

LOOK FOR SPIRITUAL EXCELLENCE

Titus 2:1-15

Nowadays when we have elections, we hear much discussion about integrity and family values from the candidates. Many realize that an unrestrained, “do anything you want” lifestyle leads to ruin. As Christians, we are called to witness to the benefits of having accepted Jesus as Lord of our lives. Usually, we think about telling someone about these benefits; however, *what we do* is just as important as *what we say*. If what we do and what we say are not in alignment, then others will tend to believe the message of *what we do* and discount *what we say*. When the two line up, they reinforce each other and our witness becomes a powerful force.

We all use role models as part of learning life skills. It is sobering to think that we also serve as a role model for someone else. You may be thinking, “No one is paying any attention to me, so it really doesn't matter what I do.” Every person who sees you, records your behavior in their data bank and they subconsciously (if not consciously) are being programmed regarding what a person such as yourself does. We are examples whether we want to be or not. We cannot avoid being an influence on other people. Knowing this should motivate us to be good models in Christian living. We get the pattern for such living from the word of God.

Much good advice about Christian living and the importance of being a right role model for others is found in the letter of Paul to Titus.

Aging Gracefully – 2:1-5

¹ But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine. ² Older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance. ³ Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, ⁴ so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, ⁵ to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored. Titus 2:1-5 (NASB95)

We cannot separate our belief and our behavior. We WILL behave according to the beliefs that we have incorporated into our lives. It is possible to have beliefs in our “minds” (that is, we give *mental* consent to the validity of the idea) but these beliefs not find their way into our *hearts* (that is, we have not incorporated or adopted them as our own).

What are reasonable behavior expectations for people whose lives have been transformed by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit? A general description that Paul gave to the church at Corinth was to “let all things be done in decency and in order.” In this letter to Titus we see some of the specifics that should be demonstrated by people who are living decently and orderly. The first item in the list is translated as “temperate” or “sober” and really does have the origin of its meaning in the idea of being free of wine. We see this same “quality” of behavior in the list for older women in the next verse. The use and abuse of intoxicants have been problems for people for a long time. We see the devastating effects on people’s lives in our nation today. In Paul’s day, the most available substance for such abuse was beverage alcohol. People today have become very inventive and have “discovered” hundreds of other substances to alter their minds.

The use of such substances can become a way of life for large groups of people. In Yemen, for example, the use of (chewing) khat (an evergreen plant) which has a low level of amphetamine in its leaves is a widely practiced activity and it produces a mild euphoria and keeps the people in a non-productive mode of operation. This was the same thing that was happening in Crete with the abuse of wine.

It would seem obvious that sobriety would be a prerequisite for reverence or dignity in

the way a person conducts himself. (By the way, that is the next item in Paul's list.) It would also be helpful in demonstrating good common sense (third item) in making decisions. The bottom line is that it is very difficult to teach the basic doctrines of faith, hope, and charity to people who are not able to think clearly because they are impaired from alcohol use. (In this letter Paul used the terms faith, perseverance, and charity. Perseverance springs from hope and is an outcome of the confidence we place in the promises of God.)

The admonition regarding the use of wine for older women was similar to what he had related to Timothy about elders; however, there is a subtle difference in the effects of the use of wine in the two cases. For elders in Ephesus the admonition was to not be intoxicated, but for the older women of Crete the warning was to not be addicted (literally enslaved) to wine. It is bad enough to occasionally become drunk; however, the problem of addiction is several orders of magnitude worse since the person's life is being controlled by chemical dependency.

On the positive side of recommended behavior we find such things as teaching and encouraging the next generation regarding the practical aspects of how to handle the situations that people encounter in life. If the older generation does not pass along "what works," then each new generation has to discover such ideals through trial and error and the society in which we live will not make any progress and will likely deteriorate. We see this happening in our country today. There is a retrograde in what is considered to be socially acceptable behavior and we have become a nation of crude and vulgar behavior that would have been thought of as scandalous several decades ago. The humanists teach that better education will lead to positive evolution of human behavior apart from any spiritual considerations, and yet we see the exact opposite happening today since these same humanists have been partially successful in removing godly influence from our culture.

Demonstrating Integrity – 2:6-8

⁶ Likewise urge the young men to be sensible; ⁷ in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, *with* purity in doctrine, dignified, ⁸ sound *in* speech which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us. Titus 2:6-8 (NASB95)

Paul realized the importance of our *actions* in the influence we have on others. Being an example (or as KJV renders it "pattern of good work") speaks to the influence we have on others. People who make clothes cut up pieces of fabric into the right shapes that are then sewed together to make the garment. In commercial operations, many pieces are cut at a time and the cutting is controlled by a "pattern." Not only is it important that the cutter follow the pattern, it is especially important that the pattern be right. One bad role model can have a devastating effect on many others; however, the reverse is also true that one good role model can have a positive effect on many others. It is generally accepted that more mature Christians can teach younger people by the examples of their lives that validate the message they speak; however, younger Christians have the potential to be even more influential on other in their age group.

Paul did not neglect the importance of *what we say*. Our doctrine needs to be pure. Others should realize that we are serious about God's word and that we really do believe it. It is possible to teach the truth and instill doubt in others at the same time. For example, if we teach that Jesus taught us to "turn the other cheek and go the second mile" and then comment that this is just an ideal that will not really work, then the lack of sincerity will negate the effectiveness of the truth on those who hear. It is important also that *what we teach* be based on a firm foundation of the word of God and not just our speculation of what the meaning might be.

The expectation and requirement that we be a good example can be heavy burdens. However, it is not something that we have to bear alone. Our entire spiritual journey has not

been something we have accomplished or deserved. We first experienced the Mercy of God in that He held back His righteous judgment (the soul that sins shall die). Next, He extended His Love to us by paying the penalty for sin by the death of His Son on the Cross. God's has now given His Grace to us in His indwelling presence within us. This provides the power over sin in our lives. The motivation and ability for righteous living are benefits of the grace of God.

Working Faithfully – 2:9-10

⁹ Urge bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, ¹⁰ not pilfering, but showing all good faith so that they will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect. Titus 2:9-10 (NASB95)

The reality of an economic system that had slaves and servants is difficult for us to mentally process in the world in which we live today where “freedom” is touted as being so important. The truth of the matter is that such relationships exist today without the force of civil or criminal law. Many people find themselves in economic bondage to debt they have accumulated as a result of being in bondage to a particular lifestyle to which they have voluntarily tied (or bound) themselves. The response of most people to such bondage is to voluntarily tie themselves to a job or career that will provide the means to lessen the restraints of the other things to which they are tied. Others, who can't or will not work, will find themselves in bondage to a government welfare system that hinders their free choice of alternatives and forces them to vote for promises of more help from their slave masters.

The bond slaves of Paul's and Titus's world had little or no choices unless they could have someone pay their debt and buy their freedom. People today have more alternatives but may not want to exercise their possible choices. The point is that whatever situations in which you find yourself, you can choose how you will react to the situation. If you have a job to do or have obligations to someone, then you should do the best job you can, you can choose to forego arguing and being disagreeable, and you can be completely honest and faithful. Not adhering to these principles will ruin your own reputation and if you are a professing Christian you might give a bad name to all Christians.

Living Righteously – 2:11-15

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, ¹² instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, ¹³ looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, ¹⁴ who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. ¹⁵ These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you. Titus 2:11-15 (NASB95)

It is God's unmerited favor (grace) that brings us salvation. Notice that the salvation of which Paul writes is happening in the present tense; it is ongoing. God's grace enables and sustains us by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The evidence of that grace is in the person of God's Son. He died as the payment for our sin and now He lives in us to free us from the power of sin. Now that we are free from the penalty and power of sin, we are also free to reach our full potential as children of God. God Himself is working in us to bring it about: “that He might redeem us and that He might purify us.” We are in the process of becoming purified and set apart (holy) and being zealous of good works. We already have these by faith and the process we call sanctification is where we bring what we have by faith into the reality of our daily lives. God teaches us by many means (His word, the example of others, circumstances we encounter, etc.) that we must deny and turn away from ungodliness and the attractions of the world. He teaches us that though we are still in the world that we must live soberly (disciplined in our behavior), righteously (above reproach) and godly (in accordance with the character of

God).

Some may ask, “Why?” The answer lies in the hope of every Christian expressed so well by Paul: “the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.” Paul wrote about two “appearings” of Jesus. The first was in His Grace. The second will be in His Glory. His Grace is at work to transform us so that we can participate in His Glory!

It is always good to keep in mind the great price that Christ paid in order to set us free to make the right choices and decisions. At the same time we are basking in the blessing of such a great gift, we need to turn that coin over and ask what are the attendant responsibilities that come with the blessings. Paul mentioned four things that should be considered. Freedom from lawless deeds actually carries with it the responsibility to make right choice in the decisions we face. Prior to our salvation, we were enslaved or addicted to the selfish alternatives. As Christians, we need to exercise the appropriate self-control to align our actions with the principles of the Kingdom of God. The second consideration is purity which requires that we maintain awareness of Christ in us and be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit as God works in us to produce an outworking of the purity that is characteristic of Christ Jesus. Earlier we discussed the issue of slavery, and we need to realize that we are no longer slaves to sin, the world, the flesh and the devil but we are the possession of God Himself through Jesus Christ. Now that we are His, our motivation should be to be well pleasing to Him by doing the works that He had foreordained that we should walk in them as related to us in Ephesians 2:10.