



TITUS 1-3 PAUL'S MARVELOUS PASTORAL INSTRUCTIONS TO TITUS

This is a letter to Titus, a young and beloved Gentile minister whom Paul had left in Crete. It was probably written around A.D. 63, after Paul had been released from his first Roman imprisonment and before his second and final one. He had traveled to Crete with Titus and had left him there to oversee several congregations.

Crete was the largest of the Greek islands, around 150 miles long and 35 miles wide. Back around 800 B.C., Homer called it in *The Iliad*, "the island with a hundred cities" since it was fertile and had a large population, including many Jews.

Crete had been the capital of the famous Minoan civilization (1,500 B.C.–1,200 B.C.), but in New Testament times, under Roman rule, it had sunk to deplorable moral depths. The people were generally known for being dishonest, greedy and sensual. In fact, the Greeks had coined the Gk. verb, *cretizo*, or "to do as a Cretan," which meant "to lie." It reminds us of something similar with Corinth, where the Greeks had coined the term "*corinthianize*" to describe the Corinthian's chief weakness -- sexual immorality. So Titus had the unenviable task of setting in order the congregations of these avowed difficult people.

Paul begins the letter, "Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect and the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began, but has in due time manifested His word through preaching, which was committed to me according to the commandment of God our Savior; To Titus, a true son in our common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior" (Titus 1:1-4).

Paul starts by humbly yet proudly stating his credentials: he is a "*doulos* of God," or a household slave, who does his master's will. He is also an apostle or an "envoy" of Jesus Christ, one sent out with the authority of his master. Next, he explains that God's plan of salvation – offering the hope of eternal life to mankind – was planned "before time began." Yes, God the Father and the Word, who became Jesus, wanted to have an eternal family relationship with those who answered Their call.

He continues, "For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you—if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict. For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain" (Titus 1:5-11).

The list here to ordain an elder is a bit more stringent than the one in 1 Tim. 3:1-7, perhaps because here it required more spiritual strength. He expects an elder's children to be "faithful," or believers, and not be accused of dissipation (from the Gk. term *asotia*, or an inability to save money, and so, figuratively, is a person who squanders his funds on his own pleasures, as the term is used for the prodigal son's dissolute living in Lk 15:13. The other Gk. term here is *anupotaktos*, which means a person "not in subjection, or who is rebellious."

He also adds that the minister is a "steward" of God, from the Gk. term *oikonomos*, an administrator of a household or an estate. So the minister has to give God an account of how he has managed and taken care of the congregation.

He mentions some of the church's problems stem from "those of the circumcision" which harks back to the issue of imposing on believing Gentiles the need for circumcision, keeping the ritual law and the Rabbinic regulations such as those mentioned in Acts 10, 15, and Galatians.

He then clarifies, "One of them, a prophet of their own, said, 'Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.' This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the

truth. To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work" (Titus 12-16).

He quotes from a famous sixth-century Cretan philosopher, Epimenides, who described a general character flaw of the Cretans as being dishonest and sensual. As *Tyndale NT Commentary* brings out, "The apostle is about to urge Titus to take a strong hand with the unruly element in the Church, and is first priming him on the well-known characteristics of the people with whom he is dealing. This principle has constant relevance, for every minister of the gospel must of necessity be cognizant [of] the character of his people, however distasteful the facts may be" (p. 188).

So Paul identifies a bit more of what those Jewish Christian brethren "of the circumcision [party]" wanted to impose on the Gentile believers besides circumcision—Jewish fables and commandments of men, normally regulations taken from the Rabbinic Talmud, Mishnah and Midrash, and full of fables, something similar to what Timothy had to deal with at Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:4; 2 Tim. 4:4), which were causing so many problems and leading astray some of the brethren.

Consequently, Paul has to give a strong remedy, "Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith." Authority sometimes means having to apply discipline to protect God's flock.

He then focuses on the duties of the older brethren in the Church, "But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things—that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed" (Tit. 2:1-5).

These are timeless principles about older members who have more experience and can help those younger members with sound Christian advice and by setting a good example for them.

To the youth in the congregation he says, "Likewise, exhort the young men to be sober-minded, in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you" (Titus 2:7-8).

Young men, he states, should be "sober-minded," from a beautiful Greek word, *sophron*, meaning a person who has self-control over his emotions and passions. Barclay brings out, "For that very reason, the first thing at which any young person must aim is self-mastery. No one can ever serve others until he has mastered himself. 'He who rules his spirit is greater than he who takes a city' (Pr. 16:32). Self-discipline is not among the more glamorous of the virtues, but it is the very stuff of life. When the eagerness of youth is buttressed by the solidity of self-mastery, something really great comes into life."

He goes on to say, "Exhort bondservants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all things, not answering back, not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things. For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works. Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you" (Titus 2:9-15).

Even those who were believing slaves were to set a good example with their masters by showing a converted attitude, as Joseph did in Potiphar's home (Gen. 39:2-6). Then Paul explains the essentials of salvation: overcoming sin through Jesus Christ's sacrifice, Him living in us, we obeying God's laws, zealous of good deeds, and looking forward to the coming kingdom of God.

He adds, "Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to be

peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men. For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Tit. 3:1-7).

So he says we should first be good citizens in our countries, setting a fine example. Next comes recognizing having gone astray until He called us. Then through baptism and the laying on of hands, we began a new life, being forgiven of our past sins through Christ's sacrifice and becoming heirs of the *hope* of eternal life--for it's not a guarantee. Thus, Paul is stressing that grace without God's laws becomes a *disgrace*, while only keeping God's laws without God's grace is falling into *legalism*.

In fact, knowing some would misunderstand his emphasis on grace or God's unmerited forgiveness and favor, he clarifies, "This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men" (Titus 3:8).

Hence, Paul, just like James, believed in faith plus works, for works alone are not enough, just as faith alone is not sufficient. You need both of these elements to have proper Christian balance.

He also adds, "But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless. Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned" (Titus 3:9-11).

Paul was stating that there is just so much you can discuss about a topic with a contentious person. Again, "the law" in this context has to do with Rabbinic interpretations dealing with Jewish genealogies and commandments of men.

Barclay has a good comment on this, "The second part of the passage warns against useless discussions. The Greek philosophers spent their

time on their fine-spun problems. The Jewish Rabbis spent their time building up imaginary genealogies for the characters of the Old Testament. The Jewish scribes spent endless hours discussing what could and could not be done on the Sabbath, and what was and was not unclean. It has been said that there is a danger that a man may think himself religious because he discusses religious questions. It is much easier to discuss theological questions than to be kind and considerate and helpful at home, or efficient and diligent and honest at work...It is Paul's advice that the contentious and opinionative man should be avoided. The King James Version calls him the heretic. The Greek is *hairetikos*. The verb *hairein* means 'to choose'; and *hairesis* means 'a party, or a school or a sect.' Originally, the word carries no bad meaning. This creeps in when a man erects his private opinion against all the teaching, the agreement and the tradition of the Church. A heretic is simply a man who has decided that he is right and everybody else is wrong. Paul's warning is against the man who has made his own ideas the test of all truth. A man should always be very careful of any opinion which separates him from the fellowship of his fellow believers. True faith does not divide men; it unites them."

Paul ends the epistle with these words, "When I send Artemas to you, or Tychicus, be diligent to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. Send Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their journey with haste, that they may lack nothing. And let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful. All who are with me greet you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all. Amen" (Titus 3:12-15).

Paul asks Titus to meet him in Nicopolis, likely the famous city in the district of Epirus on the western shore of Greece. It was a populous area in the Roman province of Dalmatia (see 2 Tim. 4:10).

It appears Zenas and Apollos were the ones who brought this epistle to Titus and Paul also tells him to provide for them as they travel on.

We see that Paul was teaching the perfect Christian balance of law and grace – keeping God's laws with God's help, that produce good deeds and yet trusting in God's grace to help carry them out.