



From Cretan to Christ's Showcase

Titus 2:1-10

Those Cretans could really throw a party

How will you be celebrating Thanksgiving this year? Have you ever wondered how Cretans celebrated Thanksgiving? I know what you're thinking: "They didn't." Well, you're right, sort of. They didn't celebrate it for the reasons we celebrate. But they did have holidays and feasts. And could they ever party!

The first century historian/philosopher Plutarch wrote of "associations"; mens' groups where 15 men would gather and each would bring a bushel of barley and 8 gallons of wine and 2 1/2 lbs. of cheese and 5 lbs. of figs. And these men would invite the young boys to these feasts to "mentor" them on the ways of being a Cretan kind of guy. Think about it: any time you have 15 men bellying up to a table and gulping down 120 gallons of wine in front of a group of teen-age boys—it's not exactly the Boy Scouts.

And what of their wives? Oh, they weren't far behind. In a fascinating book, Bruce Winter¹ wrote of the emergence of the Roman "New Wife" or the "New Woman"; one free and unshackled from the bondage of respectable behavior. These ladies appeared at dinner feasts, eating, drinking, and afterwards participating in "after dinners", something which would make you blush if I told you. Another first century historian/philosopher, Philo, told of special tables where drinking bouts occurred; he wrote of "an unholy trinity of eating and drinking and sexual immorality at private dinners." All of this raises the question: "Is there a better way to do family?" Enter Titus.

But Christians do things a little differently

Titus 2 began with *"You, however."* These were strong words intended to rebuke the Cretan way. What you believe and how you live are inseparable. Does your life match your beliefs? Paul wanted Titus to teach the Christians on Crete that the Gospel would always lead to godliness. If not, then it's not the Gospel (Titus 1:16). The Gospel influences not merely what goes on in the church family when the church is gathered, it affects everyone around the Thanksgiving table. Paul was criticizing the Cretan culture's "unholy trinity" and challenging everyone in the family to live the Gospel way. He started with the leaders! Older men, older women, younger women,

¹ Bruce W. Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), pp. 141-167.

younger men, Slaves. The key word is “self-control.” Furthermore, he did not leave out Titus (2:7-8).

Maybe Paul is just old-fashioned

Sometimes we read our own culture into the Word; we view these vv. as if Paul grew up in "Leave it to Beaver" America; where Dad went to the office/factory and Mom was a homemaker (as if being a full-time homemaker was an act of capitulating to white, American males). But Titus 2:3-5 was not written in the 1950s.

Paul's words to occurred in a day where the options were not "Career" vs. "Honey, please stay home and wear an apron." The options were: "Honey, instead of going out tonight again to eat and drink and have sex with other people, why don't we stay home and put Junior to bed and pray with him?" Given this, isn't it perfectly sensible for Paul to tell Titus to tell the younger wives/mothers in the *Christian* communities, "Please pay attention to your family?" And, "When your spouse insists that you not participate in the 'unholy trinity' of 'after dinners,' kindly cooperate!"

Also, some might wonder why Paul didn't have more to say to the young men other than, "Be self-controlled." Well, first of all, is it a good idea to evaluate based on word count? Some scholars—and I agree—argue that the words “in everything” could/should apply to v. 6. In other words, “*Encourage the young men to be self-controlled in everything!*” Given that, what else needed to be said? When you consider what causes young men to self-destruct, is it not typically due to a lack of self-control in one or more areas of their lives? Sexually? Substance abuse? Verbal discipline? Pornography?

Furthermore, Paul's words to slaves assume that: (a) there are Christian slaves; and (b) those slaves have the dignity of making moral choices. They may not be able to change their status as slaves; but they can influence—even their masters—for the Gospel! Even the lowest in society can contribute to adorning the splendor of the Gospel!

And, of course, adorning Christ is the issue!

How we do family will determine whether we adorn Christ!

“ . . . so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.”

In other words, [how we do family] is not the beautiful woman, but the necklace. The beautiful woman is the Gospel—“the doctrine of God our Savior.” So one crucial meaning of our [doing life in the family] is that the way we do it will increase or decrease the attractiveness of the Gospel we profess before unbelievers. Of course, the great assumption is that they know we are Christians. The whole point of the text breaks down if there is nothing for us to “adorn.” Thinking that our lives will glorify God when people do not know we are Christians is like admiring an effective ad on TV that never mentions the product. People may be impressed but won't know what to buy. (Piper 2003, 143)