

Titus 2: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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Preacher: Alastair Roberts

- [0 : 0 0] Titus chapter 2. But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness.
- Older women likewise are to be reverent in behaviour, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.
- Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us.
- Bond-servants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything. They are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour.
- For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our 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 lawlessness, and to purify for himself a people for his own possession, who are zealous for good works.
- [1 : 3 0] Declare these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you. In the opening verses of Titus chapter 2, Paul speaks to the life of the household.
- In his teaching in verses 1-10, he seems to be especially concerned to encourage a respectable and God-honouring form of life among the various groups within the church, older and younger men and women, and bond-servants.
- Several scholars have remarked upon the influence of the phenomenon of the new Roman woman, with some wealthier women abandoning old standards of sexual propriety, neglecting the life and management of the household, and trying to be more vocal in the traditionally defined public sphere.
- Toleration of such behaviour in the church, and the impression that the message of emancipation in the gospel justified it, would have brought the gospel into disrepute for many in the society.
- Many commentators have speculated that Paul had such women partly in view in his teaching in 1 Timothy chapter 2, verses 9-15. Although this sort of background has likely been overstated by many, it is not unlikely that such women were part of what Paul had in his sights in verses 3-5.
- [2 : 4 2] Paul is concerned that the Christian message not be ill-spoken of, and even more, that those who profess it adorn it by their behaviour. The material of the first ten verses of this chapter is similar to some of the household codes that we encounter elsewhere in the Pauline corpus, in Ephesians chapter 5 and 6, Colossians chapter 3 and 4, and also in 1 Peter chapter 2 and 3.

The opening verses of chapter 2 suggest that there is a close connection in Paul's mind between Christian doctrine and appropriate ethics, even though they are not simply identified.

One of the more distinctive features of Paul's teaching here, in contrast to what we find elsewhere in his work, is his attention to the intersection of age and gender. He does not directly address wives and husbands here, but older men and older women, younger women and younger men.

While the marital context is referred to and is taken for granted at many points, the teaching thus organised leads more to the development of individuals into mature exemplars of their sex.

The older men are addressed first. These are not the same persons as elders, although the elders would have been older men. The older men are supposed to be sober-minded. Perhaps this is a statement about their being temperate, or perhaps it's a reference to their not drinking too much.

[4 : 01] They're supposed to be dignified, serious, to have an appropriate sense of gravitas. They need to command, respect and honour. Older men should be accorded honour and authority, but they also need to command it by their display of dignity.

They need to be self-controlled, prudent, restrained, moderate. People who have a reign upon their appetites, their passions and their moods. People whose wills are guided by their reason.

They must be sound in faith, in love and in steadfastness. These three things are presumably related to the three theological virtues of faith, love and hope, steadfastness corresponding with hope.

Soundness in faith would be belief in the gospel, and in God that does not waver under trial. Soundness in love would be seen in the commitment of the older men in their service of God and his people.

Their steadfastness would be seen in their hope-fuelled endurance under trial. Paul next turns to the older women. They need to be reverent in behaviour. They need to show a godly integrity and holiness of life.

[5 : 02] They need to avoid slander, gossip, loose talk and excesses of wine. And Paul expects such older women to play a critical role in educating younger women in godly conduct, ensuring thereby that the household of faith is well-ordered.

The older women's teaching of the younger women mostly concerns their proper behaviour in the context of their households, their practical and loving commitment to their husbands and children. Paul's language here concerning the teaching might have more of a corrective shading in its meaning.

The older women are to moderate, or maybe even, as Philip Towner argues, to call the younger women to return to their senses. The older women's instruction of the younger women is with the end of teaching them to be self-controlled, the same term that was used earlier of the older men.

However, like many such virtue terms, it is coloured by gender. With regard to the virtues, men and women can be like two different kinds of instruments playing the same note. While the note may be the same, it will have a very different timbre.

As he does here, Paul also encourages self-control for women in 1 Timothy chapter 2 verses 9-10. Likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness, with good works.

[6 : 23] The younger women are also instructed to be pure, likely meant in a sexual sense here. They are expected to be good managers of their households. We should beware of reading the term translated by the ESV as working at home in terms of modern debates about working or stay-at-home mothers.

The ancient household was a realm of production, education, welfare, society and all sorts of other such matters. The young woman managing her household would be deeply embedded and invested in active labour and the society and wouldn't be anywhere near as likely to be facing the home-workplace dilemma that many contemporary women do, where either choice may restrict her capacity for rising to her full stature.

The alternative to working at home may not be so much working in the workplace as being a busybody, a gadabout, a gossip and a lazy woman. That said, the location of the work is not unimportant.

At the heart of marriage is the task of building a world and transforming the world together with one's spouse. Marriage is not just about enjoying a private domestic retreat with one's spouse, but about forming a realm of common labour out into the world.

A marriage where no such labour is occurring, a home that is reduced to mere shared leisure, is a marriage that is missing an important dimension. Rather than merely being independent careerists, husband and wife ideally share their home as a focus and or site of their labour.

[7 : 48] They may not be working alongside each other, but their household is their common project. Men and women may be distinguished in their vocations in Paul's understanding, but the household is supposed to be a true commonwealth, a sharing of the end, the focus and the fruit of their respective labours.

The household also stands in contradistinction to the public arena. As in 1 Timothy chapter 2, Paul seems to have some concerns about the way that women were intruding upon the functioning of that realm in ways that compromised its operations, seeking authority over men in a manner that disrupted the actual operation of healthy authority.

Paul doesn't address such issues so directly here, but they are likely partly in view in the notion of the submission that women are supposed to show to their own husbands. When modern Christians speak of submission, they tend to situate it primarily in the direct face-to-face relationship of the husband and the wife.

However, the headship of the man was primarily directed out into the world, and the submission of the wife would chiefly have been to that in the shoulder-to-shoulder relationship of their common labours.

Submission in the face-to-face relationship may have been rather secondary. A wife who honours her husband greatly strengthens him, and if he is a good husband, the strength and standing that he enjoys will be used to build her up.

[9 : 04] The wife's submission is less a matter of passive and reluctant capitulation to him than willing and active collaboration with, counselling of, and honouring of her husband as he sets the lead.

She should not be engaged with a tug-of-war against him, nor just be his doormat. Rather, they should both be throwing their united yet differing energies into their common task, from which they both end up stronger for being one flesh.

Paul hopes that by correcting the younger women, the older women will protect the word of God from being ill-spoken of. Titus, for his part, is now instructed to teach the younger men in a manner comparable to the way that the older women teach the younger women.

He must present himself as a model, a lived example of the behaviour that he is encouraging. In addition, he must provide sound teaching, marked by integrity, truth, and seriousness.

The young men need to be self-controlled, restrained, prudent, and temperate. Once again, Paul is concerned that those bad-mouthing Christians in Crete be silenced, not being able to fault the behaviour of the members of the church.

[10 : 08] One of the things that we might observe here is the way that for Paul, teaching in the church on certain matters needs to be gendered and generational. It matters who teaches certain lessons.

While part of Paul's concern here is doubtless propriety, he likely has other considerations in mind too. If Titus were primarily the one charged to teach the lessons to the younger women, then the teaching might be experienced primarily as something designed to get them into line.

However, if the teaching is given to them by godly older women, women who are honoured and respected and reverent in their behaviour, the younger women will more readily perceive the teaching as something designed to build them up, to strengthen them, to enable them to become like those older women, not just as something designed to get them in line.

There are many occasions where good teaching is hamstrung by the fact that it is not being taught by the right person. A teacher who can serve as an exemplar of that which they are teaching in a way that makes it desirable to the person being taught is always going to be a lot more effective.

Even if Titus were able to teach the young women the content of their appropriate behaviour accurately, under typical circumstances, he could never be as effective as a godly older woman who could also exemplify it.

[11 : 21] Paul concludes his instructions here by addressing bond servants. As in 1 Timothy, his instructions here are limited to bond servants. He does not address masters at this point. Such servants are to act not just as man-pleasers, but as those who are looking towards a greater master, who are concerned to please Christ and by their behaviour to adorn his doctrine, behaving in such a way that stands out from everyone else and draws attention to the beauty of the teaching of Christ.

In verses 11 to 14, we arrive at what might be thought of as the climax of the letter. In this condensed theological statement, Paul expresses the theological foundation for the transformation of life that he is encouraging.

It arises from the epiphany of God's grace in history. In the work of Christ, this has brought salvation for all people. As Paul makes clear at the beginning of 1 Timothy chapter 2, the gospel is something that comes with the message of salvation to every class of persons.

Already in this chapter, he has spoken about the way that salvation can be lived out by older and younger men and women and also by those in slavery. This is not a salvation exclusive to the rich or to a particular people like the Jews.

It's for everyone. And this epiphany of God's grace in history results in a transformation of behaviour. It leads to a rejection of old ways of life that characterise the age that has passed, ungodliness, and worldly passions.

[12 : 45] The alternative to these are self-controlled, upright, and godly lives. Such lives develop out of the epiphany of God's grace in Christ in the fullness of time, but are also fuelled by anticipation, by the blessed, God-given hope of the appearance of the glory of our great God and saviour, Jesus Christ.

That future horizon leads to dramatic renovation of life. Scholars have debated the end of verse 13. Is Jesus Christ to be identified with our great God and saviour, which would be a most remarkable declaration of the deity of Christ, or is there some other way of understanding the expression?

Towner, for instance, suggests that we should take Jesus Christ as being in apposition with the glory of our great God and saviour. Jesus Christ is the glory of God. There is still a powerful theological statement being made here, but it may be more subtle in character than others believe it to be.

Verse 14 is redolent with all sorts of memories and echoes from the Old Testament. Christ gave himself to redeem us. This might remind us of the way that Jesus is described as a ransom for all in 1 Timothy chapter 2.

He has redeemed us from the realm of lawlessness and wickedness, and he has done so to purify us for himself as a new people who is supposed to be his special possession. We might think here of the Lord's statement to the children of Israel at Sinai, Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

[14 : 18] We might also think of statements like Ephesians chapter 5 verses 25 to 27. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, so that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

God's intention to create a holy, chosen people for himself is in keeping with the Old Testament promise that he will be their God and they will be his people. The redemption from lawlessness and the purification also draw our mind back to the promises of the new covenant.

God will purify his people by sprinkling clean water upon them. He will forgive their sins and their lawless deeds and he will place a new heart within them, writing his law upon it.

All of this is coming to pass through the work of Christ and the goal of all of this is to have a special, godly people who are devoted to good works. The moral transformation of life that Paul is encouraging here is not a secondary thought, it's been the whole point all the way along.

This is what God's action of grace was always aiming at. Lives that have not been revolutionised by such grace to display holiness and godliness are still born in the faith.

[15 : 37] Paul concludes the chapter by charging Titus to teach effectively and with authority. He must boldly exhort and encourage people in these matters, stirring them up to this expression of faith and good works.

He must rebuke false teachers, troublemakers and those who are not abiding by the teaching and he must do all of this with authority, not allowing anyone to disregard him. In such a manner he would fulfil the purpose for which Paul left him in Crete.

A question to consider, what can we learn from the conclusion of this chapter concerning the proper relationship between grace and good works?

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