

## Titus #3

*You, however, must teach what is appropriate to sound doctrine. Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance.*

*Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.*

*Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.*

Titus 2:1-8

In our previous study, we saw how some people in the Cretan congregations were insisting that to be a 'true' Christian you had to keep to Jewish laws and customs, whether you were a Jew or a non-Jew.

Paul encourages Titus to oppose this and to insist that becoming and living as a Christian is to be based on God's love and not on observing rituals and obeying laws.

But we also learned that a healthy Christian community requires correct beliefs and behaviour. Being 'free from the law' doesn't mean we can do whatever we please, and there are times when that means having to correct believers who are not behaving in line with gospel teaching.

The people Paul was opposing were also defrauding people financially. God's grace does not mean doing anything you like, it means living your life in ways that are in sync with God's ways.

And we concluded by looking at the dangers of turning our faith in Jesus into a box-ticking exercise, rather than the Holy Spirit empowered relationship that God wants it to be.

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And so we come to the second chapter of Titus.

In this section, Paul expands on why and how we are to behave as Christians.

He begins with advice to Titus about what his primary focus should be...

*You, however, must teach what is appropriate to sound doctrine.*

Titus 2:1

Here we see Paul re-emphasising the importance of understanding what we believe as Christians. The first words of Paul's letter to Titus declared that the letter's primary aim was was...

*...to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness...*

Titus 1:1b

### ***Slide: Titus 2:1***

Titus is encouraged to teach what is appropriate to 'sound doctrine.'

The word 'doctrine' can come across as dry and boring, but correct doctrine, having a proper understanding of how our faith in Jesus, affects the way we live our lives, is foundational to being a Christian.

Much like using a recipe to create a meal, we need to include the right ingredients in the correct quantities if we want the result to be edible.

When doctrine is 'sound,' it nourishes and strengthens our faith. The word translated as 'sound' comes from the Greek 'hygiaino.' It is the root word behind our English word 'hygiene.' 'Sound' means 'to be healthy.'

Doctrine is not just about knowing stuff. The purpose of doctrine is to help us live godly lives. Like a brilliant dentist who never bothers to brush his own teeth, there are many Christians who know a lot of theology but never put it into practice. Christians are to be people who ‘walk the talk.’

In the previous chapter Paul was warning Titus about people who claim to know God, but deny him by their actions (Titus 1:16).

As Jesus said...

*By their fruit you will recognise them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles?*

Matthew 7:16

True belief will result in a positive change of mind, heart and lifestyle.

And so Paul proceeds to lay down some practical advice on the way that believers should live, starting with ‘the older men.’

*Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance.*

Titus 2:1-2

1600 years ago, John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople wrote...

*‘There are some failings which age has, that youth has not. Some indeed it has in common with youth, but in addition it has a slowness, a timidity, a forgetfulness, an insensibility, and an irritability.’*

John Chrysostom, 347 – 407

I can see all you ladies nodding and smiling. And yes, what Mr Chrysostom observes is as true today as it was sixteen centuries ago. As we get older there is a temptation to dwell on the unanswered prayers and the unfairness of life.

Many older men become convinced that they are always right, and use their age as an excuse to indulge in behaviour that they would be quick to condemn in younger people.

And worst of all, they are tempted to succumb to cynicism, to get weary of helping others and become lazy and self-indulgent.

For this reason, Titus is to encourage the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect and self-controlled. And the way to achieve this is be 'sound' (remember, 'sound' means 'healthy')...

— in *faith*, what we believe.

— in *love*, how we think and behave towards others.

— and in *endurance*, keeping on keeping on, continuing to fill what's empty and emptying what is filled.

Man, do I need to have this tattooed on my heart and my brain.

And I am someone whose life has been, and continues to be, more comfortable than so many other people in this world.

I have regularly got away with things I deserved to suffer for, and been blessed far more than I deserve to be blessed.

And yet there are so many things that regularly grind me down:

— When friends who used to be enthusiastic Christians tell me they respect my faith, but it's 'no longer for them';

— And the times when the world seems so dark, so full of suffering, when I find myself wondering, 'What if there's no God, what if I'm making this all up?'

***Slide: Titus 2:3-5, self control, etc, highlighted***

And when I feel myself sinking into self-pity, I ask God to give me the gift of self-control, the faith to believe that he is always with me, even

when I don't feel that he is. And for love for other people, and the endurance to prepare for and do the things I know he wants me to do.

And, you know what, God *loves* answering those kind of prayers.

And now it's ladies time...

*Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good.*

Titus 2:3

That Paul addresses women at all is significant. One of the revolutionary aspects of Christianity is that women have the same status before God as men. Both are equally loved and made in God's image.

And while there are God-given differences between men and women, the New Testament shows that women were involved in a wide range of Christian ministries from the very beginning.

And, surprise surprise, older Christian women face similar temptations to older Christian men.

The word translated 'reverent' doesn't occur anywhere else in the New Testament. It means 'befitting a holy person' or 'behaving like a priest or priestess.'

Again Paul is emphasising how believing women have a high status in God's eyes, and that they should act accordingly. With great status comes great responsibility.

Many of Paul's letters indicate that the wonderful freedom from sin that these women had found through their faith in Jesus, and the new found status as being equal to men in God's sight, seems to have sometimes become freedom to do whatever they pleased, causing them to slip into drinking and gossip.

Like the older men, the older women are encouraged to be good examples to younger Christians. To teach what is good, both with words and especially in the way they live their lives.

*Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.*

Titus 2:4-5

Christian freedom is not freedom to be your own selfish pig, it is freedom to be the person God wants you to be.

And for a wife that includes showing love to their family, being self-controlled, pure, busy, kind and subject to your husband.

Is this old-fashioned? Probably. But in the context of the Christian message it is not discriminatory.

Paul could just as easily have applied these principles to young men (in fact, he is just about to). In the letter to the Ephesians, Paul tells husbands and wives to 'Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ' (Ephesians 5:21).

Submission is a two-way thing, and ultimately both women and men are to submit to Christ's authority (Ephesians 5:24).

Once again Paul emphasises the importance of Christians living lives that are consistent with the good news they proclaim. Paul wants to remove every possible barrier from people coming to accept Jesus as their Saviour and Lord.

And Paul continues...

*Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. In everything set them an example by doing what is good.*

Titus 2:6

I think you can see a pattern here. In fact I think that Paul is deliberately repeating himself for emphasis. Like the older men, older women and young women, the young men are to be self-controlled and live lives that

are consistent with their Christian faith. This would have sounded a lot more radical in the 1st century than it does today.

The debate continues as to the roles of men and women in society, but in the 1st century it was simply assumed that women were inferior, and subject to men. That Paul gives similar instructions to the women as to the men is significant.

Paul then moves on to some advice for Titus.

*In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.*

Titus 2:7-8

Once again, Paul reinforces the importance of good living and good teaching, so that even those who don't agree with what we believe have to admit that we live lives that are honest and loving.

I used this illustration when we were going through the letter to the Philippians, but it bears repeating.

A man called Julian became emperor in the 4th century, shortly after Constantine had made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. Julian hated the Christian religion so much that he became known as 'Julian the Apostate.'

However, in a letter to a pagan priest he writes...

*"We ought then to share our money with all people, but more generously with the good, and with the helpless and poor to suffice for their need... For it is disgraceful that, when no Jew ever has to beg, and the impious Galileans support not only their own poor but ours as well, all men see our people lack aid from us."*

And yes, ‘impious Galileans’ is Justin’s slur word for Christians. As we all know, there is nothing more annoying than someone you dislike behaving better than you do.

Titus was living in a culture legendary for its bad behaviour. Paul emphasises once again that one of the most powerful evidences for the truth of Christianity is that it changes people’s lives for the better.

We live in a culture that doesn’t just tolerate, but actively encourages bad behaviour. The Christian response is to refuse to conform, to live well, and be prepared to explain the truth of the Christian faith to anyone who is prepared to listen.

And now we come to one of those ‘tricky’ passages.

*Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Saviour attractive.*

Titus 2:9-10

Oh dear.

First, let me say that I am aware that a white male speaking on the subject of slavery, especially in a congregation like this one, needs to be very careful indeed.

Also, a subject this complex would take a series to deal with properly.

So, please, be patient with me.

First some history...

Up until the last few centuries, slavery was a way of life worldwide. White people enslaved people. Black people enslaved people. Everyone enslaved people. Sometimes it was when they won wars. Sometimes it was for money. Sometimes you just belonged to a caste that meant you were a slave. Humans are horrible to other humans!

It is also a fact that it was the Bible's teachings that provided the primary motivation to abolish slavery in the UK in the 19th century.

Also, we know that the Apostle Paul was not a fan of slavery.

He puts people who trade in slaves in the same category as murderers (1 Timothy 1:9-10).

And he says that if a slave can gain their freedom legally, that they should (1 Corinthians 7:21).

But why did it take so long for Christians to move to abolish it? Why didn't Paul (or Jesus for that matter) just flat out condemn slavery?

The most probable answer is that it simply didn't seem possible. Slavery was such a way of life that people couldn't imagine how society would work without it.

One of the best analogies for this is what would happen if someone decided that because fossil fuels were such a threat to the environment that we should stop using them immediately.

In fact, there have been people who have said this. And they have been ignored, because so many of the things that we take for granted in society rely on them.

People are working at finding more environmentally friendly methods of generating power. But in the meantime they have not stopped using fossil fuels.

Paul was not in a situation where he could abolish slavery, any more than you or I are in a position to stop the wars in Ukraine or Sudan.

The Bible's teachings make it clear that slavery is not God's perfect will. There was no slavery in Eden.

And over time, these teachings have led to people realising that slavery is wrong, and have moved towards its abolition.

Paul knew that his primary task was to preach the good news of Jesus Christ. And that good news has dramatically shaped the world we live in today for the better. Not perfect. But better. His work laid the foundations for the civilisation we live in today.

And for the good news to spread, Christian believers, whether slave or free, had to live the Jesus way, which includes turning the other cheek and carrying their oppressor's luggage the extra mile.

Christian slaves, like Christian women, had to learn that being free in Christ didn't mean being free from the responsibility to live godly lives. Christian freedom is freedom to choose to be hard working, respectful and trustworthy, to make the teaching about God our Saviour attractive.

As Paul continues...

*For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope – the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.*

Titus 2:11-14

God's grace offers salvation for all people. This is the glory and the scandal of the good news. There is no one too bad to be saved. And there is no one good enough to not require saving.

And Paul concludes this section by re-emphasising how salvation manifests itself in changed lives. Saying 'No' to things that don't honour God, and to live lives that reflect the Jesus we love and worship.

God's plan was always that humans, made in his image, would live in loving relationship with him and with one another. And he wanted this to be a relationship that we chose, not one that he forced upon us.

And it not for nothing. One of the reasons that Christianity spread so rapidly was that it offers hope, not just for this life, but for life after death.

Jesus, by his death, resurrection and ascension, has broken the power of sin, and offers anyone who believes in him not just redemption from sin, but admission to a community of Jesus followers 'who are his very own, eager to do what is good.'

Not 'doing good stuff so we get into God's good book,' but 'doing good stuff because we are grateful that we are already in God's good book.'

Paul concludes this section with...

*These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you.*

Titus 2:15

Paul knows that preaching and teaching the good news is not easy. But he knows it is essential. We need to be people who encourage one another to do the things we should be doing, and lovingly rebuke one another when our behaviour contradicts our Christian faith.

Ultimately God calls us to live lives that honour him, and help other people to draw near to him. And as we do this, we will experience his power and his blessing, especially in difficult circumstances.

Amen.