

Grace Energized Men: Living Wisely in a Foolish World Titus 2:2c

As we open to Titus 2, listen as God speaks through Paul to each of us today, expressing exactly what He wants us to be. Paul wrote out this curriculum for Titus, it was to be taught to every person in the church as a personal map to a life of pleasing God. This letter explains the specific ways that men, women, boys, and girls can choose to obey Christ by responding to His Word.

God's Word carefully lays out the vital qualities of life, chosen character habits that are the pathway to highly useful living. To be a highly useful tool in God's Hands, and to live a highly rewarded life, God wants these qualities to become your life-priorities. They begin in verse 2:

*Titus 2:2 that the **older men** be **sober, reverent, temperate**, sound in faith, in love, in patience; NKJV*

Six Desires for Every Man

We are examining the 24 Spiritual Qualities God is looking for today in Christ's Church. He has written down His clear and defined expectations and as we read Titus we find that means that: **God has Six Desires** for each godly man of maturity. Those six desires are framed by these six descriptions God sent. He said these highly useful men are:

1. "Sober" as this Greek¹ word **nephalious** is rendered in the KJV and NKJV; or "Sober-minded" is the way that the ESV renders it; and "Temperate" is the rendering you find in both the NIV and the NAS. The only church-wide curriculum for men starts with this word God chose that communicates the quality of: **MAINTAINING A BALANCED LIFE IN AN OBSESSIVE-COMPLUSIVE WORLD.** In other words, they choose to live a life a life balanced by God's Word in an unbalanced world.
2. "Reverent" as this Greek² word **semnous** is rendered in the NKJV; or "grave" in the KJV; or "worthy of respect" in the NIV; or "dignified" as both the ESV and NAS

¹ Strong's number 3524

² Strong's number 4586

translate it. This word God chose communicates the quality of: **GETTING SERIOUS ABOUT GOD IN AN AMUSED WORLD.** These men think deeply about God in an amused, shallow-thinking culture. That means they are not entertained by sensuality, never amused by vulgarity, and they won't treat God's Word superficially.

3. "Temperate" as this Greek³ word **sophronous** is rendered in the KJV and NKJV; or "Self-controlled" as we find in the ESV and NIV; or "Sensible" as translated in the NAS. This word was chosen by God to communicate the third quality He wants to see in His highly useful and rewarded men, which is: **LIVING WISELY IN A FOOLISH WORLD.**

God wants older men whose lives are yielded to His control. God wants them to live in such a way that their lives demand an explanation from a watching world. This wise man's life is characterized by the defining qualities of the Greek word **sophronous** which means, "self-controlled, restored to one's senses, earnest living'.

God wants a man whose life speaks louder than his words; whose character is noticed and prompts other men to examine their own lives.

The Titus 2 older-man-in-the-faith's life is a pattern for others to use in shaping their daily choices for living into:

Lives that Demand Explanation

As Christ's witnesses we live our lives before a watching world; and we can live such temperate or self-controlled lives by the grace of God, that our lives prompt demands, from those who know us, for an explanation. Today we find this word we are studying (**sophronous**) in the midst of Paul's earlier letter to the Church at Rome. After 11 chapters of profound doctrine, Paul uses this word for self-controlled, temperate, sensibility to begin the application of practical godly living before a watching world.

Please turn there with me to Romans 12, and listen to the pathway to usefulness; and a life pleasing to God that we find in choosing to live wisely in a world that is characterized by an immense amount of godlessness and foolishness.

*Romans 12:1-5 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. 3 For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to **think soberly**, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. 4 For as we have many members in one body, but all the members*

³ Strong's number 4998

do not have the same function, 5 so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.

Paul was God's slave, proclaiming the Gospel message to the Roman Empire. Almost a twin to our modern culture, the Romans lived in a very proud and self-centered society. So Paul told them as he tells us, that the only way be useful to God starts with ourselves given in surrender to the reality that God is our Master, and we are His slaves (that summarizes the famous v. 1-2). Paul then goes on to explain that:

Surrendered Lives are Lived Wisely

When we come to the very first choice we make as those surrendered to Christ's Lordship of our lives in v. 3, we encounter this same word for temperate, sensible, or self-controlled living. Note that v. 3's call to living wisely before a foolish world is to everyone:

*Romans 12:3 For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but **to think soberly**, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. NKJV*

The context of Romans 12 is serving God with the gifts He has given us, and behaving like His children as we do so. And the very first lesson is about how we live wisely for God in an extremely foolish world. The entry point into usefulness according to Romans 12 is choosing to live wisely, or thinking the way that Christ wants us to think, about ourselves and about our lives.

To capture the sense of this verse it helps to put in the word 'estimate' for the word "think" then it would say: "Don't overestimate yourself (**hyperphroneo** 'super-think') beyond a true estimate, but estimate yourself with a proper estimate".

Wise living starts with a proper estimation of who we really are. Only God's Word can lead us to that proper view of self. Now, turn back to our text in Titus 2:2.

To be a tool in the Lord's Hands, a godly older man learns to cultivate this God-designed, proper view of self that is honest and accurate. He has a realistic and Biblical view of his strengths, his weaknesses, his God-given talents, and all his human deficiencies. After coming to an accurate appraisal of who he is and how God made him, he sees his place and purpose in God's program.

This man avoids the two extremes, he neither thinks he is better than he really is: which shows up as pride and conceit; or thinking that he worse than he really is: which shows up as self-depreciation and uselessness. Rather he thinks with the wisdom from God above, through His Spirit within, as expressed in God's Word.

And what does God's wisdom, for living wisely before a foolish world look like, when followed by His obedient Titus 2 grace-energized men?

First, Living Wisely Exposes the Foolish Philosophies our World

One whole area of wise living that these temperate men get disciplined in is: to recognize, understand, and resist the growing list of unbiblical beliefs, and the post-Christian rules by which America now lives. Just to name a few:

1. ***Wise men see and resist our foolish world's NARCISSISM or self-centeredness.*** Foolish people live for themselves.

Remember Christ's story about the rich fool (Luke 12:13-21)? Foolish decision-making always starts with a premise of "what is best for me?" Wisdom from God leads us to start all decision making with the desire of, "What is best for God?" and "What magnifies Him?" and "What glorifies Him?" That is a man of temperate wisdom.

2. ***Wise men see and resist our foolish world's UNIVERSALISM or the belief that salvation is not exclusively in Christ alone.*** Foolish people think that no idea or belief is invalid, so they do what is right in their own eyes—not God's (Judges 17:6; 21:25).

Foolish people think that there really isn't any ultimate truth. Foolish people believe that there are many "true" systems of thought, that lead to many roads to God. Wisdom from God's Word causes us to start with God as the source of Ultimate Truth (John 14:6). We then see that Jesus is the incarnation of Truth and is the only One that can lead us into truth by His Word, and His Spirit of Truth (John 16:13) within us.

Probably there is no more powerful communicator of false beliefs to be resisted than the constant false teachings of modern movies. Listen to what the New York Times reported⁴ the week of Christmas:

It's fitting that James Cameron's "Avatar" arrived in theaters at Christmastime. Like the holiday season itself, the science fiction epic is a crass embodiment of capitalistic excess wrapped around a deeply felt religious message. It's at once the blockbuster to end all blockbusters, and the Gospel According to James [Cameron].

But not the Christian Gospel. Instead, "Avatar" is Cameron's long apologia for pantheism — a faith that equates God with Nature, and calls humanity into religious communion with the natural world.

In Cameron's sci-fi universe, this communion is embodied by the blue-skinned, enviably slender Na'Vi, an alien race whose idyllic existence on the planet Pandora is threatened by rapacious human invaders. The Na'Vi are saved by the movie's hero, a turncoat Marine, but they're also saved by their faith in Eywa, the "All Mother," described variously as a network of energy and the sum total of every living thing.

⁴ December 21, 2009, Op-Ed Columnist, Heaven and Nature, By ROSS DOUTHAT <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/21/opinion/21douthat1.html>

If this narrative arc sounds familiar, that's because pantheism has been Hollywood's religion of choice for a generation now. It's the truth that Kevin Costner discovered when he went dancing with wolves. It's the metaphysic woven through Disney cartoons like "The Lion King" and "Pocahontas." And it's the dogma of George Lucas's Jedi, whose mystical Force "surrounds us, penetrates us, and binds the galaxy together."

Hollywood keeps returning to these themes because millions of Americans respond favorably to them. From Deepak Chopra to Eckhart Tolle, the "religion and inspiration" section in your local bookstore is crowded with titles pushing a pantheistic message. A recent Pew Forum report on how Americans mix and match theology found that many self-professed Christians hold beliefs about the "spiritual energy" of trees and mountains that would fit right in among the indigo-tinted Na'Vi.

Religion exists, in part, precisely because humans aren't at home amid these cruel rhythms [of life and death on Earth]. We stand half inside the natural world and half outside it. We're beasts with self-consciousness, predators with ethics, mortal creatures who yearn for immortality.

This is an agonized position, and if there's no escape upward — or no God to take on flesh and come among us, as the Christmas story has it — a deeply tragic one.

Pantheism offers a different sort of solution: a downward exit, an abandonment of our tragic self-consciousness, a re-merger with the natural world our ancestors half-escaped millennia ago.

But except as dust and ashes, Nature cannot take us back.⁵

3. ***Wise men see and resist our foolish world's HEDONISM or a "pleasure first" priority in life.*** For foolish people, the pursuit of pleasure becomes the meaning of their existence. Wisdom from God starts with "seek first the kingdom of God" (Mat. 6:33) and continues with "whether therefore you eat or drink—do all for the glory of God" (I Cor. 10:31), and ends with "you are not your own...therefore glorify God with your body" (I Cor. 6:19-20). Wise men surrender to Christ's supremacy over life, over all pleasures, and even over personal needs—as a supreme truth.
4. ***Wise men see and resist our foolish world's SECULARISM or the practice of compartmentalizing life into boxes that have no impact upon each other.*** A foolish person believes that sacred things belong in church and that the rest of life is secular. For a foolish person seeking God's will and direction through prayer and God's Word is no longer practiced—that is for church not life. Wisdom from God teaches us that "of Him, through Him, and to Him" are all things (Rom. 11:36). We seek the gracious Lordship of Christ to invade all of our life.
5. ***Wise men see and resist our foolish world's MATERIALISM or living for stuff.*** A foolish person measures their life by what they own, where they live, what they wear, where they go, and what they drive. A foolish person lives to gain more stuff, and ACCUMULATION has become their theme song of life. Wisdom from God teaches us that our life is a vapor, and that nothing material can be taken to Heaven, only sent ahead. A wise person realizes that happiness is a byproduct of obeying God and that greed is idolatry (Col. 3:5) in God's sight. Jesus told us that it is far better to give and inherit eternal possessions (Mat. 19:28-29) than to grasp onto getting as much as we can—and losing it all (Matthew 16:25-26). That is wisdom!

6. **Wise men see and resist our foolish world's RELATIVISM or ignoring essential differences.** A foolish person believes there are no absolutes, and that everyone should be allowed to be their own authority. To a foolish person whatever works, feels good, or satisfies is okay; and so all the old rules, all the old barriers, and all the old moral landmarks are gone. Foolish people make their own rules in the now as they go through life. But wise men seeks out the "old paths" as God's Word describes the sensible life of wisdom to Jeremiah (6:16). And as Christ's parable of the house upon the sand illustrates (Matthew 7:24-26), only the wise build their lives upon the solid Rock of God's Word, and in the end find security.

So, we avoid foolish philosophies or error and resist them.

Second, Living Wisely means Investing Time in Christ's Church

There was a fascinating book *Bowling Alone* written by Robert D. Putnam (Simon & Schuster 2000), which documents the erosion in the past few decades of our American societal fabric. Putnam says this was caused by the diminishment of social groups, close associations, personal connectivity, chosen social support groups, and even close personal friendships. He goes on to say that we have increasingly become a nation of 'disconnected, isolated, lonely individuals'.

When we look around we see how true his conclusions really are. And if we ponder the ramifications we can see that this is especially bad news for Christ's church. We have been called of God to bond together in local assemblies that share an intimate fellowship. In Christ we are to become closer to one another than what exists in most ordinary family groups.

For the church of today, the old American saying "united we stand, divided we fall" is especially relevant. The more rapidly our culture and American society fall apart, the more important it is for us as Christians to take vigorous steps in the opposite direction from the cultural trends of dis-connectivity!

Paul told Titus to have each member of the church taught to nurture others. We are to train and model ways to live wisely in a foolish world; which means the microcosm of our individual lives and family lives are all brought under God's control.

In reading the letters of the Apostle Paul one can't help note the very large number of Christian brothers the Apostle knew, prayed for, and cared for--even though they were scattered about all over the Roman Empire. They were all "family." We see Paul frequently stopping to pray for them or send them greetings though they lived hundreds of miles apart. It was not exactly as if he had nothing else to do! Today it is not likely we know much about other believers in our fellowship, as well as Christians in other congregations, even when neighboring churches are just down the block. And next door neighbors? Many of us have no clue about them at all.

There is a cure to this situation of gradual decline in the Christian community, but it depends on individuals who will repent of the status quo, begin repenting, and rearranging their priorities to begin systematic investments of time poured into the lives of other believers.

God has given each of us a spiritual sphere of influence in the kingdom of our individual lives. Our invisible influence amongst our families, our friends, at church, at work, thrives only when we live under the authority and rule of Jesus, the King of kings.⁶

Wisdom comes from God.

God speaks through His Word.

His Word is the only place to get His wisdom.

What would be the most important investment we could make in 2010? How about time each day to read God's Word so we have something to share with others? Since it only takes eighty hours to read the entire Bible, let me ask you this: Can you invest 15 minutes per day to cultivate the mind of Christ while living in this foolish world? Those hours of your life become a gift that is totally given to God!

Isn't God worth it?

Finally, Wisely Seeking Dependence on God

What is one the strongest intoxicants this world has to offer? It is a spirit of personal independence, rather than dependence upon God. One line of the Lord's Prayer should be on our hearts, we need God's provision just to make it through each day. Jesus told us to ask: Give us this day our daily bread.

Most people (even believers) seek to live as independently as possible. We commonly ponder personal goals, dreams, and ambitions, but often fail to realize that we're just doing what we had already decided is right. Note that very last verse of Judges we already alluded to earlier under universalism:

"In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25).

Unless we stay anchored to God's Word, self-determination and self-driven lives are the norm. Think of what you know about Israel entering the Promised Land. As the Jews entered Canaan they found it to be unbelievably lush, green, and productive. But God

⁶ Quoted and adapted from the Lambert Dolphin email NL#80, 10/27/07.

warned His people repeatedly about the evil of the Canaanite pagans and commanded that they be driven out and destroyed.

Rather than get rid of them, however, Israel gradually began to think that maybe they knew better than God. So Israel slowly got conformed into thinking and acting just like the Canaanites. This whole decline was explained in Psalm 106:

“They did not destroy the peoples, concerning whom the LORD had commanded them, but they mingled with the Gentiles and learned their works; they served their idols, which became a snare to them” (Psalm 106:34–36).

The Canaanite snare to Israel, played out in the Book of Judges, is probably a good picture of the autonomous lifestyles many professing Christians in America are living these days. *Wikipedia*, the online source for many Americans, really does capture the essence of current thinking:

“In general, the American dream can be defined as being the opportunity and freedom for all citizens to achieve their goals and become rich and famous if only they work hard enough.”

This statement of the American dream is the most frank definition of what may actually be our deeply rooted national form of idolatry. As believers we have become so American that we think God and the American dream somehow fit together. We are so steeped in our culture’s lifestyle that we fail to fear the Canaanite danger all around us, and thus we’re in the same dangerous place as Israel was in the times of the Judges.

Materialism is Idolatry

Our society offers all manner of consumer goods, pleasures, travel, and enjoyment to live the so-called “good life,” but we are asked to be “tolerant” of (and eventually to buy into) this pagan idolatry, which is everywhere. And if we, like the Israelites before us, compromise our faith and mingle and blend in with the Canaanite culture in America, the terrible sickness and blindness of Revelation 3 will take hold of our lives.

Look at Christ's last and poignant letter to His church in Laodicea:

Revelation 3:17-19 Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked— 18 I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. 19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

They may have rationalized like this: “The Canaanites seem nice, look harmless, and make great neighbors. Though they have bad habits, worship fertility gods, engage in sexual promiscuity, and reject the truth of God, *maybe* the Canaanite gods really do

bring prosperity and success. So perhaps it was actually those gods that made the Promised Land so fruitful!"

The Israelites, by wanting to have their own way, began choosing to live independently from God. They slowly mingled and blended in with the Canaanites. Consequently, God's Word has sternly warned future generations of the dangers of becoming ensnared in that same compromising lifestyle.

There's no doubt that we are now living in the most intoxicating time in history. We are surrounded by the constant allurements of wealth, comfort, and false promises of security. But whenever we give in to the "Canaanite" virus, we slowly detach from our closeness to Christ and independently drift around seeking our own goals, our own plans, and our own ambitions.

In summary, a grace-energized man chooses to live a self-controlled life even though he is surrounded by self-centered people, living out their own agendas, and mostly ignoring God's Word. Because he is "temperate," he stays true to the Lord while living in the midst of the Canaanites of this world. And that is a man God uses—a life He rewards.

If you are an older man in the faith, I exhort you to heed God's call to maintain a self-controlled, temperate life of wisdom, resisting our increasingly foolish culture!

For Further Study:

Grace-energized Men of Temperance: Are Wise in their Witness

God wants a man whose life speaks louder than his words; whose character is noticed and prompts other men to examine their own lives and seek to emulate his joy, his peace, and his walk in the Spirit—in evident and practical ways. The Titus 2 older-man-in-the-faith's life is a pattern for others to use in shaping their own lives.

When Paul gave Titus⁷ the curriculum for Christ's church he said to train men that are:

1. ***Temperate in an intemperate world.***

- This describes an attitude of mind that leads to prudence and self-control in life. It is the opposite of frivolity and carelessness that are based on ignorance. It is translated "sober" in Titus 1:8 and 2:4, 6, and 12, and "discreet" in 2:5.
- Seriousness of life and purpose are important in the Christian life, and especially to older saints who cannot afford to waste time, for they begin to realize that their time is short.
- This word describes wise living and thinking that has self-control, good judgment, discretion, common sense, sound-minded, discreet, and sensible, and able to keep an objective perspective in the face of problems and disagreements. Such wisdom tempers pride, authoritarianism, and self-justification.⁸

2. ***Sane in an insane world.***

- He says that we must be steady in mind. We might render it: "Preserve your sanity." The verb Peter uses is *souphronein*; connected to that verb is a noun *souphrosuneu*, which is formed from the verb *souzein*, 'to keep safe', and the noun *phroneusis*, 'the mind'. A temperate man has the wisdom which "keeps safe his mind" to render this word literally.
- The great characteristic of temperate wisdom is that it sees things in their proper proportions; it sees what things are important and what are not. When men view their life from the perspective of eternity, then God is given His proper place, and everything else settles into its proper place.

3. ***Sensible in a senseless world.***

- These men slowly learn the discernment, discretion, and judgment that only come from walking with God for many years. They slowly learn to control their physical passions, to reject worldly standards, and to resist worldly

⁷ 071202AM GEM-08

⁸ Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership—An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Revised and Expanded), Littleton, Colorado: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1995, p. 193.

attractions. Like Paul, these men when energized by God's grace "think so as to have sound judgment" (Rom. 12:3).