

The Primacy and Practice of Sound Doctrine

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Bible Text: Titus 2:1

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As we look to Titus chapter 2, Titus chapter 2. We will be looking at verses 1 and 2 today as I want to encourage you to, in faith, live out your sound doctrine in sound practice.

Listen as I read to you God's word in Titus verses 1 and 2, I'll be reading from the modern English version. "But as for you, teach what is fitting of sound doctrine. Older men should be sober, serious, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience." The grass withers and the flower fades but the word of our God stands forever.

I had the opportunity and privilege of teaching some courses at Sterling college while I was there. Sterling, while once part of the United Presbyterian church, which was a close cousin to us in many ways, particularly in their practice of accapella Psalm singing up until the early part of the twentieth century. Now, Sterling is broadly evangelical and with that comes all the good and all of the frustrating that comes with that. And teaching some intro kind of Christian life type courses, invariably you'd run into the student that didn't want to mess with all this doctrine. "Don't, don't bother me with all of this technicality. I just want to live my faith. I just want to love God and love others." And I always loved it when they landed on those four words because I had him, I had him. "Oh really, you want to love God and you want to love others? How do we do that?" And that would grow into a conversation about God's law and about the importance of truth in living out your faith and in living out love for God and love for others.

And as Paul has introduced himself to the church on Crete by this letter to Titus, and as he has commissioned Titus for the work ahead of him, to oversee the election and ordination of elders in all of the churches in Crete, and as Paul has confronted now the false teachers who wanted to, as we read in Galatians, wanted to drag people back underneath the law, and you heard Paul's words regarding those men, what he wished would happen to them who were promoting circumcision, we now come to the second chapter. Paul didn't know it was the second chapter when he was writing this, he just wrote a letter and, for our study, we have divvied these things up so it's easier to focus all of us together on the same spot. But as we come to the second chapter we come now to what else Titus was to do, that he was not only to faithfully execute the work of overseeing elections and ordinations of men into the office of ministry and into the office of elder, but that he was to teach. This was to be his response to those who had already crept into the church and had already begun disseminating this false teaching, which was at one point true teaching misunderstood and misapplied. And so he was to teach. "But as for you, teach what is fitting of sound doctrine."

And we see, firstly, in these verses the primacy of sound doctrine, the primacy of sound doctrine. Titus must teach and he must teach ALL. This is a challenge in this day and age when we have so microscopically dissected ourselves into every little group and category. Some might say, "What can a man say to a woman? Shouldn't we have woman ministers to minister to our women?" Well, having women doesn't necessarily fix it for then what can a woman say to a man if a woman is in position, if you were operating by that standard. But it goes even deeper than just the male-female distinction. What can someone who hasn't had of a certain life experience say to someone who has had a certain life experience? I know of a situation where a family lost a child at a young age and that is the forbidden zone for their pastor. He can talk to them about anything else except their processing of the death of their child. "What can you say to us? How can you possibly understand?" Young people, you know it all. Are you willing to listen to the older folks around you who don't know as much as you do about so many things? But this is a two way street, isn't it?

Jay Adams says Paul categorizes distinct groups in general as needing particular kinds of help. He begins with the older, presumably more mature, members of the congregation. "Older men," he says, "must be taught. (this is Jay Adams speaking) Some older men will not allow others, especially if they are younger, to teach them anything. They think age alone is sufficient to carry them through. Few things are more tragic than to see an older man or woman still tenaciously holding to opinions, most of which have been proven faulty over and over through the years. Titus is not to let age become a barrier, he must teach older members of the congregation as well as the younger." Or as Matthew Henry's commentary says, minister must not- "Ministers must not stay in generals, but must divide to every one his portion[s], what belongs to his age, or place, or condition of life; they must be particular as well as practical in their preaching; they must teach men their duty, and must teach all and each his duty. Here is an excellent Christian directory, accommodated to the old and to the young; to men and women; to the preacher himself and to servants." The primacy of sound doctrine practically applied to each one.

Now brothers and sisters I, at least on this point, am no dummy. I like to be liked and I know how to be liked. I could stand in this pulpit and preach only of the glorious mysteries of Christ Jesus and have all of us drawn up in such a way so that you walk out every week saying, "Joel is such a wonderful minister!" But I'm not just called to that. I'm not JUST called to that. I am called to that, but I'm also called to preach and to teach and to counsel in specific ways that some might interpret as stepping on toes or being a little too obvious from the pulpit or getting a little too personal. As Voddie Baucham says, "if you can't say amen, say ouch." And that's what a pastor is called to, not out of hostility, not out of pride, but out of love for the flock. In Christ's story of the ninety-nine, Christ the shepherd doesn't stand at the flock and say, "now, some of you might be wandering off!" No, he went to the one that was wandering and he saved him. Brothers and sisters, as this happens in the church, as it happens in worship, as it happens in our times of Sabbath school, and as it happens in the pulpit here, it must be rooted and grounded in the truth. The primacy here is of sound doctrine. But if I engage in that, if you engage in that as a Sabbath school teacher, if you engage in that as a parent to your children, or a child to your parent if you happen to be put in that position, it better be rooted in the truth of God's word or else it becomes a free for all. This is what we see in our culture around us.

Secondly, we see the practice of sound doctrine, the practice of sound doctrine. And this hinges on two words. I'm guessing in your translation, as in mine, they are the third and fourth word of verse 2 of chapter 2: should be. "Older men should be..." Listen, this speaks to the fruit of preaching and teaching in the life of the believer. In the context of preaching, Paul is prescribing change, change that is fueled by the Word, that is accomplished by the Holy Spirit, and is experienced by people. Take note, older men of the congregation, this is what Titus is preaching, what the preaching of the other pastors on

Crete, this is what it will do to you. That is- that is what Paul is saying here, essentially saying, be warned! As Titus preaches to you, as he teaches to you, this is what should be happening among you. Listen, the preaching of the Word brings change. It brings change. Either the Lord will grow and develop you in conformity to the character and image of Christ, or you will be hardened and brought under condemnation.

Now, some might say, "I'm not so sure those are the two options because, you know, Joel, I come here every week and I just kind of sit here and and you preach and it's okay and I critique it, I have you for lunch every week and I don't really sense that big of a change in my life." Well, I hate to tell you, but the change is there. Just because you don't feel it and see it does not mean you aren't being hardened to God's word. These are the difficult realities. God's word does not return void, it sets out to accomplish something and it accomplishes it whether we want it or not, whether we want to admit it or not, God's word penetrates our hearts and it inacts change. And it can be a softening that brings about great fruit of righteousness and holiness and love and gracious living, or it penetrates our hearts and it brings hardness and numbness and despair.

Do you find the preaching of the Word necessary in your life? I'm not saying I'm the best preacher, by any stretch of the imagination. I thought I'd at least get some Presbyterian amens on that one. I'm not saying I'm the best preacher, but I'm YOUR preacher. I'm sorry. Maybe that should be followed by an apology. I am your preacher. Is the preaching necessary for you, or is it a waste of x number of minutes in your life because you really have it figured all out and the blue book says this has to happen so you subject yourself to it every week. This is what Paul is calling the Cretan church to wrestle with. Don't think that as this letter was read aloud there weren't at least a handful of people that said "that's right, that's right, that's what Titus is supposed to do, that's right, those guys need to stop teaching that. Now-wait, hold on, what now? You're getting a little personal here." But Paul is calling the church to wrestle through what SHOULD BE in their midst as this young pastor brings the Word to them week in and week out, and as he trains, and as he ordains, and as he sees them elected and installed. These men who are filling the pulpits of the Cretan church week by week, this is what should be. That they should hear the Word preached and to begin to live out the sound doctrine that comes from the true living Word of God.

So we see the primacy of sound doctrine, we see the practice of sound doctrine, thirdly, we see the particular application of sound doctrine. "Older men should be sober, serious, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience." This is a list in two parts: the first three flow together and the second three flow together. The first one being sober, or level headed. Matthew Henry says this: "That the aged men be sober, not thinking that the decays of nature, which they feel in old age, will justify them in any inordinacy or intemperance, whereby they conceit to repair them; they must keep measure in things, for both health and for fitness, for counsel and example to the younger." Brothers, may it never be said "oh that's just grandpa. That's just how he is. You know, he is so old, he is so cranky, he has a lot of aches and pains and sometimes he's responding from that." Let it never be. Let there be a measure that is kept in all things. Let us never seek to find excuses in inordinacy or intemperance.

Next, Paul says that older men should be serious. And all the real covenantors said *growl*. The word "grave" is used. Many times people think that means you should look like you should be in the grave. But this isn't just some overwhelming seriousness that drives every situation, including birthday parties. This shows an appropriate understanding for the place of levity and seriousness. Understanding the difference and understanding when it is needed and when it is not. The third word here: temperate. Temperate, talking of self restraint. That steadfastness of the sobriety mentioned in the first point, played out in passions and affections. This doesn't mean that the man won't be passionate or jovial. It

means he will not let those things lead him into sin. That he has the appropriate joy of the Lord. Insert here my diatribe against those who would extrapolate joy and happiness away from each other. It's the same idea, it's just the underlying where does that come from, where does that happiness, where does that joy flow from. And a godly man is temperate, he shows that self restraint.

Then the second part of the list flows together. And if we look to the Greek we see the word "the" in front of each of these three. So it sounds more like sound in THE faith, THE love, THE patience. These three are tied inextricably together, particularly by the way they are structured in the second part of the list, and different men look at them differently. Calvin sees faith as kind of applying to the first table of the law, and then the love there as the second table of the law, and patience is how you live to see both of those played out. They do indeed all flow together. If we have not faith, then love for God or others will not come. Jay Adams says this: "When his life is strong in the showing of love to God AND to others, it is a spiritually healthy one, but not until. Let older persons read the gospel of John and the book of first John if they want to understand the means of by by love and how one shows it in life-- what scripture means by love and how one shows it in life. Nothing could be a greater testimony to the world than a loving older man who lives according to biblical injunctions. It is that sort of life Paul commends to the older men." Men, as we grow older, as we increase in our years, do we enjoy more the idea of being seen as lovable, and therefore approachable, or do we enjoy more the idea of being seen as ancient of days and so grave and temperate that people are afraid of us? What sort of life would Paul commend to us?

Paul is laying these things down because they are true and real struggles for men. We're fine with our womenfolk being seen as sound in faith and in love and in patience, but I'm a man! Oh, I believe in God. Oh, I love you. If it changes I'll let you know. Patience? You don't understand how important it is for you to act and do this thing, I don't have time for patience in how I treat you. In fact, I think Calvin touches on how these were real problems by saying that this first soberness, *νηφαλίους* in the Greek, this level headedness, he says because it was a problem that as men got older they started drinking a lot. It was a real problem so Titus was to address it. The particular application of sound doctrine is not always comfortable for the hearer or the preacher, if I can be clear in that. But men, we need to hear these things. We need to grapple and wrestle with these things as we grow in our years. Let us be careful as we grow older to be set in the ways of Christ, not simply set in our ways.

Fourthly, the prayerful application of sound doctrine, the prayerful application of sound doctrine. And this is where we take the camera that has been focused on men and older men and we open it up to all of us. How does this text to older men apply to all? Well, young men, seek to grow in these things. Pray for the Lord's change in YOUR life in what should be. When somebody tells you to man up, let your mind go to Titus 2 and think: am I manning up in the way that Christ would have me be a man or am I letting worldly standards flow into my life? Children, pray for your older brothers, pray for your fathers, pray for your grandfathers. These are sins that easily beset us or can become those. Pray that God's grace would be evident in our lives and that, as we grow older, we would grow in the faith and in the love and in the patience that Christ has called us to in the gospel. And ladies, pray for your brothers, pray for your fathers, I'll let it be redundant, pray for your husbands, as if you don't. Pray for us. Pray for us, that we would receive the teaching of God's word and that we would be changed, that we would live and be as we should be. That the message of God's word would penetrate our hearts and change us, not because we are so great, or not because we can do it on our own, but because it is evidence of the grace of God in Jesus Christ through the power and presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit working out in us the person and work of Jesus Christ as the Spirit applies him to us. This is not something we can do on our own. I get nervous whenever I hear any part of ministry talked about as "well, we can do this!" It makes me nervous and it terrifies me when I hear ... comes out of my mouth, I try to grab it and

push it back in, because we are called to these things, but we are called to these things in light of the gospel. So please, everyone who is not a older man in the room, please pray. Pray for us even as we pray for ourselves, that these things would be true of us, that they would be said of us, that this would be our testimony, that we are becoming as we should be as, in faith, we live out our sound doctrine in sound practice.

Stand with me as we pray.