

ADORNING TRUTH
Christmas Sermon 2022
Titus 2:1-15
 Chadron Berean Church

Let's pretend that you're home and you hear a knock at the door. When you open the door, you are greeted by a man trying to sell you a hair restoration product. He touts it as the best hair restoration product in the world, able to restore any hairline to its former glory. He has dozens of success pictures with various clients and stories to tell. And so you think, "*Alright. I'm convinced. I think I'm going to buy some.*" However, just as you think that and just before you go to hand him the money, he takes his hat off to shoo a pesky fly and you realize the man selling this product is bald on top. Are you still going to buy that product? You know, that's kind of what it's like when Christians try to introduce people to Jesus Christ, but their own life shows no signs of transformation. We are not in reality what we profess. Even the atheistic, Postmodern philosopher Fredrich Nietzsche said, "*Show me that you are redeemed, and I'll listen to you talk about your Redeemer.*" That's something of where we are going with today's message from Titus 2:1-15.

Really we're here because of one word in Titus. Every Christmas since I've preached through Titus just over 3 years ago, I have found myself drawn back to one little word in that New Testament letter: **adorn**. Every Christmas when we decorate, or adorn, our houses with lights and trees with garland and ornaments. But just like we adorn our houses and trees, so the Bible says we are to **adorn truth** by the way we live our lives. In the words of Spurgeon, "*each Christian is an ornament of Christianity*" so that even skeptical men like Nietzsche, who don't believe eternal truth exists, might just be more willing to listen. Titus 2:1-15 reads,

1 "But as for you, proclaim the things which are fitting for sound doctrine. 2 Older men are to be temperate, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance. 3 Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, 4 so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, 5 to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored. 6 Likewise urge the young men to be sensible; 7 in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, 8 sound in speech which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us. 9 Urge slaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be pleasing, not argumentative, 10 not stealing, but showing all good faith so that they will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect.

11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people, 12 instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously, and in a godly manner in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and

Savior, Christ Jesus, 14 who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, eager for good deeds. 15 These things speak and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. No one is to disregard you."

So **Titus** is an epistle, or letter, written by the apostle Paul to a traveling missionary companion of his named Titus whom at one point, Paul left him to stay pastor the churches on the island of **Crete**. Titus' task was to see these churches become established, orderly, healthy, God-glorifying, lost-reaching churches. We could call them "**sound**" churches.

Titus' Mission: Establish sound churches. (1:5)

This mission is explicitly stated in **1:5** both for Titus' sake and the sake of the churches he'll be serving. It says, "*For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you.*" So there are churches gathering in the cities on the island of Crete, most likely churches that sprung up as a result of those Cretans who were there at Pentecost (Acts 2:11), but they because they were isolated from the mainland, still needed apostolic care and instruction and direction. So Titus' mission is to set these disorganized, messy churches set in order so that they become the churches God calls them to be.

And I usually don't pick on individual words as much as I will do today, but there are just a handful of words in Titus that can very graphically sharpen our understanding of the instruction and the heart behind it. First, the words "**set in order**" – three words in our English Bibles – is the one word *epidiorthose* in the original Greek. Just like an *orthopedic* surgeon sets bones straight or an *orthodontist* aligns or sets straight your teeth or an *orthographer* corrects spelling, so Titus' job is to **straighten out or correct** these churches. To do that, Paul focuses on two things: **sound doctrine and sound living**. And one produces the other: sound doctrine should produce sound living.

Sound (hygiānōusē) is another word to highlight. It mean **healthy**. Even just looking at the Greek word you can see the correlation with our word for hygiene. When someone is lost and eventually found we say, "*They are safe and sound.*" Sound, as in a good condition, healthy. Well, sound doctrine is healthy doctrine for us. It brings spiritual health. When we study doctrine and theology, we tend to get big heads about who's right – but we have to remember that doctrine isn't meant to make us cold. It's not an end in itself. We study doctrine and theology because we want to think right and thus live right, glorifying God by right thinking of Him and right application to our lives. Doctrinal study should bring spiritual health – healthy hearts and minds and lives and relationships with God and man. I think we could say that churches would reach more people if they focused more on being a healthy church than on being a large church. Quality over quantity. And if a church focuses on being healthy (quality people) we shouldn't be surprised to see God increase our quantity. Living things tend to grow when they are healthy. But it's pretty hard to invite people into a body that isn't healthy. The body needs some restoration to health first.

That was the problem at Crete. The churches were struggling with was false teaching that was destructive to the congregation's health. Paul talks about **empty-talkers** and **deceivers** who want to promoted **foolish controversies** about **genealogies** and the **Law**. There were **factious, legalistic** were **upsetting whole families for personal gain** (Titus 1:10-11; 3:9-11). So Paul has talked about leadership and **appointing elders**, men of integrity, who can **hold fast the faithful word** and be **able to teach sound doctrine** (1:6-9). It needs good leadership.

But two common examples of unhealthy doctrine are legalism and license. **Legalism** (the idea that we're saved by works or somehow more acceptable to God because of our good works) and **license** (the opposite extreme; the idea that we can live however we want because of God's grace) are both examples of unhealthy doctrine. They both produce pride and quarrels and self-centeredness. It ruins our lives and relationships with God and man. Sound teachings of **grace**, however, produces fellowship and love and humility and purity like you see in verse 11. Paul says **the grace of God teaches us to live righteously and godly as we wait for Christ's return**. Christ came because legalism doesn't work – we could never be good enough. But He also came not so that we could go on sinning, but so that we could be set free from sin's penalty and power over us. He came to bring us life and restore us.

When you go through the Bible and you see the word **life** or the words **eternal life** (*zoe*), it's not always talking just about duration – eternity. Sometimes it's talking about a quality of life that starts now when we are born again through faith in Christ (John 10:10). It's spiritual life within that brings meaning and purpose and a restored relationship with God, different from the life of fallen man who a slave to sin and transience/temporality (2 Tim. 2:10). Jesus appeared to reveal life (2 Tim. 2:10) because we didn't have any life in us (John 6:53). In a sense, He came to restore so much of what we were intended to be before sin or as we will be after His return when we are glorified and sinless. The process starts now. Paul mentions that in verses 11-14. Everyone who has this **blessed hope** is going to live different. We live *now* in light of *what is to come*. Eternal life begins now, not just when we die.

Again, in Titus you need to know, this isn't just about us. It's for the glory of God but also, **for the sake of outsiders**. **Sound doctrine** is to produce **sound living** which in turn keeps advancing the gospel. And both are needed to pass on the truth to the next generation or reach the lost. Don't they say that passing on the faith to your kids is 10% formal teaching and 90% how you live? I don't know if that's true, but it does emphasize what this passage is emphasizing and that's the need to teach the truth both formal instruction and through modeling it with our words and deed. We have to talk the talk and walk the walk. That's the idea here. As a result of healthy doctrine, healthy lives result – live that are radically different from the world for the sake of a watching world. One man said, *“Paul knew that the saving truth of the gospel message falls on deaf ears when those preaching it live ungodly lives that show no evidence of redemption. When Christians live in open sin, they can hardly expect unbelievers to heed a message that purports to save men from sin.”*

Remember Crete was a very carnal place. It was a vacation destination. Paul quoted one of their poets, Epimenides, in chapter one, saying, “*Cretan are always liars, evil beasts and lazy gluttons.*” Someone said the only reason to go to Crete is “*to eat, drink and soak in the immorality.*” Even their gods were immoral. Zeus was a deceitful, gross adulterer. It made deceit out to be a cardinal virtue. And since there were no harmful, wild beasts on this island like bears or lions or poisonous critters, the joke was that the people are the beasts. Cretan Christians are to be radically different from what Cretans are known for, thus **counteracting culture**. I came across this deal last night that said, “*While we’re putting Christ back into “Christmas” let’s put him back into Christian too...*” I thought that went well with today’s message. Christian means “little Christ”. We are to be Christ-like. Little reproductions of Christ as His followers.

Verse 6 says we prove to be an **example** (*typos*). A type, a model, or an image. The word meant to leave an impression as with a dye. Like when you miss the nail with the hammer and dent the wood, you literally leave an impression in the wood. It’s a visible scar that’s not going away. Or like when you slide on the ice and hit that post with your bumper – you leave an impression. Well, we leave an impression on others with our Christ-like behavior. It’s interesting how as Christians, sometimes we think that we’d better not be “too Christian”. Water it down and make it more palatable. On the contrary, the Bible says we make it attractive by sticking to the Word and refusing to bend to worldliness. We are to live holy lives...

Verse 5 says, “*so that the Word of God will not be dishonored.*”

Our lives we can either honor or **dishonor** (*blasphemeo*) truth. They can *support* or *supplant* it. 1 Timothy 6:1 says when we live in sin, it *slanders/blasphemes* God’s name and gives people an opportunity to speak against our doctrine or at least be skeptical of it.

Verse 10 says we want to, “*adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect.*”

The word **adorn**, my favor word here, is the Greek word *kosmeo*. It sounds a lot like our word cosmetics. Women use cosmetics to adorn, or beautify, their faces. Some men would like to “make attractive” their hair lines again. 1 Timothy 2:9 and 1 Peter 3:5 says that more important than jewelry and fine dresses, women “adorn” themselves with godly behavior. But that’s the idea. It means to beautify, decorate, arrange, make neat or make attractive. In fact, some of your Bibles translate it “*make the doctrine of God our Savior attractive.*”

Adorn is also used to describe the 2nd temple Herod refurbished and was in operation in Jesus’ day in **Luke 21:5**. It was a beautiful structure. One of the wonders of the ancient world. Ornate. Made of gold and marble. But even more powerful the use of the word adorn in Scripture to describe our future home in glory. In Revelation 21, the apostle John describes in detail the eternal, New Jerusalem that all believers will one day enjoy. It’s a brilliant and wonderful place. It’s the stuff that movies can only try to depict. Walls made of crystal-clear jasper. Pearly gates. Streets of gold so pure that they’re transparent – no impurities in it. It has no need of the sun and

there is no night there because God's presence is its light. And those who are there will walk by His light. Describing the beauty of it,

Revelation 21:19 says, *“The foundation stones of the city wall were **adorned** with every kind of precious stone.”*

Revelation 21:2 says, *“And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride **adorned** for her husband.”*

You know, my favorite part about a wedding is watching the look on the groom's face as he sees his wife walking down that aisle. We all rise and turn around to watch the bride, but I'm always glancing back to him because he is overwhelmed with emotion. Well, John is likening the saints to a husband who with wonder, watch as the New Jerusalem comes down to a restored earth like a bride adorned for her husband.

The term **adorn**, interestingly, is also a verb used for **trimming of a wick on a lamp**. If you've ever used an oil lamp camping or when the power goes out, it's similar to an ancient lamp. Every now and then you have to trim the wick to keep it lit and keep it bright. As we live out the truth, we keep the light of Christ shining bright. We are lights in this world (Matt. 5:14; Phil. 2:15).

The last verse I want to pick on for our word adorn is in relation to the use of our tongue. **Proverbs 15:1-2** says, *“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise **adorns** [makes acceptable] knowledge, but the mouth of fools spouts folly.”* Some folks have a lot of good things to say, and though they speak truth, it's the way they say it that it turns people away. We're called to speak truth in love lest we become noisy gongs that drive people away (1 Cor. 13:1). Paul says to be **sound speech** adorns the gospel (Titus 2:8).

So I mentioned **Friedrich Nietzsche** at the beginning of the message. Nietzsche, again, was a Postmodern philosopher whom along with other naturalists like Karl Marx, Charles Darwin, Sigmund Freud, we have to thank for so much of society's beliefs today. He died in the year 1900 and is considered the father of **nihilism**. Nihilism is the idea that there is no absolute truth or eternal truth or eternal realities. He rejected everything spiritual and all religious and moral principles. He coined the phrase, *“God is dead; we have killed him.”* He believed the way to freedom was to acknowledge there is no such thing as truth.

But Nietzsche understood that we would also be signing our death certificate as a society. The implications for people in an evolutionary construct were no meaning or purpose for our lives. There is no hope and society becomes anxiety-ridden and despairing. In such a view, all you have left is your own mind and living for personal desires. Nothing is nailed down anymore anymore – not even genders – and that was plan from the beginning. And when all the desires and longing aren't met or are met, it leaves you empty and unfulfilled, or they are ultimately self-destructive to you, you have nowhere else to turn. Freedom from God only brings slavery to sin and self.

Now we are living in a Nietzschean culture, full of broken and hurting people with no stability and direction for their lives. And I tend to think many people are waking up to this reality because the evidence speaks for itself. Though many are still pushing the evolutionary narrative, even evolution is crumbling as science advances, revealing the complexity of creation or new discoveries in the fossil record or geological record throw wrenches in their theories.

In a culture like this, what it needs more than anything is for Christians to speak truth and adorn truth with their lives. Whose lives support what they profess. People whose lives make sense. Whose lives show others that there is security. Stability. Wholesomeness. Whether we're talking about our life goals, our relationships, marriages, parenting, finances, jobs with outsiders, we need to communicate biblical meaning, purpose, direction, and hope. To show a lost culture that there is a map, a sinking culture that there is a solid rock to stand on, one that brings meaning into the most mundane, ordinary moments in life, and hope into the darkest moments. We get to be ornaments and lights on God's Christmas tree. People are drawn to magnificently decorated trees like the Rockefeller Center Christmas tree in NYC.

A small business owner had a conversation with God. The business owner said, *"God, should I add a little fish symbol to the corner of my landscaping company's logo?"* God replied, *"What for?"* And the business says, *"So people will know they're dealing with a Christian company. So that they'll know I'm a Christian."* To which God replied: *"Let's leave it off and see if they can figure that out by the way you do business with them."*