

Women's Bible Study Spring 2011
A Spiritual Legacy: Passing On What You Know
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Live What You Teach...Titus 2
Robin Kaufmann

"All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten."
Or at least that is the title of Robert Fulghum's bestselling book.

In this collection of essays, Fulghum lists 16 lessons that he says hold the secret to successful living. They are simple lessons...things you learned in kindergarten...things you might find yourself saying out loud 10... 20...200 times a day if you have young children. Some are cute...some profound...most of them ring true, for sure.

"Share everything."

"Play fair."

"Don't hit people."

"Wash your hands before you eat."

"*Flush.*"

"Don't take things that aren't yours."

"When you go out in the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands and stick together."

"Everything you need to know is in there somewhere," says Fulghum. "The Golden Rule and love and basic sanitation...politics...and sane living."

The book struck a nerve in American culture and after 15 publications, the title of the book is now an idiom for back-to-basics wisdom...how to live and what to do.

Paul's 1st century letter to his friend Titus is a bit like Fulghum's book...a back-to-basics, foundational curriculum. In this case it is laid out for a young pastor and the brand new churches for which he was responsible. In an effort to coach him in how to order and teach the newly formed Christian churches on the island of Crete, Paul's letter, like a good teaching manual, lays out a plan for how to do just that. But unlike Fulghum's entertaining book, we will see that the what and the how of teaching are rooted in the answer to the question of why to teach in the first place.

Let's pick up with this letter where we left off last week...right in the middle... in what is now labeled as the 2nd chapter of the Book of Titus. If you have your bibles with you, you can read along with me.

I. What to Teach

In this relatively short letter, Paul does not mince any words. Remember the stinging indictment of the characteristic dishonesty of the Cretans in the first chapter. He goes so

far as to say that the false Cretan teachers “profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.”

BUT, says Paul, to Titus, YOU should be different. Do not teach lies. Instead, teach what is in accord with...what *agrees with* or *fits in with*...sound doctrine. In this first sentence of the chapter, we see the “what to teach” of the curriculum that Paul is laying out for Titus: sound doctrine and what agrees with it.

A. Sound doctrine

For most of us, the word “doctrine” can be a little intimidating...as if it is an academic notion that is understood only by those who are formally trained in theological matters. The reality is... we all have a “doctrine.” Whatever set of beliefs or teachings shape your life is your doctrine. In a book entitled “When Life and Beliefs Collide,” author Susan Custis James says just that. In every moment of life, she proposes, we exercise what it is that we believe in:

“Life comes to women in stiff doses,” she says. “When it does and we are crushed...or stretched beyond our limits, we need to surround ourselves with good theologians- husbands, pastors, and steadfast friends...who will encourage and help us. But at the end of the day, it won’t be their theology we will lean on, no matter how good it is. We will lean on our own. Adversity and adventures have a way of exposing the state of our theology. We may have heard a lot about God. In the thick of things, we will discover what we really believe about him. We ask too much of ourselves to wade into these deep waters with so little to keep our faith afloat.”

Three weeks ago my family and I were driving home after a family Christmas in IL. An hour south of Rochester, with me at the wheel and the cruise control set at 68 mph, our Suburban, with my entire family in it, slipped on an ice-coated road and flipped at that high speed into the ditch and then the field. Although shaken and a little bruised, we all remarkably walked away from the type of accident that often kills or maims people. In the days following our accident in which I vacillated between gratitude for our protection and guilt over what had happened in the first place, it is true that my beliefs about God did, literally, collide with my life. In the past few weeks, all of those theologians in my life...my husband, pastor, and steadfast friends...have surrounded me and encouraged me. I am so grateful for the body of Christ and the strength and truth with which they have built me up. But when the lights go out at night and I am alone with my thoughts, it is my own theology, passed down from generations of believers, revealed in the Word of God, and illuminated by the Holy Spirit, that has bubbled up to the surface. God is sovereign. That I have known and seen evidence of for years. God is good. That He showed me on the cross. Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life. That is who He says He is. But when guilt and fear over the “what ifs” of our accident threatened to overwhelm me, I found myself not just needing to know this doctrine theoretically, but needing to believe it as a reality that practically plays out in life...that He has numbered our days and that nothing happens that is out of the reach of His hand. Personal crisis, national tragedy, and suffering in general...life and beliefs do collide and certainly, then, don’t we want a “sound doctrine” with which to navigate the waters?

Sound doctrine is the contrast that Paul gives to the false doctrines that he has targeted in chapter 1. Sound, in this case, might also be translated as “healthy”...free from injury, defect, disease. The Greek word that is translated as “sound” in this verse is used to describe medical cases in the New Testament. Mark uses it to describe the bleeding woman whose bleeding stopped when she touched Jesus and He said, “Daughter, your faith has healed you” (Mark 5:34). It is used again in John to describe the paralyzed man by the pool in Bethesda who is healed by Jesus when Jesus says, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.’ At once the man was cured...” reports John (John 5:9). You see, he was healthy, whole, sound...free from defect or disease. Like a healthy person is in contrast to a sick person, healthy doctrine...sound doctrine...is in contrast with the sick teaching of the deceivers.

In the earliest days of the church, the apostles “proclaim(ed) the good news that Jesus is the Christ” (Acts 5:42) and Paul “preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 28:31). In his letters, Paul writes that it his ambition “to preach the gospel” (Romans 15:20) and to “preach Christ crucified” (I Cor 1:23). It is this ... preaching Christ...that Paul has in mind when he encourages Titus to “teach what is in accord with sound doctrine.” Drawing on all of Scripture, pastor and author Tim Keller boils Christian doctrine down to this foundational truth: “The Gospel is that you are more sinful and flawed than you ever dared believe, but at the same time, you are more loved and accepted than you ever dared hope because Jesus Christ lived and died in your place.”

B. What agrees with it

Now, if that doctrine is the foundational belief of your life- it changes everything! Think about doctrine- this healthy doctrine- like eating. We eat nutritious food to nourish us... “You are what you eat,” as the saying goes. A diet of fresh vegetables, whole grains, and healthy proteins will fuel our bodies for living. In the same way, a diet of healthy, sound doctrine- one that recalls both your sinful nature and your belovedness, and points to the life and death of Jesus Christ - will nourish and sustain your soul. You see, if you know you are sinful, then you know you need to be forgiven. If you know you are loved, then you know that you are forgivable. When you then know that you are accepted ...in spite of your sin that started it all...then instead of trying to save yourself or cover up your sin, your soul is fueled, and free, to live. When this sound doctrine is ingested and becomes the foundational belief in your life, you have the power to live a life that honors the One who lived and died to forgive you. Like healthy food is fuel for our bodies for physical living, so healthy doctrine is the fuel for spiritual living.

II. How to teach

And living is just what Paul had in mind when he implored Titus to teach what is in line with this sound doctrine. We have already seen what is not in line with sound doctrine in the lying and disobedient Cretans. What *is* in line with sound doctrine of Christ is spelled out in the following paragraph of the text in what Paul lays out as the “how” of his curriculum.

Starting in verse 2, Paul divides the believers in the Cretan churches into age, gender, and social standing groups, with specific, although similar, descriptions of the character qualities each should display.

Older men should exercise self-control, be worthy of respect, live wisely, have sound faith, and be filled with love and patience.

Younger men are to be self-controlled. Titus himself is to serve as a role model for this group of believers...doing good works and ensuring that everything he did reflected integrity and the seriousness of his teaching. Titus's sound doctrine was to be both told and shown, in much the same way that Paul, himself, held up his own life as an example. Paul called believers to practice the things that they had "learned and received and heard and seen in me" (Philip 4:9).

Older women are to live in a way that honors God, not slander others or be heavy drinkers. They are to teach what is good and to train younger women.

And the younger women? They are to learn to love their husbands and children, live wisely and be pure, to work in their homes, to do good, and to be submissive to their husbands.

Slaves were to obey their masters and try to please them rather than talking back or stealing. They were to be entirely trustworthy and good.

So what is the reason behind the different character qualities for the different groups of people? Likely these particular attributes were targeted because they would first address particular offenses common to these groups of people in this society. For example, one commentary that I read states that "slandering talk" and "drunkenness" were among the vices commonly associated with older women in Greco-Roman society. It is easy enough to imagine that younger men needed a reminder to be self-controlled or younger women a reminder to be submissive to their husbands.

On the other hand, if you look closely, all of these characteristics are variations on one common theme: self-control. Self-control over their passions, tongues, attitudes...this is a character trait that would stand out in stark contrast to the lack of self-control in the dishonest and gluttonous culture that was described in Titus chapter 1. Healthy doctrine lived out in followers of Christ would then...and does now... make the Gospel "attractive in every way." While Christianity admittedly has some mysterious and difficult-to-understand components, certainly the living out of its teachings by the believer is apparent to the world. A Cretan in the 1st century or your next door neighbor in this 21st century might not understand a virgin birth, but the character qualities outlined in this passage is a language that is understood by all. Margaret Manning, a writer for Ravi Zacharias Ministries, suggests that if we, as believers, would ingest the sound doctrine of God so that it becomes a part of who we are- like the "you are what you eat" analogy- the teachings of God would "radiate from our faces" and the way we

live, speak, and act- “even our very countenance-would give witness to the truth of God’s word.”

When my husband was in medical training in Virginia, another doctor was hired to do a 2-year neuro-radiology fellowship. This man was a professed Christian and a participant in our local Christian Medical fellowship, thus we had some interaction with him in a social context. At the hospital, he was known to be, in Tim’s words, “incomprehensibly incompetent.” At every turn, he seemed to be lacking the knowledge and skills to do his job. By the other physicians in the department, this man was regarded as incapable of medical practice. As a result, anything he said or did was regarded as foolish and he was not taken seriously. His witness for Christ, at least in that context, was destroyed and in a very real sense, his outward behaviors had brought shame on the Word of God. We didn’t know this man for long and we still don’t know his story...how it is that he got to that point in the first place, or what in the world was going on, but from that experience, my husband has learned first hand that a believer must first be respected generally before he will be heard on more controversial, and more important, matters. In medicine, as it certainly is in most other fields, the language that is understood by co-workers is competence, hard work, and integrity. When asked in an interview how Christians can be good doctors, it is reported that former US surgeon general C. Everett Koop, said, “First...be good doctors.” It is in this vein that Paul tells Titus and the churches in Crete to live self-controlled and reverent lives. The gospel message and the gospel life go hand in hand...one is ineffective without the other.

Note that Paul does not tell Titus to instruct younger women, although certainly, as their pastor, he did just that. Instead, he puts the primary teaching responsibility for younger women onto older women. It is the honorable lifestyle of older women, their diet of sound doctrine, and their experience as wives and mothers that gave them the insight from which they could teach. In a culture in which the only profession women could conceivably hold was to work at home, the older women who had held the same job were the natural teachers. Today, we can understand this verse to mean that whether we hold a job outside of the home or not, young women can greatly benefit from the encouragement of older women to hold their family life as a high priority.

In my own life, the exercise of this mandate in Titus 2 for the older women to teach younger women has been one of the more sanctifying aspects of my Christian walk. As the writer of Hebrews 11 laid out the people of faith that had come before him to point the way, I have my own “Hebrews 11” list of women who have walked or continue to walk a life of faith ahead of and beside me. Like the title of this message, these are women who have lived what they taught.

In faith, my Grandma lived a life of love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness, goodness, and self-control. Like the Proverbs 31 woman, she was called blessed by her husband. He adored her, and, as the story goes, one of the worst things she ever said about anyone was to call my Grandpa an “old windbag” after he carried on about

how beautiful she was. As far as I knew, that was as contentious as she ever got with her husband!

In faith, my Mom taught me about Jesus. From her, I learned simple things... foundational truths...like "He made the world" and "He loves you" and "He died on the cross." Once she told me that she really only wanted to know that her children would be with Jesus one day and I recall that moment as being one in which my heart submitted to the truth that Jesus spoke to it: that He is my Savior and Friend.

In faith, my mother-in-law lives an exemplary life. She has taught me humility and faithfulness and the wisdom of having a teachable heart. She plays an affirming and supportive role for me personally, for my marriage to her son, and for my children.

In faith, Louise, a young wife herself in 1993, mentored me as a brand new bride. I was married at the age of 21 and I think Louise looked at my young marriage to an equally young medical student and thought, "This girl needs help!" It was with her that I did my first real bible study, and from her that I learned to communicate with my husband and to stand beside him for better and for worse.

In faith, Diane, has preached the gospel. She was 65 years old when I knew her, and she was still replacing her bible every year because she used and marked the old one so heavily that it was no longer readable. "Let Scripture teach Scripture" she always said and she knew her way around her bible like I couldn't believe. For 4 years I sat under Diane's teaching. She both taught me the bible *and* how to study the bible and ignited in me a passion for the Word of God that still burns today.

In faith, Libby has lived a life of joy and hospitality. In my years with her, she was welcoming, and funny, and always looked like a million bucks. She had a beautiful home and an even better wardrobe, but her real treasure was her Lord Jesus. Libby is a southern gal and taught me things like, "Don't ever serve naked butter!"...which means, it's never appropriate to serve an empty slab of butter...you've got to dress it up a little!

In faith, Jane has lived a life of reverence. She thoughtfully and steadfastly walked beside me in the years of my husband's medical training, when my parents were also divorcing, and continues to do so now in the books and hymns she has given me and the notes she sends. When I think of the peace of Christ, I think of Jane because that is what she brought to my life.

And because like a bucket with a hole in it, I tend to leak, here in Rochester, God continues to surround me with women who train and encourage me. Sandy and Gretchen and at least 1/2 a dozen women in my small groups, this church, and in the local body of Christ at large all heed the call of God to live the life that they teach as they pass the Gospel on to me. I am blessed to be able to rest in the wisdom and understanding of older women in this community and compelled to obedience by their example. With this legacy that I am receiving from all of these women comes the

opportunity to pass it on myself. Although I am not yet submitting to being “older,” I do have to admit that I am old enough to no longer remember my natural hair color! So, I too must pass a legacy of sound living and sound doctrine on to my daughters, my younger sisters, and to younger women in this community who are walking a life of faith behind me.

To say that the women I have told you about have impacted me in life-changing, eternal ways is no understatement. Spanning the four decades of my life...each with their own personality, strengths, and weaknesses...these women, and a few others, have trained and encouraged me in a particular way. From their own journeys...filled with both the painful and the pleasant experiences that life holds for all of us...each has learned to trust Jesus and now they reassure me that I can do so, too. You see...God Himself proved to me that He tells the truth when He came to the world to die for me...just like He said He would. But often, it is helpful that someone with “skin on” remind me of that! And that’s ok...that is how God intends the body of Christ to function. It is in community...within the body of Christ...that this curriculum is lived out. “He died for us so that...we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up...” (1Thess 5:10). This is what leads us to the “why” of what we teach.

III. Why to Teach

Here it is in verse 11...The grace of God has appeared. The grace of God brings salvation, trains us, and gives us hope...certainty, really...of the 2nd coming of Christ.

A. Grace brings salvation

In this remarkable verse, we see the foundation of all that we have read so far. It is here that our curriculum really begins, because without this verse, there really is no curriculum at all. This is the why of teaching...the reason for the what and how we teach. Verse 11 is Christian doctrine in a nutshell: the grace of God, in the person of Jesus, came to bring salvation. But so big is the Grace of God and so massive are the implications of Grace in the flesh, that verse 12 continues to tell us what else the Grace of God does. “It teaches us to say ‘no’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives.” What does it mean, then, that grace “teaches us?”

B. Grace teaches us

Together we studied the 10 commandments last fall. In that study, we saw that the law teaches us about our sin...it shows us just how ungodly we are. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not have idols. You shall not murder or covet. No matter how hard I try, I still tend to make myself the center of the universe, to my shame I often worship the gifts rather than the Giver, and generally I just want what I want...whether it belongs to me or not! I’m selfish and shot through with sin, and the law shows me just how much. The purpose of the law is to do just that: to show me that I am a sinner and drive me into the gracious arms of my Savior. In Galatians, Paul says it like this: “The law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Gal 3:24 KJV).

So while the law shows us our ungodliness, here in Titus we see that it is grace that teaches us to say “No” to that ungodliness. The law teaches us what ungodliness and a worldly passion look like, but it is grace that teaches us to renounce those things. We too often make the mistake of trying to use the law to change ourselves. If we could just work at it a little harder...implement this program or follow that set of rules...then surely we would be changed. But the problem with that is that the law doesn’t have that power. The power that the law has is to point us to a Savior.

Here we find that the Savior who has the power to change us is Grace Himself. In his letter to Timothy, Paul writes that “the mystery from which true godliness springs is great: HE appeared in the flesh” (1 Tim 3:16). In the flesh he came to save us, in the Holy Spirit He is here to change us. “His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness” (2 Peter 1:3). When you know you are loved and forgiven and accepted, you can respond by living a God-honoring life in return. Throughout the people, events, and places that make up the story of your life, God’s grace changes us into the Godly, self-controlled, upright community of believers that He intends for us to be.

C. Grace gives hope

That older woman in your life?...that is grace teaching you to say no to ungodliness. That difficult relationship in your family?...that is grace teaching you to persevere. That frustrating day at work or with the 2-year old...or both?...that is grace teaching you self-control. That car accident for which you feel responsible?...that is grace leading you to a new understanding of God’s sovereignty. That passage of Scripture that convicts or encourages?...that is grace revealing Himself to you. It is Grace who appeared, Grace who saves you, Grace who teaches you, and Grace who will bring you home. He is coming again...Grace...our great God and Savior...and a glorious appearing it will be.

I recently heard a pastor say, “God didn’t save us to be Christians. He saved us to be human.” Certainly we have great anticipation of the second appearing. But while we wait for our faith to be turned to sight, we get to be human. We get to be trained and shaped to be who it is that God created us and saved us to be... ”a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.”

So, you see...it turns out that all we ever needed to know is not just learned in kindergarten...it is learned in the School of Grace. If you haven’t done so already, please do enroll. There the curriculum is already laid out. And your teacher? Well, it turns out that your teacher is your very best friend...and He has already done detention for you.

I am in your class there, too. You can’t miss me...I’m the one in tears in the front row because I failed again. Teacher Jesus has his arms around me...He’s whispering, “Robin...it’s ok...I’ve already done your homework for you. You’re going to get an A! And don’t worry, I’ve got a tutor already lined up for you. She was once right where you are at now. Come on...let’s go to lunch...you can meet her there.”

We'll go to lunch together...young and old alike...and there we will feast on the Bread of Life and be filled with Living Water. Together we will eat and drink...healthy food...fuel for life...and we will learn and be changed by the *only* One who always lived...and died...what He taught. And we will never be the same again.