

Radically Normal

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[0:00] If I could ask you to open your Bibles to Titus chapter 2, we're going to read the whole of the chapter. But as for you, teach what accords to sound doctrine. Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-control, sound in faith, in love and in steadfastness. Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to too much wine. They are to teach what is good and so train the young women to love their husbands and children. Be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind and submissive to their husbands like the word of God may not be, 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 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 give 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. Declare these things, exhort and rebuke with all authority, let no one disregard you. Amen. And may God bless this reading to us.

Good morning again, or good afternoon. Well, it's still good morning. As I said earlier, if you're visiting, you're very welcome. Please stay behind. Online, if you're online again, you're very welcome as well. But apologies, I can't organise the coffee in those circumstances. But as you probably know, if you've been around, that over the last two or three years, I've been working my way through the books of the letters of 1st and 2nd Timothy and the occasional preaching I've been doing. And I came to an end of that a couple of months ago, and the logical thing to do was to keep going to the next book of the Bible, which is Titus. But while it's the next book of the Bible, we are going back in time a little. 2nd Timothy was Paul's last letter. He was in prison at this time. He was in prison in Rome. And the general assumption is that he was awaiting his imminent execution. And his death was not far away. And obviously, the last chapter of 2nd Timothy is quite an emotional and amazing book to read in that context. But Titus is a little bit before that.

We don't know exactly, but maybe two to four years before 2nd Timothy. It's a book which is addressed to Titus. We don't know an awful lot about him, but what we do know is all good. He was a trusted companion of Paul. We read about him, for example, in 2nd Corinthians as Paul's man on the ground in Corinth. We also read about him in Galatians as a fellow traveler of Paul. And in the last chapter of 2nd Timothy, he is mentioned there, he was in Dalmatia and different views on where that is, but maybe Turkey, Croatia, that sort of area. In this book, Titus was obviously on the island of Crete.

And with the little, we have read about him, you can say he is a solid and reliable person. He was trusted with some pretty heavy duty work. While we haven't read it, he was entrusted with financial collections and all the temptations and integrity that requires.

[5:16] And he was helping Paul with the conflicts that he would have with the church in Corinth. And he's also a man that seems to be very resilient. We don't read about him disappearing off or having a fight or anything like this. He just seems to be there, plodding on and doing the work that he should. And I think as well that when you look at him, he was somebody who was really good in amongst people. As I said earlier, Colin's working through 2nd Corinthians at this minute, but Titus seemed to be the intermediary between the forthright Paul and the people who maybe didn't want

to listen to him. He was the man on the ground that was a go between them. So I think you could say he maybe wasn't the main man, but he was the companion of Paul that had been there the longest.

And he was a trusted pair of hands. And because he was a trusted pair of hands, Paul obviously allocated the work in Crete to him here and the church in Crete. And the families in that church had their fair share of troubles and difficulties. And that takes me to my first point, which we need to understand.

What was the problems? What was it that was damaging the church and the families in it? And there was two things. And the first thing was that there was false teaching in the church in Crete. There were people who didn't follow the biblical line or feel that they were subject to the teaching of the Bible or the discipline of the church or the apostles. They deceived people with an alternative gospel message. And while there would have been different nuances of this and different flavors, essentially what they seem to be saying is that they agreed that salvation only came by faith in Christ, but that in itself was not enough. That something else was needed. Something maybe an additional special experience, extra knowledge or participation in additional processes or practices or compliance against laws. And if you didn't do these things, well then you were not a real Christian.

In effect, they were saying you needed some sort of man-made experience or task to complete your salvation. And the thing about all these enhancements as well, that they all seem to have an element of subservient to the people who were promoting these ideas. It was follow me and not God. It was do what I say and not what the Bible says. It was stick with me and I'll keep you right. So the teaching was wrong.

It created almost a cult-like experience where there was a leader who was the focal point of all these things. And a particular example that Paul calls out is the circumcision group who had a view that you couldn't have faith without being circumcised first. And what they were doing was that they were adding to the law of Moses the salvation of Christ. And that was particularly relevant to Titus because if you bear with me and turn back to Galatians chapter 2 and verse 3, where this group of people, this circumcision group, were running the same argument amongst Gentiles, but in verse 3 it says, but even Titus who was with me was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. So this argument had already been dealt with. Titus was the example that was being used to say circumcision is not required. It's salvation by faith alone. So he'd already faced one of these things and had already been used as an example of what was right and what was true.

[9:40] And in addition to these false teaching, there was certain sort of national characteristics or personality characteristics of the people in Crete. Now I'm not suggesting that any of us ever talk like this in this day and age, but turn with me back to chapter 1 and verse 12 and 13. It says, one of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons. This testimony is true. You just wouldn't say that in this particular day. And we have to be careful in what Paul was saying here because he was clearly engaging in a bit of intellectual irony. And the way Paul expressed himself was a way which he was allowing to poke his opposition on the island because he was saying, even your own people say, this is how you are. And it was also clearly a generalisation because not every man or woman on Crete at that time would have been liars, evil beasts and lazy gluttons. There would have been good people there and people who were the very worst. And we can speculate all we want about the reasons as to why people were there. But the point is this type of behaviour had consequences.

And it was leading people to a sort of self-indulgent and putting their own, a self-indulgent life-skill and putting their own bodily instincts first. It was a me-first type of thing. And as I'm sure all of you know, me-first, it can never truly satisfy. Because there's always a desire to look for that next new thing when the immediate buzz runs out. And that in turn made them more susceptible to the false teachers that were there. But whoever came about it, the consequence was it was ruining whole households. And since the Cretan church would have been made up of probably small house churches, it was ruining the church as well. And if you go through the first 10 verses of chapter 2, you can see or deduce the sort of problems this church was experiencing.

It was rampant individualism. It was putting me first above everybody else. And it manifested itself in different ways. There was an utter lack of self-control in how they acted and the way they were, particularly in their relationships and outside of the marriage as well. There was gossip.

There was drunkenness. As I said, there was consequences, was marriage difficulties. There was parental difficulties as well, and difficulties in the workplace too, and I'm sure many others. And this was a mess. And they truly needed help. And the problems they were facing do actually sound quite modern as well. Because we live in a world which puts me first.

[13:10] We live in a world which values what looks good and what feels good. And we live in a world which for all of this brings little satisfaction and contentment.

And year on year, we see the purpose of life being questioned and downgraded. And people living without hope. And year on year, we see the value of life go down.

And we see all the social, moral, and economic consequences of all these things. So that's my way of saying this small book is very relevant to each one of us in the context that we live in.

So that was the problem. There was a lack of sound biblical teaching and national characteristics that worked against good teaching and pushed back towards bad lifestyles and bad teaching.

So it was a vicious, it was a downward circle. So the next two points I want to raise are about what to do about it. And the first thing to do about it is we are to preach sound doctrine or we are to preach the gospel.

[14:23] Or another way of maybe expressing is we are to preach what is healthy in terms of the life that we should live. And the truth is that over time, the church in its widest sense doesn't always do that and does respond incorrectly to the external environments and trends of the society that it lives in.

And to give a few examples, I've said many times over the years that when I was young, we focused on the thou shalt not. Whereas now there's much greater emphasis on Christian freedom, even where that is wrong.

We are influenced in so many ways by the world we're in about how we dress, the way we promote ourselves and our church, the version of the Bible we use, the type of music we sing, maybe a more informal environment than what there was when I was younger.

And I could go on and on with examples like this. But as I said, the church does evolve and adapt to the times and environment it is in.

And in most of those cases I've read, there's absolutely nothing wrong with that. And in most of them, they are very good and proper to do. But there is a dividing line.

[15:44] And that is where what we do is not in accordance with sound doctrine. And to put the other side, it could be the Bible translation that we use that isn't faithful to the original or adds, distorts or takes away from what the Bible says.

It could be the thing that we sing that is not correct or biblical. It could be the clothes that we wear that are just not appropriate for the circumstances that we are in. It's the things that we don't say in a sermon because we worry somebody might be offended.

And the thing about all those sorts of things is that every one of them has an element of man putting his desires in there at the expense of God's.

And you'll have picked up from the examples that have said there that sound doctrine isn't just about salvation by unconditional grace or the great theological elements of the Bible.

Sound doctrine is also about teaching a practical lifestyle of godliness that is a logical consequence of the new life that you have as a believer in Jesus Christ.

[17:01] So what we are told is, and what Titus is told here, is that we are to teach each other, and we are to teach people in how that new person should be.

Because it just doesn't always come easily. It didn't come easily to this church and creek because society norms were very different. Many people had come in from outside, or many people would have come in from outside the church and didn't have experience or teaching or knowledge to be able to know what is right and wrong.

And we live in a circular world today where so many things seem like normal or routine, and what's the problem with that, which just aren't biblical.

So we all face these situations where it's hard to know, or you're going against the grain, which makes it difficult to do. So when we talk about teaching a sound doctrine, in this context it is a particular application on how to live properly, how to go about our daily lives and act in a way that is proper and good.

And then what happens from verse 2 right down to the verse of 10, it contrasts what's a good lifestyle and what's bad.

[18:25] And the godly lifestyle is one that is the exact opposite of the me first, self-centered attitude that we read about in this church, and which we experience so much today, which is based on a best fuzzy and a worst wrong doctrine.

And it's a lifestyle which one of the commentators I read, he talks about it as a lifestyle which never goes out of fashion. I don't think that's right, because it is a lifestyle that's gone out of fashion.

But I think what he should have said was, it's a lifestyle that can never be wrong. It's a timeless lifestyle that will always be good. And he breaks it down into five here.

And I think having spent the last two or three weeks looking at this, there's maybe value in picking them out one at a time and dealing with each one on their own.

But it's, as Ruth said, older men and younger men, older women and younger women, and as well workers. And he has applications for what a good life should be for each of these groups.

[19:37] And if I take men first, modern masculinity, if I be blunt, is thoroughly messed up. And if I asked you all to document a typical male stereotype in the culture which we live in, it would be somebody who's emotionally closed, somebody who hides any fear or vulnerability.

Anger is one of the few emotions which perhaps, along with aggression, that we are allowed to express.

We are very independent and we sort out our own problems and don't like to ask for help. We are providers, modern hunter-gatherers, if you like, but with less competence at domestic chores or parenting.

Physical toughness and physical confrontations are seen as essential character traits. We are hyper-sexual.

Everything's about sex. And so little is about true love. And we all love a bit of activity-based bonding.

[20:52] In recent years, if I be frivolous, it's been moved on a bit, so we have, we're allowed now to occasionally moisturize and use scented cologne and antiperspirant.

And after Christmas and birthday presents, we do a bit of exfoliating scrubs just to keep our skin in perfect nick. But that, it's not too far away from the truth, but it's a very sad way for masculinity to be.

Men can be in need. Relationships do fail. Jobs can be lost. Men can feel vulnerable and depressed.

Even young men get sick at times, as we know in this church, but they hide it all behind a mask of masculinity. Men can often be easily hurt.

In fact, the greater the machismo in man, the more likely it is that they will have a very thin skin. In reality, men are weak.

[22:00] The modern man is a very weak thing. But a godly man is very different from this. For older men, older men will be self-controlled.

They will be able to manage their physical and their sexual urges rather than be ruled by them.

They are people who are worthy of respect. They have a gravitas or a seriousness about them.

And it doesn't mean that they can't have fun or they can't laugh, but it's all done within respectable boundaries. They go about life with a dignity that just makes others feel confident and safe when they are in their presence.

And I'm very lucky I was surrounded by men who met that criteria and still am. And they're the sort of men that while younger men don't want to admit it, they're secretly saying, what a guy.

That's the sort. Older men, older Christian men should have a faith that's so real that you feel that you can almost touch it and feel it. and they live not for this world and they can endure even the worst of things because they're looking ahead to the next when all these things will be overcome.

[23:24] Older men, they are gentle. They should be kind and compassionate. They should be men who show their love as opposed to those who show their urges.

So that's in older men. Younger men, it seems that you get off a little bit easier because you've only got one task and that's to be self-controlled.

And the sad thing is that is the one thing that you're least able to do. You have these passions and strident attitude that prevails everything in your life.

Maybe it's your relationships or even worse, your lack of them. Maybe it's your attitude to your job, your favourite sport or team, your hobby that you have and you're called to be self-controlled and be able to sit back and say, well, what would a godly man do in the situation that I'm facing in here?

But sadly, it's the one thing that you're least able to do. So what do we do? The older men get alongside you. They're there to help you.

[24 : 34] They're there to gently correct you and put you on the right path when you're going down the wrong direction. They're there to get alongside you and encourage you.

They're the sort of people who are role models to you because they are doing it and they're not telling you to do things that they're not doing. Older men, we are to invest in our younger men and help them to live a full Christian life and stop them from being controlled by their urges and the destruction that brings to themselves, to others, to families and all the things that that does. But most importantly, older men, we are to teach the younger men what it says in the Bible because that is the way that they can identify their lack of self-control and their failures.

But it also gives them encouragement that even in the worst of your failures, that we have a God who deals in real men who make exactly these mistakes. We can look back to the example of David, an adulterer, a murderer, a useless husband and father, but yet God used him to do wonderful things.

We can look at Samson who had no time for anything else but his wives and concubines, but God used him for wonderful things. On the other hand, we can look at Gideon, a young man lacking in self-confidence, but yet God used him to defeat a wicked nation that was subjecting his people.

[26 : 14] God can use you and as older men, we should be encouraging you that that is what the Bible example actually is. Now if I turn to women as well, it wasn't easy being a woman in these times.

Very much like today, there was a morally permissive attitude. There was men who were causing pain and suffering to their wives and families by living life as they saw fit.

There was false prophets and false teachers making it even harder for them by forcing them into rituals or pursuits to achieve that super-Christianity and as a result, they were neglecting their husbands and their families and all the things that came with that.

And between these two things, what was happening was that women were being turned off family life and marriage because of the way men and false teachers were being.

And I don't want anybody to think this is a chapter which says all women should be married or women shouldn't work. All this chapter is saying that because of these things, it was family life that was being particularly impacted and there that was a help that was particularly needed.

[27 : 35] Anything else is just a misuse of this chapter. So women like their men needed help. Older women had to be told to move away from the slovenly and decadent lives that they might have been leading.

They're told not to gossip or say bad things about others. There is no situation where it's right to gossip about others and to put them down and there's no situation where that should give any pleasure to anybody.

You're to stop doing that. Boozy lunches or excessive drinking is not allowed. Many of us have been part of families that have been destroyed by alcohol or drugs or other things.

But older men, but like the older men, they are to be teachers, teachers and guides to younger women. Note men that it's the women who get the job to teach the younger women.

It's not the men. It's the women who are given that job because they are way more suitable and experienced and knowledgeable in doing that. And it removes any temptation that can come from a man getting involved in places where they shouldn't do.

[28 : 54] But older women, we are to train our younger women how to love. And this is an interesting one to me because we have this attitude in life that you either love or you don't.

It's just automatic. But love's not like that. Love can be lost. Love can be relearned. It's something that needs to be trained.

And we saw it here with the women that they, because of maybe the way that they were treated by their husbands, they ceased to love their husband. And yes, men, if we're being honest, we are all hard to love at times.

Older women, lend your experience to younger women to let them know how to deal with that. But also, we find a situation here which is almost untenable for us to think about that they didn't love their children either.

And there were certain things that were driving that. Maybe they were, these false teachers were taking them out of the home to do different things, to follow their path and they weren't devoting

their time.

[30:01] Maybe there's health issues, but we've got lots of new babies in our church and we can't imagine a situation where a mother wouldn't love her child. But yes, what was happening where false doctrine comes into the church?

And you only have had to have looked at the news in recent times where we can see a mother who didn't know how to love her child. And while I don't know the woman, I have no doubt that she never had any love from her own mother either when you look at this.

So you need to be taught how to love. You need to be taught how to regain your love when you lose it. And you need to be taught how to exercise self-control because these women and you as young women, you live in situations where there is no moral compass and it's easy to lose that self-control as well.

And finally, older women, you can help our younger women navigate the idea of marriage where we're in the Christian church that we believe that the man is headship and his wife should be submissive to him.

But at the same time, we live in a modern world which just can't understand that that is true but there's also a quality between man and woman in a marriage.

[31:27] The fuzzy intellectual environment that we are in just can't see that those two things are not mutually exclusive. In biblical terms, they go together.

And finally, and I know I need to be getting on, workplace relationships. I don't have a lot of time but if any of you have had the book by John Stott which says, Facing Christians Today, it highlights just in the way that church life and family life has been messed up by poor doctrine and work life has as well.

And there's different ways. There's ungodly political systems. On one hand, maybe communism that looks to distribute wealth evenly but doesn't take into account man's inability to share in that way or doesn't seem to understand in the way that that disincentivize and takes motivation away from work.

We can go to the other extreme of unbridled capitalism which leads towards me first at the expense of others. And then we can look at the situation of slavery here which lends itself to exploitation, dehumanization and resentment.

So sound doctrine is relevant for our workplaces and what we are told very quickly is to be different. We are to be people who go that extra mile, people who work hard, people who treat others properly and correctly.

[33:03] And in doing that, the consequence of that is not only will it fulfill your work life but it will make the faith that you have seem fragrant and something to be desired by your colleagues in management who have none.

So I need to close here. But what are we asking us all to do here? Well I think ultimately what we are asking people to do is to bring hope and purpose to life by living in a way that shows the reality of your experiencing God's faith or God's salvation in your life.

It starts with sound teaching and it flows into all areas of your life and if you follow it it will make all areas of your life better. Men replaces love with conflict.

Woman teaches you how to love better. And it teaches you how to deal with all the things that come your way.

For younger people it gives you the help and support that you will need to grow and mature. For older people it gives you responsibility and purpose and usefulness in a world that worships youth.

[34:26] Older people you have value, you have particular value and we need that and our younger people need that as well. For workers as I said it's a path to greater satisfaction in your work.

It's a path to greater respect amongst you and your colleagues and it's a path by which we can make our gospel seem compelling and wonderful.

And if I put all that together sound doctrine and godly lifestyle they bring families together, they bring churches together so that they function in a way that God families should with love and for the good of all people and mutual support of each other.

but best of all it's one of the most effective ways that we have of evangelising the world around us if we live in the way that we're told to entice us here.

Amen.