

The Impact of a Christian Home

Titus 1:5-6

Last week we started our fall sermon series and began to dig into the book of Titus, which is a letter from Paul, a veteran missionary, to his ministry partner Titus, giving instruction on how to complete the work of establishing the new churches they planted on the island of Crete. We talked about how rough that society was – that they were descendants of defeated mercenaries and pirates who had a long history of resistance to rule. We also talked about how important godliness and transformation would be for the new believers on that island in order to make an impact for Christ in their communities.

I noted that we have some similarities to their situation because of our culture's continual decline into immorality and wickedness, and it's important for us to pursue transformation in all areas of our lives as well in order to make an impact for Christ in our communities. God can draw people to himself through our transformation and this letter will help us examine different areas of our lives to see where that needs to happen. Today we're going to look at the areas of marriage and parenting.

One of the growing problems in our society is the disintegration of biblical marriage and the effect that's having on children, families, and society. All of us have probably been affected in some way. The problems are widespread. Many husbands and wives mistreat each other and have really bad marriages, which causes problems in the home. Then there's divorce situations, second marriages, and blended families, which God can certainly work for good, but there's often a lot of pain and problems that go with them. We also have a relatively new surge of gay marriage which is a further abandonment of biblical values and opens up a whole new definition of marriage and family that's really confusing. Some kids have no experience of what a mom or dad is or even what a man or woman is. There's all kinds of dysfunction and as kids get older and become adults they often replicate that in their own families and that spills over into growing problems in all segments of society.

So it's alarming and discouraging on one hand, but it also provides an opportunity for us to make an impact for the gospel in our society if we will allow the Holy Spirit to transform us when it comes to marriage and parenting. So we're going to

look at what Paul writes to Titus about these things and consider how we can grow in these areas.

We are going to begin looking at the instructions in chapter 1 where Paul tells Titus to appoint elders in each town they had planted a church in. In their first phase of missionary work on the island of Crete, Paul and Titus had started these churches and now it was time for Titus to go back and establish leadership in them to guide and keep watch over the new believers. By that time, there was enough time and teaching for some of them to experience spiritual growth and maturity, and they were the ones who would be called on to serve as elders.

So we're going to look at a couple characteristics elders should have and I want us to see that these are not rare qualifications for an elite group of mature Christians. These are common characteristics that should become evident in all our lives as we grow in spiritual maturity. So even though they are listed as qualifications for eldership, they apply to all of us, and as we grow in them we will become distinct from the culture around us and able to make an impact for Christ on the people in our lives. Here's how Paul begins...

Titus 1:5-6

This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—⁶ if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.

So he starts by saying that elders are to be above reproach. That means other people shouldn't be able to point to behaviors or wrongdoings in your life in which they could bring an accusation against you that is unfitting of an elder in a church. It is assumed that this is referring to someone's current behavior, not what they did in the distant past. Every Cretan man probably had reproachable behavior in his past, but since turning to Christ and committing his life to him, there should be a track record of obedience and an overarching pattern of godliness. That's what it means to be above reproach. Paul moves on to describe what that should look like in a man's relationship with his wife and children.

He says he is to be "the husband of one wife" – or, more literally, as Gene Getz explains in his book "The Measure of a Man," he should be "a one woman man."

There's a lot of debate about what Paul has in mind – Is it polygamy? Is it divorce and remarriage? I think the best thing to do is look at the historical and cultural context he's writing into because once you understand what was going on in the Greek culture at that time, it becomes pretty clear what Paul had in mind.

To understand marriage from a Cretan perspective, you have to throw out your understanding of what the Bible says. That's just not the way they operated. I found quite a bit of information about ancient Greek marriages, and I'm assuming there were similar practices on the island of Crete.

In the Greek culture, marriage was more about a business transaction and securing your future estate than about love and romance. Marriages were almost always arranged, and they were a way that the bride's father could improve his wealth and social standing. For the groom, it was about having a wife that could bear legitimate children to whom he could pass on his estate. So his wife was like a role-player in the family. She had her job and that was to have children and take care of them.

To give you an idea of how husbands viewed their wives, one Greek statesman wrote that a wife's role in the family was "to bear us legitimate children and to be faithful guardians of our households." According to the World History Encyclopedia, it was seen as a wife's duty to serve her husband and to ensure the upkeep of his property and the continuation of his line. She was a role-player. Love and romance could happen in marriage, but often didn't, so it was sought elsewhere by the husband. Thus, it was very common and socially acceptable for Greek men to have mistresses and concubines. That was the norm.

But among Christians in Crete, there should be a significant difference – especially among the more mature believers. Paul had undoubtedly taught them about the real meaning of marriage and what it was supposed to look like. He probably took them to Genesis 2:24 that says, "*Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.*" In other words, the sexual relationship was to be exclusive between a man and his wife and there should be no mistresses or concubines. He should be a "one woman man."

Paul also likely taught them about the meaning of marriage using the same things that he wrote in Ephesians 5:31-32 where he says: "*Therefore a man shall leave*

his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' ³² *This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church."* So the meaning of marriage is that it represents the covenant relationship between Christ and the church. So the way a husband and wife treated one another was very important. Men were to love their wives and women were to respect their husbands, and in that culture, that behavior would be very noticeable. Very different.

In Ephesians 5:22-24 Paul taught wives how they were to treat their husbands: *"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands."* It's likely that in a Greek culture wives would often despise their husbands and be disrespectful. But for Christian wives it was to be different. The way they treated their husband was to represent the church's respect for Christ. Therefore they should show submission and respect to their husbands. Very different than what wives normally did.

But it wasn't just wives who were to be different – Paul calls husbands to drastically change their behavior. In Ephesians 5:25-30 he writes: *"Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. ²⁸ In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, ³⁰ because we are members of his body."* Greek men often ignored their wives. Wives were actually confined to separate living quarters with the children and expected to remain there. So Paul would have taught the Cretan men to be radically different than what they learned in their culture. *"Pay attention to your wife, love her, nourish and cherish her as you would your own body, because the way you treat your wife is to represent Christ's love for the church."*

So Christian marriages were to be noticeably different than Cretan marriages. A husband should only have one woman – and it should be his wife. And husbands and wives should treat each other with love and respect. That kind of

transformation would make an impact for Christ in that society because it would demonstrate the gospel. It would stand out and be different. People would notice.

What kind of marriages do we need to have so people will take notice in our culture? The dysfunction of marriage is different in our culture than it was in Crete, but it's still far from the biblical standard and if we seek to have the kind of marriages that the Bible teaches us to have, I think it will be very noticeable. Husbands and wives who are faithful to one another and who treat one another with love and respect for the glory of Christ will stand out in our culture of divorce and remarriage and gay marriage. So, are you faithful to your spouse? Are you treating them the way Christ has called you to treat them? If you're not married, are you pursuing sexual integrity? Or are you like everybody else – looking at porn, sleeping with your boyfriend or girlfriend? Christ calls us to be different – so that we glorify him and make a difference in the culture in which we live.

The second area we're going to look at today is parenting. Paul wrote, "*his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.*" Children in Christian homes should behave differently than those in Cretan homes. In Cretan homes, the father would likely be uninvolved in child-rearing. And worse than that, the behavior he modeled to them would likely be very poor. We saw last week that Cretans were known as "liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons," and if that's what the adults were like, I can only imagine what the children were like.

Paul says that for the elder, or the spiritually mature home, the children should not be "*open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.*" I think that implies that Cretan children were probably little monsters. Debauchery points to wild and excessive behavior, and insubordination refers to being defiant and rebellious. I think these things were common in Cretan homes.

But the children of elders and mature believers were to be different. The ESV says "his children are believers," but I think that's a little misleading. That makes it sound like Paul says they should be "Christians" and I think that could be true to an extent. If the parents were teaching Christianity in their home, their children would likely have the same beliefs and values and not some other religion

(whether they were truly born again yet or not). But I think Paul has something else in mind – I think he has the opposite of debauchery and insubordination.

According to Thayer's Greek Lexicon the word translated "believers" in the ESV means children who are faithful, reliable and obedient. They are well behaved, not wild and rebellious. That means both parents should be active in teaching and modeling godly behavior and values. There should also be correction and discipline of bad behaviors. This would be much different than the normal Cretan home and people would notice. This would be another way that transformation could make an impact in that society.

When it comes to our culture, I think we can make an impact as well in how we parent our children. When I talk to teachers in the public schools, one of the things that they are noticing is a drastic increase in behavior issues among children. There's a growing amount of disrespectful and out-of-control behavior that ends up affecting everyone in the class and a huge amount of time and energy is spent on dealing with bad behavior. Children with good behavior are beginning to stand out more and more and people take notice. When a child is respectful to their peers and teachers, helpful, kind, listens, follows instructions – the teacher notices and is very appreciative.

A lot of these behaviors – both the good and bad – are a reflection of what's happening inside the home and what kind of parenting is taking place. As Christian parents we have been called to be involved, to teach our children the ways of Christ and to bring correction and discipline when necessary. When Paul wrote to the Ephesian believers, he said this in Ephesians 6:1-4: *"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), ³ "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land." ⁴ Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."*

It is our responsibility as Christian parents to model Christ to our kids and teach and discipline in his ways. I think the key to Christian parenting is being the kind of person you want your kids to be. I can't over-emphasize the importance of pursuing your own personal relationship with Christ and growing in discipleship when it comes to your effectiveness in Christian parenting. We need to abide in Christ in order to have his heart for our kids and we need to be living the kind of

life we want your kids to live. If you are living an authentic Christian life, you will be teaching that to your kids day in and day out and it will make up for many of the mistakes and failures you're going to make in parenting. It has to start there. You can't teach your kids to be someone who you aren't. And if you try to teach and discipline them to follow Christ while you aren't following him yourself, you will likely drive them far away from him. Be the kind of person you want your kids to be. They are learning from your example every day whether you're trying to teach them or not.

This doesn't guarantee that your kids are going to act like angels or become devoted followers of Christ, but in my opinion, it's the parent's greatest tool in parenting, and all the other efforts in parenting will only be effective if you get that right. Model Christlike behavior and then teach and discipline your kids to have that kind of behavior to the best of your ability. And if you do, it will make a difference. It will make a huge difference in your children's lives and it will make an impact in our society as people notice the behavior of your kids.

Impact through Transformation. That's the theme of this series. Godly marriages and parenting can make a difference and as we seek to become more like Christ and grow in these areas, he can use them to open doors in people's lives. Is there something God is calling you to do in response to these things this morning? Something he wants you to do in your marriage? In your parenting? I encourage you to take time to pray and respond to him as we spend time in worship together.