

Study of Titus

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Introductory to Titus

I. The Man

Titus was a Greek believer (Gal. 2:3), won to Christ through Paul's ministry (Titus 1:4). We know little about his background; he is not once mentioned in Acts. It is likely he was a convert from heathenism whom the apostle enlisted for service. He assisted in taking the offering for the saints (2 Cor. 2:1–9; 7:8–12; 12:18); and he met Paul at Troas with the report of the Corinthian situation (see 2 Cor. 2:12–13; 7:5–16). Titus carried 2 Corinthians back for Paul (2 Cor. 8:16–24). Titus was Paul's helper, left at Crete to organize the church (Titus 1:5) until Paul could send Tychicus or Artemas to take over (Titus 3:12). Titus was at Rome during Paul's second imprisonment, from whence he traveled to Dalmatia on a mission for the apostle (2 Tim. 4:10). Paul's estimate of Titus is given in 2 Cor. 8:23.

II. The Letter

Paul's haste in leaving Titus at Crete made it necessary for him to write to encourage and instruct this dedicated co-laborer. The Cretians were not the easiest people to work with, as Titus 1:12–13 points out. We do not know who started the church at Crete, but this much we know: the organization of the church and the lives of the members had both fallen into disrepute. It is likely that the church suffered from two sources: (1) visiting Judaizers who mixed law and grace, and (2) ignorant Christians who abused the grace of God and turned it into license. Paul had several purposes in mind when he wrote this letter: (1) to remind Titus of his work of organizing the church and appointing elders; (2) to warn him about false teachers; (3) to encourage him in pastoring the different kinds of people in the church; (4) to emphasize the true meaning of grace in the life of the Christian; (5) to explain how to deal with troublemakers in the church.

III. The Emphasis

Several words are repeated in this brief letter, helping us to understand the burden that was on Paul's heart. Notice that there is a major emphasis on good works (1:16; 2:7, 14; 3:1, 5, 8, 14). Saved by grace means saved unto good works. Christian doctrine and Christian living are to be sound (1:9, 13; 2:1–2, 8). There ought to be a life of godliness (1:1; 2:12), not worldliness. God's grace leads a person to live a godly life (1:4; 2:11ff; 3:7, 15). If you want a key verse for the book, it is probably 3:8: "those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works" (NKJV).

Titus 1

Paul opened his letter with several admonitions for Titus to heed in order that he might fulfill his ministry.

I. He Was to Proclaim the Word (1:1–4)

This formal greeting is more than the opening part of the letter. It is a statement of the place of the Word of God in the life of the local church. Paul was a servant and apostle according to the faith of the church (God's elect, chosen ones). His ministry was not apart from the church but tied directly to it. This "faith" is what Jude calls "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). It is that deposit of truth that God gave to Paul (1 Tim. 1:11), and which Paul in turn had given to Titus and Timothy.

One of the problems in Crete was an abuse of the grace of God. "God has saved us by grace," these people argued, "so we are free to sin." Paul answers this teaching from the start by defining the faith as the "truth which is after godliness." Godliness is a favorite word with Paul (1 Tim. 2:2; 3:16; 4:7–8; 6:3, 5, 6, 11; 2 Tim. 3:5). It means practical holiness in one's daily life (see Titus 1:16 for the contrast). Later, in Titus 2:11–15, Paul explains that grace saves us and also disciplines us to live dedicated lives. The person who uses the doctrine of grace to excuse sins either is not saved or does not understand what grace really means.

The message of grace also points ahead to the blessed hope of Christ's return; see 2:13. Here, then, is the message Titus was to preach: God's grace to save sinners and sanctify believers; the holy life that follows true faith in Christ; and the daily expectation of Christ's return. God's wonderful program of salvation was marked out before the world began, but now it has been revealed through preaching (the proclamation of the Gospel). Never minimize the place of preaching in the local church.

II. He Was to Organize the Church (1:5–9)

We do not know who founded the church in Crete, but we do know that Paul left Titus there to organize it and remedy the weaknesses that existed. There was definite opposition to Titus' ministry, and there is the suggestion that he wanted to resign. "But that is why I left you there," Paul writes. "If there were no problems to solve, the church would not need you!" As long as Christians are in this body of flesh, there will be problems in our churches. When these problems arise, the answer is not to hide them, or for officers to resign and find a new church. The answer is to face them honestly and prayerfully and settle them according to the Word of God. "Set in order" in v. 5 is a medical term meaning "to set a broken bone, or straighten a crooked limb." The church is a body, and the pastor must occasionally be a "spiritual physician" and set some bones.

Titus was not to select the elders (i.e., bishops, v. 7—two names for the same office); he was to ordain those whom the churches had chosen. "In every city" in v. 5 indicates that the Gospel had spread from place to place, which is as it should be. These qualifications for elders are parallel to those given in 1 Tim. 3. "Faithful children"

in v. 6 means “believing children.” For “riot” see Luke 15:13. The bishop is a steward of God’s blessings, both material and spiritual; see 1 Cor. 4:1–2. He is to hold fast the “faithful word,” and this brings to mind Paul’s “faithful words” in 1 Tim. 1:15; 4:9; 2 Tim. 2:11; and Titus 3:8. The pastor must know the Word for two reasons: (1) to be able to minister to the saints and (2) to be able to refute the false teachers. “Gainsayers” (v. 9) means “those who say against, those who contradict.”

III. He Was to Refute the False Teachers (1:10–16)

Wherever Christ sows the good seed (believers), Satan follows with counterfeit seed and false teachers. There was, in Crete, a group of people who contradicted the teachings of Paul and taught instead Jewish fables (legalism) and the commandments of men (traditionalism). We must constantly beware of false teachings. “Those of the circumcision” (v. 10) had battled Paul from Jerusalem to Rome, and they are still opposing the truth. When we mix Law with grace, we end up with false doctrine. Paul describes these teachers as empty talkers, deceivers, and unruly.

Paul even quoted a famous poet, Epimenides, who described the Cretians as liars, ferocious beasts, and “idle gluttons”—not a beautiful description! In fact, the people of Paul’s day invented a new word out of the name “Cretan” that meant “to lie, to speak like a Cretian.” Of course, Paul is not suggesting that all Cretians were lazy gluttons and liars. Doubtless there were many people, both within and outside of the churches, who lived decent lives.

Dietary laws and asceticism were key doctrines to false teachers, and Paul attacked these people in v. 15. It is unfortunate that v. 15 has been so grossly abused by misinformed Christians. Some Christians use it to support their own sinful practices, saying, “To the pure, all things are pure—so what I am doing is not wrong.” Paul had nothing of this sort in mind when he dictated these words. He was dealing with the problem of clean and unclean foods, as he had in 1 Tim. 4:2–5. He is teaching that the believer who knows the Word of God receives all foods as clean; the unbeliever (and the false teacher) has a defiled mind and conscience and therefore sees nothing as pure. In fact, instead of the impure foods defiling the heretic, he defiles the food! Moral purity is not a matter of diets; it is a matter of a clean heart and a good conscience. Jesus taught this in Matt. 6:22–23; see also Rom. 14:14.

How was Titus to treat these false teachers? Was he to unite with them and try to see their point of view? No! He was to stop their mouths (v. 11) and rebuke them sharply (v. 13). After all, their teachings were upsetting (subverting) entire families (v. 11). And their motive was simply to gain money (“filthy lucre”); they did not wish to honor the Lord. Verse 16 sums up the situation: these false teachers professed one thing and practiced another; they denied Christ by their works; they were abominable and disobedient; they would never pass the test (i.e., they were reprobates).

We have false teachers attacking the church today. It is one thing for people to hold to a false doctrine because of ignorance, and quite another for them to hold it and teach it as God’s truth. Ignorant people should be pitied and patiently taught the truth; deliberate false teachers should be rebuked and rejected. Once the church compromises on the truth, the truth will be swallowed up in lies.

Note the emphasis here on “sound doctrine” (v. 9) and “sound faith” (v. 13). This is the “healthy” doctrine we read of in Paul’s letters to Timothy. False doctrines lead only to spiritual sickness in the body of Christ.

Titus 2

If Titus had spent all his time refuting the false teachers, he would have neglected other matters that are necessary for a healthy church. It is important that the pastor have a balanced ministry, teaching and exhorting the saints as well as refuting the enemies of the truth. In this chapter, Paul deals with three groups of people in the church and exhorts Titus to remind them of their obligations in the Lord.

I. The Aged Saints (2:1–3)

The church at Crete may have been the result of Peter’s ministry at Pentecost (Acts 2:11), in which case there would have been older saints in the fellowship. It is a blessed thing when the local church family has in its number those aged pilgrims who have long walked with the Lord. They are indeed privileged to live such long lives, and with this privilege comes a serious responsibility.

The aged men are to be sober (vigilant), grave (serious, easy to respect), temperate (self-controlled), and sound (healthy) in the faith. Spiritual health is more important than physical health. Their love and patience should be an example to all; how difficult it is for some “senior saints” to be patient with the younger generation!

The aged women were to be reverent in their behavior, not gossips or drunkards. They had the wonderful opportunity of teaching the younger women in the church, both by precept and example. It is possible that Paul may have had in mind some of the widows who were supported by the church and expected to minister to its members.

II. The Young Men and Women (2:4–8)

Paul speaks of the young women first, encouraging them to listen to the older women and learn from them how to be godly wives and mothers. Here we have a description of what God expects of the young Christian wife. She should be sober, taking a serious attitude toward marriage and the home. No younger woman who does not want to be a serious wife and mother ought to marry. The home is not a playground. Love is vital to a happy home, so Paul reminds these women to love both their husbands and their children. Read Eph. 5:22–23 for the details.

The Christian wife must have careful conduct, being discreet and chaste. “Keepers at home” (v. 5) literally is “home-workers” or “homemakers.” She should be faithful at home and not put outside interests ahead of her husband and her children. Why? “That the Word of God be not blasphemed.” It is tragic when a Christian home is a poor testimony for Christ because of disobedient and careless wives and husbands whose

values are confused. The husband or wife who neglects the home is worse than an unbeliever.

Since Titus was a young man himself, Paul used him as an example of what young men in the church ought to be like: “Be a pattern of good works that all may follow” (v. 7). Be clean, be sincere, be serious; these statements summarize Paul’s admonition. In v. 8, he reminds Titus that he must be careful in his speech lest the enemy find something to criticize.

III. The Servants (2:9–15)

We have met this group before in 1 Timothy as well as in Ephesians and Colossians. Paul had a heart for the slaves and was anxious that their daily lives honor Christ. Their first responsibility was obedience; they were not to “talk back” (same Gk. word as “gainsayers” in v. 9). A submissive will and a controlled tongue can be a wonderful testimony for Christ. Servants should seek to please their masters and not do only what they require of them. Going the “extra mile” helps prove to people the reality of salvation.

“Purloining” in v. 10 means “stealing.” Since they had no wages, slaves were often tempted to steal from their masters, and such theft would be easy since masters often left their possessions in the management of their servants. “Good faith” means “honesty, faithfulness.” Paul gives slaves a higher motive for honest service in v. 10 —“that they may adorn the doctrine of God.” That is, that they might, in their lives, “beautify the Bible,” making it attractive to the unbelievers.

The grace of God was an abused doctrine in Crete, so Paul paused to undergird his admonitions with a doctrinal foundation. There are some who would turn grace into license, teaching that Christians can live in sin since they are no longer under Law. Of course, the believer is not under Law but under grace; but grace brings an even greater responsibility. How can the Christian deliberately sin against the grace and kindness of God? Paul presents the three tenses of the Christian life:

Past: “The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men” (v. 11)

Present: “teaching us” (v. 12)

Future: “looking for the blessed hope” (v. 13)

In other words, God’s grace not only redeems us, but it also reforms us and rewards us. “Teaching” in v. 12 in the Gk. is the word for training or disciplining. We are disciplined by grace. Believers who honestly understand the grace of God will not want to live in sin. They will turn from ungodliness and worldly lusts; they will live serious, clean, dedicated lives in this present world.

There is no greater incentive for Christian living than the second coming of Jesus Christ. “Looking for that blessed (happy) hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God” is the more accurate translation of v. 13. God’s glory dwelt here on earth in the person of Christ (John 1:14), but went back to heaven when He ascended (Acts 1:9). His glory now abides in the believer (1 Cor. 6:19–20). When Christ returns, we shall see His glory and share His glory (John 17:22–24). Paul speaks of “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27).

Jesus gave Himself for us; the least we can do is give ourselves to Him and live Christ-honoring lives until He comes. “Redeem” means to purchase out of slavery. We are His “peculiar people”; that is, we are His special treasure, His personal and beloved possession (see Ex. 19:5; 1 Peter 2:9). “Peculiar” does not mean “odd”; it means purchased and possessed by Christ. We are a purchased people, a purified people, and a practicing people, “zealous of good works.” Trace the theme of “good works” in Paul’s letter to Titus and you will see how important it is.

There are two “poles” to the Christian life: we look back to the cross (v. 14) and ahead to the coming of Christ (v. 13). These two poles help keep us steady in our Christian walk. These themes are written into Paul’s description of the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11) where we are to remember His death “till He comes.”

Titus 3

This chapter continues Paul’s exhortation to Titus concerning the ministry of the local churches. He has discussed the aged saints, young men and women, and servants. Now he deals with two additional classes of people:

I. Civil Rulers (3:1–7)

Christians ought to be good citizens. True, our “citizenship is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20), but while we are here on earth, we ought to apply our Christian faith in practical daily life. The church is not to get involved in party politics, but certainly Christian people should seek to apply Christian principles to the affairs of city and nation (Rom. 13; 1 Peter 3:8–17).

Even if the believer cannot honor the personal conduct of a ruler, he must honor the office and the laws of the land. Of course, if the laws contradict the Word, the Christian’s first allegiance is to God (Acts 4:19; 5:29). “Ready to every good work” (v. 1) suggests that Christians ought to support that which is good in the program of the government. Certainly many of the great humanitarian reforms of the past have been led by men of Christian principles, and we ought not to be mere spectators when it is possible for us to do good. Christians are the salt of the earth and the light of the world; therefore we must involve ourselves in the good causes of government, provided we do not compromise our convictions or hinder the work of the Lord.

Some Christians think they will accomplish their purposes by arguments, and in v. 2 Paul warns against spreading lies with evil intent and starting fights. “The wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God” (James 1:20, NKJV). Gentleness and meekness can be stronger than even political power. Christians depend on different weapons as they fight sin (2 Cor. 10:1–6). The believer knows how to trust God to fight his battles after he has done all he can (Rom. 12:17–21). Meekness is not weakness; rather, it is power under control. Jesus was meek (Matt. 11:29), yet He knew how to exercise power.

In vv. 3–7, Paul reminded these believers of the motive for honest living: the grace of God. The emphasis of this letter is that God’s grace not only saves us, but it also controls our daily lives and makes us more like Christ. “Remember your old life, before you were saved,” Paul wrote. “This will help you understand your unsaved friends better and have pity upon them.” We have been saved by God’s “kindness and love.” God hates the sins listed in v. 3, but He loves the sinners. Through Christ’s death on the cross, God has been reconciled to the world (2 Cor. 5:14–21) and is thus able to save all who will come to Him by faith. The Gk. word for “love” in v. 4 is similar to our word “philanthropy.” It is God’s gracious and giving attitude toward undeserving sinners. This news of God’s love “appeared” in Christ, His Person and work, His teachings, and most of all, His death and resurrection.

Paul makes it clear that our salvation is not by works, although it results in good works (v. 8, and see Eph. 2:8–10). The “washing” (v. 5) has nothing to do with baptism; in the Gk. this word means “laver” and refers to the OT implement used in the tabernacle. He uses the same word in Eph. 5:26, where the washing is accomplished by the Word. Throughout the Bible, water for washing is likened to the Word of God (John 15:3; Ps. 119:9; and Eph. 5:26). In other words, v. 5 describes the two agents of our new birth (regeneration): the Word of God and the Spirit of God (John 3:5). See also 1 Peter 1:23 and James 1:18. The Spirit has been “poured out” upon all believers, and the tense of the verb here indicates that this action occurred once and for all, that is, at the pouring out of the Spirit in His baptism of believers at Pentecost. The believer is justified by grace and is an heir of God. What a blessed position we have in Christ. This wonderful salvation ought to motivate us to be better citizens, that the lost around us might see Christ in us and want to know Him.

II. Heretics (3:8–11)

The word “heretic” comes from a word meaning “to choose” and suggests a person who causes divisions in the church because he forces people to choose: “Are you for me or for the pastor?” Galatians 5:20 lists “heresy” (forming of parties, divisions) as a work of the flesh; it was prevalent in the carnal church at Corinth (1 Cor. 11:19). These church troublemakers loved to argue about words and genealogies, which suggests that they had a Judaizing background and tried to build novel doctrines on OT ideas. Such unprofitable and empty discussions are to be avoided; they will never convince the enemy and only divide the church.

How was Titus to handle these problem people? For one thing, he had to avoid arguing with them. Then, if they persisted in causing strife even after two admonitions (and this implies public warnings), they were to be dismissed from the fellowship. Church members who cause divisions and then take their membership to another church should be allowed to go. If they come back but manifest a repentant spirit, they should be warned and received. If they cause trouble again, they may be granted the right to transfer a second time; but if they attempt to return again, they must not be received into the fellowship. Some sympathizing but untaught saints might say, “But perhaps they have reformed this time.” Paul points out in v. 11 that such people will not reform; they are “turned inside out” (subverted) and in a state of constant sin; that is,

they are beyond remedy. Our local churches would have fewer divisions if pastors and officers would observe this important principle.

Paul closed his brief letter with information about the travels of his associates in the Lord's work. He informs Titus that "reinforcements are coming" to assist him in the difficult ministry on Crete. Either Artemas or Tychicus would replace him so that he might join Paul at Nicopolis; but meanwhile, Titus was to stay on the job until someone arrived to continue the work. It is well to keep in mind that God does not destroy one ministry to build up another one. When He moves a servant, He has a replacement ready to step in. If no replacement is ready, it might be an indication that it is not time to move.

It seems that Zenas and Apollos were the ones who delivered this letter to Titus. Paul advised Titus to assist them as they continued their journey, which was probably a special mission for Paul. Christians ought to help one another as they go about in His service; see 1 Cor. 16:6, 11 and Rom. 15:24. We must take care not to assist those who teach false doctrine, however (2 John 9).

Verse 14 was Paul's reminder that the local Christians ought to assist Titus in his work and in his ministry of helping others on their way. The pastor and the people should share in this ministry of hospitality and encouragement. "Being fruitful in every good work" (Col. 1:10) should describe all Christians and not the pastor and officers only.

He closed with his apostolic greeting, linking love with faith. "Grace be with you all" marks the letter as genuinely from Paul (2 Thes. 3:17).