

6. The Church's Fruitful Partnership: Personify the Gospel Message

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- [0 : 00] Well, perhaps you'd like to turn with me to the passage we read in Titus chapter 2, page 998 in the Church Bibles. And we're thinking this morning in our series on the Church's fruitful partnership and mission, we're thinking about what the Gospel commands us to do.
- And it tells us that we as God's people are to personify the Gospel message. And I want to speak therefore this morning about the power of genuine Christian character.
- And we began this series in 1 Timothy chapter 2, where we're told that we all have a mission, and that we have that mission because there is one God, and only one way to that God, through the man Christ Jesus.
- The sole mediator between God and man. There is no other way. But this God, Paul tells us, desires all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth, that is, to the saving knowledge of God through Jesus Christ.
- And so last time we saw that we have a vital partnership, every one of us, in proclaiming the Gospel message. Nothing but nothing is more important for the Church to understand today, or indeed in any day, than that.
- [1 : 28] Proclaiming the Gospel message. And all of us have a part in that. Not just those who are specially called as evangelists to proclaim Christ to those who don't know him, but also all of us together.
- And we're doing that today, as we meet in Jesus' name. We're all proclaimers to those outside, and to those who happen in amongst us. We're proclaiming the Christ who is truly here, in our midst, and speaking to us this morning.
- So there is never, ever less to Christian mission than sustained and prayerful Gospel proclamation. And don't believe anyone, friends.
- Don't believe anyone who says to you that words are rarely needed in Christian mission. That is plainly unbiblical. Faith comes by hearing. But, the Bible is also clear that words alone are not all that there is to Christian mission.
- The New Testament is just as clear as is Jesus himself. That the truth is not just to be proclaimed to the world, but it is also to be demonstrated to the world in the lives of Christ's people.
- [2 : 43] And so we are to personify, embody the Gospel message, and so authenticate that Gospel message in the world.
- And in that way, therefore, the medium of the message is also very, very important. Remember in 1 Timothy 3, verse 15, that key verse in his letter, he speaks about the Church as being God's household.
- He speaks about it as being a pillar and a buttress of the truth in this world. And it's among God's people, it's in his Church on earth, that the world will encounter God's truth.
- But not just hearing that truth for life, but seeing that truth in life. And especially experiencing it in the lives of Christ's people. Truth incarnate.

Truth lived out in human flesh. That's what Christ Jesus himself embodied. And that's what we as his people are called to embody in this world. Just as he personified the grace and truth of God as God our Saviour, so we are to personify that great and truth of his great salvation.

[3 : 58] That's very important for us to remember, especially in our own day. I would say today that in public life, wouldn't you agree that hypocrisy is probably the great cardinal sin?

And rightly so. People rightly get angry when politicians lecture us about something or other, and then are fine to be doing precisely that thing themselves in their own private life. Well, so it is for us as Christian people.

Our lives must match our message. Or else we too will be accused of hypocrisy. And alas, that accusation is often made against Christ's Church, and it's not always unfounded, is it?

And that's why in a lovely phrase that we read there in Titus chapter 2 verse 10, we are to seek in everything to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour.

We are to beautify the message that we proclaim in the lives that we lead as Christian people. And that's true for the church as a whole, as a community, and we're going to look at that particularly next week, the power of genuine Christian community.

[5 : 11] But it's equally true of us all as individuals, because there is very great persuasive power in genuine Christian character, in lives that personify the gospel message.

So I want to think about that this morning under two headings, looking in two places where the apostles speak very clearly about this vital aspect of partnership. in mission. And firstly this, the winsome Christian character that commends the gospel.

Just look again at these verses we read in Titus chapter 2. We've only got time this morning for a few brief comments, but notice first, back in Titus chapter 1 verse 9, that Titus is to appoint Christian leaders in Crete who hold to sound doctrine, and who are able to teach that and also contradict it.

We must be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict sound doctrine. But you see, belief can never be separated from behaviour.

That's why in chapter 2 verse 1, Paul says he is also to teach what accords what goes with sound doctrine. What goes along with sound doctrine. The New Living Translation has it this way, teach the kind of living that reflects right teaching.

[6 : 39] Now, he must do that because, Paul is very clear, you cannot have Christian people who are like the people of chapter 1 verse 12. Liars, evil beasts, and lazy guttuns.

Well, of course you can't. Who is going to listen to a gospel that leaves people behaving like that and doesn't change them at all? No, by contrast, and in total contrast to that, believers are to be sound.

They are to be healthy in the faith. I wonder if you notice how that little phrase, brackets, verses 2 and verse 10. Do you see? Sound in the faith, verse 2, in love and in steadfastness.

And then, in verse 10, you have just the abbreviated version of that, showing all good faith. It's a life of faith and love and steadfastness, says Paul, manifested in the kind of character that's displayed in verses 2 to 10, between those brackets.

It's that kind of life that shows sound, healthy Christian character. It's that kind of life that personifies the gospel of Christ. And notice in these verses, I'm sure you did, that he is not just calling a few particular special people to be the showcasers of the gospel.

[8 : 02] He's not just saying that there are to be some people in our church, especially holy, that we can hold up and say, here are the people, if you want to look at them, that show you what real Christians are like. No, there's something for absolutely everybody, the old and the young, the men and the women.

It's very comprehensive. They are all to exhibit healthy Christian character. They are all to exhibit what accords with sound doctrine.

But you see, Paul is wise enough to know that not all people are the same, and that different age groups and different sexes perhaps have different weaknesses. So he spells out one or two here just to challenge everybody.

Verse 2, he speaks to the older men. You older men, you're not to lose a grip on yourself, says Paul. You're not to go to seed as you get older. No, you're to be sober-minded. You're to be dignified.

You're to be self-controlled. And verse 3, the older women, you're also to be the same. You're not to spend your retirement wantonly, not getting out the gin and tonic at 11 o'clock before lunch and then spending all afternoon gossiping with a big bottle of Chardonnay.

[9 : 10] No, he says, the older women, you've got a role to play. Look, teaching and training the younger women, showing them how to manage their marriages, their family life, and so on. But the younger women also, verse 4, have got a challenge.

They're not either to live for themselves, to live indulgently, they're to play their part, they're to have a godly commitment to their marriage, to their children. They're to make a contribution, working for the household, not freeloading.

They're to be kind and hospitable. They're not to be selfish. They're not to be self-assertive. And the young men, verse 6, they don't get away either. They need to keep themselves under control, says Paul, in all kinds of ways that young men find very hard to keep in control.

And the Christian leader is not left out either, verse 7. Indeed, he's to be a model of all of these things. But even, verse 9, those in perhaps the most lowly positions, those indentured servants, even they are not exempt, but they're to exhibit this healthy Christian character in their work that personifies the gospel message.

And you see what Paul is giving us there. He is giving us a whole church partnership of every kind of diverse group of people whose winsome Christian character will commend the gospel of Jesus Christ to all, especially to outsiders.

[10 : 48] Now, it's true, none of us find that very easy, do we? I think when you're a young person, you tend to think, well, as you get older, it becomes much, much easier to be godly. And you look at old folks, you say, well, it's easy for them, they don't have any of the temptations that I've faced.

I'll go and chat to somebody twice your age after the service and ask them how easy it is to be godly. And they'll tell you, it's just as hard as you find it. Maybe when you're older, you think, well, of course, if only I was young again, life would be much easier for me.

I know it was easy for all these things, but look, I've got all these things to cope with now. It's much easier for those young folks. Well, you go and have a chat with the young folk and you find out all the pressures and you see, what we find when we share fellowship with one another and encourage one another is that none of us find it easy to live these healthy lives of winsome Christian character.

Of course we don't. It's a real struggle. But listen, Paul wants us to see what that winsome Christian way of living can actually achieve for the gospel of Christ.

Look at verse 5. Living like that, he says, stops the gospel of Jesus Christ being maligned and reviled. Look at verse 8.

[12 : 05] Living like that means that those who oppose us are shamed. They can't find anything evil to say about us. You can't write off the message, can you, of somebody whose life is consistent and has lived with real integrity, with sheer attractiveness that you just can't deny.

You can't write off their message if that's the life that is transparently obvious before you. But it's more than that. It's not just a defensive thing. It's not just something that takes the wind out of the sails of all of those who would oppose you and be against the gospel.

Look again at that lovely phrase in verse 10. That winsome way of living in everything, says Paul, will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.

The word adorn means to beautify. It's the word that we get our word cosmetic from. Cosmeo. That doesn't mean that you can make something attractive that is inherently ugly.

It's a sad fact of life, isn't it? That you can have all the cosmetics in the world and you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. Sometimes people try. They just make it even more of a sow's ear.

[13 : 17] But you can, can't you, beautify. You can bring out the full beauty of characteristics and traits that are already there. You can show off in the very best possible light the beauty that's already there.

It's rather like taking a beautiful diamond and just putting it in just the right setting and the stone is seen in all its beauty and wonder. Or a picture that could be seen to be really quite ordinary but you put it in just the right frame and just under the perfect lighting and it's shown up to be the beautiful thing that it is.

I have a lovely picture there in the vestry of Aslan from Narnia and it was in a grotty old frame down in the understair cupboard in my parents' house.

But I pulled it out and rescued it and got it framed and mounted and hung on the wall with a beautiful light right on it and it's utterly transformed. It's a thing of great beauty. And so it is with our lives with the way that we live, the way that we speak.

we can make more visible the true beauty of our God and Savior and of His Gospel. And that's why Titus emphasizes this so much.

[14 : 32] We don't have time to study chapter 3 but just look at verses 1 and 2. Think of the impact that there would be visibly from a people who are always ready for good works.

Never speaking evil of anyone. Never quarreling. Always gentle. Always perfectly courteous. Will that not be noticed? That would be noticed wouldn't it even within the church.

Now be very clear about this by the way. Titus Paul is not talking at all about doing these good works in order to impress God or in order that God would accept us.

Look at chapter 3 verse 5. It's absolutely plain. We're saved not by good works but by God's mercy who washes away our sins. But we are saved, says Paul in verse 8, for good works.

And those who have believed they're always to be devoted to such things, he says it again in verse 14. We're to be devoted to good works, never being unfruitful. We'll never be unfruitful in these works if all our motivation truly comes from an experience of that great mercy that we have received from God himself.

[15 : 58] Because you see, if you know God's true grace, you simply have to share that, don't you? Just as if you've known true forgiveness, you can't possibly be an unforgiving person.

because you know that God's grace has changed you inside. You've come to be the kind of person who loves grace and mercy. And you understand that the more you exhibit and give grace and mercy to others, the more God himself pours his grace and mercy into your life.

That's gospel arithmetic, isn't it? To give is to receive. That's what Jesus says. And so it's not a hard and brutal task for us to be fruitful in these good works.

It's a joyful response. It simply accumulates greater grace and mercy from God to us. And that desire, as it's enabled more and more in our own personal lives, builds character that will commend the gospel of Christ.

But that's not all. winsome character that commends the gospel will also lead more and more to winsome Christian conduct that will even convert people to God our Savior.

[17 : 18] Turn over a few pages, if you would, to 1 Peter, chapter 2. I think it's page 1015 in the Visitor's Bibles. 1 Peter, chapter 2, and verse 12.

I want to look at a couple of places in chapter 2 and chapter 3 where we see that Peter the Apostle is in absolute agreement with Paul about how important it is for us to personify the gospel message.

Look at verse 12 of chapter 2. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on a day of visitation.

Now, it's just the same as Titus, isn't it? But even more, he's actually saying that our conduct might even lead pagan opponents ultimately to glorify God themselves on what he calls a day of visitation.

In other words, a day when God himself visits them in saving grace. Winsome Christian conduct that can lead in God's providence to actual conversion of people to knowing God through Jesus Christ.

[18 : 29] Now, if you look over to chapter 3, verses 1 and 2, you'll find a specific application of that principle that Peter makes.

And in this instance, it's particularly the witness of a Christian to their non-Christian spouse, in this case, a wife to a husband. Verse 1 of chapter 3. Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, that is, they don't believe, by the way, that's Peter's way of speaking all through the epistle.

You're brought to life by obedience to the truth. You can tell if somebody believes because they obey the gospel of Christ. So even if someone does not obey, they're not a believer, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives when they see your respectful and pure conduct.

See what he's saying? The unbelieving partner can be won without a word by the conduct of their Christian spouse, by winsome Christian conduct of a believer that personifies the gospel, that adorns the glorious message of Jesus.

Without a word. Of course, don't misunderstand, Peter is not saying people don't need to hear the gospel. You read on down to verse 15, you'll see as we looked at last week, that every one of us, he says, has got to be ready to give a verbal defense, a verbal answer for the hope that we have.

[20 : 04] He's not saying people don't need to hear the gospel, but what he is saying is that words alone are not enough, that they must be matched by the winsome conduct that enfleshes the message.

And he's also saying that sometimes, sometimes, there does come a time perhaps when enough words have been said for the meantime. And when to keep on saying more and more things can be counterproductive.

And when it can be better and wiser to ease off and to just let your actions speak instead. And that is especially so, I think, in our closest and dearest relationships.

People who are nearest and dearest to us, spouses, family members, and so on. That's often, isn't it, where we have to be most sensitive. It's quite different just going up to somebody in the middle of the street who you've never met before.

Very different with somebody who knows you inside out. So, for example, a wife might come along to Christianity Explored or to church and come to faith.

[21 : 10] And naturally, she's going to be zealous for her husband to come to know the Lord as well and to find life. But she could go home and go on and on and on so much trying to convert her husband that he just gets utterly threatened, more and more angry and resentful and just switches off and will not listen and dig his heels in.

Or perhaps a young person, a child or a young student might be converted to Christ at camp, say, or at university. And they go home and they sit about zealously evangelizing their parents every possible opportunity, leaving notes on the breakfast table and all sorts of things.

their parents are going to get jolly irritated. And they might become more and more hardened against the gospel. Because these close relationships, they demand respect.

And you can't hammer on and on and on and expect to continue to get a welcoming hearing. And with our nearest and dearest, it's often very, very difficult.

It's hard. And that's why the conduct of our lives and the manner in which we speak and in which we live, these things become of the utmost importance, don't they?

[22 : 26] What we do and how we do it and how we act, what we do say and what we don't say, and all of these things, we are to adorn the gospel. We are to beautify it in our lives before those that we are seeking to influence.

And Peter says to us, in those circumstances, don't fear, don't despair. So powerful is the drawing power of genuine Christian character and conduct that they may be won without a word by your respectful and pure conduct that emanates the fragrance of the Lord Jesus about your person.

Now there will be a time for words, of course there will. Wise words of answer, seasoned with grace. words, when your conduct wins you the opportunities, when you're enabled to speak to your loved one because they simply can't help but want to know more about what this thing is that has so changed your life for the better.

There will be a time for words. But while there's still a lot of hostility, a lot of defensiveness, sometimes your audible words just can't be heard. But in those times your conduct will speak and it will be heard.

Your conduct must not give them any cause to revile the gospel. Rather, by contrast, it's to beautify, to adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.

[24 : 02] So you see, if you're an employee, for example, but you've got a reputation at work for laziness, for apathy, are you going to get a hearing with your bosses for the gospel?

I don't think so. Or if you're a neighbor, you've got a neighbor you want to witness to who's not a Christian. But if, and this happened to a non-Christian friend of mine, if you happen to live next door to an elder of the church who is such a bad neighbor and so obnoxious that you actually have to sell your house and move somewhere else to get away from him, are you going to be attracted to the Christian gospel?

Obviously not. Or if you're a wife who's become a Christian and you're constantly nag-nag-nagging your husband to come to church for the sake of you and the kids and so on, on and on and on about how you need to become a Christian.

But at the same time you're just constantly rebuffing your husband in all kinds of ways, including perhaps in the bedroom. You show no interest in showing love to your husband. husband, I'm afraid you're on a hiding to nothing.

Or the same if you're a husband and you become a Christian and your wife is neglected in the house and you can give her absolutely no help because you're always out at a church thing or else you've always got something more spiritual to do like reading your Bible when all the chores need to be done.

[25 : 26] You're not going to get a very sympathetic hearing for the gospel of Christ. Or if you're trying to reach your work colleagues with the gospel, they're not going to respond, are they, to an invitation to church from you if you're the person who never goes out of your way to help them, who never goes the extra mile to pull your weight in the team, who never is the one who'll say, yes, I'll come in on Saturday morning and help with all the rest of you and do some overtime because you're too spiritual for that and taken up with other things.

It's just pretty obvious, isn't it? They're not rocket science. You see, the gospel word is vital. Faith comes by hearing.

But sometimes, and this is especially so for those who are closest to us, our marriage, our family, our closest friends, these kind of relationships, sometimes we have to win a right to be heard.

And the trouble with people who really know us is that they really do know us. We can't fool them, can we? And our lives can be counter-evangelistic.

That is, that the anti-gospel message of our character and our conduct can shout so loudly that those who know us best are just deafened and simply unable to hear the audible words of the gospel when we want to share it with them.

[26 : 52] The words of our lips are just drowned out by the words of our lives. So don't misunderstand, don't underestimate the power of the message that we do convey all the time without a word.

That message can be very destructive for the gospel. I think I would have to confess at times I'm very ashamed of when my conduct has been like that.

I'm sure perhaps you felt the same too. But you see, it needn't be like that. Peter in this letter says, we are a holy nation. We are a people for God's own possession.

We have received mercy, he says. We've been born again through the living and abiding word of God. We're living stones, chosen and precious. We're being built into a spiritual house wherein God himself dwells by his spirit.

his irrepressible beauty has been planted within us. So let that show, says Peter, that the beauty of that precious gemstone be seen by the setting that your life places it in before other people.

[28 : 11] Live more and more to allow that light to illuminate your life and to shine out from you. And you will adorn, you'll beautify the gospel of God our Savior.

Don't underestimate the power of real Christian character and Christian conduct. People will notice. And they can be won, says Peter, without a word.

Without untimely and unwise words from you. But with your patient and winsome ways. Your life is always speaking.

So is mine. Well, let your life speak for Jesus. Sometimes it might just be that people notice that when you do make a mistake and a muck up, when you do annoy somebody or you hurt somebody, you're the person who goes and says, sorry.

Apology is a very rare commodity, isn't it, in today's world? That will be noticed. There will be many, many other things that are noticed too, as you quietly seek to let your life speak to the Lord Jesus.

[29 : 26] Winsome Christian character will commend the gospel of God. Winsome Christian conduct will even convert to the God of the gospel.

That's the way God himself makes himself known to others. So friends, let's be encouraging one another always to live so as to personify the gospel message, to adorn, to beautify the doctrine of God our Savior.

God's love for us. When we survey the wonders of his great love for us, the message that this table down below us proclaims this morning, surely we can't do anything else.

Surely it demands our soul, our life, our all, our everything in that great cause. We finish by singing hymn number 838, Fill all my life, O Lord, my God, in every part with praise.

Fill every part of me with praise. Let all my being speak of you and of your love, O Lord, poor though I am and weak. Number 838. Number 838. Number 838. Number 838. Verse 450.

[30 : 58] ■ây is unafraid by song Es taller than modifier.

For everything in to high in Him. ErViment and You reign. O Father, will chief the Lord for yet chiefing mercy?

I am the Lord of thy belonging O be Adeep Alesm■ gives a given Dr Widder-Despero 3 Am idea Join us again as Dr. John insurance.

And all that love of me In every heart of me And all my healing spirit For you and God of your heart The Lord that truly others, We■ Weil we■ Know may God no one time in thee State The praise and glory to you.

And oh, the mighty day, O earth, And hope forever to you.

[33 : 22] And oh, the mighty day, O earth, And hope forever to you.

And oh, the mighty day, O earth, And heaven's glory to you.

And I may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, And the love of God the Father, And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, Be with you all, now and forever.

Amen.