

2. Behaviour that befits the gospel

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[0 : 00] Well, let's turn in our Bibles to Paul's letter to Titus once again, page 998 in the Pew Bibles. And tonight we have this second in a series of four sermons on this short but focused letter written by the Apostle Paul, written with all his authority as an apostle.

You'll notice that he emphasizes his authority in the very first verse. He's not just a servant of God, he's also an apostle of Jesus Christ. And he writes to Titus, who is one of his trusted fellow workers and who is stationed on the island of Crete.

Now you'll see in chapter 1 verse 5 the reason why Titus is there in Crete. And that is that Paul left him there. They'd obviously been working together as a pair of missionaries on the island.

And Paul had left him there so as to appoint suitable elders for the brand new baby churches which have just been planted in different places on the island.

And the thrust of chapter 1, and we read this last Sunday evening, consists in Paul's description to Titus of the right kind of person to be appointed as an elder or church leader.

[1 : 11] And a very searching description it is in verses 6 to 9 of chapter 1. And why must these excellent elders be appointed? Because, as verses 10 to 16 make the point, there are plenty of unsuitable people, unscrupulous people about, who will try to get their hands on the leadership of the churches if they're given half a chance.

And they will take those churches up the garden path. Now this is of course a perennial problem. Churches being led up the garden path by the wrong leaders. And when you see a church which is moving up the garden path, almost certainly the reason is that the pastors and elders who lead it do not match Titus chapter 1 verses 6 to 9.

Then in the final verse of chapter 1, look with me at chapter 1 verse 16, you'll see how Paul tells Titus how these wretched people, these unscrupulous leaders can be recognized.

And that is by their lifestyle, or what Paul calls their works. Just look at how he puts it in verse 16. They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works.

They are detestable. Strong language this, isn't it? Detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work. It's a damning analysis. So these people speak fair, but they live foul.

[2 : 33] They're clearly the opposite of the elders and pastors of verses 6 to 9. The good elder, in verses 6 to 9, is disciplined and self-controlled with regard to sex and marriage, as verse 6 puts it.

He's self-controlled with his temper, verse 7, his use of alcohol, his attitude to money, his way of handling people and caring for them. He's also an able and courageous teacher, as verse 9 puts it. He knows both how to teach the truth and how to refute or rebuke those who contradict it. So, as we begin chapter 2, Paul has just laid out for Titus, in chapter 1, the contrast between the good elder, who teaches well and lives well, and the godless person, who seeks to exert a damaging influence in the churches, who is not only empty in his teaching, but also, in those words of verse 16, detestable, disobedient, and unfit for any kind of good living.

He neither teaches nor lives in a godly fashion. So, in the opening verse of chapter 2, Paul is saying to Titus, don't be like those wretched people of my previous paragraph, they're total strangers to godly living.

Your job, my brother Titus, by contrast, is to teach... Now what? Look at verse 1. You are to teach what accords with sound doctrine.

[4 : 02] In other words, the lifestyle that accompanies and grows out of a true teaching of the apostolic gospel. Now, it would be easy to misread that first verse, as if Paul were simply instructing Titus to teach sound doctrine.

Now, of course, we can be sure he wants Titus to teach sound doctrine, the true Bible gospel as taught by the Old Testament and the apostles. But verse 1 is about lifestyle.

It's about the manner of life that accords with the teaching of sound doctrine. Now, this is Paul's major concern in this letter, to instruct Titus to teach in the Cretan churches the behavior, the lifestyle that befits the gospel.

people. So, Paul's focus throughout this little letter is not so much the sound doctrine itself. He gives us plenty of that in his bigger letters, Romans and so on.

His focus here is the behavior that accords with and grows out of true gospel doctrine. Now, it's this aspect of chapter 2 which I want us to think about this evening.

[5 : 11] I want, in effect, to take chapter 2, verse 1 as my text for tonight. I want us to see how Paul, who is of course our teacher as well as Titus' teacher, how Paul relates gospel behavior to the sound doctrine of the gospel itself.

Now, just run your eye down over verses 2 to 10 in chapter 2. Those verses, you'll see, are all about behavior. They describe what a godly lifestyle looks like.

So, in verses 2 to 10, Paul gives instruction about the behavior appropriate to the older men in the churches, then the older women, then the younger women, then the younger men, then a couple of verses, 7 and 8, to Titus himself, and then finally, slaves, slaves who would have formed a significant constituency in the early Mediterranean churches.

Now, we're not going to look at the content of verses 2 to 10 this evening. I want to save that for next week. So, you'll have to wait another week before you have to decide whether you're a golden oldie or still a bright young thing.

Tonight, I simply want to look at this question of the relationship between gospel doctrine and the godly behavior as Paul teaches this in Titus chapter 2.

[6 : 26] Now, let's just stand back from the text for a moment and consider the question of ethics. Each one of us has some kind of ethical system in operation in our hearts and lives.

the reason why you are not at this very moment murdering the person sitting next to you is because your ethical system forbids you to do so.

Or to be a little bit less dramatic, if you've come here to church tonight by car, almost certainly you've come in a car that belongs to you or is borrowed from a friend rather than one that you've stolen because you have an operational system of ethics at work in your heart and mind.

Now, where does this ethical system that we all have come from? Ethics is the study and practice of what ought to be done and what ought not to be done.

It's right and wrong. But where has your ethical system come from? From society? From the Bible? From your parents? Your conscience?

[7 : 33] Maybe a combination of these factors. But we have to face the fact that our relationship with our ethical system is something of a love-hate relationship.

We don't always admire and applaud good behaviour because sometimes we rebel against it. For example, if I can just tell you an instance from my life of long ago, I remember the first time when as a young boy I climbed up the steps of a double-decker bus.

I was with a young friend of mine. I was probably 10 or 12 years old and I sat with my friend at the very front seat of the double-decker bus because you're about 14 foot up there and you get a good view of the road.

So we went and sat there and that was lovely. We'd been there a minute or two when my eye dropped to knee level and I saw two notices that had been pinned up to the front of the bus. The first one read no standing.

I had no problem with that. I didn't wish to stand. It was very nice to sit. The second notice, however, said no spitting. Now, you will know that any self-respecting young boy is a master of the art of spitting.

[8 : 45] In fact, any boy who reaches the age of 12 or 14 without being able to spit accurately at a hapenny from three yards distance is not worth knowing. Now, it wouldn't have occurred to me, it wouldn't have crossed my mind to want to spit on the bus if that notice had not been there.

But it was there and I can tell you it gave my ethical inclinations a rough time for a few minutes.

Now, you'll want to know whether I spat, won't you?

Actually, I didn't. I didn't, but I very much wanted to. I could feel the saliva gathering in my mouth.

So, what was it that stopped the boy who wanted to spit from actually spitting?

I suspect it was the look in the eye of the well-built lady with the large handbag who was sitting just across the aisle from me. In other words, fear of reprisals, fear of a clip around the ear and a ticking

off.

Now, more seriously, what is it that keeps a Christian to the life of Christian ethics? What keeps this ethical system? What feeds it? What teaches us to love and value the kind of behavior that the Bible teaches?

[9 : 57] What molds the Christian into the kind of person who loves and practices the lifestyle which, in Paul's words in verse 1, accords with sound doctrine?

Well, let's see how Paul answers that question. It is gloriously simple. Titus chapter 2 shows us why Christians practice Christian ethics.

So, just put your best reading glasses on, if you will, and look with me at the shape of this second chapter of the letter. In verse 1, Paul is instructing Titus to teach the ethics which accord with the gospel.

He then tells Titus, in verses 2 to 10, what these ethics look like in practice. So, the older men are to live in such and such a way and the older women in such and such a way, the younger men and so on, through the categories of church members until we reach slaves in verses 9 and 10.

So, the Christian ethic is laid out. Not the whole of the Christian ethic, there's a lot more to it, but this is a pretty good sample. And then, verses 11 to 14, and that's what I want us to look at particularly this evening, these verses explain why this ethic is to be followed and practiced.

[11 : 12] Why should the Christians live in a verse 2 to 10 fashion? The reason is there in verse 11. For the grace of God has appeared. That's why.

Now, that little word for at the beginning of verse 11 is critically important. It shows that verse 11 is explaining verses 2 to 10. So, a past fact given to us in verse 11 gives rise to the present imperatives of verses 2 to 10.

Now, you'll see verse 11 is all about the coming of Jesus. When Paul says there, the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people.

He's not talking there in some vague way about God's kindness in providence. He means that when Jesus came and lived and taught and died and rose and ascended, that was God's grace appearing so as to bring salvation to all who were prepared to repent and believe.

So, verse 11 is about what actually happened in about the year 30 AD, some 20 years or so before Paul wrote this letter. He's saying that God's grace, his wonderful saving purpose towards undeserving wretches like us, his grace appeared.

[12 : 29] There it was in the person of Jesus for all to see, not only in his person but in his achievements. But look again at verse 11. It not only explains verses 2 to 10 as it looks backwards, it also looks forwards into verse 12.

The grace of God trains us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in the present age.

So, verse 12 is really summarizing verses 2 to 10 in short form. And then in verse 13, Paul turns from looking back in history to the first coming of Christ and he looks forward in history to the return of Christ, waiting, verse 13, for our blessed hope, the appearing in the future of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who, and here Paul again looks back at the cross at this point, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and so on.

So, do you see what Paul is doing in this little paragraph from verse 11 to verse 14? He is teaching us that the gospel, the good news of what God has done for us in the person of Jesus and the good news of what he will do for us at the return of Jesus, this gospel provides the mighty impetus for the Christian ethical lifestyle.

We are to live in a verse 2 to 10 way because the grace of God has appeared. It's this grace that trains us to say no to ungodliness and yes to self-control as we wait during the present age for the completion of our salvation at Christ's return.

[14 : 16] So, it's the double fact that Christ has come and that Christ will come again that causes Christians to live in a way that pleases God in the present age.

Let me put it like this in a slightly different way. In Paul's thinking and teaching there's a very clear pattern that emerges in all of his letters and it's this.

The gospel indicatives lead to the ethical imperatives. Now, indicatives are statements.

Imperatives are commands. So, it's the statements of what God has done in the person and work of Christ that lead to the commands as to how we are to behave in response.

God has done this, therefore, brothers, live like that. That's Paul's pattern. The ethical commands are never given in some kind of a vacuum.

[15:17] They're never given without a reason. The factor which gives power and urgency to the ethical teaching of the Bible is the gospel itself. God has done all this for you.

Therefore, our only fitting response is to live out the Christian ethic. Now, you see this pattern particularly clearly in Romans, Ephesians, and Colossians.

In those three great letters, Paul explains a great deal of the gospel. He unfolds it at great length, the wonders of what God has done for wretched and hell-bound sinners.

All this, Paul says, God has done for us. Therefore, live accordingly. So, in response to what God has done and in gratitude to him, live like this.

Now, in this letter to Titus, it's exactly the same pattern in chapter 2. The only difference is that Paul puts it the other way round. So, he says, live a godly and self-controlled life because God has done all this for us.

[16:23] Now, once we see this pattern, that Christian ethics are the direct fruit of the gospel, it is such a help to us. It means that we're in no doubt about why God calls us to live holy and self-controlled lives.

It's because he has done all this for us in sending Jesus 2,000 years ago to rescue us and it's because of all he is going to do for us when Christ returns to take his people into their glorious eternal future in the new creation.

That's why we live the Christian life and the Christian lifestyle. Now, the non-Christian doesn't have the same ethical imperative because he doesn't know the gospel indicative and that is why ethically the non-Christian is at sea without a compass.

That really is the case, isn't it? If you're not a Christian, ethically, you're at sea without a compass. A good illustration of this, I think, is the Radio 4 program called The Moral Maze. Do any of you ever listen to The Moral Maze?

It comes on most Saturday evenings between roughly 10 and 11. It's a program chaired by Michael Burke, Michael Burke, the former newscaster, and he chairs this group of, I think it's four regular panelists, and for the best part of an hour, it's pretty hard work listening to it, but for the best part of an hour, they discuss some topical current moral problem, something that's been big in the week's news.

[17:46] I think yesterday evening they were discussing sweatshops in Asia and whether it's ethical and so on to buy clothes through supermarkets here which have been made from sweatshops over there.

Now, the contributors in The Moral Maze are very clever and articulate people, but ultimately they're at sea without a compass because, generally speaking, they don't refer to God or the Bible.

Or if they ever do, it's generally in such a way as to suggest that we modern, sophisticated beings have outgrown the need for the moral absolutes of a 2,000 years old book.

But when biblical ethics are ditched and the point of reference and authority is not the unchanging God, but the changing opinions of man without God, we end up precisely in a moral maze.

And a maze by definition is something you can't see your way through or out of. So for all the cleverness and the verbal dexterity of these panelists, we're no wiser at the end.

[18:53] A clear ethic to live by is only derived from the gospel of God's grace. When we cast off the gospel, when we cast off the Bible that teaches the gospel, we become ethically unhinged.

We're at the mercy of the shifting currents of popular opinion. Now this surely is why the moral life of modern Britain has been in such rapid decline for the last 50 or 60 years.

Now there are many exceptions, but as a society in general, we have cast off the Bible and the gospel, and the moral consequences of that casting off are to be seen in life all around us.

People are losing the capacity to relate to each other with loyalty, with fidelity, with trustworthiness and honesty and love. This is true in marriage, in family life, parents and children.

It's true in business, in the workplace, in politics, in the media and in sport. And when you see how the Bible ties the ethics of self-control and godliness to the gospel, it makes you realise that British society is not likely to return to a shared ethic of self-controlled living unless there is some significant turning back to the gospel of Christ in our country.

[20:10] So that's a great goal for us to pray for and to work towards. All right, let's turn back now to the text to see some of the specifics of Paul's teaching about how to put biblical ethics into

practice.

I've got four points to give you. Each of them is quite brief. They need to be brief. We don't want anyone being carried out in a coma at eleven o'clock. So first of these four, let's notice the grace of God is our ethical trainer.

The grace of God is our ethical trainer. Here's verse twelve again. Training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled upright and godly lives in the present age.

Now what is it that is providing this training? What's the subject of that participle training? It's the grace of God which has appeared bringing salvation. That now trains us to say no to ungodliness and yes to self-controlled upright godly living.

Now friends, let me ask, do you regard yourself as someone who is in training? I'm not thinking here of fitness clubs and jogging around Bella Houston Park at seven o'clock in the morning.

[21 : 27] I mean training for godly living. It is interesting that we should need to be trained. In fact, if you just turn back a page, you'll see Paul uses exactly the same phrase, same word, in 2 Timothy 3 16.

One of the uses of scripture is for training in righteousness. Do you see at the end of verse 16? Training. So we need to be trained. If we need to be trained to renounce ungodliness, the implication is that we don't naturally know how to renounce it.

The implication is that there's a long-term training project in mind. We know perfectly well how to say yes to ungodliness. We've been doing that since we've been drinking our mother's milk. That's in our nature, isn't it? But renouncing ungodliness is so foreign to us that we need to be trained. We need to submit to a training program to do it.

And it's the grace of God which acts as our trainer. The grace of God that appeared in the person of Jesus 2,000 years ago and made salvation available to all people.

[22 : 37] So when we put verses 11 and 12 together, we learn that the person who receives training in godliness is the person who studies the way in which God's grace has appeared, bringing salvation.

So the more we're able to discover about Christ's first coming, what it meant, why he did it, the more we shall learn how to live godly lives in this present age.

In particular, I think, we shall be deeply grateful. As we study his first coming, his appearing, and his cross particularly, we will want to say to him, have you done all this for me, Lord Jesus?

Did you really subject yourself to humiliation and rejection and flogging and death on a vile cross to rescue me? Well, if you've done all this, of course I must renounce ungodliness and live for you.

So as we come to appreciate the grace of God displayed in the life and death and resurrection and exaltation of Jesus, we will be put into training.

[23 : 42] And as we're trained, we will become more and more ready and able to say no to ungodliness and yes to self-control and godly living. We're in training.

It doesn't all happen at once. We know that. It's a lifetime's project. In 1880, an English minister whose name was Hay Aitken published a book which he titled *The School of Grace*.

The School of Grace subtitled *Expository Thoughts on Titus 2, 11 to 14*. And in this book he wrote, Grace not only saves, but undertakes our training.

It's an interesting thought, isn't it? We're used to singing, especially in that hymn *Amazing Grace*, of the way in which the grace of God rescues a wretch like you and me. But grace also undertakes our training.

So by all means, let's go jogging in Bella Houston Park. It might extend our lives by three months and reduce our waistlines by seven-eighths of an inch. But the serious training, the important training, is the training given to us by the grace of God.

[24 : 50] Better to learn how to renounce ungodliness than to lose half an inch around the waist. So the grace of God is our ethical trainer.

Let's gladly submit to the training. Now secondly, the return of Christ is a great spur to godliness. Look at how verse 12 spills over into verse 13.

Living a self-controlled, upright and godly life in this present age goes hand in hand with our waiting for the appearing of the glory of Christ. That's his return. Now why should those two things go together?

Godly living now as we wait for the age to come and the return of Christ. Well surely the reason is simple and it's this. When you joyfully look forward to the bliss of being with Christ in the new creation and when you know that the new creation is going to be far, far better than the very best things in the old creation, it's not so hard to say no to the enticements of sin and self.

There's no need to go clutching at the fleeting and soiled pleasures of sin when the glory of heaven lies before us. Now the person who's not a Christian is in a very different position.

[26 : 08] He has no thoughts of the return of Christ, no thoughts of future glory. As far as he's concerned, this life is the only life there is. So he commits himself to extracting every last drop of pleasure out of this life.

So when he's young, it's going to be sex, drugs and rock and roll. When he's older, it will be luxury holidays, gourmet dining and the opera. But the basic principle is the same.

I must live for pleasure now because death is going to bring everything to an end. But the Christian is able to be patient. He waits.

As verse 13 puts it, he waits for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ. So the Christian is able to say no to the soiled pleasures of sin because he knows that he will soon be enjoying the pure pleasures of heaven in the company of Christ and all the redeemed.

The promise of Christ's return is a great spur to godliness. We keep our eyes on the far horizon, waiting, watching, looking. Then thirdly, from verse 14, one of the purposes of Christ's death was to redeem or deliver us from all lawlessness.

[27 : 29] You see it there in the first half of verse 14. Let me read that again. Who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness. So Christ's self-giving, that means his self-giving on the cross, his self-giving up to death, that was done not only to avert God's anger, not only to reconcile us to God, not only to take away our sins and their penalty, not only to conquer the devil, but to redeem us or deliver us, redeem and deliver mean the same thing, to deliver us from all lawlessness.

In other words, Christ died so that we should be no longer gripped by lawlessness, but enabled to conform to his law. Now again, that doesn't happen overnight, but it does happen over time, redeemed from all lawlessness.

If you're a parent, I wonder if you ever look at your children and say, your name may be Emma or Gemma or Wayne or Dwayne, but your middle name is Anarchy.

I have four children and whatever good effects grace may be having on their lives, I know that by nature they are anarchists. Nobody knows that better than I do. And where do they get their anarchy from?

From their parents. Especially their mother. No, both of their parents. Both of them. And where do their parents get their anarchy from?

[29 : 08] The answer is from Adam and Eve, the primeval anarchists, who opted for lawlessness rather than submission to God's law. Now look at us here tonight.

I don't know how many people there are here, maybe 200. There are 200 natural born anarchists sitting in this room tonight. And Christ went to the cross to redeem us from all lawlessness.

So he has died to redeem us from every last lawless impulse and thought and action. Isn't that a cause to be thankful to him? Isn't that a spur to live a self-controlled upright and godly life?

And then fourth and last. Christ also died, looking at the closing words of verse 14, to purify for himself a people for his own possession.

If his people are to be truly possessed by Christ, of course there is a long term purifying process that has to take place. you know how there has been talk in the news from London this last week of a big plan to build some purifying desalination water plant somewhere down on the Thames estuary to provide millions of gallons of fresh pure water for the south east of England.

[30 : 25] It needs to be a pretty powerful purifying process to make Thames estuary water drinkable, I would have thought. Now it is a powerful purifying process also, equally as powerful, that is needed if my heart and your heart are to be taken and trained, purified, so as to hate the sin that we once loved and to love the things of God which we once took no interest in or even despised.

But this, you see, verse 14 is saying, is another reason why Christ gave himself to death on the cross, to purify for himself a people of whom he could then say, these truly are mine, they are my

possession, they reflect me, they reflect my mind, they reflect everything that I value.

In the words of verse 14, they are zealous for good works. Their lives, therefore, are marked by faith and love and hope and joy. Their lives are being transformed, they are being purified, they are learning to love other people, they are learning to bring the gospel to the sinner who needs it, they are learning to care for the weak and needy, to lift up those who have been broken down.

These are Christ's people. Once they were zealous for sin and its soiled pleasures, but now they are zealous for good works. So Paul says to his friend, verse 15, Titus, my brother, declare these things, exhort and rebuke with all authority, let no one disregard you.

In other words, Titus, it is of the utmost importance that you teach all these things which accord with sound doctrine. You must teach not only the gospel itself, but the ethics that arise from the gospel.

[32 : 12] Why should Paul be so insistent? I think the answer is because the Christian lifestyle so powerfully commends the gospel to those who are not yet Christians.

Paul wanted the church of Christ to shine on the island of Crete like a beacon of light in a dark place. We know what Cretan society was like. Look back to chapter 1, verse 12.

Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons. That's a quotation. But Paul adds, this testimony is true. So Cretan society in the first century was marked by untruthfulness, they're liars, by evil behavior, by laziness and self-indulgence.

Now does that ring any bells? Think of our society today. Untruthfulness, evil behavior, laziness, self-indulgence.

So the reason why our churches today should teach a clear, pure, shining Christian ethic is exactly the same reason why Paul commanded Titus to teach it in first century Crete.

[33 : 23] It's the shining quality of Christian lives that commends the gospel. If the world around can see that we are being purified by Christ and transformed into a people of his own possession, if they can see that his first coming is training us to renounce ungodliness and that his second coming is spurring us to holiness, if they can see in us the lifestyle that accords with sound doctrine, they will be drawn to hear the gospel itself and they will be compelled to pay attention to it.

Thank you.