

Going Against the Flow

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[0 : 00] Well, last Sunday, I was at St. Peter's Free Church in Dundee. I was preaching there morning! It was a joy to worship with our brothers and sisters in Christ there, many of whom were asking! for you and the church family here. Between the services, we also had the privilege of going to an elder and his wife for lunch. We had a great time there. They lived out in Blair Gowry, I don't know if you know, Blair Gowry is about 20 miles or so outside of Dundee. And on the way back in for the evening service, we'd been driving, Mary and I and the boys, for five or ten minutes or so going along the roads. When I turned to Mary and I said, I don't actually have any idea where I'm going. I'd just been driving along. It all seemed fine. I knew where we wanted to get to, but I had no idea which turns to take in order to get there. And then five seconds later, five seconds after telling Mary I don't know which way we're going, I turned left at a set of traffic lights.

And Mary naturally immediately asked, right, if you don't know where we're going, why did you just turn left? Fair enough question, right? To which I said, without hesitation, because all the cars in front of me turned left. I genuinely had no idea which way was the right to go, and so I just followed where everyone else was going. I wonder if you've ever found yourself in a similar situation, right?

Assuming that everyone must be going where you are, everyone going out of Blair Gowry at half past five on a Sunday, surely must be going to St. Peter's Free Church in the center of Dundee. When we're not confident where we should be going, when we're not confident which turns we should be taking, sometimes we impossibly, we just go with a flow. Everyone seems to be heading this direction, surely that must be the right way. So often that is, isn't it, our natural instincts.

Follow the crowds. And that is what we will do, isn't it? That is what we will likely do if we are ourselves not confident, not confident in our destination, and not confident in the route we need to take to get there. Last week, Ben was taking us through the end of Titus chapter one, and he was showing us, wasn't he, what Paul is saying to St. Tice there is how to spot a false teacher.

And one of the markers of a false teacher Ben showed us was how indistinguishable they were from the world around them. They look like the world. False teachers did not have sound, healthy doctrine. And so instead, instead of going the right way, they went with the flow.

[3 : 07] They followed the way of the world because they were in it for themselves. You could not tell them apart from the rest of the inhabitants of Crete. They did not have healthy roots, and so there was no healthy fruit.

They had taken on the spirit of the age. And so the false teachers, the false teachers together with the rest of the population were all heading in one direction.

But here in chapter two, here Paul turns his attention back to Titus. And how does he begin there? Titus, but as for you, Titus, they are going this way, but not you. Titus is to do something different.

And the something different that Titus is to do is to teach the church to be different, to go against the flow. Not to be like the world, but to stand out from the world.

But in order to go against the grain, in order not just to follow the crowd, we need, don't we? We need to be confident. We need to be certain. We need to be sure of where we are going.

[4 : 29] And we need to be confident on the right way there. What path we must take. That, I think, in a way, is what Paul gives us here in chapter two. A roadmap for pilgrims on the way.

First he tells us the directions, then he tells us the destination. Directions for Titus that he might direct the church so that they would not just instinctively fall in line with everyone else around them, but instead follow the right path to the right place. This roadmap that Paul hands Titus does not have kind of rights and lefts to a geographical location. Instead, it is an instruction, isn't it, in a way of life.

A way of life that leads to an eternal purpose. And so as we go through this passage, we'll see two purposes Paul puts forward for ensuring that we are following these directions towards a godly life.

That the big purpose, isn't it, the most obvious one, is that we will arrive at the right destination. We'll see that kind of comes to the fore in our second point this evening. But what we'll see in our first point, really, that also, also we are watching this path so that other people but the world would look at us, would look at the path we are on, and say, maybe that's the right way.

Maybe we should start following then. Two connected purposes for Paul, putting this roadmap before us here in this chapter.

[6 : 02] Well, I should actually say, but before we get into our two points this evening, I should say, we're going to take two goes at Titus chapter 2, but hopefully not because this evening is lacking too much, but because there's a lot, isn't there?

There's a lot packed into this short chapter. I'm sure you noticed that as we read through it. And a lot of it, right, we do want to think very carefully about.

So this evening, this evening, we're just going to kind of piece together the big picture of Titus 2. Let's understand that the context he's speaking into. Let's understand that the purpose of the chapter as a whole.

And then having done that this week, we'll come back to Titus chapter 2 next week. And really think about the kind of the details, a deep dive, particularly into verse 2 to 10 there.

Because there is a lot in there, isn't there? I'm sure it probably provoked some questions for you, even just as we were reading it. So we'll put together the big picture with our time this evening.

[7 : 04] Then next Sunday, we'll remind ourselves of that big picture and dive into the specifics. Hopefully that makes sense. Basically, what I'm saying is if you want your questions answered, you've got to come back next week. So let's come back to where we were a moment ago and get into our first point, right?

Verse 1 to 10 there, where we see Titus is to teach godly living in order to defend sound doctrine. Titus is to teach godly living in order to defend sound doctrine.

We've already noticed, haven't we, how Paul exhorts Timothy to go a different way to the false teachers. And that different way, we've seen the rest of verse 1, that different way is to teach what accords with sound doctrine.

Not just teach sound doctrine, but teach a way of life, a lifestyle that accords with that sound doctrine. I think there's an obvious immediate implication there, isn't there?

If there is a life that accords with sound doctrine, there is a life that does not accord with sound doctrine. There's not just a right and wrong thing to believe, there is a right and wrong way to live and you cannot separate the two.

[8 : 19] This is kind of the big message of this book in a way, isn't it? Doctrine and duty, godliness and the gospel, however you want to put it, they are inseparable. You cannot believe the true gospel and not want to live a godly life.

Likewise, you cannot live a godly life without knowing the true gospel. There is a way of life that accords with sound doctrine. What does that life look like?

That is why I think Paul kind of explains fully in verse 2 to 10. Like I said, we'll get more into this next week. But I think, for this evening, as we take in the whole chapter, I think we can summarize it in a word or phrase, self-control.

That is the life that accords with sound doctrine. Titus is to teach self-control. That's obviously not exhaustive, but it is, I think, a legitimate summary because just glance through verse 2 to 10 with me.

Verse 2, older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled. Verse 5, older women are to teach younger women to be self-controlled.

[9 : 34] Verse 6, younger men are to be self-controlled. Self-control is not mentioned by name for the older women or the bond servants, but it is, I think, clear, isn't it, that they are to exercise self-control.

In matters of speech, alcohol, temper, greed. And then it is all summarized for us later on in verse 12, where we read that the grace of God trains us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions and instead to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives.

A godly life is a life of self-control. And self-control does not mean a kind of, you know, royal more even-like lifestyle where you have to get up at half past five every morning, run 10K, do a thousand push-ups and never eat a donut.

It doesn't mean that kind of lifestyle, but it does mean discipline. Discipline. The ability to stop yourself when you know you should stop.

The ability to keep on going when you know you should keep on going. I think we maybe get a hint of what the lack of self-control in Crete looked like back in the words of their own prophet in chapter one.

[10 : 54] What were they? They were lazy gluttons. Not self-controlled, no self-control to keep going when they needed to keep going.

They just wanted to stop. I'll be lazy. No self-control when they should have stopped eating. A lack of self-control is quite simply, isn't it?

A giving over of yourself to your passions, your feelings, your desires, with no attempt at restraint.

A culture that does not value self-control is one that says, isn't it, if you feel like it, do it. If you desire it, you should have it.

We'll think more about that next week, but as we skim over it this evening, I think we can say, can't we, we live in a culture that does not uphold self-control as a virtue. I think, yes, in terms of laziness and gluttony, also in terms of speech, definitely, I think, greed, perhaps most obviously, sex.

[12 : 05] if you desire it, you should have it. It's that old anecdote, isn't it? You see a film titled The 40-Year-Old Virgin and you know immediately, don't you, that must be a comedy because in our culture, how ridiculous, how hilarious that anyone would practice chastity by choice.

the idea of self-control is non-existent in our culture on those fronts. It is such a foreign idea, isn't it, that anyone would be self-controlled in that area or in terms of our comfort or our wealth.

No regard for self-control, but as for you, Titus, but as for you, teach something different.

Teach the church to be different, live a different way and he needs to teach that, doesn't he? Because if we don't have the road map laid out clearly before us, our instinct is always to follow the crowds and to go with the flow.

But I wonder, as we read through those verses, if you notice the reasons, the reasons that Paul kind of dripped into these verses for living a self-controlled life here.

[13 : 30] Like I say, in a way that the big reason is kind of coming in verse 11 to 14 with the word for there, but even through these verses, Paul points us, just as a kind of almost side note to something else as well.

Just look through those verses again and see the motives Paul lays out here for godly living. End of verse 5. Older women are to teach younger women to be self-controlled amongst other things.

Why? That the word of God might not be reviled. Verse 8. Titus is to be a model of good works. Why? So that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us.

Verse 10. Bond servants are to show good faith to their masters. Why? So that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God. Part of the reason Titus is to teach godly living is to win over, to win back the false teachers and the world around them.

Do you remember the purpose of his rebuke in chapter 1 back in verse 13? It wasn't just tell them off, was it? It was rebuke them so that they may be sound in faith. Part of the reason Titus is to teach godly living is that those looking on would see something, would see something in the self-control that the godly, the upright living of the church and see the beauty, the beauty and the truth and the goodness of the gospel.

[15 : 03] So that people would watch on and say, I might have heard bad things but I can't see it here. So that people would come in and say that this feels different.

This feels better. Godly living really does defend an adorned sound doctrine. I remember when Mary and I were engaged, she was working as a nurse and of course we weren't living together.

And Mary's colleagues found this hilarious. How can you marry someone if you don't know what it's like to live with them? They found it hilarious or at least they found it hilarious as a group.

It was never anything too serious but she would get kind of lightly mocked when the staff team were together. But for all the banter in a group context, most of her colleagues came and asked her about it privately, genuinely wanting to know more.

And some of them really did see the goodness of it, wishing that they'd done the same. self-control. Now that is in a way the most simple is an expression of self-control.

[16 : 25] It's not that hard to implement but even that counter-cultural expression of self-control opened the door for gospel conversations and adorned the doctrine of God. People really did see the goodness of it and so wanted to know more about what Mary believed.

You might well find yourself looking ridiculous when you refuse to have more than a pint. That does not mean people do not see the difference.

It does not mean people do not see the goodness. The false teachers didn't they? They became indistinguishable from the world and so in becoming indistinguished from the world become unappealing to the world.

Now that is what we have seen isn't it in so many churches up and down this country? A church that looks like the world is a church that is emptying because why would the world bother with more of the same?

But as for you Paul says but as for you go against the flow stand out from the crowd not like a sore thumb but as a shining light in the darkness.

[17 : 41] So that people would see something different. Something beautiful. Self-controlled upright godly lives defending adorning sound doctrine.

That is what the whole church is to do and that is isn't it Paul says specifically that is what Titus that is what elders are to teach and because it is going against the flow it is never going to be an easy task.

Paul knows doesn't he verse 15 Paul knows that Titus is going to face people who will want to disregard him ignore him look down on him because of what he teaches but Titus is not to let it happen.

Don't let them look down on you. Stand up and stand firm seeing that the godly life of self-control really is good and right. and I think just very briefly before we move on to our second point I think don't we we get a glance a glimpse there of how to spot a true teacher.

Ben helpfully showed us last week that false teachers are in it for themselves. They want to be loved by everyone they want to fit in they want personal gain.

[19 : 08] A true teacher is one who is willing to stick out. to go against the grain to suffer personal loss for the glory of God.

Paul says to Titus that you must be ready to rebuke people. Let me tell you that doesn't win you many friends but it is what an elder must sometimes do.

If an elder does nothing but rebuke that is a problem isn't it? But I think it's equally concerning if an elder never rebukes.

A good sign of a true teacher is an elder who is not afraid to not be liked, to say difficult things, to be ready to go against the flow even if it comes at personal cost.

Not in it for personal gain. So Titus even at personal cost is to teach the church. Teach the church to live godly self-controlled lives so that sound doctrine might be defended.

[20 : 16] That is our first point. Our second point this evening. We see there in verse 11 to 14. We see that sound doctrine is what produces godly living.

If godly living defends sound doctrine, we want to ask, don't we, how can we live godly lives? The answer is sound doctrine. At the start of this series in verses 1 to 4, we came across the first bite-sized gospel summary in Titus.

We'll get another one in chapter 3. Here we have a second of these unbelievably rich, single sentence long summaries of sound doctrine.

This small but very rich summary is shaped by two appearances. First, in verse 11, we see the grace of God which has appeared.

And then secondly, in verse 13, we see the glory of God which will appear. And the point is this, I think if we have a right understanding of Jesus' first coming and a right understanding of Jesus' second coming, we will live self-controlled, upright, godly lives.

[21 : 33] sound doctrine will produce godly living. So let's see how Paul shows that looking first at the grace of God which has appeared.

Notice there, in this single sentence summary of sound doctrine, Paul begins, doesn't he, with the saving grace of God. I wonder if you have ever seen Stacey Solomon sort your life out.

There's certain things I didn't think I'd ever admit to publicly watching, but here we are. Yeah, not in it for personal gain. Right, sort your life out is one of those kind of home makeover shows, where Stacey and her team, they go into the homes of hoarders, right?

People whose house is an absolute tip from top to bottom. There's rooms that you cannot get into because there is junk piled six foot high covering every inch of the floor.

And in they go, right, and they clean it all out. They completely empty the place. And it's kind of entertaining, right, they lay it on the floor of a warehouse so you can be properly aghast at how much stuff they had.

- [22 : 47] The team, they reorganize everything, they get rid of massive piles of clothes, hundreds of toys and all the rest. They clean out the house. But the point is, it's never just to clean out the house.

Because while they're doing that, Stacey is constantly giving tips and advice throughout about how to keep the house clean and tidy. The point isn't for them to go and provide a blank canvas for the family to move back into and completely trash again.

The point is to give them a new start so that from that moment on, they can start living in a different way to the way they've been living before.

And we'd be horrified, wouldn't we? Horrified to be a bit strong for daytime TV. We would see how massively a family's got it wrong, how massively they've missed the point.

If they arrived and went, oh, that is a beautifully clean house, that was so nice of them to do that for us, we'd better get straight back to the dump and collect our stuff from the skip. They've not got it, have they?

- [23 : 57] That they've not understood. You'd say, no, no, no, you've missed the point. The transformation was not the end point.

The transformation was not an end in itself, it was supposed to be the beginning of a new life. The cleaned out house was not the finished line of an old life, it was supposed to be the start line of a new life.

Just look again at the first few words of verse 11 and see how Paul begins his summary of the sound doctrine with the saving grace of God.

For the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation for all people. But that is not the finish, is it? It is glorious, it is good, but that is not the finish line.

That is the start line of the Christian life. The grace of God appeared not only to save, but also to teach.

- [25 : 03] To teach what? To teach how to renounce ungodliness and morally passions. How to live self-controlled, upright, godly lives.

That is why the grace of God appeared. Not just to save you, but to change you. It is quite obvious, isn't it, that I am referring to the grace of God appearing.

Paul is referring to Jesus' incarnation. I think it is self-evident to ask, why? Why doesn't Paul just say, Jesus? Why doesn't he just say, for Jesus has appeared?

I think because in describing it as the grace of God, he is, isn't he, bringing directly to our attention the goodness of it.

Grace is an unmerited good gift given to us. We know that, don't we, of our salvation. Do you think that of your sanctification, of your godly living, of renouncing ungodliness?

- [26 : 12] We might sometimes think, mightn't we, that salvation is a good thing, godly living is a kind of dutiful thing. We've received this amazing thing, I suppose I better do this now. But Paul says, no, they both are from the grace of God.

They are both from his unmerited goodness towards us. Being taught to renounce ungodliness and live a self-controlled life really is a glorious gift of God.

Salvation and training, training for godliness. forgiveness, they are both what Jesus came to give us. He came to save, yes, but not only to save, also to teach, to teach us to live godly lives.

Sound doctrine will produce godly living because sound doctrine knows that Jesus' work in me, Jesus' work in me did not finish when he cleaned my heart, when he cleared the house out.

when Jesus did that, his work in me only just began. A right, sound, healthy doctrine looks at a cleaned out heart and sees not the end of the gospel but the beginning, the beginning of a new life.

[27 : 29] So the grace of God has appeared and the glory of God will appear. if a cleaned out heart is not the finished line, then what is?

Let me just read verse 13 and 14 again. What are we doing? We are waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ who gave himself for us.

Why did he give himself for us? To redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

Zealous for good works. That is why we have been redeemed. That is who we might be. That we might be Christ's own possession, a pure people.

That is what Jesus is coming back for. That is the destination we are to be heading for. A holy people, a pure people who love to live godly upright lives, who delight in it, who treasure it, who want nothing more.

[28 : 52] If clean hearts was the end goal, if kind of just the forgiveness of our sins was the end goal, we could stop in our tracks, couldn't we? If all that mattered was our forgiveness, well I think that's where you get the two errors that we were talking about last week again, legalism and antagonism.

If all that matters is making sure I'm forgiven, either I need to do everything I can to make sure I am forgiven, legalism, or I'm forgiven by the grace of God so it doesn't matter what I do now.

If you put that at the finish line, one of those two errors will follow. But put it at the start and put that zeal for good works at the end and we will long to live the godly lives that we're called to here.

We have not been saved by good works. We have not been saved by good works. but we have been saved for good works.

And when we understand that is where we are going, that will inform one to every turn we take. Every turn we take in life, every decision we make. And if that is where we know we are going, we will not be tempted to fall in with the way of the world when they are going a very different direction.

[30 : 19] We will not follow the crowd because we are certain we are going somewhere different, somewhere better, somewhere glorious, somewhere good, a purified people of God.

And we are confident, aren't we? We know, we'll go to this more next week, but we know how we need to live in order to get there. By renouncing ungodliness and worldly passions.

By living self-controlled, upright, godly lives. When we walk on that path, we are walking step by step towards our eternal purpose.

And so Paul lays, doesn't he, he lays this road map before Titus, this, he says, this is what you must teach. Because this is what sound doctrine is. Not a salvation you earn by works, not a salvation that makes works relevant, but a salvation that has been given by God's grace in order to produce godly living, a healthy tree that will bear healthy fruits.

Healthy doctrine that will produce godly living. So hold fast. Hold fast to this sound, true, healthy doctrine.

[31 : 37] And commit yourself to godly living. God's because there is no other way. That is the way, the only way. That is the direction we must go, the direction we will be compelled to go if we understand why Christ has come and why he is coming again.

And when we follow this path, when we follow this path, not only will we arrive at our glorious, eternal, heavenly home, we will also show the world what we know to be true, what we profess to be beautiful, and that the saviour who's coming we long for is glorious.

So let us live a godly life because what else can we possibly do when we have been saved and taught and are looking forward to the glorious grace of God. Let us pray.

our great God and saviour, Jesus Christ, we praise you for your grace, that you have come and saved us, that you have come to teach us, and that you will come back for us once more.

Lord, help us to live in light of these glorious truths, and so to live lives that are pleasing to you in all that we do, turning away from the sin in which we once walked, and turning to you in everything.

[33 : 20] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.