

Blueprint for a Young Church

By Don Green

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Truth Community Fellowship

Creation Museum
2800 Bullittsburg Church Road
Petersburg, KY 41080

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

This is a really wonderful day for our church and it's a day that I expect to look back on with much gratitude to the Lord and what happens from this point forward for a long time to come. It was February 11 and 12 last year, 2012, when we first met together as a group of believers in this place and with the crazy idea that we were going start a body of believers here devoted to expository preaching and it's been almost 16 months since that first weekend together and as we've gone through a lot of different teaching, we're kind of testing the waters, we've kind of been sharing together in the joys of worship together and the common salvation that we share together. But today and in the weeks to come, we're going to start to do something that transcends even that in importance and I'm very excited about it because we're starting today to really look at what it means to be a New Testament church and the songs that we've been singing have kind of led us to this point here in the service this morning and we're going to be looking at the blueprint for a young church. I can't tell you how delighted I am that we're able to do this.

It's not very often that you have a chance to pour a pure and a new foundation and to build on a foundation that doesn't carry the weight of a lot of prior history that maybe is good, maybe it's not and so we have an opportunity to do this together and it starts today and it's really wonderful to be able to do this. If there is anything that I could have you kind of approach this with it would this: as we start to unfold these great themes from the New Testament and specifically from the book of Titus, we're going to have this growing deepening sense that we're a part of something that transcends our individual lives. You know, it's easy to come to a church, to look for a church, and say, "What's in it for me? What's going to meet my needs? How does this meet what I want in a church?" I'm so grateful to have so many people gathered here together who are motivated by higher aspirations than that.

What we're going to see here as we go into this is that we have to think about church from a vertical perspective. We have to think about church starting with the Lord Jesus Christ himself rather than thinking about what I want, what's in it for me, what's in it for my family, what can I do here or what's going to be given to me as a result of it. If you're going to understand the church at all, you have to start with the one who gave his life to buy it; you have to start with the one to whom the church belongs. I want you to turn to Titus 2 to just see this. This is kind of our starting point and then I am going to go

through every single verse in Titus this morning, all 46 verses of them which means that we'll probably be here for about 90 hours or so just in time to go home, clean up and come back again on next Sunday morning. No, it won't be like that at all.

Titus 2, beginning in verse 11, we'll come back to this passage, but I want to start this to orient your thinking. Look, we've all come from a lot of different church backgrounds and we kind of just need to cleanse our palate, as it were, and just come back to the purity of the New Testament and kind of get a fresh view from the beginning about what the church is supposed to be. Well, it starts here in the book of Titus 2:11 where the Apostle Paul said, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus," now watch this here in verse 14. This is not about our individual lives at all. The purpose of salvation, what Christ was doing, transcends our individual lives and we need to see ourselves connected to something that has a much greater vertical purpose, a much greater eternal purpose than us simply being able to live a reasonably happy Christian life until we go to heaven. It's much bigger than that and collectively as we study these things in the coming weeks, collectively as our hearts are knit together around this church, I want us to grow in our understanding that we're part of something that is happening here at Truth Community Fellowship that transcends in importance our individual lives. Our individual lives are important, there is going to be all kinds of individual ministry happening here for years to come but it's connected to a greater purpose. We serve a greater purpose and have a greater purpose in the existence of this fellowship than simply individuals finding satisfaction from Sunday to Sunday in the way they gather together.

Look at chapter 2, verse 13 again, "our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus," and watch this in verse 14, "who gave Himself for us," why? Lord Jesus, what was your purpose? Why would you bother redeeming sinners like us? He gave himself for us "to," purpose, "redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." You see, as Christians, Christ bought us with his own blood and therefore we belong to him, not to ourselves. He bought us to possess us. He bought us to set us apart, to live differently, to be motivated by higher eternal purposes, to realize the responsibility and the privileges of pursuing purity and being devoted to the glory of this one who so wonderfully, unspeakably laid down his life on the cross for our salvation. You see, he didn't do that so that we could simply have our spiritual slate wiped clean and then go on living life however we wanted to and pursuing whatever earthly interests and passions that we might have. No, no, no, see, there's this whole glop of humanity and Christ purchased us out. He redeemed us and brought us out and separated us as Christians so that we would be devoted to his glory. That's a higher purpose than living simply to achieve the best job that you can and your best life now and all of that stuff. You see, we're here to serve a greater purpose; we're here to serve a greater one than us; we're here to serve a purpose that transcends our individual lives. We're here to be increasingly set apart and purified for the work and for the glory and for the love of the one who laid down his life for us and I want to be a part of that kind of church and I hope that you do too.

What does it look like? What does that kind of church look like? Well, that's what the book of Titus is about. You see, Paul wrote this letter to his apostolic representative, you might say, Titus, who was located on the island of Crete in the Mediterranean Sea. The state of the church there was still kind of unformed; there were Christians there but there weren't churches established yet. They were still in the very beginning throes of becoming what Christ had purchased them to be. So, as Paul writes to Titus and says, "This is what I want you to do, I want you to go and establish the church. I want you to be Christ's representative and establish the churches in the way that they ought to be on this island." What we see is a parallel 2,000 years ago to what we are to be doing here today. It's all laid out for us in all of its great clarity and simplicity. Paul is writing to Titus saying, "This is what a church should be like."

And here we are together, this is really exciting. We've gotten to know each other over the past year and a half or so. We have an idea of our common interests and our common passions and you know what the pulpit of this church is like for better or for worse. If we're gathered together around that and we're starting to knit together, then we're seeing here in front of us in the book of Titus the grand blueprint of what it's all supposed to be like, what we're supposed to pursue, what we're supposed to do. Even more important: what we're supposed to be. It's not about programs but about character. Not about loving ourselves but loving Christ and serving him. Not about living as individuals pursuing our own selfish pursuits with disregard to how it affects one another but realizing that in the church of Jesus Christ there should be a unity and a purity that we are collectively committed to pursuing, enhancing and together. Not just the leadership, not just the pastor but together having a heart desire, a heart passion to protect and advance that purity and unity together, realizing that we have a gift from God that he's given us to give us place like this and we become, as we start to understand what Christ wants this place to be, what he wants this body of believers to be, we become jealous to protect it, jealous to preserve it and to advance it lest it would be corrupted by influences that don't share the love for Christ that is set forth in his word.

So, we start to realize that we all have ownership in this, that we all have a part to play. Some of us it's up front; some of us it's behind the scenes. All of it precious in the sight of Christ who died to purify us as a people for his own possession. Truth Community exists to belong to Christ. Incidentally, as we belong to Christ, we'll serve one another and minister to one another but I want you to have that vertical perspective: Christ on the cross. Christ, as we read earlier from Mark, bearing with the most grievous, unjust accusations and despicable treatment at the hands of sinful men who should have been bowing and grabbing his feet and worshiping him and thanking him for the gift of life instead were beating him, spitting upon him, mocking him. We need to see Christ and not let that simply be a narrative that informs our mind but a narrative that moves our hearts, realizing that Christ on the road to Calvary, this was part of the cost of my redemption and we have a sense of urgency and loyalty and love and gratitude and unspeakable humility before that kind of example, before that kind of life from the Son of God and say, "What can I do to be faithful to that in the few short years that God gives me here on earth?"

Suddenly, earthly pursuits seem to dull in comparison and loving Christ and obeying him becomes the sweetest thing on earth. As the Apostle John says: his commandments aren't burdensome when we realize who he is and what he did. "You bought me with your own blood? O Lord, what can I do in response?" Part of what we do in response is that we work together to form a faithful body of believers that are according to what God has revealed in Scripture and that's what we're going to see in Titus. We're going to see an overview here today and then we'll unpack it passage-by-passage in the weeks to come but today it's a blueprint for a young church. Paul, writing to Titus, is going to show us what a church should be and I'm going to give you five really fundamental priorities for a young church. This is what we're building. This is what we're pursuing is what we're laying out right here. This is a foundational message unlike any that we've preached in our prior 18 months together. The blueprint for a young church: this is where as we understand these things, as we grow in these things, we're moving from calling ourselves a fellowship to calling ourselves a church in the highest New Testament sense of that word. What a privilege it is for us to be able to do this together. I'm very grateful to the Lord.

First of all, we're just going to go through verse-by-verse from beginning to end in the book of Titus. What's a blueprint for a young church? 1. A church builds on biblical authority. A church builds on biblical authority. It all starts with the Scripture. Look at the first four verses of Titus, "Paul," there's your author. We looked at him last week, didn't we? We saw his testimony, the one who was bought out of his own hostility toward early Christianity and became the apostle to the Gentiles, the apostle to us, in a sense, you might say. Verse 1, "Paul, a bond-servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness, in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago, but at the proper time manifested, even His word, in the proclamation with which I was entrusted according to the commandment of God our Savior, To Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior."

What's Paul doing here in this opening paragraph here? Well, he's laying forth, he's setting forth what his authority is to address and to instruct on the building of the church of Jesus Christ. He says, "I'm a bond-servant, I'm a slave of God and I'm an apostle of Jesus Christ." You see, Paul was uniquely commissioned directly and personally by the Lord Jesus Christ to be the instrument of building the church and laying the foundation for the church and so Paul is setting forth as he writes to Titus in this embryonic stage of development of the church in Crete, he's laying forth his apostolic credentials to show that he has the authority to instruct on what a church should be like. Listen, Paul is unique in that way unlike any other pastor since apostolic times, unlike modern church gurus who try to tell the church what do to by conducting polls and things like that. Paul had true authority. Paul had direct instruction from Jesus Christ that he communicated to the church as being the authoritative way that Jesus wants his church build.

As you read through this, you see that the church is built on the truth of God. It's built on the promise of God who cannot lie. God has revealed his truth in his word and we

proclaim that. I love how Paul says, "I was entrusted with this." Paul felt a sense of personal stewardship, of high accountability. "I was entrusted with this and therefore I must act upon it. I must be true to the trust that was given to me and, Titus, here's what that trust means for a young church." Well look, we're in the same kind of position now in that we have received a stewardship. God has providentially given us a stewardship in this place to be faithful to. To be faithful to the truth that has been laid down in Scripture. To be faithful to the truth that faithful godly men through the centuries have taught and reinforced and been burned at the stake for and have given their lives to and given their study to. We're the inheritors. We've received that heritage over the past 2,000 years and we have a high responsibility to be faithful to it and to get it right.

Well, the only way that we can get it right is by sticking close to the Scriptures. I don't care at all what a modern church guru says about what the church should be like to the extent that it varies from, that it differs from, what the Bible says. This is our authority. This is what we build on. We take this word and individually and collectively, corporately, we say we trust this foundation. This is the word of God and everything that we build comes as we build on the four corners of the Scriptures as we build it up, however high and however far God lets us go. That's all we care about. It's the authority of the Bible because the Bible is the word of the living God and the Bible is the word of the living Christ who gave his life to redeem us and to purify for himself a people of his own possession. Christ has made his word known through the apostles including the Apostle Paul and this is what we build on. It's nothing else. George Barna is not going to tell Truth Community what to do. We're just going to submit ourselves and trust ourselves completely to biblical authority. That's our lifeline. The Bible is central to any true church and therefore it's central to Truth Community Fellowship as well.

Beloved, here's what I want you to see as you're thinking through these things and hearing these things and working through what does this mean for me in all of this, what I want you to see is that there is a lot of protection for you in a congregation that's committed to biblical authority because it's not just that the Bible is over the church generally, the Bible is over the leadership of the church as well. Every pastor that ever steps into this pulpit, every leader that ever serves, is serving under the authority of Christ. We don't have an independent authority as leaders in Truth Community Fellowship. Our authority is based on the Scripture and that's your protection. That's your assurance of the direction of this church is that as we're faithful to Scripture, God is going to guide and bless as we honor the authority of his word. This is a precious place for us to be, a precious place to stand on the authority of God's word.

Paul, as he's writing to Titus saying, "This is what the church it like," points to his apostolic authority, points to the promise and the truth of God which he promised long ages ago and said, "This is where you build the church," and it's from that position of apostolic authority that he declares what the church is to be. We'll go into all of that more. All of this, remember, is just a little bird's eye overview. I don't intend any of these comments to be comprehensive here this morning but a church builds on biblical authority. Look, you can tell a church, you can walk into any church and immediately see what they think about the Scriptures. How do they handle the pulpit teaching time? Is it a

time of jokes and entertainment? Well, you know what a church is saying when they teach like that? When a man stands up in front of eternal souls who will one day soon be standing before the august throne of God in judgment? What's a church saying? What is it communicating when it thinks that humor is the order of the day? What is it saying when it teaches for 15-20 minutes? It's saying, "This isn't important." Not here, beloved, not at Truth Community Fellowship. We recognize the authority of the Bible and we're going to display the authority of the Bible by giving it a central place in the life of our church. That's why we teach. That's why we teach seriously. That's why we teach a long time. You know what? I promise you, promise you, that none of you that give yourselves to the life of the Lord Jesus Christ within the context of this church, none of us are going to go before the throne of God when we give an account on the judgment and we stand before Christ's seat of judgment and give an account for our lives, none of us at that certain time to come are going to think that we wasted our time by devoting ourselves to his word. That thought's not going to occur to anyone. We're all going to be so bathed in gratitude that God gave us his word and showed us how to live and prepare in our hearts for that very moment, no one is going to regret the fact that we were serious about the word of God at Truth Community Fellowship.

I say these kinds of things to you all the time and I'm going to keep saying them until you start saying them back to me because then I'll know that it's really embedded in your heart. We have to look forward to the day that we stand before Christ and give an account to him. We have to take that future day and bring it into the present and let it shape the way that we live and do ministry now and I am so grateful to God that he's given me a group of people like you that share that earnest desire in your heart and you care about those things and that we can pursue this kind of ministry together. I can tell you, I know a lot of pastors that are in ministry now that I went to school with that would love to have a man like Dan Jackson stand up and do what Dan said. I did not inform what he said on that at all. Those are all his words. That's the kind of men that say, "You know, I want the word of God. I want to obey the word of God. This is our collective responsibility." That's precious. That's precious. Beloved, let me tell you, if you're wondering whether Truth Community is the place for you or not, look, I know a lot of people consider a lot of things but when you think about the fact that you're going to be before Christ one day really, really soon, you want to be with a group of people that are looking toward and preparing themselves for that day with serious devotion to Christ and his word.

I'm just telling you, that day nothing else is going to matter and so a church builds on biblical authority. Do you know what the great thing about it is? The great thing about it is that when you're pursuing what we're talking about here, it's really, really joyful. It's really profoundly joyful. This is a great way to live life. This is positioning yourself for the ultimate blessing of God on your life come what may. You know, look, I'm really mindful of all the young families that are in here and those of you that faithfully bring your young ones in here as well. Look, as your family is part of the life of a body like this, you're preparing your children for that as well, it's not just you. And no one on the day of judgment is going to think that we wasted our time. No one. That's just not going to happen and we're going to know not only the present blessing of Christ but the eternal

blessing of Christ for honoring the authority of his word and honoring the death of the sinless Son of God as the sole ransom for the soul of a sinner.

So blueprint for a young church: first of all, a church builds on biblical authority. Secondly, here you go: a church establishes godly leadership. A church establishes godly leadership. There's got to be leadership in the church of Christ and Paul immediately goes to this point in verse 5 of chapter 1 with Titus. He says, "For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you." Paul says, "Look, the first order of business here is to establish leadership who can oversee this work and advance it." So that's where he starts with Titus, he says, "I want you to establish elders." Now, as you read the scriptural teaching on biblical leadership, you realize that God does not intend for every man to be an elder in a church. A church is not a great experiment in democracy in that sense where everyone has the same position everywhere. No, Paul makes it clear that the people who lead for Christ in the church of Christ must somehow resemble Christ in their character. It's not just about what an elder does, what Paul points to – oh, this is so very important – what Paul points to is, "Titus, look for men of this kind of character as you're looking for who to appoint."

Look at verses 6-9 here. Paul said, "I want you to appoint elders namely," verse 6, "namely here's the kind of man, Titus, that I want to be installed as an elder. It's a man who is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion." He goes on in verse 7, "For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain." It's interesting how he lists out a bunch of negatives there and says, "This kind of character stays out." Then in verse 8, he puts in the positive character that we're looking for, "but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled." Verse 9, this is really good, really important, "holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict."

Now, that's a mouthful of character to be looking for in spiritual leadership and we'll study these qualifications more closely as the weeks go by but for now, all I want you to see is this: Paul says there should be leadership in the church and there are character qualifications for that. It's not the guy who has the most experience in the world. It's not the guy who's attained the highest status in the world. You look for this character which may correspond to earthly prominence. Sometimes, many times, it won't but the character is the non-negotiable feature of this. What I want you to see as we consider this is the character. You know, we've said that the first point was that a church builds on biblical authority, well notice, that biblical authority is assumed and built into the qualifications for an elder as well. Look at verse 9 again, Paul says, "These elders, these leaders must be ones who hold fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching." What teaching? The apostolic teaching. These elders need to be able to "exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict." There is an element of an ability to teach, a love and loyalty and fidelity to the word of God that manifests itself in the ability to teach so God's people understand and respond and grow under it. Also, that when opponents

and those who contradict come along, those same elders, those same leaders, are able to say, “No, that's wrong and here's why from God's word.”

So to be an elder is a place of great privilege, it's a place of great responsibility and the character and the qualifications for that office are high and we don't lightly appoint people as elders. Elsewhere in Scripture it says that you want men like that to be proven over time; let them show that they're faithful in little things before you put them in charge of big things. But for now just notice: the character of an elder and his responsibility to teach. He must have proven character and the capacity to instruct people in biblical truth and in sound theology. That is a non-negotiable requirement for leadership.

As Paul goes on, as he's dealing with the immediate problem or the immediate situation in Crete from 2,000 years ago, you'll see that there was a place for immediate application for Titus to put this into practice. There was an immediate pressing need right then when Paul wrote this sometime probably in the decade of the early 60s; there was a problem right then that required elder oversight and elder intervention. That's why Titus needed to get the men going. Before we look at verse 10, let me just say this: not knowing really the fullness of the backgrounds that you're all from, I know that some churches, I just feel a sense that we've got to preserve our numbers, we never want to have a confrontation because we might lose families over the confrontation. Look, that's not a biblical way to lead a church. You can't do it that way. Sometimes exercising godly leadership means that you have to confront and refute those who contradict. You have to engage the conflict because there's going to be conflict and when you remember, beloved, when you remember the precious nature of that which we're trying to protect, the truth of Christ, the purity of his body, the purpose for which he died is to have a people of his own possession to love his truth, then you realize that there's something precious there to protect. Sometimes protection means you're going to have to deal with those who try to contradict what's happening.

Look at verse 10. Titus faced a problem with Jewish influences and Paul says, “You've got to silence this disruptive men.” Look at verses 10-14 of chapter 1. This is all flowing out of what biblical leadership looks like and what it does and what its responsibility is. Verse 10, Paul says, “For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision,” the Jews, “who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain. One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, 'Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.’” That's a quote from a Cretan poet from earlier years before Paul wrote this and Paul says, verse 13, “This testimony is true.: That Cretan poet got it right, he says. “This is true. For this reason reprove them severely so that they may be sound in the faith, not paying attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth.”

Now beloved, here's what I want you to see in that. Here's all I want you to see about this for today as we just do this little bit of an overview: it is a sober and a serious responsibility but church leadership must protect the flock of Christ. He doesn't put people in leadership so that they can enjoy perks and privileges, he puts them there as

under-shepherds, those who care for the flock and those who protect the flock. A biblical shepherd in those days carried a staff and a club: a staff to care for the sheep and to bring them back when the sheep started to stray off the path. I'm talking about a literal shepherd here. It's a metaphor for church leadership. But he also carried a rod, a club, that when another animal or something attacked the sheep, he would go after and he would beat it off in order to protect the sheep and preserve its life. Church leadership has a serious, sober responsibility not to let threats go unaddressed but to address them for the sake of protecting the flock that looks to those leaders for spiritual guidance and protection.

Now, with that said, one of the aspects of leadership and I've been around just long enough in other places to see this, is that the flock doesn't always perceive the threat. The flock isn't always aware of what the danger might be and so the flock doesn't always realize that there are men with agendas, men with personal or theological agendas who will try to hijack a church to achieve and further their own ends. Leadership has to be mindful of that and has to act and has to protect even when maybe the flock doesn't fully understand why they're doing what they're doing. The leader, part of being a spiritual leader, is that you're out front. That means you get the conflict. A church leader doesn't necessarily enjoy that, I don't know anyone that enjoys it in that sense, but is willing to engage it for the sake of fulfilling the purpose of Christ in protecting the flock. Days will come, those of you that stay with us, days will come where you'll see leadership engaging this and let me tell you, the most precious thing that you can do at a time like that is to come alongside your elders and say, "Look, I appreciate what you're doing. I don't understand all the details. I know you can't tell them all to me but I appreciate what you're doing. I love you and I'm praying for you and I'm with you. How can I serve you?" Serve your elders that way and strengthen them for the task because it's not easy sometimes. Look, we've got to understand that a church is not a town hall meeting where every opinion is valid and entitled to expression. Paul says that these empty talkers were to be silenced and so we recognize that there are times where the church has to assert its prerogative to be the pillar of truth, not a form for theological contradiction. That's part of the responsibility of an elder: to uphold the truth of God.

Now, even as I'm standing here talking to you, the weight of that is just hitting me fresh again. I'm thinking, "Wow, this is important. This is serious." As you consider your own future in the church, maybe you've thought, "I'd like to be a church leader some day." I'd love to see church leaders grow up right out of the men right here. That would be great. I want that. I expect that but as you think along those lines, you have to think beyond it's cool to be up front and for people to think that you're an elder, you have to realize on the front end and deal with the sober responsibility that it is to be responsible to protect the truth of God and to protect the flock of God. This is really sobering. We're not playing games here.

Paul goes further and says, "Our struggle isn't even with flesh and blood but it's with the principalities and the demonic forces. We'll be struggling with real issues here." Look, biblical elders embrace that and they're conscious, "Christ is with me. The Holy Spirit is with me." There is a supernatural power and energy in a biblical church that it doesn't depend purely on the native abilities of the pastor. But I tell you, you feel the weight of it.

Sometimes when you're engaged in these conflicts, you just feel the physical effects of the contradiction that people bring against what you're trying to do. You feel it and it weighs on you and sometimes you lose a little sleep over it, "Am I doing this right? Lord, I need to pray some more about this." That's not a call for men to shy away from the office who are called to it but it is a call to recognize that it's a high calling to be a leader in the church. It's a high calling because we serve a high God and Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. It's a high calling because we serve, as church leaders we serve that which was so precious to Christ that he laid his life down for you and so the last thing that a guy who's thinking rightly in church leadership can do is say, "These people are here to advance my agenda." Oh no. No, God forbid that there would be a shepherd who would stand before Christ and give an account for handling a church like that. No, no, we're put in leadership, you men that are going to be elders one day in this place, we're put in leadership for the design of serving and protecting that for which Christ died. That's a high and holy calling. It's a place of blessed privilege but it's a place of responsibility.

So, leaders must exercise discernment, they must silence bad teaching to protect the flock. Sometimes that is a thankless task but leadership gladly does it in service to Christ. Look at verses 15 and 16, just continuing on this idea of the leadership and what leadership does and the discernment that leadership exercises. "To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed." Church leaders understand that not everything that glitters is gold; not everyone that professes to know Christ really does; not everyone that comes and says, "I want to serve here," is doing so with the best of intentions. And so, church leaders take their responsibility seriously, we look for men who meet these character qualifications and then we release them to do their work because a biblical church establishes godly leadership.

That brings us to a third point. On this third point, we bring everybody in. This third point covers every one of us here. Third point: a church cultivates private godliness. A church cultivates private godliness. And this is where we all come under the umbrella of this: a church establishes growing disciples through sound teaching. As Dan said earlier in his little statement, every one of us have a responsibility to pursue here. Every one of us is covered by this in terms of where do I play my part, how do I fit into the church, it starts by you cultivating and taking seriously your personal pursuit of holiness and your personal pursuit of godliness. You realize that your godliness is part of the outworking of the purposes of Christ in a local church.

Look at chapter 2, verse 1 and notice that teaching is right at the center of it. Chapter 2, verse 1, "But as for you," Titus, now that I've dealt with those negative influences, let me come back to you, Titus, "But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine." Paul goes on to show the various places of impact on our private lives. I'm going to give you three so point number three here: a church cultivates private godliness. Now I'm going to give you three areas in which you examine yourselves and take this seriously. First of all, a church cultivates private godliness in personal character. In your personal character, this is where a church is to work out its ministry is in the realm of the

inner recesses of your heart in the kind of man and the kind of woman and the kind of young person you become. This is not about external activity and church picnics and that kind of stuff. I'm not opposed to picnics, I'm opposed to picnics that don't take holiness seriously, okay?

In personal character. Paul explains how Christians should conduct their lives and establish their character. He says, first of all, older men are to be models of dignity. Look at chapter 2, verse 2, "Older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance." You guys that have some gray hair on your head, listen, you are here in order to set a pace, to set an example. You are to show by your life the way a serious, dignified Christian lives his life. I'm grateful to have a lot of you guys like that here with us but realize that whether you're officially holding an office of church leader or not, that your gray hair is an indication to you that you have a responsibility to the dozens and dozens of young adults and young people coming up that they could look at your life and say, "Ah, that's what a Christian man is supposed to be like. There is someone that I'm going to aspire after." This is part of being in a church is that we realize that our character has an impact and displays an example to those around and we embrace that, we're glad for that and we pursue it.

It goes for the women too. Look at verse 3, "Older women," and I'm not about, if you think I'm foolish enough to categorize who in this room is older and younger in this passage, you're crazy. I'm not going there at all. You can classify yourself in this passage and I'll trust that the Spirit of God leads you to a proper conclusions. "Older women likewise," just like the older men, "are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, so that," here's the example portion of it. You older ladies realize that you're a model for the younger ladies that are in the congregation. You embrace that. You love them so that, verse 4, "they," meaning these older women, "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."

One of the things that I learned early on is that a male pastor, there are just limits to what he can say to help a young woman be a good wife. You need godly women who are cultivating that, those that have been married to husbands, sometimes difficult husbands. Why my wife is nodding right now, I don't know. But you need women who have gone through the battles and are faithful to their husbands and have been faithful to their families to say, "Here's how you do it. You come around and here's how you do it," in a practical way that only a woman to a woman can do.

And young men are to develop common sense and godly deeds. Look at verse 6, "Likewise," Titus, "urge the young men to be sensible," and then he brings it back full circle to Titus in verse 7, he says, "in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine." There it is again, right? The teaching, the biblical authority. It's woven through the very fabric of everything that Paul says in this letter. "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."

Here's what I want you to see: we said that what's the blueprint for a church is built on biblical authority; it establishes godly leadership; and it cultivates private godliness and that godliness starts in your personal character. The application is a little bit different depending on your stage of life but between older women, older men, younger men, younger women, I think we're all covered here, right? We've all got a place. You can see yourself in this passage and realize that your own personal private character is a part of the outworking of the ministry of this church and so we pursue that, realizing that it's not just about me, it's not just about you individually. We see ourselves in connection with a body that is pursuing the purposes of Christ which include our own private character.

It also goes to vocational responsibility. The workplace, Paul alludes to here in verse 9. He says, "Urge bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in 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." There it is again, beloved. I don't get tired of pointing it out to you, the doctrine of God, the doctrine of God our Savior, informing the way that we even handle our workplace responsibilities. A Christian should manifest a good work ethic. A lazy, contentious employee is a poor testimony to Christ and so we realize that there is a church context even to the way that we pursue our employment. "I need to elevate my game here. I need to be faithful here because this reflects on the teaching and the testimony of Christ and the testimony of our church."

So it's in private character, it's in vocational responsibility and Paul goes on and says it's even in social submission, the way that we deal with government. Look at verse 11 again, Paul says Christians are to live sensible godly lives as they look for the hope of Christ. Verse 11, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men," watch how he applies this, "instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires." If you're struggling with sin, if you're struggling with sinful desires, simply deny them and say, "No, that's wrong. I repent of that before your throne, Lord. I deny that. I'm not going to cultivate it and engage it in my mind any longer." Verse 13, "looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us." Oh beloved, I would to God that every one of your hearts would fall upon those words and melt. He gave himself for us. The Son of God gave himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed. You see in verse 14 the reason for the affection that we have for Christ. You see in verse 14 the motivation toward the pursuit of these things and the motivation toward faithfulness. He gave himself for us. The Son of God gave himself for our unworthy souls. What love, what grace, what manifestation of kindness is this? He "gave Himself for us to purify for Himself," verse 14, "a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." Verse 15, "These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you."

You see, true Christians, church members, understand and realize that their private lives reflect on and contribute to either positively or negatively the testimony to Christ. People look at us and see a reflection of what Christ is. They look at us and say, "What does this church stand for?" And true Christians want to do their part even if it's unseen, even if it's just battling successfully, persistently, consistently, faithfully, against private temptation.

They say, "I want to do my part. I'm not up front. I'm not involved much but I'm part of this body and my private life matters and therefore I'm going to pursue holiness in the name of Christ as my part of contributing to the testimony of this church."

Part of that opportunity is to be subject to the rulers in our lives. Look at chapter 3, verse 1, "Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men." I don't know about out there, it's kind of warm in here so I'm trying to dial the heat down a little bit, I guess. I just want you to see what follows here now. That quiet attitude that Paul just described in verses 1 and 2, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men, do you know what? It's okay to be kind to people who aren't Christians; it's okay to show kindness to people that are rebels. It's okay to be gracious to them, that's just part of the gracious Christian testimony.

Where does that gentle spirit come from? How is it that we cultivate that in our mind? How is it that we can be patient under rulers that we might object to? How is it that we can respond in love and grace to people who don't treat us kindly and well? Watch verse 3 here. "For," here you go, here's your ground for it. Paul said, "Be gentle, be peaceable," why? "For," here's why, Paul says, "for we also once were foolish ourselves." Every one of us fit into verse 3. Paul says, "We once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another." Do you know what? I think I'm going to simplify my testimony from here on out. People say, "What were you like before you were a Christian?" Instead of giving them the details, I'll just read Titus 3:3 to them because that was me. That was me: foolish, disobedient, deceived, thought I was a Christian when I really wasn't, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spent my life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. It's painful for me to read that verse because I remember specific aspects of my life that all proved the truth of what Paul said. Do you know what? If you're a true Christian, you can look back and you can see something of that in your own testimony as well.

What Paul's point is: you remember this. We won't go off on this tangent but you just remember that you weren't born a Christian. You were born into sin and you had to be redeemed from it. When you stop to remember as a Christian now for 20-30 some of you 50 years, you say, "Wow, even now I can look back and I remember I was foolish, I was disobedient, I was a slave to sin and I was hateful, I was angry all the time," speaking personally. That has a way, when you remember that and remember what Christ saved you out of, it has a way of softening that harsh judgmental spirit that you otherwise would bring because you've forgotten where you came from. We need to remember where we came from. This is where we came from, every one of us that are Christians. Wow, what a dark picture of what you once were. What a dark picture of what I once was and I embrace the truth of it and you should too. You should not be ashamed as a Christian, you should not hesitate, let me put it this way, as a Christian to say, "That verse describes what I used to be like." As soon as you acknowledge that and admit that, then pride has been knocked off the throne of your heart and humility replaces it and it changes the way that you interact with people. You're able to be gentle and peaceable

because you realize, “Wow, if Christ doesn't show them the same mercy he showed me, they're going to end up like I was only worse.” Then you go on. Then you go on.

Here I was in verse 3 and what happened? My life was manifesting everything that Paul describes in verse 3 and then in verse 4, “But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.” Notice, he calls Christ our Savior, he calls God our Savior. That's because Jesus Christ is fully God in human flesh. Verse 7, “so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” Look, let's spend just a moment here. I know it's warm in here; I know I've been talking a long time. But I want you to spend a moment of your mind here in what's just been said. There you were in the character of verse 3, not only with no claim on God but deserving his intervention of judgment on your life and then, and then, and then the kindness of God appeared in your life. Then in your sinful condition, God showed kindness and mercy, having first displayed it in the coming of Christ and his sacrifice on the cross and then he made it real and personal in your own life through the work of the Holy Spirit. Oh, do you see it, beloved? Oh, do you see it? You've got to see yourself. You've got to see yourself properly in the past and then realize that in this completely unworthy condition, God, the God of the universe, the God of the Bible, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Savior, showed kindness to you. He had mercy on you. As it were, he looked at you and said, “Look at Ryan there in his sin. Oh, I'm going to have mercy on him.” The Spirit of God begins a work and brings you to salvation and delivers you from all of that and delivers you from the judgment that it deserved. What can you say to that except that this is a display of utterly undeserved goodness and mercy from a loving God on a sinner like me.

And how can we contemplate these things without having our affections for Christ deeply moved as a result? There you were in your utter indifference to God and his word and his people and future judgment and eternal life and God saved you by kindness, by the work of Christ, by his mercy. Richly, verse 6, not just measured out but richly poured out abundantly you in Jesus Christ so that having been declared righteous “by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” Not only did he pull you out of that mire of your prior sinfulness and cleanse you and forgive you, he's given you the hope of an eternal life in heaven, of never ending, every deepening spiritual bliss in the perfection of the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ. I ask you: how could anyone hear that and not be moved? How can those of you – I don't understand those of you who aren't Christians. I really don't. I mean, in one sense I do but as I see these things in Scripture and you hear them, I don't understand how you can sit there, as it were, with your arms folded across your chest in utter indifference to the glories of Christ that are being displayed to you in his word. How can you sit there unmoved? How can you be indifferent to this Lord Jesus Christ? Don't you see? Don't you see the horrible sinfulness of your own soul? Don't you see the glory of Christ?

If you see it, then it's time to – today's the day. Today is the day to say, “Lord, it's time for me to bend my knee, to repent of it all and to embrace you and to receive this gracious gift of eternal life that I see laid out for me in Scripture.” Do you know what? He'll save you. Even now, after all this manifest rebellion that you have lived against him, even now he'll save you. Why? Because he's that gracious, he's that merciful, he's that kind that you can come to him right now on the warrant of his promise of grace and goodness to everyone who believes, you come to Christ right now and say, “Save me. Save me. O Lord Jesus, save me. I am so sorry for how I've lived in rebellion to you. Now Lord, I lay it all down. Take me and save me and use me as you will.”

Do you know what? I have no doubt that if you approach Christ in that way that he'll save you because look at verse 8, Titus 3:8, “This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently.” What I just laid out to you in the offer of eternal life, those of you who are here who don't know Christ, what I just laid out to you on the authority of God's word is a trustworthy statement that deserves your full acceptance and I speak confidently because the word of God is clear and accurate and reliable on the saving intention of God to those who come to him in repentant faith. He'll never turn you away.

Now, let's wrap this up pretty quickly. We've got two more quick ones. Fourth of all: we said that a church is established on biblical authority; a church establishes godly leadership; a church develops godly character; fourthly, a church protects its purity. A church protects its purity. Paul knew that in the midst of this kind of spiritual work just as we know that it will happen here eventually, factious men, divisive men would arise. You know, there's just going to be, it's just the nature of it. There are going to be times where divisive men come and try to discredit and destroy the good work that God's doing at a time like this. Well, what do we do with that? Listen, church leaders to the best of their ability dependent on the Spirit of God for grace, do not allow such men to poison the work. Just like some of you build fences around your gardens to keep the rabbits and the deers out, just like shepherds of old would build fences around their flock to keep the wolves out, church leaders and the entire church protects its purity because the work at stake is so precious that the idea of letting someone disrupt it is intolerable and so a church protects its purity.

Look at verse 8, “This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men.” Now watch it: here's the protection. Verse 9, “But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.” So, the word makes it clear that there will be people who come who want to introduce controversies into the work. They want to dispute about things in the law and Paul says avoid that, it's unprofitable, it's worthless and if men continue in their pursuit of factious behavior like that, warn them once, warn them again and if they still persist in it, then you open the door and send them on their way. You see, this is introducing us to the concept of church discipline and protecting the purity of the church.

Here's the way that you need to view that. This is part of the conflict of church leadership that I've told you before: it's not pleasant and no one enjoys it. The temptation from a distance is to say, "We need to be loving and embrace everybody. Isn't Jesus a Jesus of love and we need to embrace them all?" No, not when you read God's word. You realize that there are times where people are better off outside the church and we're jealous to protect the purity, the unity of the body. We're jealous to protect that because it's part of what Christ himself died to do. Look back at chapter 2, verse 14. I want you to see the connection here. Christ died to purify for himself a people for his own possession. Well, if people come and introduce strange doctrines and divisive behaviors and divisive attitudes and try to pull people away, then it's not only the privilege, it's the prerogative, it's the responsibility of a church to rise up and say, "No, not here. You'll need to find another place to worship if that's the way that you want to be." A church protects that unity, protects that purity because, beloved, nothing will undermine the work.

Oh, oh, look, if I was really demonstrative and manipulative, I would get down on my knees and beg you to pay attention here but I'm not going to do that. Just know that I'm begging you with what I'm about to say. A church that is built on biblical authority, a church that establishes godly leadership, a church that is cultivating private godliness in order to honor the name of Christ – listen, those are high and holy and eternal purposes to pursue together collectively as a body and what I want you to see if you name Truth Community Fellowship as your home, what I want you to see is that you should have your own sense of protection and jealousy over that as well. Say, "I want to protect this. This is what Christ wants and this is where I and my family are flourishing." So when someone comes and injects conflict in that and injects teaching that contradicts the direction and the teaching of the church, your response should be one of saying, "I want to protect what we have here." You're jealous to protect it and you realize here in the Scriptures that there is a foundation for that. We protect this in the name of Christ. We protect it in the name of the flock of Christ. We protect it because we want to be faithful.

That's all. "I just want to be faithful to the Lord who saved me," you say to yourself and if you treasure what's happening here at Truth Community Fellowship like I do, that's worth protecting. Someone breaks into your house, going after your wife or your kids, you're up and half of you are pulling out your concealed carries and you're dealing with that. Well look, that same sense of protection and care for the body of Christ should find a place in your heart that makes this a matter of tender watch-care as we collectively protect the purity of the church. Your church leadership will care for those things but it's so easy for gossip and innuendo to undermine like termites and just protect that in your private conversations. Say, "Ah, I don't want to go there. I don't want to hear those negative things from you. I love my church. I love the people at my church. I love the Christ of my church. I love the word of my church too much to let you interject something divisive like that." It's okay to tell people that.

Now, we get to final point five here, good stuff here: a church cultivates mutual care. A church cultivates mutual care. I'm reminded of what, I think, Paul said that you don't have to have anyone teach you to love one another because you just naturally do it and as I

briefly touch on this fifth point, I'm speaking to people who naturally just cultivate this and are already doing what the word of God calls for. A church cultivates mutual care. As we go through life together, we love one another and we care for one another. We're involved with each other. We're not separate islands in a long string of islands like the Aleutian Islands off the coast of Alaska. We're interconnected. Our lives are shared with one another and you see that in the last four verses here, in verses 12-15. Paul says, "When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, make every effort to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. Diligently help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way so that nothing is lacking for them. Our people must also learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful." You see what's going on there, Apollos and Zenas apparently carried this letter to Titus. Paul says, "Titus, I need you. Would you come to me soon? By the way, I'm caring for you and I'm sending Tychicus or Artemas to take care of you," and you see all this mutual care going on just within the guts of the ending of the letter. And he states it more broadly, "Our people must also learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful." We help each other and we rely on grace along the way as we do.

Paul closes and says, "All who are with me greet you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all." That last little phrase there "grace be with you all" shows that Paul meant for everybody to hear this, not just Titus. Titus was the bearer. Titus was the one to implement but Paul intended for everyone in the church to read this and this is how we know that this is intended for all of us here today. Grace be with you all.

So in the book of Titus – I'm really closing it up now, thank you for your patience this morning as I had so many things to say and on my heart – in the book of Titus, God has given us a simple blueprint for a young church. It's not complicated. It's clear but it takes a lifetime to implement. We're going to do this together over time. We're going to build something that's going to last and outlive us all. That's my prayer. That's my desire. But for now, you can see what Truth Community aims to be. I want you to write this down if you're at all taking notes, I want you to write this down, if you want to know where Truth Community is going, here it is in one paragraph that I'll say a time or two. What does Truth Community aim to be? We seek to be a church where biblical leaders teach and guide a united congregation of born-again Christians that serve one another in the pursuit of godly character to the end that we might glorify Christ who saved us with his own blood. That's it in a nutshell. If you can get that in your head, you've got it in a nutshell. We seek to be a church where biblical leaders teach and guide a united congregation of born-again Christians that serve one another in the pursuit of godly character to the end that we might glorify Christ who saved us with his own blood.

Beloved, here's what I want you to see: that pursuit is a noble call. This is a noble call worth pursuing. There is a lot for me to do. Do you know what? There's a lot for you to do. Let's put our hand to the plow and get to work.

Bow with me in prayer.

Father, we just want to honor what your word has said. Help us to honor your word, raise up godly leadership in this place, help us to cultivate personal godliness, give us the wisdom and the grace to protect the purity of this body of believers and help us to care for and to love one another in a way that is worthy of Christ. We commit these things to you. We ask for your blessing and we eagerly expect your answer in Jesus' name. Amen.

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