

## **Making God Attractive**

### **Titus 2:1-10**

How much time do you spend making yourself attractive? We have whole industries dedicated to the various possibilities of making people attractive.

- Cosmetics industries to make sure we can cover up the natural blemishes.
- Personal fitness industries to keep our bodies in tip-top shape.
- Fashion industries to decorate us.
- Plastic surgery to fix up the bits we don't like.
- Magazines to show us all the options.

There's billions of dollars tied up in it.

Think of a bride on her wedding day – what's she go through?

- She gets a special dress to show her beauty off to advantage.
- She goes to the hairdresser to get her hair done.
- Then the manicurist to get her nails done.
- Then someone to do make-up to cover up her natural beauty.

Many of us spend significant time and expense making ourselves attractive – or at least presentable – each day. The end of today's passage talks about making *the teaching about God our Saviour attractive*. Do you put as much time and expense into doing that? Have you even thought about it? Do you know how you'd go about doing it? Is it important to you?

### **The Basic Concern**

When you look at these verses, you quickly notice that

they're a series of instructions about what's to be taught to different groups of people:

- Verse 2: *Teach the older men*
- Verse 3: *Likewise, teach the older women*
- Verse 4: *Then they can train the younger women*
- Verse 6: *Similarly, encourage the young men*
- Verse 9: *Teach slaves*

So, we could look at each of those in turn. I could tell you what's required of the older men. They could listen while everyone else goes to sleep. Or maybe they'd go to sleep while everyone else listened so they could make sure they knew when they could tell off the older men.

We will look at some of the specifics in a few minutes – but, before we do that, I want us to look at something that I think holds the whole section together. Look at the end of verse 5:

*... so that no one will malign the word of God.*

Now look at the end of verse 8:

*... so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.*

And the end of verse 10:

*... so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Saviour attractive.*

Paul wants Titus to teach the Christians in Crete to develop certain qualities and to behave in certain ways. Why?

- So they can have bragging rights before God?
- So they can be nominated for Cretan of the year?
- So that they'll look good?

No – so that God will look good.

These people are now God's people. They belong to Jesus. Thus, how they behave reflects back on God. It's

a theme that's common in the Old Testament in relation to Israel. It comes out both positively and negatively.

- Positively, Israel's told: Be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy. They're to be different from the nations. They're to look like they're God's people.
- Negatively, when Israel does the wrong thing, as she so often does, it results in the nations blaspheming God's name – dishonouring God's name.

When God rescues Israel from slavery in Egypt, He sets apart the nation to be a kingdom of priests. They're to be different from the other nations. They're to demonstrate God's good character to the other nations. When they fail to live rightly – when they do wrong and copy the wicked behaviour of the other nations – then God's name's dishonoured.

It's like sports stars being charged with bringing the game into disrepute.

- Ben Cousins in the AFL and his drug use.
- Matthew Hayden and his on-air radio comments about Habijan Singh.
- Nick D'Arcy who made the swimming team for the Beijing Olympics and then had a bar brawl with another swimmer.

They're high profile players. Their actions off the field reflect back on the sport that's made them famous. When those actions are bad, they reflect negatively on other players and on the organisation and on the sport. People think: O, that's what the AFL condones. And so they're charged with bringing the game into disrepute. The AFL wants to make it clear they don't condone that sort of behaviour.

Paul says it's like that with Christians as well. The way

we behave results in people saying either good things about God or bad things about God. It can result in people being drawn towards the truth about God or being repelled from the truth about God.

- Ever been in the situation where people notice you're different? They notice you don't use the same bad language as everyone else. They notice you don't laugh at the dirty jokes. They notice you don't have girlie magazines lying around your desk.
- On the other side of the coin, ever been in the situation where you've heard: "I thought Christians weren't supposed to do that sort of thing"?

So, how are we going at being different? In what ways are we to be different? What are the differences that make the teaching about God look attractive?

- If everyone round us is wearing clothes, should we do without clothes?
- If everyone round us drives a car, should we walk?
- If everyone round us goes to the movies, should we avoid the movies?

The area in which we're to be different relates to godliness. Remember back in 1:1

*Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness.*

In 1:5, Paul reminds Titus he's left behind in Crete to appoint elders in every town. What's an elder supposed to do? Verse 9:

*He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.*

In other words, the elders must have the knowledge of the truth and they must teach it to others so they can grow in

godliness.

Today's passage keeps the same emphasis. Verse 1:

*You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine.*

And then comes a list of various groups of people Titus is to teach – and a list, not of facts and knowledge as such, but of godly qualities that result from people having knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness.

It's not a matter of being different for difference sake. It's a matter of living godly lives – lives that flow from the knowledge of the truth of the gospel. Because we live in an ungodly world – a world in rebellion against God and opposed to God and wanting to do its own thing rather than God's thing – our godly lives will stand out as being significantly different from the average non-Christian. Or they should stand out in that way. And it's that difference that makes the teaching about God attractive.

So again I ask, how are we going? As I was preparing this sermon, I listened to a sermon by Kent Hughes. It wasn't on this passage – it was on a different part of the Bible altogether. He quoted a whole stack of statistics about Americans watching TV. The surveys show that the viewing habits of American evangelical Christians are no different from the rest of the population. Whatever the population of America watches, American evangelical Christians watch the same things in the same proportions.

Or, how do we do in the area of consumerism? We live in a society that encourages us to consume. Buy more, eat more, have more, keep up more, experience more, play more, throw away more. What does godliness look

like in relation to that? Is it to thank God for His good gifts and go on a binge of consuming more? No – the Bible talks about stewardship of God's resources and the idolatry of serving money and using resources to care for those in need. So, how do we compare with our culture – are we different or do we simply go along with the values of our culture and copy everyone round us? Do our lives represent a distortion of God's word?

In previous generations, Christians were concerned to be different from our culture – to uphold standards of godliness that caused them to stand out. They developed a series of rules.

- No drinking.
- No dancing.
- No smoking.
- No movies.
- No make-up.

And so it went on. Their concern was to help Christians – especially Christian young people – avoid the traps of ungodliness. These things were considered detrimental to spiritual health. People thought involvement in these things would easily lead to sinful behaviour.

Subsequent generations of Christians have criticised such unbiblical rules – labelled them Pharisaic, legalistic, man-made traditions. They denied the freedom we're given in Jesus. Yet, now we see so many areas of life where Christians are no longer distinct.

- We watch the same steamy movies as everyone else – and we no longer bat an eyelid doing it.
- We have the same interest in exciting our taste buds with new experiences as everyone else.
- We spend our money on the same things they spend

their money on.

- We join the same groups and fan-clubs on facebook as everyone else.
- Our divorce rates are the same as our culture.

While we rightly decry the apparent legalism of earlier generations, one wonders if we've thrown the baby out with the bathwater. We've emphasised Christian freedom to the extent that many Christians interpret it as a right to indulge themselves in whatever way they want. As one writer has put it: we've gone from Puritanism to hedonism and no one's bothered to shout out *fire* while it was happening.<sup>1</sup>

### The Specifics of Godliness

Paul provides instructions to Titus on how he's to teach godliness to different sections of the church. Titus is to teach them the gospel – sound doctrine – and the godliness that flows from the gospel. This is the conduct, the behaviour, the character, the lifestyle that follows from our knowledge of the truth.

Titus isn't simply to make sure these people know the gospel – that they know sound doctrine. That's certainly important. You can't get anywhere in terms of becoming a Christian or growing in the Christian life without knowing the gospel. But just knowing the gospel isn't sufficient. The knowledge of the truth must lead to godliness. We're to live out the saved life God's given us. And so, the things Titus is told to teach in this chapter relate to the way we live – it's behaviour and lifestyle. Christian teaching can only be considered truly effective when there are changes in behaviour that reflect the truth.

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<sup>1</sup> London & Wiseman, *Becoming your Favourite Church* (Ventura: Regal, 2002) 217.

Why are there different instructions for the different groups? Does godliness look different depending on which group you fit in? Do old men have to be sound in faith, love and endurance but old women don't have to worry about those things? Do old Christian women have to avoid being addicted to wine, but old Christian men can be addicted as much as they like? No. Godliness remains essentially the same for everyone. But people's circumstances in life change – and the particular temptations to various forms of ungodliness often change with those circumstances. The temptations young men face are often different to the temptations old men face.

Yet, I don't think that means we can just put ourselves in one of these groups and ignore what's said to the rest. It's not as if you can say:

Well, I'm still young. I don't have to worry about being temperate, worthy of respect and sound in faith, love and endurance. When I think I'm in the old category, then I'll worry about those things.

Two things against that:

- First, these things are part of godliness. Godliness remains godliness no matter what your age. The requirement for godliness doesn't change depending on your age. If being temperate is part of godliness for old men, it is that because it's part of the overall definition of godliness. Thus, it remains part of godliness for everyone.
- Secondly, the only way you get to be like that when you're an old man is if you practise being like it while you're a young man. It's what you're to aim for – and to aim for now.

Now, I don't have time this morning to go through each

of these groups in detail. I'll leave you to do that for yourself later. I'm going to concentrate on two things:

- First, the idea of self-control – because it comes up in relation to old men, young women and young men.
- Secondly, the stuff that's said to slaves. We don't have slaves today and so there's the temptation to simply skip that bit – but I think these qualities of godliness are equally relevant to us today and so I want to encourage you not to skip over them.

### Self-Control

So then, self-control. The New Testament uses a number of different Greek words that are translated as *self control* in English. The particular one that's used three times in this passage has the idea of behaviour that's based on thought. It's the more prudent, thoughtful aspect of self control. It's the idea of not just reacting based on your instincts or what you feel like doing or what seems to come naturally – but being controlled enough to stop and think through the situation and react on the basis of that thoughtful consideration.

Now, that's actually a quality I think our society values at one level. We respect people who can control their emotions in difficult situations and think through their reaction and give a considered response rather than flying off the handle. We think there's a problem with those who give vent to road rage or hospital rage or shopping queue rage or whatever the latest rage incident happens to be.

But I think what Paul writes here is much broader than that. It certainly includes that, but it includes more as

well. It includes thinking through all things from the perspective of the gospel. Consider some examples.

Some of you young people have received your first pay packet recently. You've had all this time with virtually no money and now, all of a sudden, you have what feels like lots of money. What do you do with it?

- Our culture says: indulge yourself. This has been a long time coming. Now's the time to splurge. New clothes. New junk food. New CDs. New whatever. You've got this new financial freedom. You deserve to enjoy it however you want. Just buy whatever you feel like. Spend your money on what comes naturally.
- Is that a godly response? Is that thinking through how God wants us to use money? Is that showing self-control?

It doesn't change once you get older either. In moving to Bathurst, Lesley and I have come here with less financial responsibilities. We're no longer financially responsible for our children. We no longer have to spend all that money on all those experiences and opportunities our culture tells us good parents provide for their children. That frees up a significant amount of money in the budget. What should we do with that?

- Again, our culture says: indulge yourself. You've restrained yourself for so long – now's the time to spend up on what you want to do. Take an overseas holiday every year. Get a new entertainment system. Start a new hobby. Go out to dinner more often. Just buy whatever you feel like. Pamper yourself.
- Is that a godly response? Have the priorities of the

gospel changed simply because our kids have left home? Because we've sacrificed as parents all those years, are we now entitled to be rewarded with a bit of self-indulgence?

Our culture trains us in the ways of materialism – and much of that focuses on self. Sure, we're taught some restraint.

- You can't indulge yourself if that'll cause harm to someone else. You can't play your music loud at midnight.
- You shouldn't indulge yourself to the extent your credit card debt gets out of control. When you're about to go bankrupt, you know it's out of control.
- You should give something to charity.

But, other than that, go for it. Enjoy yourself. Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die. Spend up big – it keeps the economy going.

Paul tells Titus to teach self-control – for that's in accord with sound doctrine. Think through your behaviour in terms of the gospel. You've been set free from that old sinful way of life – that life where you set self up as god and simply pleased yourself. You've been set free for the purpose of godliness. You're to be distinctive.

### Slaves

We could continue thinking about self-control for a long time – how it relates to food and drink, to sexuality, to driving, to playing sport, to evangelism – but we'd better move onto slaves. Verse 9:

*Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them,*

*and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted ...*

Slaves were common in the first century. Many of the early Christians were slaves. We don't have slaves today – we don't function as slaves, we don't own slaves – and so the temptation's to think this is irrelevant for us. What are the basic principles of godliness for slaves as Paul outlines them here?

- Respect for authority.
- Willingness to work.
- Absence of defiance.
- Honesty and trustworthiness.

Won't those same principles apply in any situation where we're under authority?

- Employees and employers.
- Students and teachers.
- Children and parents.
- Citizens and governments.

How do Christian employees make the teaching about God our Saviour attractive? Won't it be the same?

- Respect for authority.
- Willingness to work.
- Absence of defiance.
- Honesty and trustworthiness.

Sure, you're not a slave. Your employer can't beat you like a master could beat a slave. Your employer can't call on you 24/7 like a master could a slave. You probably have the freedom to suggest improvements to your employer. You can negotiate better pay conditions. You have the freedom to change employers. Yes, there are a lot of differences. But will not the effect of knowing God in the place you work be essentially the same? Isn't this

still how godliness looks?

Now, there'll be people who aren't attracted to those qualities. Your workmates may not appreciate it if you don't join in their whinging and complaining about the boss. To reject that is distinctive. They may feel downright threatened by your willingness to actually work – it shows up their own laziness. They may make fun of your honesty in the workplace and give you a hard time generally. Some people reject godliness out of hand. And you'll be tempted to think this godliness stuff isn't really making God look very attractive to these guys. And that may well be right.

- The attractiveness has to do with how God defines it – which means that it's stuff that's in line with His perfect and pure character.
- It's not attractiveness in worldly terms. The world finds sin attractive. They're committed to their rebellion. They desire to continue that lifestyle.

Yet, the attractiveness of the Christian life does act as salt and light. When non-Christians begin to have stirrings about the futility of their sinful lifestyle, the distinctiveness of the Christian's lifestyle arouses their curiosity.

And it's the same in school and with teachers. If you want to live a godly life in the workplace, school's the time to start practising. And that means showing respect to teachers – not just when they're present, but also when it's just your friends running them down in their absence. It means being willing to work at your studies – not just doing the minimum possible whenever you happen to be under threat of punishment. It means not being defiant in the way you act towards teachers. Even more than that, it means not being defiant in your attitude towards them.

### **Is this a Priority?**

So, how much time and expense do you put into godliness? Is it important to you? Is it as important to you as your physical appearance? Are you keen that you be attractive in this way – as keen as a bride is to scrub up well for her wedding day?

Paul says this is the outcome of the gospel in your life. This is God's salvation for you. Faith and the knowledge of the truth lead to godliness. Teaching sound doctrine involves encouraging Christians to pursue these things. These things don't save you – God alone does that. But these things are the salvation God's done in your life. God intends that our lives demonstrate that to others.