

## ***Honoring God in Each Stage of Life***

Titus 2:1-10

I remember a conversation I had when I was in my late 20s with a man in his late 70s. I was in seminary and (presumably) had most of my life ahead of me. He was retired and in failing health. We were talking about my future, and his comment to me was, “I wouldn’t trade places with you for anything.” That was one of the strangest comments I had ever heard in my life. I think I assumed that deep down every older person would wish that they could trade places with me. My attitude was almost like, “How dare you not be jealous of my stage of life!?!?” The idea that you could be older and still be satisfied and content in your stage of life was a brand new idea to me.

I’ve come to see that this is the very attitude that the Scriptures urge upon us. The Scriptures encourage contentment at every stage of life, recognizing that each stage of life offers unique opportunities to honor God. For example, there are certain things that an older man in his 70s has to offer to others that a younger man in his 20s never could.

Today we continue our study of “A Healthy Church” from the book of Titus. In chapter 2 Paul tells Titus to instruct people in different stages of life. The thing that stands out is how every stage of life offers unique opportunities to “adorn the doctrine of God.” In a healthy church people seek to live out sound doctrine in every stage of life. They aren’t jealous of the life that others have; they accept the life they’ve been given. In a healthy church the attitude is, “God, I want to honor you in *my* life.”

The virtues and cautions that Paul tells Titus to urge people in each stage of life aren’t necessarily unique to that group of people. For example, older women aren’t the only people who shouldn’t be “malicious gossips”; older men should also avoid being malicious gossips. So we need to be careful not to read too much into Paul’s comments to each group. At the same time, we do want to see the wisdom of what he writes about each group; his comments weren’t random or trivial; there are virtues and cautions that are appropriate for each of us at each stage of life.

### ***Honoring God in each stage of life:***

In the second half of Titus 1 Paul told Titus and the elders at Crete to address false teachers because they led people away from “sound doctrine.” In chapter 2 Paul tells Titus that everything he teaches, by contrast, should be consistent with sound doctrine.

1 But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine.

In verses 2 through 10 Paul explains to Titus how sound doctrine could be applied to people in every stage of life. He applies sound doctrine to older men, older women, young women, young men, and bondslaves. We’ll take these categories one at a time.

***Older men (2:2)*** Paul first discusses what Titus is to speak to “older men” so that they will live in a way that’s compatible with sound doctrine. The chronological terms in this passage are relative. NT scholars tell us that at age 40 you became an “older man.” The average lifespan was only 45 or 50 years old due to a high infant mortality rate. Of

course some lived to be older (72 was considered to be a ripe old age). This passage forces me to grapple with the fact that in Paul's categories I am an "older man" since I'm solidly in my 50s. Paul's words are really a challenge to "grow up" in all the ways that matter. It's fine to be a boy if you're a boy, but you don't want the church full of 40-, 50-, or 60- year-old boys. Here's what Paul writes:

2 Older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance.

The terms "temperate" and "dignified" are also found in Paul's list of qualifications for elders and deacons in 1 Timothy 3 (3:2, 8, 11). Temperate is sometimes translated "sober" and is probably used figuratively here. Instead of being carried away into all sorts of excess, older men are to have a clear, sober approach to life. Dignified is sometimes translated "honorable"; older men are to be the type of people that others rightly honor.

"Sensible" is found three times in Titus - in 1:8 in relation to those who serve as elders in the church, here in 2:2 in relation to older men, and in 2:5 in relation to young women. And so it's a virtue that's appropriate in every stage and circumstance of life. If you're sensible you're thoughtful and prudent instead of extreme and rash. You live your life by principle, not impulse.

Finally, Paul writes that older men are to be "sound" (in the sense of being well-grounded) in three areas: faith, love, and perseverance. Instead of losing ground or slipping, they are supposed to be solid when it comes to their faith toward God, their love toward others, and their perseverance through trials and the normal stresses of life. In this way older men are of great value in their families and in the church.

Paul doesn't explicitly challenge older men to do anything here, but I think it is implicit. Older men are to live the type of lives that will be an example to others. Some of the older men will be elders who provide oversight in their families and in the church; but others with these qualities will *also* have an influence in the lives of many. In the church, older men with these qualities are invaluable.

About 15 years ago I was in a doctor of ministry class at Trinity (north of Chicago) taught by Larry Crabb. The class was comprised of 35 pastors from many different denominations. At one point Crabb said, "Think of everybody in your church over 65 years old." After a long pause he said, "Raise your hand if you want to be like them when you're 65." Guess how many hands went up. . . .three. It shouldn't be that way. That's why Titus was supposed to urge older men to be sound in faith, love, and perseverance. Many times, instead of being more loving (i.e., patient and kind and humble toward others) people get more crotchety and angry and bitter as they age. It's not that you become a different person when you get older; it's that the person you already are becomes apparent. You quit covering it up because you don't care so much what others think about you.

By the way, if I were in that class today, I would raise my hand in a heartbeat. I so admire those in our church who are older. I learn so much from their faith, love, and perseverance. Those who have suffered well have an invaluable ministry in the lives of those who are going through tough situations. It is possible to age well. In a healthy church that actually happens.

***Older women and young women (2:3-5)*** Here is Paul's counsel to "older women":

3 Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good,

Positively, they were to be "reverent in their behavior"; their actions were supposed to demonstrate their holiness. Such holiness would mean (among other things) not being "malicious gossips." Gossip involves talking about people and situations for no good reason. [The word Paul uses is *diabolous* (lit. devilish).] Paul (and James and Jesus) taught that words should be used for the purpose of building others up instead of tearing others down (James 3, Matthew 5:22, Eph. 4:29, etc.) Being a malicious gossip is obviously incompatible with "teaching what is good" (which we'll discuss in a minute). And an older woman's holiness would also mean not "enslaved to much wine" - she's not controlled by alcohol.

The main application Titus was to urge upon "older women" was "teaching what is good" - which Paul goes on to describe in verses 4 and 5. He primarily had in mind older women teaching young women about family life. It is assumed in these verses that both the older and younger women were married, had children, and "worked at home" (managing a household). That was the normal situation in the first century and so that is the scenario Paul addressed. When we apply this Scripture in our day we'll need to broaden out this scenario to include older women helping younger women negotiate being single, honoring God in the workplace, etc. The principle is the same: godly older women have a teaching ministry in the lives of young women. You may not feel adequate but if you are walking with God, you will have much to offer.

Here's Paul's directive to Titus. Older women are to "teach what it good". . .

4 so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, 5 *to be* sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored.

The strong implication is that the church shouldn't abandon younger generations to figure things out on their own (which usually ends up being a disastrous experiment of trial and error). Older women need to be willing to teach, and younger women need to be teachable. This can happen in Bible studies or life groups. But it can also happen in the context of one-on-one relationships; sometimes God surprises us with friendships that provide the opportunity to speak deeply into the life of another person.

Specifically, Paul mentions encouraging young women to "love their husbands" and to "love their children." In some seasons of life loving your husband and your children is

easy; you post pictures of them on Facebook and write how amazing and thoughtful they are. But in other seasons, loving your husband and children takes every ounce of effort you've got. The last thing you want to be is patient and kind. At this point you would have lots of options: read a book on marriage and parenting (good) or give up (bad) or even talk with someone else who's in the exact same circumstances as you (which could be good or bad).

But what if a godly older woman came alongside you to give you encouragement and perspective? She would be able to share from her experience - both her successes and her failures. She might be able to pray for you in a way that nobody else would. The sky is the limit in terms of the insight and hope that an older woman might give.

Think about the role an older woman might play in helping a young woman learn to be "subject to [her] own husband." It's a lot easier to say what submission *isn't* than to say what it *is*. It isn't being a doormat, following your husband into sin, or letting him "be the boss." In my understanding, when a Christian wife submits to her husband she welcomes his servant leadership in the marriage. Instead of competing with him and resisting his leadership, she does and says things that will encourage his initiative in the relationship - especially spiritually.

Sometimes this is about the most difficult assignment that a Christian wife is given. When her husband is loving her as Christ loved the church, living with her in an understanding way, and honoring her as a fellow heir of the grace of life, "being subject to him" is one thing. But what about when her husband isn't following Christ and/or isn't kind or gentle or patient? That's where the counsel (the "good teaching") of a godly older woman would be invaluable. Who could possibly give wiser advice than an older woman you respect who has actually walked through the complexities and difficulties of marriage?

As we sometimes say, the sermon isn't the "last word" on a topic; it's the "first word" in a broader conversation that needs to take place in the church. I've had some conversation with Julie Coonrod, who oversees our women's ministry at Faith, about these relationships. The leadership team of women's ministry really has a heart to see each woman here at Faith connected in life-giving relationships with other women. Life groups are a great place to meet other women in different stages of life. There is even going to be a Wednesday morning life group that focuses on developing spiritual friendships and encouraging these types of relationships in every season of life. If you need help in finding this type of relationship contact Julie or someone else on the women's ministry leadership team.

**Young men (2:6-8)** Paul only tells Titus to "urge the young men" to do one thing. In just the same way as Titus was to urge older men, older women, and young women:

6 Likewise urge the young men to be sensible;

The term "to be sensible" can also be translated "to be sane" or "to be sober minded." Young men (again, roughly speaking he was talking about men under the age of 40)

would typically have a wife and children, a job, and responsibilities in the community. Instead of being irresponsible or reckless, young men should approach their lives in a sober minded manner. Unless they “grow up” while they’re young men, their families and the church would suffer. I would urge the young men here at Faith to see your late teens, 20s and 30s as a foundational time in your life. The habits of thought and speech and action that you develop now will either bless or curse the rest of your life.

Interestingly Paul quickly follows up his comment about young men with a challenge to Titus to be an example. As the primary teacher on Crete, Titus needed to be an example in doctrine and deed. Everyone would benefit from Titus’ example, but perhaps Paul is thinking especially of the influence he would have on young men.

7 in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, *with* purity in doctrine, dignified, 8 sound *in* speech which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us.

As a teacher Titus needed to be an example in the areas of good deeds, doctrine, and speech. You can’t keep people from saying bad things about you, but you can keep them from saying bad things about you that are true. That’s just what Titus would do if we were an example in these areas.

Teachers (such as Titus) and elders (which Titus was to appoint) were supposed to be examples to the rest of the church. This example is especially important for young men who are trying to figure out how to manage family life, church life, and work. Instead of living your life by trial and error, you should be able to look at others who have negotiated the years you’re walking through. Older men, we need to be willing to invest time and energy in teaching younger men. Young men, you need to be sensible/sane and teachable. Sometimes young men resent those who are older because we typically have more resources and more influence in the church and in the community. I would urge you to invite the wisdom and perspective of those who are older. This is really vital for the health of the church. In a healthy church those who are older also learn from those who are younger (reverse mentoring).

***Bondslaves (2:9-10)*** Lastly Paul addresses what Titus is to urge upon “bondslaves.” We don’t have time for a lengthy discussion about how the NT approached slaves (or servants), but I want to summarize my understanding. The NT authors didn’t directly address the institution of slavery (which doesn’t mean that they approved of it); rather, they challenged people to honor God in whatever circumstances they were in - even if they were bondslaves.

The condition of slaves varied greatly in the Roman empire of the first century. Some slaves were treated as property (much like slavery that existed in this country for over a hundred years); other slaves were treated as valuable members of the household. Some slaves were chained together to work the fields; other slaves were architects, administrators, physicians, and teachers. Slaves could be set free through the payment of a ransom. So, a slave could either be in an incredibly oppressive, harsh

environment, or a slave could enjoy economic prosperity and even a high social status. But the fact remained that all slaves had masters.

In other places Paul encouraged slaves to gain their freedom if possible (Philemon 8-16, 1 Corinthians 7:21). But while they were still bondslaves, Paul urged them to honor God in the way they conducted themselves.

9 *Urge* bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, 10 not pilfering, but showing all good faith so that they will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect.

It would be very easy to justify NOT being subject to their masters, not pleasing them, being argumentative, or even stealing (they could easily argue that they had been wronged so they deserved what they were taking). Paul and Jesus both consistently challenged that logic. Rather, it would be better to **be** wronged than to wrong someone else (see Matthew 5:38-48, 2 Corinthians 6:1-8). Titus was to urge slaves to “show all good faith” so that they would “adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect.”

This is actually a radical perspective that only a person following hard after God can even hear. Because of their life circumstances bondslaves had a unique opportunity to honor God. Just as Jesus suffered without uttering threats and without reviling, bondslaves could bless instead of curse when mistreated. They could wear the doctrine of God our Savior like a cloak that everybody would see. The application for us involves seeing how the difficult circumstances in our lives (the ones we are powerless to change, the ones in which we feel helpless) as unique opportunities to adorn the doctrine of God our Savior. In the workplace, for example, how can you show the generosity, forgiveness, and perseverance like Jesus did? When wronged, how can you avoid returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but give a blessing instead?

To be a healthy church, each of us needs to accept that “this is my life, the only life I have. . . and I need to honor God given my age, my marital status, my circumstances. . .” In a healthy church we aren’t envious of each other (older vs. younger). Just like in a healthy family, we encourage and help each other honor God in each circumstances and stage of life. During our time of response now, consider what God is saying to you in the life He has given you.