

TITUS

1:1-16

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Taught at our Sunday morning service, 8th January 2023 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

Reading: Titus 1:1-16

Introduction

This morning we are going to begin a verse by verse study of the short letter Paul wrote to Titus, a young pastor whom it is reasonable to think he had led to Christ himself. But as we go through this, we'll see that this letter is not only relevant to Titus, or to pastors, but to each of us - for we all should have an understanding of both what godly leadership looks like, and the purpose of it. Indeed elders, whom Paul will write about, 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 fulfil in the church if they are to be living examples of the doctrine they profess.

Starting zoomed out, and as hopefully we each know, the Bible is comprised of two parts - the Old and New Testaments. And together these consist of 66 books that were written down by 40 different authors, each inspired by the Holy Spirit to write exactly what God would have them say - for our learning, for our obedience, for our comfort. In the New Testament, written following Jesus death and resurrection, we find 27 books made up of the 4 gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke, & John - that record Jesus earthly ministry, the book of Acts that documents the beginnings of the church, and then 21 letters (or epistles as they are known) written by the apostle Paul, James, Peter, John and Jude - before the final book of the Bible which is Revelation, which specifically is the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Whether you are young in the faith or not, a few details that may help you find your way around your Bible better, are that Paul's letters are all named after who he wrote to, while those from James, Peter, John and Jude are named after them. And each author's letters are grouped together, starting with Paul's letters, rather than them necessarily being in the order they were written - maybe think of it as how you'd arrange them on a bookshelf by type and author.

As for Paul's letters, we find Romans first - an incredible overview of Christian doctrine and belief - followed by the 8 other letters written to churches. Then we find his pastoral epistles to Timothy and Titus, then his letter to Philemon which is written to an individual by that name, and next we reach Hebrews - over which there is some debate as to who wrote it, though I believe that was also Paul.

Zooming in a little further, these three pastoral epistles are written separately to 2 young men whom Paul had a tremendous impact on, and whom served alongside him in ministry. Timothy, as well as having travelled with Paul, was pastor of the church in Ephesus that Paul had founded, while we find Titus in Crete - though it's not the only place he served. In fact, although not mentioned in the book of Acts, Paul notes in Galatians chapter 2 that Titus was with him and Barnabas when they went to Jerusalem in Acts 15 when a dispute arose over circumcision - Titus himself being an example of a Greek believer who was not circumcised. And in 2 Corinthians Titus is mentioned as serving alongside Paul, with reason to believe he served *in* Corinth for a while, while in 2 Timothy he is mentioned as having departed for Dalmatia.



As for the basic details of this particular letter, Titus is the 56th book of the Bible... written by the apostle Paul to Titus who was on the island of Crete - which is found in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea (it's around 160 miles long by 7.5 to 37 miles wide). While no doubt as enjoyable for it's weather then as it is today, the island was also known for its inhabitants - and not in a good way, for even their own called them out as lazy evil liars.

As such, there was work to do in the lives of those who had grown up in this culture - this letter contains at least 13 commands from Paul to Titus - such as to set in order, appoint, rebuke, speak, exhort, remind, affirm, avoid, reject, to come to me, to send/support others, to let our people learn and to greet others who love Jesus.

- **Author:** The apostle Paul
- **Location:** From Paul to Titus in Crete
- **Length:** 3 chapters, 46 verses, 921 words
- **Timing:** 64-67AD (likely 65AD)
- **Theme:** Church leadership & sound doctrine

Less than 1000 words long, and written between 64-67AD, its overall theme is church leadership and sound doctrine - though it also speaks of God's mercy & grace, good works, Jesus return, plus tackles worldliness, heresy, and legalism.

Some topics come up more than once - the Word is mentioned twice in chapter one, and again in chapter 2. Doctrine is mentioned once in this opening chapter, and twice in the next. While good works are mentioned six times - once in chapter 1, twice in chapter 2, and three times in chapter 3. Of course, teaching of the Word and good doctrine should lead to good works.

Chapter overview of Titus

Over the next 3 weeks we'll study one chapter per week, which we can summarise as follows:

- Chapter 1: Sound leadership
- Chapter 2: Sound doctrine
- Chapter 3: Good works

Of course, each chapter covers more than these things - but having a summary can help us to memorise the main or salient points.

Overview of chapter one

This morning then, we'll look at the 16 verses of chapter one, which can be summarised as:

- v1-4 - Greeting to Titus from Paul
- v5-9 - The qualifications of elders
- v10-16 - The task of elders

Chapter one

So let's get into the chapter. We read in verse 1...

Titus 1:1

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,

At the very start of this letter, Paul speaks of service; not to good causes, but to God. And the term he uses (*Doulos* in the Greek) is that of a bond slave - one who willingly chose to remain a slave of his master for life - next noting he was an apostle, meaning he was sent by God, effectively as a delegate to act as Christ would if He were on earth. And that's important to note, for what he writes to Titus was foundational not only for the churches in Crete, but churches everywhere. This isn't merely Paul's musings, but God's instruction for how *His* church should operate.

And the truth that Paul speaks of here and elsewhere, is that which should produce godliness. As one commentator put it "*if the truth that you have does not lead to a godly life, there is something radically wrong with your faith.*"

Paul continues...

Titus 1:2

in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began,

This is what we believe in. That we have all this ahead, which God planned before we even existed. And this is not a fading hope, but a concrete one that God Himself has promised. We read...

Titus 1:3

but has in due time manifested His word through preaching, which was committed to me according to the commandment of God our Saviour;

So that is, God has proclaimed His message to us through preaching of His Word. Not through any other means. And He has done so in His timing, choosing to send Jesus into this world at a time when the Greek language was spoken throughout the world, and Roman roads allowed faster, easier travel than ever before. Furthermore, it is under God's authority that Paul now preaches.

Titus 1:4

To Titus, a true son in our common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Paul concludes his introduction, first noting to whom this letter is written - to Titus, who he describes as a true or genuine son in the faith. It seems likely, if not certain, that he had been instrumental in Titus coming to know the Lord.

Second, he opens in a the same fashion as his letters to Timothy where he says grace, mercy and peace, and in similar fashion his letters to the churches, plus Philemon, where he says grace and peace. In all cases, grace always comes before peace, for we cannot have peace with God without the grace of God. Never forget the source of your peace, nor seek it elsewhere.

And third, Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, makes no mention of the Holy Spirit because the ministry of the Holy Spirit, as noted in the Bible, is to point to Jesus, and not to Himself. For that reason, always beware ministries, movements or individuals that focus on the Holy Spirit, rather than on Jesus Christ.

And so to Titus, he writes...

Titus 1:5

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—

Paul begins to set out that which Titus needs to do, the first priority being to establish godly, spiritual leadership in these churches on the island of Crete, which evidently was something that was lacking. There's two immediate things this should prompt us to think about.

First, we should be quite realistic that there are things lacking in every church - including ours! It's been well said, that if you find the perfect church, don't join it - because you'll ruin it! What's important is that we're not comfortable with mediocrity, lethargy and apathy in ourselves - but rather look to God and His Word for what He would have us do.

Second, godly leadership is a priority. Both that leadership should be godly, for imagine what a church with ungodly leadership would be like, and second that godly *leadership* is necessary and important - that there be those that have spiritual oversight of the local church, not to fleece the sheep, but the feed them and care for them.

And I'm incredibly thankful to God for the godly leadership we've been blessed with over the years here, and still have when we look at our elders. I know that both you and I are blessed to have Bob, Pete and Matt serve in this way. But the time will come where new elders are required, and at that juncture - whether because we need additional leaders as the church has grown, or God has called any one of our current elders to serve in a different way, or even in a different place altogether - we must know how and who should be appointed.

When it comes to the how, there are differences of opinion between types of church today - but what we see here in Titus is that elders were appointed by a pastor, not voted for as if it were a popularity contest. But this is not a secret process either - rather it should be so evident to a church family that someone is suitable to be an elder, that the appointing of them would never be controversial, but rather down to the Lord's calling on that individual, and God's guiding of the pastor. Simply put, if it isn't obvious someone has God's calling on their life, if their life doesn't match Biblical requirements, then they shouldn't be an elder. As for the Biblical requirements, Paul lays these out next...

Titus 1:6

if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination.

So, an elder should be blameless. How then can we find *any* elders?! you might wonder. Well, this isn't about being sinless, but rather an elder should have such integrity that any mud thrown at him won't stick. That is, their conduct should build such reputation, that any individual trying to slander them has no ground to stand on.

We also read that an elder should also be the husband of one wife. What does this mean? Well, it doesn't rule out single men from being elders - Paul himself was single during much if not all of his ministry. Rather, this means that an elder cannot be a polygamist, having many wives. Nor can he be an adulterer who has divorced his wife to marry another. Rather, his understanding of marriage is that it is to be one man and one woman for life.

Next, Paul sets out faithful children as requirement of elders. Does that mean the man without any children isn't qualified to be an elder? No. What this is saying is that those that do have children should indeed be raising them well, instructing them to be obedient, and they should not be unruly or riotous, or defiant of authority - rather they should be faithful children who listen to their father. For as Paul will separately write to Timothy, "*if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?*"

This does present us with what can be an uncomfortable truth, that the way children behave is in a large part down to their parents. Of course we praise parents when their children behave well (and so we should) but when they behave poorly, we're quick to justify with excuses. Now, don't get me wrong, there are behavioural impacts outside of a parent's control - but we must not minimise the need for good Biblical parenting.

We either believe that the Bible sets out guidelines and requirements for Christian parents and that those things can and will make a difference if correctly applied, or we're all on our own doing a best guess. *But what of lovely people that have unruly kids?* Well, unruly kids doesn't make them unlovely people - but it may be an indication that they were not great parents. Harsh? Well, what's the alternative? That everyone is a perfect parent and it's down to chance whether you get a well behaved one or not? We can't have it both ways. The reality is we will all make mistakes as parents - Sian and I included. But we can't use that as an excuse. What we must do is to continually look to the Bible as to how we should parent, and be quick to listen, quick to change. And elders have a responsibility to parent well in the same way that ALL their conduct at home should honour the Lord.

Charles Spurgeon said:

If any mans life at home is unworthy, he should travel several miles away before he stands up to preach. When he stands up, he should say nothing.

Charles Spurgeon.

And it is a man's home life where Paul starts in setting out these requirements for elders. But now he continues writing to Titus and moves to the character of the man in public, and gives us the reason all this is important:

Titus 1:7-9

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.

The term *bishop* is synonymous with elder. Elder referring to the individual, who was to be a mature believer, and bishop, or overseer which was the office or role of an elder. We again read that those who take on this role are to be blameless - not perfect, not without sin - but one whom any accusation against will ultimately be found to be untrue. And they are to handle the things of God well - not only the Word of God, but the people of God - handling well all things put into their care.

They are not to be self-willed, not in it for their own purposes, not serving only in the way they want to, but in the ways that are necessary - just as Paul considered himself to be a bondservant. That, and the need to be a steward of God, to be just, and to be holy, are unique requirements in this list to Titus (though the principles are found elsewhere in scripture for all Christians), but every single other requirement of elders here is also written to Timothy in 1 Timothy chapter 3, underlining the importance of these things.

Including that an elder should not be quick-tempered, or as put to Timothy, an elder should not be quarrelsome. They should not be an argumentative man! Not prone to outbursts of wrath. They should not have a short fuse. And so don't expect the elders to jump on someone you think is out of line. In many cases, it is right that we will prayerfully consider what to do. We should not be rash or impulsive in that sense.

And elders should never, I repeat never, be drunk. They are to be filled with the Holy Spirit, not drunk on alcoholic spirits. They are not to be controlled or distracted by drink. Their decision making should never be influenced by it. And their example or witness must never be compromised by it. I hope each of you would be appalled to see myself or the other elders in a drunken state, or to even hear that we had been such. But do consider, that the reason elders are to set this example is not because they are super Christians that are so holy they almost float around - no, elders are to be an example that the whole church can, and should follow. And as such we must never be drunk, nor our judgement influenced by drink. And we must be faithful to TEACH God's word that no Christian should become drunk, and that we all should consider our weaker brother.

An elder should not be violent - lashing out at others. Your translation may say "no striker" but that's not in the sense of joining a union in strike action, but that you should not strike anyone with your hand or fist.

Paul writes here, and in 1 Timothy, that an elder must not be greedy for money. It cannot be our motivation in ministry, nor our goal in life. Rather, we're to use what God has already given us for good - to be hospitable to others... opening our homes and our calendars. From inviting someone for a meal, to perhaps hosting visitors to stay, or taking the time to have cuppa with a member of our church family.

Elders are to love that which is good - good people, good things. They are to be the kind of folks that smile when they hear of good things happening. Consider of course, that good work(s) are mentioned and encouraged 6 times in this letter - if the elders don't love what they are encouraging, there's a problem!

They are also to be sober-minded. That is, they are serious about their life, their ministry. They are not to be the court jester. Doesn't mean they can't have fun, or be fun to be around. But there's a gravity to the role and responsibility. The word behind this implies they are to be of a sound mind, and in control of themselves.

Elders are to be just - to be fair in their dealings. And that's so very important when dealing with church matters. They are to be holy. They should be pursuing holiness, and an example of it too. And they are to be self-controlled. How is this different from *self-willed* that was already noted in verse 7? Self-willed is wanting our own way. Self-controlled relates to having our desires under control. But not just what we don't do, but what we do - elders should be disciplined disciples, committed to prayer, the Word, and to serving God.

And then we read, "holding fast the faithful Word as he has been taught". Note this critical point - an elder in the church of God, must have faithfully sat under the teaching of the Word of God. Not just hearing in the Word in one ear and out the next... but grabbing hold of it, taking it on board. Writing to Timothy, Paul says that an elder should not be a novice - that is, a novice in the faith. Worldly qualifications, business experience, or being a people person are not qualifications for eldership. A man must sit under the word of God and learn it, and apply it to his own life first.

Why is that important? Because the elders' task is, we read, to *"by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict."*

Paul starts these requirements of eldership with integrity and character; with a man's life at home, and in public. When those things are in place, we (or any church looking for an elder) should look for a godly man who holds the Word of God fast, who lives by it, who knows it, and can faithfully apply it, *that he may be able to exhort and convict.*

Of course, the primary place that the teaching of the Word of God takes place is in the pulpit - but let's not think that's the only place that correction happens. Elders are to come alongside you, talk with you, encourage you, and where necessary, correct you to. If you want something different from your elders, then you want something different from what the Bible prescribes. This is why it's so very important that an elders own life be in order, before trying to guide, counsel, correct, rebuke or equip those in the church who God has placed in their care.

In case Titus was in any doubt at the need for such a task, Paul writes in verse 10:

Titus 1:10-11

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.

There are those that want to cause problems in the church. And then there are those who don't set out with that aim, but achieve the same result! Here, Paul warns of idle talkers - those who do nothing, but say much. So before you listen to someone, look at their lives. Where is the fruit? What is going on in their life? What is their manner of life? Don't look for gifted speakers, look for godly men.

Paul also warns of deceivers, whose mouths must be stopped. It's not that we should be suspicious of each other, but that it's so very important that we check out all that we hear against the Word of God, to see if what any one of us say stacks up against the Bible. And Paul warns Titus specifically of those of the circumcision, that is those in the church who would try and bring us back under the law to earn or keep our salvation - whether through how we dress, what we eat, or the act of circumcision itself. This is familiar ground for Titus of course, having been present in Jerusalem when this very issue came up.

Regarding the people of Crete to which Titus is to minister, we read...

Titus 1:12-14

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.

It is not a good thing, when even those that are part of the culture are saying how wicked it is! But note this instruction to rebuke those Christians who are drawn into legalism, and to rebuke them sharply - not for pleasure, nor for gain, but that they may be sound in the faith. Considering that, it should not come as a shock to us that sharp rebukes are needed today as well. Indeed, what Paul has been laying out of for us here is that those whom God calls to serve as pastors and elders, will find it necessary for the glory of God, the benefit of the individual, and the benefit of the whole body, to correct those that live and teach contrary to the Bible. That again is why elders must not live contrary to the Bible themselves.

Titus 1:15-16

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.

In other words, those that believe it is what we eat that makes us holy are missing the point - for if that is the only holiness in your life, then you are not holy! They might think they are spiritual, but are in fact denying and disobeying Him. They are still sinners in need of God's grace.

Conclusion

As we wrap up our Bible study this morning let's consider once more why elders are necessary, looking at Paul's exhortation to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:

Acts 20:28-35

Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. "So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. I have shown you in every way, by labouring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' "

There is clear need for elders, and there are clear qualifications of those called to serve in this way. Beyond what have read this morning in Titus, or we find in 1 Timothy, we also read the following in 1 Peter that we studied just a few weeks ago:

1 Peter 5:1-4

The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

This is not an easy task. And it is a very serious one. As such, there is to be both support and accountability for elders, as we read in 1 Timothy chapter 5:

1 Timothy 5:17-20

Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain," and, "The labourer is worthy of his wages." Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear.

Where there are godly elders, we are to submit, to get behind their godly leadership, and to let them serve us with joy. We read this in Hebrews:

Hebrews 13:17

Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

Elders are to be an example in their home life, their manner toward others, and in their relationship with God. They are here to set an example that the whole church may follow, to teach and help apply the Word of God, and correct as needed. And next week, as we study chapter 2, we'll look at the sound doctrine that sound leaders should teach.

Application questions

So then, as you talk with each other after the service, as you go home this day, and as you go through this week, consider these things:

- Are your expectations of elders in this church or any, based on scripture?
- Looking to the example of godly elders, is *your* own life - private and public - as it should be?