

Advent Devotional December 20, 2021

Scripture

Titus 2:1-10

1 But as for you, teach what is consistent with sound doctrine. 2 Tell the older men to be temperate, serious, prudent, and sound in faith, in love, and in endurance.

3 Likewise, tell the older women to be reverent in behavior, not to be slanderers or slaves to drink; they are to teach what is good, 4 so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, 5 to be self-controlled, chaste, good managers of the household, kind, being submissive to their husbands, so that the word of God may not be discredited.

6 Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. 7 Show yourself in all respects a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, gravity, 8 and sound speech that cannot be censured; then any opponent will be put to shame, having nothing evil to say of us.

9 Tell slaves to be submissive to their masters and to give satisfaction in every respect; they are not to talk back, 10 not to pilfer, but to show complete and perfect fidelity, so that in everything they may be an ornament to the doctrine of God our Savior.

Devotional

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In Titus, Paul (or someone in the tradition of Paul) writes a letter to his church-planting disciple in Crete. Sections like Titus 2:1-10 detail ideal behavior for churchgoers based on Greco-Roman social expectations.

There are different rationales for why Paul upholds Greco-Romans social norms. Perhaps he is presenting the new church as a non-threat. Perhaps he is bringing the gospel into the context of Gentiles. Perhaps he is drawing a dramatic comparison between new Christians and false Christian teachers in the area (Titus 1:9-16).

Whatever the reason, we cannot read these household codes without acknowledging the hurt that comes from labeling and limiting others based on identifiers such as gender or class. Social orders, whether they exist today or in the Greco-Roman time period, create a hierarchy of value—but God calls us to see and value each other for our inherent, rather than socially assigned, worth.

Maybe the Advent invitation of this passage is to lament the ways that the gospel has been contextualized to its detriment. In other words, Titus 2 can invite us to grieve the times when the church in a broken world has labeled others rather than loved them.

If we read through Titus 2:14, we are reminded that faith is not simply about following social norms. It is about matching our professed beliefs with our actions. And we are empowered to do good deeds, to match our words and actions, because of Christ's life, death, resurrection, and promised return.

So, in many ways, Titus 2 encapsulates the circuitous mystery of faith. Despite good intentions, we sometimes follow the rules of society and not God. Yet, somehow, we are also on the miraculous journey to become more like Christ, a journey made possible only because of Christ. And this is the contradiction we sit with in Advent—God came, God is here, God is coming, but we wait in a broken world.

Prayer

God of grace, forgive us for the ways and times that we reflect the world around us instead of your radical love. Help the church to atone for the ways it has excluded people and perpetuated a hierarchy that goes against your will. Thank you for the gift of your Son, who lives on in us. Continue to create in us new hearts that empower us to match our faith and actions. Amen.