

Titus 1
March 19, 2023

Open with Prayer

INTRO TO TITUS:

Titus, a young pastor, faces the unenviable assignment of setting in order the church at the Mediterranean Island of Crete. The Cretan inhabitants were notorious for untruthfulness and a morality.

Paul writes advising him to appoint elders, men of proven spiritual character in their homes and businesses, to oversee the work of the church. But elders are not the only individuals in the church who are required to excel, spiritually. Men and women, young and old, each have their vital functions to fulfill in the church if they are to be living examples of the gospel they profess. Throughout his letter to Titus, Paul stresses the necessary, practical working out of salvation in the daily lives of both the elders and the congregation. Good works are desirable and profitable for all believers.

Biblical scholars believe that Titus was written by Paul after his release from Roman imprisonment. And we we'll see that in verse 1 of this opening chapter. There are 13 references to Titus in the Pauline epistles that make it clear that he was one of Paul's closest and most trusted companions. This convert of Paul was probably from Syrian Antioch. Let's read Chapter 1.

BOOK:

1 Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness—² a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time,³ and at his appointed season he brought his word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior,

⁴To Titus, my true son in our common faith:

Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

Titus' Task on Crete

⁵ The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint (ordain) elders in every town, as I directed you. ⁶ An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. ⁷ Since an overseer (traditionally bishop) is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. ⁸ Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. ⁹ He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

¹⁰ For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group. ¹¹ They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by

teaching things they ought not to teach—and that for the sake of dishonest gain. ¹² Even one of their own prophets has said, “Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.” ¹³ This testimony is true. Therefore, rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith ¹⁴ and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the commands of those who reject the truth. ¹⁵ To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. ¹⁶ They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

False doctrine is like yeast: it enters secretly, it grows quickly, and permeates completely (Gal. 5:9). The best time to attack false doctrine is at the beginning, before it has a chance to spread.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 2, pp. 260–264)*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

While Timothy was laboring in metropolitan Ephesus, Titus had his hands full on the island of Crete. Titus was a Greek believer (Gal. 2:3) who had served Paul well on special assignments to the church in Corinth (2 Cor. 7:13–14; 8:6, 16, 23; 12:18). Apparently, Titus had been won to Christ through Paul's personal ministry (Titus 1:4) as Timothy had been (1 Tim. 1:2). "As for Titus," Paul wrote, "he is my partner and fellow worker among you" (2 Cor. 8:23, NIV).

But the people on the island of Crete were not the easiest to work with, and Titus became somewhat discouraged. Like Timothy, he was probably a young man. But unlike Timothy, he was not given to timidity and physical ailments. Paul had been with Titus on Crete and had left him there to correct the things that were wrong. Since Jews from Crete were present at Pentecost (Acts 2:11), it is possible that they had carried the Gospel to their native land.

Titus had his share of problems! The churches needed qualified leaders, and the various groups in the churches needed shepherding. One group of false teachers was trying to mix Jewish law with the Gospel of grace (Titus 1:10, 14), while some of the Gentile believers were abusing the message of grace and turning it into license (Titus 2:11–15). By nature, the people of Crete were not easy to work with (Titus 1:12–13), and Titus needed extraordinary patience and love. It would have been easy for Titus to have "heard God's call to go elsewhere," but he stuck it out and finished his work.

As you read and study this letter, you will discover that it is a condensed version of Paul's first letter to Timothy. In this first chapter, Paul reminded Titus of three responsibilities he had to fulfill.

Preach God's Word (Titus 1:1–4)

In this rather lengthy greeting, Paul emphasized the importance of the Word of God. Four times he used the Greek preposition *kata*, the root meaning of which is "down." But in this context, *kata* helps us see the relationship between the ministry and the Word of God. Consider the four phrases.

"According to the faith of God's elect" (v. 1a). Paul's ministry was governed by the Word of God. He was "a slave of God" (the only place Paul used this phrase) and "a messenger sent on a special commission" by Jesus Christ. But the purpose of his ministry was to share the faith, that body of truth contained in the Word of God. "God's elect" are those who have trusted Jesus Christ as their Savior (Eph. 1:4; 1 Peter 1:1–5).

"The truth which is after [according to] godliness" (vv. 1b–2). "Godliness" is an important concept in this letter, just as it was in 1 Timothy, even though the actual word is used only once. But the repetition of "good works" emphasizes the point (Titus 1:16; 2:7, 14; 3:1, 5, 8, 14). The truth of the Gospel changes a life from ungodliness (Titus 2:12) to holy living. Sad to say, there were people in the churches on Crete, like some church members today, who professed to be saved, but whose lives denied their profession (Titus 1:12).

This faith in Jesus Christ not only saves us *today* and makes our lives godly, but it also gives us hope for *the future* (Titus 1:2). We have assurance for the future because of God's promises, and God cannot lie (see Num. 23:19). We are born again "unto a living hope" (1 Peter 1:3, NIV)

because we have trusted the living Christ. We believers have eternal life now (John 3:16; 1 John 5:11–12); but when Jesus Christ returns, we will enjoy eternal life in an even greater way.

“According to the commandment of God” (v. 3). God reveals His message through preaching. This does not mean the act of proclaiming the Word, but rather the *content* of the message. “It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching [the message of the Cross] to save them that believe” (1 Cor. 1:21). This Word of the Gospel was committed to Paul (see 1 Tim. 1:11), and he had committed it to Titus. This ministry was according to the commandment of God and was not given by men (Gal. 1:10–12).

As in 1 Timothy, the title *Savior* is often repeated in Titus (1:3–4; 2:10, 13; 3:4, 6). The God-given written Word reveals the Savior, because a Savior is what sinners need. God’s grace brings salvation, not condemnation (Titus 2:11). Jesus could have come to earth as a Judge, but He chose to come as a Savior (Luke 2:10–11).

“After the common faith” (v. 4). The word *common* means “to have in common.” This faith is the possession of all of God’s people and not just a selected few. Christians in different denominational groups may wear different labels, but all who possess the same saving faith share “the common salvation” (Jude 3). There was a definite body of truth deposited in the church, “the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3, NIV). Any departure from this “common faith” is false teaching and must not be tolerated in the church.

As you review these four statements, you can see that Paul related everything in his ministry to the Word of God. His calling and his preaching depended on faith in Christ. He wanted Titus to grasp this fact and to make the Word of God a priority in his ministry. Throughout all three of the Pastoral Epistles there is an emphasis on teaching the Word of God. Local churches ought to be “Bible schools” where the Word of God is taught systematically and in a practical way.

Ordain Qualified Leaders (Titus 1:5–9)

One reason Paul had left Titus on the island of Crete was that he might organize the local assemblies and “set in order” the things that were lacking. That phrase is a medical term; it was applied to the setting of a crooked limb. Titus was not the spiritual dictator of the island, but he was Paul’s official apostolic representative with authority to work. It had been Paul’s policy to ordain elders in the churches he had established (Acts 14:23), but he had not been able to stay in Crete long enough to accomplish this task.

Several of the qualifications listed here (Titus 1:6–8) have already been discussed in our study of 1 Timothy 3:2–3: “blameless, the husband of one wife ... not given to wine, no striker [not violent], not given to filthy lucre ... a lover of hospitality ... sober.” The fact that these standards applied to Christians on the island of Crete as well as to those in the city of Ephesus proves that God’s measure for leaders does not fluctuate. A big-city church and a small-town church both need godly people in places of leadership.

Now, consider nine additional qualifications.

“Having faithful children” (v. 6b). *Faithful* means “believing.” The bishop’s children should be Christians. After all, if a servant of God cannot win his own children to Christ, what success can he expect with outsiders? This is the same principle Paul emphasized to Timothy (1 Tim. 3:5)—Christian living and Christian service must begin at home. The children in an elder’s home must not only be saved, but must be good examples of obedience and dedication. To be accused of “riot” [wild living] or disobedience [“unruly,” unable to be ruled] would disqualify their father from the eldership. This applies, of course, to children still at home, under the authority of their father.

Too often, new Christians feel a call to the ministry and want to be ordained before they have had a chance to establish their families in the faith. If the children are small, the problem is not too great; but mature children go through a tremendous shock when all of a sudden their household becomes “religious”! A wise father first wins his own family to Christ and gives them a chance to grow before he pulls up stakes and moves to Bible school. We would have fewer casualties in the ministry if this policy were followed more often.

“The steward of God” (v. 7a). A steward does not own but manages all that his master puts into his hands. Perhaps the most famous steward in the Bible is Joseph, who had complete control over all of Potiphar’s business (Gen. 39:1–9). The most important characteristic of a steward is *faithfulness* (Matt. 25:21; 1 Cor. 4:1–2). He must use what his master gives him for the good and glory of his master, and not for himself personally (see Luke 16:1–13).

The elder must never say, “This is mine!” All that he has comes from God (John 3:27) and must be used for God. His time, possessions, ambitions, and talents are all loaned to him by the Lord; and he must be faithful to use them to honor God and build the church. Of course, *all* Christians ought to be faithful stewards, and not the pastors only!

“Not self-willed” (v. 7b). An elder must not be “overbearing” (NIV), a person always pushing to have his own way. While church members ought to respect and follow the leadership of the elders, they should be certain that it is leadership and not dictatorship. A self-willed pastor is arrogant, will not take his people’s suggestions and criticisms, and makes sure he always gets his own way.

“Not soon angry” (v. 7c). He must not have a quick temper. There is a righteous anger against sin (Eph. 4:26), but much of our anger is unrighteous and directed against people. A righteous man ought to get angry when wrongs are done. Someone has said, “Temper is such a wonderful thing that it’s a shame to lose it.” Wise counsel, indeed.

“A lover of good men” (v. 8a). “One who loves what is good” (NIV) is an alternate translation, and this would include good men. But it also includes good books, good music, good causes, and many other good things. A man is a good man because he has a good heart and surrounds himself with good things. It is difficult to believe that a dedicated servant of God would deliberately associate with things that are bad for him and his family.

“Just” (v. 8b). “Upright” is a good translation. He should be a man of integrity who sticks by his word and who practices what he preaches. His conduct is righteous.

“Holy” (v. 8c). “Unstained” gives the idea. “Be ye holy, for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16). The root meaning of *holy* is “different.” Christians are different from lost sinners because Christians are new creations by the grace of God (2 Cor. 5:17).

“Temperate” (v. 8d). “Self-controlled” is the meaning, and it applies to a man’s appetites and actions. “Disciplined” is a synonym. A pastor must discipline his time so that he gets his work done. He must discipline his desires, especially when well-meaning members try to stuff him with coffee and cake! He must keep his mind and body under control, as he yields to the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:23, where *temperance* means “self-control”).

“Holding fast the faithful Word” (v. 9). The word *faithful* was a favorite with Paul (see 1 Tim. 1:15; 4:9; 2 Tim. 2:11; Titus 3:8). God’s Word is trustworthy because God cannot lie (Titus 1:2). Because the Word is faithful, those who teach and preach the Word should be faithful. Again, Paul used the term *sound* doctrine which we have already met in 1 Timothy 1:10. It means “healthy doctrine” that promotes spiritual growth.

So the elders have a twofold ministry of God’s Word: (1) building up the church with “healthy” doctrine, and (2) refuting the false teachers who spread unhealthy doctrine. The naive

church member who says, “We don’t want doctrine; just give us helpful devotional thoughts!” does not know what he is saying. Apart from the truth (and this means Bible doctrine), there can be no spiritual help or health.

The mentioning of those who oppose true doctrine led Paul to give the third responsibility that Titus was to fulfill.

Silence False Teachers (Titus 1:10–16)

It did not take long for false teachers to arise in the early church. Wherever God sows the truth, Satan quickly shows up to sow lies. Titus faced an enemy similar to that described in 1 Timothy—a mixture of Jewish legalism, man-made traditions, and mysticism. Paul gave three facts about these false teachers.

What they were personally. Paul had nothing good to say about them! They would not submit to God’s Word or to the authority of God’s servant, for they were *unruly*. “Rebellious” would be a good translation. Beware of teachers who will not put themselves under authority.

They were *vain talkers*. What they said impressed people, but it had no content or substance. When you “boiled it down,” it was just so much hot air. Furthermore, they excelled in *talking*, not in *doing*. They could tell others what to do, but they did not do it themselves. Note especially Titus 1:16.

The great tragedy was that they *deceived* people by their false doctrines. They claimed to be teaching truth, but they were peddlers of error. Because they themselves were deceived by Satan, they deceived others, “teaching things they ought not to teach” (Titus 1:11, NIV).

They were *carnal* and *worldly*: “liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons” (Titus 1:12, NIV). What an indictment! Instead of living for the beautiful things of the spiritual life, they lived for their own appetites. Paul’s adjectives are arresting. These men were not just “beasts,” but “*evil* beasts”; they were not just “gluttons,” but “*lazy* gluttons.” They were celebrities, not servants. They “lived it up” at the expense of their followers, and (true to human nature), *their followers loved it!*

Paul summed up their character in Titus 1:16. They were “abominable,” which means “detestable, disgusting.” Christians with good spiritual sense would be completely disgusted with the character and conduct of these teachers, and would never follow them. “Disobedient” means “they cannot and will not be persuaded.” Their minds have been made up and they will not face the truth. “Reprobate” literally means “not able to pass the test.” God does not use them because they have been proved unfit. This same Greek word is translated “castaway” in 1 Corinthians 9:27. There it is in an athletic context and means “disqualified.”

Having described what these teachers were, Paul then shared a second fact.

What they did. The picture was clear: These false teachers told lies from house to house and thus upset the faith of the people. Whole families were affected by their unhealthy doctrines. For one thing, they were teaching Jewish legalism (“they of the circumcision,” Titus 1:10; see 3:9) which Paul rejected. They were also teaching “Jewish fables” (Titus 1:14), which probably described their fanciful interpretations of the genealogies in the Old Testament (1 Tim. 1:4).

It never ceases to amaze me what some people get out of the Scriptures! I was once on a telephone talk program on a Chicago radio station, discussing Bible prophecy. A man phoned in and tried to take over the program by proclaiming his strange interpretations of Daniel’s prophecies. He rejected the clear explanation given in the Bible and was very upset with me when I refused to agree with his fanciful ideas.

Dr. David Cooper used to say, “When the plain sense of Scripture makes good sense, seek no other sense.” There is no need to find “deeper meanings” to the plain teachings of the Word of God. Such an approach to the Bible enables a “student” to find anything he is looking for!

Since the early church assemblies usually met in private homes, it is easy to understand how “whole houses” (Titus 1:11) could be upset by false teachers. People today who have Bible study classes in their homes must be careful lest visitors come in with strange doctrines. There are sects and cults that look for these classes and plant their agents just for the purpose of winning converts, so we must be careful.

Why they did it. Their main motive was to make money “for filthy lucre’s sake” (Titus 1:11). They were not ministering to the church; they were using religion to fill their own pockets. This explains why Paul said that “not given to filthy lucre” was one requirement for an elder. A true servant of God does not minister for personal gain; he ministers to help others grow in the faith.

But behind this covetousness was another problem: Their minds and consciences had been defiled (Titus 1:15). This is what happens when a person lives a double life: Outwardly, he commands respect; but inwardly, he deteriorates. No one can serve two masters. These deceivers’ love for money caused them to teach false doctrine and live false lives, and the result was a defiled conscience *that did not convict them*. This is one step closer to that “seared conscience” that Paul wrote about (1 Tim. 4:2).

Titus 1:15 is one of those verses that some ignorant people try to use to defend their ungodly practices. “To the pure, all things are pure” is used to excuse all sorts of sin. I recall warning a teenager about the kind of literature he was reading, and his defense was, “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Your heart must be filthy if you see sin in what I’m reading. After all, ‘To the pure, all things are pure.’ ”

To begin with, Paul was refuting the false teaching of these legalists with reference to *foods*. They were teaching that Jewish dietary laws still applied to Christian believers (see 1 Tim. 4:3–5). If you ate forbidden food, you defiled yourself; but if you refused that food, you became holier.

“It is just the opposite,” Paul argued. “These teachers have defiled minds and consciences. Therefore, when they look at these innocent foods, they see sin, because sin has defiled their vision. But those of us who have pure minds and consciences know that all foods are clean. It is not the foods which are defiling the teachers; it is the teachers who are defiling the foods!”

But this principle must not be applied to things that we know are evil. The difference, for example, between great art and pornography is more than “in the eye of the beholder.” A great artist does not exploit the human body for base gain. For a believer to indulge in sinful, erotic experiences and claim that they were pure because his heart was pure, is to use the Word of God to excuse sin. The application Paul made was to food, and we must be careful to keep it there.

Having shared these three facts about these false teachers, Paul added one further matter.

What Titus was to do. He was not to stand quietly by and let them take over! First, he was to “exhort and to convince” them by means of “sound doctrine” (Titus 1:9). The only weapon against Satan’s lies is God’s truth. “Thus saith the Lord!” is the end of every argument.

Titus was to stop their mouths (Titus 1:11) and prevent them from teaching and spreading false doctrines. He was to “rebuke them sharply” (Titus 1:13). Paul would give this same counsel to Timothy in his final letter: “Reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:2).

Paul’s purpose, of course, was to convince these teachers and get them to be “sound in the faith” (Titus 1:13). But while he is doing this, he must protect the church from their false

teachings. False doctrine is like yeast: it enters secretly, it grows quickly, and permeates completely (Gal. 5:9). The best time to attack false doctrine is at the beginning, before it has a chance to spread.

The attitude of some church members is, “It makes no difference what you believe, just as long as you believe something.” Paul would not agree with that foolish philosophy. It makes all the difference between life and death whether or not you believe the truth of the Word or believe lies. You can choose what you want to believe, but you cannot change the consequences.

“And ye shall know the truth,” said Jesus Christ, “and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

Litfin, A. D. (1985). *Titus*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 761-763) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

I. Salutation (1:1–4).

1:1. Paul began by identifying himself as **a servant of God**. Usually, no doubt as a result of his Damascus Road experience (Acts 9:1–9), Paul called himself a “servant of Christ Jesus.” Only here did he use the term “servant of God.” On the other hand, **apostle of Jesus Christ** is standard. Both of these titles (“servant” and “apostle”) focus on Paul’s two main concerns: **the faith of God’s elect** (cf. Rom. 8:33; Col. 3:12) **and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness** (cf. 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Tim. 2:25; 3:7). God was using Paul to call out a people for Himself (e.g., 1 Thess. 1:2–10) and to teach them the truth which is conducive to godly living (cf. 1 Tim. 6:3). In other words, Paul’s ministry was aimed at both the salvation and sanctification of God’s people.

1:2–3. In the NIV the **faith and knowledge** (already mentioned in v. 1) are said to be **resting on the hope of eternal life**. “Resting on” is from the single Greek word *epi*. But it is better to understand this word as “with a view to,” as in Ephesians 2:10. Thus Paul’s thought is that all of his ministry is “with a view to” eternal life. This hope was promised to the elect from eternity past (2 Tim. 1:9) by God, who cannot default on His word. Only in the latter days, however, has the full understanding of that word come to light in the message God gave Paul to preach. As is common in the Pastorals, the apostle referred to God as Savior (cf. 1 Tim. 1:1; 2:3; 4:10; Titus 2:10; 3:4). God’s eternal plan to salvage a people for Himself, rather than any this-worldly agenda to liberate social structures or institutions, formed the primary focus of Paul’s ministry.

1:4. **Titus** was the ostensible recipient of the letter even though this epistle, like 1 and 2 Timothy, was designed to be read widely. Titus was called **my true son**, indicating possibly that Paul was responsible for Titus’ conversion. The same phrase was also used of Timothy (1 Tim. 1:2). Or the term may denote a mentor-*protégé* relationship, or both concepts. The greeting **grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior** is typical (cf. 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2) except for the last term which was applied earlier (Titus 1:3) to God the Father. Paul used the term *Savior* in Titus’ letter interchangeably for the first two Members of the Godhead (cf. 2:10 and 13; 3:4 and 6).

II. Qualifications of the Elders (1:5–9).

1:5. As with Timothy in Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3), Paul had left Titus behind to provide leadership to the fledgling church in Crete. Now the apostle reiterated his previous instructions,

both for Titus' sake and for the congregation's. The organization of the Cretan church was **unfinished** due to the brevity of Paul's visit. Thus, Titus was to **straighten out** (lit., "set in order") the situation by appointing **elders in every town**. Titus was now acting as an apostolic agent (cf. Acts 14:23) in Paul's absence. His authority in the Cretan church was an extension of Paul's own. Such authority ended with the close of the Apostolic Age.

1:6. As in 1 Timothy 3:2–7 Paul listed the qualifications for elders (cf. comments on 1 Tim. 3:1). There the list numbered 15; here 17. Yet both lists cover essentially the same qualities: (1) the elder must be **blameless** (*anekklētos*, "unreprovable"). In 1 Timothy 3:10 Paul used this same word of deacons, while in 1 Timothy 3:2 he used *anepilēmpton* to express the same thought of the elders. (2) **Husband of but one wife** probably means that the elder should have been married only once (see comments on 1 Tim. 3:2). (3) The elder must have his own household under control. This involves not only the matter of discipline (1 Tim. 3:4–5), but also positive spiritual influence as well. His children must be believers who **are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient**. The apostle had explained why this requirement is important (1 Tim. 3:5).

1:7. Here Paul switched from the term "elder" (*presbyteros*) to **overseer** (*episkopos*, commonly translated "bishop"). The two words are plainly interchangeable in the apostle's thinking, referring to the same church office. The term "overseer" is singular here, but this certainly does not mean that there must be only one *episkopos* per congregation. Rather the word is used here in a generic sense. Paul was simply affirming that these qualifications are required of all overseers. The need for blamelessness is repeated from verse 6. The reason this quality is so important is that an overseer serves as a steward of God. Damage to a church leader's reputation is damage to God's reputation. Then Paul resumed his list with five vices which must not characterize an overseer: (4) **not overbearing**, not arrogant and self-willed; (5) **not quick-tempered** (cf. James 1:19–20); (6) **not given to much wine**; (7) **not violent** (cf. 1 Tim. 3:3 for this and the previous vice); (8) **not pursuing dishonest gain** (cf. comments on 1 Tim. 6:5).

1:8. Whereas verse 7 lists negative characteristics to avoid, verse 8 lists positive qualities to be sought. The elder must be (9) **hospitable** (cf. 1 Tim. 3:2); (10) **one who loves what is good** (cf. Ps. 15); (11) **self-controlled**, or temperate and sensible (*sōphrona*; cf. Gal. 5:23; 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 2:2, 4); (12) **upright** (*dikaion*, "just"); (13) **holy** (these last two are, with blamelessness, two of the characteristics Paul himself had modeled [cf. 1 Thes. 2:10], but neither is mentioned in 1 Tim. 3); and (14) **disciplined** (in contrast to the vices of Titus 1:7; cf. 1 Tim. 4:7–8).

1:9. Not only must an overseer meet moral and spiritual standards in his personal life, but he must also be a reliable man of the Word. (15) He must **hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught**. This last clause, "as it has been taught," actually comes first in the Greek, for emphasis. According to Paul, an elder is a conservator of the truth, one who must understand it, hold it fast; (16) **encourage others** by teaching it; and (17) **refute those who oppose it**. To be qualified as an elder a man must be a capable handler of the truth (cf. comments on 1 Tim. 3:2).

III. Characteristics of the False Teachers (1:10–16).

1:10. Having mentioned those who oppose the truth, Paul then described them for Titus and offered advice on how to handle them. He noted their three most prominent characteristics: they are **rebellious** (cf. Jude 8), **mere talkers**, and **deceivers**. All three characteristics were also present in Timothy's opponents in Ephesus (cf. 1 Tim. 1:3–11; 6:3–10; 2 Tim. 2:14–18); but in Crete, Titus faced a Jewish element (the **circumcision group**, cf. Acts 11:2; Gal. 2:12) in whom these characteristics stood out prominently.

1:11. These false teachers **must be silenced** because of the damage they were doing to the families of the congregation (cf. 2 Tim. 3:6). No doubt Titus' method of silencing was to be the same as Timothy's: the false teachers were to be instructed not to teach certain things lest they be excommunicated (cf. 1 Tim. 1:3–4; 2 Tim. 3:5). Again Paul condemned the motives of the false teachers—they were interested in **dishonest gain** (cf. comments on 1 Tim. 6:5).

1:12. To emphasize his point Paul quoted from Epimenides, a Cretan poet and philosopher from the sixth century B.C. who was widely believed to be a religious prophet. Though the quotation may originally have referred to a particular lie (namely that Zeus was buried in Crete, which was especially offensive to those who believed Zeus was still alive), by Paul's day the saying had become a proverb which merely emphasized the low reputations of Cretans generally. So little did others think of the Cretans that the verb *krētizō* was invented to mean "to lie." Of course many noble Christians were in the congregations in Crete, but Paul was frontal in his assertion that the false teachers possessed these baser Cretan tendencies.

1:13–14. How the congregations reacted to Paul's forthright use of this quotation is not known, but they certainly could not have missed his point: **This testimony is true**. The false teachers fit the Cretan stereotype. Thus their negative influence must be remedied, if at all possible, by salvaging the false teachers themselves. Titus was to **rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound** ("healthy"; cf. 1 Tim. 1:10; 6:3–4) **in the faith**. The ultimate goal of discipline should be to recover the one who is in error (Gal. 6:1; 2 Thes. 3:14–15). In the present case Paul hoped that Titus' severe rebuke would be enough to bring the errorists around so that they would cease paying **attention to Jewish myths** and **to the commands of those who reject the truth**.

1:15–16. The "commands" of verse 14, especially in light of the Jewish and possibly Gnostic influences, undoubtedly included ascetic rules about eating, drinking, and purification (cf. Col. 2:20–23; 1 Tim. 4:1–5). Paul set the matter straight by reminding his readers of the Lord's teaching that purification is largely a matter of the internal rather than the external (cf. Mark 7:15; Luke 11:39–41). Nothing outside can corrupt one who is internally pure; but someone who is internally impure corrupts all he touches. The problem with the false teachers was that on the inside, in their **minds and consciences**, they were impure. As a result, even though they claimed to know and follow God, their corrupt actions belied their true natures (cf. 1 John 2:4). Their impure interiors thus rendered them externally **detestable** (lit., "abominable") to God, **disobedient** (cf. Titus 1:10), and **unfit** (*adokimoi*, "disapproved"; cf. 1 Cor. 9:27) **for doing anything good** (cf. 2 Tim. 3:17). Once again Paul connected theological error with moral deficiency.

Dockery, D. S. (1998). The Pauline Letters. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (pp. 611-612). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

INTRODUCTION (1:1–4)

Paul had been released from Rome. He probably then went to the island of Crete, as well as to Ephesus and Macedonia. Titus, Paul's colleague in ministry, was left behind to work. The letter to Titus was written later to offer him advice and encouragement.

Paul began the letter by identifying himself as "a servant of God." Only here did Paul use this phrase. Elsewhere he used "servant of Christ" (see Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:1; Phil. 1:1). Paul's salutation is quite long for such a short letter. In the salutation Paul emphasized the purpose of his letter.

Titus is identified as “my true son in our common faith.” This designation points to the endearing and intimate relationship between writer and reader. This special relationship assured that in Crete, Titus rightly represented the aged apostle.

ELDERS (1:5–9)

The first subject of this letter provided Titus with instructions concerning church leaders. Verse 5 states Titus’s task, and the following verses in the paragraph identify the character qualities needed in the new leaders.

Titus was to appoint leaders in every place where there was a group of believers. Probably the entire congregation selected these leaders with the encouragement of Titus. He had the official responsibility, as a representative of Paul, to appoint them to office.

The character qualities identified here corresponds closely to 1 Timothy 3:1–7. Yet differences should be noted. These differences help us see how Paul applied general truths to particular situations. Unlike 1 Timothy, no deacons were mentioned here, suggesting that the organizational structure was not as advanced in Crete. The leaders’ character should be blameless, and their doctrinal commitments must be faithful to the biblical message.

FALSE TEACHERS (1:10–16)

The elders were needed to defend the truth being attacked by the false teachers. Paul described the false teachers in 1:10–13. They were (1) “rebellious” because they rejected the demands of the gospel message; (2) “mere talkers” because they tried to use impressive speech, even though it accomplished nothing; and (3) “deceivers” because they were leading astray the church members. These false teachers could not and should not be trusted because they were “liars.” Paul’s own observations about these people confirmed the negative assessment of one of Crete’s own prophets. Just as Paul gave principles with which to appoint church leaders, so he also provided Titus with guidelines to deal with the false teachers.

The error is described in terms of “Jewish myths” or “the commands of those who reject the truth.” These false teachers should be rebuked from the perspectives listed in 1:15–16.

Believers who have been purified by the work of Christ can perceive all things as pure. Unbelievers, especially legalistic ascetics, do not enjoy true freedom in Christ. These false teachers were attempting to set up human standards against which matters of purity and impurity could be judged. But Paul identified these standards as corrupt.

Fields, W. C. (1972). Titus. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), The Teacher’s Bible Commentary (pp. 769-770). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

Paul’s Introduction (Titus 1:1–4)

This is more than a salutation. It is a majestic statement of God’s plan through the ages. Paul, “a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ,” was called to advance that plan. The reference to Titus as “my true son in the faith that we share” (v. 4) may indicate that Titus was converted under Paul’s preaching.

Titus’ Work in Crete (Titus 1:5–16)

The first order of business for Titus is clear. He is to see that elders are duly appointed in every congregation (v. 5). “Every city” implies the existence of churches throughout the island.

Elders or presbyters and bishops or overseers are terms applied here to the same office. Paul is concerned more with the good character of these officers than with an explanation of their titles (vv. 5–9). He repeats instructions previously given to Titus in person. The qualifications are the same basic requirements he sets down in 1 Timothy 3:1–7. These church leaders must be of proven character. They must be able to teach effectively and deal firmly with error.

This leads Paul to say sternly that the rebels and deceivers, some of whom are converts from Judaism, must be stopped (vv. 10–16). The people of Crete had a reputation for being an uncouth lot. Added to this tendency is the fact that some Cretan Christians were mercenary. Other believers are preoccupied with irrelevant legends. Still others are hypocritical, saying one thing and doing another. Paul says this kind of inconsistency must stop.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Titus 1). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

© 2023 Lee Ann Penick