

The Energy Of Desire & The Assertiveness Of Pride

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[0 : 00] Just as you're seated, will you bow your heads in the paper. Father, you have a word to speak to us.

And you speak your word independent of us. That your living word comes through the written word. And it's to come with power in the spirit and with deep conviction.

So as we turn our minds and our hearts to your word, we ask that indeed you will speak to the circumstances of all of our lives. Giving us grace to hear not those things which are the foolishness of men, but that great wisdom which is the foolishness of God in Christ.

We ask this in his name. Amen. Amen. I have heard some murmuring in the ranks during the past six weeks or so about spending the whole of Lent in the epistle of Paul to Titus.

And this epistle is found in the Pew Bible beginning on page 200 and ending on page 201. And it's very short. But it talks about important things.

[1 : 38] About the faith in God that we have come to. About the knowledge of the truth. About truth finding expression in godliness. About a hope of eternal life.

And a God who never lies. And then it goes on to tell you about the stern demands of leadership. And the recognition that even at the level of this congregation, there are few people that want to take the responsibility of leadership.

Because of the demands it makes. And these leadership demands are on your home, your personal life, your family, the conduct of your life, the nature of your relationships.

It's a very demanding role. And so with, I think, a mock humility, many bow out from taking on the role of leadership.

Well, then it goes on to talk about the raw material out of which the church is made. And that wonderful verse in Titus about the people who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers.

[2 : 55] And they're teaching people who are drunk, violent for greedy gain. That this material out of which God wants to build his church is very raw material indeed.

And so you take this raw material and you hammer it into shape with sound doctrine. That's what has to happen.

The sound doctrine has to be there in order to hammer the raw material into some kind of shape. And the sound doctrine is in contrast to the commands and myths of men who don't know God and yet who are very good communicators.

And that creates a structure of society in which the older women don't gossip or drink too much and set an example to the younger women and the younger women in their relationship to their husbands.

And the husbands, the older men in relationship to the younger men and the leadership in relationship to those that follow and the children and the slaves, all of them trying to demonstrate by their lives as they live them the sound doctrine in which they have been taught.

[4 : 14] You get at the end of chapter 2, the breakthrough in a sense like the burst of sun coming through on a day like this.

After long days of rain, you get two sunbursts in this book. One verse 11 following chapter 2 and one verse 4 following.

And I asked Sarah when she read this morning not to go into that because I want to preserve the full glory of that sunburst for Easter day. So that what we have to deal with today is what we have to remember and of what we have to be reminded.

And if you look in verse 3, you'll see what we have to remember. Remember. This is how it's in the Jerusalem Bible it says.

It begins verse 3 with remember. Remember we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by men and hating one another.

[5 : 29] I sometimes find that the impact of the New Testament on people is to in a sense close them down so that they become very unemotional, very unexciting, very uninteresting people because they're so aware of the nature and power of sin.

And when you are given a verse like this to preach on, remind them that we ourselves were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived. That Christians think that means that the essence of being a Christian is not to be foolish, not to be disobedient, not to be deceived.

And further to go on and take the rest of that verse and try and work it out by some moral affirmation from our willpower that we will not be led astray.

We won't be slaves to various passions and pleasures. We'll eliminate them altogether. We will pass our days in malice and envy.

Well, we won't do that, but then we won't do anything else either. And we won't be hating men and hated by men. Well, that's their problem, and so we don't think about it.

[7 : 03] So you get that kind of, I think, really obstinate turning away from the manifestations of sin, and all we succeed in doing is coverting it within our own lives rather than dealing with it.

So I wanted you to think this morning in these terms. I want you to take the island of Crete, to which this and the people of that island, and it was a big island with a wonderful history, rich in tradition and in the civilizations that had been part of it, and see this as a small community into which the gospel comes and creates a gospel people.

Crete is a little island in the huge sea of the Mediterranean, and we are a little planet in a vast universe to which this word comes.

Our lives are totally occupied, and you could add to this list, and you may if you like. Cars, planes, people, fruit from Chile. I think that's an amazing parable of something.

You have to work out exactly what it is, but it's something unbelievable. There's fish and chips and cans of beer and bottles of wine and movies and guns and bread and butter and rice and sleep and screaming and murder and marriages and divorce and robberies and heart surgeries and spacecraft and poverty and landmines and revolutions.

[8 : 39] Hate and blasphemy and an aspiration to freedom. And those are just a few of the many, many, many ingredients that go into the pot which we call our world and which are constantly being stirred one way and another.

Well, what happens is we have to figure out how to deal with this. And when Paul writes to Titus and describes this whole thing, he says, the problem is that, and remember, Titus, he says, that this is the kind of world in which you live.

These are the kinds of things that motivate you. And he said you have to learn to be reasonable, but being reasonable is not enough.

And there must be the energy of desire and the assertiveness of pride.

That's part of the fuel that keeps our world going. The energy of desire and the assertiveness of pride. That doesn't come from St. Paul.

[9 : 51] That comes from William Temple, who was once the Archbishop of Canterbury. And he was talking about the human condition, which Paul describes in verse 3. But he says, nevertheless, there has to be the energy of desire and the assertiveness of pride.

That has to be there. And I would like the church to be full of people who were full of desire, that really wanted to see something happen, and who were totally committed in that.

But Paul points out to you that there are problems with desire. And the kind of problems that you run into is that desire needs to be organized.

It needs to be organized by pride and controlled by reason. And if it isn't organized in that way, it becomes lust and is evil.

The temple goes on to say, when attention is fixed not on its direct object, but on the pleasure connected with its satisfaction. Did you get that?

[11 : 00] I'll go over it again. Desire needs to be there. Desire becomes lust when instead of it having an appropriate object, it becomes engrossed with the pleasure of the relationship.

In other words, it loses its object, and it just becomes involved with the process. And that's why playboy philosophy, for instance, is so helpful to us, in our society, in our culture, as we like to think.

The difficulty with it is that it doesn't satisfy, ultimately, that there is no satisfaction in it. And you see, and that's why Paul says, remember that you once lived this way, foolish, disobedient, deceived, but the satisfaction you were seeking, you never found.

And that's because the desire had become lust, pleasures and passions. When it talks about pleasures and passions, it's talking about coveting.

Remember, thou shalt not covet at the end of the Ten Commandments. It also is, I think, the exclusive usage usage in the whole of the New Testament of the word from which we derive, that word which is so often associated with Vancouver, hedonism.

[12 : 41] Those are the pleasures and passions. That goes together. And when that goes together, then it loses, it's no longer controlled by pride and reason.

And when Temple is writing about pride, he says it's, pride protects the whole self from particular desires.

Reason arbitrates between desire and pride. You have desire and you have pride. And desires are liable to take you in any direction at any time to seek their fulfillment.

And only your pride saves you from going and your reason arbitrates in order that your pride will win out over your desire.

And so he talks about that battle going on in people. And he talks about it in such a way that he quotes somebody.

[13 : 53] And I don't know who he's quoting. Maybe some of you are wise enough to know who he's quoting. But he says in connection with pride, what man has to do is he must make an ally of the lion, which is pride, in order to control the monster, which is lust.

So you begin to see from a, I suppose, from a philosopher's point of view, what Paul's getting at when he writes, we ourselves were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving diverse lusts and passions, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.

A total loss of pride in who we are as people, a total loss in pride of where we're going, a total loss of any sense of self-worth.

So given over are we to passions and pleasures, malice and envy, hate and hating. We've lost all sense of direction.

I talked to somebody yesterday who was in hospital, and I said, if you had to preach on this text tomorrow, what would you say? And she talked about the big cities, you see. And one of the things the big cities do is grant us anonymity.

[15 : 19] Nobody knows who we are, so we can behave as we like, on the one hand, and still maintain a totally different life, on the other hand, because we're living in an anonymous kind of world.

And so one of the things that you need to do is to get to be known by people. and to know people. And so that your pride is nurtured by those around you who love you and care for you.

And so you can make of pride which can be dangerous, you can make of it an ally by which you can overcome the monster which is about to destroy you.

I thought it was a powerful picture, and a powerful picture that I think helps me, at least, and I hope you, to understand why, Paul says to Titus, remember, this is the basic reality.

We ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by men, and hating one another.

[16 : 28] Foolish, because we didn't know any better, disobedient, because we did know better but chose not to do it, deceived, because we live in a world where we encourage mutual deception one of another.

We practice deception all the time. And so we have this life in which we're, in a sense, out of control. We don't know who we are.

Well, then you see, what happens on the basis of that is, having remembered that that's who we are, then Paul makes the amazing claim in chapter 3, verse 1, telling us how we are to behave.

And when he says how we are to behave, he says, remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for any honest work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, to show perfect courtesy towards all.

Submissive, obedient, ready for honest work, speaking evil of no one, avoiding quarreling, to be gentle, perfect courtesy towards all. That's quite a transformation that's asked for, isn't it?

[17 : 50] How do you take that raw material on the one hand, where we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, and turn it in to being submissive to rulers and authorities, obedient, ready for any honest work?

How does that happen? Well, how it happens, of course, is what we spoke about, what we're going to talk about next week when we look at verse 4, because that describes the process by which the change is effected.

But for now, I want just to give you one picture, and that picture is the person of our Lord Jesus Christ entering Jerusalem. Now listen to these words and think of him.

Submissive to rulers and authorities, obedient, ready for any honest work, speaking evil of no one, avoiding quarreling, gentle, showing perfect courtesy toward all.

Do you see the picture? that's what we're asked to do. Now, why did he do it? What pride did he have?

[19 : 10] What reason did he have for doing that? Another thing that William Temple said is, humility and forgiveness are thin and poor if there is no pride behind them.

And he said, a person conscious of power, accepting subordination, is a finer thing than the same act in a person who has no such consciousness.

And so you see, the secret of Jesus Christ is, conscious of power, he accepted subordination. Because he was aware of a kingdom.

and because of his awareness of that kingdom, he, in terms of this world's kingdom, came into it by being submissive to rulers and authorities, obedient, ready for honest work, speaking evil of no one, avoiding quarreling, gentle, and showing perfect courtesy to all.

He did that because his eye was ultimately on the kingdom. And he did that for that reason. And that, of course, led to his crucifixion.

[20 : 49] And in the sense that Christian disciples are those who are crucified with Christ, I'm sure that that program would lead to ours as well, a kind of crucifixion.

temple said that there's three ways we relate to people. One, we ignore them. Two, we compete with them. And three, we cooperate with them.

And the only reason we cooperate is because we have an absolute and final goal, which is our satisfaction. And competition isn't enough. To win that goal for ourselves is no good.

To win it for the world is what we're after. And you see, that was Christ's purpose was to bring in this kingdom. And what he's called us to do is to engage in this world in claiming a kingdom.

Not to be those who ignore others. Not to be those who are in competition with others. But to be those who seek the kingdom.

[21 : 55] And in seeking the kingdom are prepared prepared to consciously submit to subordination in order that this final goal to which we are called as sons and daughters of God might be realized.

Christ. And you see, that's why Paul, as he concludes his letter to them, says, just remember this is what you wear.

Remind one another this is what you're to be. And the reason for this is because there is a kingdom. And the pattern for it is our Lord Jesus Christ as he entered Jerusalem to claim that kingdom.

Amen.