

# Christians in the Church

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 21 January 2024

Preacher: Ali Sewell

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Jesus up, but also having in the world around us, showing that good news of Jesus, all to that ultimate end, that God would be glorified. He would receive the glory that he deserves. So a really encouraging letter, a great letter for us to be looking at as a church. A quick recap, this is week three in Titus, so kind of halfway through. A bit of a recap, a really big theme we've seen so far in this letter is that idea that the gospel leads to godliness. The gospel leads to godliness. This letter is shot through with that idea of how the truth of Jesus Christ transforms us to be living for him. And one of the roles of the church then is that that is the place where we hear that truth and are equipped to live that out. That is one of the roles that the church carries out, helping the gospel lead to godliness. And we saw last week how Paul began that with the leadership of the church, the importance of those who hold on to the truth, who live out the truth, then teaching the truth to others. Once again, to keep people constantly coming back to Jesus, back to the gospel, which is the foundation of the truth. So that's what we looked at last week.

This week, the focus shifts really from the leadership, the eldership of the church, to the membership of the church, to the body of the church, to those who actually make up the church.

I suppose it's like the manager or whatever, the coaching team of a football team is significant, but it's actually the players on the pitch who do the work. That is true of the church as well, and that is what our focus is on in Titus chapter two. This passage shows us what does it look like to live as one of God's people? How does each one of us live out being the church, this countercultural community, this city on a hill, this light to the nations as we're called to be? How do members of the church live? And again, how does that work out in the day to day? And just before we dig into that, if you have a look at verse one, you'll see how all of this is connected, all of this flows from what we spoke about last week as well. As for you, Paul says to Titus, teach what accords with sound doctrine. And it says Titus carries out that central role of teaching the Bible, teaching the gospel, teaching the truth and its implications to God's people. That is what's forming this type of community described in chapter two. And as I say, I think it is just such an attractive and such a positive picture. So let's get stuck in. What does that look like in practice? Three things I think we see here describing the role of God's people within the church as they are shaped by the gospel. And the first thing is this, that godly church members adorn the gospel. Godly church members adorn the gospel.

So we're straight into that big idea of Titus again, where the gospel leads to godliness or verse one of this chapter. This is what accords with sound doctrine. This is living out our faith. The gospel creates godly church members who adorn the gospel. And so you'll see if you have a look down at your verses, really verses two down to nine, Paul speaks to various groups then within the church. And for each of them outlines what this godly living is particularly going to look like. So do have a look there at your Bible.

You'll see verse two, older men, verse three, older women, verse four, young women, verse six, younger men, verse seven, instruction to Titus himself, verse nine, to bond servants or slaves. Paul describes here what godly living is going to look like at different ages and stages within the church.

[ 3 : 52 ] And important to note here that remember this is the same gospel, this is the same truth, it's the same sound doctrine of verse one. But what we get here are particular pitfalls to avoid, particular aspects of character to live out in the different stages of life people find themselves in. We're not going to work through all of those just purely because of time. But you will notice, I hope there are some common threads that run right through there. And so verse three, older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior. There's this likewiseness between the older men and the older women. It's there again in verse six, likewise urge the younger men. You'll see that idea of self-control repeated in a number of these different categories that Paul lays out. So what we're not doing here is making kind of hard and fast distinctions. We're not saying we're living as a Christian, we'll look completely different from this group of people here to this group of people over here. There are these common characteristics being worked out in the different settings. And there are some distinctives, aren't there? So older men, the first category that Paul speaks about are particularly to be dignified, to be sound in faith, love and steadfastness. There's a sense just reading that verse there of kind of maturity, of steadiness expected from these guys. These men are to be people who are looked up to within the church. And it's worth asking here, trying very hard not to catch anyone's eye as I ask this question, how old do you have to be to be an older man? Perhaps that's a question that's kind of going through your mind. Am I an older man? Because Paul doesn't give an age bracket here, does he?

And I think actually that's significant because probably the idea is that lots of us operate in both of these categories, older and younger. I think there can be a real tendency for those perhaps sort of in their 30s, perhaps 40s, my generation desperately trying to still think that we're young.

And it's good in the church to recognize our kind of degree of immaturity and to look up to those more mature in the faith. But it's also really good, really important, I think, to be willing to step up into that kind of older bracket. Being older is never a negative thing in the Bible. Being willing to say, yeah, I'm now at that stage where there is that degree of dignity, of maturity to be expected of me, that I should now be someone, certainly not perfect, but who it could be said is sound in faith, in love, in steadfastness, to grow up in our faith. The same for older women and what that entails.

And we'll specifically focus on that in just a minute. But for some of us here, it might be very easy to kind of say, well, I'm definitely older. That kind of time for denying that has long gone. For other of us here, we might be very new Christians. We'd firmly be in that kind of younger bracket.

Perhaps for some of us, it's that need to realize that we need to grow up into this older, more mature character that Paul is looking for here. So that's that one question. But really the big question for all of us to consider, take seriously that we're getting from these verses. What does godliness look like at my age and stage? Paul is trying to help us think, what are the particular dangers?

[ 7 : 20 ] What are the particular opportunities? What are the particular responsibilities for me to work out the gospel, work out these principles in the particular sphere of life in which I operate?

And that's what Paul's trying to help us do here, I think. So for example, the older women, verse 3, not to be slanderers or slaves to too much wine. What Paul isn't doing here is kind of reverting to some kind of sexist stereotype. What he is doing is taking seriously the fact that for most women in this culture, in Crete, where Titus was, where this letter is addressed to, their time was spent in the home. And therefore, the danger, the temptation for them just to kind of hang around with their neighbors, chatting about other people while drinking a few glasses of wine, that danger was much greater because of their situation. And so again, when he goes on to say, you know, younger women are to be working at home, that's not instructing women to not have a job. Instead, Paul is saying, while you are at home, while the vast majority of these young women were, to use that time well, to be diligent in investing that time rather than wasting that time chatting about other people, drinking too much.

Really, Paul is saying, if this is where you are, think about what it looks like to live that out in a godly way. And isn't that just a great question for all of us to think about if we're Christians, if we're part of the church? That's a great question to talk to one another about, to ask about what lifestyle accords with sound doctrine in the place where I am. Now, wherever that might be, whether that is at home, as a parent, whether that is out in the work environment, whether that is at school, whether that is at clubs or with friends, whatever it is, what does it mean there for the gospel to lead to godliness? That big theme of this letter, but which is also kind of personal for each of us in the situations that we find ourselves. And so the gospel leads to godliness. We've seen that before, but one aspect of that which is new here, I think, in chapter two, is as we're saying in this first point, that these godly church members adorn the gospel. So the purpose or the result of this godly living by God's people is in view here. Do just have a look down at your Bibles here.

What is the reason given for the young women's godly behavior? The end of verse five, it is so that the word of God might not be reviled. Why is Titus's behavior and speech important? Well, the end of verse eight, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us.

What reason is given for the bond servants' service and faithfulness? Well, verse 10, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior. There is this huge emphasis that the world is looking on as God's people live out their day-to-day lives. People observe the church, this light on a hill that can't be hidden, and our behavior can either complement or contradict the gospel message that we stand upon. It can either bring people to revile God's word, if there is that kind of hypocrisy there, or that great phrase in verse 10, it can adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.

[11:09] The preacher and writer John Stott puts it like this, a consistent Christian life is like the setting in which the gospel jewel is displayed. What is it that brings people to want to know more about Jesus, to be interested in him, to want to explore the gospel? Is it not, nine times out of ten, the behavior of Christians that they know, observing Christians and how they live? And there are various kind of stats that would back that out as well. But also, just as true, just as powerful, what can put people off ever wanting to hear about Jesus? To reject the gospel before they've even heard it.

Well, also, the behavior of Christian people, when we're not putting the gospel into practice in our lives. Do our lives adorn the gospel or cause people to revile it? And really, as we just finish this point, it is amazing, isn't it, to think that every action, even the most mundane thing that we take part in, whether that is at home, whether that's at work, whether that's at school, whether it's wherever we are, when we decide how much we are going to have to drink at the works night out, when we consider how we're going to speak to someone or not about someone else, how we interact with our boss or our colleagues at work, just the kindness or the manner with which we deal with others in those day-to-day interactions. Paul is able to say, even to the bond servants, kind of really the lowest of the low, given the most menial of tasks that nobody cared about, that even as they do those things in accordance with sound doctrine in a godly way, that whatever it is we're doing, we have that incredible privilege of being able to adorn, of being able to show the beauty of the gospel. And so there's that outward kind of looking focus here that we see in Titus chapter 2. Godly church members adorn the gospel. As the gospel leads to godliness, as we live that out, people watch and we want our lives to point to Christ.

But there's also then within this passage, I think as well, a kind of an inward look, we might say, or we could call this a discipleship focus on how the whole church is to build itself up. We see secondly here, godly church members teach the gospel. And really, we're going to hone in here on verses 3 and 4. Likewise, I say, older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women.

We said last week, one of the primary roles of the elder was to teach, to give instruction in sound doctrine. But we see here in chapter 2, that that teaching role isn't only something that elders do.

It's not something that only happens from the pulpit or the kind of rickety music stand on a Sunday morning. It's actually something that is infused throughout the congregation. As Titus is to teach in verse 1, well, one of the ways that makes its way through the church is as other older Christians are teaching and training the younger. One writer puts these verses like this, churches today should be known for more than just the classes they offer or the books they recommend.

[ 14 : 31 ] They should be known for humble fathers and mothers in the faith who gladly receive and invest in the lives of younger Christians who are new in the faith. And what a great picture that is.

And what a great thing to be known for as a church. And that is given particularly, as we just read there, in the context of older women, women more mature in the faith, teaching younger women. I don't think that means this kind of interaction is only for women. This picture of more experienced Christians drawing alongside and encouraging, modeling the Christian life to newer, younger Christians is something incredibly positive across the church. And yet I do think there are also reasons why it's specifically given in these verses addressing wisdom. There's a kind of wisdom, isn't there, in Paul not saying to Titus, who is a youngish guy at this stage, Titus, make sure you spend lots of your time hanging around with all the young women. You know, maybe Titus would have liked that advice, but it would be easy to see how that could look a bit suspicious. That might not be the wisest thing.

There's practical wisdom there. But also Paul recognizes that there are people within the church family, people in that congregation, who are better equipped for teaching, for modeling, for training what it means to be a godly younger woman. And that is godly older women. It's those who have been the recipients of this teaching of the Bible, who've put it into practice in their lives over the years, who've been there and done that, however imperfectly that might have been, however hard that might have been.

And often it is actually sharing those struggles and being open about those difficulties that can help people the most. This is not talking about kind of super women who have everything sorted, passing that all on. It's just talking about normal Christian women who have been through those different stages of life and able to help and support younger Christians as they go through the same. Who better to pass on that truth and the practical applications of it. And again, we come back to that question, well, who is an older woman? I could, again, make myself very unpopular here. But again, I think there is a degree to a sense in which we're perhaps all a bit older than we think. And what I mean by that is it's always tempting in a passage like this to be looking up and saying, well, where are these elder Christians in my congregation who are going to teach me, who are going to train me, who are going to invest in me?

And that's a really good attitude to have. It's good to seek out those people, to recognize the really important role that older generations have to play within the church to ask for help.

[ 17 : 23 ] And that's a good attitude. But I think we're often slower, perhaps, to take stock of where we are and look back or look down and think, well, who can I be this older Christian to? And as I say, I think this is for men and women. But remembering Paul is specifically addressing this to women at this point. It's a great question to ask. Who could I be this Christian mother to? You know, you don't need to reach the kind of free bus pass age to ask that question. One of the great things about the church is that it is intergenerational. Most of us here are younger than some and older than others, able to learn, but also able to be involved in training others in godly living. I would say for me, this is perhaps the most exciting part of this picture of the church that Paul paints in Titus. This incredible vision of a church family where people are teaching and training one another, where people are helping one another live that out in practical ways. We used to have this banner here. It ripped in half and have not fixed it yet. But you'll have to try and remember it or imagine it. It said, building community, sharing Jesus. That is not just something that is done from the front. That is something that is done together, older and younger, side by side within the church. That's how God has designed it.

This brilliant picture. And yet it's also important while we see that the beauty of that, also to be realistic about that, because it's hard to do. Because so often in life, as it gets busy with work and family and everything else, it is the relationships. It is time spent with others who are not directly dependent on us. Time spent with others we don't have to spend time with. Those are the relationships. Those are the things often that get kind of squeezed out a little bit. And yet Paul is saying that's an essential part of God's plan, of God's design for the church. And so that means that we need to make time for one another. That interacting in a way that enables us to kind of model the gospel in our lives, to rub up against one another, especially in a way that younger Christians can learn from the more mature. That isn't just a kind of a nice bonus if we can manage it. It's actually part of what it means to be a church together. And so perhaps we all need to be a bit more deliberate in planning and enabling that. And if you're an older Christian, perhaps who doesn't think you have much to offer, well, please take seriously what Paul is saying here, because that is not how God sees you.

God thinks of the older, the more mature Christians within any church as having such value, such wisdom, such maturity, and that role to then pass that on to others as well.

So what does that actually look like? A few examples. Hospitality, something that's already been mentioned in this letter, is a great opportunity for this. Simply spending time together in people's homes. We've said before that doesn't need to be anything fancy. Although if you love to cook, roll out the three-course meal and people will be delighted with that. The Bible doesn't prescribe how this looks. It just says, you know, get together, encourage one another, teach and train one another. And not just with those we know, not just with those kind of like us, our nearest and dearest, but also bringing others in so that they can see the gospel worked out. Another example of how we try and help with this is community groups. Again, our groups are intentionally kind of intergenerational because the Bible says that we learn from one another. So again, whether that is Wednesday evenings, whether it's community group lunches, whether it's any other things that happen, it's a great opportunity for all of us in the church to go with that mindset that doesn't say, oh, do I fancy it this evening? How am I feeling? Will I get anything out of it? But actually to be thinking, well, what can I give? Who can I go and support in this group? How can I encourage others through being there and live out this biblical picture of the church? And there's a couple of examples, hospitality, our kind of community group structures. But I think for all of us, it's looking for these opportunities really to be building those relationships, making people a priority. And not just friends or people at the same age and stage, but getting together, particularly older and younger, so that as we see here, we can be those godly church members who teach the gospel to one another. So in the Bible's vision for the church, godly church members adorn the gospel, godly church members teach the gospel.

And thirdly, finally, that's all possible because godly church members are equipped by the gospel. As always, it is the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the foundation of Paul's message. It is the gospel which is the foundation of the church. And so we see in chapters like this, Paul is not shy to give his instruction to the church. Here's what you should be doing. Adorn the gospel. Teach the gospel. Here's how you should be living. But remember, these instructions are never, ever steps to God, steps to a relationship with him. They're always possible and only flow out of that relationship with him. And that relationship he has enabled through Jesus. So we see that there, don't we, at the start of verse 11.

[ 23 : 18 ] For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people. Paul is saying, live this out as a church, verses 1 to 10, 4, verse 11. God's grace has been shown in Jesus, who alone saves. How are we, again, able to train others as we've just been speaking about? Well, verse 12, that gospel, that grace has first trained us to renounce on godliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. It's only as we are people deeply shaped and trained and equipped by the gospel that we're able to live these lives we're speaking about that adorn the gospel, that we're able to teach the gospel to one another. God's work in the gospel is always the foundation to that. And we're shaped by that, Paul says, really as we live with these two horizons in view that he lays out in these verses. First, looking back, the grace of God has appeared.

Jesus has come. Verse 14, who gave himself to redeem us from all lawlessness. The Christian life looks back to what Jesus has done. It is finished. But it also looks forward, verse 13, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, living in anticipation of that day when Jesus returns. Another huge theme of this letter and all Paul's letters. One author describes these verses as like a room with kind of two windows on opposite walls through which the light is streaming in through this window, looking out to the cross, looking back, seeing all that Jesus has done, and through this window, looking forward, looking out and seeing the glory of the returned Jesus Christ.

That certain future hope for God's people. And it's only with the light from both of these windows shining in that we're able to operate, we're able to live well, we're able to live godly lives in this present age, as Paul says, verse 12. How does that train us, change us, equip us? Two specific details in these two kind of tenses that Paul highlights of grace and glory. And we'll finish very briefly with this. We look back to that grace that has appeared, that grace, remember, God's unmerited, undeserved, unchanging love for us, that love he showed us when we were still far from him, and that we have seen in the gospel of Jesus Christ that he came and he suffered and he died in our place. And as we keep our eyes on that grace, we come to see that we don't have to prove ourselves, we don't have to be constantly trying to perform or be at the top of our peer group, whatever that might be.

Instead, we can focus on, we're trained to live out the kind of steadfastness, the self-control, the humility, the dignity that these verses commend as godly living. We can live that out with real security, knowing God's love for us, that grace that trains us. But also, if or when those things maybe seem to feel a bit second best, surely there's something more. Are other people not getting ahead or other people not having better experiences? Well, we're also called as well to look ahead to that glory to come, to the return of Jesus, to the hope of eternal life in light of which any experience this world can offer will pale into insignificance. But that glory we can live in anticipation of and be certain we share in, because as it says here, we have been redeemed by Christ, purified as a people for his own possession, who are zealous for good works, seeking to live that out as godly church members who adorn the gospel, godly church members who teach the gospel from that foundation of being godly church members equipped by the gospel. Let's pray together.