



3. The Greytop Blues? Titus 2:1-8

2:1 But you must teach what agrees with sound doctrine. 2 Instruct the older men to be sober, sensible, and self-controlled; to be sound in their faith, love, and endurance. 3 In the same way instruct the older women to behave as women should who live a holy life. They must not be slanderers or slaves to wine. They must teach what is good, 4 in order to train the younger women to love their husbands and children, 5 to be self-controlled and pure, and to be good housewives who submit themselves to their husbands, so that no one will speak evil of the message that comes from God. 6 In the same way urge the young men to be self-controlled. 7 In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness 8 and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.

One of the challenges of being Christian in this modern world is that what we find in Scripture is often quite different to what the conventional wisdom and lifestyle of the world is. Think of major social issues where biblical values are different from the rest of society and you'll see what I mean – abortion, homosexuality, marriage and divorce, social justice, war and peace, materialism – those are the big headlines as it were. That said, even though most Christian teachers and theologians can argue a really strong and different perspective to all these issues, too often we find that Christians think and act like the world – we compromise with it, because in our post-modern world, that's what we do.

Life in first century Crete seems to have been much the same: a world in which morality was relative and where everyone was just laid back and it was a case of within reason, anything goes. Into that Titus is given instructions to get the churches into good order on Crete. Last week we looked at Paul's command to make sure Titus got it right at the top. Leadership was going to be on the basis of integrity and maturity. Leadership was not going to be jobs for the boys, or "he's a nice chap, so what if he has two wives and three mistresses", or ignore the fact that the leader's family were falling apart. So often leadership even in our modern day when society is much the same as Crete is based on who's got the loudest voice, the biggest influence, the only one prepared to do it, or can pressure their way into leadership rather than being based on the scriptural values of integrity and maturity.

However, tonight we are going to see that integrity went all the way down from the oldest to youngest members of the church. In fact Paul gets Titus to address the issues with the older and younger men and the older and younger women.

In one sense this passage is a child of its time. Paul gets Titus to address the older and younger men, whilst Titus is to get the older women to deal with the younger ones because it would have been inappropriate in that society for him to have had a huge amount to do with the personal teaching and mentoring of women – it wasn't done.

That was the issue. Like Paul Titus had to contextualise. He had to preach and teach according to who he was dealing with. For Paul it was having a good knowledge of Cretan poets. His grasp would have impressed. Similarly Titus had to make sure that he didn't offend sensibilities by teaching the younger women personally.

But there's a difference between contextualisation and verse 1 draws that line: *But you must teach what agrees with sound doctrine.* There was a huge pressure to go the way of Crete and allow all kinds of ideas to float around. But Paul drew a line at what was sound and didn't change and he was ensuring that Titus drew that line and encouraged Cretans to do the same.

Donald Guthrie says this of Paul: *As important as the mission mandate was to Paul, he would not do just anything to make the gospel appealing to the unbeliever. The church must live within the world, which is fallen, and within cultures, which in various ways express this fallenness, but it must do so critically, measuring everything against the Word of God. It will undoubtedly find that much of any given culture can be accepted, worked with and (in Christ) improved upon; but wherever the culture encourages or advocates behaviour that violates the will of God, the church must make its stand for God, whatever the consequences. The point to be observed in this context is that responsible Christian living within society, which promotes mission while not compromising God's values, is a part of God's will.*

That's our challenge, so how do we make that happen. This passage looks just like Paul dealing with four groups of people, older men, younger men, older women and younger women. But we see as we read it that it gives specific personal responsibilities to the older people.

Now that's kind of relevant here tonight as we are all older people. The majority of us are in the greytop group. So we find that most of this applies to us uncomfortably directly. You see, all four groups of people have personal moral responsibilities placed on them:

Older men

Instruct the older men to be sober, sensible, and self-controlled; to be sound in their faith, love, and endurance.

Older Women

In the same way instruct the older women to behave as women should who live a holy life. They must not be slanderers or slaves to wine.

Younger Women

to be self-controlled and pure

Younger Men

In the same way urge the young men to be self-controlled.

By the standards of those times, we're mostly oldies: *Now "older men" is an interesting word, presbutes, it's a word that means just that, older men. There are some ancient sources such as Philo and Hypocrites that use the term to refer to people over 50. Somewhere in the 50 and over and 60 and over category this term comes into play.* James Mac Arthur

Agatha Christie wrote on one occasion that she married an archaeologist. And someone asked "why would you marry an archaeologist"...to which she replied, "Because the older I get the more he'll appreciate me."

Being old should have its advantages – maturity, experience, wisdom, strong in faith, love and endurance, holy. Those are all ideas used here explicitly or implicitly. Titus was an older man too and the words reserved for him show us where Paul is going with this: *In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.*

If we're older people, we should be an example. No doubt about that. Here's James Mac Arthur again: *The maturity of godliness will be a benediction to the body of Christ....There's no value in being old if you're not godly. There's no value in being old if you're not a model or an example.*

Yet I've come across enough older people in my time to whom I'd attach the old saying "there's no fool like an old fool". Yet, we are called to be an example to the younger generation. Actually, we're called to be more than that. As I've said, the older women were instructed to teach the younger ones – that's proactive. The older men did not have such a direct command but Titus as an older man did and we can safely assume that what applied to him also applied to other older men. So what were they encouraged to do?

Here we see swimming against the tide. Young women were encouraged to *to love their husbands and children, 5 to be self-controlled and pure, and to be good housewives who submit themselves to their husbands, so that*

no one will speak evil of the message that comes from God. Now that would be described as a sexist thing to say in modern terms. Titus would probably get the same of annoyed Cretan women. That's where the Biblical difference lies. Marriage is the foundation of good family life and of a healthy society. Unfortunately reality is different in society and in the church. We don't often have to go far to find broken marriages and absentee fathers, and as the people of God it is our duty to love them as Jesus does; to bind their wounds, to help, to encourage them, to bring healing and wholeness out of broken relationships. But never to condone poor actions and decisions that got them there in the first place.

That's where we go against the flow in encouraging, teaching and supporting people to form good marriages, lasting marriages, loving marriages: good ground for the nurturing of family life. That's the task of the older folk in the church – not to criticise when things go sour, not to judge when things get rough, but to nurture the younger people in the church in their married life, to pray for them, support them in difficulty. That starts before they even get as far as marriage. The older folk are to encourage the younger ones to be self-controlled. That usually means in scripture to control oneself spiritually, emotionally, sexually so that you don't fall from sinful actions.

There is a positive way to go about that, or there is the negative one where people wag fingers and make snap judgements on others, or keep reminding people of their past failure without moving them on to what they should be in Christ. Over the years I've seen plenty of that too. Or the other one is to try to be Christian by helping people as much as we can, but never stopping to say "you can't do that, it's wrong" or make them take responsibility for themselves.

The really tough implication of us as older people in a modern church that has a younger generation that are not self-controlled, make poor decisions, show little fidelity to family and have a questionable commitment to being like Christ and that's this:

How much of an example have we been to them

- in our personal conduct?
- In our conduct as a generation within the church?

How hard have we tried to encourage our younger generation?

For some of use, we know we've done as much as we could have. For others, maybe God is challenging us. It's easy to say: "it's their fault, what can we do?" But we have a Biblical responsibility as older people to be an example, and to teach and encourage.

It's not too late. Where do we start? We start in prayer. Identify people, pray for them. Help them, be spiritual parents to them. To those who are married, support them practically where we can. To those who have been through broken marriages, to bring healing but also to help them find healthy relationships in Christ. But we need to be prayerful of ourselves too. This is an area and issues where actually there's plenty of biblical input but answers are never clear cut or easy. We need to be the godly people, the people of integrity that are capable of finding those answers and being that example.

That's our challenge. Phew!

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Seafarers Centre, Felixstowe 4/7/10
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