

OB Elbert - A True Influencer

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Influencers. You know, one of the most commonly cited ambitions of young people these days when they're asked, what would you like to do with your life? They say, I would like to be an influencer. What does an influencer do? They inhabit the digital world and they tell people what to think and what they should enjoy, what to listen to, what to eat, how to have their nails done, you name it.

There are websites and influencers desiring to make money from their specialty. I do know one dear sister here who unwittingly was a great influencer to me. In that she told me why my tomato plants are not doing well and we shall reap the bounty thereof at some point.

I did mention yesterday morning about how thrilling it is that the Lord has miraculously preserved many of the writings of Apostle Paul for 2,000 years.

And I'd like to think that I was rummaging through an old chest and I found this very old letter. It's about 2,000 years ago, and it was addressed to a man by the name of Titus, and it was from the Apostle Paul, and Titus was a true influencer. There are maybe four or five points that I hope I can get across to you today. I'm not expecting you to pass muster and stand in front of me and recite the entire Epistle of Titus when we're done with the presentation.

Right? That's not realistic. But there are so many important things in the book. He was a true influencer, and he did it not for earthly treasure. He did it to serve God.

That's evident in the first few verses. So if you'll open up your Bibles.

I was talking to Brother Daniel just before this discourse and talking about the pleasure of. Of pulling back from the digital world at times and just getting a printed Bible. Maybe you have a favorite that you really like that you've used for years. One of those Bibles that when somebody mentions a scripture, you see a picture of it in your head and you know exactly where it is on the page. To take that printed Bible and sit in a quiet place and just spend time communicating with the Lord, reading His Word.

So here we go. Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ. For the sake of God's elect, for the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior. There's so much there.

Paul writes to Titus for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their acknowledgment of the truth. So in the Greek language there's I think the word gnosis, which means knowledge, and then there's epignosis, which means active understanding and application of knowledge. It's like in the college we would teach the kids facts, but hopefully go beyond that and teach them critical thinking skills, and that's what we as Christians need to do. We need to be critical thinkers about the word of God.

It's essential, the knowledge of the truth. Verse one, which accords with godliness. What does that mean?

It means that the theory aligns perfectly with the practice.

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The theory aligns perfectly with the practice.

And what does this result in? Why do we do it? In hope of eternal life.

God, who never lies, promised this eternal life before the ages began. Think about that for just a moment.

Before the foundation of the world, before the ages began, God had thought this plan out so thoroughly, he knew that there would be a class of people that he would save and that saved for the purpose of being blessers to the rest of mankind and to have eternal life, and there's one other little nugget there too.

Paul tells us or reminds Titus, God cannot lie, and that that affects me for two reasons. The first is if I say, well, it's nice that it says it, but I don't know if I believe it a hundred percent or not, are we calling God a liar? That would be a strong thing to say, wouldn't it?

And in the New Testament, as far as I have found, there is only one author who uses that phrase, God who cannot lie, and that's the Apostle Paul, which helps me to believe more authentically that he did write the Epistle to the Hebrews, because that's the only other place where that phrase occurs in the New Testament. Hebrews 6:18, God who cannot lie. So what better guarantee could you? You want, you know, you could buy the five year extension service plan on that new washer or dryer.

How does that match up with the integrity and the Word, the promise of the eternal God? This is the real thing.

So Paul is writing to Titus, verse 4, his true child in a common faith. His true child. Maybe there was a little bit of doubt as to whether Titus was really in the mix or not, because Titus was a Gentile, he was a Greek, and when Paul went to the conference in Jerusalem, and the record of that is in the second chapter of Galatians, Paul talks about how well, everything went great discussion and he said that even there these Jewish leaders did not compel Titus, who was a Greek, to become circumcised.

In other words, though he was a transplant into the promises of God, it was not expected that he would keep Jewish traditions in order to be acceptable. He was fully acceptable. Paul's true child in the common faith trusted so much that Paul left him in Crete where there were issues, and I wonder, were there any ecclesias back then that did not have issues? I think that that's one of the experiences of the Lord's people in every ecclesia that are issues.

And depending on how we deal with them, we either commend ourselves to the Lord or show him that we need some more education and exercise.

Then Paul begins to set forth the qualifications for eldership. If anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. Because an overseer as God's steward must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick tempered or a drunkard, or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good self, controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. So these are the type of men that we hope God will give to the church to be leaders of his people, men who are hospitable.

And that doesn't. I think I was talking in fellowship with maybe a couple of you here. I don't think hospitality as it's mentioned here, means that after your Sunday study, or maybe they studied on

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Saturdays, had a meeting then, and you say, well, you know, you five brethren come to the house, you know, we've got a nice meal, come over and hang out and we'll have some fellowship, and then the next week a different group of people comes over. I believe that this word means that they are hospitable in the sense that they're open and accessible, that you can talk to them, that you don't have to look at them and be kind of afraid to talk to him because he's so severe or he's way better than me, I can't approach him.

Shouldn't be that way. Hospitable people need to be leaders in the church. People who can be approached, people who care about you, people who care about each other.

He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as he has been taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. Because there are many who are insubordinate. They are empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the Circumcision party, the ones who wanted people to become Judaized Christians. They must be silenced since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.

This testimony is true, and of course we always pause there and say, what did he mean by saying that? Did he mean that it's true that these are words that are being said by their own prophets? Or having worked with the Cretans for a while, he's in full harmony saying, yeah, it's a true statement. The Cretans are liars and evil beasts.

Lazy gluttons.

Rebuke them sharply that they may be sound in the truth, and this is interesting. Titus is a Gentile, he's a Greek, and he's going to these so called Jewish experts, and now Paul says to tell them this, rebuke them sharply that they may be sound in the faith, not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth. All right, it all sounds reasonable thus far.

And now, spoiler alert, I'm going to give you what I consider to be one of the main pillars of this presentation today. Here comes one of the main points, and it's verses 15 and 16.

These are precious thoughts to me. 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. They profess to know God, but they deny him. By their works they are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.

And this principle that I would love to share with you today, if God gives us the ability to do that, is that to the pure all things are pure, but to the unbelieving and defiled, nothing is pure. I have some corollary scriptures that I'd like to attach to that. The first of them, and maybe one of my favorites, is Psalm 50. I'll be quoting verses 16 through 21.

As for the wicked, God says, how dare you recite my statutes or speak about my covenant with your lips? You hate instruction and toss my words behind you. When you see a thief, you befriend him and you keep company with adulterers. You give your mouth free reign for evil, and your tongue devises deceit. You sit and speak against your brother.

You slander your own mother's son. Here's the point. These things you did and I kept silent because you assumed that I was like you.

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Get it?

I kept my silence and you thought I was just like you.

But now I'm going to rebuke you, and I will set forth my case before your very own eyes, and isn't that true? God in his silence, watches the actions of the world, and people have created their own gods, right?

Many different countries, idols. They're all created in the image of fallen and broken human beings. They're fickle, they're vengeful, they are carnal. They're not like the true God. But God, in His silence, let people run away with their imaginations and think that he's just like us.

And he's not. I Continue on. Psalm 18:23, 26.

I was upright before him, and I kept myself from iniquity. So the Lord restored me according to my righteousness because my hands were clean in his sight. Here's the point.

To the holy, you show your gracious love. To the upright, you show yourself upright. To the pure, you show yourself pure, and to the morally corrupt, you appear to be perverse. To the pure, all things are pure.

But to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure. Our next scripture, you're all very familiar with, and it for some time just kind of seemed like an innocuous and passing thing. Sermon on the Mount. The Beatitudes. Love that.

Love it. But verse 8 of Matthew, chapter 5 says this. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

And I don't think I thought as deeply about that in years past as I do now.

Yeah, okay, good. I keep my heart pure. I'm going to go to heaven. I'll see God. That's not what the point is here.

I don't think the point is that if our heart isn't pure, we can't really see God with clarity for who he is. It takes purity of heart to see God. My last cross reference in this regard is Hebrews chapter 12, verse 14. The apostle says, strive for peace with everyone and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. Heart purity is essential to seeing our Creator in all his glory.

To truly understand God, it takes a pure heart. You know, if I put on my eyeglasses and the lenses aren't pure, and I've got icky stuff all over. Well, excuse me just a second. There we go. I've got icky stuff all over my lenses, I can't see clearly.

But if I cleanse the Lenses I can see very clearly. Our heart is the lens that lets us see God. So the more pure our heart is, the clearer our image of him will be. Paul resumes with Titus 2. 1.

As for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine.

Teach what accords with sound doctrine. Years ago I bought a copy of Eusebius, History of the Christian Church, and Eusebius was a great man in the Christian Church, apparently was at the Council of Nicaea and was working with many, many manuscripts, apparently original copies perhaps of some of the Epistles and the history of the Church, and going through all that, writing

the history of the Church, and I wanted to read that, to find out what was really important, what were the real issues of the Church in Eusebius. Day had my pencil in my hand, paper next to me.

I was ready to write. I read and I read and I read, and there wasn't a list, no list of, well, you have to believe this. Well, of course, you have to believe that Jesus Christ is our Redeemer, of course, and you have to believe in God. But doctrinal delineations nowhere.

But there was a cause of controversy in the early church, and in a sense, it was doctrinal. The source of controversy that history records for us and was identified by Eusebius is elders with big egos who want to compete with each other, and as I reflect back on modern church history and our history, in speaking to elders who were involved in the cataclysmic events of the 60s and early 70s in our movement, it really seemed that this was the issue that was really driving divisions among us. Competition.

I'll leave it there, but I will cross reference a statement of Paul to Titus, chapter 2, verse 1, and that statement comes from Romans, chapter 16, verse 17 and 18.

I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught. Avoid them, for such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive. I believe that divisions and obstacles are the things that were contrary to the doctrine that Titus had been taught. I don't think it was a list of all of our doctrines that we delineate, that we enumerate.

The doctrine he was talking about, I believe, was the unity of the body of Christ and people who are dividing Christ for the sake of personal gain, for personal influence, aggrandizement, maybe wealth, turning their gospel, their teaching, into wealth, making a business of it.

What should we do with such, he says, avoid them, and perhaps that's the best way to approach it.

Well, now we're talking about various offices in the church or strata in the church social strata. Older men.

I can't believe I'm an older guy now.

I've been told, don't call yourself old anymore. You're well seasoned. Older men are to be sober minded, dignified, self controlled, sound in faith, in love and in steadfastness, all the fruitage of a lifetime of serving Christ.

They are to be self controlled, pure, working at home, kind, kind to their wives, the older women. Actually, I found a big typo here on my screen. The older women are to teach their younger women how to love their husbands and how to love their children.

And, well, they're married, right? They're mothers of their children. Of course they love them, right? The answer is not necessarily. Sometimes our fleshly clashes in the marriage relationship or family relationship are difficult to navigate.

And in those difficulties, it is so important to step back, be respectful, be kind, and realize that when clashes flare up between husbands and wives, parents and children, that those are momentary things, they will pass. But the obligation to one another, the love for one another, born out of respect, born out of deep affection, will continue on.

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Well, let's not leave the younger men out of this. The younger men are to be self controlled.

Practice in all respects. Practice to be a model of good works, and in your teaching, show integrity, dignity, sound speech that cannot be condemned so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us.

Enough said there.

In addition to under the pure, all things are pure. One of the big blocks of this presentation today, one of the things I hope that you walk away with. This is probably number two, and it deals with the bondservants, and These are verses 9 and 10 of Titus, chapter 2.

Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything. They are to be well pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior. That word pilfering is interesting. You know what pilfering means.

And I observed many, many years ago when I was at work that the printer in my office was identical to the printer in my home.

I ran out of ink.

I could just take one of these ink cartridges home and eventually buy another one and put this one back. Or I ran out of staples at home. I'm putting together some handouts for the brethren. I'll just take one row of staples to staple My handouts together.

And then I said, absolutely not.

Our employer is not our office, Max. Right. Our employer is not our office, supply store or anything else, hardware, whatever. We are not to pilfer from our employers, and it may seem a very light thing, but attention to such detail really, really affects the beauty and integrity of the Christian life.

I Read from Ephesians 6:5,8, Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters, according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as unto Christ, not with eye service, as men pleasers. The boss is looking. Get busy, you know. Okay. He's back in the house.

Yeah. I'm going to sit on this rock and just take it easy for a while. Now. Not I servants, but as unto Christ, as the servants of God, doing the will of God from the heart with goodwill, doing service as to the Lord and not to men, serving men, knowing that whatsoever good thing, any man does the same, shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. Chapter 2.

Titus, verses 11 to 15. Don't need a whole lot of exposition, but I will read them based on this. This is why we should obey all the preceding verses based on. Because the grace of God has appeared and you've received it, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self controlled, upright and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession, who are zealous for good works. Titus, declare these things.

Exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you.

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It all goes back to the fact that our hope, as we said yesterday, our hope will not disappoint us.

The day will come when we will realize that. Here we are. These things. Declare spoiler alert. Number three.

This is chapter three, verses one and two. Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, to show perfect courtesy toward all people.

If there is one almost universal element to our broken, fallen humanity, it's that we love to speak evil of other people.

And sometimes we try to mask it. You know, it's just like building up inside us, and to excuse it, we say, well, you know, I hate to say it, but, and then, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. You didn't Hate to say it.

You're just looking for an excuse to say it. The command is simple, Speak evil of no one. Because when we speak evil of people, we're not making ourselves any better, and the person that we're evil speaking about, maybe they don't know that you're doing it. But it's harmful.

It's more harmful to the person whose ears are open to what you're saying. Here, let me pour some auditory poison in your ears. May I? That's essentially what's going on. Speak evil of no one.

But here's the most important aspect of it. When we speak evil, it's the seed in our heart that's at the base of this evil speaking, that we do these terrible things we say about other people, and Jesus warned us about that, didn't he? I'm reading from Matthew 15. I'll read verse 11 first.

Jesus said, not that that goeth into the mouth defiles a man, but that which comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man.

Be careful, little mouth, what you speak. Right? We have our little junior sing that at our annual convention. Be careful, little ears what you hear, eyes what you see. But be careful, little mouth, what you speak.

Because these things coming out of your mouth defile your heart, and I continue reading. In Matthew 15, verse verses 18:20, what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person.

Speak evil of no one.

There's a statement in Proverbs, chapter seven that just kind of comes to mind. No. Ecclesiastes, chapter 7, and the wise man there notes that, you know, if you and your house, you have servants in the house, and you're in the living room, and they're in the storage closet next to the living room, and just kind of listening in on the conversation there, and you hear your servant evil speaking of you.

And the wise man admonishes, don't take it to heart, because you yourself know that you've said such things about other people, probably including that servant. He's the worst servant I've got. After all I've done for him, too.

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Verse 3 of Titus 3. For we ourselves were once foolish. We were disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hating others, being hated by others and hating one another.

And that's kind of where a lot of the world's evils come from that malice in the human heart.

And that's very prevalent in the world today too. Here are people denying I'm not a hater.

I had a person that I worked with for many years, not directly, but close enough to. To hear their actions, and oh, they. They boiled over in the pot of disregard and disrespect for other people, and amazing how unaware that person was of what they were doing.

And they would often say to other people, hey, I'm not a hater, okay? But we can deceive ourselves. Let us examine our hearts. Because if our hearts are pure, what do we get? To see God.

Thank you. So I also learned in my time teaching at the college that you have to give students 17 seconds for them to answer in the classroom before you really start pumping the answers harder. So, good one. Thank you. Yes, we want our hearts to be pure so that we can see God.

God saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. That was Romans, chapter 12, verses 1 and 2. Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Being justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of life. The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people. We contemplate the role of works in the Christian life.

Faith, without them is dead. There must be manifestations of our faith.

But on the other hand, grace is always mentioned as that favor of God that is largely responsible for the reward we get.

And it occurs to me that if I wanted to earn the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, if I wanted to sit on a throne and rule the universe, if I wanted to be one of God's special children, if I wanted to be part of the bride of Christ, if I wanted to be numbered among the hundred and forty four thousand and one, there's nothing that I could do in my broken human state, even though justified by God's grace, nothing I could do with my broken humanity to earn that office.

And yet I run as though my life depends on it. Because it does. Just a thought.

Come in.

Thank you.

Continuing on in the end of Titus, avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, quarrels about the law, for they're unprofitable and worthless. As for a person who stirs up division after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful, he is self condemned.

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Titus was an influencer I am thankful for Paul's letter to him. I am thankful to our Heavenly Father for preserving this letter so that 2000 years I can pick it up and read it and be instructed. Brethren, thank you all for your attention this weekend. It's been lovely to be together. This has been a wonderful convention, seeing all my Canadian brethren especially.

But love you Americans, too. As I said, apolitical. Right.

I thank God for you, and I talk sometimes about 3, 3, 4, 5, 4 o' clock in the morning, wide awake, laying there, staring at the ceiling, and I start going around the country, around the world, thinking about you, and they're good thoughts, and I pray for you and rejoice that I get to walk together in this world with you.

May God bless you.