

# More than Words

Titus 2:6-10 | Sept. 23, 2018 | Bryce Beale

So long as we the church proclaim mere words, the world will sleep.

They have heard so many words already. They have heard the endless ideologies of daytime talk shows; they have heard the thousand notions of their peers day after day in breakrooms and school halls.

Our generation is like the Jews of Jesus' day, who were driven about by every wind of Pharisaic tradition and carried along by false messiah after false messiah, only to be repeatedly smashed against the rocks of disappointment.

But then came this rabbi, Jesus, with more words—and the people listened.

They listened because his words were packed with reality. They were not *mere* words, but words with power.

Jesus says, with words, that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. And then he casts a demon from a man. “What is this?” the people say. “A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him.”<sup>1</sup> A new teaching—more words. But not *mere* words. These words were joined to touchable evidences.

Jesus casts a compassionate eye upon the paralytic man let down through the roof and lying now at his feet. “Take heart, my son,” he says, “your sins are forgiven.”<sup>2</sup> The Pharisees scowl and doubt and disapprove in that crowded room. And the Savior, knowing their thoughts, decides to demonstrate his statement by an undeniable act. “But that you may know,” he says, “that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—that is, that you may know my words are not *mere* words—he says to the paralytic, “Rise, pick up your bed and go home.”<sup>3</sup> And the paralytic walks home.

No man or woman will embrace any belief until God, by his intervening grace, opens the sealed eye of the heart to see the reality of that belief. The gospel we proclaim will be a series of marks on a page, or a sequence of phonetic sounds proceeding from a mouth, until God impresses on the heart of our hearers that these words speak of a grand fact.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 1:27 (ESV).

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 9:2.

<sup>3</sup> V. 6.

We are certainly convinced that none but God can effect this change in those who hear. Who besides Jesus can open blind eyes?

Yet, as we will see in Titus today, God means to impress upon the world the reality of your message through your life. If your life can be explained apart from any supernatural alteration of it, if you conduct yourself by the usual principles of selfishness that guide the larger mass of mankind, then what you speak concerning the gospel will be words and words and only words.

But if your manner of life has changed from what it was before the gospel touched it—if once you walked in selfishness, but now in love, once in gross corruption but now in holiness—then you will offer more than words. You will give the world a teaching with power, with reality.

You will by the evidence of your own transformed life adorn the gospel of God our Savior.

Hear now how Paul asserts the same in his instructions for young men and servants. He has in chapter two of this letter been providing Titus with the virtues he must teach believers in the cities of Crete. Paul has explained the manner of life fitting for older believers, and for young women. Now he turns to young men and to servants.

### **TITUS 2:6-10**

Paul continues to list the qualities that believers in every circumstance must have—and we will today consider these, for young men and for servants.

But I wish to focus also on the reasons Paul provides for this behavior at the end of his instructions. Therefore the division of this message today will be simple: Why must young men do as Paul instructs, and what does Paul instruct them to do? Then, why must servants do as Paul instructs, and what does Paul instruct them to do?

## Young men

First, then, before we consider what Paul requires of young men, we should consider why he requires it of them.

### Why

You will notice that verse 6 is about young men, but verses 7 and 8 are about Titus himself. The most likely explanation of this is that Titus is himself a young man—we will take him to be. Also, his task is in some ways different from that of most young men, but, as we will find, those qualities required of him are not far from what God requires of all.

Putting together then these three verses, from 6 to 8, notice the reason for how young men are expected to behave, in verse 8: “so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us.”

“Aha,” someone may say, “being a good Christian is all about appearances after all. The young men are to be on their best behavior simply so that no one has anything foul to say about them. Christianity is like parents who care too much about their reputation then—they urge their children to mind their manners, because they don’t want them to mar the family name.”

What will we say to this? Well, simply that it is too quickly concluded. Look back at our text. From verses 1 to 10 of Titus 2, Paul is providing the morals, but three times in the section he offers the reason, and we are only looking at one of those times. We must take in the others to understand each.

Consider the first of the three reasons, given at the end of verse 5: young women are to act in such and such a manner “that the word of God may not be reviled.” Join this reason with the current one: we must act a certain way so that our enemies have nothing bad to say about us—why? So that the word of God, the gospel, our message may not be reviled.

Christians will always be hated for this reason or for that, but we must never give our opponents a real reason to hate us. And we must not give them a real reason to hate us because if they have a reason to despise us, then they have a reason to despise our message. If on the other hand our lives are pure, they may still rage against the light, but they will know that it is light. They will know that our message is true, since it has made us into what we are.

The concern above all others is the reputation of our message.

Think only a moment and you will probably recall hearing from the lips of an unconverted soul, “Christians are hypocrites.” You offer the gospel of life to your neighbor and plead that he believe, but he replies, “Yeah, I used to church, but I got burned by so-called Christians and I never intend to go back.”

We cannot say there is no soundness at all in their logic. We Christians claim to have the Spirit of God dwelling within us; we say that Christ has crushed the power of sin and slain its principle in our hearts. We are more than conquerors and have overcome the world. Our hearts have been changed and our inner persons utterly reformed. These are strong words.

And the world, when they hear this, thinks, “Show me.” So many religions and philosophies make extravagant claims—but the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

There are words, words everywhere. But where are the words with power? Where are the words with the might to truly regenerate the inner person? The world is watching, is wondering where it will find such words. And the world is not watching with an open mind, but with an innate hostility against the truth. The fallen nature of your lost friends and family and co-workers predispose them to disbelieve the gospel. They are, as Paul speaks of in verse 8, “an opponent.”

Yes, Titus’ opponents were, at least in part, those mentioned in the first chapter and again in the third—Jewish “Christians” with debauched lives, more concerned about deep-sounding topics and technicalities, about Jewish myths and genealogies, than about a holy life, who loved to stir up divisions in the church.

But he and we are also up against a hostile culture. Every unbelieving mind leans itself against our gospel by nature.

Therefore we must provide no kindling for their fires. If they will fume and blaze against the good word of our Lord Jesus Christ, at least let us not be the fuel for their fires. Paul’s hope is that we, by our obedience, will actually put these opponents to shame. He means for us to let those fires burn out, since we give them nothing to burn on.

We are about to turn to the behavior that we who are young men must have, but do not miss this reason given by Paul for the behavior. We proclaim a gospel that alone of every message can truly transform the inner person. But if we do not live as those who are transformed, our gospel will appear to be nothing but words. It will be spoken against, because we who hold it will be spoken against. Brothers and sisters, these things must not be. The name of our God is tied to our behavior—that is a weighty fact!

If there are any here who long that the name of Jehovah be honored in the world—among your classmates, your neighbors, your co-workers—then the behavior and attitudes soon to be recommended are far from unimportant for you. They are not an empty list. These are the ways in which we show the world that the gospel is real! It has weight, it touches this plane of actual experience. It is not a myth composed of mere words—it is the truest story ever told.

And if the world, when it hears the message of our Savior, God in flesh suffering for a fallen humanity, risen in preeminent glory, wills to reject that message, do not let it be because we fell short of the calling with which we were called.

## What

How, then, are we to live, so that we may shame the enemies of the gospel and demonstrate the factual weight of our message, by the grace of God?

See verses 6 through 8:

Likewise [as Titus has been instructed to instruct older men and women, who would in turn help younger women], urge the younger men to be self-controlled. Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned.

The young are not known for their self-control. Desire is strong, and wisdom often weak. This seems especially true of young men.

Paul probably has in mind men in their 20's—so young men fresh out of high school, in the college and post-college years. Combine with this the fact that Cretans were not known for their virtue, and you have a generation set before Titus who likely resembled the average college freshman today.

We are accustomed to the excesses of alcohol, drugs, and sex which tend to make up the college experience. It is hard to calculate a concrete number, but probably 60-80% of college students drink alcohol—with about half binge drinking.<sup>4</sup> In the last few decades, the abuse of prescription drugs has jumped to join the abuse of other substances.<sup>5</sup> And the average college student sleeps with five people not their spouse during their college years.<sup>6</sup> We could go on.

But tell me, what would happen if some power could be found which, when applied to this very group of dissolute people, would restrain them, clean them up, and leave them clothed and in their right mind? What if the world were to happen upon a community of young men who were self-controlled?

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<sup>4</sup> “College Students and Drug Abuse,” *AddictionCenter.com*, Beach House Center for Recovery, <https://www.addictioncenter.com/college/> (last edited Sept. 4, 2018; accessed Sept. 23, 2018); “College Drinking,” *The NIAAA Website*, National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, <https://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/CollegeFactSheet/Collegefactsheet.pdf> (accessed Sept. 23, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> Joseph A. Califano, Jr., “Wasting the Best and the Brightest: Alcohol and Drug Abuse on College Campuses,” *CenterOnAddiction.org* (May 28, 2007; accessed Sept. 23, 2018).

<sup>6</sup> “Collegiate Sexual Exposure,” *CollegeStats.org*, <https://collegestats.org/explore/collegiate-sexual-exposure/> (accessed Sept. 23, 2018).

What if they found late high school students who, instead of selfish, were very role models of selfless deeds of service, outshining every other age group in the unbelieving world? What if these young men had minds that were filled, not with evil schemes and silliness, but with a message that praised integrity and dignity, a message that produced in them a healthy and well-balanced life?

I will tell you what—the world would fall on its face and worship God, declaring that God is really among you. Yes, some will go on mocking; but some will not. Some will say, “Look at these young men—what is this message that has reformed them? Here are no mere words; here is a teaching with power!” They will look for something to blame, and will not find it, and so they will be ashamed—we hope, unto repentance and eternal life.

## Servants

Our text goes on and so must we. Leaving behind the young men and their witness, we move to another group of people: servants.

Certainly some of the young men already mentioned would be in this category too in the ancient world. Some sources estimate that one-third to one-half of the entire Roman world around the time of Paul’s writing were servants.

Was this an institution similar to early American slavery, with which we are familiar? Yes and no.

Yes, in that these servants were in some sense considered property—they had fewer rights and fewer protections than those who were free. As even Paul affirmed, it was better to be free than to be a servant, and servants who could purchase their own freedom should do so. Israel’s own history was one of liberation from slavery in Egypt. So the servants to whom Titus must speak are in an institution like American slavery, in that neither institution was good. We must not see Paul in this passage condoning the idea of slavery, though he is intent on helping servants live holy lives.

On the other hand, American slavery differed from ancient slavery in the blatant evil of its origin. In the ancient world, some servants were captured in war, but others sold themselves into slavery to escape debt or poverty. No doubt there were evil and vicious dealings from masters, but servants did seem to have several protections in place.

American and British slavery was much less like this. In plain terms, American settlers kidnapped Africans, in a manner we would consider terroristic today. Slaves were not regarded as human, but as stolen property. In the Old Testament, a Hebrew who kidnapped another Hebrew and made him a slave was punishable by death—but that was

the entire basis of American slavery. This was why Charles Spurgeon refused to have any fellowship with a slaveholder in his day. “Whenever one has called upon me,” he wrote, “I have considered it my duty to express my detestation of his wickedness, and I would as soon think of receiving a murderer into my church . . . as a man stealer.”<sup>7</sup>

One day the principles of God’s word would overthrow the institution of slavery in Britain and America in a way seen nearly nowhere else at any time—but in our present passage, Paul is more concerned about those principles than about what they would one day produce. His heart extends in compassion to all who suffer; but he knows their suffering cannot reach its eventual end if the gospel is lost or buried. So his first concern is not that the servants find freedom, but that in their unideal state they honor the gospel.

Notice the reason for his instruction to these servants, in verse 10: “so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.”

Since we do not have real servants today, has this passage lost its relevance? By no means! For today employment serves much the same function as servanthood did then. An employee is compelled by need, while a servant was compelled by force—but beyond this distinction there are mainly similarities.

Paul then wants Titus to see the lazy and lying Cretans recrafted into diligent workers. And why should Paul care at all about this?

Because if the Cretan believers obey, they will “in everything...adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.”

How many of your testimonies contain this clause: “I began to spend time with a believer or group of believers, and I realized I did not have what they had, but I wanted it. They had peace, they were trustworthy and respectable, they were selfless—and I wanted that.”

In other words, the gospel you heard the first time seemed like only words to you; then you saw its effect, and those words became beautiful words. They were words with power, words that carried salvation.

This is what it means for the gospel to be adorned by our behavior.

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted in “The Reason Why America Burned Spurgeon’s Sermons and Sought to Kill Him,” *Spurgeon.org*, The Spurgeon Center, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, <https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/blog-entries/the-reason-why-america-burned-spurgeons-sermons-and-sought-to-kill-him> (Sept. 21, 2016; accessed Sept. 23, 2018).

We dare not think we can make the gospel beautiful—it already is. The rational mind will see in the gospel all that the soul was created to enjoy. But because of sin our minds are not rational. A veil lies over our hearts, until it is removed in Christ. And often God intends to remove that veil through the influence of a Christian who is simply good. A good employee makes the gospel a respectable message even among those who reject it. He or she adorns the teaching of God our Savior.

## What

And just what kind of employee accomplishes so great a task? Paul tells us in verses 9 and 10:

Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith.

Now, slaves in the ancient world not uncommonly led dissolute lives. Part of the blame belonged to their masters, who used them for labor but did not care about their souls. Hence a free child would be brought up with an eye to his manners and morality, while a servant child might be neglected in these areas. The consequence was that code of slaves recorded, as a stereotype, by Jews after Jesus' day: "love one another, love theft, love debauchery, hate your masters and never tell the truth."<sup>8</sup>

Think of how many employees today in spirit despise their bosses. They are all too quick to tell you the many injustices they have faced from their employer, and sometimes they will unkindly tell it to his or her face. By their grumbling attitude they make the workplace more miserable than it was before, both for their boss and for their co-workers. This is quite normal.

And since they feel themselves mistreated, it is not hard for them to justify wasting a bit of company time, or keeping back a bit of something that belongs to the company. If there is an opportunity to skim a bit of money off the top without another noticing, well, they are underpaid anyways, right? It will only go into the pockets of those at the

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<sup>8</sup> Babylonian Talmud, *Pasahim 113b*, quoted in I. Howard Marshall and Philip H. Towner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, International Critical Commentary (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 260; see also John Chrysostom, "Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to Titus," in *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. James Tweed and Philip Schaff, vol. 13, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889), 533-34.

top of the hierarchy, who have enough to spare. This is a normal attitude as well.

But what if an employee—even a whole subset of employed individuals in our society—bucks this normalcy and works in an entirely different way? What if these Christian workers do not despise their bosses, but submit to them in everything, and in word and thought and deed? What if they obey the exhortation in 1 Peter, to “be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust”?<sup>9</sup> The breakroom buzzes with complaints about the boss, but this person adds a comment in the boss’s defense.

What if the boss finds among a whole slew of headache-inducing employees, one small group of them who are a refreshment, an oasis in the workplace desert? These few persons, or maybe just one, can be trusted with anything at any time, and they will happily and faithfully undertake the task. The boss, like Potiphar, would not be opposed to entrusting the whole household to this Joseph, without fear of embezzlement or betrayal.

What if there were really workers like this? I will tell you what—if men and women worked like this, their bosses and co-workers would respect the gospel. I am not saying persecution would dissipate, for there must be persecution; but there would also be respect, and some would be saved. Those who slander such workers in the breakroom would, eventually, lose all credibility, since none of their claims would play out. They would be like the accusers of Jesus, who were made to look like fools even though the Savior answered them not a word. His holy and modest behavior won the wonder of Pilate, the repentance of the thief crucified beside him, and the declaration from the Centurion overseeing his punishment, “Certainly this man was innocent!”

An employee who conducts himself with a similar innocence over time may spark, even in his opponents, the thought, “What was this gospel he was talking about again?” Or the thought, “Well, I think she’s wrong in her beliefs, but no one can question her life.”

## Conclusion

Brothers and sisters, we are not peddlers of bare words, Sophists with philosophies as empty as our heads. We are small, we are insignificant in this world—we are not numbered among the great, and we will not be remembered by the writers of history—but we hold fast a word that will never pass away.

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<sup>9</sup> 1 Pet. 2:18.

Heaven and earth will pass away, but not our gospel. All mankind like grass will pass away with the scorching sun, but the word of God endures forever.

Christ crucified for sinners, trading his innocence for our guilt, he will, as the Welsh have sung, “never be forgotten throughout heav’n’s eternal days.”<sup>10</sup>

And if by our conduct we can silence those who hate this gospel, and show them and all others that it is a teaching with authority and power, then let us do all that we are able by the Spirit to do so that we might, like jewels around a neck, expose the beauty of our doctrine.

It is easy to say, “My sins have been forgiven,” but so that the world may know the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins, let us arise, take up our pallets, and walk in obedience.

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<sup>10</sup> William Rees and William Williams, “Here Is Love Vast As the Ocean,” trans. William Edwards, *Hymnary.org*, [https://hymnary.org/text/here\\_is\\_love\\_vast\\_as\\_the\\_ocean](https://hymnary.org/text/here_is_love_vast_as_the_ocean) (accessed Sept. 23, 2108).