



BECOMING ZEALOUS FOR GOOD WORKS: TEACHING

Titus 2:1-10

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Introduction – Our Discipleship Deficit

It has become cliché to describe evangelicalism as a mile wide but an inch deep. That's a rather unflattering way of saying that although in America adherence to evangelical Christianity is widespread, the depth of commitment among evangelicals is actually pretty thin. We're good at winning converts; we're not so good at making disciples. We can fill huge churches, but we struggle to grow godly Christians.

Evangelical Christianity thus suffers from what you might call a *discipleship deficit*: a shortfall in the area of teaching people how actually to live the Christian life. Perhaps no one has written as thoughtfully on this problem in recent years as Dallas Willard. In fact, he's been hammering on this point for years. Listen to what he said in an article that appeared in *Christianity Today* in 1980:

For at least several decades the churches of the Western world have not made discipleship a condition of being a Christian. One is not required to be, or to intend to be, a disciple in order to become a Christian, and one may remain a Christian without any signs of progress toward or in discipleship.¹

He then concludes:

So far as the visible Christian institutions of our day are concerned, discipleship clearly is optional.²

In other words, we have a discipleship deficit. But how do we address it? We address it, at least in part, by doing what Paul calls Titus to do in the opening verse of this passage: “teach what accords with sound doctrine” (2:1). *Teaching is a great catalyst in creating a people who are zealous for good works; teaching builds that City on a Hill.* Preaching is primary in God's economy (1:1-4); leadership is next in line (1:5-16). But when both biblical preaching and godly leadership are in place, the next thing the church needs is teaching.

The main point of this passage, and the main point of this message, is that we as a church have a responsibility to teach. This is Paul's main point to Titus in 2:1; everything else he says is an elaboration of that charge. He is here advising Titus on how he ought to teach and what he ought to teach. So this passage helps us think about our own teaching ministry as a church: what we ought to focus on and how we ought to go about it. And what I would like to do is simply unfold this passage for us with three observations about the teaching ministry of the church: three theses, if you'd like, which are very important for helping us become a people who are zealous for good works.

¹ Willard, *Spirit of Disciplines*, p. 258.

² Willard, *Spirit of Disciplines*, p. 259.

Thesis #1 – We Must Teach the Character and Conduct that Corresponds to the Christian Faith

Our first thesis is this: *we must teach the character and conduct that corresponds to Christian faith*. This is the first point in this passage; it's also the main point of this passage. For this is exactly what Paul, in the opening verse of this passage, calls Titus to do: "But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine" (2:1). Note carefully Paul does not say: "But as for you, teach sound doctrine." You may have noted the unfortunate heading the ESV gives to this passage, as though that's what Paul in fact said. But he didn't. He said: "teach *what accords with* sound doctrine."

Of course, teaching sound doctrine is implied in this call. And elsewhere in this letter Paul underscores sufficiently enough both the necessity and importance of teaching sound doctrine. As we saw earlier, an elder must "hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine" (1:9). This means elders and teachers must know the word of God, and the contours of the gospel, and be able to teach them faithfully. They must teach sound doctrine.

But here in this passage, and in this opening verse, Paul calls Titus to teach something else – or, perhaps better, something more. Not only sound doctrine, Titus must also teach what accords with sound doctrine. What is that? Well, look at what Paul does in the rest of this passage: he himself teaches what accords with sound doctrine. And with a quick glance we see what he's teaching: character and conduct.

So Titus is to teach not only sound doctrine, but sound ethics; not only what the Christian is to believe about God and the gospel, but also how the Christians is to act in light of who God is and what the gospel is. This is what it means to teach what accords with sound doctrine: to teach the character and conduct that corresponds to Christian faith.

In my experience, churches tend to fall short of the responsibility to teach what accords with sound doctrine in one of two ways. One way is to simply teach more and more sound doctrine, as though pumping people full of doctrine alone will somehow make them more holy people. The other is by thinking it's sufficient to get people simply to sign off on sound doctrine, as though the mere profession of sound doctrine is itself sufficient to encourage living in accordance with sound doctrine. This is precisely where the false teachers in Crete went awry: they divorced doctrine from ethics. They professed to know God, but denied him with a life that was not in accord with sound doctrine (cf. 1:16). That's why Paul begins this verse the way he does: "But as for you." Titus's teaching is to contrast sharply with the other teachers described in 1:10-16.

So what should it look like, this teaching that accords with sound doctrine? We note two things from what Paul says in verses 2-10. First, it's to be *comprehensive*. Not exhaustive, of course, but comprehensive: Paul offers instruction to *all ages* and to *both genders*: first, to the older men (v. 2), then the older women (v. 3); next to the young women (vv. 4-5), and then young men (vv. 6-8). He also includes a concluding word to slaves (vv. 9-10), because they too were an important part of the ancient household, and thus offers instruction for every *station* in life as well.

The second thing to note is that it's to be *concrete*. Sometimes we content ourselves in our teaching and in our living with rather vague generalities. Paul doesn't. He speaks here

quite specifically and concretely about the kind of character and conduct correspond to sound doctrine. “Older men,” Paul says very plainly, “are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness” (v. 2). “Older women likewise,” Paul continues, “are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine” (v. 3). Young women are to “love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands” (v. 5). Young men are to be, well, what young men often struggle to be: self-controlled (v. 6). And slaves: they’re not to be argumentative or to steal, but be full of integrity and well-pleasing to those they serve (vv. 9-10).

You see, this is all pretty specific and concrete stuff, even at points a bit in-your-face. A good reminder that we need to teach this way: calling out specific, concrete vices to avoid and behaviors to practice. This is the kind of teaching that will save the church from mere nominal Christianity, as well as nurture mature believers.

Some of you may know the name, Ajith Fernando. He’s the national director of Youth for Christ in Sri Lanka. I recently read something he wrote about the situation of the church in Sri Lanka that drives home this precise point:

I was once talking to a pastor working in an unreached area of Sri Lanka about the struggle to nurture godly believers among recent converts to Christianity. We talked about how important it is to explain the Christian lifestyle and to address areas of unholiness that we are seeing in the church. He said that most pastors today avoid doing that because it brings up many questions that are difficult to handle. People come to Christ because he meets their needs, not because they want to be holy. If we talk about particular issues of holiness, they are turned off and leave the church. So pastors avoid addressing these issues. If this is allowed to continue, we will soon have a highly nominal church.³

The church is responsible, then, to teach character and conduct that corresponds to the Christian faith. And it must be intimately related to our understanding of the gospel and God’s grace as it has appeared in Jesus Christ. There can be no divorce or disjunction here between Christian conduct and Christian doctrine.

Thesis #2 – We Must Leverage Our Relationships to Teach Christian Living

Now while the opening verse of this passage calls Titus to teach, we recognize he’s not the only one here called upon to teach what accords with sound doctrine. It’s not Titus’s job alone to teach the character and conduct that corresponds to the Christian faith. No, we see in verse 2 that older men are called to exemplify for the entire congregation a way of life that suits their station in life; and we see in verses 3-4 that older women are called explicitly to “teach what is good” to the younger women; and we see in verses 6-8 that Titus, himself a young man, is to model for and thus teach to the other young men what a godly, self-controlled life looks like.

So we see from these verses that the teaching ministry of the church extends well beyond Titus himself. In fact, we realize that the vast majority of the teaching that’s supposed to happen in the life of the church happens not in formal ways through Titus’s

³ Fernando, *Joy and Pain*, pp. 157-58.

instruction; but in a thousand informal ways through the various relationships that exist among the believers in these churches. In other words, the whole congregation is to be engaged in the ministry of teaching. Which brings us to our second thesis about the teaching ministry of the church: *we must leverage our relationships to teach the character and conduct that corresponds to Christian faith.*

But how? Through *modeling* and *mentoring*. Think about it: Who does the majority of the teaching in this church? Me or you? The vast majority of the teaching is done neither by me, or any other member of the Pastoral Staff, nor does it even happen at church or on Sunday. The vast majority of the teaching that takes place in this congregation happens offsite: in your homes, in your workplaces, around the dinner table, when the friends are over. The vast majority of the teaching comes about through the myriad of informal interactions that take place between members of this congregation week to week: getting together for coffee, talking on the phone, hanging out at the park, meeting up for a meal, sending emails or text messages back and forth, getting together for times of prayer, and so on.

That is why we must *leverage* these relationships in order to instruct others in how to live the Christian life. Every interaction you have with another Christian is an opportunity for modeling the Christian life and mentoring another person in the Christian life.

And what a powerful teacher modeling and mentoring can be! The devotional writer, Andrew Murray, wrote a wonderful book on parenting. At the outset of the book he makes a very important point about raising your children to be lovers of Christ rather than of the world. And he lays down this simple principle: *Example is better than precept*. Or, you might say, modeling and mentoring is more effective than lecturing. Listen to what he writes:

Not in what we say and teach, but in what we *are* and *do*, lies the power of training. Not as we *think* as an ideal for which to train our children, but as *we live* do we train them. It is not our wishes or our theory, but our will and our practice that really train. It is by living the Christ-life that we prove that we love it, that we have it; and thus will influence the young mind to love it and to have it too.

Here Andrew Murray has captured what I take to be one of the main lessons of this passage in Titus: that example is better than precept; that we must leverage relationships – modeling and mentoring – to teach how to live the Christian life.

Thesis #3 – We Must Recognize the Gospel’s Reputation is at Stake in our Teaching

Our third and final thesis is this: *we must recognize the gospel’s reputation is at stake in our teaching*. One of the themes we’ve stressed in this series so far is that, according to Titus, the good works of believers are for the sake of outsiders. Or as we put it several weeks ago: good works are evangelistic in their thrust.

We see this theme played out particularly clearly in this passage. If we fail to teach what accords with sound doctrine, we will inevitably fail to live lives that accord with sound doctrine. And if we fail to live lives that accord with sound doctrine, we will tarnish the reputation of the gospel. Or, as Paul says, we will bring “reproach on the word of God” (v. 5). Similarly, he warns Titus a few verses later that Titus himself must live out and

teach what accords with sound doctrine, “so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us” (v. 8). On the other hand, teaching what accords with sound doctrine in order to live lives that accord with sound doctrine will do much, positively speaking, to “adorn the doctrine of God our Savior” (v. 10).

Now this is very interesting because we realize that teaching what accords with sound doctrine is one of the best means of evangelism. This is also ironic because we so often tend to pit discipleship against evangelism. We tend to see the one as moving us inward, while the other is obviously moving us outward. But this passage reminds us that it need not be so. Instead, our teaching, and our modeling and mentoring, can have the powerful effect of helping others commend the beauty of the gospel with their lives. So what we have here is a call to do *discipleship-evangelism*: to make disciples who actually follow Jesus and thus commend the gospel to outsiders.

At least once a week I get some flyer in the mail about an upcoming conference aimed at helping church leaders better lead their churches in their ministry and mission. In fact, earlier this week I received a very impressive looking brochure for an upcoming conference in Atlanta. It was full of impressive pictures and promising sounding keynote addresses. I also knew and, frankly, quite liked a few of the speakers I saw on the docket. But as I perused the topics to be addressed, I noted the conspicuous absence of anything even remotely approaching the kind of thing we find here in Titus 2. Which, I must confess, brought a smile to my face, as I began imagining myself delivering a keynote address at such a conference and asking the horde of thousands, eagerly gathered together to glean from me some fabulously sexy new ministry insights, to hear me invite them to turn in their Bibles to Titus 2; and then to hear me wax eloquent on the fact that if the church really wants to advance the gospel in today’s culture, then older men must live dignified lives, older women must live reverent lives, younger women must love their husbands and children, younger men must get a grip on their passions, and so on.

How do you suspect that might go over? I don’t frankly suspect that I’d receive a return invitation. But that’s not because the advice isn’t either biblical or, biblically speaking, entirely missional. It’s instead because it would be found old fashion and, more importantly, difficult.

Let me tweak a line from G. K. Chesterton to say that it’s not that the Bible’s approach has been tried and found wanting; it’s that the Bible’s approach has been found difficult and therefore left untried. It’s very easy these days to stir up much enthusiasm for missional technique; it’s much harder to train people to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age. But I know which in the long run is not only more true to the goal of the gospel, but also more effective for gospel outreach.

Conclusion

Let me conclude this morning by pointing us ahead, by pointing us to next week’s passage, and by pointing us to *grace*. For it is very important that we conclude on this note. It would be all too tempting to come away with from this passage and this morning’s message with marching orders in hand and try to man-handle the teaching ministry of the church.

We must remember that it is the *grace of God* that trains us on the art of living Christianly in the world. It is reliance upon what God has done, not what we must do; it is resting in his provision for us, not the provisions we must make for ourselves; it is looking to his Holy Spirit for empowerment, not to ourselves for the necessary motivation to do what needs to be done. Unless we look to the grace of God and promote the grace of God in all our teaching, we may well end up in the predicament the Pharisees in Jesus' day found themselves in: they were great teachers and a holy, well-disciplined bunch, but they were miles and miles from the Kingdom of God because they didn't understand the grace of God.

Brother and sisters, teaching is vital in the life of the church. Next to preaching and good and godly leadership, it is the most important way in which we become a people who are zealous for good works. Because solid, sound, practical teaching catalyzes our zeal for good works into the actual practice of good works.

And it is the responsibility of the whole congregation to participate in the task of teaching. It's a calling placed upon all of us. We must all be about the business of teaching what accords with sound doctrine.

Amen.