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A Portrait of the Ideal Church

Text: Titus 2:1-10

The late John R.W. Scott wrote, as he introduced this passage,

*Being the rational people, we are as human beings, since God has made us in his own image, we need to know not only* ***how*** *we ought to behave as Christians, but also* ***why****.* (emphasis mine)

The ideal is very often far from the reality. I offer two observations about the ideal church. In the ideal church:

1. **Particularity would be acknowledged and encouraged** - Titus is a pastor, leading new believers. Paul wants Titus to know that the Church is a different entity than any other with which Titus has had dealings. Tim Keller has said:

*Christianity brought into human thought for the first time the concept that you chose your religion, regardless of your race and class. Christianity also radically asserted that your faith in Christ became your new, deepest identity, while at the same time not effacing or wiping out your race, class, and gender. Instead, your relationship to Christ demoted them to second place. [[1]](#footnote-2)*

1 Peter 2:9-10.

*But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light, who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.*

Saints are, literally, something else.

Titus has been left in Crete, to organize the Church (1:5). Pastor Titus is to *set in order the things that are lacking.* There are others and then there is Titus. There are other entities and then there is The Church. *But as for you* (v. 1). Saints are peculiar people. We are different, without apology. When Paul wrote to Titus, all the content would have been on papyrus or parchment and would have been continuous content with no breaks. It was not until the mid-16th century that we had the biblical record broken into chapters and verses. Sometimes that division is unfortunate, as it interrupts the flow of the writing. Here is an example of that. Let’s read 1:10-16 and the description of the people Titus must address. Then let’s read 2:1a. *But as for you.*

Secondly, in the ideal church:

2*.* **Diversity would be acknowledged and encouraged**- Note that Titus is not to deliver a general word with a one-size-fits-all mentality. For descriptions of the diversity that marked the first century church, see Acts 13:44-48 and Ephesians 2: 11-13, 19.

Note the diversity here. There is gender and age diversity. Five groups of people are addressed:

1. Older men (v. 2)

2. Older women (v. 3)

3. Young women (v. 4)

4. Young men (v. 6)

5. Slaves (9-10)

In the ideal world/church:

**Older men are to be** (six-character traits):

Sober - sensible. This is such an important characteristic that Paul thinks it ought to mark all the age groups (2:2, 5, 6, 12). Wear sensible shoes. Eat sensible meals. Make sensible choices. Mother used to say, “Act like you got some sense”.

Stephen Davey, pastor of the Shepherd’s Church wrote on this passage,

*The truth is old men have lived long enough to see just about everything. They’re old enough to know that sin promises more than it produces. Older men have handled enough money to know that it doesn’t bring happiness- in fact, it has wings like a bird and can just as easily fly away. Older men have owned enough stuff to know how quickly it breaks down or gets stored away in the shed. Older men have seen enough sickness and suffering to know that life is fragile and unpredictable.[[2]](#footnote-3)*

Reverent- worthy of respect (*semnos)*

Temperate (sophron)- self-controlled; prudent; discreet

I greatly admired Gerald Ford, the 38th president of the United States. He succeeded Richard Nixon, after Nixon’s Watergate scandal and resignation. Gerald Ford was a temperate, self-controlled man.

**Illus**.

An excerpt of an essay by James Cannon ([pbs.org](http://pbs.org))

*Ford personified what Nixon was not. Ford was honest. He could be trusted. Throughout twenty-five years in the House of Representatives, Ford had proved himself to be a man of integrity. It was for that integrity that the highest powers of Congress, Democratic and Republican, chose Ford to be Vice President, knowing that Nixon's presidency was doomed......*

Sound (healthy; free from infirmity or disease) in faith

Sound (healthy) in love

Sound (healthy) in patience

**Older women are to be (v. 3):**

Reverent in behavior- **pos**. This Greek word (hieroprepe) appears only here in the entire New Testament. This differs from the reverence spoken of in v. 2, when referring to the older men. This very specific Greek word refers to one who performs priestly duties. These older women were to represent God to the people. These older women were to lead others to consider sacred spaces and sacred, holy ways of being.

**Illus.**  In the Anglican Book of Common Prayer marriage ceremony, there is a prayer that the officiating minister prays for the bride. It is that she may “in all quietness, sobriety, and peace, be a follower of **holy and godly matrons**”. In the ideal church, the older women are **holy and godly matrons**.

Not slanderers- **neg**.

Not given to much wine- **neg**

Teachers of good things- **pos**.

**Younger women are to be** (v.4-5):

* Discreet
* Chaste
* Homemakers
* Good
* Obedient/submissive. On verse 5: *Where submission or sacrificial love are abandoned, or compromised marriages suffer or collapse completely. (New Bible Commentary,* Ed. by G.J. Wenham, J.A. Motyer, D.A. Carson, R.T. France. P. 1313)
* Concerned about public witness (that the word of God may not be blasphemed)

**Young men are to be (**v.6):

* Sober-minded
* Exemplary in good works. Paul writes often, about good works (Titus 2:7, 14; 3:1, 8, 14). Paul never says that good works will *earn* our salvation. Paul says performing good works is one way we *demonstrate* our salvation.

**Slaves are to be (v. 9-10):**

* Obedient/submissive (cf. Ephesians 6:5-8; Colossians 3:22-25)
* Not answering back
* Not pilfering

**Illus.**

According to federal prosecutors on the case, Rev. Clarence Smith Jr., who led New Life Impact Church (Chicago, IL) for many years, was indicted on fraud charges for taking more than $900,000 from the federally funded Child and Adult Care food program through the Illinois State Board of Education. Instead of providing food to needy children, Smith was inflating the number of meals he served to charge the city and state thousands of dollars, falsifying reports to the sponsor to continue receiving funding. He would deposit the checks into the church’s bank account and then [allegedly withdraw money](https://exchange.blackenterprise.com/owa/redir.aspx?REF=myo5zgpYSCj0KArmQPc-cBThSDOlM_ei2O-gx9xRtdVCkEWEnqbXCAFodHRwczovL3d3dy50aGVkYWlseWJlYXN0LmNvbS9mZWRzLWNoaWNhZ28tcGFzdG9yLWRlZnJhdWRlZC1mZWRlcmFsLWZvb2QtcHJvZ3JhbS1mb3ItbmVlZHkta2lkcy10by1idXktaGltc2VsZi1hLWJlbnRsZXk.) via debit cards or checks on purchases. It was discovered that the pastor used the funds to pay off his personal expenses and give himself lavish presents. [The Chicago Tribune](https://exchange.blackenterprise.com/owa/redir.aspx?REF=njn-QWR3xERJtj07S2bNoAbvaOu68aQ6m2S-uEdiLbZCkEWEnqbXCAFodHRwczovL3d3dy5jaGljYWdvdHJpYnVuZS5jb20vbmV3cy9jcmltaW5hbC1qdXN0aWNlL2N0LWNoaWNhZ28tcGFzdG9yLW1lYWxzLWZvci1uZWVkeS1raWRzLWJlbnRsZXktMjAyMDAxMTAtZ2s0cmdjNHFkYmhxaGFqazU3azY3aTJ4bGktc3RvcnkuaHRtbA..) has reported that one of those gifts was a $142,000 2015 Bentley luxury sedan.[[3]](#footnote-4)

Note what is at stake here as groups are addressed:

The integrity of the word of God. Note the end of verses 5,8 and 10.

V.5- ...that the word of God may not be blasphemed

V. 8- ...that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you

V. 10- ...that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things

Both the older men and women are in a mentoring role (4-6), with the ultimate goal being that of training a generation of young men and women who are loving, discreet, chaste, good at management, submissive, sober minded AND committed to protecting/defending/guarding the way the world sees the word of God.

One more Greek word:

In verse 10, Paul tells Titus that slaves were to *adorn* the doctrine of God. The Greek word translated *adorn* is *kosmeo.* We get our word *cosmetics* from it. Same word can be translated *decorate, arrange in order.*

In the ideal Church, the saints, the believers, add shine to the ministry. They add order and decoration to the work of the ministry. Alexander MacLaren says that we must remember that these words were originally written to slaves, who traditionally lived in squalor. Here, the possibility exists of the lowly slave being able to make more beautiful this glorious gospel. The slave becomes *cosmetics* for the doctrine of God!

**Illus.**

**The Gospel According to You**

The most beautiful story was given to all,

Written down many long years ago

By Matthew and Mark, by Luke and by John,

Of Christ and His mission below.

And you write a gospel, a chapter a day,

By your deeds, whether faithless or true;

So as others read it, what do they think

Of the Gospel according to you?

It's a wonderful story, the Gospel of love,

As it shines with the Christlight divine.

Oh, that its truth might be told once again

In the story of your life and mine.

You're writing each moment a letter to all:

Take care that the writing is true.

It's the only Gospel some people may read -

The Gospel according to you.[[4]](#footnote-5)

Amen

1. 5 Features That Made The Early Church Unique. thegospelcoalition.org [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Titus (Wisdom Commentary Series) p. 164 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. [BlackEnterprise.org](http://BlackEnterprise.org) January 31, 2020 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Anonymous. Other versions of this poem are in existence, one being attributed to Paul Gilbert and another to Leroy Brownlow. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)