

August 2, 2009

Titus 2 Part 1

Alright good morning. It is so good to be back with you. I'm just glad to be alive after last weekend, but even more happy to still be able to walk and talk at the same time. For those of you who are guests, I had told everyone a few weeks ago that I was going on a backpacking trip that was way beyond my skill level and the fact that I'm here today is proof that at least some of you people remembered to pray for the grace of Almighty God.

But I'm also glad that you are here today, because this morning we start chapter 2 of the book of Titus. So open your Bibles to Titus chapter 2.

As you get there, let me bring up a few relevant reminders from chapter 1. Remember this whole letter – short though it may be – is a chance for God to show us his blueprint for establishing his church – what he wants the local church to be.

We learned from Paul's description of his own ministry in the opening verses that God's church is not only to be about bringing those God has chosen to saving faith, but to be moving those who are saved to spiritual maturity.

We learned that the leaders of the church – the elders – must be able to encourage and rebuke with sound doctrine.

And we saw the truth that righteousness – rightness – purity – being clean before God is the result of faith – of right belief in the truth – not of external works.

Now as we move into chapter 2, Paul is again addressing Titus in his writing about what Titus is to do – what he is to teach in these new churches on the island of Crete. But just like with the listing of the elder qualifications in chapter 1, this is again more for the Christians on Crete to see and hear than really for Titus alone.

Now normally we – meaning you and me – approach our study of God's Word with a microscope on Sunday mornings. We take a few verses – or sometimes just one verse – and though we connect it to the context, we take it apart and study it and then move on. But for chapter 2 we need to start with a wide angle lens instead of a magnifying lens. We need to see this as a whole first in order to learn a really important point in the process of letting God speak to us through Titus.

So this is going to be what you might call a one note sermon today, but the applications of that note should be both encouraging and challenging for all of us. So let's look at the chapter together. Titus 2.

(TEXT)

Now before you start micro-interpreting this or focusing on and thinking about the specific portions you think are speaking to you or the parts that you hope so and so hears or whatever – step back with me and look at the whole. Remember, this is part of God's blueprint for his church – so what do we see here?

First – **what God cares about has nothing to do with the SIZE of a church; what God wants has to do with the virtue and CHARACTER of a church.** This is so important for us to really grasp because there are so many other opinions and options out there. And yet what makes a church healthy has nothing to do with how many programs it has or how much money it has or how big it is; what makes a church healthy is its holy character. And that is rarely ever mentioned today in all the church growth stuff out there. We're told if you want to grow your church you need to come up with technique and strategy and marketing savvy, etc etc but that really doesn't concern the Lord. What God is concerned about is the quality of the church. The size of any given church is bound up in God's own sovereign purpose, but his goal is the godliness – the character of the church.

And that is what we begin to see here in chapter 2. **As much as the end of chapter 1 was making sure we didn't see our external works as what make us RIGHT with God, as being more important than faith; in chapter 2 we see how important our external works are because**

that is how we IMPACT the church and the world. People judge our Jesus by what we do and who we are not just by what we say.

So the second thing we see here is a pretty clear set of categories within the church. If you notice, Paul lines out six different groups for instruction – the older men, the older women, younger women, younger men, Titus himself (though we'll see what he tells Titus is pretty much meant to be for the younger men as well) and then slaves.

Each generation – each gender – each station in life is going to have its own set of challenges to face and the particular issues that Paul addresses here concerned things he saw in Crete. So the list of issues that Titus must address in his teaching includes anger, immorality, immaturity in life and doctrine, a lack of reverence, slander, meanness, substance abuse, idleness, family breakdown, dishonesty, frivolity, disobedience, back talk, and theft.

And folks if that kind of stuff had to be addressed in an apostolic church – one with direct contact and influence and teaching from actual Apostles – then we can be pretty confident that these issues will be present in the churches where we are or will be. They may be under the surface, but wherever fallen people meet, these things will be – just in varying degrees. And we'll look at those things as we go through this chapter.

But what I want us to see this morning is what Francis Shaeffer points out from Paul's words. He says "With God, there are no little people." I mean it is easy sometimes for older men and women to be regarded as passé. It is just as easy for younger men and women to be regarded as lacking gravitas. One of the authors I studied in relation to this issue simply said "Who among us has not regarded as irrelevant the older man or woman to the modern world? Have we not at times disregarded younger men and women whom we thought were too inexperienced to make serious contributions to the plans being laid down?"

But what we see through the wide angle lens of chapter 2 is the reminder that everyone is made in the image of God – no matter how old and no matter how young they are. All the Christians we rub shoulders with have the same Father and are indwelt by the same Spirit. And we've got to guard and live in this truth.

In fact each generation must relate to each other – they have particular responsibilities. You see that in how many times Paul refers to setting examples and to training each other in this chapter. What we must see is that **God designed the body of Christ so that older believers might be SHARPENED by the younger and younger believers might be TAUGHT by the older.**

That involves two necessities. First, **the older generation must see that they have much to CONTRIBUTE to the younger generations and be aware that they are being WATCHED and listened to.** They need your wisdom, experience, and application of God's truth to the demands of life. Second, **the younger generation must be TEACHABLE and value the counsel of older generations of Christians and be willing to SPUR them forward through enthusiasm for Christ.** Together, we must hold each other accountable to live like Christians, to learn from each other, and to value the generational diversity in the body of Christ.

This wide angle view of the local church is not a small deal found only here in Titus. This truth – God's plan for his church – is all over the New Testament. I don't normally jump around large passages of Scripture, but it is always better to let God's Word say it than for me to try and say it. So grab your Bible and turn to some passages you know or have heard and listen to them instead of just with you in mind, with the larger view of the church in mind. Let's start in Ephesians chapter 4. Just turn to the left several pages.

Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16. Keep going left to...

1 Corinthians 12:4-6, 12-13, 18

Finally – continue to the left to **Romans 12:1, 4-5**

Folks think about this. **When the BIBLE – God's Word – hits something this hard – this many times – to this many different groups of people and individual churches, we better listen. Because something about it is important to GOD.**

What we see in all we just read about us being one – each of us having gifts to be used to build each other up – each of us being where God wants us for his purposes – so that we make up the local body of Christ that God designs – means that back in Titus chapter 2, when Paul says “here are the standards – older men are to live like this – older women like this – younger men like this – younger women like this – everyone in the workplace like this” – one of the basic reasons is that **my Christianity and the way I live aren't just about ME nor is CHURCH just a place that I go.** There is so much at stake here. My relationship with Christ – my salvation – isn't just for my own benefit.

And yet that is so dominant a mindset that we have to actually fight against it. We've got to somehow get Christianity beyond that because that's where we are stuck right now. What can Christianity do for me? Which leads to: What can this church do for me? When the question that ought to be included is: What can my Christianity do for everybody else? What can I do for this church? That's the issue coming up here in Titus we will see in the next couple of weeks in a few different ways.

See when we look first at this chapter as whole in light of what we learned from chapter 1 – with God's blueprint for the church in mind – then the important implication for the church and all of us as individuals is that we must begin to give up our hard-won independence and become interdependent: we must become people who depend on each other. This does not mean becoming weak or less capable of doing things. We become interdependent in order to become stronger together.

Now that sounds nice doesn't it? Interdependence is much easier to acknowledge than it is to act as though our very lives hinge on others. And that is somewhat natural – I mean in our culture, growing to maturity means cutting the ties that bind us to others – we learn to make decisions and to chart our own course. So acting as a part of an interdependent body like we saw God describe in so many places – involves unlearning the habits of a lifetime.

Today there is often more quote community on facebook or twitter than in the church. I'm not saying those things are bad – not at all – but the reason our culture leans that direction is a matter of control. I share what I want and when I want to stop – when I want to no longer deal with you – I sign off – I unplug – I logout and there's nothing you can do about it. That community is individualistic. **God's plan for our maturity – his blueprint for the church – is not INDIVIDUALISTIC.** The only complete Christian is the body of Christ. Only the body can be whole. Anyone who wants to be a complete Christian must realize that he is part of that body – dependent on and depended on by others – and must act accordingly.

I told you this was basically a one note sermon. So having said all of that, here's the note. **We need each other. God's blueprint for establishing his church is people moving to LIFE in Christ one step at a time together.**

So just being as practical as possible which always steps on my toes and yours, here's a few implications of that today.

First – whether you consider yourself an older generation or a younger generation, for the vast majority of us in here, there is a generation on either side of you – which means **there are people on either side of you spiritually in this place that need you to BE and DO what God shows as His plan for those roles.**

What does that mean we need to address?

It means **Fairway needs SENIOR ADULTS who are connected in as many ways as possible.** I've looked as hard as I could, I simply cannot find a spiritual retirement age in the Bible. There is no age – no level – where any of us can sit back and say “I've done my time, now it is time for the church to serve me.” Granted what we do and are able to do changes with time and ought to be mentored into the hands of others, but isolation and bench warming is never ok with God, so it can't be ok with us.

Which means senior adults who relegate themselves to only interacting with their own peers – even to the point of consistently coming to seniors only programs but not to corporate worship with the body of Christ - reveals a completely wrong view of church, Christianity, and the heart of God.

It also means that the younger adults who do the very opposite – who relegate themselves to a corporate worship service only also have a wrong view of church, Christianity, and the heart of God. **Fairway needs young adults, families, military personnel who may connect first through the worship service on a personal level, but who quickly INVEST themselves in the other areas of ministry and opportunity beyond an hour Sunday morning.**

Granted in both those situations there are exceptions. The realities of age and earth-bound bodies means often the older we get, the more likely we simply can't do as much and the realities of some stages of schooling or career means there are times when we don't have the freedom to even choose the use of our time. But the point is those are exceptions, not rules – phases, not habits.

A final other real practical application today when it comes to those of us at Fairway is that **'no RELATIONSHIPS' is never right**. Not to be pedantic this morning, but just like the physical heart can't exist by itself nor can the body work if it only sends blood to the parts it is naturally comfortable with because they are closest to it – neither can we. **We cannot fulfill God's blueprint for his church if we simply come to get what we WANT** and make no real effort to connect in real relationships **OR if we stick to the relationships we ALREADY have with those who are closest to us** – either in age or gender or life stage or job or race or economic level or any imaginable way to segregate ourselves.

There can be no young versus old – old versus young – new versus long timers or long timers vs newbies – no locals versus military or military vs locals – right section vs left section or whatever level of silliness you want to go to.

I've said it before but God through Paul to Titus to us is saying it again today – **we all need EACH of us and we each need ALL of us to be the church that God wants us to be.**

So – real fast – how do we do that? We'll get more into it in chapter 2, but for now a few simple things for all of us.

First – **Deal with YOUR VIEW of Christianity, of church, of your role in both.** Deal with any of the implications we just talked about to make sure they haven't found their way into your life – your mind – your filters of church.

But then – **focus on PEOPLE first.** Set your priorities so that you focus more on helping people and building relationships than on church organization or accomplishments. More on creating a caring atmosphere than on principles of programs or business.

In that – **expect a MESS.** What I mean is accept that life is messy and know that God wants us to wade through the mess so we can build authentic relationships with sinful, imperfect people. Don't be afraid to get involved in people's lives. We have to.

Finally – just hints for accomplishment – **be HUMBLE – be passionate – be HONEST.** We could spend time defining those out but you guys are intelligent people. You know what damages relationships so you know the opposite is what builds them. Pride – indifference or selfishness – and dishonesty do no one any good. So connect in humility – in passion – in honesty.

How do you start this process? Go back to the question we've asked so many times: **If EVERYONE did church and the Christian life like I am, would Fairway be better or worse off?**

Is your church stronger because of you?
Do you serve with a servant's heart?
Are you a consistent servant or a convenient servant?
Have you retired from being involved?
Are you isolated from relationships?

In a nutshell what we see here is that **with God and in His church, there are no LITTLE people, just you and me for the glory of God.**

So let's you and me be for the glory of God!