

Exhortation

By Joel Wood

Bible Text: Titus 2:6-8

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Titus chapter 2 verses 6 through 8. Hear the Word of the Lord as I read it. May God enlighten our hearts and minds as we hear it. "Likewise, exhort young men to be self-controlled, in all things presenting yourself as an example of good works: in doctrine showing integrity, gravity, incorruptibility, and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that the one who opposes you may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you." The grass withers and the flower fades but the Word of our God stands forever.

Has your mouth ever gotten you into trouble? You're either remembering that time or lying to yourself, probably. We've all been there. I asked some young people this week, "Have you ever been talking about someone and then realize they were standing right behind you?" One girl said, "Oh yes, it's embarrassing." I know it's hard for you to imagine, but your pastor's mouth has gotten him into trouble, at times. It's interesting that here in this text, as God speaks through Paul and to Titus to the young men, that the mouth is one of the things that he addresses. But he addresses others, as well. And here in this text he is saying, "Young men, WITH your elders, learning to uphold the glorious truth of Christ by being exemplary in how you act, in what you believe, and in what you say." This, like the other texts, is addressed to a specific subgroup of the First Reformed Presbyterian Church of Crete, but also, like the other texts, there are things that each of us, whether we find ourselves in that category or not-- and again it's, you know, the older women that's always the hardest group to find volunteers for. Nobody wants to be in that category. And ALL men probably want to be in the- the "young man" category. We seem to have a hard time admitting that we're getting older and we're not as young as we once were. But it still has aspects that apply to all of us, if for no other reason than to pray for one another, to walk with one another in an understanding way.

Firstly, we see the discipling of younger men. That word "likewise" is there again, this is the continued work of teaching that Paul has given Titus for the older men, for the older women as they train the younger women, and now for the younger men. "Likewise, exhort young men to be self-controlled..." This exhortation, this-- the word there is παρακάλει. It's related to the word Paraclete, as we know it, which is how Scripture speaks of the Holy Spirit, speaks of encouragement. There are two ways to confront someone on an issue. There's two P's. You can either punch them in the face or you can put your arm around them. One creates an antagonistic environment where things need to be dealt with right now, right here, between you and me. Sometimes the Gospel may call for that but more often than not we're called to exhortation. We're called to put our arm around the other. And what happens when you do that? Well, when you punch someone in the face you have to be standing in confrontation to them and each other becomes the problem. When you exhort, when you encourage, you put your arm around the other and you two are now facing the problem together and you're able to lead and nudge

with your arm around them. That's what Paul is calling Titus and the elders of Crete to do to the young men of the church, to exhort them to be self-controlled. But the emphasis here is on togetherness, walking together, facing problems together, discipling the younger men. Young people, are you being discipled? If not, ask your elders, ask me, "Why am I not being discipled?" And perhaps ask yourself, "Am I willing to walk alongside the older men in the congregation, to be encouraged, and to be exhorted in self-control?"

Secondly, we see exemplary action. And this is to lead toward exemplary action of young men. This is an interesting passage because it seems like it's running on two different tracks and you can just go pick up a couple commentaries and you'll probably get these two tracks. That Paul, in one sense, is telling Titus to be exemplary in these things as he disciplines the young men of the church. Then the other track is: therefore the young men of the church need to be walking in this way. And so there are these two tracks: for Titus to be operating this way and for him to be exhorting and encouraging the young men of the church to be walking in this way and therefore they walk together. The exemplary action: "...in all things presenting yourself as an example of good works..." And, of course, our mind can go to the book of James and the importance of good works, in a sense, the priority of good works in our Christian life, that if we are not producing good works our faith is in question because we're saved unto good works. And so there needs to be exemplary action here of younger men, but ultimately of the elders of the church as they disciple the young men as Paul is calling them to do.

Thirdly, we see the exemplary doctrine of younger men. "... in all things presenting yourself as an example of good works in doctrine showing integrity, gravity, incorruptibility..." Now in this list we find mostly the same things that have been encouraged in others, that others are to exemplify, this integrity, this gravity. But here it's applied to doctrine, it's applied to the teaching of the church. I think it's helpful that the apostle puts doctrine in the text after self-control and being an example of good works. Why? Well, in our age of kind of a regrowth in understanding of reformation doctrine, we understand that when a young man gets a hold of doctrine, usually self-control and good works are not the fruits of that moment. Why? Because, "Well, I've- I've learned this truth. I see this truth. What's wrong with all you idiots that you don't see this the way I do?" When five minutes before they held the exact same position as the people that they're now condemning. So young men, let us remember that a true understanding of true doctrine helps us in our self-control, helps us in producing good works. It helps us in our love for one another. Young men, you're to have integrity; elders, you're to have integrity. These are the two tracks in our doctrine. We're to have gravity, we're to take it seriously. There also needs to be incorruptibility, not adding to and not taking away from the teaching of Scripture. We see this in the very beginning as Eve and the serpent are in confrontation with one another, that Satan take- takes away, the accuser takes away from the Word of God. Eve adds to the Word of God. I think she got that from her pastor. But she adds, Satan takes away, that's how Scripture opens. Our whole entire state is of fallenness and brokenness is rooted in our mishandling of the truth through our first parents. And how does Scripture close? Scripture closes with the warning to not add to the Scriptures or to take away from the Scriptures. That's what Paul is encouraging Titus to encourage the elders to encourage the young men here, that the truth that we hold to should be an uncorrupted truth. We don't have to make Scripture say more than what it's saying. And yet we also don't have to shy away from where Scripture is clear in what it's saying. We need to be exemplary in our doctrine.

Now, I know that sounds speech flows in this list here but I wanted to-- I want to parse it out a little bit. Fourthly, we see the exemplary speech of younger men, "... and sound speech that cannot be condemned..." Ecclesiastes 5 [vs 2], "Do not be quick to speak with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God. For God is in heaven, and you are on the earth; therefore may your words be few." There are a handful of times in my life that I can look back and say, "You know, I

should have said something and I didn't." It's much harder because many more are the times when I walk away saying, "Why did I say that?" Maybe it's easy for you once those words are out of your mouth to grab 'em and put 'em back in but it's not for me, they travel fast. And it's all the more convicting as we couple that admonition in Ecclesiastes, to let our words be few, with the words of Christ in Matthew 12:34, "O generation of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." Brothers and sisters, when we ask ourselves, "Why did you say that?" we have to remember that our mouths are not disconnected from our hearts and we are driven down in to the heart of the matter when we speak to one another. Trinity, you are known for your passion for pure doctrine. Are we known for sound speech that cannot be condemned? Are we known for speaking the truth in love? Does the doctrine that bubbles up in our hearts spill out of our mouths in loving exhortation and encouragement or does it spill out in harsh condemnation? It's easy to be gracious sometimes with those who are very different from us. I think David was with me in the omelet line as the session was up in Pittsburgh last-- end of last week for the conference at the seminary. And I tend to strike up conversations with people wherever I go and so the young woman making our omelet Saturday morning started talking about church and where she goes to church and- and it was obvious that she loved the Lord and she enjoyed worshipping Him but she was obviously in a different part of the life raft than we were. And sometimes it's easier in that moment to smile and nod and say, "Well, keep seeking the Lord," and it's a lot harder to have sound speech, to have gracious speech toward those who are so much like us and yet just different enough. We can hold so many things in common and yet one little thing that's a bit different, it can cause a breakdown of grace in our hearts and then out of that our mouth speaks and we end up punching one another in the face rather than putting our arm around one another and exhorting and encouraging one another and looking at the problem together and seeking the Lord together and pursuing truth together. Our speech, brothers and sisters, needs to be exemplary. That needs to flow from my mouth, it needs to flow from the mouths of the session, it needs to flow from your mouths, young men, and we all need to be an example to one another starting with us, the ordained leadership.

So, we've seen the discipling, we've seen the exemplary action, the good works that- that need to be happening because why? We are saved to good works. We don't do good works- works to be saved, we do good works because we're saved. The exemplary doctrine that we need to go to Scripture and what Scripture says, that is what we believe. The fruit of that in our conversation and in our relationships. This exemplary speech that our words are few and the words that we speak we understand flow from the heart, so let our hearts be right before the Lord. Fifthly and lastly, we see the enemy of younger men, the enemy of younger men. Verse 8 closes, "... so that the one who opposes you may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you." Now, we know we have earthly enemies, right? And I- I say on a regular basis I'm only paranoid because people are really after me. We know we have enemies, we know we have those who are out to get us, whether it be in your job and there's just that work force competition, or in your family were something went wrong a number of years ago and there's that- that human dynamic of relationship there where there's opposition and an enemy. But this goes deeper than that, the earthly enemy that we have in the church is simply a manifestation of the eternal enemy, the devil. He is not eternal but he's an enemy of the eternal life that we have. First Peter 5 [vs 8], the apostle warns us "Be sober and watchful, because your adversary the devil walks around as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." So brothers and sisters, we must be on the lookout for the enemy because he is active, he is lurking in the shadows waiting to strike. But see, that's not all Scripture has to say about the situation. In James' 4 [vs 7] we're told, "Therefore submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." So how do we begin to conquer this enemy? It's through submission to God and that's exactly what Paul is talking about to Titus. What more is self-control than spirit-control, being controlled by the Holy Spirit, living in submission to God and- and seeing that worked out in real and tangible ways. This is so important in the church.

In First Timothy 3 [vs 6], Paul warns that- that the leadership of the church, he says, "He must not be newly converted, so that he does not become prideful and fall into the condemnation of the devil." See, there it is again, "the condemnation of the devil." When these things happen, when these things flow forth in the church it is the devil who is on the attack. In Ephesians 4 [vs 27] we're told, "Do not give place to the devil." It's interesting, in Jay Adams' commentary on Titus, he talks about giving a handhold, giving a foothold to the devil in the words that we speak. Couple chapters later in Ephesians fi-- 6 [vs 11], Paul tells us, "Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil." What is that? That's the understanding and the applying of the whole complex of redemption, of righteousness, of truth, of faith, of the Word, of the Gospel, understanding and applying it we are suited up to do battle. Against whom? Against each other? No! It may look like that at times, but it's not against one another. It is against our mortal enemies, the devil, and as he tempts and operates in the world and in our flesh. This not a call to find the demon behind every bush or under every tree but, brothers and sisters, this is a call to understand that when we are doing the things that Trinity does and when we believe the things that Trinity believes and when we operate the way that Trinity operates we are taunting the enemy. When we seek truth and we pursue it and when we seek worship and we pursue it and when we seek love for one another and we pursue it, when we seek to no longer be transient, wandering around in the tabernacle of state school buildings and when we seek to plant ourselves in one spot and become a lighthouse to the community and to the region we are provoking the enemy to come and attack. And as our doctrine works its way out in works and speech and self-control, we shame our enemies. We shame our enemies. We shame THE enemy and they have nothing evil to say of us. Brothers and sisters, I pray that we get this, that we get that having right doctrine is not the end but seeing that doctrine worked out as we uphold the glorious truth of Chris, becoming exemplary in how we act, in what we believe, and in what we say. And men, it starts with us. Young men, you need encouragement, you need exhortation. Elders, we need to be encouraging and exhorting and helping. And church, all of us need to walk together in these things. Ladies, pray for the men of our church, that we would be men of Christ. Children, pray for your dads, pray for your elders, that we would lead and that we would exhort and that we would encourage and that we would be encouraged and be exhorted and that we would follow in these ways. Why? So that together we can uphold this glorious truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. So that our enemies have nothing to say, THE enemy does not have a foothold, a handhold, a toehold, a fingerhold, no kinda hold among us that Christ might be glorified.

Stand with me as we pray.