

## Imitating Christ

Jonathan K. Dodson | Titus 2:1-10 | May 10, 2020

There's a phrase that's fallen out of use among Christians. It captures the shape of the Christian life, a kind of shorthand for being a true Christian. *Imitatio Christi*—the imitation of Christ. It's what Jesus meant when he said, Follow me. It's what Paul means when he says to Titus, *show yourself to be a model of good works*. The word model means to make an impression. Like modeling clay pressed into the lives of his followers, Titus is to leave the *imprint of Christ* on their lives. But to do that, he must train people who will in turn imprint Christ on others: the older *training* the younger, and the younger *imitating* the older. A reminder the Christian life is *not lived independently but interdependently*: imprinting and imitating Christ. Let's look at the impression of Titus, Men, Women.

### Titus

The first way Titus is to make an impression is by [teaching what accords with sound doctrine](#) (1). What *accords* with sound doctrine? Not the unscrupulous teachers at Crete. Titus is to teach the church a scruples *character* that accords with doctrine, behaviors that align with their beliefs. Now the word *accord* here actually means fit. *Strong character fits with sound doctrine*. I was talking to a newly-wed couple and asked them What attracted you to one another? The wife said (among other things) I liked the way his clothes fit. The trick is to keep them fitting! Not too baggy not too tight. Our character should fit our doctrine. If it's too baggy, we're taking too much license, veering from sound doctrine, obscuring the gospel. If our clothes are too tight, we fall into legalism, constricting the gospel. *But character that fits sound doctrine adorns our Savior (10) by looking like him*. So when onlookers see a humble, gracious, self-controlled, dignified person at work or in the neighborhood, and discover you're a Christian, they're like Oh yeah, that's because they're Christians. They're like their Savior. *Imitatio Christi*. What impression are leaders, Titus to make? [Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity](#) (7). **Dignity**. *A dignified person evokes respect*. They are honorable in speech and conduct. You want to learn from. Unfortunately, these people are rare, partially because in the age of a Big Me we want to flatten everyone, especially authority figures, so as to not feel small. We don't stretch *to be dignified*; we celebrate being undignified.

Dignified people are rare; the word has a serious tone, a person who takes the gospel seriously but not himself too seriously. He's comfortable in Christ and therefore a **model** of good works. *He doesn't need to be an activist or an intellectual, but his life and doctrine have a visible symmetry.* **Teaches with integrity** (7). My wife frequently talks with pastors' wives who will say to her, Don't you hate it when he's teaching and you just want to roll your eyes? Character needs to fit doctrine, we're to be models of goodness, making an impression of Christ. So, look out for admirable qualities in your leaders. Bring others' attention to them, not to idolize but to imitate Christ. Ask how they cultivate a virtue. That's how character building works. Find an example and emulate. My wife has devoted herself to various people over the years. She learned from John to keep her commitments, from Julie to be generous, from Steve to be forgiving, and from Jean to be devoted to sound doctrine. Who are you learning from?

## Men

Next he turns his attention to men. Older men are **to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness.** There's no specific age range here, as older and younger are relative to the church at Crete. In fact, younger men can sometimes be godlier than older men, but it should not be that way. Some of your wives are outpacing you; your character is baggy/tight, undisciplined or apathetic. As we age, we should ripen in Christlikeness, but that doesn't happen; you have to seek out those older in the faith.. **Sober-minded** means to be clear in your thinking, not back and forth, waffling on decisions. **Self-controlled** flows from sober-minded. Your convictions drive your commitments. This kind of person isn't wishy-washy. They are dependable and exemplary. The community recognizes it. They see in this man a kind of dignity they want to emulate and seek him out for counsel. Men like this attract other men. Likewise, older women train younger women. It's how the church matures. Not by one person training everyone, but by many men and women training other men and women, formally and informally. This isn't mechanical; it's relational. Follow up with someone after a CG call, lingering to talk after a sermon, going out for coffee. Who will you make an impression on and whom can you imitate?

## Women

Oh man, good morning. Thank you Jonathan for this privilege to talk directly to my city life sisters today regarding a passage that has literally been shaping me and motivating me for the past 30 years of my life. I first read this passage in my late 20's...so Paul's words have been forming me first as a single woman, then a married woman and now a mom. While there is SO much I wish I had time to share, I want to just mention two things...You asked the question "Where do we need to step up?" I believe that we are in a moment very similar, if not identical, to what this early church was going through...the cultural voices are so loud and they challenging God's authority in the church and in the home...we need the Truth of the Gospel to resonate in our hearts louder than the voices on our screens. love that Paul gives us permission to get perspective and training not just from the Word of God and just from the pulpit - but also from our brothers and sisters - those who've walked ahead of us and have more evidence of God's faithfulness through different seasons. BUT...he doesn't qualify just any one....**The requirements were:** be "older" by demonstrating Christ-honoring character - especially self control. I think if you look closely at the text, all the character traits we're asked to develop can stem from self-control... older women must be self controlled in their behavior, their words, their comfort with appropriate authority, their use of their time, etc. The Lord has set forth a small list of behaviors that show off to the world that we are His people. Character traits that show the world who God is. When we slander another woman in gossip, we talk about her in a way the God would never talk about his daughter. When we are controlled by substances, we use God's resources in a way they weren't designed and that are harmful. He's asking all of us to grow into maturity...and once we do we find the freedom - there is freedom in knowing your words are not secretive, your marriage is secure, your children know they're loved...these aren't character traits meant to burden us, they're meant to free us!

So the first thing here is implore us to desire to become older women! Will you grow old with me City Life? Will you get serious about your faith and grow into maturity... will you set in your heart a determination to be like the proverbs 31 woman who smiles at the days to come, she has no fear for her household? Look around you, look at your influences. Which ones are the loudest? Which ones are wooing you to disregard God's faithful plan? Get rid of those...AND...according to scripture, find a woman who's dignified and faithful to

Christ to help you. **Secondly**, we need OLDER women!!! No matter how old you are, we need godly faithful women to stand up and speak truth to the younger women. We can't just stare out our windows and wish that women would follow Jesus...we have the awesome privilege of being a part of God's plan for redemption and for building the church...if we will just SHARE and TEACH what we've been taught and what we've surrendered to. The World and the Church needs evidences of grace when we are doubting, we need evidences of provision when we're hungry, we need evidence of God's kindness when we're hurting. Paul is giving us permission to cling not just to stories of Abraham, Isaac and David...but to current day stories of faithful men and women in our lives who are fighting the fight of faith and seeing God prove that He is still faithful, He is still powerful, He is still redeeming. BUT... we can't do this if no one steps up. Paul didn't say "Titus, go get the eloquent speakers who've been through seminary to train these people up." No. He said go get the older men and the older women to pay attention to the younger women and younger men. Use those with godliness to train up the next generation in godliness. Be willing to share your story and speak truth. We are all in this story y'all!! We are all building up God's church, right here and now. We need dignified, self-controlled people to stand up and boldly proclaim how God has healed your marriage, how you choose self-control over substances by the power of Jesus, how you've chosen to speak life over people rather than gossip because the Lord has set you free...we need to hear your stories of redemption ....why??? So that the Name of Lord will be proclaimed as the Truth that it is...and that we may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior. It's really so exciting.

## **Conclusion**

Our character should fit sound doctrine, men and women, leaders and followers. Godliness is becoming of the gospel. Why? Not just for us but for the world. V 8: So a watching world may have nothing evil to say about us. In the words of Luther, [Because the heathen cannot see our faith, they ought to see our works, then hear our doctrine, and then be converted.](#)" Do people see a goodness in you that draws them to gospel? [Are we living in a way that demands a gospel explanation?](#) How? Being [sound in faith, love, and steadfastness \(2\)](#). That's what motivates godliness. It's not finding the greatest example of a virtue and trying our darndest to emulate it. While we should be blood-earnest about godliness, it's sound

faith, love, and steadfastness that keeps us going. A variation on the cardinal virtues: ***faith***, hope, love. A sound faith comes, not from yourself but from who you trust. If you've held out being serious about imitating others, enamored/trusting the Big Me, come to Christ. He will not cast you out. His strong, forgiving arms are open. His presence an invitation. Come to Christ. Sound ***love*** doesn't pick and choose who to love, favoring people like us. Healthy love chooses to love those *unlike* us. Just like we've been loved by Christ. None of us were remotely like Jesus, but he died for us anyway. Soak in that love and extend it to others. Finally, sound ***steadfastness***. It's not perfection overnight but *perseverance* over a lifetime. Fix your eyes on Jesus in faith, hope, and love. Trust and imitate *him*. Be steadfast because there's real hope for eternal life, a life in which according 1:1, we'll be fully like him. That day is coming, just as sure as God who never lies has promised before the ages began. It's a done deal, we just need to close the gap. So put your faith, hope, and love in Jesus, making an imprint of Christ!