

NEW TESTAMENT BIBLICAL LITERACY

Lesson 68

Titus

In addition to the letters to Timothy, Paul wrote a letter to Titus, which we also call a “pastoral epistle.” It is unclear whether Paul wrote I Timothy or Titus first. Both seem to have similar dates of composition. We are fairly confident from Paul’s tone that 2 Timothy was written later, shortly before Paul’s death. Accordingly, we look at Titus out of order by our New Testament table of contents yet in order, most likely, by date of composition.

I. BACKGROUND

We have already laid out much of the background of Titus in our notes on 1 Timothy. Until now, however, we have not looked closely at what we know of Titus.

What we know of Titus comes from Paul’s letters to the Galatians (2:1-3), 2 Corinthians (Chapters 2, 7, 8, and 12), and 2 Timothy (4:10). Of course, we also have the letter to Titus as well. From these passages, we learn that Titus was a Greek convert of Paul (Tit. 1:4) who traveled with Paul (Gal 2, Tit. 1:5). Paul did not have Titus circumcised as Paul did Timothy, a decision the Jerusalem church ultimately vindicated (Gal. 2:1-6).

Paul repeatedly used Titus as his delegate or representative to churches. We read of Paul dispatching Titus to the Corinthian church for those purposes in 2 Corinthians. Again in Titus, we read Paul having Titus stay behind in Crete to aid the church. We also know that Paul sent for Titus to join him on the Western coast of Greece before Titus ultimately went into Dalmatia (modern Yugoslavia) for mission work (Tit. 3:12; 2 Tim. 4:10).

Aside from those factual details of Titus, we get insight into his character by noting both how Paul spoke to him (Titus) and how Paul spoke about him (especially 2 Corinthians). Titus was a man Paul trusted. Paul trusted Titus’s doctrine and Titus’s ability to work with the church to carry out God’s plans. The trust was deep enough to include a great comfort level. Remember that when Paul wrote his harsh letter to the Corinthian church, Paul used Titus as an emissary to the church to work as a mediator. The Corinthian issues and conflict were particularly troublesome to Paul. So much so that while Paul was in Troas responding to a door God had opened, Paul left because Titus had not yet returned from Corinth, leaving Paul with “no peace of mind.” Paul went on to Macedonia to find Titus sooner.

Once Titus returned from his Corinthian mission and told Paul the depth of his success, Paul's joy exploded! The ministry of the Corinthians to Titus augmented Paul's delight. The Corinthians not only took Titus's message to heart, but also refreshed Titus's spirit in their treatment of him.

In Titus, we see a heart that mirrored Paul's. Titus was a self-starter who went about God's work with enthusiasm (2 Cor. 8:16-17). Paul saw Titus as a partner and a fellow worker. It is no wonder Paul gave Titus the tasks we read about (2 Cor. 8:23).

As we set out the post-Acts possibilities in our background to 1 Timothy, Paul likely went from Rome to Crete with Titus in tow. Paul eventually left Crete, but Titus stayed on the island to help better establish the church.

Crete was an island in the Mediterranean, south of Greece. When Paul was being taken to Rome via ship as recorded in Acts 27, Paul urged his Centurion guard to dock the ship at a port on Crete for the winter. The Centurion decided to make for another harbor further west on the island, but a north wind took the vessel away from the island to an ultimate shipwreck off Malta.

The people of Crete ("Cretans") had quite a reputation. They were well known for being dishonest and evil lazy slobs (Tit. 1:12). Those folks would be ripe for the work of God!

We can divide Titus basically in to these sections:

1. Greeting and instructions on church structure (1)
2. Teachings for various groups within the church (2-3:11)
3. Final remarks (3:12-15).

II. TEXT

A. Greeting and Instructions on Church Structure (1)

As we typically see, Paul begins his letter identifying himself. Atypically, however, Paul gives a very lengthy discourse as he describes himself to his dear friend Titus. Only in Romans do we see Paul give such a lengthy narrative following his self-identification. To Titus, Paul sets himself out as "a servant of God" and an "apostle of Jesus Christ."

Paul does not stop there, however. Paul adds that his apostleship is for the “faith of God’s elect” and for “knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness.” Even with that add on, Paul still doesn’t stop. Paul notes that the “faith” and “knowledge” that lead to godliness do so energized (“resting on”) the “hope¹ of eternal life.”

This eternal life was “promised before the beginning of time” by God, “who does not lie.²” Again, we might think Paul would be done identifying himself, but he is not! He now adds that the God who does not lie, “at his appointed season brought his word to light” through the preaching entrusted to Paul by the command of God (1:1-3).

Only at this point does Paul address the letter to Titus, his “true son” in the faith they shared. Paul offers his trademark greeting, “Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior” (1:4).

After the greeting, Paul reminds Titus why Paul left Titus on Crete. Paul wanted Titus to finish up the chores of appointing Elders for the church in the various towns as well as give some additional teaching to the fledgling churches and Christians.

As in 1 Timothy, Paul gives a list of traits for those Titus would appoint to the Eldership. They are to be blameless, husbands faithful to their wives, with children who are believers, rather than wild and disobedient. Paul says the Elders are entrusted with God’s work, hence it is important they not be over bearing, quick-tempered, given to drunkenness, violent, or pursuers of dishonest gain.

Those Elders so entrusted with God’s work should rather be hospitable, lovers of good, self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. The Elders must hold firmly to the truth of the gospel. This enables the Elders to encourage others and refute those opposing sound doctrine (1:5-9).

¹ As we have mentioned in earlier lessons, the Greek word we translate as hope (*elpis*) does not mean “desire,” but a “confident expectation.” The emphasis is on something not yet possessed, but confidently around the corner.

² We have here a little foreshadowing of one of Paul’s concerns about the flock that Titus is working among. We will see that the Cretans have a reputation as “liars” distinguished from God who does not lie.

This factor was especially important in Crete because there were “rebellious people” who talked a great game but were ultimately just deceptive. Most of these were Jewish Christians. Paul wanted these folks silenced. They hurt not only themselves, but also their households. Evidently, these rebellious folks had teachings that lined their pockets with dishonest gain to the detriment of others.

Paul is saying nothing new about some in Crete. The Cretans actually had a rather long-standing reputation that was not exactly upright and virtuous! In verse 12, Paul quotes a Cretan poet who settled in Athens named Epimenides. Nearly 600 years earlier, Epimenides wrote, “Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.”³ Paul wants these folks rebuked “sharply” so that “they will be sound in the faith” and will ignore the false teachings and commands of other Jews.

Paul emphasizes that there are folks who have corrupted their consciences and minds where nothing they do is pure. While some of these people claim to know God, their actions show otherwise. The result was detestable, disobedient folks who were “unfit for doing anything good” (1:10-16).

B. Teachings for Various Groups within the Church (2-3:11)

On the heels of Paul’s discussion of those people who taught in error for personal gain, Paul instructs Titus on matters to teach for gain of the kingdom and those in it. Titus is to teach “what is in accord with sound doctrine.” This teaching took different words for the 5 groupings of Cretans: older men, older women, younger women, young men and slaves.

1. Older men – Paul wants the older men to be temperate (careful with alcohol), worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, love and endurance.
2. Older women – The older women are to live reverently. They are to avoid speaking ill of others or drinking too much wine. They are to “train” younger women the very traits that they should have themselves.
3. Younger women – Within the framework of the older women training the younger women, Paul sets out matters

³ Epimenides was saying this in regard to Cretan claims that Zeus was buried on their island.

for the younger women to “learn.” Younger women were to learn what it means to love their husbands and children. They were to learn purity, self-control, how to maintain their homes, to be kind, and to show proper respect to their husbands. These traits were important for the families, but also for beyond the families. These traits would keep others from maligning the word of God.

4. Younger men – Paul wants the younger men encouraged to be self-controlled. Paul wants Titus to set an example for the younger men by his own actions as well as his teaching. Titus was charged to “show” integrity, seriousness, and soundness of speech.
5. Slaves – Slaves were to treat masters with honesty, showing themselves trustworthy and respectful. In this way, slaves would make the teaching about “God our Savior attractive.” Paul sees the slaves as evangelists in the hands of God, even as they live in their slavery!

All of this teaching made perfect sense to Paul. Because the grace of God (Jesus dying in our stead) had occurred, there were lessons for us. The cross “teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions. We learn instead to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives. We live thus in the present age because of our confidence in the coming appearance of Jesus. Our redeemer, Jesus, who gave himself not only to rescue us from wickedness but also to purify us as his people “eager to do what is good” (2:1-2:14).

Actions were very important to Paul. They showed the seriousness of the Christians. They showed the genuineness of faith. By actions, Paul could see that people were indeed convicted that Jesus had come, died because sin was deadly, and will come again to take us home for eternity. That truth (not merely as something to “live by” but as real truth) would truly change the lives of people in day-to-day living.

So, Paul urged Titus to teach accordingly. Titus was to teach the Christians to be subject to their rulers and authorities as well as “ready to do whatever is good.” Folks were to live peaceably with consideration to others. They were not to slander others, but to show true humility “toward all men.”

This was not “normative” living in the world. Even Paul was “foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures.” Paul and others “lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.” But with God’s loving kindness, with God’s appearance in Jesus, things changed. We were saved and healed from the passions and evils rampant within us. We were saved, not because we changed, but because of the nature of our God. Our God is merciful. He seeks to save us in our dirty, spiritless state. He washes us clean, setting his Holy Spirit about the work of renewing us and transforming our lives.

In this way, we have been declared righteous (“justified”) and have become heirs confident of our eternity in his loving presence. Here is our motivation for living differently. Here is the reason we are careful to do what is good, excellent, and profitable for everyone. We do not live for today or for our passions and desires. We live as the people of a coming eternity, working for the purposes of our God who continues to work in the lives of others for his destiny. People who claim faith, but live in denial of that faith are charlatans. Maybe they fool others, maybe they fool themselves, but Paul was not fooled. Paul saw them for what they were, “warped and sinful,” – “self-condemned” (3:1-11).

C. *Final Remarks (3:12-15).*

Paul closes his letter urging Titus to do his best to finish up and come see Paul once relief arrives on Crete. We would be remiss if we didn’t emphasize Paul telling Titus to “Do everything you can to help Zenas the LAWYER” (Emphasis added). One last time, Paul insists that “our people” learn to devote themselves to productive lives doing what is good. Paul sends final greetings and closes his letter.

III. POINTS FOR HOME

1. Faith is real.
2. Salvation is real.
3. Our lives should show that reality.
4. Find your category and get to work!