

Countercultural Discipleship

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 August 2025

Preacher: Donald Smith

[0 : 00] If you were with us last week, you will hopefully remember that we've already had one go! Last week we looked at the whole of Titus 2 so that we could come back this week and do a deeper dive! into verses 2 to 10 there. I think a number of people thought I'd done this because someone else was preaching this Sunday evening and I was trying to wriggle myself out of a tight space. That is not the case. The reason we're doing it this way is so that we might come to these verses and understand them as fully, as properly, as best we can because of the context that they are written in because these verses really do, don't they? They get into the kind of the nitty-gritty day-to-day life of believers. So before we do kind of get into these verses, before we come to verse 2 to 10 specifically this evening, let's just remind ourselves of what we did see last week.

Paul has, well, been writing this letter, he began writing this letter, didn't he, stressing the need for Titus to appoint more elders in Crete, elders who'd be able to teach healthy doctrine and refute unhealthy doctrine. And those elders, what were needed when they in Crete because there were those who were propagating unhealthy doctrine, that there were false teachers in Crete. And there, at the end of chapter 1, Paul turned his attention to those false teachers and he said, didn't he, well, he helped us understand what would really stand out about a false teacher.

It was not that their teaching, right, part of the reason they are so dangerous is because their teaching is not obviously false. But what will really betray their true colors will be their conduct. It was their life of ungodliness that uncovered their masks and would show them for who they truly were. And that conduct, that ungodliness in the false teachers made them kind of indistinguishable from the world around them. If you spent a day following an average Cretan and one of these false teachers, right, you could not tell at the end of the day which was which, that they would have looked the same. And so now in chapter 2, Paul turns his attention back to Titus and says, but as for you, right, not you, Titus.

You are to go a different way, walk a different path and take the church with you. So that sound, healthy doctrine would be defended.

[2 : 57] Not only through the words of the elders, but also through the actions of the whole church. Godly living, Godly living is the end goal of salvation.

We saw that, didn't we, in the two comings of Christ, that we are saved by grace for good works. Not saved by good works, but saved for good works.

Jesus came to justify us so that we would be sanctified when he comes again. He gave himself up for the church so that when our glorious God and Savior, Jesus Christ, returns, a beautiful bride will be waiting for him.

And so godly lives is what will set apart those with healthy doctrine from those with unhealthy doctrine. Because those with healthy doctrine are those who are being taught by the saving grace of God.

And who know their purpose is to be beautiful for the return of their Redeemer. And so that means, doesn't it, that we, that we, the church, will walk a different path.

[4 : 17] Go a different way from the false teachers and from everyone else. That is what we saw last week.

Not going with a flow, but going towards godliness. And this week, as I mentioned just a moment ago, we're coming back to the same passage. But we're focusing this evening specifically on what Titus is to teach.

And so what the church is to be. And I'll come back around to this again at the end. But let me just say here, this is just going to be a kind of surface-level introduction to these verses.

The point of Paul's exhortations to Titus is that he would keep on teaching and declaring these things. So there's lots in these verses that we're not going to cover. But that doesn't mean we just get to sort of leave them behind until we come back to preach through Titus in 10 years or whatever.

This is what discipleship will look like. Live lives like this. So ask questions about it afterwards if you've got them. I'm sure you will. Ask your elders. Ask your life group leaders.

[5 : 23] Ask myself or Joe or whoever. Ask yourself or whoever. Because we want to learn as best we can how to live a godly life. For the good of the gospel and for the glory of God.

So let us get into our one and only point this evening. Training in godliness for the goods of the gospel.

And this is, perhaps we should say right from the off, this is counter-cultural discipleship. So brace yourself. Brace yourself. Because we live, don't we?

We live in the now but not yet. And that means that there is still worldliness in us, isn't it? There is much that we absorb from the surrounding culture that we assume to be good and right.

Without ever considering whether it is really godly. That is in every one of us. So we need to come to these words humbly. Ready to learn.

[6 : 24] Ready to be corrected. Come with a heart of pride and you will almost certainly be offended if you think you know better. You will not learn. You will not grow in godliness.

But come humbly. Come with a soft heart. And you might still feel uncomfortable at points. But by God's grace we will be transformed.

And so made zealous for good works. What we're going to do here is simply take a moment to hear what is said to each particular group.

Apply that to our context. And then think about how that growth in godliness shines the light of the gospel. So three things in each kind of sub-point.

What is Paul saying? What does that mean for us? How does that defend sound doctrine? So let's begin in verse 2 there with older men. Older men.

[7 : 23] And perhaps even just two words in. We're already feeling, aren't we, kind of the cultural pushback against this. Because Paul does not hesitate, does he? He does not hesitate to group people together.

And say specific groups, specific demographics need specific exhortations. But the passage is unmistakably clear. Men and women at different ages, different stages of life, need to be called away from particular worldly passions.

And need to be called to particularly God-given roles. That's immediately, isn't it, going a little against the grain.

But this is God's better design than whatever the world might offer. To be clear, there is no inequality. But to be equally clear, there is difference.

We'll see that as we go. But for now, let's come to the older men. The commentaries I read this week suggested that the age range this word has in mind is kind of over 40. Maybe you didn't think you were old, but there you have it.

[8 : 34] I'm not going to do the same thing with the older women. We don't need to be specific, do we? But I think it's helpful to have a kind of ballpark figure in mind.

Older men, verse 2, are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness.

Let's just run through those six things quickly and then pull back to see that the thread that holds them all together. Sober-minded is a kind of level-headedness.

A clear thinking so that you are trusted by others to respond reasonably. Dignified speaks of every kind of commendable conduct that others cannot help but revere.

The kind of life that people look at and can do nothing but respect and honor them. Self-controlled, we mentioned this a little last week, is the discipline, right, not to give in to our desires, but rather to be in control of them.

[9 : 51] That doesn't mean being emotionless. It is about the ability to restrain yourself, to hold back, to stop yourself from doing something you know you shouldn't when your impulse is to just go and do it.

Sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, and sound or healthy in faith, love, and endurance. And this is where I think we really see what Paul is getting at. Faith speaks of a relationship with God.

Love speaks of close relationships with others. Endurance speaks of perseverance in those relationships.

Piece that all together. And the full picture we get here, isn't it, is one of a man who loves his brothers and sisters in Christ. Who loves the Lord.

And the goodness of those relationships is there for all to see. So that onlookers cannot do anything but respect him.

[11 : 01] Honor him. I think Titus is to challenge the older men to be seen in Crete, to be honorable in their relationships amongst others and with God.

I think in our context we can maybe take one step further back as we press this home. A particular challenge, I think, maybe for older men in the church today is to be seen.

To be seen. To be honorable in their relationships with others and with God. Because there is a tendency, I think, isn't there?

For older men to shrink to the sidelines. To lean on old age as a reason to take a seat on the subs bench. When they should be taking the captain's armband.

And using their experience to lead by example. To be visibly faithful to God. And to the rest of the church.

[12 : 08] To love the Lord and love others. And to be known for it. Now that is counter-cultural, isn't it?

Because which demographic are the worst at investing in relationships? I've not reached the 40-year-old mark yet.

But as the years go on, I can see this coming. And we want to say, don't we, that's just men being men. But it's not.

That's the whole point, right? It's maybe what our culture has decided it's okay or fine for men to be like. But it is not the biblical vision of mature manhood.

God wants to see older men. God wants to see older men stand up. And take on responsibility.

[13 : 13] Take the lead. In relationships. Set an example of what it means to live a life of faith, love, and endurance. So, older men, let me ask you, is that you?

Is that who you are? Are you committed to your relationship with God and his people? And can the church, can the world see that?

As I was thinking about what this kind of older man would look like, I put a few sentences together, looked down at what I'd written, and immediately actually thought of a man called Bob Aykroyd.

Now, some of you won't know who Bob is. If you want to know something of who Bob is, read verse 2. Just one example. Bob is now a lecturer at the seminary down in Edinburgh.

Most nights, Bob will pick up the phone and just chat with a young Christian to see how they're doing. Now, that is very simple, isn't it?

[14 : 24] It only takes 15 minutes or so. In fact, I don't think it takes Bob 15 minutes because he's usually making dinner at the same time with 34 different pans clattering in the background. But even in that one act alone, you know, right, don't you?

You know there is a man who loves the Lord. There is a man who loves the church. There is a man who perseveres. Now, we don't all have to be Bob phoning people every night.

One Bob's more than enough in the world. But do you see how simple a thing it is? And how good a thing that is for the church.

You will be able to speak to countless young men across the domination. And Bob has been instrumental in their life of faith. Simply because he gave them a call once every two months.

When an older man loves the Lord, loves his people, and lives that life out in the open, it is a great thing. It is a great thing for the church.

[15 : 32] So, older men, let me encourage you to stand up and reach out. Why not pick up the phone? Ask someone after the service, do you want to meet up for a coffee this week?

Come to the prayer meeting. Whatever it is, what we want to say is, right, do not hide. Do not fade into obscurity, but show your love for Jesus and your love for others for the good of the gospel.

Because the church and the world will see a difference in that. Like a shining light when they see men like you, not folding into themselves, but opening themselves up to others.

It is a wonderful testimony to the life-changing power of the gospel and the good that can come from it. Secondly, Paul moves on to older women.

I'm going to be very careful who I look at here. Verse 3, Older women, likewise, are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine.

[16:39] They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women. We'll come on to the rest of verse 4 and 5 in a little minute. Again, the word for reverent there is actually very closely connected to the word for a priestess.

And again, I think the point is similar to what has just been said to older men. They are to live a life that is obviously God-centered. They are to conduct themselves in such a way that it is clear to everyone who they are committed to.

We are here to serve the Lord. Visibly devoted to Jesus and his church. And I think we get an idea of what that reverent life is to look like from the three instructions that follow, which I think can be summarized as not against others, not for yourself, but for others.

And not against others, don't be slanderers. Slanderers. If older men are prone to not speaking to people enough, older women can be prone to speaking about people too much.

And not all that is good. Slandering is taking part in any kind of malicious gossip. Not just gossiping yourself, but being part of conversations where that is happening.

[18:04] Older women are not to be against others, that they are not to take part in that kind of behavior, in that kind of speech. And they are to show that with their words, right, and what they will allow others to say too.

Not against others and not to be for themselves. But Paul says there, doesn't he, don't not to be slaves to much wine. I think it's helpful, but when Paul condemns drunkenness, he says drunkenness.

So there's something slightly different in view here. And what I think that is, right, is that Paul has not so much in mind kind of heavy drinking on a night out, more kind of cocktails with breakfast, brunch, lunch, and dinner.

But the point is, right, that was the life of luxury in Crete. Right, you made it when you could sit around drinking wine all day. In the Cretan lifestyle magazines, you would have seen women sipping a glass of red wine from daybreak until sunset.

That was the ideal. A luxurious life of self-indulgence. That might be wine, in our context.

[19:18] It might not be. It might just be a year full of trips abroad. A bathroom full of the most fashionable cosmetics. It might be a pristine garden. But the point is, whatever, you are in it for yourself.

You are indulging yourself in luxuries. You're indulging your desires, your appetites, so that you can have the so-called good life.

But older women, older godly women, are not to be like that. They're not to be against others.

They're not to be for themselves. Instead, they are to be for others.

End of verse 3 into verse 4. However, older women are to teach what is good and so train younger women. In a world that is so concerned with the individual and giving time to ourselves, godly older women are to be known for giving themselves.

Giving themselves to younger women, giving their time, their energy, their knowledge, their wisdom, passing on what they have. Not for their own sake, but for the sake of those that they are investing in.

[20:32] Now I want to say, I think this is something we see a lot of in our church family. And it is a wonderful thing. Let me encourage you, older and middle-aged women, to keep going in that.

Keep investing in the young women in this church. It is a wonderful thing. But as you do so, let me also exhort you, right, to make sure you are not speaking against others, that you are not indulging yourself in the midst of that.

Watch what you say. Watch what you say about other people. Watch how much you speak about other people when it doesn't need to be said. And maybe if you are not already investing in the life of younger women, think about how you can be.

With whatever time and energy you have, how can you be teaching what is good by training the younger women in this church? We'll see in a moment what is to be taught before we get there.

I think it is just very briefly pointing out. What have we seen so far? We've seen Titus is to teach the older men. Titus is to teach the older women.

[21:46] We'll see in a moment that Titus is to teach the younger men. But when it comes to younger women, it is older women who are to be teaching them.

This obviously does not mean men cannot speak to women or that no knowledge or wisdom can cross gender lines. But it does mean that on a personal level, apart from a woman's husband, if she has one, the primary influence on a young woman's life should be an older woman, not a man. For the good of the woman and for the good of the gospel. For the witness of the gospel. We're going to move on to younger women now, but as we come to this, remember, older women, this, as we see in these verses, is what you are to be teaching.

Verse 4, younger women are 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 might not be reviled.

Once more, we immediately, don't we see the outward orientation. Younger women are not to live life for themselves, they are to love their husbands and love their children.

[23 : 13] They are also to be self-controlled, we've seen that now with older men, older women, and younger women. They are to be pure, and they are to work at home.

That's where it really starts in the sandpaper, doesn't it? Now, we want to be clear what Paul isn't saying here. We also want to be clear what Paul is saying here.

Right, Paul is not saying women cannot work in full or part-time employment. He is not saying that women cannot or should not have normal, regular, everyday jobs.

Right, Paul himself worked with a woman called Aquila. He made tents with her. And most pertinently, I think the wise woman of Proverbs 31, right, the archetypal, godly woman that is active in the marketplace.

But the wise woman of Proverbs does not only work in the marketplace. Before that, she is hard at work in the home.

[24 : 20] And that, I think, is the emphasis of these words here. This is not against busyness in the workplace. It is against idleness in the home. Now, we've seen that, haven't we, a bit with the Cretan culture already, lazy gluttons.

There was obviously a tendency in Crete to see how little you could get off with doing. But Paul says, no, no, no. Work. Work hard, wherever you are. Even if you are at home all day, make sure you are working hard at home.

So women absolutely can and at times definitely should work. Having said that, I think these verses do make clear that young women, marriage young women, and especially those with children, are to make home life their priority.

That is to be the most important thing for them. One commentator says, and I agree with him, that while this is not a command for women to stay at home, the apostle, without question, ranks a wife's obligations to care for her husband and children over her personal benefit or fulfillment.

any woman who makes career status or financial advantage a higher priority in her life than the welfare of her marriage, children, or home transgresses scripture.

[25 : 46] That's going against the grain, isn't it? That's countercultural discipleship. in a world that says we should put ourselves, our ambitions, our desires first, God says put your family first.

Love your husband and children. Prioritize your home over your career. The feathers are probably already ruffled, so before they settle back into place, let's look at the rest of verse 5.

Young women are to be working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands. Again, this is not Paul saying women are to be submissive to men.

Wives are to be submissive to their own husbands. nor is it saying that a wife is to suppress her intelligence or gifts or talents in the home. Rather, I think it is saying that a wife should fully express her gifts, her talents, her intelligence for the purpose of supporting her husband's spiritual leadership in the home.

The point of submission is not suppression but proper expression. Supporting the husband in his duty to sacrificially love his wife and lead the household.

[27 : 21] And the result is that the word of God would not be reviled. reviled. That's interesting, isn't it? Because I reckon most people's gut reaction is that it would be exactly this kind of thing that would cause the word of God to be reviled.

Here come those oppressive anti-woman Christians again. But Paul is quite confident it will be the opposite. And I think what makes that difference is whether young women are taught or told to make the home a priority and submit to their husbands.

If I went home and told Mary, right, you must prioritize me and our home life. You must submit to me without ever her ever receiving any teaching on that front.

It would come as no surprise, would it, if she grumbled about that in conversations with friends, if she begrudged it in her heart. But because Mary has been taught to prioritize home life by her mum and by other godly women, she loves to do that so that when other people ask her about it, she does not revile it in the slightest, but delights in it and loves to speak about the goodness of it. Everyone would know that she does it because she loves to, not because it is what has been told to do, but because it is what she has been taught to do.

[29 : 13] That again, isn't it, shows the part that the older women can play in this, in teaching this, and that can be, I think, a very powerful witness. People might not agree with it, but a wife or a young mother who can say my priority in life is not me, it is not my career, it is not what people think of me, it is not what I get, it is not how much money I earn, but it is others.

It is my husband's, it is my children. A young woman who is able to say that to non-Christian friends, to be able to say I am not interested in things being as easy as possible for me, but as good as possible for my husband and children, that will surprise people.

And I think if that testimony comes from their lips, the word of God will not be reviled. So older women, teach this, teach this to the younger women.

And young women, it is worth asking yourself, do you delight to prioritize your home? Do your colleagues at work know that your career is not your priority?

Do you speak warmly and supportively of your husband when he isn't around? Are you working hard at home to cultivate a godly household and support the spiritual leadership of your spouse?

[30 : 43] before we move on, I think just a very brief word that I think is worth saying. Because of the cultural circumstances, single young women living alone would very seldom happen, if at all.

So Paul does not really address here, does he, single young women? It's quite clear in what he says that he expects these women to be married at least and likely have children.

If that is you, if you're a single young woman, I think there are still principles here that carry, aren't there? Be loving, be self-controlled, be pure, be kind.

And I suppose, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7, as long as you are single, use it for the Lord. words. But whether you want it or not, it is something God has given you, so make the best use of it, to love and serve the church family.

Fourthly, then, Paul addresses young men. And this one stands out a bit from the rest, doesn't it? It stands out for its brevity.

[32 : 03] Like a boxer's jab, sometimes the most effective way to say something is to keep it short and sharp. It's short not because young men have less to work on than everyone else.

It's short because there is one shortfall present in young men that stands head and shoulders above everything else. That is a lack of self-control.

Urge the younger men to be self-controlled. Self-control has been mentioned to everyone. Here it takes center stage and we know why, don't we? Porn, sex, gambling, alcohol, crude conversations, selfish ambition, jealousy, anger, take any of the above and many more.

When it comes to counter-cultural discipleship, when it comes to young men, there is one area that efforts need to be concentrated on, isn't there? Young men, you know that.

You know that. Young men, you must learn to be self-controlled. To learn to long to do what is right, rather than simply giving in to what feels right or good in the moment.

[33 : 41] And Titus is to lead by example on that front. In verse seven and eight, Paul addresses Titus as a young man amongst young men. And I think he's saying to him, don't wait for an example to be set, but set the example.

Be a model of good works and a model of good speech. And I think we can stretch that out a little, right? We were thinking last week, weren't we, about how the temptation is always to fall in with the crowd, to go with the flow.

But that is especially the case amongst our peers, isn't it? We can present ourselves one way to our elders, people older than us, another way to those who are younger than us.

But when it comes to hanging out with people at our own age and stage, all of a sudden the guardrails fall off. And there is very little self control. But Paul says to Titus, don't fall in line, but stand up.

Stand up and stand out as an example of godliness. So whoever you are, man or woman, 15, 30, 50 or 80, let me encourage you, do not wait for someone else to set the trend, but rather start living a godly life yourself.

[35 : 00] Go and be that person now, a model of good works and a model of good speech. Just before we close, let us come very briefly to bond servants there in the last couple of verses.

Joe mentioned actually a little bit last Sunday morning. Bond servants, they were slaves. The Bible, well the ESV kind of translation doesn't use that word because they weren't slaves in the way that we might often think of slavery in terms of the horrendous nature of the North American slave trades.

It wasn't necessarily as bad as that, but it was not good. It was evil. But by addressing bond servants, Paul is not condoning slavery.

In fact, by addressing them, he's treating them as equals in a way that would not have been expected. So the gospel was sowing the seeds of slavery's destruction, but those days had not yet arrived, and so bond servants, they needed to know how were they to live, how were they to conduct themselves as Christians.

The answer, Paul says, is not to cause an uprising, but to show good faith, to work hard, to please their masters, to be honest.

[36 : 25] Now, we could draw a few lines over to the modern-day workplace, but I think the more important takeaway is to recognize that whatever situation we find ourselves in, however unhappy we might be about it, whatever injustice might have happened, when it comes to how we conduct ourselves, how we live, when it comes to asking the question, what is the life here that accords with sound doctrine?

When that is our question, when we want to know how we can adorn the gospel of God our Savior, the answer will never be start an argument, cause a riot, steal something back. the answer will always be live in such a way that causes whoever is watching on to see something very, very, very different about those who believe in Jesus, whether it is older men who are known for loving others, whether it is older women who forego the comforts of old age and instead give their time and energy to teach younger women, whether it is younger women who prioritise their household, love their families and to submit to their husbands, or younger men who manage to exhibit some self-control.

They will all cause people to turn their heads and take notice and say, there is something, there is something about what they believe.

Now, as I said at the start, this is just the beginning. I've probably gone on for too long and yet said so much less than I wanted to. There are parts of this that we've had to glance over, but this is not the end.

This is the beginning of countercultural discipleship. This is what Titus is to teach, not as a one-off, but constantly. This is what he used to declare, to exhort and to rebuke.

[38 : 26] So come with your questions. Ask your questions. Speak to those you trust. But also, as we do that, let us live these lives as best we can, so that the goodness of the gospel would be seen, so the world would see that Jesus really does transform lives, not just internally, but externally.

that they would see the people of Christ shining like lights in a dark world. And for all the good that godly lives will do for the growth of gospel, even more importantly, even more importantly, godly lives will prepare us, the bride of Christ, for the return of our glorious Redeemer.

This is who you and I were saved to be. So let us live out our heavenly calling and make known our glorious Savior. Let us pray.

Father, we thank you that Jesus Christ came to save us and to teach us us. Lord, we pray that by your grace you would continue to teach us through this passage, through your word.

Lord, that we would take to heart humbly what we need to take to heart, that by your spirit we would be changed what we need to change. But above all else, Lord, that you would be honored and glorified through us.

[40 : 12] Help us to adorn the gospel through our lives, to make known the glory of Jesus us as we look forward to his coming again. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.