

When I served with the New Zealand army as a chaplain there were physical test we were required to pass. They were called 'Required Fitness levels' or RFLs. You had to run 2.4km in under 10 minutes, then roll into press ups and crunches.

The worst time for fitness testing was in mid-January. Loads of people failed.

Why was the January RFL the most failed?

Because over summer almost all of us had indulged and bulged. With all of the food choices through Christmas and New Year we had put unhealthy things into our bodies... Christmas cake, extra helpings, and more beer than usual. When it came to January testing, many of us were unprepared because we hadn't been living in a healthy way over the summer break.

Paul was keen for Titus to build healthy churches, not by watching what they ate physically, but by what they consumed spiritually.

Today we are going to be challenged as a household of God, to be growing as a healthy Christian community, full of healthy Christians.

In the preceding passage to the one we've heard read today Paul had just given Titus a warning about some very unhealthy spiritual fare being offered to the Church on Crete. Some 'Rebels' 1:10 were teaching the need to adopt the Jewish law as necessary for Salvation.

Add to that the influence of Cretan culture, a culture which was undergirded by deception, and you can see why Paul was worried the churches there might be taking on unhealthy habits. Habits founded on something other than the truth which leads to godliness (Titus 1:2)

The criticism of this unhealthy teaching, and unhealthy teachers has been direct. They were detestable, disobedient, and unfit for doing anything good. Instead of pointing people to the truth which leads to godliness (1:2) they were taking people away from that same truth. Paul repeats the emphasis that all teachers in the Church were to prioritise, 2:1 'teach what is appropriate to sound doctrine.'

He'd told Titus to carry out the same charge when he appointed elders for the churches, they had to 'hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it had been taught.' (1:9) Titus is to teach what is healthy, for Christians to believe and do. And he is to model it at every step of the way v.7. Titus needs to ensure his faith is in action, to model, guide, and direct the church.

I read a great quote from Philip Towner this week, which I want to share with you:

'These churches are being urged to sink healthy roots deep into the uncertain Cretan soil, to shake loose the cultural elements that have attached to the Christian message, and they are to be as salt and light in this wild frontier.¹

To be salt and light, having sound doctrine is critical, but it's not going to see us growing the Kingdom of God on its own. Healthy food is great fuel for the body, but it won't result in healthy living, it needs to be paired with exercise. To be spiritually healthy we have to exercise what we believe. Faith has to be put into action. It has to be lived out, by Paul, and Titus, and the whole Christian Household - older men, older women, younger women, and younger men, So Titus is to guide them all,.

Here are some discussion questions to get us thinking about the different parts of the household of God he needs to teach - you've got about 5 minutes to work through these questions.

What do older man need to hear? What will keep them healthy? (v.2)

What do older women need to hear? What will keep them healthy? (v.3)

What do the instructions of v.3 and v.2 have in common?

How do these all reflect what was required of Elders in Titus 1:6-9?

The guidance for healthy living in God's household is plain. Older men should be characterised by their love, faith and endurance. They are called to let their love of God permeate every part of their lives, to strive for dynamic faith which exceeds the unhealthy Christianity promoted by the opponents on Crete. Living out that healthy faith will see Christlike character emerge.

Older women are also called to show the inner working of Jesus, outwardly. Not by gossiping, and idle distractions. Drunkenness was a problem in both Hellenistic, and Jewish society. Christian women were to be different.

Both were to set the tone for the whole Christian Household.

Household - an understanding.

The idea of a household was central to life in the Greco-Roman world. Households were multi-generational, and were hierarchal. Sometimes we can look at a passage like this and be tempted to see it as another form of the household code which governed society.

¹ Philip H. Towner, The Letters to Timothy and Titus, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 717.

Paul's intent is much higher, it wouldn't make any sense for him to say 'uphold sound doctrine' and then to just copy and paste the cultural construct of the day for Titus to teach. He wants the healthy household of God to embody, to live out their belief in Jesus in a way that supersedes the cultural codes, and points to the goodness of God at every step.

The smooth running of the household, was generally the domain of the mother of the home. Maternal care, and domestic competence ensured that family life, multi-generational family life ran smoothly, and provided stability for every facet of life in the Roman world. When we read v.5, and see that women should be busy at home,

Familial relationships were drawn along lines of authority: Wife to Husband, Children to Father, and Slave to Master.

Let's examine the values of the Christian household in discussion: (8 mins)

Questions:

Look at the whole section: What values are common to all groups, male or female, young or old?

Paul focusses on the need to mentor young women and young men.

What are young women to be like?

What are young men to be like?

Are they naturally like this?

What particular challenges do young mothers face which makes the guidance of older women so essential?

In this passage we can find two verses particularly difficult; v.5 and v.9

Last week we focussed on rebellious teachers were causing issues on Crete; whole households were being disrupted by their teaching. (1:10), and the impact of Cretan culture on the gospel. The ideal of the New Roman woman has been taking hold on Crete, and women were being encouraged to embrace a newfound sexual freedom, akin to Roman men. They were able to throw parties indulging in excess alcohol, at the neglect of their children, and family responsibilities.

The Christian woman is being called to reject the spirit of the age, and to be shaped by the Spirit of God instead.

"Don't chase the ideals of the New Roman Woman," we can hear Paul cry; be renewed, as new creations in Christ, transformed by the renewing of your minds.

We can read 'Be busy at home' (v.5) as some kind of confining statement, as if this is the only place women should be engaging. Women aren't chained to the kitchen, or limited to being home-makers;

the emphasis for young women is for them to carry out their duties to the best of their abilities, to the glory of God.

If Christian women leapt onto the wave of the new roman woman, Paul warns, the Good News of Jesus may suffer. v.5. The cultural revolution that was taking place looks like it was leading to the breakdown of family units.

Theres a warning there for any Christian, regardless of whether we are male or female. We need to conform to the Good News, to Sound Doctrine, rather than the shifting winds of the culture of our day. Because not only will jumping on these cultural shifts make us unhealthy spiritually, they can malign the Good News of Jesus. The goodness of the Good News is undone, when we don't live it out.

In this particular instance, Paul provides a remedy, a wholesome, Christ honouring, life-giving remedy. Christian women, if you have a husband love them. Respect them. Don't belittle them. Don't push them around. Don't join in with the overriding cultural voice of our day which says men are incompetent idiots. Love your husbands - even when they are incompetent idiots. Show them honour and respect. Cultivate healthy homes, care well for children if you're blessed with them, all to the glory of God.

We also need to recognise that 'be subject to' does not mean 'be a second class citizen to.' Galatians 3:28 and 1 Corinthians 12:13 make it abundantly clear, that men and women, slave and free are equal. Not the same, but absolutely equal.

Christian wives, if you have been made to feel lowly in your marriage, I'm sorry that's happened. Know that you are loved, and worthy. God sees you as so valuable that he sent his son to die for you, to redeem you.

This is no justification for men to treat women badly. This isn't a license to suppress or oppress. In this passage we see the responsibility of men -to be temperate, worthy of respect, and to love. That flows into marriage, where blokes are to 'love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.' Our care for wives should be full of sacrificial love and grace, all to the glory of God.

Christian husbands, if you have taken this passage, or teaching from Ephesians 5 to dominate your wife you've got it wrong brother. We all fail to love our lives as Christ loves the Church, but he is the same Lord who has died for you, and is at

work in you. You can apologise, ask for forgiveness, and seek to serve your wife, if you've got this wrong in the past.

The same remedy was given to Christian slaves so that they might have a powerful testimony to their masters. Paul doesn't condone slavery, per se. It's a cultural reality he needs to engage with.

Within the household of God there are slaves, and masters.

Paul wants people living in slavery to carry out their duties to the best of their ability. Honestly, diligently, pushing back against the cultural norm of the day. Paul wants the Christian slave to have an approach to their master which shows how good the gospel is. He wants them to be healthy in their belief and the way it is lived out.

If they are dishonest, belligerent or tardy, because of their newfound identity in Jesus - as equals, they will undermine the possibility of their lives shining in a dark world, bringing the Good News

Neither of these ideas of subjecting ourselves for women or even addressing slaves sit very easy with Western Culture today: here are some questions to help us grapple with them a bit deeper. (5 mins)

Questions: Where does our culture collide with the idea of being subject to another?

What would wives being subject to husbands look like today?

How can a husband love a wife in a way that helps her thrive, and flourish?

Application: In the West as we age we are often seen as less influential. In the Church older men and woman have a critical role ensuring the health of the whole Christian 'household.' How can you draw someone younger than you on in their faith?

Paul's purpose is so clear in v.11: he longs for the things that are taught to us, the truth, to lead to godliness in our lives. He longs to see faith in action, and for the Christian message, both spoken and embodied - lived out, to be attractive.

The temptation for us can be to change the message, to make that attractive. To chop out some of the tricky bits of the Bible's teaching; maybe we've been tempted to do that even today as we've thought about wives being subject to husbands, and slaves to masters... its not popular teaching.

Its hard to hear that everything we have is a gift from God, its hard to hear that sexual expression is only for men and women in the confines of marriage, its hard to hear that God's good design is for men and women to be different but complementary in their roles, its hard to hear that we are all fallen and in need of the grace of God, people deserving of his wrath, its hard to hear that we can't fix that ourselves, but that we need the Lord Jesus.

We can be fearful that the message of the cross, of forgiveness full and free in the sinless death of Jesus, in our place, so that we might be right before God; is unattractive, when it is the greatest news in the world. The news that God loves us so much he credits to us what belongs to Jesus - perfect restored relationship despite our failures. We are to be people who live out our faith in a way that makes people want to know more about our Lord and Saviour.

Older men, older women, younger men, younger women, we are to so live the Good News of Jesus that people are drawn to hear about the truth we've believed, so that they too might be made right with God.

This week there are three ways we can do that:

We can exercise self-control. No doubt you will have opportunities to grump or grumble, you might have opportunities to fly off the handle, you might have opportunities to assert your will on another - instead, exercise self-control. Stand up, walk away, pray and ask for help in that moment, and ask God to help you choose godliness.

We can draw alongside someone younger than us to encourage them in their faith. It can be frightening to put yourself out there, but the request doesn't have to be complicated - "after the message on Sunday I was wondering if you would like to meet up, so I can pray for you." Or "would you like to come and read a chapter of the Bible with me?" These are humble beginnings, that can create shared life in the Lord Jesus.

We can make ourselves subject to those God has placed over us: whether that is our Government, a boss, a teacher, a husband, a parent, - we can choose to humbly, accept their guidance and direction, even if its not our natural inclination, or first choice.

I'm sure you can think of other ways you can put your faith in action, and live out the Good News of Jesus, why don't I pray and ask God to help us all to live out our faith in ways that are attractive?

Lord your word can be hard to hear, and hard to apply to our lives. Would you help us to live the Good News of Jesus? Would you give us eyes to see where our culture draws us away from you, and where our hearts are hard towards you?

Lord we long to live out the good news in a way that makes it attractive, as people see the freedom you give to live a healthy life in accordance with your will. By your Holy Spirit would you transformed hearts set on living to your glory? We ask in it in Jesus' name.
Amen.