

# Titus 1 • Shoring Up a Ministry

## Introduction

Titus was a Greek believer won to Christ through Paul's ministry. Although not mentioned in the book of Acts, Titus is mentioned in Paul's epistles. He was left at Crete to begin the work of shoring up the church which had apparently come under the influence of visiting Judaizers and false teachers who were notorious for mixing the Law and grace, and believers who saw the grace of God as a license to abuse their newfound freedom in Christ. Although the church at Crete may have begun right, it was steadily veering off course and Titus shouldered the responsibility of initiating the process to restore them to the right and proper path. This letter is a practical guide to how churches or organizations can be restored to their proper calling in Christ.

<sup>1</sup>Paul, a bond-servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness, <sup>2</sup>in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago, <sup>3</sup>but at the proper time manifested, even His word, in the proclamation with which I was entrusted according to the commandment of God our Savior,

<sup>4</sup>To Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

### [Read v.1-4]

#### **Q: What is the recurring theme contained in Paul's opening salutation?**

A: He repeatedly uses terms about God's Word, the Truth. ("...the knowledge of the truth", "God, who cannot lie", "manifested...His word", "the proclamation with which I was entrusted", "according to the commandment of God".) This is really a statement about the place of the Word of God in both Paul's ministry and the church itself.

#### **Q: Why, in Titus' particular situation, was it crucial to reaffirm the truth?**

A: Titus had been charged with shoring up the church in Crete whose organizational structure and individual members had both fallen into disrepute because they were embracing a false gospel abusing the grace of God. They thought that because God saved them by grace they were free to sin.

#### **Q: How does Paul's opening statement address this false doctrine?**

A: Paul specifically states that "the faith of those chosen by God", in other words the quality of the faithfulness of true Christians, is revealed in "the knowledge of the truth", a way of stating that such faithfulness is visibly connected to the doctrines they believe. This is all revealed in the conduct of their lives in that this "faith" supported by "the knowledge of the truth" works "according to godliness". In other words, the proof of God's grace at work is a life changing to become more and more like Him according to His Word, **forsaking** sin and its ways. Where the truth takes hold, godliness results.

**Point:** One of the strongest indicators of the presence of false doctrine is in an attitude that accommodates sin. The very definition of "heresy" is allowing truth to live side-by-side with error.

#### **Q: "Godliness" is a word Paul uses often in his letters to Timothy and Titus. What exactly does "godliness" mean?**

A: Think of it as "practical holiness" in the course of our daily life. It's the intended result if we actually put God's Word and ways into practice in our life. In other words, it's a direct reflection of the quality of our personal obedience to the truth, proving it has become a part of us. (The fancy, seminarian term is "incarnated".)

#### **Q: To what does the true message of grace point?**

A: According to v.2, "the hope of eternal life". It was yet another affirmation that the work of the true Gospel is to leave the old life behind to focus on the one to come, to begin living now as God sees us in eternity.

**Q: So what might be a practical application for having to restore a church or ministry who has strayed and pursued false teachings?**

A: God's truth has to be established. Never minimize the place of preaching to consistently affirm the truth or to establish it to begin with. It always begins and ends with God's Word.

**[Read v.5-9]**

<sup>5</sup>For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, <sup>6</sup>namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. <sup>7</sup>For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, <sup>8</sup>but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, <sup>9</sup>holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.

**Q: What exactly was the purpose of "overseers" in the Early Church? After all, they had apostles, prophets, and pastors such as Titus, so why was there even a need for someone to be appointed "elder"?**

A: Note that Paul's instructions to Titus were for "every city as I directed". One of the main reasons was that there weren't near enough apostles, prophets, and pastors to go around. They were nearly all "itinerant" in that there were far more churches planted and springing up than full-time pastors to permanently stay with each of them. This context of the office of elder in the Early Church had a lot to do with maintaining spiritual integrity during those times between the apostles'/pastors' visits.

**Q: So what is Titus' main charge?**

A: "...set in order what remains..." (v.5) Paul connects his opening affirmation to establish true doctrine with the need to establish an organization which is based on, and further affirms, God's Word.

**Q: Why is this list of personal character traits important? How are they connected to the mission to establish and affirm God's Word?**

A: They're proof of individuals who are actually putting God's Word into practice, which in turn is evidenced by the quality of their personal relationships.

**Point:** *Where there are no changed relationships there is no true Christianity. At most there might be extensive head knowledge, but the fulfillment of the Gospel is to love one another. Every requirement for an elder provided by Paul is rooted in the quality of one's personal relationships, the proof of whether the Word of God has actually become a part of you or not.*

**Q: How is Titus' establishment of elders a tool to deal directly with the false doctrines and false teachers influencing the local churches?**

A: They are supposed to be so well-versed in God's Word that they not only live it as proved by their personal relationships, but they are "able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict". (v.9) They live the Truth, preach the Truth, and defend the Truth.

**Application:** *How does this compare to the way your own local church selects and assigns responsibilities to its elders or board members? How is it possible that some church selection processes are actually reinforcing false influences in the body instead of directly addressing them? (Hint: No valuation of personal relationships, no ability to preach and uphold the Word.) How might this teaching explain why so many churches are under the wrong influences today?*

<sup>10</sup>For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, <sup>11</sup>who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain. <sup>12</sup>One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.” <sup>13</sup>This testimony is true. For this reason reprove them severely so that they may be sound in the faith, <sup>14</sup>not paying attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth. <sup>15</sup>To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. <sup>16</sup>They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed.

### **[Read v.10-16]**

**Q: What seems to inevitably follow wherever the good seed of Christ is sown?**

A: Satan follows with counterfeit seed and false teachers.

**Point:** Regardless of the current health of our local church or ministry, there inevitably comes the time when it must be defended from the internal corruption sure to come from Satan. There are two pictures of Satan in the Bible, one as a dragon representing his work to outwardly persecute believers, the other as a serpent representing his work to internally deceive believers.

**Q: In quoting Epimenides, is Paul affirming this observation of Cretans to be true?**

A: In Paul’s time the Cretan culture was so endemically corrupt that to call someone a “Cretan” was another way of calling them a liar. Paul is speaking about a cultural phenomena on Crete where this people group was particularly fond of fables, myths, and alternative stories to the truth. They had a cultural predisposition to not being able to discern the truth well which made them easy prey for false teachers to come along and influence them with false teaching.

**Point:** The only remedy for a lie is the truth; the only cure for faithlessness is faithfulness; the only way to address disobedience is by obedience. This is why Paul advocates to “reprove them severely so that they may be sound in the faith”. (v.13)

**Q: What is the true meaning of v.15? Is Paul saying anything and everything is acceptable to anyone saved?**

A: The terms “pure” and “defiled” are referencing the problem of clean and unclean foods. It’s similar to what Timothy had to deal with (1 Tim. 4:2-5), the false dietary laws and asceticism of false teachers, particularly the Judaizers. Paul is actually teaching that the believer who knows the Word of God receives all foods as clean, whereas the unbeliever/false teacher has a defiled mind and conscience and therefore sees nothing as pure.

*“The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!*

*Matthew 6:22-23*

**Q: How was Titus to treat false teachers? Was he supposed to accommodate them? To try and see their point of view?**

A: No! They “must be silenced”! (v.11) He was not only to stop their mouths, but to “reprove them severely”. (v.13)

**Point:** This is exactly what Jesus did each and every time He faced those espousing false doctrine in the course of His own ministry, isn’t it?

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**Q: What was the root problem of the false teachers?**

A: Their motive was simply to gain money. (v.11) Ultimately they were the exactly opposite representation of the ideal goal of godliness because, “*They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him*”. (v.16)

**Point:** *In other words, although someone’s teachings claim to contain Christ, the proof of their deeds and personal relationships prove that they are actually denying Christ, refusing to put anything of the true Gospel into practice in their personal life.*

**Overall Application**

*In the opening salutation, Paul establishes the need to establish the true “faith of those chosen by God” (v.1), followed by the goal of establishing proper leadership as the ability to hold “fast the faithful word...to exhort in sound doctrine” (v.9), and finally by reproving false teachers so that believers “may be sound in the faith”. (v.13) The emphasis throughout is on sound doctrine established by the preaching of the Word, by living the Word, and by defending the Word. What does this teach you about what may be necessary in order to bring your own church or ministry back from the influences of false teaching?*