

Keynotes from Tim Gamston's am Sermon on 10/10/2021

Text: Mark 7 v 14-23 and Titus 1 v 12-16

Series: "Living godly lives in a godless culture"

Part 5: "The way to true Christian purity"

Scripture references from the ESV

Mark 7:14-23 And he called the people to him again and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand: ¹⁵ There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him."^[e] ¹⁷ And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. ¹⁸ And he said to them, "Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, ¹⁹ since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?"^[f] (Thus he declared all foods clean.) ²⁰ And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. ²¹ For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. ²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

Titus 1:12-16 One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." ¹³ This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, ¹⁴ not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth. ¹⁵ To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. ¹⁶ They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.

The good news about Jesus is life-changing – literally. When we come to trust in Jesus, we are not just saved from the punishment that sin deserves, we are also saved from the power of sin in our lives. We will begin to live differently. **Real faith in Jesus changes us so that we begin to live like Jesus.**

As Christians who have experienced the grace of God, we will be enabled to live godly lives in an ungodly world because faith in Jesus unites us to Jesus so that he lives his life in us and through us.

To help us live out these godly lives, Jesus has ordered the church so that it is led by godly men (elders) who are to:

- live out the commands of Jesus
- teach the commands of Jesus
- ensure the church lives out the commands of Jesus

Jesus is the head of the church, and he leads it by his Spirit working in the hearts of his people and through his word as it is faithfully taught and applied. The Holy Spirit works in the church through the word, transforming the church so that it takes on not only the character of the pastor but more importantly the character of Jesus.

- The goal of leadership in the church is to see a people who are becoming increasingly like Jesus, but

what is the way to Christian purity?

Titus' task on Crete was to see the church families living the kind of lives Jesus required of his people. The Cretans' bad character and ungodly culture were affecting the church. The church was allowing the culture to shape their life rather than being shaped by the commands of Jesus. That is a danger for us today.

Our culture has very different views from what Jesus commands over numerous issues such as use of time and money, how the universe came into existence, how children should be raised and marriage defined, the role of men and women and even how gender is defined. The danger is that the church begins to reinterpret the Bible in the light of our culture, so that culture, rather than the commands of Jesus, is what changes the church. We see this happening today, so what Paul writes to Titus is relevant for us. Rather than letting culture shape the church,

we need to be a people who shape our culture by living godly lives in a godless culture.

- **What is the way to Christian purity?** In vv13-16 (above), Paul shows us that Moral character comes from the life of God, received through faith in the soul of a person and not by keeping external rules.

There are two ways to purity – a wrong way (taught by the false teachers) and a right way that Titus was to teach.

1) The wrong way to purity is the way of legalism (v15).

Paul is talking about ritual purity – the kind that God requires for us to come into his holy presence, but in the context of the false teachers who should be rebuked (vv10, 13-14). They were teaching that to be pure you needed Jesus **plus** circumcision, **plus** obedience to Jewish commands, **plus** observance of the traditions of Judaism. The false teachers saw that the Cretans were not living as they should be, but their solution was to give them rules to live by.

Paul teaches commands for Christian living, but **having a set of rules for living doesn't by itself change a person.**

- Jesus commands us not to tell lies and this might make us feel guilty so that we try to be honest for a time, but when the temptation to cover our failures comes, we find that the command on its own hasn't changed us.

Even today, many people think they can change our godless culture by insisting on keeping church traditions which have not been commanded by Jesus.

It doesn't work. Paul shows that rule keeping as a way to moral purity is eternally dangerous (v16). The works that the false teachers assumed would show that they knew God had the opposite effect. This was because of their unbelief (v15), which could also be described as misplaced faith. They were saying that they would be accepted by God because they were following the rules he had given. People still do that today, thinking that God will receive them into heaven because they:

- Go to church, light a candle and/or say a prayer
- Get baptised, take the bread and wine and/or serve in a ministry
- Keep a set of rules surrounding the use of Sunday and keep away from certain 'sinful' places

They are trusting in their good works for God to accept them, but it doesn't change who they are or lead them into the kind of purity that God requires for us to stand in his holy presence for all eternity.

2) The right way to purity is the way of faith (v15 To the pure all things are pure)

We can understand what Paul meant by this if we look at something similar that Jesus said (**Mark 7:14ff** above). The religious leaders believed that a person made themselves unclean by eating food forbidden by God. Jesus shows that the problem is not with the food but with the heart. We are not unclean in God's eyes because we eat the wrong things, but because our hearts are sinful (**Mark 7:20-23** above). The place where our thoughts, motives and actions come from is sinful and so our thoughts, motives and actions are sinful.

- Rule keeping will not change our hearts and to try to use this method will only create self-righteous legalists who may profess to know God but in fact deny him by their works (**v16** above). Something else is needed and we find this in **Titus 2:14** (see p4).

It is Jesus who changes our hearts.

When we put our trust in him, he comes to take up residence in our hearts and sets to work to clean them up from the inside, so that our thoughts, motives and actions become increasingly clean. Jesus does this by the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us, purifying us. We will find that we do not need to fear that we may be contaminated by eating the wrong food, not being circumcised (or christened), or by not following some ancient tradition that has no basis in the teaching of Jesus. That does not mean that we can live as we please. Already in this first chapter of Titus, we have had commands for church leaders not to be arrogant, quick-tempered, violent or greedy for gain. Elders are to be hospitable, lovers of good, self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. These commands must be obeyed, but they are obeyed by hearts that have been changed by Jesus as he comes to live in us by the Spirit. Obedience to the commands of Jesus is the fruit of a heart that has been purified.

It is the result of the life of God in our souls.

The false teachers thought they could change hearts through changing external actions, but this can only come from

a heart made clean and, crucially, kept clean through faith in Jesus.

To live pure lives in a godless culture, there are three actions we need to practice:

a) **Humbly confess our sin.** The false teachers seem to be lost eternally because they don't know God (v16) but vv13-14 suggest otherwise, and give hope to them and any of us who have been trying to get right with God through legalism. Titus is called to rebuke them severely but the purpose of a rebuke is always to lead people to confession of sin, and to Jesus where they will experience God's mercy. The way to cleansing, and to purity, begins with confession. (1 John 1:8-9 see p4).

When we are rebuked, we may become defensive and try to justify ourselves. Instead, we should humbly and prayerfully ask God if the rebuke is justified and then confess our sin to him. He knows everything about you already and will keep his promise to cleanse and forgive you.

Unless we take ownership of our sin, we will never begin on the path of cleansing.

b) **Prayerfully meditate on scripture.** There is a link between sound doctrine, our minds, our conscience and our behaviour. (Psalm 101:2 see p4, vv15-16 above). We need to spend time meditating on the truth that comes from God, rather than listening to the messages that come from our culture or from false teaching.

'When I look at the world, I will conform to the ways of the world.

When I look at the word, I will conform to the will of God' (A.W.Tozer)

We need to read scripture slowly, taking time to allow it to inform our minds and purify our conscience, so that our minds are transformed. Paul links all this in Titus 1:1 (see p4) and again in Romans 12:2 (see p4). As we meditate on the truth of God's word, we will know the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

c) **Receive the Spirit through faith.** The Holy Spirit is essential if we are going to live pure lives in an impure culture. We cannot do it on our own. Galatians 3:2 (see p4) shows us that we receive the Spirit by hearing with faith. We hear the word of Christ, and as we believe Christ and meditate on the word, so the Spirit works in us to transform our lives.

Legalism won't change us – only faith in Jesus can do that. We need to take time to keep in step with the Spirit, reading the word of Christ and meditating on it. If

someone rebukes you, bring it to God and humbly ask if what they are saying is true. Sometimes God needs to afflict us (**Psalm 119:67** see p4) to bring us to a place where we come to the end of ourselves and are willing to humbly confess our sin and turn to Jesus, so that he can bring purity into our lives. We may feel we will never know the grace of God again, but that grace comes to us – we see the triumph of his grace in our lives and the lives of others.

- Take a moment to ask God to search your heart, and if he exposes sin in your life, confess it to him.

**Make room for the work of the Holy Spirit in your life to change you
as you trust in Jesus and meditate on his word.**

Titus 2:14 (our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ,) who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

1 John 1:8-9 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Psalm 101:2 I will ponder the way that is blameless. Oh when will you come to me?
I will walk with integrity of heart within my house;

Titus 1:1 Paul, a servant^[a] of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness

Romans 12:2 Do not be conformed to this world,^[c] but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.^[d]

Galatians 3:2 Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?

Psalms 119:67 Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word.