

Shortly before sitting down to earnestly begin writing this sermon, I took a quick peek at Facebook to procrastinate...I mean, to see if there might be any good sermon illustrations in my news feed. 😊 And sure enough, James Kim, one of my pastor friends down in Tacoma (Lakewood, actually...“Little Church on the Prairie”...it’s no longer on prairie land, though) had posted something just a little earlier in light of some of the challenges that Boeing has brought upon itself in the last few years, including just a few weeks ago, that fit the bill:

**“Don’t get confused on purpose. Of course Boeing needs to make a profit; but that’s not its purpose. Its purpose is to make the best, innovative, and safest airplanes in the world and profit is the byproduct. But for the sake of profit Boeing cut corners in safety and has done irreparable damage to its reputation. What is true of Boeing is true of churches. Don’t get confused on your purpose” (Pastor James Kim, friend of Pastor Brian’s).**

Staying focused on one’s purpose – whether its an \$80 billion annual revenue company like Boeing, a church like ours (slightly smaller revenue), or an individual disciple of Jesus – staying true to one’s purpose requires self-control. For most of us, maybe nearly all of us, if we’re honest, self-control is not anyone’s favorite word – especially this time of year, right? ...When the Girl Scout cookies are delivered (Samoas don’t last long when I’m around); but self-control, or self-discipline, is exactly what’s needed to stick to the purpose God has called us to.

**And: The odds are good we could all use a little encouragement in the area of self-control.** So, I hope you’re encouraged by this message this morning. Now, the passage today says a number of things that to our 21<sup>st</sup> Century ears are a little challenging to hear, and we’ll talk about that. But when we look at it closely, we see that there’s a very specific reason for Paul writing what he writes here, and this reason is timeless. It applies to all of us who follow Jesus. So, as we continue in our Five Guys series where we are

looking at five of the most overlooked books of the New Testament, we are in **Titus chapter 2** this morning. This is God's Word to you and me today, and we'll read the whole thing at once this morning...

So, chapter 1 ended with some strong words about people in the churches of Crete where Titus is helping them to develop some structure and organization...and there are people who are *not* helping the cause of the church. They are bringing divisions into the church through their teaching and living. And as we read just now, Paul wants Titus to counteract that, as he writes, **“You [Titus], however, must teach what is appropriate to sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1)**

The way it's phrased is a little backwards from how Paul might normally phrase things, with the active emphasis on “what is appropriate” – meaning, appropriate behavior, appropriate living and relating to one another – and the “right teaching” or “right doctrine” being a little more passively affirmed. Typically, we see more of an active emphasis on the teaching that leads to holy living and right behavior.

But it fits the next several sentences he writes, where he puts an emphasis on Titus teaching people how people live. Right doctrine is not just about head knowledge; it has to lead to right living; to holy living. And: **The very first thing he writes is that he wants Titus to teach the older men “self-control.”** He then goes into a few other things for these older men that, it seems to me, mostly flow out of “self-control.” In fact, this self-control really is sort of a foundational element to all the rest that he writes – whether it's instructions to the older men, or older women, or younger men or younger women, and Paul uses the phrase three times in these verses. Clearly, “self-control” important. But additionally, it just sort of makes sense that self-control is needed for all the rest other things he writes about here, too.

**For instance, a life that is worthy of respect, is a life lived with self-control.** Think of the opposite: An out of control life is not one that earns the respect of other people. Out of control tempers, out of control work habits (workaholism), out of control sexual activity, out of control eating or

drinking, out of control driving...the list could go one, and none of it earns the respect of others. Living in control earns the respect of others.

Then a couple verses later when he tells the older women not to slander. Again, that takes some self-control, especially if that's something you're inclined to do. And when you pair this with the command not to be addicted to too much wine...it's even *more* imperative to have self-control. Alcohol addiction is clearly a lack of self-control, and we're probably all aware that the tongue can get loose in those times and slander is much more likely to happen. So, these two can go hand-in-hand, and I suspect Paul intentionally lists them together. The point is: self-control helps keep these things in check.

**Self-control is helpful for the directives given to younger women, also.**

Now, the assumption in this writing is that the younger women were married. In their day, that was the norm. Young women got married, as did young men. For women, marriage was a means to financial security. Working outside of the home was uncommon, perhaps especially in a place like Crete – it was off the beaten path, an island out in the Mediterranean Sea. There are some instances in the New Testament where we read about women who were business women and provided for themselves – such as Lydia who was known as a seller of purple cloth; Luke 8:3 tell us that women financially supported Jesus and his ministry *out of their own means*; and many of us are familiar with the woman described in Proverbs 31 who clearly is running a business outside of the home. But the reality is that women were not usually esteemed in that way, especially in Roman culture more than Jewish culture, and outside of some of the larger cities.

So, the directives given to young women require self-control. Now, the one about being submissive to their husbands is rather off-putting for us in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. But we must also remember Paul's writing in Ephesians 5 where he admonishes husbands and wives to “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21). So, the fuller picture is one of *mutual* submission in a marriage, and it's all part of submitting to Jesus as Lord.

**Continuing in Titus, when he gets to the young men, he then reiterates the command to be self-controlled (verse 6).** Titus – who is likely one of

these “younger men” himself – is to set an example for them: to teach them what follows in verse 7 and 8, such as integrity and soundness of speech.

He then addresses slaves. We certainly wish Scripture spoke more consistently that slaves should be freed. We do see that in Scripture, and we’ll get to one in a couple weeks in Philemon. The most famous statement on this topic comes from Paul in Galatians 3:28 when he writes, “**There is neither Jew nor Greek, Slave nor free, male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus**” (Galatians 3:28). It’s a radical, ground-breaking statement for them in their day. But slavery was an institution that probably simply needed to be broken slowly so that the message of Jesus did not get derailed. There was a very real risk that if they upset cultural norms too much, then the Church would never have gotten off the ground and the message of Jesus would fade into oblivion. That was a very real possibility.

What he does tell Titus to teach them is to obey their masters and not to steal, and to gain trust of their masters, and so forth. And in the context of the letter: that takes some self-control, and in the long-run is more successful in winning people to Jesus (the context seems to be a newly believing slave with an unbelieving master). Trying to seize power and assert rights – even if Scripturally founded – wasn’t going to advance the cause of Jesus. It would have been using the means and ways of the world – like force, coercion, power-grabbing – to achieve Jesus’s purposes. But that’s *not* how Jesus operates. Jesus never forces himself upon anyone.

So, what we see is that: **All of this self-control is for a larger purpose: So that the good news of Jesus would be presented positively to a non-believing world.** Our vision at Rose Hill is to lead people toward Jesus where we live, work and play...and that’s essentially what Paul is articulating here. Every group of people he addresses – older men/women, and younger women; then the younger men; and then slaves – each grouping ends with a phrase along the lines of the last half of verse 10 where he wraps up the teaching to slaves by saying that Titus should teach this to them, “...so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive” (Titus 2:10b.) In other words, so they’d lead people toward Jesus.

Similarly, at the end of his teaching about younger men, he writes at the end of verse 8 that it is, "...so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us" (Titus 2:8b). And at the end of his teaching to older men and to women both older and younger, he summarizes it by writing in verse 5, that he wants them to live this way, "so that no one will malign the word of God." **Each of the directives to the different groups of people ends with rationale (verses 5b, 8b, and 10b) for why it is important to live as he admonishes; Each is centered on living in a way that positively shares Jesus with the world by living a Christ-like life, rooted in Scripture.**

Paul then completes the thought process of each of these statements (verses 5, 8, 10) in verse 11. We live this way so that no one will malign the word of God or have anything bad to say about us, and so forth, **"For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people" (Titus 2:11)**. Old, young, slave, free, married, unmarried, black, white, and whatever other label we might use to divide people by, Jesus unites us because he offers salvation to all of humanity. We *all* need saving. We *all* have sin in our lives, and salvation is needed for each of us. Salvation is found in Jesus, and that is what unites us together. And those of us who have said "yes" to this gracious act of love are to live in such a way that it stands out to the world and others are drawn to Jesus as well. Not that it stands out and repels people, but stands out and attracts them.

Paul then brings back the self-control (sophronos is the Greek word) theme in verse 12 for the third and final time here. **"It [This grace of God] teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age" (Titus 2:12)**. So, he starts with self-control, he brings it back in verse 6, and he ends (almost) the thinking with self-control once again here in verse 12, reminding us that ungodliness – the ways of the world, such as power, selfishness, anger, coercion, force, manipulation, lies, and so forth – are *not* the ways of Jesus. This is not how Jesus' followers live, because Jesus never lived that way.

**People of the world will not be drawn to Jesus through the means of the world – partly because many people of the world know that Jesus was not worldly.** They see our fraudulent ways when we don't live like Jesus. Therefore, our witness of Jesus – our ability to represent him well, to live for him, to stay rooted in him, hinges on our self-control, because the ways of the world *are* tempting; but living like that damages our witness. And by the way, let's not forget that our self-control is powered by the Holy Spirit. We're not alone in this. Self-control is one of the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Self-control is, in many ways, the one that leads to the others, just as it is the foundation for the ethical and Biblical living given in this second chapter of Titus. So, it is a Holy Spirit-led self-control. It's about God's work in us.

**So: With the Spirit powering us, this self-control leads us to live in such a way that we resist the temptations of the world, and live in a way that stands out from the world, to inspire and lead people toward Jesus.** And this should come as no surprise, because that is how Jesus lived. He lived with incredible self-control that was powered by the Holy Spirit. From his three-fold wilderness temptation to use his power to his own advantage, to his bogus trial before Pilate and the others where he could have gotten all defensive and out of control, to his crucifixion where an *actual* criminal hanging on a cross next to him implored him to “save himself”...In these situations and others: Jesus had incredible self-control so as to stay focused on the mission before him. The distraction for Jesus was never financial profit as it might be for a company such as Boeing or for ourselves; rather, his distraction was to be self-serving. To use his power for his own gain and benefit, rather than others as he did throughout his ministry.

**And: We face the same temptations, and it is the same self-control that will help us overcome those temptations.** This is true in our worshipping life together as a church, in our homes and neighborhood communities, in our places of work and schooling, and more. Those are the place where we can live with self-control and say “no” to ungodliness and worldly passions. And while Paul finishes out the thinking that we do this while we wait for Jesus to return, the reason why we live godly lives is actually back up in verse 10:

**“...so that in every way they [we] will make the teaching about God our Savior [Jesus] attractive” (Titus 2:10b).**

In other words, live a life that looks different than the world. Live with contentment – even when materialism and economic prosperity beckons. Live with joy – even when life is sad. Live with peace and hope – even in the face of trying circumstances. Live with kindness – even when people are mean. Live with gratitude – even when people let you down. Live with patience – even when the driver in front of you is going at a snail’s pace. Live with love – even if the world hates you. This takes self-control, with God’s Word setting the standard and His Spirit working in us to live as he calls us. This is how Jesus lived, and we’re called to do the same – whether we’re old or young, male or female, in a position of power or sitting beneath someone regardless of nationality or any other dividing wall: God calls us to live like Jesus so that we would lead people toward Jesus in all spheres of life. Let’s pray...Amen.