

Life Imitating Faith

Titus 2:1-10

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You may have heard people describe certain events as “life imitating art.” Sometimes things we see in movies, TV shows, or books end up being reflected in real life. For example, many people point to some of the tech billionaires of our day being like Iron Man, a tech genius who used his money to indulge his fantasies. Other times, art seems to almost look into the future, and life eventually imitates it. Jules Verne’s novels are examples of this. In the 1800’s, Verne described a submarine that could travel long distances underwater, while still providing electrical power and navigating effectively. Now such technology is reality. Another eerie example is the book *The Wreck of the Titan*, written in 1898, which described a large ocean liner being sunk after striking an iceberg. It described massive loss of life due to insufficient life boats. Twenty years later, the Titanic experienced a strangely similar fate.

Life often imitates art. And art reflects the beliefs of the artist. A few years ago we visited the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. The top floor contained the oldest pieces, including many masterpieces (we were particularly excited to see Van Gogh’s *Starry Night*). As you moved down the floors, the artwork was produced more recently. And as we moved forward in time, the pieces looked less like beautiful masterpieces and more like a weird hodgepodge of stuff. Sometimes it literally looked like trash. In recent years, our world has become increasingly hopeless, and people have struggled to find meaning. The art produced reflects that—it too is meaningless and hopeless.

Today, I want to suggest another direction we can (and should) take; instead of life imitating art, our lives should imitate our faith. In Titus chapter 2, Paul emphasizes the importance of our lives matching the faith we claim to hold. He reiterates we should not merely know the truth; our lives ought to reflect that knowledge. He calls different groups to holy living and gives some examples of what that looks like in different stages of life. Paul’s words are immensely practical, so I hope you will listen closely to what he has to say.

Older Men

Paul speaks to several different groups. The first is the older men of the church.

As for you, Titus, promote the kind of living that reflects wholesome teaching.

² Teach the older men to exercise self-control, to be worthy of respect, and to live wisely. They must have sound faith and be filled with love and patience. (Titus 2:1-2, NLT)

First, Paul tells Titus to promote living that reflects wholesome teaching. In other words, Titus was not only to concern himself with making sure people had the right information, but also that they are putting that information into practice. He tells Titus that part of his role is not only to instruct the Christians on Crete in right doctrine, but also in right living.

For the older men, Paul lists several traits Titus should help them cultivate. **First, they should exercise self-control.** Self-control is a mark of maturity. It is seen in the way a person talks, the way they use their money, the things they choose to do, and the way they respond to others. As we become more mature in faith, we should demonstrate greater control over our emotions, our desires, and our words.

Second, they should be worthy of respect. Mature Christian men ought to have a reputation as being trustworthy, reliable, knowledgeable, and giving wise counsel. Respect comes not from a title or position or even a certain age. It comes from those around you seeing consistency in the way you live your life. The way we conduct ourselves in the church and in our community ought to be worthy of respect.

Third, they should live wisely. This is closely related to the idea of self-control. A person who lives wisely doesn't simply follow every whim they have, nor are they pulled about by every new concept that enters the cultural zeitgeist. Instead, those who live wisely choose to stand on the things God says, even when the rest of our society is running in a different direction.

Fourth, they should have sound faith. If you have been a believer for a long time, you should be clear on the essential doctrines of the faith. Mature Christian men should not be wishy-washy or unsure when it comes to their faith. They should be honest about the limits of their knowledge and humble in the way they interact with others, but sound faith means that their foundation is rock-solid. This should be true of every mature Christian.

Finally, they should be filled with love and patience. Our world says powerful men are aggressive and don't tolerate anything less than perfection. Paul says a mature Christian man chooses to relate to the people around him with love and patience. We should see and care about those around us. We should be gentle, not harsh. And we should be patient with those who are still learning. Instead of attacking those who are weaker, we should seek to build them up and strengthen them. These are not signs of weakness—they are marks of biblical manhood.

Women

Next, Paul turns his attention to the women, speaking first to the older women, and then giving a glimpse of what the younger women should be as well.

³ Similarly, teach the older women to live in a way that honors God. They must not slander others or be heavy drinkers. Instead, they should teach others what is good. ⁴ These older women must train the younger women to love their husbands and their children, ⁵ to live wisely and be pure, to work in their homes, to do good, and to be submissive to their husbands. Then they will not bring shame on the word of God. (Titus 2:3-5, NLT)

His instruction to the mature women of the church likewise includes several principles. **First, they should live in a way that honors God.** This should be their primary focus. The world tells women all sorts of things about who they should be. These messages

are often confusing and contradictory. Paul cuts through it all and says their primary focus should be living in a way that honors God.

He gives some examples of this. **They should not slander others or be heavy drinkers.** This, too, is a form of self-control. They should control their emotional and physical desires, including removing themselves from situations that might not be conducive to this. Mature Christian women should not be people who stir up trouble or engage in gossip. They should not have a reputation for drunkenness or other forms of immoral behavior. Rather, they should demonstrate self-control in all they do.

Paul also tells Titus that the older women have a responsibility to teach the younger women. Paul was saying that mature women in the church have an important role in the strengthening of the church. This was a unique concept in the ancient world, as women were generally not thought as having positions of significant responsibility. But Paul said mature women were an essential part of the church, and they were to take a responsibility for teaching the younger women how to live as women of faith.

Of course, if the older women are to teach these things, they must be areas they have already worked on in their own lives. So, the role of teaching the younger women is not just about age, but about demonstrating these traits themselves.

So what are the older women to teach the younger women? **First, to love their husbands and children.** This seems pretty straightforward and obvious, but Paul puts it first because it isn't an easy task. The child-rearing years are difficult, and you often find yourself wondering if you are doing it right. Mature Christian women should rally to the younger women, sharing with them ways they can lead their families well and encouraging them in the work. For the married woman, her first responsibility is to love her husband, because loving her husband well also shows love to her children. A healthy and loving marriage creates the ideal environment to raise children.

Our society places little value on marriage. We have equated empowering women (which is a good thing) with telling women they don't need their husbands and should ignore them or leave their marriages. This is not a good thing. Older women can teach the younger women the great power and influence they have simply by showing love and respect to their husbands and their children. Their subtle influence guides the family whether they realize it or not. That influence will probably not be fully appreciated until many years later. But a woman who has walked that path and has seen the fruit of such faithfulness has the credibility to teach that attitude to others. She can encourage them that it's worth doing these hard things because they will ultimately be worth it.

Second, to live wisely and be pure. This is a common theme in these lists. We must strive to be people who apply God's Word to the way we live, and we must teach others to do the same. Again, this requires placing a higher value on God's Word than on the competing voices we find in our society today.

Third, to work in their homes and do good. Paul was not saying Christian women should not work outside the home. Rather, he is reminding women that they have important work to do in their own homes. Men do too (and they must not neglect those responsibilities), but God has given women unique gifts to minister practically to their families. Though the work often feels thankless and unnoticed, Paul tells the older women to encourage the younger women to keep doing good things and serving those in their home, because they are making more of an impact than they can see.

Finally, to be submissive to their husbands. Many point to Paul's instructions on submission as evidence that he was a misogynist who subjugated women. But if you read all the places Paul talks about submission, you'll see he tells husbands and wives to submit to one another. He is telling the older women that they should teach the younger women to trust their husbands. They should respect their opinions and leadership, even as they voice their own opinions. A wise husband listens to his wife but may still decide to make a decision that is different than her. And wise wives learn to trust their husbands, even when they view things differently.

Paul says they should do these things so they will not bring shame on the word of God. How we live affects the way people view God. Remember what is at stake in the way you choose to live. There are bigger issues than our preferences and comfort—how we live is a billboard for what we believe about our Lord, and it will affect what others believe about Him as well.

Young Men

After speaking to the older and younger women, Paul turns his attention to the young men, and gives specific instructions to Titus (who is likely a young man himself).

⁶ In the same way, encourage the young men to live wisely. ⁷ And you yourself must be an example to them by doing good works of every kind. Let everything you do reflect the integrity and seriousness of your teaching. ⁸ Teach the truth so that your teaching can't be criticized. Then those who oppose us will be ashamed and have nothing bad to say about us. (Titus 2:6-8, NLT)

He tells Titus to encourage the young men to live wisely, which is basically what he told the other groups. The young men should strive to live the same way Titus was teaching the older men to live. In 1 Timothy, however, Paul gave a command to Timothy, but it is a good principle for all young men.

Don't let anyone think less of you because you are young. Be an example to all believers in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity. (1 Timothy 4:12, NLT)

Paul's statement is that young men should not allow their youth to sideline them from serving the Lord...but they should strive to set an example for others in all they say and do. If you, as a younger man, want to serve the Lord well, strive to be an example in how you live. Sometimes people are hesitant to give young people a chance. Rather than demanding your way, earn respect by being an example of mature living.

Paul then gives direction to Titus specifically, telling him how he should live among the Cretans. He tells him something similar to Timothy—that he should strive for consistency in his teaching and life. He says Titus should be an example of integrity.

He also tells Titus to teach the truth so no one can criticize his teaching. I have to laugh at this statement. Few people who enter ministry are prepared for the amount of criticism and complaining they will face. Paul said that one way Titus could head off such criticism was to be doubly sure he was only teaching the truth of scripture. When we stand on God's Word rather than our own insights, those who object are objecting to God, not us. All who teach should be careful to ensure we are not going beyond what the scriptures say.

Slaves

The last group Paul speaks to is somewhat surprising to us. He speaks to slaves.

⁹ Slaves must always obey their masters and do their best to please them. They must not talk back ¹⁰ or steal, but must show themselves to be entirely trustworthy and good. Then they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive in every way. (Titus 2:9-10, NLT)

Much like Paul's choice to refer to himself as a slave of Christ, this reference to slavery is somewhat surprising to us. Why doesn't Paul speak to slave owners and tell them slavery is wrong? Why doesn't he tell slaves to rebel and throw off this oppressive institution? To answer that, we need to remember a couple of things. **First, slavery at this time was not like the slavery we know.** While there was some slavery that treated people as subhuman and mere property, most was voluntary servitude. It was a choice people made to pay a debt or provide for their family. It was not quite the oppressive institution we tend to assume.

Second, Paul was advocating for a higher purpose. Paul tasked slaves with reaching their masters with the gospel. He was saying they had a purpose in God's plan and could be used by Him regardless of their station in life. He didn't tell them to rebel against slavery because he saw an opportunity for slaves to minister for Christ. They were not second-class citizens in the body of Christ, but an important group within the church. He said their ministry was more important than their station in life.

His guidance for slaves was straightforward: **Be respectful, obedient, trustworthy, and good.** Paul told these men and women that instead of fighting against their masters, they should serve them. They should demonstrate character in the way they dealt with them and the way they handled their master's affairs. They should distinguish themselves as trustworthy and respectful.

Is there a modern application to this? I think the closest would be the modern worker. Workers today often do not feel they are afforded the respect or treatment they deserve. But that does not give them license to be bad workers. On the contrary, Paul says it provides an opportunity to testify to Christ, simply by working with respect and integrity.

Paul reminds us that the way we represent Christ is far more important than the way we are treated by those who rule over us.

Conclusion

This passage is all about practical application. It reminds us to make sure the way we live matches what we claim we believe. The world is watching us and taking notes. We should work to not discredit the gospel by the things we do. But there are a couple of additional lessons I want to highlight today.

First, the church needs you. God intends for us to teach one another and to learn from one another. When we work together, we find encouragement, guidance, and purpose. Many churches today focus only on young people. They claim they are the future of the church (which is true), but assume the older generations aren't needed. They are! Older generations have lived through the struggles facing younger people today. When we ignore the older generations, we miss out on the wisdom God has taught them. If you are older, don't assume that because you can't do the same things you did when you were younger, that you have no value. You can cheer on those carrying the mantle, you can encourage and guide them to be all God called them to be. The church should be a cross-section of our society. Each stage of life is important and has its own role to play in the church. We need them all!

Second, we have a responsibility for each other. American Christianity has become very individualized and consumeristic. We tend to focus primarily on what we can get out of the church, what we like, and what "speaks" to us. But Paul reminds us that the church is not just about us and our preferences. So be patient with those who may value things that you don't. Be patient with things that aren't your cup of tea. But also work to look beyond yourself to your Christian brothers and sisters. How can you help them grow in their faith? This passage reminds us that we are to work together so that we may grow deeper in our faith and learn to live in ways that are more like Christ. We all have something to teach, and we all have lots we can learn. Look beyond yourself and work together as a team. That's how God designed us to function.

Finally, we are called to holy living. People can discern what we believe by watching the way we live. We sometimes assume that once we get the basics down, we can coast. That's not biblical. We are all called to grow in holiness. What does your life say about your beliefs? When people look at you, do they see a life of self-control, a life dedicated to Christ? Does your life look different from the rest of the world? How you live testifies to the truth of the gospel. So be intentional about how you order your life and the traits you cultivate. Growth in faith means becoming more like Christ.

There are many examples in our world of life imitating art. The world takes notice of these things. I believe the same is true when our life reflects our faith. So let's strive for consistency in our walk with Christ, and let's rally around each other, helping each other to become all God has called us to be. When we do, we'll be stronger, we'll become more like Christ, and we'll represent Him well to our world.

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