

## Church Matters: Studies in Paul's letter to Titus

### New Life! New Motives!

Titus 2:1-15

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### Stormzy—A New Life?

I watched a Louis Theroux interview with the rapper Stormzy this week. During lockdown Stormzy says he had a spiritual awakening in which he began to pray and read the Bible. Two changes in his life, seem to confirm his claim. His lyrics have become cleaner and more wholesome. And he's begun to forgive his dad who walked out on him when he was an infant. Time will tell, but a changed life is the surest proof of real faith in Jesus Christ, for *"If anyone is in Christ they are a new creation, the old has gone and the new has come."* (2 Cor 5:17)

You ask, how do those changes take place? Well here it is, *"Work out your salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose."* (Philippians 2:12-13) "God is at work in you", powerfully, continually, making you more like Jesus— God, the Holy Spirit is the ultimate cause of all the changes. But since we're not robots, we've got a role to play, we've got to work these things out, we've got to repent, we've got to put off the old life and put on the new. We've got to find out what pleases the Lord Jesus and obey him. It's a partnership, if you will. God is the supreme energizer but he expects us to co-operate.

The verses we're looking at today, Titus 2:1-8, are about our role, the changes we are called to make, the behaviour we should line ourselves up with. But let's not forget, as we go along, that the Lord is the one who empowers us to change. We must act for sure, but ultimately his Spirit is the powerhouse.

And let's also not forget as we come to these "do, do, do" verses, that Christianity is not a list of rules, a code of conduct. Christianity is primarily a new relationship with God through Jesus Christ, whereby God has become our Father, we his much loved children; and our obedience flows out of our love for him; we want to live lives that please him because he first loved us. Let's keep these thoughts in our hearts as we proceed.

Paul says “this is what it looks like to be a Christian older man, a Christian older sister, a Christian younger sister, a Christian younger man. Here are the patterns of behaviour, the Lord wants each of these four group to aspire to.” We all follow models, we all need to know what it looks like to be an older Christian man, what it looks like to be a younger Christian woman. If we’re not given those examples, then we’re likely to default to the examples in the world around us.

An older man may pick up a copy of “The Oldie” magazine, for example, and copy the behaviour of some wrinkled star! A younger sister, on the other hand, might follow the life of a Kardashian; a young man, the pattern of a sporting hero, and so on. It’s no accident that the word “follow” is used on social media!

Paul says “here are four godly patterns, one for each group, older brother, older sister, younger sister, younger brother.”

We should take note, that Paul begins with older folks, “teach the older men, verse 2”, “Teach the older women, verse 3.” I don’t know what the dividing age between young and old, you need to work that out for yourself. Are you an older person or a younger person? Work it out. What is significant here, is that Paul does not assume the churches on the island of Crete are “Hillsong” Know what I’m talking about? Look at any video of a Hillsong congregation and you won’t see a grey hair in sight. The culture and the music of the church is so slanted towards youth, older saints are shocked or shooed away. There is something seriously wrong with a monochrome church which contains just young people, or just older people. On the island of Crete, people of all ages had responded to the Gospel! We thank the Lord, for the different ages of believers at MPC. That’s the way the Lord wants it to be!

### **Older Christians, this is for you!**

*“Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled and sound in faith, in love and endurance. 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.”*

Older men, you are given four words which fit together like four pieces of a single jigsaw puzzle and which could be summarised “be dignified.” An elderly Christian man should be *Temperate*—level-headed. If the vice of younger men is running to extremes, the virtue of an older Christian man should be level headedness. He should

be *worthy of respect*—some older men think that just because they have grey hair, they should be respected. But Paul says—respect needs to be earned. One African commentator writes: *“In Africa, elders are respected and thus they sometimes consider themselves above the law and entitled to do as they please. Paul, however tells them, they should be respected not just because they have cultural authority over the young but because their lives inspire respect.”* *“Too many old people forfeit respect because they are malicious and pass their time drinking or gossiping.”*

Older men should be *self-controlled*. This is a word that Paul gives to everyone. Learn to control your thoughts, your tongue, your words. Old men must be sound. *Sound in their faith*—in what they believe, settled, sure of their doctrine. *Sound in love for other people*—in a culture that encourages older people to think about themselves and their hobbies—“you deserve it after all those years of work,” Paul says to older men—continue to think of others, continue to love other people, be sound in love. When I was a younger man, two older men took a real interest in my spiritual well-being and my future, they had a profound influence on my future—older men, you’ve got a vital role to play! And *Sound in endurance*—don’t whinge and moan about all your life trials. I knew of a man who dreaded visiting his aging parents because all he got was a catalogue of ailments, “this hurts, that doesn't work properly!” In fact he had begun to call those visits “the organ recital!” Christian men should be sound in endurance! Older Christian men, work this out!

Older sisters are given four words. They must be *reverent* in the way they live—literally exhibit sacred behaviour. In some films, older women are portrayed as living out a second teen age. “Mutton dressed as lamb,” they hit the town! That behaviour is precisely what older Christian women must *avoid*. “Be reverent in the way you live.” Older sisters must not slander. Slander is malicious gossip—passing on juicy morsels, that are either true or not true, but which you know could be harmful. Older sisters if you have more time on your hands in the winter of your life, don’t squander it slandering others, instead use it to teach the younger women, back to that in a moment. Older Sister must not *be addicted to much wine*. Alcohol consumption for both men and women rises in England with age, then tapers off at the end of life. And it’s clear that men have the bigger problem than women. We don’t know if drinking was a particular problem on the island of Crete, among older women, if they had too much time on their hands, or too much disposable income, or were in the habit of drowning decades of sorrows with booze. We don’t know, but moderation in drink is exhorted for the older sisters. And fourthly, older sisters must *“teach what is good”* —

meaning, teach younger sisters, as verse 4 does on to say. Older sisters you have a wonderful role to play getting alongside younger sisters, setting them a godly example, teaching them how to live a godly life as a Christian wife and mother. This is what discipleship in the church is all about, the older Christians taking the younger Christians under their wings. What vast supplies of godly wisdom are stored up in our older saints, which the Lord wants to see released into the church!

In an IC engine, there is a heavy flywheel, a disc of metal. The flywheel ensures that the car move steadily along the road. The pistons are constantly injecting the crankshaft with a blast of power, and without the flywheel, a car would judder and shudder along the road, giving an uncomfortable ride. But the flywheel, smooths out the jolts and impulses of the feisty pistons.

Older saints, you are the steady, calming, reverent, temperate, sound, flywheel of the local church!

### **Young People, listen Up!**

Younger women, first, *“Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, 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.”*

Young women must be taught *how learn to love their husbands and children*. How to love your husband and how to love your kids is a skill to be learnt. Suppose a new Christian wife thought that she should dress and behave like a Kardashian in order to love her husband. That sister needs an older sister what loving her husband truly means: *“Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewellery and fine clothes. Instead it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful.”* (1 Peter 3:3-5). Suppose a mother thinks that loving a child is about giving them whatever they want, (because that’s what her parents did) or since her parents did not discipline her, she needs to be superstrict with them. That mother needs an experienced older sister who has brought up children of her own to explain that love involves balance.

Younger sisters should be *“self-controlled and pure.”* There's the word self-controlled showing up again. Pure could also be translated chaste. Younger sisters, in an age

where many young women dress with ever-increasing immodesty, showing off every curve of the female body, perhaps the greatest immediate visible witness you can make in the world is by modest attire. I watched an interview with an old American man, I believe at the time of the interview, he was the oldest man in the USA. And he was asked about the changes he has seen in his life time, and among them he listed the dress of women. When he was a lad, so that is around 1910, he went on to say, he was lucky—his words—if he saw an ankle. Young sisters must *“be busy at home.”* Paul is not saying that a woman can’t work outside the home: the noble wife of Proverbs 31 has a role that extends outside the home, but she does not neglect her family responsibilities. A woman must never use her career as a cover to neglect her God-given responsibility as a wife and mother. She must be *“kind.”* Kindness is revealed in loving acts, whether small or great. You work this out. Young Christian women, fill your life with acts of kindness. And finally, younger sisters should be subject to their husbands, they must recognise the God-given order between men and women in marriage. Equal but different. Sisters need to work all of this out!

What about younger men? Just one word for you “encourage the young men to be self-controlled.” That’s not fair, say the other 3 groups! One word for young men, but four or five for the rest of us! But hear what Paul implies: that young men by nature lack self-control in *every single area* of life! They lack self-mastery in their speech, the proper use of time, how much they drink and, their emotions—you name it, they’re out of control! Young men are creatures of excess, indulgence, immoderation, subordination, intemperance and dissipation. Fact: some 75% of all offenders are men. Fact; men are almost twice as likely to binge drink than women. Fact: men are almost 20 times more likely to go to prison than women. And so the desperate need of young men is self-mastery! Paul is not letting young men off the hook, but saying they have a problem in every area of their lives! And so the one thing they need to work on is self-mastery! And young pastor Titus must set the young men an example: *“In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness 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.”*

We all need the grace and power to work these things out for ourselves, don’t we? And if we do, verse 10, what a wonderful motivation, we *“will make the teaching about God our Saviour attractive.”* The world is watching as well as listening, and if we live out these new lives, different lives, in the power of the Holy Spirit, the Lord will use those lives to draw other people to Jesus.