

Introduction To Titus

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[0 : 00] Like I said, I just want to really set the context of the letter before we jump in to our verse-by-verse study. And the first thing we want to do is understand the characters of the letter. Who's actually involved here as it relates to this letter to Titus?

So let's first talk about the author, whom we're told in verse 1 of chapter 1 is the Apostle Paul. Paul wrote this letter, but there is some mystery around the time that he wrote it.

There has been some effort to try to take the pastoral epistles in particular and fit them within the timeline of the book of Acts that tells the story of the early church and focuses so much on Paul's ministry.

But the overwhelming evidence, not only biblically but extra-biblically, suggests that there were two imprisonments for Paul. You'll remember that Acts 28, it ends with Paul in prison in Rome.

He had been in prison for four years. When we study the book of Philippians, we see that Paul truly believed that he was going to be released from that imprisonment. He didn't believe that he was going to die at that particular moment.

[1 : 11] He was prepared to die, but he told the Philippians that he believed that the Lord was not going to make that the case, that he would be released from it. When we understand that he wasn't actually in a dungeon in Rome at that particular point, whatever their version of a dungeon would be, he was just on house arrest.

He had some freedom to move about and to do some things there in Rome. It becomes clear that Paul ultimately ended up being released from that imprisonment. And from there, he traveled. It seems that he traveled on a few more missionary endeavors for maybe four, five, six years before he was incarcerated again under the reign of Nero.

And then in the process of that incarceration, he was actually legitimately imprisoned and ultimately beheaded for his faith and martyred.

It was during this time frame in between the two imprisonments that Paul and Titus at some point journeyed to Crete, probably started a few churches there sometime in the mid-60s.

[2 : 13] And Paul wrote this letter to follow up with his colleague. And special consideration needs to be given to Paul's age and circumstance when we evaluate the content and the style of the letter.

Paul recognized that the apostolic age of the church was coming to an end. And the pastor or epistles are written from the perspective of a man who knew his days were numbered.

The apostles' doctrine, as far as I mean apostles, as in all the apostles, what we have contained in the New Testament, had already been thoroughly recorded in other books. Titus, having traveled extensively with Paul in his ministry, didn't need an explanation of doctrine or of particular practices. He already knew those things. And Paul trusted Titus regarding those issues, which is why he left him in Crete to lead these churches and to help establish them.

This letter should be understood, really, as a summary challenge to a young companion to which the baton of church leadership was about to be passed.

[3 : 27] Donald Guthrie said, Titus contains the natural and human expressions of the apostles' own reflections about the future of the work he is obliged to delegate to others.

Most of you know that my dad has pastored for over 40 years. And beginning January 1st, he transitioned out of a role of lead pastor at Promised Land Baptist Church and now is on staff as an assistant pastor at Laurel Baptist in Charlotte.

And in the process of the last three years, he didn't know he was going to end up at Laurel, but he knew that his time, he could sense that his time as a lead pastor was coming to an end, either through retirement or transitioning to a different form of vocational ministry.

And over the last three years, you know what he's done? He's prepared his church for that moment. He's preached through the pastoral epistles. He's tried to disciple leaders in the church to be prepared to lead the church through a temporary absence of a pastor, a lead pastor in the church. He's tried to prepare them for his departure. That's what Paul's doing here. When he writes to Timothy and he writes to Titus, he is writing from the perspective of a man that knows his days are numbered.

[4 : 43] He knows that the ministry of the church and the care of the churches are going to have to be passed on to the next generation of church leaders. And what we see happening and unfolding in this letter is the final statements, in a sense, of what he believes these young preachers and pastors must remember as they lead these churches forward.

This helps us understand the urgency of tone in this letter. Much of Paul's counsel is written in the imperative mood, which challenges anyone who would take a casual or passive approach to church doctrine and church practice.

Because there are many people who would say, I don't care about doctrine. That's boring. Or who cares about the way the church is structured and the way that things are carried out in a church. I just want to go and be a part of the things that are scheduled if it's convenient for me.

No, this letter, the urgency of this letter, challenges that type of spirit. It challenges Christian passivity. It challenges those who would demean doctrine and who would demean the necessity of helpful church practice and polity.

Just look at a few examples. Look at verse 13 of chapter 1. In regards to false teaching, Paul says, Rebuke them sharply that they may be sound in the faith.

[6 : 05] There's urgency there. Look at chapter 2 and verse 15. At the end of this section on discipling, he says, Titus, declare these things. Exhort and rebuke with all authority.

Don't let anyone disregard you. Chapter 3 and verse 8. The saying is trustworthy and I want you to insist on these things. So that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works.

There's urgency in this letter. Here, Titus, don't mess around. Do these things. Preach the word. Be faithful.

Lead the churches. There's urgency here. Let's look at the recipients as well. Of course, you know, Titus is the primary recipient. And when you think about Paul's companions in the New Testament, Titus might not be the one that immediately comes to your mind.

There isn't a single passage that carefully describes who Titus was. But if you examine all the little mentions about him in the New Testament, and you bring them all together, what you'll discover is that Titus was an incredibly faithful Christian and pastor.

[7 : 23] His relationship to Paul was very similar to Timothy's. He was a young believer that was probably personally led to Christ and discipled by Paul.

You see that in verse 4 of chapter 1. To Titus, my true child in a common faith. It's the same thing he said about Timothy. These are not merely colleagues.

There is a discipling relationship that has occurred here. And though Titus isn't mentioned by name in Acts 15, Galatians 2 tells us that he was a Greek Christian who traveled with Paul and Barnabas to the Jerusalem council.

Do you remember that in Acts 15? You remember there's the controversy in the church where the Jewish converts were saying these Gentiles need to be circumcised. They need to commit to certain Jewish things before they can really truly be saved.

And the apostles gathered together in Jerusalem to confront the heresy and to set the record straight that no, salvation is by God's grace. It's apart from all works that don't matter.

[8 : 29] Galatians 2 says that Titus traveled with Paul and Barnabas there. And not only was he present, but he became their prime example of a Gentile believer who was truly converted to the faith, who had the Holy Spirit of God resting on his life, and yet he was not circumcised.

And they essentially say, here's exhibit A. Look at Titus, which made him uniquely qualified to deal with the Jewish heresies that were existent on Crete.

It's a fantastic character in the Bible, but it doesn't just end there. Titus was an apostolic delegate from Paul. He was sent by Paul to Corinth, to Dalmatia, and of course, Crete.

You can read all about it in 2 Corinthians. Titus was known for his faithfulness, his dependability, and his competence to assist churches with mounting theological and moral issues.

And here's the bottom line about Titus. The fact that most of his ministry was carried out in Corinth and Crete shows that he was a strong, patient leader who was especially skilled at strengthening struggling churches.

[9 : 48] And I'll put that in context for you. If there was a church that we are aware of in our area that the pastor left or retired or resigned or whatever the situation may be, and there wasn't someone already prepared in place to kind of step up into that role.

And I was familiar with the church. And they said, will you help us find a pastor? I might would call a few friends of mine that might would be interested. One of the questions my buddies are going to ask is what is it that you know about the church?

What's the truth about the church? What's the issues that are going on there? And I may know of a few issues, and I'll describe the issues to them. Now, let's say that it's a church like Crete or a church like Corinth.

I say, well, there's some pretty severe sexual immorality going on. They are spiritually arrogant people. They care a lot about their own giftedness, and they're not very servant-hearted.

They're not very loving toward one another. They're faithful to the gospel, but they're not very loving. You know, they've allowed some kind of heretical theology to come into.

[10 : 52] It's going to be a bit of a fight, to be honest with you. Most pastors run away from that. That's enough for them to say, yeah, I don't want anything to do with that. I don't have the energy for that. Titus ran to that situation.

In fact, 2 Corinthians tells us not only does he run to it, but his love for Christ's church was far greater than his fear of church hurt.

2 Corinthians 8, 16. Thanks be to God, Paul writes, who put into the heart of Titus the same earnest care I have for you.

For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest, he is going to you of his own accord, knowing the issues in Corinth.

Paul says, Titus isn't going to you begrudgingly because I asked him to do it. This is not a favor for me. No, he loves you. He wants to come to you. He's not running away from your issues. He wants to help you.

[11 : 52] His love for Christ's church was far greater than his fear of church hurt, which brings us to an important question as we just think about this person of Titus. How does your love for Christ's church compare?

Because our tendencies is to be the opposite of Titus. Whenever we experience issues or whenever we experience hurt or things don't go exactly the way that we want them to go, our first inclination is to find another place.

Or maybe we stop attending so regularly. Or we stop giving regularly to the offering. Or whatever it is. We stop going to the classes or the groups or whatever it is. We get offended by somebody or whatever happens.

Not Titus. His love was so great that he ran to the problems, knowing that it was going to be a struggle and that he was going to have to deal with real people. People ask all the time.

When I see them that don't belong to our church, they ask, how's things going with the church? And I love the question on one hand because it encourages me that people care. And I think the most helpful answer is things are going really well and we're also people who have issues.

[12 : 57] because we all are. Titus didn't run away from that. No, he loved the church. That's the kind of person he was. And Paul says, he's my partner and fellow worker and he's my true child in a common faith.

But this letter isn't just addressed to Titus. It's also for churches. Paul's letter was indeed personal. That doesn't mean it was private.

In fact, it was never intended to be confidential. It was addressed to Titus, but the letter was copied and was read to the churches in Creed as necessary apostolic teaching given by the Spirit of God. Again, Donald Guthrie says, in contrast with the other Pauline letters which are addressed to churches, all three pastoral epistles are directed to individuals and many of the injunctions are clearly personal.

Yet much of the material appears to be designed for the communities to which Timothy and Titus were ministering. Thus, they are generally thought to be quasi-public epistles.

[14 : 09] Here's why that matters. The early church treated this letter to Titus not as a unique keepsake of Paul's personal correspondence. Like you might go to the museums in Washington, D.C.

and you might find a set of personal correspondence between some historical figures of our nation. That's not why the church kept this letter. Scribes very carefully, meticulously, from its delivery began to copy it and transmit it and share it with churches in their area and eventually this letter began to spread to other places around the world so that other Christians could see not a writing from Paul but so that other Christians could see the Word of God.

The only reason for the church to take that kind of care in personal correspondence is if they truly believed that it was inspired Scripture. Which means that Titus was not simply for Titus.

It was for churches given by God for churches both then and now. And that's reason enough for us to take it seriously. That's the characters.

Quickly, let's look at the circumstances of the letter. There's no indication that Paul ever journeyed to Crete in his missionary journeys in Acts but according to verse 5 in chapter 1, clearly he and Titus had gone there at some point and probably had established a few churches.

[15 : 37] It's also likely that there were already some other Christians there based on some Cretans being present in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. I think it's safe to assume that some of them were converted and went home and began maybe some small churches.

So there's Christians there at least at the point that the letter was written. The congregations, as I said before, were young church plants. They were being tested by heretical theology and they were being tempted by an immoral Cretian culture.

Paul eventually moved on from Crete but he leaves Titus behind. That's the circumstances here.

And he leaves him behind with a particular task. Here's Titus' task.

He was to set things in order, verse 5, he's to set things in order so that the gospel of Jesus would be proclaimed, the apostles' doctrine would be preserved, saved, and fruitful Christians would reflect the kingdom of God to which they belonged.

And the letter is a follow-up to Titus to challenge him and encourage him in the work that he was left there to do. The circumstances on Crete were no different than our own.

[16 : 56] We too are constantly embattled with heretical theology. Maybe, perhaps even more so today where information moves so fast and you can get on YouTube and find people with millions of views on a YouTube video and you really have no idea where they came from and very quickly you can get sucked into a heretical theology.

We're inundated with that. They seem to be friendly to our cause but when we really dig down they're not full of good works, God-glorifying works, but evil works.

Just like the churches on Crete, we need to be diligent to set up structures that will help us continue to proclaim the gospel, preserve sound doctrine, and produce faithful disciples.

It's the circumstance. Let's quickly overview the contents and then we'll pray. Here's the theme. The theme of Titus is the inseparable link between faith and practice, between belief and behavior.

And this truth is based, according to the ESV Study Bible, this truth is the basis for its critique of false teaching as well as its instruction in Christian living and qualifications for church leaders.

[18 : 13] The structures in Titus aren't the goal. The structures in Titus are the means to accomplish the goal, which is gospel fidelity and good works and good works that glorify the Lord.

And the bottom line in Titus is that belief affects behavior. Doctrine produces devotion. And the primary assertion in Titus is that the Christian gospel is the only foundation for consistent and lasting devotion to God's glory.

Now that doesn't mean that non-believers aren't concerned with behaviors that we would categorize as good works, but it does mean that the inevitable result of genuine faith in Christ is a life that is marked by consistent good works, by sanctification that does not lead us towards worldliness, but leads us away from worldliness.

That's the point of the letter. The Cretans were facing ideologies that in some sense looked like love for God, but ultimately did not produce godly works.

And the responsibility of church leaders is to confront such heresies, proclaim the true gospel that produces godly behavior through the work of the Holy Spirit.

[19 : 34] Let's look at how this is represented in the book itself. Look at verse 1 of chapter 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.

In other words, faith in Christ and knowledge of sound doctrine produces godliness. When you come to Christ, when you immerse yourself in the sound doctrine of the Bible, the inevitable result will be godliness.

We see it from the very first verse. Not only that, we see that evil works demonstrate one's alienation from God. Chapter 1, verse 16.

Look at that with me. They profess to know God, but they deny Him by their works. In other words, our behavior exposes the true nature of our beliefs.

And one of the things that comes through strongly in this letter is that if you claim to know and follow God, but you have no interest in living in obedience to God, you're not interested in the six things that we've covered earlier that are all rooted in the Scriptures.

[20 : 54] You don't really have a lot of interest in doing those things, but you want to say that you belong to God. My friend, you're not a Christian. You're not a Christian. Because faith in Christ and sound doctrine from the Bible will inevitably produce good works through the work of the Spirit.

That's the urgency of Paul's writing. Don't let the heresy seep in because the heresies won't produce godliness which shows that you've lost the gospel. And if you've lost the gospel, then what's the point?

He says, sound doctrine confronts cultural norms. Look at verse 12 and 13 in verse 1 in chapter 1. We read it a while ago. One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons, and this testimony is true.

Now look at chapter 2. We won't read all of the first 10 verses. We'll just pick some parts around. Teach what accords with sound doctrine, verse 1, because older men are to be sober-minded and dignified and so on.

Then the older women, likewise, verse 3, are to be reverent in behavior and so on. They're to train younger women to love their husbands and so on. Self-controlled, pure, working at home. Younger men are to be self-controlled, so on and so forth as it goes.

[22 : 15] There's a stark contrast here that Paul is painting. Here is how the world lives. Here is the fruit of Christ's work in a believer's life. Let me give you some examples.

This isn't very different than our own day. Our culture says that the idea of male headship in the home and wives primarily as homemakers is oppressive, demeaning, and abusive.

The Bible says right here in verses 3 and 4, older women are to so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, working at home, kind, submissive to their own husbands that the word of God may not be reviled.

What's the point here? It doesn't matter what the cultural ideal says. Christianity will always stick out in the crowd. It will always look different.

And we'll get there in a few weeks. Paul's point is not that women can't work outside the home. His point is that according to the scriptures and God's design, their primary role, their primary concern is to care for their homes and to care for their children.

[23 : 34] Well, that flies in the face of cultural ideologies today. And at some point, we're gonna have to come against this truth and we're gonna have to consider, am I gonna go along with what I feel like is best in the cultural ideologies or am I gonna come to the scriptures and I'm gonna be obedient to what the Lord says produces good works through the work of the Holy Spirit in my life?

You say, well, I thought Titus was gonna be an easy book. It might not be that easy for us. How about another one? Have you ever heard of quiet quitting? It's a buzzword today.

Essentially, quiet quitting is an employee of a business who only does the bare minimum necessary to maintain their job. they refuse to actually go above and beyond anything that they've asked to do. We're told this culture says that this type of behavior is encouraged, it's probably good for your mental health and this degradation of any kind of power structures in our culture says that your boss doesn't deserve for your hardest work, so just do whatever you gotta do to get a paycheck and move on.

What does the Bible say? Look at chapter 2 and verse 9. Bondservants, this is really slaves and masters. I think it applies to our work. Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything.

[24 : 54] They're to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering. That means thieves. They're not to steal from their business. They're not to steal time from their business, but showing all good

faith so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.

And here's the point. The issues mentioned in Titus are not merely behavioral qualities. They're characteristics of Christ's kingdom people.

They confront what is acceptable in cultural ideas because they mark the lives of individuals who ultimately do not serve the kingdom of this world. And if you belong to Christ, you are a stranger here.

You are not serving this world. You are serving His kingdom and your life is to reflect that kingdom. And Paul says when the gospel is there and self-doctrine is there and the core values are there, whatever it is, the things that are biblically based, when those things are there, this is the kind of life that it produces and it's going to fly in the face of culture and the culture is going to hate you for it. We also see that good works proceed from salvation. They do not produce salvation. Chapter 3, verse 3.

[26 : 11] For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy and hated by others and hating one another.

But when the goodness and loving kindness of our God and Savior appeared, He saved us not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy.

So, lest you get the wrong idea, these works that Paul is talking about do not produce salvation.

They flow from a person who has actually come and received the grace and mercy of Christ.

The gospel produces humility and patience toward non-believers. That's chapter 3, verses 1 through 3. We see gospel fidelity and good works require discipline and intentionality.

That's chapter 3, 8 and 9, and verse 14. Look at verse 14 of chapter 3. Let our people learn to devote themselves to good works. That means it doesn't, it's not always going to come naturally.

[27 : 09] You've got to care about it. You've got to keep it in front of you. You've got to pursue it in your life. And the focal point of all of this as we read a few moments ago in chapter 2 is that Jesus' purpose in coming was to redeem us from sin and make us eager for good works by making us His own people.

That's the point. Jesus didn't come to make us free to sin. He came to make us free from sin. He's redeeming a people for His own possession.

He's making them His kingdom people and He's shaping them to look like Him in this world. And they'll stand in stark contrast to the world when they're focused on the true gospel and the sound doctrine of the Bible.

That's Titus in a nutshell. But what about the structures? There's three structures that Paul says if this is going to be preserved. Gospel fidelity that leads to good works through the Holy Spirit.

If this is going to be preserved in these churches you need three structures in place. One, faithful and qualified leaders. That's chapter 1. You need a plurality of leaders, elders and deacons that are qualified, that will serve the church and preserve these things to make sure the church is heading in the right direction.

[28 : 29] He also says you need intentional discipling. Did you notice in those ten verses in chapter 2 the older men teaching the younger men, the older women teaching the younger women.

That may not necessarily relate to age in every circumstance. It may just be related to spiritual maturity in some circumstances. But the path forward is intentional discipling with one another.

That's a structure here. And then the third one is swift confrontation of error. We see it in chapter 1, we see it again in chapter 3. Deal with error.

Don't let it fester. Deal with it, Paul says. Let's wrap it up. The process of writing this letter, Paul ends up giving us a portrait of a healthy church.

In Titus, a healthy, God-honoring church includes foundational gospel doctrine, faithful church leaders, functional Christian discipling, felicitous handling of error.

[29 : 33] I needed an F. It means proper, but I needed an F. So, felicitous handling of error and fruitful Christian living. In Titus, this is what a healthy church looks like.

Not a perfect church. No church is perfect. Not until we get to heaven. This is a healthy church. One that glorifies God in this world. It looks like this. You know what this reminds me of?

This reminds me a lot of gospel focus and Bible teaching and gathered worship and discipling culture and kingdom mission and pursuing holiness.

As we study this letter together, I want to ask you to do something with me. Will you resolve with me to maintain gospel fidelity and devote yourselves to good works?

Works that glorify the Lord. Will you join me in ensuring that our church structures itself in such a way to help us proclaim the gospel, preserve sound doctrine, and produce faithful disciples?
[30 : 48] And perhaps we can borrow again from Edwards' preface in this. Being sensible that we are unable to do anything without God's help, we do humbly and treat him by his grace to enable us to keep these resolutions so far as they are agreeable to his will for Christ's sake.
That's what we can look forward to in the coming months as we study Titus. Titus.