

The Character of a Healthy Church (Part 1)

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Date: 13 April 2015

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[0:00] I'll start tonight with a couple of questions.

! Is Highland Park a healthy church?! Don't answer them, just think. What does a healthy church look like?

Probably can't answer the first without knowing a little bit about the second. And tonight we're going to let the Apostle Paul answer those questions. He's going to give a little help from me and a lot of help from John MacArthur, but we're going to let the Apostle Paul talk to us.

Churches have reputations. What is our reputation in the community of believers among other churches?

And for that matter, what is our reputation in the sacred halls of heaven where it matters the most? I can't remember 20, 30 years ago what it was, and it wasn't very good, Mike, in some of the old days.

[1:21] That's the guys that fuss and fight over different things and start other churches. Now we've just spent a couple of weeks looking at the characteristics of the pastor, elders, and other church leaders, and now Paul switches to a discussion of the congregation and the people that populate a church.

Now mark this down in your thought process. A spiritually healthy church will be populated with believers that live for the purpose of showing sinners the way to salvation in all of its power and joy. One of the reasons we're here, one of the primary reasons we're on earth as ambassadors for Christ. Well, here's what the Spirit of God has to say to us this evening, starting in the first verse of Titus chapter 2.

But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine. Older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance.

Older women, likewise, are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips, nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored.

[3:16] Likewise, urge the young men to be sensible in all things, show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, sound in speech, which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us.

Urge bond slaves to be subject to their own masters and everything, to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith so that they will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect.

This is the section of Scripture we're going to cover tonight and next time. So we're going to build on tonight, next time. Paul finished chapter 1 talking about false teachers that were plaguing the churches on Crete.

Paul, and let me say to you in the last few years, I have taught in here Sunday morning and Monday evening, Acts, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus.

False teachers plagued the early church. Paul had to deal with those guys all the time, everywhere he went.

[4:33] And it's probably worse today than any point in church history. But it was bad then. These were men that spoke to churches, professing to be one with Christ and representing Him.

In truth, they were deniers of Christ, and that was typically proven by their lifestyle. Paul described them in Titus 1.16, which we already looked at, as men who were detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed.

Paul always had a way of saying things. Because these men were liars, Paul now informs Titus to speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine.

Now, why was this important? Because by doing so, it would strengthen the testimony of the churches for the gospel to be presented and for lives to be saved.

And apparently, Crete was full of false teachers. And it was Titus being instructed by Timothy, go out and find true ministers to minister to these congregations.

[5:46] So the first characteristic of a healthy church, and remember, apply that to Highland Park, but that first characteristic of a healthy church is that they hold to and speak sound doctrine.

This is a way of saying they teach the Bible in all of its fullness. We do not back away from difficult or politically incorrect teachings.

We are not to be intimidated by the world, the flesh, or the devil when it comes to speaking about sound doctrine. The very word sound translates from a Greek verb meaning to be well and healthy.

Now, maybe a couple of you are sitting here saying, well, don't all churches do this? And the answer to that is no. Not all churches do that. Not all churches in Bartlesville do this.

Not all churches on Washington Boulevard in Bartlesville are teaching sound doctrine. Now, this runs counter to what we see in the world and across America and even in some segments of our community.

[6:57] We have arrived at a time, and Paul said we would, 2,000 years ago, when men and women will not endure sound doctrine.

But wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

That's 2 Timothy 4, verses 2 to 4. The churches on Crete face this. The churches in Ephesus face this.

The churches in Washington County face this every day. Churches are people. Churches are made up of people.

I tell people, churches are not brick and mortar. I don't want an F5 to come through here, but if Highland Park gets knocked down, we're going to have church Sunday morning.

[7:56] This church will have church Sunday morning. I can assure you. On the parking lot, up at my farm, somewhere we're going to have church. Churches are people. What is true of individual believers can also be true of the entire church bodies for good or evil.

True churches are supposed to be grounded in spiritual truth. We are to immerse ourselves in spiritual truth at church during Sunday school, at home, when we're out driving around, and when we are so grounded in spiritual truth, we are building a hedge of protection against those things that are spiritually false.

And there's a lot of falsehood out there. The church is healthy and productive because the members are healthy and productive. Always remember that the fruit of right doctrine that a church holds on to and preaches and teaches and lives is righteous living.

It's righteous living. It translates into righteous living. And we've had some interesting experiences over the last 40 years with other churches, like on pulpit committees and things that we go to.

And they weren't living up to those standards of righteous living. Like any true church, Island Park wants to grow. We would like to see this grow both spiritually and numerically.

[9:38] The pastor and staff working with the teachers focus on the spiritual depth of the church. Let God take care of the breadth of the church. This is precisely what Paul was telling the church at Corinth.

And he said this, I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. God gives the increase.

And boy, if we could really lock on to that and just be, preach sound doctrine, preach the truth, it'll just fall into place. And we've seen that happen. And may I say to you that when we teach right doctrine, when we love people, including the laws, God will give the increase.

When we follow that pattern, it will be done God's way in God's timing. And that's the correct way for that to happen. So how are we as individuals to live our lives in the church so we can do what God has called us to do and be effective witnesses to what is a real darkening and dying world?

In our study, in this portion of scripture, Paul will address five groups that are in the church today. They're in Highland. They're in every church.

[11:00] The five groups are older men, older women, young women, young men, and slaves.

And I want to change that terminology a little bit and we'll call it employment or employees. And the first one we're going to deal with is that of older men.

And trust me when I say this, there's some of us in here. We'll get you identified in about two minutes. Although I know who you are and I don't mean to be staring at anybody right here. Older men, Titus 2.2, older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, and love in perseverance.

Now, typically, we associate old age with the great qualities of spiritual maturity, wisdom, and patience.

[12:04] Job said, wisdom is with aged men and with long life is understanding. In Job 12.12, this is the way it is supposed to be.

But let me clue you in on a little thing. It is not necessarily the way it is in some churches. And Mike Dursham knows where I'm headed.

When my family joined Highland Park back in 1980, we had a very interesting makeup of the congregation.

Now, Mike, you were here. Jerry, James, you weren't, were you? Okay, but you were young. Yes, 23. We had an interesting makeup.

We had older men, Johnny, Johnny was a kid, though, because he was still hiding in the tunnel system, I remember. He was in. We played softball, the older guys against the young guys, he threw me out from right field at first base.

[13:16] I had a shot out there and he threw me out. Anyway, I had never forgiven you on that. I'll forgive you tonight. Tonight is, I'll forgive you. We had some old guys who were lovely guys.

I loved them. I miss them. They had built the church from meager salaries. They had, they had everything except money.

They had raised their kids in the church and they knew the Baptist doctrines that they'd grown up with. They knew you weren't supposed to dance, smoke, chew, tobacco, kiss girls that do.

They knew all that. But when it came to an in-depth knowledge of serious Bible doctrine, many of them, but not all of them, were sorely lacking in depth.

They'd been a product of years of preaching and teaching and they just, and it was interesting that it fell to some of the younger guys. And some of you were here this evening and it fell to us to really learn and hold on to and teach strong doctrine to the younger men and to the older men.

[14:41] So we were in the middle, but it was, they were looking at us to explain what, what many of the doctrines were. Now, that wasn't the perfect biblical model that Paul is talking about, but it was necessary.

It was made necessary because of the situation we were in. Now that I have arrived at old age, and I will prove that to you in just a moment, and I'm not alone in here, I can tell you there are some other things that happened as well.

When you, when you get older, some things happen. You have less energy. You have less vision. I promise you, you will have less hearing.

You'll have more aches and pains. And another thing that happens as we get older is we get set in our ways and change becomes much more difficult.

We become creatures of habit, and that's okay if the habits are good, but if the habits are bad, it can present formidable challenges, and we can get so caught up in some sort of besetting sin that perhaps we don't even recognize it as sin anymore.

[16:03] Well, that's just the way I am. You know, attitude. We've had a lot of that. Now, what should old age mean?

And if you're not old in here tonight, you are at least heading in that direction. Levi and those guys, you're heading there. You've got a ways to go.

Trust me. Old age in the church should bring a greater love for God, greater love for the people in the church. I do think, I know in my experience, I tend to become more heavenly focused.

We begin to think more and more about one day seeing the Lord face to face. You know, Brother Ralph was praying for that, and God answered the prayer. Two passages speak to this that we should all be striving for regardless of our age.

Bear in mind, when Paul said, I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith. And then there's another passage out of the Psalms, which may have been written by David in his old age.

[17:14] Psalm 71, 17, O God, thou hast taught me from my youth, and I still declare thy wondrous deeds. And by the way, that's a psalm on old age.

Psalm 71. Over the centuries, God has used old men to do great works. Moses was called to serve God at age 80.

That's when he starts serving God. A little more recent than that was the life of John Wesley. He reached the age of 83.

When he was 83, someone did the math. He had traveled a quarter of a million miles on horseback delivering the gospel of Christ.

He had preached 40,000 sermons, written 200 books or pamphlets. At age 83, his eyes were failing, and he complained that because of that, he was only able to read and write for 15 hours a day.

[18:25] At age 86, he apologized to those around him because he slept in until 5.30 every morning. I mean, that's about the time I roll over, you know, and I'm getting really good sleep.

The church is to have a special love for the aged, whether men or women. But old age does not automatically make someone godlier or more faithful or more effective in serving the Lord.

But the church is to have a special respect for older members. Older members may from time to time need correction. We've seen that here. But the biblical way to rebuke an older person is to do so with great respect and care.

Paul taught Timothy with these words, Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but rather appeal to him as a father. 1 Timothy 5.1 So just who are the older men in the church?

Told you I would identify you. And we get a clue from Paul's letter to Philemon, which we've, by the way, already studied if you think back.

[19:43] Philemon verses 8 and 9. Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do what is proper, yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you since I am such a person as Paul the aged.

Paul the aged. That's what he called himself. And now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus. Paul said he was an old man when he wrote that. Well, how old was he?

He refers to himself as an elderly guy. From the historic record, it is believed that he wrote that letter in his mid-60s.

He was in his 60s. And it's a beautiful letter. I'm 67. Mike's a little younger. Jerry's a little older.

But we've met the test of Paul. The pastor's really young. You guys are... I mean, that's pretty much it. In here. Tonight, anyway.

[20:55] Oscar's not here. He'd be off the charts. Based on that statement, if you are 60 or above, Paul says you meet the test of being one of the older guys.

I, for one, do not plan on ever arguing with the Apostle Paul. I'm not going to do that. How are we, then, as the older men, we'll use this class as an example, this gathering, how are we as older men to live our lives?

We are to be holy. We are to be, live exemplary lives before the Lord every day. We're to live the same way before the church. We're to live the same way before the world, the lost world.

Older men are supposed to abandon the recklessness of youth. My wife is always saying, what are you going to do when you grow up? She says that many times a year.

And Paul says here, the older guys are to be temperate. You know, we don't use that word much anymore, so I had to look it up. Basically, it literally means to live a life free of intoxication.

[22:08] I got no problem with that. Never acquired a taste for alcohol of any form. But it really means symbolically to live a moderate life.

Live free of extravagance and overindulgence. Paul and Peter used similar words to describe a sober-minded person.

Paul also says that the older man should be dignified. This is a man whose character is one of honor.

He does not tolerate immorality. He does not tolerate vulgarity. He doesn't want the things that are sinful to be around him.

Older men have seen tragedies. They've seen some of those very up close. they can identify with these and be of help when such strike younger families.

[23:12] They can help them out. Paul also says that older men are to be sensible. They should be able to exercise discernment and discretion.

That comes from walking year in and year out with the Lord. That's how you learn to exercise that. Older men should be able to control their passions, be uninfluenced by worldly standards and worldly attractions.

And may I say that we have to work at that. We have to work at that in this sin-filled world that we live in. The older man should be sound in faith.

He should have a healthy and proper view of doctrine developed over years of study and by that I mean self-study by exposure to the preaching of the word.

Because of his faith the older man knows this. He can trust God in all of life. Nothing's going to come at you that God is not completely in charge.

[24 : 26] God's word is sufficient. He centers his life on the sovereignty of God in all things.

The scriptures say the older man is sound in love. He has a love for God and he has a love for God's people. And you know you can't abandon one for the other.

I've known guys, oh I love God, I wouldn't go to church because my life depended on him. I hate those people. They're hypocrites. I always tell them, hey there's room for one more. Come on in. Love for God, love for God's people. The older man should be available to bear the burdens of those in the church that are in need.

He even loves those whose love is never deserved. The older man is acquainted with 1 John 4 7 which says we are to love one another for love is from God and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

[25 : 42] The older man is to be sound in perseverance. perseverance. He should be able to endure hardship. Why? Because he's been doing it for a long time.

The older man should be able to accept disappointment. Why? He's been disappointed many, many times as he's grown in the Lord.

He has known failure. He has known thwarted plans. He lives the truth of Romans 8 28 that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose.

I'll tell you as an older man, one of at least three in here this evening, I can tell you one thing I'm grateful for is unanswered prayer. And maybe it wasn't unanswered so much as God said no.

Well, I'd be in a lot of trouble if he answered every prayer I ever prayed. I'd be in deep trouble. Deep trouble. What about older women? Now, I can say some things tonight because there's none of them in here.

[26 : 51] I will deny it Sunday if your wives or mothers come running up to me and say, did you say blessings like you? But what about older women?

Verse 3 and 4. Older women likewise, are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips, not enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, so that they may encourage the young women. Very interesting. And Paul, again, does not specify an age when women become old. His use of 60s, the 60s, is probably appropriate.

Next Monday, Diane's going to be 66. And I reminded of that yesterday. She said, I don't want to talk about it. That's all she said. Widows were to be taken care of when they reach 60 years of age. Paul wrote that to Timothy in 1 Timothy 5, verse 9. Older women are deserving of great respect on the part of the church.

[28 : 02] You know, in my own life, the older women in our church, Maxine Schnitzer and Eunice Dahl and LaWanna Brewer, I always call them Miss Eunice, Miss Maxine, you know, whatever, Miss LaWanna, Miss Barbara.

I always do that. And it's just respect for them. They deserve great respect on the part of the church. We should remember that the older woman is a rich spiritual resource in the church and as such is worthy of esteem and consideration.

This can be seen when Paul publicly had to reprove two women in the church. And I'll tell you who they were, but I can't pronounce one of them. Eudora was one of them and the other was Synthche or S-Y-N-T-Y-C-H-E.

Mike, you can take a stab at that. He gently told them live in harmony. That's what Paul told them. Just be at peace with each other.

He didn't rebuke them like he probably would a couple of teenagers running up and down the hallway. He said live in harmony. Older women are to serve the church as teachers of younger women.

[29:27] women. What a ministry. And I assume a lot of that goes on upstairs. I haven't been up there. They are to serve the church as teachers of younger women.

And what an age we live in where younger women should come under the leadership of an older woman who's been through the fires. They are to be an encouragement to younger women. They minister to those that are sick. They provided hospitality to traveling ministers. This is what older women did. Remember how women ministered to the Lord Jesus during his earthly sojourn? I'm always reminded of the fact that the first people that went to the tomb were women. The first person that Jesus revealed himself and resurrected.

was a woman. Why were the women the first ones that went to the tomb? Because the men were hiding. They were cowards. They were scared. They were going to get killed.

[30:34] The women said, we don't care. We're going. And they went. And they went. It is recorded in history books, secular writings, that in pagan towns, and the Roman empire was full of them, right?

Christian women would go through the streets in those towns looking for abandoned newborn babies that had been left there by their mothers or their mothers and fathers to die.

They didn't want them. Abortion was very dangerous, so they had a live birth and dropped off. And from time to time, we find babies in trash cans and, you know, on porches and stuff like that.

But the older women in the early days of the church had a rescue mission for abandoned children, babies, newborn.

And they also had a list of members of the church family that were willing to adopt those unwanted babies. And they would take them in.

[31:45] This was going on 2,000 years ago. And Paul then lists certain qualities that older women are to exhibit.

They are to be reverent in their behavior. The older woman is to be a godly example of holiness. The root word in Greek means someone who is priest-like. That's an interesting concept. The woman who is reverent will adorn herself appropriately. She'll dress appropriately for church and not be an enticement to men in the congregation.

And may I say, you know, there are certain women, I'm not singing in a high park, I'm just in the church across America. The manner of dress in some churches breeds lust on the part of a man. We had a situation here many years ago, many years ago, 20 years ago or more. A young woman came to church, a young woman. She was suggestively dressed.

[32:56] And Diane got her aside all alone, and she said, I have to tell you, that dress is inappropriate for church. Well, she was about 19 years old, maybe 20.

She started crying. And her father had actually been murdered, and her mother was in prison for paying a guy to murder him. And she said, I've got no parents.

I'm living with an aunt and uncle who are poor. This is the only thing I've got. Well, I appreciated what Diane did, except as soon as church was over, we went to Dillard's.

It became very costly. They sell them at Walmart, don't you? I know, but Diane can't spell Walmart. She can only spell, by the way, we will pass the plate tonight, because I'm still trying to recover from that from 20, 25 years ago.

Older women are not to engage in malicious gossip. And sometimes I catch myself, I'm thinking, okay, what about other forms of gossip, Paul? Well, it's not malicious.

[34:02] It's all malicious. Not only do they not engage in gossip, well, they're supposed to take it a step further. Walk away. Don't listen to it.

That's even harder, isn't it? That's even harder. Malicious gossip translates slander or false accuser.

And that is a title used many times, like 65 times in the New Testament to describe Satan. I mean, you read in the Bible guys that aren't going to be in heaven, you know, and they're this and they're this and they're they're this.

say, and gossips. And I'm going, whoa, where'd that come from? He slipped one in on me, you know. it says older women are not to be enslaved to much wine.

That refers to drunkenness. And let's face it, there was some alcoholic drinks in the Bible. There were different types of wine. I think it's real pared down from what they sell today, although we don't buy it.

[35 : 13] But the Bible always rebukes drunkenness. Never is a believer to be drunk. That person can bring dishonor to the Lord by their conduct under the influence of alcohol.

And there's no telling how many people we arrest every day for that in this town. Older women are to be teachers, teachers of younger women, and they are to teach what is good.

They are to teach what is noble, excellent, and what is lofty. By doing so, they are encouraging younger women to be righteous, godly, wives, and mothers.

Boy, the role of the older women to teach those younger women is just so important in a Bible-believing church, so vitally important. Older women are to be encouragers to the younger women.

This literally means to cause someone to be of sound mind and to exercise self-control.

[36 : 30] That's the level of influence the older woman is to have on a younger woman. That younger woman, we have a sound mind and we'll be able to exercise self-control. Women are not to teach men, 1 Timothy 2.12, but women are to teach children and younger women.

And let me say, let me quote my mother who's long dead and lived a long life. If it were not for godly women teaching children, the church would be in deep doo-doo.

That was my mom. That's not where your dad was saying. No, no, no telling what my dad, my dad would probably be outside visiting with the other guys. But, I mean, who in here wants to teach three-year-olds this Sunday?

I'd rather teach you guys at three-year-olds no more than I did. They intimidate me. Well, we've been talking about young women.

What about young women in the church? Paul says this, encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home.

[37 : 42] Boy, you'll get a rub there, won't you? Kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored. Now, it's obvious here Paul is speaking about young married women, because he says to them, love their husbands.

You got two cars here, Mike? Because Marsha's out there. Don't let her come in. No biblical standard is more under attack than the God-ordained role of women in society, in American culture. Now, we're not going to take time here to discuss the feminist movement. Suffice it to say that the women are coming downstairs. Suffice it to say it is a tremendous tool of Satan to destroy what God has so carefully built, namely the family.

That was a quote from Pastor Coleman. There you go. It is. Feminism is a tool of Satan. It just is. Now, I'm going to end my lesson this way. It's what young women are to do based upon scripture, but there's no young women in here. And these are going to be bullet points that are really self-explanatory if you'll think about it.

[39 : 13] Young women love their husbands. That pretty much explains it. Young women love their children. Young women are to exercise common sense and good judgment.

Young women are to be morally pure and a one man woman. You've heard of one woman man? One man woman. Young women are to be workers at home.

I went to a Steve Farrar deal. You were there. You went to one of those. His wife, Steve's an interesting guy. He's about six foot seven.

His wife's five foot two. They had three kids. She said, you know, I go to all these conferences and these women all work and they come around the table. What do you do?

I don't know what to tell them. He said, tell them that you're busy training the next generation of leaders for our country. He said, that's what you're doing. You're training the next leadership of our nation.

[40 : 16] Young women are to be kind. Young women are to be subject to their husbands. The young women are to do all of this so that the word of God may not be dishonored.

Boy, there's a high calling, isn't it? So the word of God may not be dishonored. Now, because of all that I've mentioned above, it should be obvious to everyone in here why Satan is using so much energy to destroy the family.

And let's face it, the family, one of the first things God created in the human race, he had Adam and then he made Eve and the first thing Satan attacked was the family unit.

And he's still after families to destroy them. Now, most of you in here are young men, which I would say goes from these guys up to about 59 years and 11 months.

That's the young men in the biblical model. I know, and most of you are still in the workforce. Most of you are still in the workforce.

[41 : 36] So next time, the lesson will be for you. And I hope you'll come. And I hope you'll bring other young guys make every effort to be here because your obedience to the biblical standard is crucial for the church.

You're the next generation of older guys. And it's coming. Like a freight train and you can't slow it down. It's coming at you. And that's where we're going to head next time.