

Adorning the Gospel

Titus 2:1-10

Grace Church | August 4, 2019

I want to begin by painting for you a picture from church history. Many of you know the name John Newton: he is the author of most likely the most famous hymn in church history, “Amazing Grace”. But what many of you may not know is what makes this hymn so powerful is that it tells the story, in a way, of Newton’s conversion. Newton was born in 1725 in London, and his father was a sea-captain. From an early age, John became an accomplished sailor, eventually becoming a captain of a slave-trading ship. Just a few years into his career, however, John was shipwrecked off the coast of Guinea. Here he became a slave himself, forced to labor and work under threat of death. Eventually he was miraculously rescued by a friend of his father. But on the way back home to England, on the 10th of March, 1748, the ship came upon a terrible storm. Newton was certain his life was over.

So the slave-trader began to pray. But there was one thing he knew: he was not a godly man. He doubted God would save him: “What mercy can there be for me? This was the first desire I had breathed for mercy for many years!... I could not utter the prayer of faith. I could not draw near to a reconciled God and call him Father.”

And yet, God heard his cry for mercy. He was saved from that storm, but that day he also was saved from his sin. He had with him on the boat a Bible and a book of sermons, and he began to read. He discovered the doctrine of undeserved grace in the gospel, and he believed it. You know the rest. The slave-trader left his old life behind. He became an unknown pastor. He wasn’t a great preacher, not eloquent or famous in his day. He cared for his church by writing letters and hymns and paying visits to their home. Newton became the very thing he thought he never would become: godly. And he penned that line that summed up his life: “Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me.”

Why do I bring up the story of John Newton? Because before we get to our text I want us to understand something that Newton understood very well: we become Godly not by our own efforts to save ourselves, but because God has saved us wretches by his amazing grace. And yet, Newton knew that this truth, of God’s free and sovereign grace does not leave us to continue on in our sin. No—like Newton, the truth of the gospel of Grace causes us to leave our life of sin behind and produces in us godliness. The slave-traders become servants of Christ. So Newton could say later of his life: ‘It is certain that I am not what I ought to be. But, blessed be God, I am not what I once was.’¹ This is the truth from our text today: when we believe the gospel of free grace as our right doctrine, we do not remain the same. We may not be what we ought to be, but by the grace of God we are not what we once were.

¹ From the introduction to *Works of John Newton* (Banner of Truth).

<https://banneroftruth.org/us/resources/articles/2001/john-newtons-conversion/>

When we, like Newton, understand God's free undeserving Grace, that truth should create in us a desire for distinct godliness. In the boat that day, Newton's belief began his behavioral shift from slave-trading to hymn writing, not the other way around. He became Godly by acknowledging his ungodliness and putting all his trust in the grace of God. So can we.

Here is our thesis for this morning. **Right doctrine always accords with godliness, and creates distinct, Godly people who display an attractive gospel culture.**

Right Doctrine Always Accords With Godliness

Last week Samuel did a fantastic job for us pointing out the problem in Crete. These people were no godly. The gospel was new to them, and so false teachers had been selling them lies. They told them if they shaped up their lives in accordance with Jewish custom and law, then they would be true Christians. But the gospel of Jesus Christ reminds us that our righteousness is manifested apart from the works of the law. In the end, the doctrine of the false teachers in Crete did not lead to godliness, but to more wickedness, for there was no Christ in their teaching. The Cretans simply trading worldliness for pride, for doctrine that was anti-gospel. Essentially, what the Cretans were hearing was: "do better" without ever hearing the good news that Christ has redeemed them while they were *still* sinners. The ethics produced by this false teaching, Paul tells us, produce a veneer, or an appearance of godliness, but really these false teachers don't know God at all. They, unlike our guy John Newton, had not experienced Amazing Grace.

So what is Paul's instruction to Titus? Call these guys out, rebuke them sharply. And now we see another instruction to Titus in **verse 1**. "But as for you". Titus, don't do what the false teachers do. Don't teach what they teach. Teach what is true: what accords with sound doctrine.

But here is what is interesting about our text. Paul hasn't yet given us an explicit breakdown of what right doctrine *is*. He will do that, next week actually. What he is instructing Titus to teach here is not the doctrine itself, but rather what *accords* with this right doctrine. And so he goes on in the next nine verses to give instructions on how the church in Crete is supposed to live, how they are supposed to set themselves up as a distinct culture. So what is it what accords with right doctrine? What is the sidekick of right doctrine? What rides in the sidecar? Paul shows us in the next nine verses: it's Godliness. He goes on to give us instructions as to how to live rightly in a fallen world. Godly living is what accords with right doctrine. If right doctrine is the root, godliness is the fruit.

Sometimes I hear our church talked about as the "theology church". Or the "academic church". There's nothing inherently wrong with that label. We value theology. We value study. But I also want us to be known as a *godly* church. Let me mention this to you again so you don't forget. There should be no conflict between theology and practice. Beware anyone who tells you that you can live a godly life by neglecting the right knowledge or understanding of God. It's just not true. This is important, because probably very few of us fancy ourselves as knowledgeable. Just the other day, I

heard someone tell me: “I’m no theologian”. I see what they mean, but they are wrong. Every man and woman is a theologian. And our theology, if it is right theology, and we believe it, cuts a direct line to how we act.

Here is what this means: If we have right doctrine that never leads to godly living, we have wrong doctrine. You ever wonder how Christians can justify terrible ethical and ungodly actions, like abortion, or racism? Because it happens. For years, *years*, Christian men and women in the American south used Scripture to affirm slave holding. And for *years* after that, they used their doctrine to justify their racial prejudice and segregation. What went wrong first? What led them to such ungodly actions and thoughts and practice and culture? Their doctrine was wrong.

This is because right doctrine always, and I mean always, accords with godliness. Not perfection, but godliness. The truth of the gospel, Church, is not passive. The truth, when we truly see it, shakes us up. It awakens us. It changes us, it shapes us, it gives us new hearts and new desires. It makes us godly. Sometimes this process is slow, but it will happen. What does it mean to be a Christian? It’s not the false teaching that the law saves. No, it’s understanding that the grace of God is a powerful enough catalyst that it can shape our hearts and minds to live in a way that accords with the truth found there.

Last thing on this point. Right doctrine always accords with Godliness. Why? Because right doctrine points us always to God. The doctrine that we hold is that Christ came into the world to save sinners. Christ is doctrine. He is the only content of what we believe. Without him, we have no doctrine at all. Believing a Christian then means that we place every area of our life under the lordship of Jesus Christ. He is central: and as we believe he is who he says he is, we model our lives to look like him. As one author says: “disciples do the truth by following [Jesus’] way and living out his life. ‘It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.’ This is the truth the disciples sees when peering intently into the mirror of the gospel: the reality of a new self, renewed in the image of Christ.”² When we truly believe the good news of Jesus, we are willing to place every single piece of our new self under his command. He desire godliness. This is because right doctrine not only accords with godliness, but right doctrine creates distinct, Godly people.

You don’t have to settle for either the church with the right doctrine or the church with the godly culture. Those things are never opposed. Where right doctrine is rightly believed, godly culture follows. And so Paul tells Titus: teach what accords with right doctrine. Tell us Titus, what Godliness looks like.

² Kevin Vanhoozer, *Hearers and Doers*, 52-53.

And Creates Distinct, Godly People

In our text there are four categories of people which Paul instructs Titus to teach godliness. We will take them one by one, and no one gets to escape this time. **Read quickly with me verse 2-9 again.** I want us to see a few things about Paul's instructions here. **First, the necessity of mentorship.**

What is interesting that I want you to see about this text is that these instructions are geared toward the *family unit*. This is because Paul's aim for the church in Crete is that they would be distinctly godly. And the way they became distinct is family by family. This is because in every family unit, and in the family of the church, there is diversity. Men and women, young and old, leaders and followers. The idea here is that if the gospel can reach the most specific cultural unit—the family—and teach godliness, then older will teach younger and this culture will be passed on through the process of mentorship and example. This is why Paul addresses both older men and younger men and older women and younger women. He imagines this mentorship model of godliness will mean that everyone has a part to play. The older saints don't just look down on the younger and say: "They have so much to learn". They take action. They set the example, they teach, they mentor what godliness looks like.

Just as in the nuclear family unit the older train the younger, so it is in the family of God. Churches thrive in Godliness when the older generation sets an example for the younger to follow. There is a necessity here of mentorship. Paul uses two words here: *train* in verse 4, and *urge* in verse 6. Older women are to train younger women. Older men are to urge younger men (probably because men need a little more urgency than training). Chances are, if you are over the age of twenty-five, there is someone younger than you in this church. If we are to be a godly church, it happens through this process of mentorship. Look, this is not difficult, it's highly practical. My challenge for you is to look around your community group. There is probably someone younger than you there. If not, we need to diversify. Our vision for our groups is that they would be intergenerational, we have efforts to that end coming in the near future. But find that one person, that young woman or man. Commit this morning to consider as we move forward what it would look like to press into that relationship with urgency. Invite them for dinner, for coffee, to see how you live your life. There are no "empty nesters" in our congregation. If your kids are out of the house, look around. You have plenty of spiritual children waiting for you to teach them what it's like to grow in godliness. Older mothers, teach the younger. Older fathers, teach the younger. This is one of the reasons we have community groups: to grow in godliness together, younger and older. In this teaching and urging, there is a certain sense of accountability: we cannot be afraid to call one another to repentance and godliness. Again, if we want to be a godly church, godly mentorship and example is a necessity. The burden is heavy: let's teach one another with our lives. Let's be spiritual mothers and fathers to one another, men and women who those younger than us can look up to as we believe and display the gospel.

If you want an example of what this looks like, I think we have one of the best examples in our church that I've ever witnessed. He gave the pastoral prayer today, and his name is Buck Rogers. What an example of Godliness for me and for the young men in our church! God has set it up this way: that godliness would be caught and taught from within the church. As one example, young men, if you cannot escape pornography—go today to an older man. Go to one who you respect, who exercises self-control. Let him *urge* you, as the text says. Let him teach you.

In order for this mentorship to work, however, our mentors must be Godly themselves. Besides the necessity of mentorship, I think we see in Paul's instructions to Titus **an emphasis on self-control.**

The men and women of Crete existed in a culture that seriously lacked self-control or self-restraint. Remember the example: one of their own called them "evil beasts". They were given to their desires, unable to control themselves. Gentleness was not their default, restraint was seldom given. Notice the emphasis here in Paul's instructions to Titus. **In verse 2** he calls the older men to be *sober-minded*, or clear headed, not given to fits of rage or drunkenness, dignified and *self-controlled*. **In verse 3**, he calls the older women to be reverent and gentle, controlling what they say, not gossiping or slandering, and not being slaves to wine, not being controlled by what they consume. **In verse 4-5**, younger women are to be self-controlled in their sexual purity and in their priorities (which we will get to in a bit). **In verse 6**, the younger men are to be self-controlled (with no qualifiers, which means they need a lot of it!). For servants, **in verse 9**, they are to be submissive, and not argumentative, controlling their desire to be right or powerful.

This is the emphasis on the distinct godliness that gospel doctrine produces. Think about our social media culture: we show very little restraint. I don't know if you use twitter, facebook, or instagram but sometimes I see all sorts of people, even Christian, saying all sorts of hateful things. We post whatever we feel, whatever unformed opinion comes to our head. No self-control, no self-restraint. It makes sense that the industries that take advantage of our lack of self-control are often the most lucrative. Pornography, for instance, is inescapable, because its producers know we can't resist. It seems to me, that if we can learn to control ourselves, in a culture that does not tend to show restraint, we will be a distinct people, a godly people.

Why is self-control so hard? Why is it that the ice cream in the freezer never stays around that long? Because self-control is inherently a battle, a fight, against our own sinful selves. And our sin doesn't go down easy. Our sinful flesh tells us "just one more", "just a little further". As one author says, "Sin is a reckless consumer."³

The basic idea of self-control is that we take up arms against our sinful selves. We have to realize this is a battle. Probably everyone wants to be a "better person", but few are the men and women

³ Ed Welch, "Self-Control: The Battle Against 'One More'", *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, vol 19:2, winter 2001.

who have such a strong desire to kill sin that make war against it. John Owen famously said “be killing sin or it will be killing you.”⁴ He called this process *mortification*. This is self-control: a desire at all costs to say no to sin, to put it to death. It is, in essence, Godliness 101. This is the life that lives in accordance with the right doctrine of the gospel, because the gospel tells us that God had every right to let himself go. He had every right to be angry with us, to unleash his wrath on us. But instead, in love he put all that just wrath on Christ. God is a God who is not given into passions—he is in complete self control. In the gospel of Jesus we see God in complete control, sending his perfect son to take control of sin and death and make us into a people who are controlled not by our sinful desires but by our identity in Christ.

And in Christ, we see our perfect example. On the cross, after being beaten and mocked and spit on and falsely accused, what did they say to him? If you are truly the son of God, save yourself! And he could have. But that jest was sin’s last final attempt. The Son of God would not give in so easily. He controlled every part of himself, killing sin and mastering it forever with a final blow by his precious blood spilt.

Christian, think of it this way. We can exercise self-control over sinful desires precisely and only because Jesus did it for us. He is not only our example, he is our righteousness. And by his death, we have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit. What comes along with the power of the spirit? The fruits of the Spirit. Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit, you can’t do this on your own. Self-control does not mean pulling yourself up by your bootstraps and slaying your sin by your own power. It means calling out to God, remembering the right doctrine of the gospel, and receiving the *gift* of self-control by the Spirit of God. If you would be self-controlled, Goldy, and distinct, what you do not need is more internet filters or less beer in your fridge. Do those things, yes, but what you really need is to get down on your knees, remember the gospel, and pray for the gift of self-control. And when that moment comes, when you are faced with that decision—will I give into self or will I control self—remember Christ. Ed Welch, a christian counselor, says it best.

We would expect God to yell at us and tell us, again, to shape up, but God’s ways, being much better than our own, are rarely predictable. Rather than give us twelve steps on which to rely, he gives us a Person to know. As Jesus is known and exalted among us, you will notice that self-control becomes more obvious.⁵

God is not yelling at your from heaven: control yourself! No, he is constantly holding out to you Jesus’ example and work. Jesus is not mastered by sin, he mastered it once and for all on the cross. And so, by remembering and relying on him, you can learn the discipline of godliness in controlling your sinful self.

⁴ John Owen, *The Mortification of Sin*.

⁵ Ed Welch, “Self-Control”.

In Paul's instructions, we see the necessity of mentorship, an emphasis on self-control, and finally we see **the importance of lordship**.

Godliness means there is no area of our life which is left unturned, no small point which we keep and don't submit to Jesus' rule and reign. In everything, we submit to the lordship of Christ. In our text, we find that the main area we are called to submit to the lordship of Christ is by laying aside our idea of what is best for our life.

Paul uses two examples to spell this out. The first is the teaching for younger women and mothers. **Read verse 4-5 again.** They are to be taught, says Paul, to not neglect working at home, in kindness and submission to their husbands.

In our culture, submission is a bit of a dirty word. Further, you might be taken aback by the admonition for women to be taught to "work at home". What is Paul getting at here? It calls to mind the evils of certain patriarchal societies, where women are unjustly oppressed and looked down upon. This would not be unlike the cultural moment of Crete at the time the letter to Titus was written. In many households, women were not treated as equal members of society or given and taken almost as property. This is not what Paul is advocating for here. The Christian household is to be different, the Christian culture is distinct. Let me very clear for you here. I want you to listen well and not misconstrue what I am saying.

Around the time of this letter, a new cultural movement was sweeping across the Roman world and had made its way to Crete. It was called the "New Roman Woman". In the ancient world at this time, men had almost unlimited freedom. They could sleep around and act in infidelity without many repercussions. They didn't have to tell anyone where they were going or what they were doing, they acted in complete autonomy. No one was their lord or master. Around the middle of the first century, however, a cultural shift began to take place. In more wealthier families, the women started speaking out and acting in ways similar to the men. Their goal was sexual freedom and autonomous expression—their platform was essentially "if men can act in this way, so can we." Marital infidelity among women became much more common, and not surprisingly drunkenness and even abortion. All this served to bring to break apart the concept of the family that was usually highly regarding in Greek and Roman culture. Women began to neglect their traditional duties at home in favor of sexual promiscuity and debauchery.

Based on that context, we understand more rightly what Paul is saying here. Hear me clearly: he is not saying that women cannot find work outside of the home. He is not saying all women should stay home all day and not find work or purpose elsewhere. There are numerous examples of women working in productive ways in the Scripture that aren't limited to household work. Paul is *not* saying that working outside the home is bad, what he *is* saying is that working in the home is good.

The sinfulness of the new Roman women, and the women of Crete, came in the fact that they were neglecting their families in exchange for license to sin. Paul is reminding the older women to teach them that working in the home, loving your husband and your children is a good and right vocation that should not be neglected. For all the young mothers in the room, hear this: you may have different ways of spending your time. Some of you may work full-time, some work part-time, some work exclusively in the home. Your day and your work might look different, but here is what should not look different—you should view motherhood as a high honor and godly vocation.

We all have plans, goals, ideas of what we think is right and good. And our culture has the tendency to put motherhood and home-making low on that list. Ask a stay-at-home mom what they do, and you might hear this: “oh, I am *just* a mom.” Just a mom? The task of raising up godly children is a godly task that cannot be underestimated. Your other jobs and vocations come and go, but your children have eternal souls. They need your care and your guidance and your love. They need you to point them to Christ.

Here is what is distinct about Christian culture: we submit to the lordship of Christ. We value what he values. To the young mothers, do not be tricked into thinking that your work does not matter. Whether you have one child or ten or have work elsewhere, your work is not in vain. Your husband is not out of the weeds on this, he should support you and care for you and the children and instruct them in godliness. But this morning we find an admonition for you: submit yourself to the lordship of Christ. His plan for motherhood may seem mundane or boring by our cultural standards, but in his plan it is glorious.

Conformity of your life to godliness is never settling for second best. Living a life that accords with the truth of God is the standard of human flourishing. Living in agreement with the commands of God is not restrictive, it's freeing. It's life-giving. Vocational success is not ultimately life-giving. The gospel of Jesus Christ gives us identity, life, and purpose. So if you are a stay at home mom and you see it as restriction, or you, as a woman or man in 2019, lament your inability to achieve your vocational goals because of your family responsibilities, you are failing to understand the significance of how life giving and purposeful and impactful your life may be when you live it to adorn the gospel of Christ with a godly, distinctly Christian life.

Very quickly, I want to address our second example of lordship. We see it in **verses 9-10**. The example here is of the bondservant. The word here can be translated as slave, but if you are confused do not think that the Bible condones human slavery in anyway. That could not be further from the truth. What is in view in the cultural setting is a man or woman who has submitted themselves to work intentionally, in order to meet their needs or raise their status in life—a bondservant.

So, this does not happen today, but we do similar things. We submit ourselves to our bosses or our supervisors in our vocations. These relationships can be difficult, just as many of the relationships in Crete for bondservants would have been. The default here is that most likely, the master or overseer is not a Christian. How is the servant to act? Or to put it in context for you, how are you

to act in godliness when you have an unbelieving boss, or maybe a boss that simply gets on your nerves? How are you to act in your workplace?

I can't spend much time on this, but Paul has a simple answer. Submission. Not being argumentative, but showing good faith. Going along with what they say. In showing submission to even unjust leadership, you are acknowledging that you belong to Christ. He is your Lord. So whether you labor under bad leadership for years and years, or you never get that raise or that promotion. If you sweep floors for the rest of your life, and this is the summation of how you paid the bills, you do it in humble submission.

Our culture tells us that we must succeed or be noticed or have power of influence in order to truly flourish, and anything else is settling for second best. God tells us that faithfulness is the goal, and faithfulness even in the mundane is life-giving and glorious and points to the goodness of Christ. Submitting to the Lordship of Christ, whether our vocation is mother, father, or trash collector, means that we are faithful. We are godly. We know that our work is unto the Lord, who saved us through the work of Christ. We trust that God is for us, and that is enough.

Right doctrine always accords with godliness, and creates distinct, Godly people. The gospel makes you godly: it makes you full of sin-killing self control and a desire to place every area of your life under the lordship of Christ and trust he knows best. But godliness has a point, a purpose. **Right doctrine always accords with godliness, and creates distinct, Godly people who display an attractive gospel culture.**

Who Display An Attractive Gospel Culture

Godliness is missional. This is what I want you to leave with here today. Notice the point of godliness in Paul's instructions to Titus. He tells Titus to be godly in **verse 7**, so that no one will have anything bad to say. And in **verse 9**, that you may *adorn* the gospel.

Have you seen a professional cake recently? It's not what the cake tastes like that makes it attractive at first. How can you know what it tastes like unless you've tried it? No, the first thing we notice about a delicious cake is what it *looks* like. The beauty of the outside makes the inside attractive. This is similar to our gospel witness. Godliness in the people of God shows the world that the gospel is true. It adorns it, makes it even more beautiful and attractive. If you want your neighbor to know Jesus, show him your godliness. If you want your wife or husband to know Jesus more, show them your godliness. If you want your children to follow Jesus, show them your godliness. The culture of the gospel is attractive because it is lifegiving.

This is how God works. He confirms and adorns his truth with action. Next week we will see this truth laid out. God, wanting to prove that he was merciful and full of grace for sinners, did something. He showed it. He let the whole world see his grace by adorning his grace with action.

Look at **verse 11**: the grace of God appeared. It showed up in Jesus, who being God, was the epitome of godliness. He never once betrayed his words with his actions.

If you feel burdened this morning by the call to holiness and godliness, I want you to end as we move to communion by remembering Jesus' godliness. He was perfect, so perfect. His perfection is the key to you living a godly life. His appearing and bringing salvation is what trains you to be godly like him. Your plan for salvation runs through and in and always around knowing Jesus. You can't really see him for who he is, as he has appeared, and not become more Godly. This is God's promise: if you believe the gospel of Jesus, you will grow in godliness. So this is my prayer church—we would be a people who understand that believing the gospel of Jesus and living like Jesus are linked with an unbreakable bond. And as we believe, we strive for godliness, which acts as a seal to the outside world that our gospel is true and our Jesus is good. May our church, our city, and our world know Jesus not just because we teach him, but because we act like him.