

Titus 2:1-15

Last week in the first of our short series on Titus we used the picture of the frontier town from the wild west to help us think about Titus and the pioneer situation he was in. The gospel had come to Crete but the result was a rough and ready bunch of believers and no real church to speak of. Much of their Christian faith was overlaid with the Cretan culture, some of the teaching endorsed this and as a result the Christians lacked any distinctiveness. For many there was no distinction between the Christian and the world in terms of behaviour.

Paul, as we saw from 1:5 had left Titus on Crete to establish a healthy church and we saw last week that the church's health was to be centred on the teaching of the apostles.

So here in v1 it should read, "You however must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine". Titus teaching was to be different from the many and to be in accord with the apostles' teaching.

1. What was the true teaching?

We note that what we have here is Paul's teaching to the church on Crete addressed through Titus. The teaching is focused on five groups and much of what Paul had to say was about their outward behaviour and the way that they would be viewed by those outside the church. As he wrote Paul was asking them to live godly lives that ran counter to the culture of their day and of that island. As we read what Paul wrote here we will identify not so much with Titus as the teacher but with the groups he is teaching and for many of us it will be through that God speaks to us today.

So v2 there was a message for the older men, let's say those over 50. They were to be temperate that is cautious in the use of wine in comparison with the intemperate culture they were living in, worthy of respect and self-controlled, that is having restraint rather than giving in to every desire, which as we saw last week was part of the culture depicted in the saying referred to in 1:12, "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons."

In the same way that Titus was to teach "sound" doctrine the older men were to be encouraged to be "sound" in faith, love and endurance. Their faith in God was to be solid, their love for others solid, and they were to endure to the end. It would be these three Christian characteristics that would bring them respect and, as we saw last week equip some of them to be elders in the church.

Next, v3, Paul wrote to the older women, for the ladies that is those who are a good few years older than you are! Two negatives they were not to be slanderers, wandering from house to house with idle gossip in which they criticise others. Nor were they to be over indulgent with the wine. Rather they were to be reverent or godly in their living and so to train or better be a living example to the younger women.

The younger women, v4&5, which I am sure must include all the ladies here, were to be loving, pure and again the words self-controlled, not following the culture of the island and giving in to every

passion and appetite be it food, drink or sex. They were to be busy at home and subject to their husbands, which to our 21st century ears may sound a bit sexist. In this, in one sense, Paul was echoing the Greek and Roman culture of his day which thought that the wife should occupy herself at home running the household. However, there was in Crete and elsewhere a “new woman” culture growing up where young women were throwing the traditional culture to the winds and pursuing sexual freedom. For the Apostle not only was that wrong but would undermine the gospel because people would fear that their wives or daughters would get caught up in this. So a call to restraint was made by Paul.

The young men were similarly, v6, called to self control and note that Titus was included amongst the young men. He was to set them an example in his living and he was to teach them with integrity. Again, as with last week, it is teaching and living going together.

Finally the slaves, v9&10, were to be encouraged to accept the authority of their masters, not to steal but to work with integrity.

The call to all these, and the list included every Christian on the island of Crete, was to live godly lives again based on the teaching of the Apostle.

If Paul were writing to us today the general thrust would be the same for the older and younger men and the older and younger women, that we live godly lives. In a sense it is summed up for us in v12, “say no to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self- controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age”.

There’s a negative and a positive. There were to reject ungodliness and passions aroused by living in the world of their day. Clearly alcohol was one of the problems for it was mentioned twice in these verses and an area where self-control was needed because if we are not self-controlled in terms of alcohol we lose self-control. But the point was that these new Christians were not simply to allow their natural human passions to rule their lives because these passions don’t lead to God but away from him. It is when they lack self-control that they are led to ungodliness. It seems from that culture that excessive drinking at parties led to indiscriminate sexual activity, actually that could be any culture couldn’t it? But the point Paul was making through Titus to these Christians was that they needed to be able to say no to themselves and to others. No to too much drink, no to inappropriate sexual activity, no to inappropriate talk. In other words they were not simply to behave like the rest of society. We too in our own day, and with Christmas approaching perhaps it is even more relevant, need to be able to say no, no to excessive drinking, no to excessive eating, no to excessive present buying and the materialism that it represents. Now I realise that can make me seem like Scrooge but that was not Paul’s aim nor mine it is simply saying that if we are Christians then our lifestyle should be different from the culture around us.

But there was also a positive in this for the self-control as Paul says here results in an upright and godly life. That is what God wants for us.

But there is a question in all this – why?

Why did Paul want them to be self-controlled and live upright and godly lives and why does he want us to?

I think in the passage he gives three related reasons. I'll take them in reverse order.

2. Why live Godly lives?

a. because of the grace of God in Christ Jesus, v11-14. "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men". God's grace has come in Jesus and these people had come to faith and that faith and the knowledge of the truth, 1v1 leads to godliness. Jesus v14 has redeemed us from all wickedness. By the grace of God we have been bought back from slavery to sin. If we are in Christ and he is in us then our lives should be different. In Christ we are made pure and so fit for God to use. Last week watching Gordon Randall do the something different spot and talking about the student room with all the clothes around, the papers on the floor, and the plates unwashed reminded me of being a student and a cup I had which I drank coffee and tea out of but didn't wash up. As you can imagine it was not a cup I could have offered to anyone else. It needed to be scrubbed clean before it was fit for use. Paul here was reminding these Christians that they had been washed clean and made fit for God's use and so have we if we know Jesus Christ. In that case such ungodliness is unfitting and it denies God's grace.

So why should they and we seek to live upright and godly lives - G because of Grace

b. secondly so that they would adorn or make attractive the gospel, v10. The reason the slaves were given for not stealing and showing they could be trusted was "so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Saviour attractive." Apparently stealing from their masters formed part of the caricature of the lazy dishonest slave. Paul's encouragement to Christian slaves was not to fall for this temptation and by avoiding the temptation they would show the gospel in a good light. People would see that being a Christian brought good changes in people's lives and so the reputation of the gospel would be enhanced. I remember a couple who weren't Christians talking to me about their teenage son who had come to faith and the difference it had made to his attitude and behaviour in the home. He literally made "the teaching about God our Saviour attractive" to his parents. Our lives should show that the gospel works, they should be a living testimony that a – adorns – the gospel.

c. thirdly by living godly lives they would protect the reputation of the gospel, v5. The wives were to live this way so that no one could malign the gospel. In their culture they risked people being put off Christianity if they thought it would destabilise home life. The call to them and to Titus in v8 is

not to give people anything bad to say about Christians and so about the gospel. I'm sure many of you will know, perhaps from situations at work, how at times you feel people are watching you carefully to see how you react in certain situations and are ready with the comment, "and he calls himself a Christian!" Our behaviour can adorn the gospel but it can also malign or undermine the work of the gospel.

This week Iranian diplomats were expelled from Britain. What had they done? Well nothing personally but the attack on the British Embassy in Tehran meant that they were tarred with the brush of aggression against the United Kingdom. What Paul was saying here is that when one Christian lets the side down it can set back the work of the gospel. So he called them and would call us to live godly lives so that we offer people no opportunity to speak against Christ Jesus and against the gospel, so P – protect – the gospel.

Why were they to "live self-controlled upright and godly lives in this present age"? Because of Grace, to Adorn the gospel, and to Protect the gospel – G A P.

You've probably had the experience of getting out of a tube train in London and hearing the message "mind the gap". Paul's teaching to these new Christians was to "mind the gap", to live in a way that was different to the culture around them and in so doing to strengthen the gospel message and build the church of Jesus Christ while as it says in v13, "we wait for the blessed hope – the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ". So it is a message for us in Advent as we look for his return – mind the gap!