SET AN EXAMPLE

Titus 2:7a In everything set them an example by doing what is good.

Review

Paul has explained that he left Titus in Crete “to put in order what was left unfinished” (Titus 1:7) and then given Titus instructions on how to choose elders and talked about the importance of silencing the “circumcision group” (Titus 1:10&11). In chapter 2 he tells Titus what to teach the older men; what to teach the older women so they can teach the younger women and then he tells Titus only one thing to teach young men.

Teach the Young Men by Example

Titus 1:6&7 Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.

“Set them an example by doing what is good.” The older women were “to teach the younger women what is good.” Titus is literally to “show himself a pattern of doing good works.” Titus was to primarily to teach the young men by example. Titus and Timothy were both probably young men. Titus 2:15c “Do not let anyone despise you.”

I Timothy 4:12 Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and purity.

“Set an example” is literally “become a pattern.”

Paul does not make the teaching of the young men less important; he just tells Titus that it is to be primarily done by example.

“In your teaching show integrity.” More literally, a lack of corruption, not containing anything false. “In your teaching show seriousness.” Translated “worthy of respect” in I Timothy 3:8&11 in the qualifications for deacons and women deacons; the noun is translated “worthy of full respect” in I Timothy 3:4.

“In your teaching show…soundness of speech that cannot be condemned.” The Greek word for soundness is healthy as in “sound doctrine in 2:1…sound in the faith in 2:2.

“So that those who oppose you.” There will always be opposition to the teaching of truth; there will always be people who want to say bad things about you. We should not give them an opportunity.

What to Teach Slaves

Titus 2:9&10 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 trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.

Slavery in the Roman Empire was horrific. Slavery in the South before the Civil War was horrific. Old Testament slavery was very different. Genesis 14:14 “When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318 trained men born in his household and went in pursuit as far as Dan.” “Born in his household means a slave (Genesis 17:12).

Deuteronomy 23:15&16 If a slave has taken refuge with you, do not hand them over to their master. Let them live among you wherever they like and in whatever town they choose. Do not oppress them.

There are also New Testament instructions for slave owners. Ephesians 6:7-9 Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free. And Masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both your Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

Galatians 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

As the number of Christians increased in the Roman Empire, slaves were given more and more rights. Christians were the leading voices in the abolition movement in the United States prior to the Civil War. But Paul is writing to Titus telling him what to teach slaves who were held in bondage in a system they could not fix, ruled by a government in which they had no voice.

“To be subject to your masters in everything.” They could grudgingly do as little as possible, as poorly as possible or “serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free” (Ephesians 6:7&8). The temptation would be to hate their masters and to try to frustrate them in every way possible.

“To try to please them.” This would require a radical work of the Holy Spirit. Again, the temptation would be to do only what was absolutely necessary to avoid punishment.

“To not talk back to them.” One prominent Roman author was of the opinion that getting work done using animals was much easier than getting work done by using slaves because the animals could not talk back or complain.

“And not to steal from them.” The temptation to steal from those forcing you to work for them without paying you must have been especially strong.

“But to show that they can be fully trusted.” Potiphar put Joseph in charge of his entire household because he was trustworthy. The jailer put Joseph in charge of the prison because he was trustworthy. Daniel was advanced to a position of great honor and authority. Slaves in the Roman Empire could, if trustworthy, acquire wealth and even buy their freedom.

But the primary reason for this teaching is “so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.” A very high percentage of the Gentiles in the First Century Church were slaves, and some of them led their owners to the Lord by following this kind of advice.

Does that mean we should not strongly oppose slavery today. Human trafficking is an evil every Christian should strongly oppose. It is not the same as what the Law allowed in the Old Testament, is evil and contrary to the fact that every human being is valuable and worthy of respect in the sight of God.

Exodus 21:16 “Anyone who kidnaps someone is to be put to death, whether the victim has been sold or is still in the kidnapper’s possession.”

This advice to slaves would seem to be good advice to employees, although that does not mean that injustice should not be opposed.

Things to Remember

Very often the best way to teach is by your example.

There will always be opposition to the truth being taught. Living what you teach makes it harder for people to oppose you.

The slavery allowed in the Old Testament was very different from what happened in the Roman Empire and in this country before the Civil War.

Paul tells Titus to teach slaves to serve in a way that would make Christianity attractive.

Human trafficking today is evil and illegal and should be strongly opposed.

Paul’s advice to slaves is good advice for anyone under authority who wants to witness to the person over him or her.