

Sermon to the saints of God assembled at Topeka – Sunday, April 14, 2019

It would take a year's worth of sermons, at minimum, to do full justice to the sobering text of the book of Titus. I am very thankful to those of my brothers who have touched on this doctrine from the pulpit before, and for both brothers and sisters in practical teaching throughout this body. This morning I would like to spend a little time on a few very focused concepts contained within this brief passage from Titus chapter 2:

1 But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine: 2 That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. 3 The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; 4 That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, 5 To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed. 6 Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded. 7 In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, 8 Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you. – Titus 2:1-8

First, a little background on this book of the Bible. It is often referred to by expositors, along with 1 and 2 Timothy (and by a few with Philemon) as a pastoral epistle, which are called this because they are originally addressed to brothers with pastoral oversight of churches and speak to issues of practical Christian life, doctrine and duties of elders or bishops. All the pastoral epistles are attributed to our brother Paul's pen – being guided with great precision and specificity by the Holy Spirit in their authorship and teaching. Titus was, at the time of this letter, a relatively young man who had travelled with and ministered unto Paul on his missionary journeys, and was ultimately charged with the responsibility, by brother Paul, of doctrinally unifying the 'house' churches that existed on Crete through teaching and oversight:

For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee: - Titus 1:5

Crete is a large island located in the central Mediterranean Sea off the southeast coast of Greece. During the infancy of the New Testament church dispensation, the culture of Crete was steeped in the polytheism and idolatry of Greek mythology and in the licentious, proud, deceitful and otherwise worldly manner of Greco-Roman culture, which was famously referred to by a reference by Paul in Titus 1 to a then-popular writing of Epimenides (a shepherd, turned self-proclaimed prophet who was a native of Crete):

One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, The Cretians are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies. – Titus 1:12

Paul's group had evangelized for Christ on that island in the early days of the church age, and the Lord had apparently added enough believers that someone would now need to stay and minister to this fledgling group of Christians. This epistle was written to give further instruction to Titus as to how to form the church(es) and to properly teach, exhort and otherwise minister unto their members.

There is no doubt that nearly all the new Cretan Christian brothers and sisters had experienced and were to continue to experience quite a shift in their thinking because of how radically different sound Christian doctrine commanded them to live and to comport themselves than in their past lives. There are expositors who lean somewhat heavily (too heavily, I am persuaded) on an explanation that the Cretan culture had been so thoroughly ingrained in these new Christians, prior to their calling, that the epistle is speaking specifically to them, in terms of changes that they must make in their lives if they were to follow Christ in earnest. This is all true – but it speaks to us in precisely the same way(s) as it did them. This is the revealed will of God – for all believers – at all times.

There are 4 categories of people spoken of in the selected passage of scripture for today: aged men, aged women, young women and young men. Outside of small children, this is the sum total of any called-out assembly of believers in Christ. This morning, I'd like to speak in greater detail on one aspect of this cluster of verses, as it relates to all four of those categories of people. But before I get to that, I'd like to make a couple observations about a few of the items in the list of good things that this passage of scripture specifically calls for the aged women to teach the young women (this, partly in response to questions that I have been asked about these things). The scripture commands the aged women to teach the young women to:

- love their own husbands
- love their children
- be keepers at home

When we look at this whole list of good things that the aged women are to teach the younger women, I think sometimes when we read this we think within ourselves: "Yup. Good list. It all makes sense to me! These are all really good things!" But there are a couple of notions that may look like nuanced understanding that I think are not really nuances, at all – but rather the main course! One of the first questions that might come to mind is: why would the Holy Spirit command the aged women to teach the young women (that is, those who are married or who

have their own children when it comes to this specific aspect of teaching) to ‘love their husbands’ and to ‘love their own children’? Remember – this is a letter written to exhort the church(es) to this behavior – not just at Crete, but for all of us, both at *that* time, and all of us who came after. Wouldn’t it be safe to say that most women at these churches (who were married or who had their own children) would say that they *already* loved their husbands and that they *already* loved their own children? Why would women need to be taught to do something that they *already* feel like they naturally do and had hearts full of?

I believe that it is because the natural heart of a woman is not to love her own husband, from a scriptural standpoint, but to still convince the conscience of a full and complete love. The flesh of woman (and man) tends to pride, to selfishness, to vanity, folly, sin, deceit and self-deceit. When you take the sum total of all the revealed will of God (which is the scripture) concerning how a wife ought to properly look at her husband, it creates a picture that most women snuff, bray and kick at secretly (in their flesh): even women who make a profession of faith. Not every aspect for every woman – but somewhere along the way, there may be some aspect of how they are commanded to manifest their love for their husbands (and to truly think of them in their hearts) that won’t quite set well with their flesh.

For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. – Gal. 5:17

These are all private notions of mind and heart, and are rarely voiced, especially in the context of knowing that they are all wrong. For some, it might be a loss of a sense of ‘freedom;’ to do what they want, when they want, with whomever they choose. For some, it may be a sense of being ‘career-minded,’ and looking vainly to that aspect of their lives for some sense of ‘self-worth’ or intellectual stimulation – perhaps even looking at their work day as the time of their greatest freedom. For others, it might be a sense of isolation, in not being able to just pick up and go talk to someone whenever they want, thereby fostering a growing resentment in their lot. (There are certainly valid situations where a wife might begin to feel isolated, and husbands, this is on you to not put your wife in the position to feel this particular despair and to do something about it if your wife ever gets in this place. After all, the aged women can’t teach the young women to love their own husbands if there is never a circumstance in which that teaching, and learning, can take place). Sowing to the spirit, and resisting the impulses of the flesh, is a process – sometimes quite a process. And for most of us, it is a lifelong process: a refining. This doesn’t, in any way, give an opening for making provision for the flesh, or to ‘get it out of your system,’ or for the older people to simply say ‘they will figure it out eventually’ – it is quite the opposite. Hence the exhortation for the aged women to teach this vital and wide-

ranging topic and spiritual skill-set to the young women. And of course, young women taking counsel from other young women, in this regard, bears little fruit. One of my blessed sisters told me a long while back that, in general, young women don't really have much to offer each other, besides some fleshly creature comfort; they can also offer one another the continuance of vanity, folly and intermittent strife and contention. A young woman might love her husband in a really romanticized way in her thoughts, but to love her husband in the only way that the Lord commands as acceptable is more work, more self-denial, more humility, more Christ-centered thinking, more proper laying things up in her heart, and more continual casting off of vanity than most are capable of in and of themselves. Each of them, to one degree or another, stand in need of great help and grace from God, and part of that help is the continual exhortation and teaching from those who know (from their own experience and more time spent with the scripture) what vanity and folly of youth looks like, as well as what good (from a purely scriptural standpoint) looks like.

The same notion is true of the exhortation for the aged women to teach the younger women to 'love their children.' Most mothers alive think they love their children – and I'm sure that, at a fundamental level, Christian women tend way more to the proper love of their children. But if it were not a necessary thing for that continual teaching to take place, then the commandment wouldn't be there. It is because the heart is prone to vanity and gratification that this teaching is necessary. Most young mothers think their children are way cuter, smarter, more advanced, loving and kind than they really are. And it doesn't matter if they really are all those things to the *nth* degree. There are many things we all do in the raising of our children that are not manifestations of spiritual love, but merely fleshly and pleasing. And though we all know, value and seek to obey the command to "raise (our) children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4) in the main, each of us has tendencies to make provisions for our weak flesh here, too. (Important to note here that this command is given specifically to fathers – and it is the fathers who set the policies for their wives to execute. So, again, the burden is on the father to make sure that the policies of child-raising are clear to their wives – don't leave her in a lurch here, husbands - and the wives to make it clear that they understand and will execute those policies faithfully). And it is equally important to note, here, that the expectation of aged women to teach the younger women to love their children implies two things. First, that not teaching the young women to (properly) love their children (sitting on your hands or leaving them alone in that work, for example), is wrong, harmful and not an instance of our reasonable service. Second, that teaching the young women to improperly 'love' their children (by either direct teaching or by example) is also wrong, harmful and not ministering in earnest.

The aged women are also commanded to teach the young women to be ‘keepers at home.’ Since, in that ripe, juicy cluster of teachings there are three that deal specifically with young women who have husbands and/or children, I think sometimes people assume that the ‘keepers at home’ also pertains only to young wives and/or young mothers. We all know that sobriety, discretion, chastity and goodness are all notions that properly pertain to all young, godly women – regardless of their lot. But ‘keepers at home’ is also a hallmark of any godly young woman, regardless of lot. If a young woman is married, she is the keeper at home for the sake of being a help meet to her husband and under his godly authority. But if a young woman is not married, she is still under the authority of her father (parents), and her first and main practical priority ought to be doing everything she can to help her parents in being a ‘keeper at home.’ If there is a mother in that home (whether a father is there or not), then that young woman ought to be figuratively joined at her mother’s hip to help. If there is no mother in the home, then that effort ought to be redoubled, and her focus even sharpened, in being a keeper at home to help her father. In none of these situations should the young women seek to be out of their houses as either a first or second impulse – there are many things that pull them away from their homes enough already: work, school, general ministering, learning from aged women, etc. I don’t think that scriptures teach that there is some ‘neutral zone’ in between the time someone is a little girl and when she becomes a young woman to whom these scriptures apply. You are a girl until you are a young woman – and when you become a young woman, you have the specific duty, in that lot, to learn to be a ‘keeper at home,’ amongst many other lessons. It is both a practical help to your home, and a great teacher in sobriety and self-denial.

Now to the concept of sobriety, which is the main focus of what remains of this sermon. All four of the categories of people spoken to in this blessed cluster of practical doctrine are exhorted to sobriety. Aged men are specifically called to be, amongst other things, sober. Aged women are called to be the same by implication (you can’t be a teacher of that which you do not know). Young women are to be taught to be sober (as they generally stand in need of it to a much greater degree than do the aged women). Finally, young men are to be exhorted to be sober-minded. Beloved, the vitality of this practical doctrine lies specifically within the notion that none of us has the natural proclivity to sobriety, but to the opposite. As we get older, this tendency is hopefully lessened by the refining that has taken place in our hearts by being corrected as sons by our blessed Lord:

5 And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: 6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. 7 If ye

endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? 8 But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. 9 Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? 10 For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. 11 Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. – Heb. 12: 5-11

(We know that this passage of scripture has a specific context for the elect Jews at the coming of Christ, but we also know that it has direct practical application to all of our hearts in how God refines the heart of the believer). Nearly all young men and women, by the nature of their circumstances and brief years, lack both a wealth of experience and many trials of their faith through the chastening hand of the Lord. These are two *great* teachers of the heart and the Lord provides most of us with many and varied lessons and refinements, or humbling, or ‘breaking’ of our hearts – blessing us with grace that tends to more frequency and sensitivity toward contrition and largely a greater sense of humility. Young men and women just don’t typically have much experience and haven’t experienced many trials at that stage of their lives. Some have, but many have suffered only the lightest of afflictions or annoyances and might have looked upon them, at the time, as the greatest of calamities (thereby showing a lesser sobriety). They can’t be moved toward greater sobriety by those two great teachers – experience and trials - at this stage of their lives, to the extent that older people have attained. That is why the command is there to *teach* the young women to be sober and to *exhort* the young men to be sober minded. It is most of what they will have by way of tending their hearts to sobriety, for the present (and it will, in time, grow further) – and we have no business leaving that teaching to time alone, or rationalizing within ourselves that “They are young – they’ll figure it out eventually.” If we do this, we are ignoring the commandment of God and replacing it with a heavy leaning upon our own understanding.

In verse 4 of Titus 2, the word that describes what the aged women are to do is *sophronizo*: which means: to teach to be sober

- 1) To restore to one’s senses
- 2) To moderate, control, curb, disciple
- 3) To hold one to his duty
- 4) To admonish, to exhort earnestly

Likewise, in verse 6, brother Titus (who is a relatively young man himself) is commanded to exhort the (other) young men (and by implication, this command is given to all the aged men, as well) to be sober minded. This sober mindedness is rendered from *sophroneo* (same root), and it means: be in right mind

- 1) To be of sound mind
- 2) To be in one's right mind
- 3) To exercise self-control
- 4) To put a moderate estimate upon one's self, to think of one's self soberly
- 5) To curb one's passions

Sobriety, in the proper spiritual context, means so much more than what Strong's or some other etymological analysis can provide. The best working general definition that I have come to is: a spiritual awareness beyond just (but certainly including) yourself. Spiritual awareness about what? Everything that we are about! With specificity, it encompasses what we are about, when we have the proper thoughts of God, in our minds and hearts, and it minimizes 'blind spots' (though never fully eliminating them).

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? – Jer. 17:9

Sobriety provides clear, steadfast answers to these questions, among others (and expressed in a variety of ways):

- What is my life really about?
- What is most important to me?
- What do people need?
- How can I help (serve) the Lord and therefore His people?
- What are Satan's devices? Am I ignorant of any of them that most specifically pertain to me? How do I achieve a lack of ignorance of Satan's devices?
- How can I keep from becoming entangled with the affairs of this life, though I live in and interact with the world?
- Am I fooling (deceiving) myself about any of these things, and therefore becoming hardened by the deceitfulness of sin? (It is called the deceitfulness of sin because you don't think it is happening when it really is. Your heart is deceived in it).

Sobriety is a big thing. It is one of the biggies. Charles recently preached on rejoicing, and it was really good stuff for us. But do you think that you can properly rejoice without sobriety? These concepts are completely intertwined – rejoicing is the by-product of right thinking about God, how you stand in relation to Him and therefore what you are called to do (and of course, doing

it). The main reason we are exhorted to sober mindedness and to exhort and teach one another to be sober minded is that our hearts and minds are NOT naturally inclined that way. Our proclivity is to vanity, sin, our own foolish notions and reasoning, and wandering far from God. The culture that we labor in is really not unlike that of Crete, except that Satan's devices are so much more varied, subtle and all-encompassing at this hour. We are literally inundated with Satan's devices everywhere, all day and all night. Anyone who doesn't see this, in light of the scripture, isn't seeing things soberly – and is either deeply ensnared at present or well on their way to it

Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. – Ro. 1:25

You will each deal, in your own way – whether through the workplace or in some other arena, with principalities and powers in high places, if you have not already.

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood (alone), but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. – Eph. 6:12

Do we really think that we will be largely left alone by Satan? Do we really think that, without sharpening our spiritual senses (becoming more sober), that most of those attacks will be easy to spot? Satan greatly desires that those who he perceives as godly men will not see to his attacks and be at ease, not thinking that there will be an assault upon him. In our sobriety, and in our spiritual maturity, we shed our ignorance of Satan's devices, thereby making it harder for him to get an advantage of us.

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: - 1Pet. 5:8

Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. – 1Thes. 5:6

Aged men and women don't get off the hook of the command to teach these things with great regularity and consistency, though at times they try. Young men and women don't get off the hook of the command to learning, seeking such teaching and exhortation out willingly and not begrudgingly, though at times they try. Young people have to *know* that they need it in volume; aged people have to take seriously that it is their non-delegable duty to God and to their co-elect. And there is some navigating through our own fleshly proclivities that we each need to come to grips with. I'm going to speak to a few of these that appear in no particular order and speak to no particular circumstance. I mean no offence by any of these – just a sober calling to

remembrance of some things for those who know them and a sobering ‘heads up’ to those who might not.

First, sometimes young Christian men (and even young women, though maybe not as often) reach an age or a life circumstance where they start to think that needing to be reminded of things, or corrected, or exhorted to certain things is a sign of weakness. Some young men and women go through a ‘phase’ when they just don’t think that taking counsel is as interesting or relevant to them as when they were mere boys, because they are more and more wrapped up in a vain sense of independence or intellectual pride. They want to handle things themselves – and getting other viewpoints may be looked upon by them, for a time, as not being able to figure a thing out for themselves or even as an element of control exerted upon them by others. Sometimes, in our pride and vanity, we convince ourselves that we are not as susceptible to vanity, sin and wandering hearts as we really are.

Many times, young people (nay, old as well) don’t really like to be exhorted to sobriety (though they would rarely be so brash as to show it openly). Typically, when their flesh is not comfortable with a continual exhortation to sobriety, they will just begin subtly avoiding the exhorter. That is so, so bad for you – young people. I can’t begin to tell you how bad that is for you. To refuse the thing that you so desperately need is so bad. The scripture specifically commands the only two classes of people who have the experience and ability to provide you with the vital teaching against your fleshly tendencies and vanity, and further states that you are in dire need of that teaching and exhortation. Also, exhorting sometimes has the tendency to make a person ‘unpopular’ or ‘not as cool’ in the flesh with the young people, which provides another fleshly obstacle to keeping the command by even the aged men and women to exhort. And it is both obvious and a great shame when this happens. If a person wants to be more ‘well-thought-of’ or ‘likeable’ or someone who the young people like to hang out with, they might in their own weakness of spirit decide to steer clear of too much of that type of exhortation. Further, a person might think to only give ‘positive reinforcement or feedback’ to young people, or to give more worldly, folk-wisdom exhortations as a way of ‘softening the blow’ or to put more of a ‘human face’ to a notion. To be sure, kindly, gentle, entreating encouragement is a fundamental part of teaching and exhorting young men and women to sobriety. But there is no substitute for sound doctrine; any other advice is worldly and vain.

Aged men sometimes don’t exhort the young men to sobriety, but in their own weakness and impatience grow weary with the lack of sobriety and merely begin distancing themselves from a person who is in desperate need of patient continuance in well-doing: of delivering good, sound, ‘no messing around’ words that are fitly framed to the situation. Sometimes, in their

weariness, or even lack of desire to ‘get involved,’ older people will just hope that the young people will hurry up and mature and ‘figure it out.’ Sometimes, under the guise of ‘patience,’ a person might decide to avoid the issue altogether.

I believe the key to the teaching of and exhorting to sober mindedness lies in charity, and such teaching and exhorting is one of the greatest manifestations of charity. In the same chapter, 1Corinthians 13, that the charity of God’s people is highlighted as the sine qua non (without which, nothing) of faith in God, we find this:

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. – 1Cor. 13:11

We know that we are prone to wander, to vanity, to sin, to deceit. If we don’t exhort one another to sobriety, how can we say that we exercise the love of Christ upon each other? In our humility, when we think right, we become aware that we are primed and ready to be vain, and sinful and wandering, and that we therefore need the constant help of God. And He gives us grace - and He gives us help. And that help comes to our hearts and minds primarily through his revealed will - the scripture, which commands us to teach and to exhort to sobriety. Because we are not prone that way in our flesh, which we war against every day. Without a sober, mature outlook upon God, how we stand in relation to Him, and therefore what we should be about, what hope do we have of *not* wandering? The love that we have for the King of the place should drive every aged person (in the word and in faith, not just in age) to diligently teach and exhort the young men and women to sober mindedness; and that same love should drive the young men and women to *seek out* that learning from the aged men and women as a *main priority* in their young lives. That we would all help and encourage each other to grow in the Lord is a hallmark of charity.

...Let thy goodness, like a fetter, bind my wand’ring heart to Thee: Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it – Prone to leave the God I love; Here’s my heart, O, take and seal it, seal it for thy courts above.

I love you all.