jesus. That's Paul's picture - putting on Christ like you put on clothes. Have you ever seen someone at one time or another who was wearing something that was just **unfitting**? Reni and I usually have breakfast together on Thursday mornings. Then we go to the Mall of her choice. I usually don't notice, but she constantly whispers things like this to me - "**If you ever catch me putting on spandex when I'm 70, just lock me up.**" I assume that's her way of telling me she doesn't think the passing outfit was **in accord** (**Titus 2:1**) for the person wearing it.

Paul is calling Titus to teach these people that there is a mature understanding that all Christians need to grow up into - an appreciation of what is **in accord** - what **fits** in the godly life and what is **unfitting**. How we need to remember this. It's not what you can **get away with** and still make it to heaven. It's what makes the glory of Christ shine most brilliantly? What demonstrates my life revolves and finds its treasure in Him?

You can see this idea repeated throughout this whole second chapter of Titus. Jumping a bit ahead of ourselves you can see how Paul repeats the theme of the gospel **being made attractive** in the way we live our lives:

**Young women** are to live in such a way that "**...the Word of God may not be reviled**" (5). **Young men** are to live lives so obviously manifesting holiness "**...an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us**"(8). And finally, even the **poor slave** - the disadvantaged and mistreated in the Body of Christ - is to respond, even to mistreatment, "**...so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior**" (10).

I especially love that last reference to slaves. I can just picture this group of slaves - rough, unrefined, the uncultured of the day - starting to appear in the church sanctuary. They start showing up at home meetings, prayer meetings, teaching classes. They make profession of faith in Jesus Christ. Now they're getting the teaching. But they don't have a lot of Christian background. They have come out of the very lowest dog-eat-dog environment.

Then they come to Jesus. **Now they're getting the teaching.** They're getting the doctrines in their heads. But then they go back into very difficult, perhaps abusive situations. They can't call James Dobson. There's no confidential "slave hot-line" to phone.

Paul says those slaves now have quite a challenge ahead of them. They have to live - right in those horrible situations - "**adorning the gospel of Jesus Christ.**" They're getting the **teaching**. Now they have to model the **lifestyle**. Don't miss Paul's point here. It would be very easy for slaves to care more about establishing their legitimate rights, or press to display their new-found freedom and equality in Christ Jesus. But it was the mark of the extent of their passion for Christ that their main concern

was making Him look great - even in their response to mistreatment and injustice.

**Such is the incredible potential and power of the gospel.** It needs very little help. It will work against all odds. All of us can live our lives in ways that are courageously and creatively **fitting** for the gospel we profess with our lips. Our calling is to model a life **fitting** with the power of the gospel. His Word, His Church, and His Spirit **can** and **will** get the job done with our cooperation. It doesn't depend on your environment. It matters not how dark or hopeless things were when you started. There is such **wonderful hope** here!

But remember, it's not enough just to **believe** right. Our lives are the **setting** for the gospel.

### 3) TEACHING TRUTH IN THE GENERATION GAP

The first people Paul tells Titus to consider are the mature, aged saints in the church:

**Titus 2:2-4 - "Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. [3] Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, [4] and so train the young women to love their husbands and children...."**

Just consider this wonderful picture for a moment. Paul just assumes that these **seniors** - these **elderly saints** - are still as anxious to grow in their love for Jesus and their ministry to others as when they first started out in their Christian walk. They weren't sidelined. They were still **excited** about their walk with the Lord - **Psalms 71:17 - "O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds."** That's a tremendous attitude.

And Paul assumes they are still **teachable**. This would, after all, be a little awkward. Titus was young. These people were old. In many areas of life they knew more than Titus. But they still loved to embrace the Word and submit themselves to it, even if it came from a younger minister.

#### a) **Paul tells Titus to make sure these *older men* are modeling certain facets of spirituality to the congregation:**

- i) ***They were to be models of self-control (2).*** Now, as with all of these virtues, the elderly aren't **automatically** mature examples of temperance. But, if they've lived their lives close to their Lord, and if they were continuing to be growing Christians themselves, they should be the best examples of temperance because they, of all people, had the most experience of **what truly fills up a life and what doesn't**.

Self-controlled elderly men should show the younger people how to be content with **fewer** things so they can concentrate on **better** things. They're not just modeling how to retire, travel, live off their investments and kick back. They should demonstrate to the young how to stretch toward the finish line!

This is the kind of Body ministry Paul wants Titus to cultivate: If you are under **thirty-five**, you **need** the regular input of someone over **sixty-five** to keep you from using up all your youthful strength and energy chasing shadows and illusions.

Self-control is the ability to avoid the waste that comes from excess. Self-control comes from knowing which desires are trustworthy and which ones merely **feel** trustworthy. Self-control is the ability to keep your life focused on the **long term goal** without being sidetracked by tempting diversions that seem inviting but don't **take you anywhere**.

Follow the example of someone who's run the same race you're running and is closer to the finish line than you are. Believe me, the perspective changes. And it gains wisdom and focus as it moves along down the road.

In fact, if you're a younger person (and there are great advantages to being young as well), and you **don't** have some kind of interaction with people **outside** your own generation, you are going to put yourself through all sorts of painful experiences unnecessarily simply because you didn't tap into the advice of someone who fell into those same pot-holes long before you got to them.

- ii) ***Older men were to be models of dignity (2).*** "**Dignified**" is the exact word Paul uses. Dignity has come to mean something more stuffy in our time - like a black tie affair. But Paul has something else in mind. Other translations use the word "**reverence**."

Older men especially should model a **keen awareness of eternity**. They embrace **joy** but have little time for **foolishness**. They know with the passing of years the value of **time** and **opportunity**. Both are too precious to waste. They've learned life is too short for what's merely trite. Older

men should bring the whole church a little closer to life's finish line in perspective and longing.

- iii) **Older men should be sober-minded (2).** They have learned the kind of **discretion** and **discernment** that comes from walking with the Lord for years. Paul doesn't mean **sour** or **gloomy** when he urges **sober-mindedness**. He certainly doesn't mean without any sense of humor.

No. But what he's calling for are good examples in the church for the young to follow, who have learned that not everything the world dishes up as cute and hilarious is safe material for the Christian's laughter.

The secular media is dedicated to making sin less serious than it is. Without strong - and very courageous examples - the young tend to laugh along with the rest of the world. So the older men should be like those the writer of Hebrews describes who "...**have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil**" (Hebrews 5:14).

- iv) **Older men should model three shining virtues - faith, love and steadfastness (2).** Each of these is in need of constant polishing in all our lives.

**Faith.** With the passing of years should come, not an awareness of the **ease of life**, but the **faithfulness of God**. Older men should have access to the ears of the younger. They should be able to sit with them when they face trial and say, "Listen, I've been exactly where you are. Here's how to keep trusting God. Here's how to keep your faith strong. Don't give up! **You** can make it because **I** made it!" We all need such encouragement.

**Love.** It takes time and practice to learn to love when your love is not earned or even deserved. We all love the people we naturally click with. It takes great courage and commitment to love people through their weaknesses and through their sins and through their burdens.

It's beautiful the way Paul assumed that, as people aged, they could find even **more** time to give to care and ministry to others in need.

**Steadfastness.** Because of their place as examples to the rest of the Body, older men must not allow their age to take the edge off their prayer lives, their counsel, their persistence through fatigue and perhaps pain. They were to model a faith that **deepened** with time.

Next week we'll deal with Paul's instructions to teaching **older and younger women** in the church. But what we should all appreciate from these verses is the way spiritual life is **modeled and learned** in a church body like ours. **Salvation** is individual and personal. **Christian living** is not. It flows in corporate patterns, examples and generations. In an age where there is a great deal of pressure by church growth experts to **segregate** and **isolate** the different ages and styles in any large church, there is strong New Testament emphasis to **keep them close together**.