

Titus 2:11,12

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 09 August 2015

Preacher: Chris Roberts

[0 : 00] And turn back to Titus chapter 2, it's on page 998 of the Church Bible. Titus chapter 2.

If you were here a couple of weeks ago, you might remember that one of the main aims of the book of Titus is to close the gap between what a church believes and how it behaves.

Titus leads his church, doesn't he, on a quest for greater godliness. Where he's based on the island of Crete, the culture there was a selfish culture.

And godliness is a disaster when it becomes about me, when it becomes about the self. We saw that last time, didn't we, in the Pharisaic religion of the false teachers of chapter 1.

And we know that in our own experience, I think. As soon as my godliness becomes about my own self-determination, well, when I succeed, I get proud, don't I?

[1 : 07] And when I fail, I am absolutely crushed. And often that leads me into feeling down and depressed about my godliness. So we don't need a self-determined godliness, but we need to be part of a church family training itself in godliness by grace.

That is, I think, the meaning of this chapter, chapter 2. I think there are two halves of this chapter.

You've got a description in verses 1 to 10 of a community, of a family training itself in godliness.

And then you've got the fuel for that in verse 11 to 14. The fuel of grace. And those two things, they marry together as a potent mix for training, for growing in godliness.

So I want to look at those two things this morning. So firstly, a church family training itself. A church family training itself. It is really hard, isn't it, to change significant things about yourself.

Old habits, things that you're stuck with about yourself. It's hard to do that if you're alone. But if you're in a group trying to do that with others, it can be much easier, can't it?

[2 : 33] I remember one member of my family, who will remain nameless many years ago, tried to go on a diet to lose weight. And for the first few weeks, it was just impossible.

We were all eating, you know, the usual fatty stuff. And it was really hard for them, until as a family, we decided that we were all going to eat the diet at the same time, just for that person.

And it became much easier for them to stay on this diet. And I think that is the kind of thing that Paul has in mind here. The church should be a church family, a community where godliness is being done together.

Where it is taught together. Godliness is not just a personal thing that you do as an individual at home, quietly. It is a family activity.

Training each other. So you'll see in the passage that women are to teach young women to love their husbands, in verse 4. The young men are to be taught by the older men, as they set an example.

[3 : 41] In this family, behaviour is shaped by what others do, isn't it? We shape each other. And you'll see that there's a structure to the way that training is done in the family.

The head teacher is Titus, isn't he? Have a look at verse 1. Titus, you teach or say what accords with sound doctrine. Verse 15.

Rebuke with all authority. Exhort. Let no one disregard you. See, Titus, he's the representative of Paul, isn't he?

The apostle. And he teaches the sound doctrine of the apostolic teaching. That must be the starting point in this godliness training family.

It is not what we fancy teaching, is it? It has to start with the apostolic teaching. And Titus is the head teacher. But then it goes on, doesn't it, in the structure, to older members of this community.

[4 : 44] The older men and the older women are to teach and train. There is an order in this family activity. It is both the privilege and the responsibility for the older members of the church to teach and exemplify godliness.

Yes. We read about slaves in verse 9 and 10. But actually, in the time we've got, I want us to be aware of, in this family training project, there is a particular emphasis on home life.

On domestic life. I think that is the case because, do you remember, back in chapter 1, the false teachers have been going around from house to house upsetting whole families.

There is a particular issue, I think, in this church of dysfunctionality at home. There seems to be a problem with godliness in the domestic setting.

That is where godliness is most at risk. Home life is to be of prime concern in this family training project. And this is where this passage is so relevant to us in many ways.

[6 : 06] Paul speaks to a culture here on Crete where men and women, particularly husbands and wives, are living self-absorbed lives at home.

Selfishness has crept into domestic life. And it's there that godliness really has a chance to shine and show itself to the world around.

So I want us to look at what Paul says to men at home and to married women, particularly in this church family training project.

What will it look like for men to live godly lives and to train other men to do that? We'll have a look at verse 2. Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love and in steadfastness.

The men, the older men, should have, shouldn't they, an air of dignity about them. They are to be self-controlled with their physical strength.

[7 : 13] There's an air of quiet strength and dignity about them. And they should be the kind of men that the younger men, later in verse 6, should look up to and want to exemplify.

Self-control seems like a big issue, doesn't it, for the men. So that is mentioned for men and women at the beginning. But later it's the only thing that is said to the young men in verse 6.

Self-control. And that is a contrast to the men of Crete. The image of the man of Crete. And the image, so often, of the modern man today.

The image of the modern man who is physically strong, but lacks self-control. He is strong physically, but perhaps weak in character.

I wonder whether we see that in sort of two forms today. There is the kind of overgrown adolescent, isn't there, at home.

[8 : 16] The kind of husband, the kind of father that is a good mate to the kids. You see him on adverts, don't you? He drinks beer and he watches the World Series.

And he's like an overgrown adolescent. I said to Emma the other day, when this baby arrives, you'll have two children to look after. And that was a bit of a joke, but actually a warning to myself.

And it's one of the ways, isn't it, that as men we can actually be out of control. We lack self-control. But I just don't grow up. With the overgrown adolescent, there's a kind of slack maleness, isn't there, that is self-absorbed.

And in a strange way, it becomes introverted in an unhealthy way. We keep ourselves to ourselves. It's the kind of man cave mentality, isn't it?

As Paul Simon said, they've got a wall around China. It's a thousand miles long to keep out the foreigners. They've made it strong. And I've got a wall around me that you can't even see.

[9 : 24] It took a little time to get close to me. It's a great line, isn't it? And I think there's some truth in that. As men, we are experts at becoming self-absorbed introverts with a wall around us.

Don't let anybody in and don't let any emotion out. Just keep yourself to yourself. And if you're an Englishman here this morning, you might be thinking, well, that is just English reserve, isn't it?

That's how we are. Maybe so. But I wonder whether, actually, building that wall around us is a way of substituting our lack of self-control, of withdrawing.

That is one image, isn't it? Perhaps the other image, though, is of the kind of Alan Sugar sort of figure. The misogynist. The one who is hot-headed and stubborn at home.

And the misogynist makes up for his lack of self-control by over-controlling his wife and family. He channels his authority badly.

[10 : 35] But the man in Titus 2 is the kind of man that you'd feel safe with, isn't it? The kind of man who has a quiet authority and a sober-mindedness who uses his authority well.

Who is sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. So that is a bit of what he says on men.

What does it look like for women? And I think he's talking particularly here, isn't he, for married women in the family, in the home. Women who are married in verse 3 to 5.

Those verses, as Sue read them earlier, I don't know if you kind of woke up at that point. They're probably the most controversial verses of this letter, aren't they? Because Paul's commands for the women undoubtedly focus on homemaking.

And in family life, don't they? Just look at verse 4. The old women are to train, to teach what is good. So train the young women to love their husbands and children.

[11 : 44] To be self-controlled, pure, working at home. Kind and submissive to their own husbands. What do we make of that? Well, I'd want to say that what Paul says here is partly down to the specific problems on Crete at the time.

The Cretan culture had taken a lot of influence from what was known as the modern Roman woman, which was fashionable at the time. We actually thought about this in 1 Timothy a few months back.

It was an idea amongst wealthy women that threw off the standards of sexual modesty and fidelity. So having multiple sexual partners, getting out of the traditional roles of raising children and family life, was becoming fashionable.

Abortion and contraception were popular even then. Sex became something that was removed from propagation. And marriage and abused for quick pleasure.

And women were beginning to demand the same kind of promiscuous lifestyles that Cretan men were already taking advantage of. And so the kind of teaching in a church like that, in a culture like that, is a teaching that lowers the value of family.

[13 : 12] That cheapens marriage and devalues homemaking for women. Now Paul has had to deal with some of that before, hasn't he, in 1 Corinthians chapter 7.

Where people are going around saying that being married is somehow less spiritual. And family life is a barrier to true spirituality. And this was an extreme issue on the island of Crete.

But it is becoming more of a temptation, isn't it, for some of us today. How is marriage and family life and child rearing presented in our modern world?

Especially for women. Especially for women. I wonder if it's seen as a drudgery. As much as a joy. As an interruption to other things, to work and career.

It's not as if Paul is saying here that all women must be married and have children. Sort of came to the kitchen sink. That is not it. If you read 1 Corinthians 7, he does not believe that.

[14 : 23] He values singleness highly. But if these women are married, the younger women are to be trained to get stuck into family life.

They are to throw themselves in to family life. As much as they can. To give it all they've got. I don't think Paul is saying here that women should not have jobs.

And be out of the home. A lot of employment was done by women, wasn't it, back then, too. But he is warning us in our culture of the temptation of keeping family life at arm's length.

Our modern culture, city culture, wants to say to you, keep your options open. Keep yourself for other things, for a career.

It does, I think, devalue home life slightly. Catherine Hepburn once said that the trouble with women today is that they want everything.

[15 : 33] I don't know if there's some truth in that. Paul speaks into a culture where men and women want everything. And he is saying that if you have a family, you should get stuck into family life.

And that is the godly thing to do. Give it your all. Now in London, that is really challenging, isn't it? The way that our culture works.

The way that the financial pressure is just on all of us. And we've got to be wise about this. It's not as families. It would be going beyond this passage, I think, to say that double incomes are not right. And I think many of you here this morning and in this church who are in families know the pressures of this. And actually, young women in the church, you have excellent examples of older women in the church who are doing this really, really well.

People who have made great sacrifices, who have thrown themselves into family life, who have maybe sacrificed careers and other things.

[16 : 43] The lifestyle that Paul commands is one that rides against the grain of our culture, where both men and women look after number one. Keep yourself to yourself for yourself.

And it's really hard to hear what he says, isn't it? It is a teaching, though, that doesn't accord with current standards of respectability in society.

Verse one, it is according with sound doctrine. It is a church family training itself where our lives are on display for others.

It's not an individual thing. So your godliness grows through the training of other men and women in the church. Men who are sober-minded and dignified and self-controlled.

And women who throw themselves into family life. And home life, domestic life, is the big visual aid for godliness. It's very hard to hear, isn't it?

[17 : 51] It's very hard to do if we don't actually spend that much time in each other's homes. It's worth thinking about. So it is a church family training itself in godliness.

But secondly, it is a family training itself by grace. A family training itself by grace. We train each other in the family.

There is a structure. Titus is the head teacher. But actually there is a training that comes from even higher up than the apostles. Than Titus.

And there is one golden rule that trumps all of the training that we can see from each other within the church. It is one lesson that the greatest apostle and the least of all Christians must learn again and again and again.

It is the training that we receive in seeing God's grace. Seeing God's grace. Verse 11. For the grace of God has appeared.

[19 : 05] Training us to renounce ungodliness. His grace has appeared to train us as a family in godliness. When God shows us his grace, his grace trains us.

And it has now appeared. We see his grace, don't we, in the work of Jesus. And most starkly on the cross. Just look at verse 14.

Jesus Christ our Saviour who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness. And to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

It's as if, isn't it, when we come to the New Testament and Jesus arrives, God's grace appears in a more vivid, more clear way. And it is seen in crystal clarity at the cross as Jesus gives himself.

And it's as if God gives us cross-tinted spectacles. Jesus appears at the cross and our whole vision is tinted with God's grace.

[20 : 14] And it's that vision that is to train us in godliness as we train each other as a church family. I think it does that in two ways.

Number one, seeing God's grace turns us off ungodliness. Just look at verse 12. God's grace, it trains us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions.

It turns us off ungodliness. Now, just imagine this morning that each one of us is wearing a necklace. And blokes, just go with this for a bit.

Okay, so we're all wearing necklaces. And on the end of these necklaces are wonderful, beautiful, precious stones. Diamonds. Huge emeralds.

Rubies. And they're mesmerisingly beautiful. And we treasure them. We love them. We polish them every day. And we go about in our lives believing that they are the most precious thing that we have.

[21 : 17] But wouldn't it be awful one evening to go back home at night and to flick on the lights and to look in the mirror and see that actually on the end of our necklaces are hissing cockroaches.

Our hideous, hideous cockroaches. Hissing. Instead of that thing of beauty that we have loved for so long, something truly hideous is close to our heart.

And as we put on those cross-tinted spectacles, the grace-tinted spectacles, we see, don't we, as we look at the cross, the true ugliness of ungodliness.

When God's grace appears at the cross, most magnificently, we see the ugliness of our sin that we once treasured.

We get a vision, don't we, in the mirror, if you like, of the ungodliness of sin as Jesus pays the wages of sin at Calvary.

[22 : 25] And the hissing cockroach on our neck becomes clear, doesn't it? If you saw a hissing cockroach on your neck, what would you want to do? You'd want to flick it off, wouldn't you? You'd want to get rid of it.

You'd want to throw it off, stamp on it, and run out of the building. I would, anyway. The grace of the cross shows us something truly hideous, doesn't it? Jesus on Calvary shows us the ugliness of our ungodliness.

It turns us off it. We want to flick it away, get rid of it, and stamp it out to grow in godliness. But there's another way that God's grace trains us.

Number two, it's a more positive thing. Seeing God's grace trains us to live, verse 12, self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Now notice there, the connection between verse 12 and 13. There is a link, isn't there, between training us to live godly lives in the present age and looking forward to the future.

[23 : 44] What we think will happen in the future will affect our behaviour today. It will affect our godliness today. John Hooper, a Protestant bishop in the 16th century, during the reign of Mary Tudor, was sentenced to death for his faith in Jesus.

As he approached the city of Gloucester for his execution, a close friend pleaded with him on the road to the gallows. He walked with him, whispering, life is sweet and death is bitter.

To which John Hooper replied, eternal life is more sweet and eternal death is more bitter. John Hooper was executed for his faith in Jesus, but he was a man who had a firm vision of the future, of eternal life.

Sin is sweet, isn't it? Sin is pleasurable. That's why Paul calls them worldly passions, in verse 12. Sin seems so sweet, it wouldn't be tempting otherwise.

But it's when the sweetness and glory and pleasure of our future starts to fill our perspective, when that hope, when the appearing of the glory of our Saviour Jesus Christ is clearer on our horizon, when the beauty of the gracious God who has saved us fills our perspective, then it's as if that future starts to seep into our present.

[25 : 25] One writer puts it beautifully, Godliness is the present expression of that eternal life, which has about it all the beauty, gravity and joy of God himself.

The more we see God's grace, the more we look at the cross, at the glory of him who saved us, the more we see the ugliness of our sin and the beauty of the God that we look forward to seeing and being with forever, the more that vision fuels our godliness.

One of the big problems, I think, in our quest for godliness is how we imagine God thinks about us. We use big man theology, where God is just a bigger version of man.

It's just a bigger version of you and me. We imagine that he behaves in the same way that we behave. God has made us in his image, but we've returned the favour, haven't we?

We think that God is like us in our ungraciousness, in our lack of grace, in our lack of forgiveness and mercy. We look at God, don't we, without the cross-tinted spectacles on.

[26 : 49] And as soon as we do that, then our godliness, it loses its fuel. But now Paul says, God has revealed who he is.

His grace has appeared. He has revealed himself in Jesus as a God of amazing grace. As you struggle with godliness and as you struggle with your own sins, what do you imagine God thinks of you?

Do you think he's approachable? What do you think God thinks of you? Let me put it another way. Do you think that Jesus, that God, is as approachable as the most gracious human being you know?

Think of that person. Sometimes I don't think that we think that Jesus is as gracious as the most gracious human being we know. Why is it that the Catholic Church has created a whole system of mediators between us and Jesus?

Why is it that we perhaps think that the mother of Jesus will be more gracious and accepting of us than Jesus will? Mother Mary, meek and mild.

[28 : 06] Why do people get apparitions of her? Well, perhaps it's because we think that Jesus himself doesn't suffer sinners so gladly. But that, you see, is big man theology.

Is he not a God of grace? Paul says, well, he appears to be just that. And we can trust that as we put our cross-tinted glasses on.

Often, we don't do that though. We forget that God is a God of grace. We forget how beautiful he is. And we forget how ugly our sin is. You may have heard the famous story of the mutiny on the Bounty, an English ship in the 18th century.

Captain Bly left Tahiti in 1787. And on his way back home to England, his crew realised that actually they didn't have much to look forward to and go back to, compared with the island paradise that they'd been enjoying.

[29 : 20] So the crew staged a mutiny, the mutiny on the Bounty. They threw the officers into a little ship and they sailed the great ship back to a remote island in the Pacific.

They persuaded some women to come and join them and set up a new community there. It seemed like an earthly paradise. They were hidden away from passing ships.

Nobody knew that they were there. When they arrived, they took all the supplies off the ship and burnt it. And they were then ready to let their passions loose.

They could do whatever they liked. And they did. They abused each other and descended into a kind of hell where selfishness reigned.

Within a few weeks, it was chaos. Weeks on end, they spent completely drunk. They'd become like animals, fighting and killing each other. One of the men eventually went mad and jumped off a cliff.

[30 : 21] But as time passed, there were only two men left, Edward Young and Alexander Smith. By this point, the women were so scared, they barricaded themselves on another part of the island.

The story took a strange turn, when Smith found the old ship's Bible. And he couldn't read, so Young began to teach him using the Bible.

They began at Genesis and read all the way through and eventually got to the Gospels, to the New Testament about Jesus. They were somehow there, gripped by God's grace.

In his journal that day, Young wrote this, I'd been working like a mole for years and suddenly it was as if the doors flew wide open and I saw the light and God's grace.

And the burden of my sin rolled away and I was like new. From that moment, life on the island changed, dramatically.

[31 : 30] The men began to read the Bible to the other women. Eighteen years later, a ship from Boston was passing that way and it happened upon the island and the captain found a godly community with love and peace.

He reported that he'd never met such a gracious and good people. As a family training in godliness, they needed to understand one thing, didn't they?

Grace. The story of the mutiny on the bounty fits so well with verses 11 to 14, doesn't it? As the men saw Jesus, they saw an appearance of God's grace so vivid and so bright a God who loves sinners, who is so loving that he pursues us so unloving even to death on a cross.

They had cross-tinted glasses on at last, didn't they? And we are a family in training, men and women wary of our own peculiar tendencies to selfishness, especially at home.

And it isn't keeping myself to myself for myself. Like the island of Young and Smith, this island, Crete, an island of liars and lazy beasts and gluttons, have seen God's grace.

[33 : 03] And so we need to stop using big man theology, don't we? Whether we're married or not, we need to be part of this family to keep training each other and being trained by grace with cross-tinted spectacles, pointing each other back to the great appearing of grace at the cross, that we might be turned off from our sin and towards our gracious God in this present age.

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in the present age.

Let's pray together.