

Titus: An Introduction

This morning, I would like to give a short introduction to the Book of Titus. And then, I would to finish our time considering 3 main themes of the letter, paying particular attention why they are important to us today. And, we will actually read most of the letter during the sermon.

The Letter to Titus is part, along with I and II Timothy, of what we call the “pastoral epistles,” letters written by the Apostle Paul, himself a pastor, to another pastor, Titus. I believe it was written about the same time as II Timothy, near the very end of Paul’s life, probably in the late 60s AD.

Now, Who was Titus? He was a close companion of Paul and was used greatly in the early spread of the Gospel among the Gentiles. He himself was a Gentile convert, and was most likely present at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). Titus was converted under the preaching of Paul. In 1:4 we read: **“To Titus, a true child in the common faith . . .”** Though not mentioned directly in Acts, his name is mentioned 13 times in the NT (Gal. 2:1, 3; 2 Tim. 5:10; Titus 1:4; 2 Cor. 2:13; u:6, 13, 14; 8:6, 16, 23; 12:18 twice). In Galatians, the Jews urge him to be circumcised and probably fought with Paul over this issue, to no avail. In Gal. 2:1-5 we read: **“Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain. But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. .**

Titus was one of Paul’s close companions and co-workers in the Gospel for more than 10 years. At one point Paul and Titus were supposed to meet at Troas and when Titus did not show up, Paul was upset saying, **“my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there”** (2 Cor. 2:13). And later when they finally met, Paul says, **“For even when we came into Madedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without and fear within. But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus”** (2 Cor. 7:5-6). What great love and affection Paul had for this brother in Christ. On this same occasion Paul says, **“We rejoiced still more at the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all. For whatever boasts I made to him about you, I was not put to shame. But just as everything we said to you was true, so also our boasting before Titus has proved true. And his affection for you is even greater, as he remembers the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling”** (2 Cor. 7:13-15) (Let me say here, it is good that gives us good companions in the work of the gospel!)

Paul loves Titus. He trusts Titus. He is a close companion with Titus. And often, Paul sends Titus to different places on his behalf. It is likely that, along with Timothy, Titus was sent to help with the divisions occurring in the Corinthian Church. When we come to Titus, which is written at the end of Paul’s missionary journeys, we see once again Paul sending his beloved, trusted, brother in the gospel to help with the development of the church in Crete. Look at 1:5: **“This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order . . .”**

What about Crete? Create is a large island just below Greece and southwest of modern-day Turkey. Presently, it has more than 600,000 in population. It is surrounded on three sides by the

Mediterranean Sea and one side by the Aegean Sea. It is associated with the place called “Caphtor” in the OT (Deut. 2:23; Jer. 47:4). The Prophet Amos calls it the Land of the Philistines. It was conquered by Rome in the 1st Century. And as we’ve noted from Acts 2:11, there was a Jewish population on the island. And at some point, the Gospel made its way there. We know there is a strong possibility that there were converts at Pentecost. For, Cretans are named as one of the nations represented with those who heard and understand the praises of God in their own language at Pentecost (Acts 2:11). After this we aren’t told much. There could have been a church that was established early. Or, it could have been established a little later. My leaning is later because the appointment of elders usually happens early on with a new church. Still we don’t know.

Now, with these things in mind about the letter, let’s turn our attention to the content of the letter itself for the rest of our time. I would like to highlight 3 emphases in the letter and speak briefly about why Titus will be helpful for us.

1. The Office of Pastor. Now, Titus wasn’t the typical pastor. He was more of missionary, travelling with Paul, and being sent by Paul to encourage, strengthen, and give help in some of the early churches. And he sends Titus to Crete as 1:5 says, that he might **“put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you . . .”** Now, we aren’t sure how long Titus was there. But, he was a pastor. And Paul wastes no time giving instructions as to what a pastor should look like. The word in v. 5 is “*presbuteros*.” It is where we get our word “presbytery” or “presbyterian.” It is usually translated as “elder,” often referring to an older person. But, if we look down to v. 7 Paul uses the word “*epsikipos*.” which is translated as “bishop,” “overseer,” or “guardian.” And in other places we see the word “pastor” when referring to the elders. This is why we believe the office of elder is the office of pastor. These words are interchangeable in this context. Our elders are our pastors and vice versa. And we believe when possible, in any church, if there are qualified elders, this office should be plural.

Now, it is very important for us to know what a pastor/elder must look like. Our elders have met with churches through the years who are looking for a pastor. Pastors come and go a lot. And we have read and heard of many job descriptions. I have spoken with a number of pulpit committees through the years about their expectations for their pastors. And more often than not, these descriptions do not include Titus 1 or 1 Tim. 3. Churches are looking for administrators, evangelists, young men with families, charismatic leaders, counselors, visionaries, seminary graduates, etc. But, when we come to Paul, the description is clear. Look at 1:6-10: **“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. For 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. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party . . .”** We will look at these qualifications more in depth in the coming weeks, but if we take this list, we see 2 qualifications for the elder/pastor: Character and the ability to teach.

Paul is concerned with “putting the church in order” (1 Cor. 14:40). And more than anything the church needs leaders with character who are able to teach the Word of God.

With this in mind, we need this book. Our elders need this book and what it teaches us. Our congregation needs these truths as we consider our pastors. For as our elders go, so will our church.

2. Sound Doctrine. Right from the beginning we see Paul’s emphasis on what is true, or what he calls “sound doctrine.” Look at 1:1: **“for the sake of the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth . . .”** In 1:13-14 Paul commands Titus to **“rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in their faith, not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth.”** In 1:9, speaking about the elder he says, **“He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.”** In 2:1 we see the same: **“But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine.”** In 2:3 he reminds the older women to teach the younger women **“what is good . . .”** In v. 10 he says, **“so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our savior.”**

In the other pastoral epistles of 1 & 2 Timothy, we see the same thing. 1 Tim. 1:10 he says that many are living ungodly way that is **“contrary to sound doctrine.”** In 1 Tim. 6:2-4 he says, **“Teach and urge these things. If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing.”** In 2 Tim. 1:13-14 he says, **“Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.”**

Now, what is sound doctrine? What does it mean to be sound in the faith? What does it mean to hold firm to the trustworthy word? What is the doctrine of God our savior? Now, we could spend a lot of time here. But, I believe to put it simply, to hold onto sound doctrine is to preach, teach, hide in our hearts, hold onto the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Which gospel? It is the gospel preached by Paul and the Apostles. Gal. 1:9: **“If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.”** Now, in the context of Galatians, a different gospel was a religion of works, and not according to grace. And there are other counterfeit gospels out there, many of them. But, we must hold on to what is true: the gospel of Jesus Christ. And then apply this gospel to our lives.

So, what is the gospel? Is it John 3:16: **“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish, but have everlasting life.”** Yes! Of course it is! But, often the meaning behind this verse is missed. Many today quote this verse and still do not hold on to the Gospel which Paul and the Apostles preached. In short, to hold onto the gospel is to hold on to everything God has said in his Word as it finds its fulfillment in Christ. But to be very clear, Paul says things like **“For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified”** (1 Cor. 2:2). Also, we see a good summary of the gospel in 1 Cor. 15:1-5: **“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast**

to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.”

This is our number one task as a church. If we lose the gospel, we lose everything that is really important! This is the main reason we use a confession. We believe our confession is a good summary of the gospel and how it works itself out in the local church. This is the main reason we have everyone go through the All About Grace class and require an elder interview before becoming a member. This is why we take membership so seriously. All these things are based on sound doctrine as we hold onto the Gospel of Christ.

3. We see an emphasis on godliness. This truth simply follows our previous one. The proof of our holding on to the gospel is found in the way we live our lives. We cannot separate holding on to the gospel from living godly in this world. The word “godliness” is found 10 times in the pastoral epistles. We see this immediately in 1:1: **“Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness . . .”** Paul addresses the entire congregation starting with the pastors. Look starting in vv. 6-8: **“if anyone is above reproach . . .”** What does it mean to be above reproach: He must be: **“the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For 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.”**

Then he continues with the older men in 2:2: **“Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness.”** Brother and sisters, a healthy church is full of godly older men. Then he moves to the older ladies in v. 3: **“Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.”** Older folks, how are we doing? Are we the model for our young people? . . . Then he moves to the younger men in v. 6. **“Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled.”** And then Paul focuses his attention back to Titus in v. 7: **“Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us.”** Then, for those in the congregation who were slaves he says in v. 9: **“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.”** And then he continues in vv. 11-14: **“For the grace of God has appeared, 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 for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.”**

These are the 3 main issues with Titus. There are others. We see an emphasis on good works. We see the topic of salvation, as well as others.

Brothers and sisters, we need this letter. And I look forward to preaching for a few weeks on these important issues. And as we go through this letter read through it weekly. Ask God to give me grace as I preach and give you grace as you hear; that we might be a church that holds on to the gospel, that we might be godly, that we might be orderly in the way we structure ourselves. These are the words of life. And Oh, how we need them!