

The Church's Corporate Piety

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[0 : 00] But we're going to turn now to our Bible reading for this evening. And we have visitor Bibles scattered around the place. So if you don't have one with you, please do grab one of those.

You'll find them scattered around the place. And we're reading from Titus chapter 2. And that's page 998 if you're using one of our church visitor Bibles.

Page 998 and Titus chapter 2. And we're reading the first 10 verses.

This is a letter from the Apostle Paul to Titus, who was serving on the island of Crete. So Titus chapter 2, verse 1. But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine.

Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. Older women, likewise, are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine.

[1 : 11] They are to teach what is good. And so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.

Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works. Slaves are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith.

So that in everything, they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior. Well, amen.

And may God bless his words to us tonight. Well, good evening, everyone. And perhaps you would turn with me in your Bibles to the passage that Paul read to us there in Titus chapter 2.

And if you don't have a Bible, if you need one, there are plenty at the back and at the sides, and somebody would be glad to get one for you. We're coming back after a few weeks' break to a theme that we've been thinking about of late, which is that of the mission of the church.

[2 : 48] And you'll recall that we looked at Paul's words to Timothy, his protégé, a few weeks back in 1 Timothy chapter 2.

Words that remind us why it is that we have a mission. Paul says to Timothy, It's because there is one God. And there is one mediator.

That is the only way to God. And that is the man Christ Jesus who gave himself as a ransom for all. So there is no other way to God, to the true God that is, except through the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate.

But Paul also says, and this is very important, that God our Savior desires all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth, the truth of that saving gospel in Jesus Christ.

And that's why, as we said in our last study, absolutely central, absolutely central to the church's mission is our corporate proclamation, proclaiming the real gospel message.

[4 : 03] Absolutely nothing, nothing but nothing, is more important for the church today, or indeed the church in any age, than that. And we all have a part in that. Yes, those who are especially called as evangelists to proclaim Christ, yes, but also, remember, each one of us.

Each one of us in our daily lives, as Paul says, being ready with an answer. Remember he says that in Colossians chapter 4, verse 6, that we looked at. That is to be ready with a gracious word in season that will witness to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And all of us together, when we meet together in Jesus' name, as we're doing here week by week, as we are doing tonight, all of us are proclaimers to any outsiders who may be in our midst.

We are pointing just by being here in our words that we sing, in our involvement in prayer, in putting ourselves under God's word. We're all witnesses to the reality of the risen living Christ who is among us by his Holy Spirit in the midst.

And that's why, just as Paul says, do you remember to the church in Corinth, when visitors, when strangers, where people perhaps even who know nothing at all previously about what's going on, when they are among us, very often they will say, well, there's something special here.

[5 : 23] There's something going on. I can sense it. Often they may not be able to articulate that clearly or specifically, at least at first. But what they are doing is bearing witness to the fact that, yes, God is really in the midst of us when we gather in his name.

So there's never less to Christian mission than sustained and prayerful gospel proclamation. Don't believe anybody who wants to say that no words are not really needed in Christian mission. That's just plainly unbiblical.

No faith comes by hearing, says the apostle. But at the same time, words alone are not all there is to Christian mission.

The New Testament is very clear. Jesus himself is very clear. That the truth is not just to be proclaimed. It is also to be demonstrated in the lives of Christ's people.

[6 : 23] We are to personify the gospel message in our lives. And that's the way that we authenticate the gospel message.

And in that way, the medium is a very important part of the message. Remember in 1 Timothy 3, verse 15, Paul tells us that the church, the household of God, is to be a pillar and buttress of truth in the world, holding up truth.

And it's among God's people, it's among the church here on earth, that the world can encounter God's truth. But not just hearing the truth for life, but actually seeing and experiencing truth in life as well.

Truth incarnate. Truth lived out in human flesh. And of course, that is what the Lord Jesus himself embodied in this world. And that's what his followers, his people are called to embody as well. Just as he personified the grace and truth of God our Savior, we also are to personify the grace and the truth of our great salvation.

[7 : 37] And that's so important, isn't it, for us to remember, especially in our day-to-day. People are so conscious, aren't they, of hypocrisy. And rightly so. We get very cross, don't we, when politicians lecture us about something and then turn out to be doing the very thing they're telling us not to do.

Remember the outrage during lockdowns when everybody's being locked in their houses and we discover the politicians are all having all sorts of parties in Westminster. Well, they knew the whole thing was nonsense.

And they ignored it. How did the rest of us feel? Pretty angry. No, people's lives have got to match their message, haven't they? And the lives of Christian people have got to match their message. That's what this passage is teaching us. And that's why, if you look at verse 10 in Titus 2, chapter 2 here, there's this lovely phrase that Paul uses, adorning, adorning the doctrine of God our Savior. We are to beautify the message that we proclaim in the lives that we lead. And that's true for the church as a whole. We're going to look next week, in particular, at the power of genuine Christian community, sharing the real compassion, the mercy of our God and Savior.

[8 : 53] But it is also true of every individual Christian because there is very great persuasive power in genuine Christian character, in lives that really do personify that gospel message.

And I want this evening just to think about this under two headings. Looking in two places, first here in Titus, then a little bit in Peter's first letter, looking where the apostles speak very clearly about this vital aspect of our mission and our part in the mission of the church.

So firstly, the winsome Christian character that really does commend the gospel. Look at these verses in Titus 2. Let me read the first verse and then a bit from verse 10.

But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. Verse 10, showing all good faith so that in everything we may adorn the doctrine of God, our Savior.

Now, we've only got time this evening really for some brief comments. But notice first of all, back in chapter 1, verse 9, Titus, according to Paul, is to appoint Christian leaders in Crete who hold to sound doctrine and who are able to teach that.

[10 : 09] And also, he says there, notice to contradict error as a necessary negative. Teach what is right and contradict what is wrong. Now, that is what makes you very unpopular today, especially in Christian leadership.

The word no is one of the most important words for any leader. But you'll be accused of spiritual abuse. You'll be accused of all sorts of things. If you say no to somebody and don't give them what they want or don't tell them that the way they live as they want is all right.

But that's what a Christian leader to do is to do, according to Paul. And so, in chapter 2, verse 1, he's to teach what accords with sound doctrine, what goes along with it, the life that goes along with it.

The New Living Translation puts it this way, teach the kind of living that reflects right teaching. So you can't have Christian people living like the people he describes in chapter 1, verse 12.

Do you see? People who are liars, who are evil beasts and lazy gluttons. Well, of course not. Who's going to listen to any gospel message that leaves people living like that?

[11:21] No, by contrast, Paul says, they need to be sound. They need to be, verse 13, sound, healthy in the faith. Look at how that same phrase, sound in faith, healthy in faith.

Look at how it brackets this whole passage we're looking at in chapter 2. Look at it's there in verse 2, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. And it's there again in verse 10, isn't it?

Just abbreviate it. Showing all good faith. It's a life of love and faith and steadfastness that's manifested, well, in the kind of character that's described in between those phrases in verses 2 to 10.

That's what shows sound. That's what shows healthy Christian character. That's what personifies the gospel of Christ that we're to proclaim. And notice that Paul is not saying here, look, you need a few showcase special Christians to point people to to behave like this.

Do you see? He involves absolutely everybody. Everybody. Everyone is involved. It's a partnership. And all through these verses in 1 to 10, he's speaking about the old, the young, he's speaking about men and women, everybody in other words.

[12:36] And it's all about exhibiting healthy Christian character. But of course, Paul is wise enough to know that different groups and different age groups and different people will experience different particular weaknesses and different challenges.

So he speaks first to older men. You see in verse 2, they're not to lose a grip on themselves.

They're not to go to seed as they get older. They're to be sober-minded.

They're to be dignified. They're to be self-controlled. Same for older women. Verse 3, older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine.

They're not to spend their retirement wantonly with their gin and tonics starting before lunch. whiling away the afternoon over a large bottle of chardonnay, gossiping about all the things going on in the church. No. No, they've got a very positive role to play.

Do you see verse 4? Teaching and training the younger women about the things that are really, really important in life for those women.

[13:45] Teaching about marriage, teaching about family life, how to love their husbands, how to love their children, how to do that which honors the Lord. It's worth noting, by the way, actually, this is the only apostolic injunction in the Bible for the teaching of women by women.

But it is a vital one. And it's something that only mature and godly Christian women can fulfill. And notice, very carefully, it's not, is it, some sort of general Bible teaching ministry by women to women?

I think there's really rather an unhelpful emphasis in some of our church circles today. It wants to go on about women in ministry all the time. As though there was some kind of general teaching ministry of women to women that the New Testament enjoins upon us.

As though, well, it really is as though women can't actually learn anything from male pastors teaching the Bible. They can't be helped by that, so they need a sort of special ancillary ministry by women, to women.

But there's no biblical warrant for that at all, is there, anywhere? Paul says to the Ephesians that God has given to the church pastor teachers to teach the whole church, men and women together, to equip all of them for their works of ministry.

[15:06] It's rather demeaning, I think, to exclude women from that, as though somehow they needed some special remedial class. But Paul here, you see, is saying that there are some things very particular to women's lives that require older women, experienced women, mature, godly Christian women to teach so that they can train younger women.

And the things that Paul seems to think are most important are matters to do with marriage, to do with children, to love husbands, to love children, to have pure lives, he says, to contribute meaningful work to the household, to rightly live in their role alongside their husbands in the created order that brings healthy life for men and women and for children.

Now, some of us here this evening, I guess, might think, well, that's terribly old-fashioned, that seems very out of date in a world that's been so shaped by modern feminism. But the fact is that the scriptures teach very plainly, not just here, but everywhere, that the primary fulfillment of a woman's life lies in playing the role that God has created her for.

And here, he's particularly talking about that role in marriage and that role in motherhood if the woman is married and if she has children. I've been reading a very interesting book by a young woman, a writer called Freya India.

She writes a blog called Girls and it's all about how Generation Z, actually Generation Z, we're not American, are we? Generation Z, that's those who were born, I think, about 1997 to 2010.

[16:53] So women who are in their 20s now about how they've been so exploited and damaged and made anxious and miserable and ruined by so much of the expectation and the commodification of women.

Her book is called Girls and the commodification of everything. I encourage you to look her up. She's on YouTube and all sorts of places. Very articulate young women. But what she is saying is I find myself thinking and feeling all the time what I want, what I actually want is to have a lasting relationship.

What I want is to feel dependent on someone who's going to love and care for me. What I want is somebody who I don't think is judging me all the time and looking at me and comparing me with all the pornographic models that I'm watching on the internet all the time.

It's very interesting. There are many and she's not a Christian woman although I think she is beginning to move very much in the direction of seeking Christian truth because she sees among Christians and in the scriptures the very things that she as a modern young woman is actually craving for and seeking to escape from from what society is trying to ram down her throat all the time.

The world will not teach young Christian women how to find the true fulfillment in life that they are longing for and desperate for. Who will?

[18:13] Well the word of God through the experience and the practical wisdom of older and wiser godly Christian women who are able to teach these things and demonstrate it in their lives.

There is no more important ministry for young women in the Christian church today. That's why for example in our student ministry we've released the word. So many of our senior mature women have such a vital role doing exactly that.

Teaching these things and sharing their lives with younger women who are able to see what that path in life actually leads to and the satisfaction and the joy in serving the Lord.

And that's what the older women are to do and the younger women verse 4 you see are to be taught not to live for themselves not to be indulgent but to play their part with a godly commitment to their marriage to their children making a contribution to the life of the household working not freeloading being kind being hospitable not being selfish not being self-assertive that's the way of happiness.

And young men are not exempt either verse 6 young men to keep themselves under control in all the kinds of ways that young men find so difficult to do. Ask a young man if you want to know what that is.

[19:38] And verse 7 very challengingly Paul says to Titus as a Christian leader you've got to be a model of all of these things. But it's not just again these even those in the lowliest positions in that society bond servants slaves household servants they too are to show and to exhibit the healthy Christian character that personifies the gospel message even in those difficult circumstances sometimes in which they may find themselves working not arguing Paul says not pilfering but showing all good faith.

You see a whole church there every possible category of people a whole church partnership in winsome Christian character that commends the gospel to all to whatever situation we find ourselves in.

Now none of us find that easy do we? Of course we don't. Young folk often think that well once you're older it'll be much easier to be godly. That sort of halcyon view singing with the Beatles when

I'm 64.

Well I'm not quite 64 but I can tell you what I'm not that far off it and I don't find it any easier at all now than when I was 24. That's the bad news for the young men.

Sometimes older folk of course think oh well if only I was young again everything would be so much easier because I've got all these things to cope with. Well have a chat to some young people tonight. Of course it's not easy is it for any of us to live healthy lives and holy lives.

[21 : 22] But look at what these winsome Christian ways will achieve. Verse 5 you see it stops the gospel being maligned and reviled by opponents.

Verse 8 it means that those who oppose our message are shamed because they can't actually find anything evil to say about us even though they want to.

You can't write off a message can you that is going along with a life that's lived with real integrity with sheer attractiveness. It's very hard to deny the reality of that thing.

But it's not just a defensive thing is it? Look at verse 10. It's such a lovely phrase isn't it? Such a wisdom way of living that in everything we will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.

That word adorn it means to beautify. It's the word *cosmeo* it's where we get our word cosmetics from. Now that doesn't mean that you can make something attractive that is actually ugly and dull in itself.

[22 : 28] There's no woman who can make herself attractive just with cosmetics. Some people think they can but it often goes really badly wrong doesn't it? I'll never forget sitting on a plane once for quite a long journey beside a lady who obviously thought that her entire face was as far as I could see made of plastic.

She had the most enormous lips I'd ever seen injected with goodness knows what. It was so bad that every time she took a cup of her tea it all dribbled down her. I don't know what she was thinking. And men can be just as vain.

But no you can beautify you can bring out you can adorn can't you the beauty of something that's already there to show it off to its very best effect. Think of a diamond in the most perfect setting for it.

Think of a painting that's given just the right mount and just the right frame. It can transform so you can see the beauty that you couldn't see before. I remember years ago finding a lovely painting stuffed down behind a Hoover in the back of my parents under the under the stair cupboard and the frame was cracked and the glass was broken and it had been sitting there for years.

I took it out and pinched it. It's what children do for their parents' things, isn't it? And when I got it framed and mounted beautifully, it's now, some of you have seen it, a beautiful painting of Aslan from *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*.

[23 : 42] It's in our dining room. And with that right frame and that mounting, it's been beautified, it's been adorned so that you can see the beauty that was always there. And you see, that's what Paul is saying about our lives.

By the way we are, by the way we live, by the way we speak, we can make visible the beauty of God our Savior and the transforming power of his wonderful gospel of grace.

And that's why Titus here emphasizes, or Paul emphasizes these things so, so much to Titus. We can't go really into chapter 3, but just look at chapter 3 verse 2. Think of the impact that would be made by people who are always ready for every good work, who speak evil of no one, who are never quarreling, who are always gentle, who are perfectly courteous to everybody.

That'll be noticed, won't it, in your workplace? Be noticed even in the church. Notice, don't get confused here, Christianity is not at all, at all, about doing good works in order to impress God so that he'll accept you.

No, Titus 3 verse 5 makes that absolutely plain. We are not saved by good works. We're saved by God's mercy alone that's washed away all of our sins. But in verse 8, he says just as clearly, we are saved for good works, and those who believe in God are to be devoted to such.

[25 : 19] We're never to be unfruitful, and we are to be devoted to such because all of our motivation comes from the experience of God's great mercy to us.

We have received so freely, we have received so wonderfully from him. You see, if you know God's grace and mercy, you can't not share it.

If you've known true forgiveness, you can't not forgive others when they seek your forgiveness because God's grace and mercy changes you on the inside.

And you come to love grace and mercy. And you understand that as you give more, so God gives you more grace as well.

That's gospel arithmetic. You see, you understand that to give is to receive. And that desire, you see, as it's enabled more and more in our lives, that builds character that will commend the gospel of Christ.

[26 : 33] But that's not all. It's not just winsome character that commends the gospel. It's also true that winsome Christian conduct will convert people to God in Christ.

You turn over a few pages to Peter's first letter, 1 Peter, chapter 2. On a bit past Hebrews and James and you come to 1 Peter.

And I want to look at just a little bit of chapter 2 here and chapter 3 where we see that Paul is in full agreement with what Peter says here.

1 Peter 2 verse 11, Peter says, beloved I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul.

Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable so that when they speak against you as evildoers they may see your good deeds and glorify God on a day of visitation.

[27 : 41] Our conduct, he says, may even lead people to glorify God themselves on a day of visitation. Otherwise when God visits them in saving grace.

Or it could be speaking about the last day when their own salvation vindicates the Christian witness of folks to them which once upon a time they had condemned. But either way, you see, what he's talking about is winsome Christian conduct that can lead in God's sovereign providence to conversion to God to people coming to know God for themselves.

And if you look down to chapter 3 of Peter's first letter in the first couple of verses there you see a very specific application of that principle which is very important indeed.

It's the witness of a Christian to a non-Christian spouse. In this case it's a Christian woman to a non-Christian husband. But I think the principle applies equally both ways. Likewise wives, be subject to your own husbands so that even if some do not obey the word they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives when they see your respectful and pure conduct.

An unbelieving partner, says Peter, can be won to the Lord without a word by the conduct of their Christian spouse, by the winsome Christian conduct of a believer who personifies the gospel, who adorns in their life the doctrine of God our Savior.

[29 : 15] Now again, of course, Peter is not saying people don't need to hear the gospel. You read down to verse 15, he goes on to command us all to be ready to make a defense, to have an answer about our faith.

He's not saying we don't need words ever, of course not, but what he is saying is that words alone are not enough, and they've got to be matched by the winsome conduct that enfleshes, that personifies that message.

And he's saying that sometimes there comes a time, and often this is so in our closest relationships, I think, often there comes a time when enough words have been said, and more words can just be counterproductive, and actually it's better, it's wiser to just let your actions talk for a time.

I think that's often the case with our nearest and dearest. Sometimes a woman will come to faith, and she'll be so zealous for her husband to find the Lord Jesus, to find the same truth that she's found.

She's so zealous about the gospel, she'll go on and on and on and on about it. And he feels threatened, he feels angered, he feels turned off, counterproductive.

[30 : 31] Sometimes a young person comes to faith in Christ, they go to a university perhaps, or they go to a camp, and they come home full of the joy of the gospel, and they go on and on and on with their parents incessantly, and their parents just get irritated with them.

They can become more hardened. But you see, these relationships demand respect, don't they?

You can't just hammer on and on and on and on and expect to always get a welcome hearing.

And that's especially so with our nearest, with our closest loved ones. And that's where our conduct, that's where our manner becomes so, so very important.

You see, by what we do and by how we act, even more than what we say or perhaps don't say, we're to adorn the gospel, we're to beautify it in our lives.

And Peter says about this, he says, don't fear, don't despair. So powerful is the drawing power of genuine Christian character and conduct that your loved one may be won without a word, without a

word, by your respectful and pure conduct, because it emanates the fragrance of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[31 : 44] Now, there will be a time for words, of course there will, wise words of answer, seasoned words with grace, when your conduct wins you the opportunity to come out with these things, when your loved one can't help but actually want to know more or hear more about the thing that has changed you so much because it's so obvious.

But when they're still hostile, when they're very defensive, very often your words won't be heard, but your conduct will speak to them. And our conduct, says Peter, mustn't give them any cause to revile the gospel but rather, as Paul says to Titus, it must beautify the gospel.

If you're an employee at your work and you're always on and on and on about the gospel, but the thing is you've got a reputation for being lazy, you're apathetic in your work, is your conduct going to win you a hearing for the gospel?

No, it's not, is it? Or if you have a neighbor that you want to witness to, but if like a friend of mine, you have a neighbor who is known to be an elder in the church but is such a nightmare to look beside that you actually have to sell and move your house to get away from the horror of living next to that person, are you going to listen to anything they say?

I'll tell you something, it made it very hard for me to witness to that friend when that was his experience of Christian leaders. Or if you're a wife who has come to faith in Christ, but you're always nagging and nagging and nagging your husband to come to church, nagging him to become a Christian because of her sake, because of the kids' sake, but at the same time, you're always rebuffing your husband in all kinds of ways.

[33 : 39] Perhaps rebuffing him in the bedroom, perhaps showing no interest at all in showing love to your husband. Well, you're on a hiding to nothing. Or if you're a Christian husband whose wife is not a Christian but she feels neglected and gets no help at all in the home or with the children or with anything else for you because you're always reading your big fat theological tomes and wanting to have extended times of family worship.

Well, good luck. She's not going to see the gospel or want the gospel in your to your gospel talk. They're not going to respond to your invitation to church if you never pull your weight in the team. If you're never the one who'll stay late and help out or fill in when somebody's off work. They're not rocket science, is it?

It's pretty obvious. The gospel word is vital. Of course it is. Faith comes by hearing. But sometimes, and this is especially so, I say again, for those who are closest to us, marriage and family life, very close friends, sometimes we have to win a right to get a hearing.

And people who really know us, here's the thing, they actually really know us, don't they? And they won't be fooled. And our lives, here's the reality, friends, our lives can be counter evangelistic.

[35 : 07] That is, the anti-gospel message of our character and our conduct. It shouts so loudly that people are deafened by it.

And they're then unable to hear the words of gospel truth that we want to articulate to them.

Because the words of our lives have drowned out the words of our lips.

Don't underestimate the power of the message that we convey without a word, says Peter. Our lives are speaking. They're speaking loudly all the time.

But the problem is they can speak in such a way as to be destructive to the gospel, can't they? But it needn't be like that.

And that's Peter's message. That's Paul's message. Peter says in chapter one, we are a holy nation. We are a people for God's own possession. We have received mercy.

[36 : 08] We've been born again, he says, through the living and abiding word of God. We are living stones. We're chosen, we're precious, we're being built into a spiritual house where God himself dwells by his spirit.

His imperishable beauty has been planted in our hearts. so let it show. Live more and more letting that light illuminate your life and shine out from your life.

And if we do that, we will adorn, we will beautify the doctrine of God our Savior. Don't underestimate the power of true Christian character and conduct.

people will notice and they can be one without a word, without untimely and unwise words from us, but with patience and winsome ways because your life is always speaking.

So let our life speak for Jesus. this. Sometimes it may just be that people notice that when you do make a mistake, when you do something wrong, when you do hurt somebody, you are the person who actually apologizes.

[37 : 24] Not many people do, do they? So that will be noticed. And there will be many other things that are noticed too as you quietly seek to let your life speak.

Winsome Christian character will commend the gospel of God. And winsome Christian conduct will convert to the God of the gospel.

So let's encourage one another. That's why we need one another. To personify the gospel message, to adorn, to beautify the doctrine of God our Savior. And that's something that we do need one another for.

Which is why the commitment that we make to one another as partners in church life, as witnesses together to Christ, that's what it's all about. So it's very appropriate that this evening we're welcoming new members into our fellowship, making exactly that commitment to serve the Lord together here.
together.