

Sunday 29th August 2021

Titus 2 (Doing the right thing)

Talk by Andrew Griffiths, Prayers by Julian Providence

Hi, my name is Andrew and thanks for downloading the talk from St John's Penge, for Sunday 29 August. This morning, I will be reading Titus 2, giving a short talk and then Julian will pray.

Reading - Doing good for the sake of the gospel

² You, however, must teach what is appropriate to sound doctrine. ² Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance.

³ Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. ⁴ Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, ⁵ to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.

⁶ Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. ⁷ In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness ⁸ and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.

⁹ Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, ¹⁰ and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Saviour attractive.

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. ¹² It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope – the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

¹⁵ These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you.

Talk

Alex and I watch a rather sweet TV comedy called Ted Lasso. Have you heard of it? It's about an American who comes to manage a fictitious football team called Richmond FC, despite knowing nothing about football – he doesn't know the rules, any of the players, nothing. The drama is about how he uses being good, honest, and acting with integrity to make the people around him better people.

When I read this passage preparing for the service today, I was reminded of one of Ted Lasso's sayings. 'Doing the right thing is never the wrong thing.' It's such a truism and is entirely obvious. But it has really stayed with me as a phrase. It keeps hitting me how profound it is, as a saying, despite it being completely obvious. Because whilst it entirely tautological – in that wrong is the opposite of right – it is something that is really easy to forget. Like when you're in the right queue, and someone cuts in and gets away with it – it can be easy to think 'ah, I wish I'd done that'... but then, doing the right thing is never the wrong thing. Or when you find a wallet on the floor of a bus with £200 in it, and hand the whole lot to the bus driver, who says 'you could have kept some of that and got away with it.' But, doing the right thing is never the wrong thing.

I genuinely think about that saying about 10 times every time I drive my car and someone in front does something wrong, jumps a queue and cuts in at the lights; or when you're on your bike and stop at the lights and another cyclist bombs past you through the red. It reminds me that even when things don't go your way because of doing the right thing, it is never, ever, can never be, the wrong thing – and the simple fact that it is the right thing to do, that makes it the right thing to do. It can be as simple as that.

And today's passage really reminded me of that saying, because it is about doing the right thing, no matter what circumstances you find yourself in. Paul wrote this letter to Titus, who was leading the church in Crete, but it has relevance for us all now. On the surface, the passage just gives some, potentially dated, advice to older men, older women, and young men; and some definitely dated advice to slaves. But there is something deeper to be found in each of them.

First, older men, verse 2: 'be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance.' The key to this guidance from Paul is that he asks them to be 'worthy of respect'. He does not tell them to demand respect, but to be worthy of it. Because Paul knew that in the culture he was writing, respect was automatically given to older men – and he was telling them to be worthy of it. How were they to be worthy – by self-control, faith, love, and endurance. By living out the fruits of the spirit, that Paul had outlined himself in his letter to the Galatians, chapter 5. Paul did not validate the position that society already gave older men, he told them to use this position as a way of demonstrating God's love – by living as Christ called them to and living as loving, kind and gentle people who deserved respect for who they were.

Next, older women, verse 3: 'be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good.' Older women were to be teachers, to share their wisdom and use the position in the culture they lived in to help others.

Young women, verse 4 and 5, are given some definitely gender-normative advice, which if I asked Alex to follow would not end well. 1950s advice to wives from a home economics textbook: At the time of your husband's arrival home from work, eliminate all the noises of the washer, dryer, dishwasher, and vacuum. You've had plenty of time to do these things during the day. Don't do them now. Encourage your children to be quiet. Be happy to see your husband. Greet him with a warm smile. Hmmm... However, Titus is not about

reinforcing the gender stereotypes we see in these verses 4 and 5, he simply recognises that they are there. Paul knows that this is what is expected of young women, but the instruction is slightly different – it is, verse 5, important to use your role ‘so that no one will malign the word of God.’ Young men are to be self-controlled ‘so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.’ Verse 8.

And slaves are called to act ‘so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Saviour attractive’. Verse 10. This is a difficult one, because it feels like Paul is validating the role of a slave. But he is not. This is the same Paul, who wrote in Galatians 5:1: It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. For Paul, the gospel was always about freedom – freedom from the law of Moses, freedom from the artificial barrier of Jew and Gentile, and freedom from the burden of sin. And it was also freedom from slavery – this was a key part of Paul’s teaching.

How does this tie in with Paul’s teaching in Titus 2? To understand that, it is important to know what a slave was – a slave was, is, a possession. A slave is a person who is told that they are no longer defined by their agency, their own will, but by the will of another – they are told that they exist to do the bidding of another, who is intrinsically more valuable than them. Slavery is evil and against all of God’s will. And we see more now than we have ever seen – evil, which the church must continue to call out. Because it stands against the gospel we proclaim.

And Paul realised and spoke to slaves about the most powerful thing to combat slavery – the sense of agency, of their ability to make a change in their lives and the lives of others through their actions. They were to act to bring about faith in others, particularly those who had stolen their freedom. Martin Luther King once said, ‘as long as the mind is enslaved, the body can never be free. Psychological freedom, a firm sense of self-esteem, is the most powerful weapon against the long night of physical slavery’. Paul’s message was the same – he told slaves to use the freedom of the gospel to convert their owners, to tell those who sought to suppress their freedom how they could be truly free.

To all of the people Paul was writing, he calls for them to live their lives in a way that shines back to Christ and the gospel. He does not simply agree with the existing culture or supports it – he calls people to use the position they have in their culture, whatever that is, to show God’s love and the gospel. Whatever their situation or circumstances, they are called to do what is right. Because doing the right thing is never the wrong thing.

What about our lives, our culture? What circumstances do you find yourself in? To the person in management: how can you act as a caring, self-controlled, and gentle way, that helps the people you manage to grow, develop and flourish as people? To the person being managed badly: how can you act in a way that helps your manager to know how to trust others? To those who have retired: how can you use your freedom to help other people, showing a caring and loving God? I could go on – in every circumstance we are called to think ‘how can the choices I make help people to know more about God, and how much He loves them?’

Verses 11-14 bear repeating here: For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. ¹² It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope – the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Are you eager to do what is good?

Because, and I really can't stress this enough, doing the right thing is never the wrong thing.

Amen.

And now Julian will continue with the prayers.

Prayers

Lord thank you for bringing us together again this morning and thank you for all your blessings over the past week - for food and shelter, for family and friends, for safety and comfort, for our health even when may not be its best. Thank you for the beauty of nature, even in our city. Lord would you help us to remember our blessings. Let them be a reminder to us of your love care for this world. Let us thank you and praise you for your faithfulness and lovingkindness as we recognise your goodness in our lives. And most of all thank you that we are here this morning because you loved us so much that you sent your Son to die in our place. Whatever happens now we are promised an eternal life with you.

We pray for our world where for so many your love and blessing seems so distant and even absent.

We remember Afghanistan at this time. News coming out of that country is of the desperation and fear and chaos people are facing trying to flee the Taliban and of people trapped and families separated with opportunities to leave now closed. Many who waited for days in the hope of rescue are seeing their hopes for a life of freedom and civility now vanishing. Lord, this feels so tragic and heartbreaking. I wondered if for a few moments we could lift Afghanistan before the Lord and cry out in our hearts for those who appear to be facing such a bleak future...

Lord we don't know how this can be fixed or if it can be fixed but we do pray somehow Holy Spirit you will hold back the darkness that threatens to swallow Afghanistan. The force of evil in that country is now strong, yet you are infinitely greater. Please Lord exercise your will in and for that nation. We pray for the Taliban. Though they have set themselves on a course of darkness shine your light upon them Lord and turn them from their evil way. We pray over more moderate factions of the Taliban that those voices would be protected and gain strength support among them.

We also remember Haiti following the earthquake 2 weeks ago coming on the back of deadly flooding. Families are still living in shelters after thousands have been made homeless and many face food and water shortages. Please have mercy on Haiti. Please

move nations to provide aid and do not let them be forgotten. Please bring healing to that nation.

And in sorrow Lord we remember so many other places throughout this broken world where people are oppressed and their lives blighted by war. Please Lord bring an end to the suffering of people in those nations and bringing an end to those wars.

We remember your suffering church thinking of our brothers and sisters in Afghanistan under Taliban rule. We remember our brothers and sisters in nations around the world who continue to be intimidated, brutalised and martyred for their faithful love for you. Lord you know each one. Be close to your suffering church and continue to give strength and power to your precious ones to stand in the face of evil that your name would be glorified. As we look into the dark places of this world and even at times into the darkness of our own lives, we know and trust that you are faithful in your promise never to leave us. In this world Lord your light has shone in the darkness and the darkness can never overcome it (John 1:5).

We pray for the needs of our church family. We pray for Will and Kath and Sam. Please Holy Spirit surround and protect them we pray.

We ask for your healing hand to be on Betty and Val for them to regain mobility.

We lift up Linda and Sue and Linda's grandfather to you. Be with them as they grieve following Linda's grandmother's death.

We pray for Yvette asking that you would speed healing from shingles and soothe any pain she may still have.

We pray for Maria. We thank you that she is part of our family with husband Harold. Please will you ready her body and mind for the radiotherapy and surgery she is to undergo. Lord we ask for her treatment to be effective. Please heal her Lord we pray. We ask for Maria and Harold to know the nearness of your presence and love throughout this time.

We thank you for the recent marriages Francoise & Mick and Ola & Sean. Please give them wisdom as they learn to live with one another in marriage and just to enjoy this new phase of life. Help them keep you close in their relationships.

We lift CAP to you and all those in the August CAP prayer requests. We thank you for CAP and how you demonstrate your love for people through it. Please will you help Lin, Rachel and Gareth prepare to reopen the service next month. Ready them mentally and spiritually to bear the burdens people will bring. We thank you for the new creation of a drop-in service. Please Lord we ask that you would bring forward volunteers to sustain this new outreach and that you will be at work through the drop-in. We pray many will come to know you through the work of CAP in the months ahead.

We pray for the needs of our church. Lord in response to the request for help sent out to us with so many roles at the church needing support would you speak to us. Please Lord prompt those with the time, talents and energy to help to come forward, giving them the courage and encouragement do so. Help all of us to be family at St John's as we serve you and one another.

Lord we thank you for all those working so hard to sustain St. Johns. Thank you for their faithfulness. Lord please bless and sustain them and help them find places of rest. Help us not to take them for granted but to work together for your Kingdom, serving you and one another.

Lord it has been hard throughout the past year and a half to be a family at St John's in the way we were before, especially without a church leader. Father You are the same God who "makes rivers flow on barren heights and springs within the valley. Who turns the desert into pools of water and the parched ground into springs." (Isaiah 41:18).

Lord God refresh and renew your people after months of dryness and separation. Please restore to us what the pandemic has taken. Cause our relationships to grow and flourish again and renew in us your purposes and vision for us and Your Kingdom here and let your love fall on us like rain dry ground.

We pray for our new vicar, Jessica. Thank you for answered prayer in bringing her here Lord. We pray you would be with her, be speaking to her with your thoughts and inspiration for the future of St John's and Holy Trinity. Help her with all the practical arrangements of moving in. Lord we look forward to her coming and all that you will do through Jessica and the new family of St John's and Holy Trinity.

We do pray for Holy Trinity that you will sustain them in life without Nick and be close to them, helping them prepare for us to join together with them as one church.

We pray our family prayer...

Our Father in heaven
Hallowed be your name
Your kingdom come
Your will be done earth as in heaven
Give us today our daily bread
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil
For the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory are yours now and forever.

Amen.

Thank you and God bless.