

The Essence of a Healthy Church: Part 1

Older Men and Women Who Adorn the Gospel

Titus 2:1-10

Intro

What is a healthy church? Usually when we think of what a healthy church is, we start talking about the things that make a church become healthy. Like, expositional preaching, plurality of qualified elders, sound doctrine, meaningful membership. Those things are essential for a church to become healthy.

But that's like saying: "A healthy person IS someone who eats right, exercises, reads a lot, has good relationships." Those are essential disciplines that make a person healthy, but they don't tell us what IS a healthy human. A healthy human is one who is physically in shape, free of sickness, sharp mentally, stable emotionally.

So I ask you: What IS a healthy church? Titus 2 paints a picture of church members who fight their sin and pursue holiness in their various seasons and spheres of life. And Paul argues:

THAT is a healthy church. Why? **[v1]** “Unlike the false teachers of vv10-16, Titus, YOU must SAY what fits with healthy doctrine.” What is it that? That’s what this whole passage is about. He needs to speak to the different categories of church members about how to live in a way that fits with sound doctrine.

Now, notice how he closes this passage with the same idea in **[v10]**. The lives of church members must *adorn* the doctrine of God our Savior. He’s basically saying the same thing he said in v1: their lives must accord with/be consistent with sound doctrine.

But that language of *adorn* adds more clarity. What does it mean to adorn the doctrine of God our Savior? He tells us what the doctrine is in **[v11, v14a]**. So the doctrine that we are to adorn is the **[GOSPEL]**.

So what does it mean to adorn THAT? Does it mean we make beautiful what is not? *Like Charlie Brown’s Christmas tree. The most raggedy looking tree you ever saw. But Linus looks at it and says, “I never thought it was*

such a bad little tree. Maybe it just needs a little love.” And he puts his security blanket around the bottom and everyone hangs ornaments on it...and VOILA! It’s beautiful!

Is that what it means to *adorn* the gospel? Of course not! Our job is NOT to make the gospel look pretty because it’s really ugly. Our job is simply to show forth its inherent beauty.

Over the summer, I was out with my boys, and I got a call from my wife...sobbing. I said, “What is wrong?” She said, “The diamond on my wedding ring is gone.” So me and the boys rushed home and the whole family diligently searched for her diamond. We were looking in the trash, retracing steps, getting on all fours.

I went out the garage and just happened to see a tiny glistening reflection of light on the outdoor rug. There it was. Everyone felt such relief, because it’s so precious. And when we looked at my wife’s ring it was very apparent why the diamond fell out. One of the prongs was broken. It couldn’t hold up the diamond.

Now, that prong is NOT what makes the ring beautiful. No one looks at the prongs and says, “What beautiful prongs!” No, they say, “What a beautiful diamond.” But they wouldn’t say that if the prongs aren’t holding it up!

Our godly lives function as prongs that hold up the beauty of the gospel. Therefore, *a healthy church is full of members whose lives adorn the gospel.* From that, Titus must exhort six different categories of church members to adorn the gospel: 1) Older men, 2) Older women, 3) Younger women, 4) Younger men, 5) Pastors and 6) Servants. This morning, we’ll tackle the first two. Let’s begin with...

Category #1: Older Men [v2]

In Paul’s day, “older men” probably refers to at least 40 year olds...maybe 50 and above. He offers six exhortations geared towards specific bends older men tend to have in their stage of life. What must you do, older men, to adorn the gospel in your season of life?

*Exhortation #1: Keep your head. [v2a, **sober-minded**].* This word could refer merely to

moderate drinking, but it also carries the idea of level-headedness. A sobriety of thought. Paul's assuming older men have been Christians for a while, and therefore, they've developed a discipline of applying God's Word to various aspects of life. The Word of God has been baked into them over time, giving clarity of mind and measured thinking.

Do you have that, older men? Do you tend to jump to extremes too quickly? Are you able to look at a situation and properly assess what's going on? If not, why not? Could it be that you've developed the habit of letting emotions rule instead of sound thinking? You've not had a steady intake of God's Word over the years? You've not let others further along in their walk speak into your life and you humbly listen?

This quality of sober thinking usually comes over time. *It's not a microwave process; it's a crock pot, where the Word of God slowly cooks into your soul.* This requires you to be serious about the things of God. Which leads to...

Exhortation #2: Be serious about the Lord.

[v2b, dignified] That word carries the idea of being *serious*...you're *serious* in a way that makes you worthy of respect. It does not mean you take yourself seriously. Too many men are think they're way more important they are.

I remember playing pick-up basketball with some friends, and my dad joined. One of my friends would get so angry every time he missed a shot. My dad said, "Trey, take God seriously; don't take yourself so seriously." We're not that important. God is!

One of the best qualities is to learn to laugh at yourself. So many men are so insecure because they take themselves too seriously and they don't take God seriously enough! When we forget ourselves and keep the Lord front and central in our hearts, we will exude dignity. That's Paul's point. Be dignified by being serious about the Lord.

I read a book over the summer called *The Practice of Piety* written by a 17th century pastor in England. "Piety" was an old English

word that described this idea of exuding seriousness about the things of the Lord. And I was struck by how often I fail to be serious about the Lord.

Listen to what the author says, “Unless...a man doth truly know God, he neither can nor will worship him aright; for how can a man love him who he knoweth not? And who will worship him whose help a man thinks he needeth not? And how shall a man seek remedy by grace, who never understood his misery by nature?...there can be no true piety without knowledge of God...” (Bayley, 2)

Older men, are you dignified? Are you serious about God? Let’s get serious! It’s past time. You’re not on the up-and-up anymore. Use whatever time you have left to promote a piety that says, “I am serious about the Lord.”

*Exhortation #3: Think before you act. [v2c, **self-controlled**]* Interestingly, this word (or a form of it) is used for each category of persons in this passage. Everyone needs self-control if they’re gonna adorn the gospel.

Certainly, *self-control* carries the idea of controlling your *behavior*, but I think it's more than that. It means controlling your *passions*. It's very similar to *sober-minded*, but it presses a more into the caution of being impulsive, fickle, rash. One author said that such qualities "should be things of the past for men in this stage of life..." (Yarbrough, 510)

A clear sign of an immature man is lack of self-control/discipline. (You may have noticed in v7 that the only exhortation Paul gives to young men is: be self-controlled!)

Older men, you should have this in place by now. Skipping Bible reading and prayer shouldn't be a thing for you. Acting rashly and impulsively, shouldn't be a thing! But it is sometimes, isn't it? How many men have you heard of who hit 40 or 50 and just go wild? They leave their family for a younger woman, buy a sports car, change their whole look, switch careers...they lose their mind!

Why? Because they're not settled in who they are in the Lord. Older men should have a

settled-ness in their heart because they know who their God is! And that takes us to...

Exhortation #4: Give yourself to God's Word.

[v2d]. The word *sound* occurs a lot in Titus and it just means “healthy.” An older man must have a healthy/mature faith because he’s gone through enough life to know *God is worthy of trust!* That’s what faith is! A settled confidence that God can be trusted. An older man doesn’t have a strong faith because HE is strong. He has strong faith because he has learned, through thick and thin, that GOD is strong!

Brothers, is your faith healthy? One of the most helpful things about some older men in this church is that they are not easily shaken.

One time an older brother shared some news with me about something difficult happening in our church that he was brought into that had potential to make a young pastor like me a little shaken. And I’ll never forget his words. He said, “Brother, I’ve seen far worse.” Brothers, don’t be easily shaken. Be sound in faith.

Exhortation #5: Love people well. [v2e, love].
Older men are not only to be healthy in faith, but they're also to be healthy in love. I take this mainly to be talking about love for others. Paul is probably addressing a matter that older folks may struggle with. They've had to deal with sins and disappointments and setbacks and betrayals and failings of other people for a long time. And they might be getting jaded.

And Paul is saying, "Titus, tell the older men not to get jaded. They gotta keep loving people." In fact, because older men have seen how people tend to be, they are able to love people in ways younger folks can't. They know when someone needs a kick in the pants and when they just need a hug...or both.

Older men, use your wisdom with people to keep loving them well. And that takes us to...

Exhortation #6: Don't give up. [v2f, steadfastness]
Endurance. Now, you might've expected Paul to say *hope* because he just said older men must be sound in *faith* and *love*. And the triad that often rounds those out is *hope*.

But that's not what he says. He says be sound in *steadfastness*. Why? To remain steadfast, one must have hope. Paul is hitting on the behavioral result of one who has hope—he remains steadfast/ endures/ doesn't give up!

Isn't this exactly what older men need to hear? *Don't give up! God's not done with you!* One of the hardest questions older men tend ask themselves is this: Am I still useful? Or am I just washed up? Here's your answer: Bill Hill.

He'd admit he doesn't have the stamina he used to. But is that brother useful? You bet he is! He does what he can. That's all God expects. So brothers, keep letting God use you! Endure. It's not time to relax and give up. Yes, you'll slow down, but keep going.

Older men, adorn the gospel in your latter years. Show forth it's beauty in your sober mindedness, seriousness, self-control, and soundness in faith, love, and endurance.

Now we turn to...

Category #2: Older Women

Keep in mind, Paul urges Titus to address the specific bents/tendencies of each stage of life.

[vv3-4a] He gives four exhortations to older women. Here's how we can state the first...

Exhortation #1: Develop a reverent demeanor.

[3a, *reverent in behavior*] This is one word in the original that puts together two words. The word combo is literally “fitting” and “priest.” *Priest-fitting*. Behavior that befits a priestess.

It's a word that, over time, just came to mean *reverent*. It implies a kind of demeanor the reveals *this person really knows God*. Like a priest, she lives in the presence of God and serves the people of God as if she serves God himself. She has a Godward reverence.

Is that how you would described, ladies of Kinney? What's the opposite? Irreverent. What is an irreverent person life? Loose with their tongue, fly off the handle, don't understand the weight of life. That sounds like a young person.

It's interesting, when we spot irreverent behavior in older women, we might say, "She's too old to be acting like that." What do we mean? It means there's a dignified demeanor older women ought to exhibit. And when she's still acting like a teenage, something's wrong.

There's so much pressure in our culture on women to perpetuate their youth, as if being young is most valuable. The Bible has the opposite view. There is something beautiful about older women. What is it? *Reverence*.

How do you cultivate this? Get with God. View everything through a Godward lens. And that will affect how you behave. Which leads to...

*Exhortation #2: Guard your tongue. [v3b, **not slanders**]* Do you know what that word is in the original? The same word for "devil." That's what he does—he accuses, he slanders. Don't be like him in the way you talk about others.

Now, why would Paul mention this to older ladies? Lemme give two possible reasons: jealousy and too much time.

Jealousy is something (I'm told) women often struggle with. And when they're jealous, they often slander...twist/ bend/ distort the truth about someone to put them down.

And you know what exacerbates slanderous jealousy? Too much time. What do I mean? Older women usually don't have little kids anymore, they're past the season of survival mode, and so they might have more time on their hands. And that can lead them to talking too much. They get on the phone for hours, "Did you hear about so and so?"

Older ladies, use this stage of life not to tear others down, but to build them up! You have an amazing opportunity to do so.

*Exhortation #3: Do not be mastered by substances. [v3c, **slaves to wine**]* Now why does he mention this? It's likely this vice was a particular problem for women on the island of Crete. Drunkenness was a common problem among women in Hellenistic and Jewish cultures at large. And frankly, it seems to be a temptation in most cultures.

I remember leading a co-ed Bible study through Titus and I said, “I honestly don’t know why Paul brings this up. It seems like men have more of a problem with drunkenness than women.” And all the older ladies in the group said, “Oh no! This is common for women. They love their glass of wine in the evening, and sometimes they can take it too far!”

It can be a form of escape from a variety of emotional troubles you’re feeling. Don’t be mastered by substances.

Exhortation #4: Invest in younger women
[vv3c-4a] Now, doesn’t that imply a local church should have intergenerational discipling taking place all the time? So many Christians are bent towards: “I wanna church with people just like me, in my stage of life.” That’s fine. But if you’re satisfied with just that, you’re missing the point of church!

It does not adorn the gospel to have a church where everyone is the same age and share all the same interests and are in all the same walks of life. That doesn’t show forth the

beauty of the power of the gospel that saves people of all ages. It shows the power shared experiences—which is not impressive.

But you know what's impressive? When a member is in the hospital and they get visits from the singles in the church, the newlyweds, the couple with five little kids, and those their age. It makes the nursing staff say, "Who are all these people? Do you just have a big family?" And you say, "Yeah, my church family." And you talk about how the gospel that brings all kinds of people together.

So let us be that intergenerational church. Older ladies, invest in younger ladies. It says in v3 you are to *teach what is good*. What's that? **[vv4-5]** We'll talk about younger women next week, but this is what the older women are to teach/train the younger women in. (In fact, the word "train" is the same word for *self-control*, used in this passage four times. They're to "self-control" the younger women on how to be good wives and moms. That's the focus of the training.)

Which, I'm not sure if you noticed, but Paul does not tell *Titus* to train the younger women. He tells *Titus* to tell the *older women* to train the younger women. He's using pastoral delicacy. It not Titus' job to be the main discipler of the younger women in his church. That's the job of the older women.

You gotta invest in them! Are you? Some of you are so aware of your failings as wife/mom that you think: "What do I have to offer?" Believe me, what you can offer is more than you think, even if it's simply: "I didn't do everything right. Here's how you can learn from my mistakes."

Listen, the younger people in our church desperately want spiritual moms (and dads). But there is a kind of older mother-like nurturing that you're able to provide that so many young people these days simply did not get...or they just still need.

So take the initiative. Invest. Open your home. Go to their home. Answer their questions. Share your thoughts. Love on them.

Conclusion

Adorn the gospel. You will only feel compelled to show off the beauty of the gospel if you know how beautiful the gospel is. *Do you know beauty of the...*

- *Spotless life of Jesus Christ*, who was never had a an impulsive passion, was dignified every way, and exuded reverence?
- *Blood-soaked cross* that bore your penalty for your impulsiveness, slander, slavery to substances?
- *Empty tomb* that says, “Your King has conquered your irreverent behavior, your lack of self-control”?
- *Record of sin wiped clean* before God. God will not judge you for your faithlessness or lovelessness because he judged it to Christ?
- *Hope of seeing your Savior face-to-face...*the one who bought you with such a great price?

You will strive to adorn the beauty of the gospel only when you know how beauty the beauty of the gospel. Know it! And let your life show it off.