

Dear Friends,

To my fellow preachers. How much of self leaks through our words and our conduct in the pulpit? I recall a story about a particular preacher who adopted the affective sing-song manner of speaking when he preached. On one occasion when he was preaching, a member of the congregation sitting near the back of the building noticed a young man whom she knew to be a music major in a nearby college. As he listened to this man's affective mannerism, he was literally beating musical time to the man's words. Biblical preaching is not about how we speak in the pulpit as much as it is about what we say and how well we communicate our thoughts to the folks in the pew. Given the examples of preaching in Acts, we might conclude that 1) the men spoke loud enough for everyone in their audience to hear their words, and 2) they reasoned very logically and clearly based on the teachings of Scripture and of Jesus, and 3) they likely spoke in a winsome conversational tone and manner. To speak or act in such a manner as to attract attention to self instead of Jesus in the pulpit fails Paul's test to Titus and to us. Everything about our demeanor in the pulpit, both words and speech manners, as well as our physical actions, Paul charges us, is to "...become sound doctrine."

Paul clearly describes the desired objective of godly, of "Becoming" sound doctrine, teaching. Although the list continues, in this week's Gleanings, I listed nineteen specific results that Paul charged Titus to work to accomplish in his preaching. Because Primitive Baptists do not support seminary

formal "preacher training" in no way implies that our people either favor or should, for that matter, tolerate ignorance in the pulpit. I recall years ago reading about the routine practice of some of our Strict Baptist ancestors in England. When a young man showed an interest and some ability in his speaking to the congregation, the church formally assigned him to his pastor for an extended time of rigorous training. Over time, as the pastor felt the young man was ready, he would speak to the church. Eventually the pastor and the church would agree if/when the young man demonstrated sufficient preaching ability and mature soundness in the faith and in his personal life that he should be ordained. The books of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus provide abundant New Testament grounds for such supervision and training before considering a young man for ordination. These letters also emphasize that evidence is to be fully demonstrated prior to ordination. "And let these also first be proved..." (1 Timothy 3:10 KJV) Paul wrote regarding deacons, but the same prerequisite should be applied to ministry as well. You don't ordain someone, hoping ordination will encourage them to grow into the position. They must grow into the position before ordination, according to these words from Paul.

When Paul left Titus in Crete to continue teaching and establishing believers in the faith, the young preacher faced a heavy challenge. This was not a season for a novice preacher to grow into his assignment. He must immediately deal with major issues in the believers there that required a dramatic transformation if they were to continue in the faith and glorify

the Lord in their lives. We face that same challenge every day in our world. How are we doing with it?

Lord bless,
Joe Holder

Titus

But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine: That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed. (Titus 2:1-5 KJV 1900)

Both Timothy and Titus were travel companions of Paul. Paul left Timothy with the Church in Ephesus to continue teaching and grounding them in the faith while he preached and labored elsewhere. Similarly, he left Titus with believers on the island of Crete to correct some rather significant misunderstandings and errors that lingered in their minds. Paul gave believers in Crete a solid foundation, but they remained too attached to their old ways and thinking. Titus 1 exemplifies some of the problems that

lingered for Titus to confront and correct. This young preacher had his hands full! He faced a contrary culture in which people were prideful and more focused on themselves than on their Lord or their faith. Instead of repenting from their cultural sins, they relished their culture and sought to adapt their faith to it, thereby abandoning and hopelessly compromising their faith. I love Paul's sense of humor at the situation. (Titus 1:10-13 KJV) One of the Crete believers, likely in prideful disdain of his own culture, though still immersed in it, said "*The Cretians are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies.*" (Titus 1:12 KJV) Notice Paul's response, "***This witness is true.***" What! A Cretian spoke those words, so he not only spoke against his culture; he spoke them in description of himself, since he was a Cretian. And Paul agreed.

The study verses I've listed above were written with this challenging spiritual task in mind for Titus' charge from the Lord and from Paul. The local culture rejected every spiritual objective Paul named in these verses. At every point of teaching, Titus faced the task of teaching sincere, but naïve and misguided believers to abandon this culture in favor of a new life-culture in Jesus. On the island of Crete or in our own culture, human culture is deeply and powerfully entrenched, but it always commands a lifestyle that is contradictory to Jesus and Bible faith. By our existence, we live in just such a culture at least six days a week. How do we choose to function in it? Embrace parts of it and invest our passions in it for six days before we go to church on Sunday and deceive ourselves into thinking our primary spiritual and moral compass is Jesus and the gospel? Jesus warned His own disciples and us, "Ye

cannot serve God and mammon.” (Matthew 6:24; Luke 16:13 KJV) How many self-deceived believers in our day strive daily to do precisely what Jesus twice said we cannot do? Eventually this effort takes the believer into spiritual shipwreck. They will painfully learn the truth of what Jesus said and abandon this world and its “Cretian-like” culture, or they will abandon their faith and embrace the culture. When believers abandon Jesus and His teaching, the outcome is sadly predictable and bad.

No preacher can force-feed his hearers the gospel, though we may occasionally try because we see the looming spiritual shipwreck which they choose to ignore. We want to prevent the pain and the countless lost opportunities for fruitful godly service and blessings. A wise man once observed, “Joe, preachers are not responsible for outcomes. The Lord holds us responsible for our teaching. Teach the truth of the gospel as clearly and graciously as you can. If you rightly inform your congregation, the Lord shall hold them responsible for how they react to it.” I’ve lived to appreciate these wise words many times over. And need the reminder.

But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine. “*Become*” was translated from a word that means to be fitting or right, including a fitting or right moral assessment. Paul specifically defines the measure by which we understand what is “Becoming” and what is notbecoming to “*sound doctrine.*” Titus faced a congregation that had not cut their emotional—and likely moral—ties with their culture. Because they showed up in church on Sunday did not mean that they were living up to Jesus’ charge that His followers be “*The light of the world.*”

How we conduct our lives, according to Jesus and Scripture or not, determines if we are a strong shining light or a flickering candle ready to extinguish and fade invisibly into the darkness.

This lesson is highly instructive—and highly challenging—to every man who occupies time speaking to the Lord’s people. We must carefully and sometimes painfully look at far more than our words. For example, how do our “Pulpit manners” color our words? Do our actions in the pulpit serve as a distraction from our words? Even if our words speak only of Jesus, do our mannerisms obscure Jesus and His teachings, or magnify them? Do we speak the truth in anger instead of love? With pride instead of grace? Does our physical demeanor in the pulpit obscure self or become a curious distraction from our words? I prefer to think the pulpit podium nicely serves to hide all of Joe except his upper torso. Every time I enter the pulpit to preach, I face a grave challenge, to make Joe disappear into the background and to shine the light of knowledge, love, and honor on Jesus. A preacher should never stop working to improve his manners in the pulpit as well as his teachings. Only in this way do we speak words that “*become sound doctrine.*”

The remainder of the sentence lists a series of “That” statements which identify what our teaching objective should be. Our preaching should point our hearers to those behaviors and motivate them to grow in the practice of them.

1. *That the aged men be sober.*
2. *Grave.*

3. *Temperate.*
4. *Sound in faith.*
5. *In charity.*
6. *In patience.*
7. *The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness.*
8. *Not false accusers.*
9. *Not given to much wine.*
10. *Teachers of good things.*
11. *That they may teach the young women to be sober.*
12. *To love their husbands.*
13. *To love their children.*
14. *To be discreet.*
15. *Chaste.*
16. *Keepers at home.*
17. *Good.*
18. *Obedient to their own husbands.*
19. *That the word of God be not blasphemed.*

If someone asks you, “Since you people believe in salvation all of God’s grace, why do you preach?” you can give them nineteen reasons directly from this passage. Far from rationalizing a sinful lifestyle, belief in grace leaves true believers so overwhelmed with love and gratitude for the Lord that they are driven to godliness by love and respect for Him. They long to grow ever stronger in their service and honor to Him by the conduct of their lives.

The Cretian believers likely did not like this kind of preaching. Reading this letter leaves us with a sense that Titus faced a heavy challenge to preach, both in the pulpit

and in his personal walk, to exemplify this gospel and to urge these people to abandon Crete and turn to Jesus and His kingdom in their daily “Citizenship.” Paul continues this exhortation in verses 6 through 10, applying gospel ethics to young men and servants. In sum, Paul reminds Titus to teach believers in Crete that their daily lifestyle, regardless their situation in the culture, is to be transformed from Crete to Jesus and the gospel.

This letter also reminds us that failure in our pursuit of Biblical ethics, in lifestyle, tends to push us into doctrinal error as well. Doctrines dealing with God and salvation are linked with our lifestyle. Failure in one predicts failure in the other.

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. (Titus 2:11-14 KJV)

Years ago I was driving between appointments for my work, listening to a Christian radio station. The speaker at the time was teaching his man-centric view of salvation by human effort and not by God’s “Effort” and grace. My interest piqued when he mentioned Titus 2:11. And I spoke aloud—alone in my car—when he inexcusably misquoted the verse, “For the grace of God that **offers** salvation hath

appeared to all men.” In this verse, “*bringeth*” is part of the translators’ conveying the meaning of salvation. Louw-Nida’s Dictionary of New Testament Words offers the following translation of the clause, “The grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to all people.” And, no, their intent in this phrasing was not to imply universal salvation of all humanity, but rather that God’s grace brings salvation to, **saves**, all kinds of people, not one class or culture of humans only. The radio teacher dishonestly misrepresented Paul’s words to suit his personal belief rather than submitting his belief to Scripture. God’s grace never appears apart from “bringing salvation” to those to whom it appears. In the language of the lesson, when grace appears, it brings salvation.

Paul’s teaching applies the gospel to believers in Crete or in our own culture, however deeply that culture contradicts the truth that God’s grace teaches. In short, God’s grace never appears without so teaching His beloved children to whom He reveals that grace. Some of the believers in Crete apparently had the mistaken idea that they could claim God’s grace and salvation, but ignore Master Teacher, Grace’s teaching. Not so.

Paul makes no claims of how much those to whom grace appears will learn Grace’s teaching and reform their lives. However, he leaves no question that Grace’s appearance both saves and teaches the ethic he described in these verses. That God’s saving grace alters a person’s moral compass cannot be questioned in light of these verses, and so many similar lessons in Scripture. Our divine task is not to constantly evaluate another person’s conduct and supposed spiritual state. It is to work to ensure that our

own lifestyle is transformed by our being a good “Student” to Grace’s faithful teaching.

Elder Joe Holder