

Promoting the Gospel with Godly Character

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[0 : 00] Hypocrite. That's what the Herald Sun reported this week as the assessment of the friend of a well-known media identity. See, the world puts a premium on living out what we say.

And conversely, the world loudly decries inconsistency between, if you like, what people profess and what they end up actually doing.

I think that's a big part of the reason for the crisis of confidence in our politicians, regardless of their political persuasion. Hypocrite. It's a charge which is laid sometimes to us as individual Christians, sometimes to the Church.

Unjustified many times, but sadly justified also. In my previous vocation, running a large company, that's exactly what one employee labelled me as he left our place of employment to seek higher pay overseas.

You see, I'd used the drafting office to design some flyers for a men's breakfast at our local church. That was inappropriate.

[1 : 20] Small issue, perhaps, but I was acting unethically. And I was clearly told so by the departing employee.

See, my Christian faith was well known amongst the 500-plus staff. But I had not adorned the gospel by my actions.

The world watches. Does Jesus really make a difference in the lives of those who follow him?

You see, that's what our non-Christian friends, neighbours, school, work and leisure club colleagues, that's what they want to know. Does my life as a follower of Jesus Christ actually stack up with the gospel?

Well, if you're visiting with us this morning, we're about halfway through a series entitled Promoting the Gospel, and we're delighted that you've come and joined with us. You see, God, in his word, the Bible, has a lot to say about how all followers of Jesus Christ are to be involved in promoting the gospel, promoting the gospel in a variety of ways.

[2 : 41] And today we're looking at those first ten verses in the little book of Titus. It's right towards the end of the New Testament, and you might like to just open that up with me as we go through that page 969 in the Black Pew Bibles.

The Apostle Paul is speaking, giving instruction to a young church leader by the name of Titus, and Titus is living on the Mediterranean island of Crete.

And God, through the Apostle Paul, has got some clear exhortations and encouragements, actually, for each one of us living in 2006 on a bigger island, the island of Australia.

So I want you to look with me as we start at verse 1. Paul writes, But as for you, Titus, teach what is consistent with sound doctrine.

This is a very emphatic way to begin. But as for you. You see, Titus is to pursue a course which is totally different to the false teachers.

[3 : 43] And the false teachers actually have just been described, if you just look back one little space to the end of chapter 1 in verse 16. Because they're described as professing to know God, but they deny him by their actions.

They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work. You see, the false teachers, they actually professed to know God, but they denied him by their actions.

And we're reminded in Matthew's Gospel by Jesus that by someone's fruit, that is, by the character they display, by their behaviour, you'll know who they belong to.

And Paul's reminding Titus that Christian conduct is not some little incidental matter to the Gospel. Verse 1 acts as a heading for this section of 10 verses.

You see, Titus is to give practical instruction and it's to be based on sound doctrine. Now, sound has got the sense of holy or healthy.

[4 : 49] In fact, in English we get our word hygiene from the Greek word that's used there. So the way that each of us as followers of the Lord Jesus are to live is to be in accord with the whole counsel of God.

That means not sort of leaving bits of Scripture out. That means not distorting Scripture, but consistent with the whole of God's holy word.

The Gospel brings transformation. And the purpose of understanding the Gospel, of embracing the Gospel, is transformation.

Because you see, friends, what's at stake is actually the reputation and the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. You see, as we go through this, the Titus simply gives six representative categories.

He combines two categories in the middle. But six representative categories that span gender, age and occupation. So let's look at that first category.

[5 : 54] It's in verse 2 and it relates to older men. These are practical instructions to older men. Now there's a debate in the commentaries and the scholarly works as to what was the age boundary line, if you like, in that first century Greco-Roman world to be called an older man.

Well, we could wax lyrical about this, but the one thing I can assure you is that our vicar, Paul Barker, is in the category. LAUGHTER But I want to be inclusive in this.

You see, us, older Christian men, are not to be drunkards. Paul goes on and he says, and we're to be worthy of respect.

This is not respect that, if you like, just comes because you're getting older. This is respect that comes from godly transformation. And we're to be prudent.

We're to exercise self-control. You see, it's not good enough just to say something like, oh, well, you know, that's just the way that Rod is. You see, the assumption in the verse is that older men are still teachable, resisting being set in their ways.

[7 : 13] In fact, as older men, we're to demonstrate soundness in all aspects of our lives. And Paul actually zeroes in and he focuses on three principal Christian virtues.

Look with me. You see, we're to be sound in faith. That is simply trusting, trusting in God. We're to be sound in love, holding to what is good, and expressing that good in selfless service to others. And we're to be sound in endurance or perseverance. You see, that's maintaining faith and love in the face of opposition and every temptation to be discouraged.

It's putting up with difficulties caused by other people. It's hanging in there in the midst of trying circumstances. Someone has said that character is not made in a crisis.

It's only exhibited in a crisis. And the implication is that these virtues of faith, love and endurance, that they'll be visible.

[8 : 21] If you like, they will be seen by all because of years of gospel transformation. So, if you're an older Christian man here this morning, there's still more for you and I to do.

There's still further for us to go. There's still more of an example of faith, love and obedience that we must give. So, that's the first category, older men.

Now, ladies, if you've been just getting a touch impatient while we've been just having a chat amongst the men, we now come to older men, older women and younger women. And that's verses 3 to 5.

Look how verse 3 begins, simply with likewise. See, the older women actually have a similar responsibility to the older men. But there are some specific traits that are identified.

And the idea that Paul's seeking to convey here is that older women are to be holy. Ladies, the sense is, allow the sense of God's presence to permeate your whole life.

[9 : 40] And Paul goes on and he highlights two things to avoid and one thing to do. The two things to avoid, simply don't be slanderers, don't be drunkards.

In the Greek culture, drunkenness and slanderous talk were common elements that were used in describing older women. And the Apostles' command is straightforward, isn't it?

Live out the reality of the transforming power of the Gospel by your godly lives. And when we think about that, these instructions are not just for older women, are they?

Well, Paul identifies a third aspect for older women. And it's positive. It's a positive instruction. See, Paul says, if you like, instead of using your mouth for slander over the garden fence, use your mouth to teach what is good to the younger women.

And who better to teach the younger women? Older women, the Lord does have an important role for each of you to play.

[10:51] To encourage younger women simply by your godly lives. And the method is by your example and by informal instruction. Keep on serving, keep on promoting the Gospel by the way that you live.

Don't waste your gifts and don't waste your time. We had a discussion forum for the young families a couple of weeks ago. The one at the end of the month is a barbecue.

A couple of weeks ago at that discussion forum, we were chatting about loving or the challenge of loving discipline. And as we chatted about that, some of the younger mums in our congregation expressed the desire for older women in the church to get alongside them, to encourage them, to share with them their wisdom.

Now I know that that happens in the life of this church. But let's make it the very fabric of our life together as a community.

Well, what then if you're a younger woman? The qualities for the younger woman are to be the same as the older because the older are acting as models.

[11:59] Paul also gives some tighter instructions. Look with me at verses 4 and 5. He says to the younger women, love your husbands and love your children.

Be self-controlled, chaste, good managers of the household, kind, being submissive to your husbands. It's interesting, isn't it? To think, you kind of think that love is a given.

But God is saying to the younger woman, you need training in love. When we think about that, the primary emphasis of love is sacrifice and service.

I don't know if you think back to Valentine's Day this year or in fact in past years in flower shop windows and certainly on cards. You'll often see a combination of words, love, desire, passion, all sort of mixed up together.

And as you look at these sort of combination of words, sometimes I nearly get the impression that love is sort of something like catching the flu. Now, we do want and need feelings but it's not feelings that drive love.

[13:08] Love isn't just a feeling, in fact it's a doing word. And so younger women, you'll benefit from some encouragement and modelling of loving your husband, of loving your children.

Paul goes on in verse 5 and he encourages younger women to live a sensible life, a life of balance and restraint. And then he says to be good managers of the household.

The sense here is to love the home. This is not a prohibition to women working external to the house.

But ladies, don't let your really important job of being a wife and a mother fall into second or third place. And then look with me towards the end of verse 5.

God, through the Apostle Paul, says to the younger women, if you like, in my paraphrase, don't allow Christian freedom and equality to lead to behaviour which brings the gospel into disrepute.

[14:14] You see, God has established a created order and that includes masculine headship. That's not of authority. That's not autocracy.

But it's of responsibility and loving care. So submission in marriage, in fact, is a loving partnership.

Now ladies, I'm sure you agree with me that the hours as being a mum and a wife seem to fall a little bit outside any trade union award, don't they?

pre or post John Howard. And the pay, well, it could be better. But God places a high importance on ministry in the home.

You see, it's not just I'm a housewife or I'm just a mum. You play a vital role in promoting the gospel when you live the gospel out in your daily life.

And this costly, this important role that younger women play in promoting the gospel, it needs support. It needs support by older women.

[15:26] Not the older women acting as busy bodies, not the older women acting as interferers, but the older women acting as wonderful encouragers.

So older men, older women, younger women. And then in verses six to eight, Paul gives some instructions to younger men and within that he also includes some instructions to Titus himself.

Now, let me just check. With a show of hands, how many actually think, given my earlier description of age boundaries, are in this younger men category? I probably should have started the address speaking about honesty.

In verse six, we simply read likewise, again reflecting back what's been said about these other qualities, likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled.

This command to younger men to be self-controlled is no different than the command to others in God's family to be self-controlled. But I think for younger men, let's see if I can say we, we don't promote the gospel in our lives by just, if you like, letting it all hang out.

[16:49] We need to be able to say no when ungodly urges and temptations appear to engulf us. So Paul gives three simple little instructions to young men about self-control.

Firstly, he says, younger men need encouragement. That is, they need others to come alongside them and support them. And then, younger men need role models, they need examples.

Look with me at the beginning of verse seven. See, Titus, likely a younger man himself, is to be an example to the young men on Crete. He was to influence them by his godly example and thirdly, at the end of verse seven, by his teaching.

And his teaching is the grounding and the foundation of his encouragement and modelling. So encouragement, role modelling and teaching.

These three will help a young man to maintain self-control. To be able to say, no to what's harmful and wrong and to say, yes, to what's Christ-like.

[18:02] So younger men, you need role models, godly role models. Of course, we're all modelling to someone, aren't we?

Tommy had been sent to bed by his mother for using profane language. And as soon as his father came home, the mother sent him upstairs to punish the boy. Oh, I'm going to teach that young fellow not to swear, roared the father.

He races up the stairs and he falls heavily on the top step and lets out a stream of expletives. You'd better come down now, his wife called. I think Tommy's already had enough for his first lesson.

We all model something to those around us. So what's the impact of our modelling? Is it promoting the gospel? As we yield to the Holy Spirit in our lives, as we confess and repent of our sins, all of us, all followers of the Lord Jesus Christ can be promoters of the gospel.

Now, sure, we're not going to live perfect lives. But the watching world is not looking for perfection. It's looking for consistency between what we proclaim and what we believe and the way we act.

[19:30] The issue is how big is the gap what we believe and proclaim and what we do in our daily lives. But more important than the world's response.

Our heavenly father expects us to shine like lights in a dark, in a hurting, indeed, in a lost world. Well, the last category is in verses 9 to 10.

Tell slaves to be submissive to their masters and to give satisfaction in every respect. They are not to talk back, not to pilfer, but to show complete and perfect fidelity, so that in everything they may be an ornament to the doctrine of God our Saviour.

Why slaves as a category? Is it just because we might sort of extrapolate to employment? I think because slaves and their circumstances can be so very mixed.

You see, for some slaves, in fact, life was quite comfortable if they had a good master. But for many, life was very difficult. People were dealt unjustly, with harshness, and they were in a degrading situation.

[20:49] So what's required of them? Honesty, honesty and loyalty. Forced labour is demeaning. And so, for any of us, if you see yourself in a demeaning situation, Paul tells us that we can actually adorn the gospel.

We can actually beautify the gospel by the way we live. The good lives of believers can enhance the gospel's appearance in the minds of those who hear it.

Now, of course, the reality is the gospel is beautiful just on its own, isn't it? I mean, the good news that Jesus Christ, the God man, let me say contrary to the lie of the Da Vinci Code that labels him as a good man, Jesus Christ, the God man, came, died for our sins and rose again.

You see, the gospel, the good news is indeed fantastic. And Paul says that this fantastic news can actually shine forth, it can be beautified, it can be adorned by the lives we live as followers of the Lord Jesus.

Three times in this short little passage, Paul emphasizes the effect of our Christian witness on the non-Christian watching world. Just flick back up with your eyes through the passage, verses 5, 8 and 10.

[22 : 15] Twice, there's a negative sense. Godly behaviour can silence those who malign God's word, verse 5. Godly behaviour can silence those who oppose the preachers of the word, verse 8.

And then positively, verse 10, so that in everything they may be an ornament to the doctrine of God, our saviour. Good works, they don't only defend the word of God, they actually promote it.

And as Christians, we are living, walking examples of what Jesus does with human lives. One way to think of it perhaps is we are billboards for the Lord Jesus.

And so our friends, our neighbours, our work colleagues, our friends at Provis, they're going to take the content of Jesus from our lives.

So I wonder what they think of Jesus because of us. That's really the question to ask, isn't it?

[23 : 27] And as we think of that and the challenge of that, we need to be reminded of, we need to continually encourage one another in the ways we live to God's glory.

Maybe as you consider this passage, you're feeling sort of a bit of a mounting building pressure inside. I mean, how can I do this? I mean, you're not aware of the struggles that I have with sin, of the temptations that seem to rise up within me.

Well, in fact, in the next section of chapter 2, beginning at verse 11, we see that it's God's love that shapes us. And that's why we want to be godly, because of what has happened in our lives.

We each have mentors, good ones, bad ones. John Stott was born in 1921. this famous internationally known minister.

He now, in his very late life, shows his age more than ever. He walks on a cane, but he speaks very, very slowly.

[24 : 36] And at the end of the meeting, he needs to sit in a seat as people speak to him. But amazingly, John Stott still travels and conducts an active ministry that's a great deal more involved than many men 20 years younger.

Stott was converted to faith in Christ as a 17-year-old boy. And the sermon that God used to bring him to explicit faith asked the question, what then shall I do with Jesus who is called to Christ?

And the preacher pressed this question, telling his audience that everyone, everyone must do something about Jesus and that no one can remain neutral.

And the Spirit of God revealed Christ to John Stott that day, sure, after that address, he had a long conversation with a preacher and he asked many questions. But the result of John Stott's conversion has been an amazingly fruitful gospel ministry over nearly 70 years.

I think his life and his ministry stand out for many reasons. He's been a brilliant expository preacher at All Souls in London where we had the opportunity and delight to visit in January.

[25 : 53] And from that church at age 64, in fact, he went out on a worldwide ministry that has borne extraordinary fruit. When John Stott started his ministry back in 1945, evangelicals had very little influence in the hierarchy of the Anglican Church.

Stott had a vision of church renewal and it was rooted in history and gospel optimism and he pursued it with vigour. And the fruit of the gospel work of John Stott, how the Lord has used him as seen throughout the world, not least the Anglican Church.

But even as I share that story with you, you might be thinking, but I'm not a great teacher or a preacher like John Stott. Friends, John Stott has an impact on people because of his godly life.

A Jewish commentator writing in the New York Times at the end of 2005 paid tribute to John Stott's godly character and conduct. This commentator does not profess faith in Jesus Christ, but this is how he describes Stott, friendly, courteous, natural, humble and self-critical, but confident, joyful and optimistic.

And as well as Stott's teaching ministry, he's been involved in working for the poor around the world and addressing social issues with dignity and with Christian thoughtfulness.

[27 : 29] So John Stott displays a deep and practical lived-out spirituality. his biographer a couple of years ago wrote a two-volume biography on his life and then separately wrote an article on John Stott.

And this is what Timothy Dudley Smith said of Stott. He thinks of himself as all Christians should, but few of us achieve, as simply a beloved child of the Heavenly Father, as an unworthy servant of his friend and master Jesus Christ, and a sinner saved by grace to the glory and praise of God.

It's a great perspective, isn't it? A beloved child of a Heavenly Father, an unworthy servant of his master and friend Jesus Christ, and a sinner saved by grace to the glory and praise of God.

Friends, that's the sort of perspective that manifests itself in a life that adorns the gospel, makes the gospel sparkle. It's the sort of perspective that manifests itself in a life that promotes the gospel by our character and actions.

By the lives that we live, by our shop front, if you like, the shop front of our displayed character and our behaviour and actions, we can either, on the one hand, we can give no evidence of salvation.

[29 : 05] What happens in that case? The gospel is tarnished. And then, in that situation, when we proclaim the gospel, we shouldn't be surprised if a watching world yells back, hypocrite, on the one hand.

other hand, if our shop front gives good evidence of our salvation by living a manifestly saved life, then what happens then?

The gospel jewel shines forth. It sparkles. Friends, each and every follower of the Lord Jesus Christ is called to live a godly life, and in so doing, to promote the gospel.

Father, we thank you for the glory of your gospel. We thank you that in your great love that we heard about just this morning in the kids' talk, you sent the Lord Jesus Christ to die for our sins and rise for our new life.

Father, this is indeed fantastic news. And I pray for any who are here this morning who don't have that confidence in their heart of a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus, that indeed they would respond just like John Stott.

[30 : 40] Repent of their sins and accept the Lord Jesus as their Saviour and Lord. And Lord, for us who are in your kingdom, who are disciples and followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, we're challenged by these words to Titus this morning to live out our lives in a godly way so that in so doing, the gospel itself shines, is beautified, sparkles before the world.

Lord, may we each, as we yield to the Holy Spirit and deal with sin in our life, indeed promote the gospel.

And we ask this for the sake and in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we ask him r IDk is s ■
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