

ADORNING THE GOSPEL



Building Healthy Churches that Display God's Power

S t u d i e s i n T i t u s

By
James Harmeling

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Studies in Titus

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All Scripture references unless otherwise indicated are taken from the English Standard Version

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INTRODUCTION: ADORNING THE GOSPEL

My wife is a beautiful woman. I tell her this fact repeatedly for her encouragement as well as for my own pleasure. I love to say it. At the same time, she, like most women, applies cosmetics to her face. She does this not to create beauty. Rather, she puts on makeup to accentuate her beauty. Cosmetics draw attention to existing beauty. This is the idea behind adorning something. The adornments themselves are not the focus of beauty. They serve to highlight what is wonderful and eye catching.

In Titus 2:10, Paul charges Titus to challenge the churches in Crete to live their lives in a manner consistent with their profession of faith. The purpose for doing this is “so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.” The word for “adorn” is the Greek word from which we derive the English word “cosmetics.” It is used this way in 1 Timothy 2:9 to describe female adornment. The beauty of Christianity for the world to notice is neither perfect Christian behavior nor good looking church members. The beauty of Christianity is God Himself. We the church are the cosmetics that highlight His power, goodness, mercy, holiness, and sovereignty. Mature Christians draw the world’s attention to the God who re-creates them and conforms them to the image of His Son. Jesus urged his disciples to let their light of the gospel shine before the world so that in seeing their good works they may give praise to God (Matt 5:16).

How does a church adorn the doctrine of God?

The book of Titus is a concise exhortation concerning how a local church adorns the doctrine of God. It is neatly divided into several sections that focus on a local church impacting the world and drawing attention to the beauty of God. These sections include developing godly leaders, guarding pure doctrine, living properly with other believers in the church, and promoting peace in society. When the world observes churches marked by integrity in leadership, conviction of truth, purity and love in lifestyle, and graciousness and honesty in the workplace, they marvel at who could have shaped them to become like this.

I have attended many art festivals over the years where the artist stood near their canvas work, sculpture, or artistic creation. After gazing or interacting with an impressive work, my opinion of the artist would inevitably rise in respect and awe. I recently heard an incredible choral work where the composer was present. Everyone in attendance marveled at the harmony, diversity, and creativity of this original work of sacred music. They quickly lined up to pose for photos with the composer. The excellence of the music drew attention to the genius of the composer.

Each local church is a masterpiece in the making. It is not a finished work. No church adorns God perfectly because it is comprised of imperfect souls in the process of purging their depravity. Nonetheless, like seeing the progress of a child through the years, a congregation can grow and increasingly reflect Christ and further beautify the gospel message. People turn their attention to the Creator and marvel in worship. Who can truly transform a human life? Who can

turn a group of people thrust together in their sinful but redeemed state and sculpt them into a work of art or arrange them into a harmonic melody of praise? God is able to transform people like this and does it through His Son Jesus' work on the cross and the Holy Spirit's internal power.

Why this church?

While Paul also writes to Timothy and offers him instruction for the church in Ephesus, his letter to Titus concerns churches in Crete. The book of Acts makes no mention of any missionary venture to this Mediterranean island of notorious repute. Thus, it may have occurred after Acts 28 and before the writing of 2 Timothy when Paul realizes his life will soon end. We discover Cretans attending the Feast of Pentecost in Jerusalem (Acts 2:11). It is likely that these people from Crete became believers (Acts 2:37-41) and returned to their island to witness. Paul later traveled to the island with Titus and helped develop these believer's faith and launch multiple churches. He specifically tells Titus to appoint elders in "every town" (Titus 1:5).

Paul makes some negative comments about the reputation of the people of this island since it functioned as a port for merchants from many lands (Titus 1:12-13). Thus, it would be nothing less than a work of God to turn crass, lazy, and dishonest natives into holy, gracious, and loving believers. If God can do a work on Crete and re-create their human lives to dwell together in harmony, He could do anything in any place. They would indeed adorn Him! Let us examine this letter with great interest and anticipation that what God can do in the lives of these people He can accomplish elsewhere across cultures and history for His glory.

The Pastoral Epistles

Paul's last letters are written to two of his key disciples, Timothy and Titus. These three brief epistles are noted as the Pastoral Epistles because they are addressed to these men who carried church leadership responsibility. This does not mean Paul ignores the church. They are the primary object of his concern and he writes to these men to guide and lead them in his absence. Timothy and Titus are neither apostles nor the pastors of these churches. Their role as Paul's fellow workers is like that of many others he encounters along the way. Their authority is delegated to them by one of Christ's apostles. They do not stand as pillars of the church. Thus, their authority is the same as any church leader today. We have Paul's instructions for healthy churches.

Titus and Timothy are colleagues, but their roles differ and the letters addressed to them, though penned down around the same time, stand distinct from each other. All of Paul's letters to them concern the church and proper teaching in the midst of the presence of false teachers. But, Timothy's letters are more personal and emphasize doctrine while the apostle's epistle to Titus focuses on the proper conduct that should result from sound teaching. Timothy is left to deal with a crisis in the church while Titus must set up multiple churches to prevent crisis. Timothy's job is more defensive in nature while Titus' work is offensive in directing how believers interact with an unbelieving world.

WHY IS THE HEALTH OF A CHURCH IMPORTANT?

Titus 1:1-4

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, ² in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began ³ and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior; ⁴ To Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.



Every child that enters the world is a miracle and a joy, but no one is content with merely birth. Everyone wants good health! When our second son entered the world, we did not know that he had contracted meningitis. Our pediatrician checked him out and saw nothing of concern, but he still told us to call him if he ran a temperature. Sure enough, shortly after bringing him home he ran a temperature. Instead of giving him an aspirin, the doctor told us to bring him into the hospital just to be on the safe side. They soon discovered his real condition was meningitis and they immediately placed him on antibiotics.

He was then transferred to a larger hospital with greater staff specialization where they kept his viral infection in check. The infection attacked his optic nerve so that his vision in one eye was permanently damaged. Left unchecked, he could have gone blind. We thank the Lord for his birth. We praise God for his subsequent health. Our son is now an adult with multiple earned degrees. He carries a solid job, plays all kinds of sports and musical instruments, and has traveled widely. His diminished sight in one eye has never impeded progress in his life.

Similar to the birth of a child, churches can begin well but require time to develop in health. Paul begins this epistle with an introduction that should not be quickly dismissed as common greetings and identifications. His words at the outset of this letter set the stage for its entire content. He does more than state his name and identify the recipient. He explains why the focus of his ministry and calling is developing healthy churches. Healthy churches are part of God's mission. They reflect God's character. They reveal God's continual leading.

Healthy churches are part of God's mission (Titus 1:1-2a)

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, ² in hope of eternal life . . .



Paul identifies himself in two ways. First, he is a “servant.” This does not draw up the image of a butler or anything self-centered. It is more of a slave designation. Paul’s agenda is not his own. He follows what his master tells him. More than that, Paul does not exalt himself by his gifts or his calling. First and foremost, he was a slave of sin who became a slave of God (Rom 6:16-22). No one is free from being a slave or servant. They either are in bondage to sin or they are transformed into servants of God. The difference is the master. Sin destroys life while God gives life and freedom. This is who Paul declares himself to be. He serves a living God who has given him eternal life.

This then sets up the next statement. He is a humble servant of God saved from sin and personally sent out by Christ. This is the meaning of “apostle.” Paul’s story of his calling and being sent by Christ is told in Acts 9 and reiterated in Acts 26. He is not merely a servant standing nearby awaiting instructions. He has a specific mission from Jesus Christ.

This mission is spelled out three-fold in the rest of verse 1 with a fourth aspect added at the beginning of verse 2. Paul’s mission as an apostle is “for the sake of the faith of God’s elect,” “and their knowledge of the truth,” and the fact that it “accords with godliness.” While the interpretation of the preposition “for the sake of” (*kata*) is debated, this is the best way to take the idea in its context. Furthermore, the believer builds their “hope” on “eternal life” instead of the present life. Overall, Paul is an apostle for the purpose of four critical areas that define a church. It is comprised of people who are soundly converted, growing in the knowledge of the truth, living godly lives, and focused on the life to come. Let us note each aspect of this mission.

- The mission of sound conversion

Paul is called as an apostle “for the sake of the faith of God’s elect.” He was called by Christ to go out and establish saving faith in people who are noted as “God’s elect.” Paul not only evangelizes people to bring about saving faith, but he must also develop and bolster this saving faith. Both areas are implied and vital. Even if God predestined people before the creation of the world (Eph 1:4), they must still profess belief in Christ (Eph 1:13; Rom 10:9-10).

Many people carry a false hope of salvation because they have heard of Jesus, can quote Jesus, attend churches devoted to Jesus, or even glibly state they believe in Jesus. But, what does that actually mean? The “faith” that Paul speaks is not some humanly engineered emotion of confidence or bland hopeful optimism of improved conditions in life. It is not personally fabricated and detailed. Rather, “the faith” is a body of truth about salvation revealed by God that people either affirm or reject. Jude charges us to “contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3). We are to embrace specific truths and defend them from perversion.

A true church is composed of people who receive the truth about Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection as taught in the Bible. This gospel message was conveyed by those Jesus personally sent out to declare it. A healthy church is not a group of people who live decent lives under their

own spiritual power devising their own versions of creeds. A healthy church starts with helpless people who recognize their moral bankruptcy before God and ask Him to save their souls through the life of His Son Jesus Christ. This is the faith that the elect must respond to. A person knows they are elect if they respond to it. The non elect have no spiritual life within them, reject the gospel all their lives, and have no desire for God or Christ or God's revelation.

- The mission of growth in knowledge of the truth

Spiritual rebirth enables a person to comprehend God's Word. As new born babes, we are to cry out for further nutrients of Scripture and to grow in it (1 Pet 2:2). Part of the Christian mission is for the elect to grow in the "knowledge of the truth." Jesus not only desired his disciples to baptize new converts, but he also commissioned them to teach these believers to obey his words (Matt 28:19-20).

This does not mean Christians jam their minds with Bible trivia. Rather, it points to a steady diet of instruction concerning the faith of the gospel message they believe. They possess a rudimentary knowledge that requires application. Having responded to the gospel message, they continue to learn further about God's holiness, human depravity, Christ's righteousness and saving atonement, and the Holy Spirit's work both to regenerate them and sanctify them.

Healthy churches that adorn the gospel message consist of people who know what they believe and why. They grow in conviction even as they increase in humility concerning their salvation. Many people in churches mistakenly believe that they are mature because they have a lot of Bible information. They may even be familiar with particular terms and theological concepts. At the same time, they evidence pride, selfish ambition, and unloving attitudes based on their knowledge. This is not the intent of biblical instruction. The Pharisees had significant knowledge of the Old Testament Law, but it did not produce fruit consistent with it. Their knowledge became an ugly mask of hypocrisy that repulsed people from God instead of adorning His beauty and drawing the nations to His presence.

- The mission of developing godly living

Paul concludes the first verse with the same connecting word used before (*kata*). This again points to purpose. The purpose of filling new convert's minds with biblical truth is to transform their lives towards "godliness." John Stott succinctly states, "Any doctrine which does not promote godliness is manifestly bogus."¹ Donald Hiebert adds, "But real truth never deviates from the path of piety. A profession of the truth which allows an individual to live in ungodliness is a spurious profession."² God does not look beautiful when people make spurious professions of faith and their ungodly lifestyles make His truth appear bogus.

¹ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus* (TBST; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1996), p. 169.

² D. Edmond Hiebert, *Titus and Philemon* (Chicago: Moody, 1957), p. 21.

Healthy churches that honor God establish a pattern of transformed lives. This comes about through knowledge of God's truth. It is a great perversion and public lie to claim such transformation and recite God's truth while continuing with sinful habits that are no different than the sinful and dying world. Paul tells the Philippians they are to shine out like stars in a darkened world (Phil 2:15). The beauty of sparkling diamonds increases when they lie on contrasting dark velvet cloth. Likewise, Christian belief is attractive in the life it produces in a world ruled by the sinful flesh.

- The mission of living for another world

While the previous three points in verse 1 go together as a sign of spiritual health, the sentence does not end. Verse 2 offers a fourth characteristic of healthy adorning churches. The believers do not merely live for this world. They are not in that sense "worldly." They view the present life as unworthy of devotion. They willingly sacrifice themselves in this life because the life to come, the "hope of eternal life" depends on deeds in this life. This produces a hopeful spirit and not one of judgmentalism or despondency. God is not adorned by critical spirits or joyless outlooks. That is not hope.

It is unfortunately rare to find believers in churches today who think about eternity. Many live as if there were no real state of eternal glory or that the gains of this world are to be preferred over what is to come. Jesus bids us to literally die (Luke 9:23). This is the idea of carrying our cross and following him. Paul indicates that he died every day (1 Cor 15:31). In that sense, he died to his own selfish desires (Gal 2:20; 1 Pet 2:24). Paul did not consider present problems and sufferings to be grieved over as if God would deny him a fulfilled life (Rom 8:18). He lived for another life and this perspective filled him with hope. Only God can give someone such hope.

Eternal life is not a caboose to a train tugged along with the rest of the cars and driven by a different engine. It is the engine that pulls all of life with it. We embrace the faith concerning Christ so that our eternal existence will not be under the wrath of God on our sin. We grow in knowledge to increase our conviction and bolster our joy of eternity. We live godly lives because our deeds in the body will yield a reward in eternity. Everything is driven by this perspective of hope.

Hebrews 11 marks people of faith who sacrificed much because they looked forward to something far better. That fascinates people who can only see a sinful world and grow weary of it. Many terminate their lives or grow cynical because this world is all they have. Followers of Christ in a healthy church live beyond this life. Their hopeful outlook adorns the gospel of God who transforms their minds to be ready for it.

Healthy churches reflect the glory of God's character (Titus 1:2b-3)

² . . . which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began ³ and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior;



Paul moves from God's mission to God's character. All this emerges from the hope of eternal life that He gives. Paul makes it clear that our hope is built on the character of God. He "never lies." This stands in contrast to the Cretan culture that is based on deception. They even became a byword in the popular phrase, "Cretans are always liars" (v. 12). Paul does not deny this reputation. He comments, "This testimony is true" (v. 13). Therefore, healthy churches are part of God's mission and they spring forth in hope based on the steadfastness of God's spoken promise of eternal life.

In verses 2-3, Paul highlights three divine attributes that shine forth in the church. These include His sovereignty, providence, and wisdom.

- His sovereignty: He designed His plan of salvation from eternity

God did not come up with the idea of giving eternal life through His Son Christ after Adam and Eve sinned. His election of believers and the means by which they would be redeemed was promised "before the ages began." Before God created the world, He established a salvation plan. While this creates some conflict within the minds of people who wonder if God willed sin into existence before it happened, there is no doubt that God did not merely react to human activity. He laid out a plan of salvation before time started and then worked it out in time and space.

The idea of a divine eternal plan for salvation is not a vague inference from this passage alone. In Ephesians 1:4, we read, ". . . even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him." Paul echoes this thought in 2 Timothy 1:9, ". . . who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began." This idea is also present in 1 Corinthians 2:7 where God's hidden wisdom was "decreed before the ages for our glory."

Healthy churches are neither an accident nor an automatic result of some inherent goodness within the church members. They come into being and grow in quality because this is part of God's promise and eternal plan. Eternal life comes through faith in Christ and leads to godliness. New people live out a new life that prepares them for a new existence in a new world. This is what draws attention and adorns the doctrine of God. God becomes recognized as the One who brings about what is impossible otherwise. He does it because He decreed it so and never takes back His word or fails to fulfill it.

- His providence: He guides history to fulfill His plan

Paul declares that the promised salvation was manifested "at the proper time." William Barclay comments, "It was no accident that Christianity came when it did. It came in God's own time; all history had been a preparation for it; and the circumstances were such that the way was open for

the good news to spread.”³ The apostle repeatedly notes this deliberate plotting of world events culminating in the arrival of Christ (Rom 5:6; Gal 4:4; Eph 1:10). Nothing in life is by accident. No one lives their lives apart from God’s sovereign direction (Acts 17:26). He guides history to accomplish His will.

Barclay marks five different historical developments that set the stage for Christianity to grow rapidly at a certain point in world history.⁴ First, there was the unifying language of Greek. More people spoke a common tongue at that time in history than any previous period since the tower of Babel. Furthermore, the Roman Empire’s unity made travel far more convenient with limited restrictions. There were no boundaries within the massive territory itself or need for visas and passports. Along with this, travel became easier and safer with the construction of roads utilized and patrolled by military units. Likewise, the seas became safer from roaming pirates due to patrolling Roman naval forces.

A fourth reason for the growth of Christianity at this time was the Pax Romana. This political stability under Caesar Augustus settled the Roman world from its recent spate of internal civil wars and conflicts. Augustus unified the empire by securing its boundaries and staying content with what had been conquered. The world was at peace because Rome did not attempt to conquer more lands and warring tribal groups were kept at bay.

The fifth reason for the prolific growth of Christianity in the first century was a general philosophical openness to worldview change. Roman religion became increasingly dissatisfactory and Gentiles, especially Roman military, were open to new ideas. Even though most of the Jewish population resisted embracing Christ as their Messiah, God still brought about a significant quantity of conversions from Israel. The Jewish predominance of the early church was soon overwhelmed by Gentile conversions as they grew disillusioned with their immoral and competing deities and became attracted to the solitary God of Israel and His holiness and mercy.

God did not choreograph history to keep His promise of the gospel so that there would be weak, pathetic, fickle, and immature groups of disciples of His Son. All history built to a point in time when progress in gospel proclamation and church planting were most effective. What God starts He finishes because His character demands this. A church is not finished until it adorns God’s gospel plan by being regenerated and purified by the Holy Spirit and mobilized into a missionary unit.

- His wisdom: He chooses human proclamation as His means of transforming lives

Finally, God’s confounding means of transforming humanity is through the act of proclamation. He chose to capture people’s attention “through the preaching.” This idea of preaching truth has

³ William Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), p. 260.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 259-260.

fallen from popularity as both preaching becomes abused and people rebel against the inherent authority exuded through heralds who publicly declare the controversial and confronting gospel message. Paul elsewhere states that God was pleased to bring about conversion through the “folly of what we preach” (1 Cor 1:21).

Both the act of preaching and the content of the message is not geared to be publicly popular or welcome. Yet it is the most effective means of convincing people of the truth. One person’s conviction of biblical truth is powerfully conveyed to others in direct appeal and explanation using the Scriptures. Nothing else compares to it. This neither indicates dry or distant lecturing nor justifies angry tirades void of biblical support. Rather, faithful heralding of biblical truth brings people under conviction and alters their lives.

Every church that has genuine converts to Christ who are growing in knowledge of the truth, living in godliness, and displaying hope of eternal life reveal a majestic God who accomplishes such transformation by His sovereignty, providence, and wisdom. We adorn Him as we reveal these divine traits at work in our lives. Even people dwelling in a land of low reputation with no trustworthiness can reflect God accurately as their lives become beautiful and draw attention to the Creator who makes us new.

Healthy churches reveal God’s continual leading (Titus 1:4)

⁴To Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.



Healthy churches have sustained growth. They do not spring up and quickly pass away. God does not create new things and fail to sustain them. Jesus said that nothing would prevail over the church (Matt 16:18). It cannot be stopped or stamped out of existence. The sustaining strength of each local church is its leadership. This is why Paul makes it the first item for attention in this letter. Churches adorn the doctrine of God by developing ongoing leadership. As the leaders live so also the rest of the congregation lives. Titus is to not only evaluate who will qualify as potential leaders in these young congregations. Paul challenges him to become the model of what solid leadership looks like (Titus 2:7). Titus is the recipient of this letter and it is important to discover who he is and the kind of ministry he performed.

While Timothy’s name appears throughout the book of Acts, Titus is never mentioned. Some have posited that Luke, the writer of Acts, is actually his brother. This may identify the mysterious “famous” brother who accompanies Titus to Corinth (2 Cor 8:16-19). If that is the case, he excludes mentioning his brother’s name in Acts in similar fashion as John hides his own identity in his gospel account. It is uncertain if indeed Luke is Titus’ brother, but it is possible since both Titus and Luke are Gentiles and brothers are regularly featured throughout the gospels and history of Israel.

Titus’ name comes up repeatedly in other Pauline epistles and we can construct some idea of his importance from these passages. It appears that Titus is consistently utilized as a mediator to

resolve conflicts in the church. These conflicts include legalistic law requirements for conversion, confrontation of sin, collection of relief fund, strengthening young churches in a difficult location, and possibly embarking on a mission to a new field. Through it all, Titus displays compassion, wisdom, calmness, and courage. Church historian Eusebius notes that he ultimately became bishop of the Cretan churches. If so, he successfully completed his work assignment outlined in this letter. Let us summarize his remarkable leadership accomplishments.

Leadership Challenges in the Life of Titus

- Church leadership challenge 1: Clarify and defend the gospel

In Galatians 2:1-5, we read,

¹ Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. ² 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. ³ But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. ⁴ Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery— ⁵ to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.

In this passage, Paul faces the challenge of defining the gospel. If the Law's requirements are fulfilled in Christ, the believer no longer needs to be circumcised. While Jews are automatically circumcised, Gentiles are not. This is why Paul brings Titus to Jerusalem. He is an exhibition of the grace of God. His conversion is sound and Paul puts him on display to validate his ministry to Gentiles. He refuses to circumcise Titus and his authority as an apostle receiving divine revelation is validated by other recognized apostles (vs. 6-10).

Titus does not enter into the debate. He stands as evidence of the true gospel message as others argue around him. He is saved without any legalistic requirement of the Law beyond simple faith in Christ. John Stott captures the drama of this moment in commenting,

It was a tense and crucial situation, an occasion fought with great peril and equally great possibility for the subsequent history of the Christian church. What would be the reaction of the apostles in Jerusalem to Paul's Gentile companion and Gentile mission? Would they receive Titus as a brother or repudiate him because he was uncircumcised? Would they endorse Paul's gospel or attempt to modify it in some way? These were the questions in everybody's mind. Behind them was the fundamental question: would the liberty with which Christ has made us free be maintained, or would the church be condemned to bondage and sterility?⁵

⁵ John R. W. Stott, *Only One Way: The Message of Galatians* (TBST; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1968), p. 41.

Titus does not mediate this dispute, but he factors heavily in a critical moment in the life of the church. He is evidence of the Spirit of God transforming non Jewish people. He validates Paul's apostolic ministry. But, he does this in the middle of conflict and opposition. His presence sets the stage for later work in difficult situations.

- Church leadership challenge 2: Confront sin

Paul's conflict with the Jews over the freedom from legal requirements for salvation sets him up for the other end of this dispute. The Corinthians abused their liberty and rebelled against Paul's authority as an apostle. Therefore, he wrote them a strong condemning letter confronting their behaviors. While some confrontation exists in 1 Corinthians (especially 1 Corinthians 5), a separate letter was sent to them that has now been lost to us (1 Cor 2:1-4). Apparently, it was delivered by Titus. In 2 Corinthians 2:12-13, we read:

¹²When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was opened for me in the Lord, ¹³my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia.

Paul had a wide door open for evangelistic ministry, but his spirit was so burdened by the letter he wrote to the Corinthians through Titus that he could not remain there. He had to find Titus. Thus, he sailed out of the port city of Troas and headed to the Macedonian region along the coast of the Aegean Sea. It is there that he locates Titus. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 7:5-7,

⁵For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without and fear within. ⁶But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, ⁷and not only by his coming but also by the comfort with which he was comforted by you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more.

Later, he adds,

¹³Therefore we are comforted. And besides our own comfort, we rejoiced still more at the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all. ¹⁴For 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. ¹⁵And his affection for you is even greater, as he remembers the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling. ¹⁶I rejoice, because I have complete confidence in you.

Titus faced a hostile situation in Corinth. He represented the apostle and had to perform a difficult task of confrontation. He was no stranger to church conflict and handled it well. Paul was anxious to see how they would respond. It went better than he could have imagined. They not only loved and responded to Paul, but they also loved Titus.

- Church leadership challenge 3: Collect money

Titus is not done with Corinth. His successful work there and his relationship with the

congregation placed him in an advantageous role. Paul had a new challenge for this church. He wanted them to become generous with giving. The congregation had wealth. The question raised is faith and generosity. Would they contribute significantly to a relief fund to assist other believers struggling in a crisis? This is part of the content of 2 Corinthians.

In 2 Corinthians 8:6-7, we see that Titus had already brought the subject up to the Corinthians. He now needed to follow up and see if they would do something about it. Paul writes,

⁶Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. ⁷But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also.

Titus was not an indifferent messenger. He had been shaped by Paul to cultivate a shepherd's heart for a difficult church. This comes out in 2 Corinthians 8:16-24. Paul writes,

¹⁶But thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same earnest care I have for you. ¹⁷For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest he is going to you of his own accord.

Paul sends Titus to renew the challenge to this church in their giving and read this letter to them. He acknowledges that Titus is his “partner and fellow worker” for their benefit in the gospel (v. 23). He manifests the same spirit as Paul (2 Cor 12:18).

It is one thing to confront a church on sin and rebellion. It is another to turn around and follow that up with an appeal for money. Titus does this and he does it well.

- Church leadership challenge 4: Strengthen young churches in difficult location

This brings us to the present letter. After Paul and Titus visited Crete, the apostle has no qualms about leaving Titus alone with a difficult task of organizing and guiding young churches in a place that has been hostile to God and His righteousness. Who else has such a record of courageous, calm, and compassionate leadership handling high emotions and delicate issues? Since Titus is to set himself up as a model to follow, it is clear that he evidences maturity and leadership most like that of Paul himself. Timothy was younger in age and less confident in ability, but Titus bears the marks of the type of leadership needed in local churches to guide them to maturity.

It is possible that a final challenge was given to Titus. Paul desires that he leave Crete in time and join him in Nicopolis (Titus 3:12). At the end of his life, Paul mentions that he has gone to Dalmatia (2 Tim 4:10). That is all we know. It is probable that he was to visit churches there and handle needs or intervene in some situation.

Paul was a tremendous leader for the formation of gospel churches, but his impact lies in developing other leaders around him. Titus was such a leader. His contribution to the strength of the church often goes unnoticed. He is but one example. Paul disciplined and mentored such leaders as Silas, Apollos, Tychicus, Epaphroditus, Timothy, Aquilla & Priscilla, Luke, John Mark, and many others. Such leadership production indicates the ongoing work of God's Spirit and adorns the doctrine of God so that it cannot be criticized as limited to one generation or type of personality.

The apostle begins this letter to Titus with vital statements that set the stage for the rest of the book. The Cretan churches, like all other churches, can grow into beautiful adornments drawing attention to the power, wisdom, grace, and majesty of God. Who else could design and create such human artwork as the Lord Most High? If God can do that in Crete, can He not also do this anywhere else today?

HEALTHY CHURCHES DEVELOP GODLY LEADERS

Titus 1:5-9

⁵ This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—⁶ 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.⁷ 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,⁸ but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.⁹ 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.



My oldest son was born with crooked feet. They pointed directly inward at each other. Fortunately, his young age enabled his bones to have great pliability. Thus, my father, a surgeon by trade, wrapped up his legs in twin casts facing directly outward to reshape or “put . . . into order” his feet. Within a short period of time, the casts came off and my son’s feet were normal. He eventually learned to walk and run and play ball like any other child.

The idea of setting something straight or putting it in order, like misshapen feet, is one of the reasons local churches require good leadership. Paul tells Titus that he deliberately left him behind in Crete with a group of young churches so that he “might put what remained into order.” The key root verb is where we derive our medical terms “orthopedic” and “orthodontics.” These refer to setting bones and teeth straight. These doctors do not add bones or teeth. They simply help take existing bones and teeth and straighten them up to function properly. This is how the word is used in Acts 14:10 where Paul heals a crippled man and tells him to stand “upright” on his feet. In another sense, it refers to proper and straight paths to walk in life (Heb 12:13).

The young churches on the island of Crete were not yet straight. It is not that they were in a state of crisis requiring reformation. Timothy dealt with more urgent issues in Ephesus. Titus had also handled greater problems in Corinth. The situation he faces now is more crisis prevention than crisis intervention. False teachers loom nearby like viruses that could attack infant believers in their early stage of growth.

Titus must set up churches to function straight and right so that they can operate in good health without dependency on any individual’s presence. Titus 1:5-9 begins a series of injunctions from the apostle to Titus that instruct him how to strengthen these young churches. He begins by setting up local leadership. Healthy churches develop godly leaders. These men strengthen a church through their sound teaching and they set a standard for godly living.

Godly leaders strengthen a church (Titus 1:5)

⁵ This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—



In the absence of solid leaders in these Cretan churches, Titus must set up a structure that enables the church to withstand inevitable spiritual opposition. A church is a flock of sheep vulnerable to attack. For this reason, Paul and Peter call upon leaders to watch over people's lives and guard them in Christ's stead (Acts 20:28-31; 1 Pet 5:1-4). William Mounce points out, "Titus does not have to remove bad elders; he must appoint good ones who can take care of potential and actual problems."⁶

Leaders must not only set a straight course to follow, but they must also remain alert to make course corrections. A friend of mine is a seasoned commercial airline pilot. He admits that modern aircraft are so sophisticated that they can fly themselves with little human intervention. Nonetheless, pilots must be present to make course corrections due to inclement weather and to react to any emergency. For my sake, I feel safer when an actual experienced pilot steers and lands the plane!

Churches are not airplanes. They are not auto-piloted. The Holy Spirit works in prepared people and gifts them with leadership abilities. These maturing believers strengthen a church by both setting its course and by adjusting to external circumstances or situations that threaten it.

Note that official leaders in local churches are to be men and there is a team of them in operation. Paul's direction is that "elders" are to be set up in "every town." Each local church has multiple elders guiding spiritual progress. These men are also called an "overseer" (v. 7). The two words are synonyms, but they signify a qualification and position description. The word for "elder" is *presbuteros*. It refers to an elderly person. The idea behind this word is that wisdom typically accompanies age. Therefore, it is unwise to set up leadership with solely young people who have experienced little in life's responsibilities and stresses. They tend to make more mistakes and the local church can ill afford to be subject to their spiritual immaturity.

The other word accompanying elder is "overseer" (*episkopos*). It is a compound word that describes looking over something in focused manner. Thus, ideal church leaders oversee the flock of God with a wise perspective on life and a close walk with God.

The current Protestant terms Presbyterian and Episcopalian derive from these two words, but these primarily refer to denominations and styles of church polity. Presbyterian churches contain a plurality of elders and regional synods while Episcopal churches are led by singular bishops. Paul does not go beyond these terms to instruct congregations. It is easy for local churches to lose the simplicity of leadership structure or abuse positions of authority. Often, churches become more complicated in their leadership structure because there is lessened trust in

⁶ William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (WBC 46; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), pp. 392-393.

individual leaders. Titus must establish worthy leaders in these churches so that they will be strong and postured to grow.

Godly leaders set a standard for transformed living (Titus 1:6-9)

⁶ 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.⁷ 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,⁸ but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.⁹ 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.



Titus 1:6-9 presents various qualifications for the kind of man who should be granted local church authority. Paul expresses these qualifications in both positive and negative terms. Overall, he categorizes them in three areas: at home; in public; in teaching. Churches will only be transformed into the image of Christ when led by people who are likewise spiritually transformed and knowledgeable of divine revelation. Hiebert rightly points out, "It is to be noted that nothing directly is said about the work of the elders. The emphasis is rather upon the character of the men placed in charge of the work."⁷ The list of qualifications matches that of 1 Timothy 3:1-7, but it is not identical. They both complement and reinforce each other.

- A standard for living at home (v. 6)

The home life of the leader headlines this list as it does with the qualifications found in 1 Timothy 3. The overall idea is that leaders are not open to accusation of unholy lifestyles contradicting the gospel. Christians adorn the doctrine of God by their transformation of life and not mere recitation of creed. Thus, leaders set the tone for everyone by being "above reproach." This does not mean they never sin or make mistakes. It simply refers to the ongoing habits and mindset. Are they consistently like Christ? The most obvious location for the unveiling of character is in the household where the heart is most exposed.

The initial statement makes it clear that overseers are male. This is the consistent message of Scripture and accords with the overt statements made in 1 Timothy 2:12-14. This does not mean women have little to contribute. It simply indicates that God made roles in the marriage relationship of male headship and these roles carry over into the church.

The godly leader has a solid marriage and proven parental authority. This is initially stated in the leader being a "husband of one wife." This has little to do with singleness or divorce (supposing any divorced church leader has biblical grounds for such, Matt 19). Rather, this single word literally means they are a "one woman man." They have eyes and devotion to one woman only: their wives. They are not open to accusation of sexual harassment, flirtation, coarse jesting, pornography and lustful habits, or adultery. Shepherds hang around the sheep, but sheep will not grow if they feel insecure around a shepherd who is a sexual predator.

⁷ Hiebert, *Titus and Philemon*, p. 37.

In addition to this, the church overseer must have children who are “believers.” The wording indicates either offspring who embrace the Christian faith or those who act in accordance with it. Thus, they act “faithfully.” The difference is significant. If overseers must have children who make a profession of faith, at what age must that happen? Are they disqualified because their child has not professed faith in Christ at the age of 6? Suppose the child makes an early profession of faith that he or she later abandons. The overseer having done nothing to deter a child from faith and was previously qualified for leadership based on a faulty and fleshly profession of faith must now decide whether to resign from their position.

It is preferable to understand this to mean a church leader must have children who act in accordance with the faith or who act faithfully. This is supported by three factors. First, the subsequent statements pose the opposite of being faithful. They do not speak of being unregenerate. Rather, they describe a youth who “is open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.” This means they are wild and out of control with no regard to authority of any kind. Such a child brings suspicion on the parent for faulty oversight. This opposite statement makes more sense of the sentence and the qualification for elders having children who behave well and submit to authority.

Furthermore, the matching passage in 1 Timothy mentions nothing about requiring saving faith. Instead, it words it more in line with the alternate idea. The children must be “submissive” (1 Tim 3:4). Elsewhere, the idea of debauchery is used to describe the prodigal son (Luke 15:13).

Finally, the word is used elsewhere in Titus to mean “trustworthy” (Titus 1:9; 3:8) and in 1 Timothy to mean “trustworthy” (1 Tim 1:15; 3:1) and “faithful” (1 Tim 3:11). Those renderings of the same Greek word clearly do not indicate saving faith. They speak of controlled behavior. The overseer must be able to demonstrate the ability to control people from destructive and rebellious living. If they cannot do this with children under their own roof on a consistent basis, they will not be able to do this with a congregation of adults.

- A standard for living in public (vs. 7-8)

The second category involves interactions with others not necessarily family members. Paul presents five negative social traits followed by six positive traits. The idea of being above reproach is mentioned again, but the apostle adds the statement, “as God’s steward.” This means the church does not belong to the overseer. It belongs to God who purchased souls with the blood of His Son Jesus Christ. An overseer cannot resort to the sinful flesh to reap spiritual results.

First, the church leader must not be “arrogant.” The idea is pleasing self. The congregation does not exist to build the pride and honor of the leader. Rather, as God’s steward of His Son’s church, the leader guides a congregation for His glory. This means that he will make decisions that may not be popular with everyone. But, the leader is not using the church for personal prestige or power. If a man vies for power with others in the church for vain purposes he should not be given opportunity to swell in pride in a position of leadership.

Furthermore, the leader is not “quick tempered.” This points to swift arousal of internal anger that lingers. William Barclay observes, “A blaze of anger is an unhappy thing, but this long-

lived, purposely maintained anger is still worse. Those who nourish their anger against another person are not fit to be office-bearers of the Church.”⁸ A church leader must not be the kind of man who quickly takes offense and holds grudges. Those with embittered spirits are slow to display the grace manifest by God.

The third prohibition for leadership is being a “drunkard.” Leaders must exhibit control over their emotions and over appetites. The man who drinks to the point of inebriation will make foolish decisions or costly mistakes that do not evidence the control of the Holy Spirit. In a drunken state, he may threaten a congregation instead of bringing security.

Along these lines, the overseer must not be “violent.” This means a striker or hitter. The church leader must not only avoid holding angry grudges, but he must control his emotions and not get into fist fights or display violent treatment of others, especially in the church. How is God adorned by someone who does this? He is not glorified.

The overseer must also avoid becoming “greedy for gain.” He does not lead to gain finances or to become rich in life. The opposite may be the case. He may have to sacrifice wealth in order to gain eternal rewards by faithfully shepherding the flock of God. If a man is self-centered, without self-control, and destructive in relationships, there can be no spiritual growth for those around him. Thus, this kind of person should not be placed in position of authority regardless of giftedness and personality.

Instead of acting in a destructive manner, a true spiritual shepherd displays traits marked by spiritual renewal and care for others. First of all, this includes being “hospitable.” The word literally means “lover of strangers.” They care about people, including those they do not know, and invite them to their home in order to serve and care for their needs.

Strong godly leaders are also those noted to be “a lover of good.” They are affirmed in doing what God declares to be righteous. They can identify the right act of integrity in a situation and are determined to both do it and promote it. This leads to being “self-controlled.” This refers to a sound mind or being sensible in action. A leader creates security for those around them by not being impulsive or emotion driven.

The final three characteristics of a godly leader in public life are “upright, holy, and disciplined.” The upright person is someone who is fair and honest. The holy man reveals pure motives and actions. The disciplined man controls passions that could rule over his life. Instead of being out of control with anger, lust, or substance abuse, they control their temper, tongue, and activities so as not to make God look bad.

These traits reveal these men to be the kind that people can trust to lead them honestly, truthfully, and with purity. They are disciplined enough in their personal lives so that they do not lose control over their feelings, families, faculties, and funds. With such high trust, these men can lead with certainty and people can follow them confident in doing God’s will.

⁸ Barclay, *Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, p. 266.

These quality men draw attention to the God they represent and adorn Him as powerful and wonderful. He transforms selfish, violent, and out of control men and turns them into a mature and productive unit who seek the benefit of others instead of themselves.

- A standard for truth and doctrine (v. 9)

One final characteristic of a qualified leader is their accurate understanding and handling of Scripture. They are not merely qualified for their education and familiarity with various views of interpretations of the Bible. Rather, they “hold firm” to a set body of doctrine that the apostle Paul taught them. The reason for their needing to be grounded in biblical truth is because they will need to articulate and defend it. This requires strength of understanding and boldness in proclamation.

There are two aspects to a teaching ministry, whether preaching on stage in a corporate setting or sitting privately with few numbers. The overseer must be able to “give instruction in sound doctrine.” This involves guiding or encouraging believers to believe properly in the Word of God.

Instruction also involves confrontation. Good leaders confront those who pose a threat to the well being of the flock of God by introducing false doctrines or contradicting truth. They are to “rebuke” them. This means they are to boldly state and explain their error and refuse to allow it to be taught in the church. Paul discloses the nature of some of these false doctrines in the ensuing verses, but he makes it clear at this juncture that leaders are to be alert to promote and reinforce truth. Apart from this, there can be no strength or growth in spiritual maturity.

Many churches today are skewed and crooked because church leaders too often allow any kind of teaching permeate their congregation. They are either not soundly taught in what the Bible teaches or they are unaware of what false doctrines may have invaded the flock.

The following 6 areas of essential doctrines are typically attacked the most. These include beliefs about God, Jesus, Holy Spirit, Bible, sin, and salvation. Various perversions of sound teaching on these six categories constantly seep into church curriculum, sermons, home groups, and individual counselors. Faithful church leaders remain alert to what the flock eats and who feeds them.

6 Biblical Subjects to be Taught and Defended

1. God
2. Jesus
3. Holy Spirit
4. Bible
5. Sin
6. Salvation

Leaders prominently guide people by God's revelation and not by the latest wisdom of man or human desire. God has designed the church to grow by confronting cultural wisdom and resisting human fleshly desires. This does not mean the church does not require structure and planning. Rather, it raises its values and priorities on God's truth and not on worldly institutions. It does not strive to compete with a fickle market. It stands unique by its operation of its beliefs and goals. Faithful leaders direct and shepherd Christ's flock along his truth. Their maturing draws attention to God's power and grace. They become His adornment for His glory.

HEALTHY CHURCHES CONFRONT FALSE DOCTRINE

Titus 1:10-16

¹⁰ For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. ¹¹ They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. ¹² One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." ¹³ This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, ¹⁴ not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth. ¹⁵ To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. ¹⁶ They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.



One of the great scandals in merchandise history transpired in the 1980's in Chicago, Illinois, United States. In a brief span of time, seven people died from cyanide poison after taking Tylenol pain relief products. Someone deliberately destroyed lives by purchasing the medicine, lacing it with lethal cyanide, and secretly returning it to the store shelves. This act ultimately forced companies to wrap their products in tamper proof packaging. Tragically, many people thought they were ingesting relief medicine when in fact they were being poisoned.

While this tragedy prompted a response to halt further attacks on people's physical health, a more serious matter occurs in the matter of spiritual intake. Throughout the world, people consume poisonous teachings declared to be from God that ultimately damns their souls. Many of the worst culprits claim to represent Christianity. Some recent statistics estimate that there are over four thousand different religions in the world, many subsumed under major religious labels. The quantity of false Christian cult groups or errant teachings is hard to number especially if there is no official recognition or advertisement of their existence. There is little doubt that false versions of Christianity number in the hundreds if not thousands. Many of these errant teachings and the controlling authorities promoting them are unique to a particular culture, language, and nation. Other lethal teachings mix various religious perspectives with the teachings of Christianity, including occult practices.

This area of concern is not new. Like new viruses replacing old ones, new false teachings consistently arise with charismatic personalities preying upon people who either search earnestly in the Bible for answers to questions or look for paths of growth to follow as young believers. False doctrines or aberrant versions of Christianity may align closely with orthodoxy and thus become difficult to detect. For this reason, the church requires strong church leaders to guide believers in proper truth. A steady diet of solid Bible teaching trains the believer to be discerning to recognize something that is not in line with orthodoxy.

It is not surprising that Paul addresses this threat immediately after directing Titus to appoint solid leaders in each local congregation. This is because false teachers do not stand by idly in the marketplace waiting for shoppers of truth. They aggressively invade people's homes and lives. False doctrine, like gangrene, will grow and take over. Good shepherds will not look the other way and hope bad teaching disappears. One faulty Bible interpretation will replace another until an entire church becomes confused and divided over the gospel and its implications.

When I was a child, I read a youth magazine that typically featured puzzles and brain teasers. One of the puzzles was a series of pictures that at first looked normal, but soon revealed subjects that were not right. The reader had to identify what was wrong in that picture. Sometimes, the errors were easy to spot. For example, a duck might fly upside down in the picture or a man would fish with the wrong end of his fishing pole. At other times, the error was harder to notice.

Healthy churches recognize false teaching. They are careful to note the beliefs of public teachers like watchful mothers reading ingredient labels on food products for their children. This is what good elders do for the church. They train the flock of Christ to discern healthy spiritual food based on God's revelation.

How do we go about recognizing potential doctrinal threats while not becoming overly suspicious or needlessly divisive? Titus 1:10-16 does not cover all false doctrines and their advocates, but it does present some guidance to ensure maturity and healthy discernment. Paul encourages Titus to reveal the sinful character traits of false teachers; to carefully protect the church from false teachers; to train believers to recognize false doctrine.

How Do We Confront False Teachers?

Reveal sinful character traits of false teachers (v. 10)

¹⁰ For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party.



The introductory word “for” connects this section with the previous one. The reason Titus is to appoint elders in every city who would rebuke those who disagree with sound doctrine is because there are “many” who pose threats to the church in this very area. Before describing the contents of their doctrine, the apostle points out the sinful tendencies of these teachers. They contrast the previously noted elders. This is one of the first ways to identify them. They are described as being insubordinate, empty talkers, and deceptive.

Paul first declares these teachers to be “insubordinate.” That is, they are unwilling to submit to anyone’s rule over them. The word is used in 1 Timothy 1:9 to describe someone who will not submit to God’s Law. Such an attitude reveals pride. They believe they are superior to others because they have a teaching that no one else conceived. Or, they believe they carry power over people because of their teaching. Either way, they refuse to back down to anyone’s correction because such confrontation threatens their very motivation for teaching. False teachers do not have humility. They are not teachable because they are insubordinate. If they are not allowed to speak in one church, they either fight to remove leaders preventing them from teaching or they move on to other churches where no one will question them.

Furthermore, Paul states false teachers to be “empty talkers.” The compound word indicates futile words or words that amount to nothing significant. For example, Paul speaks of our faith being “futile” if Christ did not rise from the dead (1 Cor 15:17). It would be a waste of earthly life depriving ourselves of worldly pleasures in hope for eternal life if Jesus remained in the grave. Conversely, the truth of Christ’s resurrection makes all worldly pursuits “futile” (1 Pet 1:18). False religion only offers “vain things” that do not stave off the wrath of a holy God (Acts 14:15). All the sacrifices, religious rituals, and activities affiliated with false religion do not guarantee anyone a right standing with God. Thus, false teachers make promises that amount to nothing. The doctrines they claim came to them by divine visions or impression make no difference in salvation or in spiritual maturity. Their promise of eternal glory is empty talk.

Finally, these false teachers are “deceivers.” This word carries within it the word for “mind.” Thus, false teachers deceive a person’s mind or are deceived themselves in their own minds. False teachers usually speak so frequently and intensively to convince people to agree with them that they actually believe what they say to be true. Whether or not they originally believed all their words and doctrines, they come to cling to them over time. The most dangerous false teachers are not the hucksters that wink while deceiving people fully aware of the falsity of their words. Rather, the most destructive tools of Satan are those who earnestly believe what they say and are willing to die for it. Their passion for their philosophy is part of what draws people to believe they speak the truth.

Paul adds, “especially those of the circumcision party.” This reveals that the most prominent threat to these Cretan churches are those with Jewish backgrounds. These false teachers have been schooled in the Old Testament Law well enough to point out numerous Bible verses to the unlearned and twist them into mandates for New Testament believers. This false control of Scripture enables them to have power over others and to ultimately coerce them into error.

This was a problem in the early church where the circumcision group mandated that Gentile believers receive physical circumcision to be approved by God (Acts 15; Gal 2). Whether this idea still remains in Crete when Titus arrives is unknown. The context appears to present different issues being debated. Nonetheless, the sinful character of these proponents of additional works for salvation throws their teaching into question.

Some solid Bible teachers may be orthodox in presenting biblical truth and yet they contradict their message and misrepresent the truth by their lifestyles. This does not negate the content of their message. At the same time, those that present heretical and poisonous ideas about God, Jesus, Holy Spirit, Scripture, sin, and salvation have little basis for ethics. History reveals that false prophets more often than not use the crowds they draw for selfish purposes. They refuse to listen to anyone or be held accountable to anyone. Their teachings do not truly change lives. Their words are thus empty. In this, they deceive people into believing something that is not true.

Healthy churches do not run after the latest trends in Christian circles nor do they pay attention to the latest preacher on YouTube announcing some vision he or she received from God. They do not clamor after those who have no accountability and who demand money from their audience to continue their work while defending a lavish lifestyle or immoral deeds. Churches that adorn the gospel are led by elders who protect the flock from such pied pipers.

Carefully distance the church from false teachers (vs. 11-13)

¹¹ They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. ¹² One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.” ¹³ This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith,



Healthy churches are led by strong godly leaders. These leaders not only reveal character flaws in false teachers, but they also carefully walk a church through false teachings in order to protect people from deception. It is easy to simply call someone a false teacher, but more is required than making accusations. Strong leaders should first bring the damage of false doctrine to a halt.

They should also reveal the sinful habits that are common to unregenerate humanity that are at work in this situation. Then, they expose error by focusing on truth.

- Stop the damage (11, 13a)

There are two commands in this passage. Both have to do with stopping the false teacher from teaching. First, such people must be “silenced.” The word refers to a muzzle placed over an animal’s mouth. The second word is more forceful. Church leaders are to “rebuke them sharply.” This has to do with cutting something off with a knife. This is the hard part of church leadership. If I know someone is attacking my wife or my child, I will become more motivated to intervene with force. It is the same with the shepherds of a local church. They forcibly intervene to bring immediate halt on any promotion of heretical teaching happening in the congregation.

Paul points out that while the situation may not have been as bad as what Timothy faces in Ephesus, Titus still faces the fact that false teachers have been “upsetting whole families.” This can mean a family unit or a family home group. Either way, the mark of false teaching is that they inevitably divide people. To be fair, orthodox doctrine can also create division as it confronts sin. Jesus himself declared that he brought a sword of division into families. But, false doctrine is more devious and cloaked. It may even promise peace so that people will cease to debate its details in doctrine.

This is what the Roman Emperor Constantine attempted to do concerning the debate over the deity of Christ. He downplayed the importance of theological details and elevated unity to be the supreme virtue. While such desires can be noble and proper, they can also cloak heresy and completely alter the nature and practice of Christianity.

Early in my ministry, I was part of a denomination that tolerated all kinds of false teaching on the gospel message as well as on moral issues. Some scholars reinterpreted the gospel so that it emphasized social reform more than individual salvation. This effected its missionary endeavors. The denomination leaders also upheld everyone’s right to interpret the Bible as they saw fit. Therefore, no one was allowed to confront someone from teaching that the Bible advocated homosexuality. I became embroiled in public and private debates over this issue and many others. Ultimately, I led my congregation out of this denomination. I was astonished to see some believers show greater loyalty to denomination affiliation than proper biblical interpretation. Our decision as a congregation was a wakeup call to be alert to false teaching that threatened to lead us astray. In the end, we had to confront it and stop listening to it in our church.

- Reveal the habits of the sinful flesh (12)

Paul then makes an interesting quote from Greek philosopher Epimenides, who lived hundreds of years before Christ. He notes him as a prophet. This does not mean that he was a true prophet of God. Rather, he was upheld as one of the wise ancient ones of Greece hailing from Crete itself. Paul quotes him to validate his conclusion about these false teachers and their propensity to lie to people in order to manipulate them for financial gain. The quote itself insults native Cretans, but it does not reflect the character flaw of every single Cretan. Paul quotes it to back up his warnings about the false teachers who come from Crete.

The point of making this quotation is to reveal that this sinful reputation is true and will continue to be true unless altered by God's regenerating Spirit. Just because a man in a local church can quote the Bible and be aware of the Old Testament and claim to know God intimately does not mean he can be trusted. His natural propensity will be to deceive people and manipulate them. In fact, one of the verbs in the Greek language uses the name of Crete. *Kretizein* means to lie to someone. That is not merely limited to someone from Crete, but it does indicate that this trait was thriving in the marketplace of this port city. Merchants were constantly lying to people in order to take advantage of them for more funds.

Strong teaching elders will instruct their congregation in the truth about human depravity. They should not quickly trust sinful people who are not changed by the gospel. Dramatic testimonies of conversion or tales of glorious visions from God do not guarantee anything of spiritual vitality. What matters is the truth and the life transformed by it. People must be instructed in the knowledge of the truth so that they may grow in discernment to approve that which is excellent (Phil 1:9-10). They should not be gullible and open to sinful humans espousing false doctrine in a local church.

- Redirect people to the truth (13b)

Elders should ultimately direct people towards the truth. Paul desires that false teachers or those who begin to echo them will stop spilling their error and become "sound in the faith." Paul actually desires to reform the false teachers. There is hope that a person may stop and reconsider that what they understood to be biblical truth may not be the case. Costi Hinn listened to his uncle, televangelist Benny Hinn, for years as he traveled with him in lavish lifestyle. He repeated select Bible passages and wove them together into a doctrine that taught by receiving Christ we can regain our original state of being filled with God's divine nature. This would make us little gods on earth with the power to speak forth words of healing and prosperity. Thus, the Word of Faith false gospel message has made headways into every land across the globe.

Costi Hinn ultimately grew troubled by this teaching and what he observed it did to people. Ultimately, his own pursuit of the truth led him to depart from his uncle and this false teaching. In his published account of his transformation, he alerts the church to the inroads of this poison and other perversions of Scripture. These teachings selfishly look to accumulate gain from people who are deceived into thinking their lack of healing and financial wealth is due to their lack of believing God hard enough. According to this false doctrine, if they generate enough faith they could create health and wealth with their own words.

Good shepherds protect their flock from dangerous contorted ideas falsely representing God. They appeal to those led astray in false teachings to abandon such and return to sound doctrine in the biblical faith. Paul pines over how other opposing arguments and words have convinced people and led them astray (1 Tim 6:20-21). He was to guard the truth. Titus is to do the same. The truth of proper interpretation of Scripture is as under attack in this century as it was in the first century.

Train the church to detect false doctrine (vs. 14-16)

¹⁴not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth.

¹⁵To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. ¹⁶They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.



After confronting the character of false teachers and distancing them from the church, Paul explores some of the dangerous ideas they propose. John Stott's insights are helpful here. In following the text, he presents three questions to test whether a system proposed by a teacher is of God or not. What is the source? What is the focus? What is the practice being advocated?⁹

3 questions to ask when testing someone's teaching

- Is their source of authority human wisdom or divine revelation? (14)

While we do not know the exact details of the error being proposed, Paul summarizes it as "Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth." Jewish myths are not biblical. They are additional works demanded by those rejecting the simplicity of the gospel. This may include works of the Law, but it may have more to do with humanly devised traditions and ascetic practices. Modern day Kabbalah is an example of this. This is more like a gnostic

⁹ Stott, *1 Timothy & Titus*, p. 183.

mystical interpretation of the Hebrew Torah that the Roman Catholic Church devised later with the Greek New Testament.

In Colossians 2:8, Paul warns the church not to be deceived by “philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.” After further clarifying the gospel message in verses 9-15, he alerts the church to those who would pass judgment on them regarding food, drink, festival, new moon, or Sabbath observation (v. 16). These are Jewish traditions that no longer apply to believers in Christ (v. 17). Other false teachers would insist on ascetic practices, angel visitations, and visions that produce pride (v. 18). The ascetic practices include denying self of enjoyable things in life that God has created for our us to give thanks (vs. 21-23; 1 Tim 4:1-5). Paul makes it clear this kind of rigid religious practice has the appearance of wisdom, but it has “no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.”

When people make up religion in order to gain godliness, they typically become harsh, militant, and without grace in demanding complete compliance to certain rules and lifestyles. These lifestyles or rules may have a connection in Scripture, but the Bible does not mandate these practices. Therefore, these activities have no power to produce godliness in and of themselves. God has not prescribed them. Man has done this being discontent with what God has revealed for us.

There are some current teachings of various strands that encourage believers to follow rabbinic Judaism. This means people are to keep the Law with the exception of the sacrificial system. Beyond adhering to the 10 Commandments, they are to keep kosher dietary restrictions, observe all feasts of Israel, and wear certain clothing in the house of God. Followers of these teachings may then rely more on their close observance to such personal restrictions than upon Christ. Or, they may establish an environment where those who act like first century Jews are upheld as closer to God than those who do not.

Other churches may be taken captive by leaders who follow the visions and dreams of men and women without any support from the Bible. Soon, the Bible becomes discarded and humanly devised systems of religion complicate and blur the simple gospel message. The question to ask is “Where stands it written?” If it is not supported clearly by Scripture, it becomes suspect.

- Is their focus internal or external? (15)

Paul’s next statement follows up the previous idea. The reason for the human traditions or speculations is to produce greater spirituality or purity. Yet this is not what produces purity. Only Christ can make us pure through his sacrifice on the cross. It is there that God judged our sin and

purified us. When we receive his sacrificed and resurrected life, it already bears the stamp of divine approval. This is why no further activities or observances will work. Paul can thus say, “To the pure, all things are pure.” Purity comes from within and works itself out. It does not come from the outside through self-denials and practice of rituals (Luke 11:37-41; Mark 7:14-23). Thus, Christians do lose their purity by external acts. Rather, their thoughts are the determining factor in their purity. As they think, so they do.

In Romans 14, Paul confronts this issue in the church. Division arose among the believers concerning external acts that caused internal impurity. This was not an issue of sexual immorality. Rather, it was an issue concerning observance of special Jewish days and diets. Neither one is condemned. All things were pure and permitted, but these should not be the determining factors for fellowship.

In contrast to internal purity, those who place a wrong emphasis on external observance (the core of human religion), do not remove their impurity. Their impurity remains because they reject the gospel, the only channel for true purity before the Lord. Apart from that, all their religious works, observances, and mystical experiences do not bring them closer to God. Their consciences have not been convicted of their sin of unbelief. Therefore, they have false assurance of pleasing God. William Barclay explains, “The infected mind soils every thought that enters into it; the imagination turns every picture which it forms into a source of lust. Every motive is misinterpreted. Every statement is given a double meaning. To escape that uncleanness, we must walk in the cleansing presence of Jesus Christ.”¹⁰

- Is their practice in life or only in words? (16)

The final question of evaluation of a teaching concerns its emphasis. Does it stress certain vocabulary or jargon but not life change? Paul’s final words are “They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works.” With many lofty words, practices, and concepts not overtly taught in Scripture that ignore the true reality of the condition of one’s spirit, the final test deals with transformation. Barclay again pointedly comments, “The ultimate test in life is usefulness, and those who are a bad influence and have a contaminating effect are of no use to God or to other people. Instead of helping God’s work in the world, they hinder it; and uselessness always invites disaster.”¹¹

Paul finishes off the chapter with three final words: detestable, disobedient, unfit. “Detestable” is a word often used for abomination. It refers to idolatry. Mounce explains, “Paul may be using

¹⁰ Barclay, *Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, p. 276.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

this word in an ironic sense; the opponents taught that myths and asceticism were the gateway to salvation, but they were idolatry, replacing the true worship of God with the idol or pseudo-asceticism.”¹² Believe it or not, false teachers try to sway Christians with promises of higher experience in Christian spirituality, but they only introduce a new form of idolatry. A different god stands before the believer dressed in Jesus’ garb presenting a new gospel message unheard of before. This is an abomination to the true God.

This leads to being “disobedient.” False teachers do not stress the gospel. They typically steer people away from it both in salvation and in sanctification. They encourage disobedience to repent and believe in Christ. Finally, they are “unfit for any good work.” The idea is not passing a test. They fail as teachers because the true test is whether they are accord with God’s revelation to transform internal lives by the gospel message of Jesus Christ.

Healthy churches grow in discernment, not judgmentalism. They properly discern what is the true gospel message and the path of holiness according to God’s word. Solid leaders help them to see this for themselves and develop maturity that they pass on to others.

¹² Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, p. 403.

HEALTHY CHURCHES ENCOURAGE GODLY LIVING

Titus 2:1-10

¹ But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. ² Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. ³ Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, ⁴ and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, ⁵ to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. ⁶ Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. ⁷ Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, ⁸ and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us. ⁹ Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, ¹⁰ not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.



My friend Bill loves to fish. He has collected an impressive assortment of fishing gear, especially lures. Some of his lures are so effective and realistic that they appear to be alive. Yet for all Bill's advanced equipment to catch fish, I have never seen him reel one in. I know he has caught many fish, but it has not happened when I have been around him. On one occasion when few fish seemed interested in biting our lines, he attached numerous lures to show off their "action" in the water. Still, no fish came by. Despite being impressed by Bill's gear and watching his advanced lures wiggle in the water, we were missing the purpose of fishing. The point of fishing is not to display fishing gear and tackle. Rather, it is to catch fish.

God has given to us His divine revelation concerning Himself and His saving grace through Christ Jesus. Many people can recite passages of this revelation and even explain it. But, it does not do any good if there is no life change. That is the purpose of giving us revelation. We are to understand it and be transformed by it. We are not called as a church to merely display our doctrinal knowledge. We are to apply it to our lives so that it shows its usefulness and divine power.

The apostle Paul moves into the heart of this letter to Titus. He has set the stage in chapter one and now reveals the important goal for solid Christian leadership. Church leaders protect the

flock from the bad food of false teachers and promote good health through applied truth. Titus 2:1-10 is neatly divided into generation and occupation groups. They carry similar injunctions as well as unique ones. This is headed by the fact that sound truth must lead to godly living.

The Cretan believers are to demonstrate the greatness of God by overcoming the sinful tendencies of their culture. Apart from Christ, they are prone to be dishonest, self-seeking, pleasure-oriented frivolous people. This negative reputation now changes into serious-minded, pure, honest people concerned about God's reputation. Sound truth accomplishes this and applies to everyone

Sound truth must lead to godly living (v. 1)

¹ But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine.



The introductory phrase of Titus 2:1 contrasts the final words of Titus 1. "But as for you" sets up rest of this letter. In contrast to false teachers who "profess to know God, but they deny him by their works," Titus is to instruct the believers in Crete to affirm the truth with their works. True faith does more than talk about God or Jesus. It motivates people to act upon the new life God grants to them.

This new life does not consist of seeking and boasting of mystical experiences or setting up new extra biblical rules to merit divine favor. Rather, new life involves life transformation from being self-centered and driven by the flesh to becoming focused on God's honor with a servant spirit bent on personal purity. This is true love and the goal of Paul's ministry (1 Tim 1:5).

If a person's life does not match the intention of the doctrine they profess to believe, they become like false teachers. They are "unfit for any good work." Literally, they "do not pass the test" of what a Christian is supposed to be like.

Godly living "accords" with sound doctrine. The Greek verb (*prepo*) means "resemble," "fitting," "suit." Over the years, my wife has offered me timely advice on the clothes I wear. Some ties do not match my shirts. Some shirts may clash with my choice of slacks. In the same way, there are some behaviors whose lives clash with their profession of faith. We cannot look aside at this or excuse it for some people. In Ephesians 5:3, the apostle warns believers that they must not allow for immorality, impurity, or covetousness be named among them. The reason for this careful avoidance of any questionable behavior is that it is "not proper" for the saints. It does not resemble true saving faith. It does not fit, match, or accord with Christ.

In 1 Timothy 2:10, Paul again points out what is fitting or “proper” for godliness. It is not external only. Women may adorn themselves, but if their whole preoccupation at church services is fashion, makeup, and hairstyle while remaining gossips or worldly they misrepresent Christianity.

The greatest hindrance to evangelism is not persecution. The greatest obstacle to adorning the gospel so that people see the beauty and magnificence of this message is worldliness in the church. Unsound doctrine throws this into imbalance. False teachers either put restrictions on people’s lives that God has not ordained in effort to deny living for this world, or they focus exclusively on this life and soon indulge and obsess over it. Heresy comes from both angles. We are called to gratefully enjoy what God has granted us in this life, but we are not to hold too tightly to it. We thus enjoy food, marriage, nature, and fellowship leading to deepened gratitude and praise.

At the same time, we increasingly recognize evil influences in the world that threaten to replace our joy in the Lord. Maturity walks between the bondage of legalism and the lure of worldliness. Neither one produces joy in Christ. Godly living is not a list of restrictions. It also involves hearty engagement in life lived out for God’s honor. Phil Towner summarizes this passage in writing, “every believer’s lifestyle must be subjected to the test of biblical principles; the alternative is to allow our lives to be shaped and approved by a value system that is opposed to God’s.”¹³ The following verses in Titus 2 describe God’s value system.

Sound truth impacts everyone (vs. 2-10)

The rest of this passage focuses on lifestyle injunctions for multiple generations. The apostle provides guidance for older men & women and then addresses the younger generation. Finally, he speaks to those who are “bondservants.” This rightly compares to modern day employees. Let us now explore each of these five categories. In the end, Paul speaks of how godly living “adorns” the doctrine of God.

- Older men

² Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness.



¹³ Towner, *1-2 Timothy, Titus*, p. 236.

In verse 2, Paul first addresses the older men. The same word is used as the office of church leaders (*presbuteros*). He presents four challenges to them, the last of which breaks off into three separate categories.

First, they are to be “sober-minded.” This is literally a restraint from getting drunk. Older Christian men are not merely those that think clearly. It is more than that. They do not justify drinking alcohol to cloud their thinking and bring on immediate disrespect. Few things are more pitiful than an old wino. An elderly man no longer possesses the strength or virility of younger years. So, his remaining contribution in life is his wisdom, experience, and godliness. Intoxication eliminates all this. He no longer can discern matters, restrict the impulses of the sinful flesh, or speak truth with power of the Holy Spirit. He has become weak in body and weak in spirit. This is unfitting for an older man who should know better after living longer than others and walking with God more years.

Furthermore, he must be “dignified.” This indicates seriousness or gravity in life. This does not mean he no longer has a sense of humor or is joyless. Rather, he has reached a stage where he knows what is most important and has sifted out what is not. Barclay adds that this describes the conduct of a person “. . . aware of living in the light of eternity, and expecting before very long to leave human fellowship for fellowship with God.”¹⁴

If an older follower of Christ is not serious about God, he is all the more pathetic. I recall an elderly man attending the church when I was a young pastor. He was cheerful, but he only could say, “Look up, Pastor Jim, look up!” That is all he would say. When I inquired how his week went or how he was seeking after the Lord, he uttered this pithy reply. After a while, it became irritable. Finally, one of my older elders confronted him on this. He said, “Why do you say, ‘Look up?’ You need to look in!” That led him to take his sin more seriously and truly seek out a savior in Christ. Some men have never developed their spiritual life in their youth. In time, they become shallow older men. This is a shame because it reveals wasted time, especially if they have been in church for many years.

The elderly men are also to be “self-controlled.” This concerns controlling the sinful flesh. This does not mean older men are free from struggling with their emotions or from developing dementia. Age weakens more than the body. It also effects emotions and mind. But, an older man should not be prone to lose control of their temper, their tongue, or their hope.

Finally, they are to be “sound” in faith, love, and steadfastness. The word for “sound” indicates health. Older men may diminish in physical health, but their spiritual life should go the opposite

¹⁴ Barclay, *Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, p. 278.

direction. They should reveal a healthy understanding of what the Bible teaches. They should also be healthy expressers of love and compassion. They are healthy in their perspective of life in order to be steadier in faith. They are steadfast and not erratic in their walk with God.

- Older women

³ Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good,



The older women (feminine form of *presbuteros*) are overall to be “reverent in behavior.” This carries a sacredness to demeanor. It indicates respectability. The contrast to this is lack of control over their tongues and alcohol. Few people respect someone who speaks ill of others all the time and justifies their own inability to avoid vice (intoxication). The pride and joy of a local church is older people who model what Christianity offers over the years. Otherwise, they are embarrassments. Who wants to be around two older out of control drunkards who speak the first thing that comes into their fleshly minds? They are mocked and not respected. They are avoided and not consulted.

In contrast, older women of internal spiritual beauty offer a treasure trove of godly instruction for the next generation. This is why younger women are next in line in Paul’s list. Younger women may have never been taught by a godly woman how to follow the Lord. Society stresses external adornment and sex appeal to attract attention to themselves. But, older godly women know better and help the younger women adorn the gospel properly by avoiding disrespectful lifestyles and habits that do not match the truth they claim to follow.

Older women are challenged to “train” the younger women in domestic responsibilities and attitude. The word for “train” is the same one used elsewhere in this passage for self-control. Mounce defines this as encouraging, advising, and even bringing someone to their senses.¹⁵ It indicates that younger women may be tempted to reject or resent their God-given role in the home. The older women have fulfilled their responsibilities of raising children and loving their husbands. Thus, they are the proper guides for the next generation of women.

- Younger women

⁴ and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, ⁵ to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.



¹⁵ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, p. 411.

As the older women in the church actively disciple younger women, the curriculum becomes set. They teach the young women to “love their husbands and children” among other things. Thus, the maturity of the young wives and mothers in a local church leans heavily on the older women present. They must train them specifically how to love their husbands and children. This is not a given trait. Many young women may grow to resent their husbands and despise their children. Indeed, men often fail to realize how taxing parenting is for women who usually spend more time involved with it.

Because older women are to match older men in being self-controlled, they offer instruction along these lines as well. The prominent role of the women is domestic. They work in their homes with the family. This does not mean every family is able to afford a single income or that women may not carry some employment. It also does not exclude husbands from participating in the work at home. Nonetheless, women are the primary caregivers in the family in regard to the sphere of home making. Older women help them carry on this work with self-control and kindness. Their attitudes are critical.

The purpose for this priority is so that the “word of God may not be reviled.” The word for “reviled” is the word for “blasphemy.” Women who abandon domestic responsibility because they do not want to be involved in parenting or home making weaken the testimony of the church. It is that simple.

Such a message is unpopular today for several reasons. First, men do not love their wives as Christ loves the church. Women become resentful when men refuse to help at home with the children or with the ordering of the home. Other men are completely absent and have abandoned their wives. Therefore, the wife must become all things and all roles for the children.

Furthermore, western society increasingly defies Scripture and God’s given roles in the marriage and family. This has led to women’s liberation, gender confusion, and heightened individualism where everyone seeks to do what is right in their own eyes. Thus, many women have not been taught to work at home and thus have been pressured into seeking fulfillment in a career outside it.

Finally, many families cannot afford a single income. While some attempt to live above their means, others must help each other so that God is honored in fulfilling His will. My wife is a school and music teacher and she worked both in and out of the house while our children were young. Sometimes, pastors make sufficient funds to support their family. At other times, they do not. Nonetheless, we made it our goal that our children would not become neglected. So, both of

us scaled back on ministries, community activities, and lifestyle choices in order to offer quantity time with our children and enable my wife to fulfill this passage.

- Younger men

⁶Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. ⁷Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, ⁸and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us.



The “younger men” covers a generation ranging from 20-40. It does not limit the age to teen years. There is a clear connection of generations in all these requirements. The older women are commanded to teach the younger women. The older men are to set examples for the younger men to follow. The character traits are similar. Both exhibit self-control and dignity. The tempestuous and impatient energy of youth is harnessed by the counsel of the older men.

At the same time, the younger men are to show themselves as models of good works and teachers. Titus is directly charged to show himself as a model for these traits, especially since he is publicly teaching. There are two things to note. First, the younger men are to be active and not passive in the local church ministry and leadership. Second, their leadership and teaching is built upon character. They are to live out their faith with purity or dignity as well as with “integrity.” This compound word is a negation of the word for spoiling or corrupting something. Evil men may negatively influence others to become evil themselves. Thus, they ruin good morals (1 Cor 15:7). The younger men are not to be negatively influenced by the world as they take positions of leadership in the church. Otherwise, unbelievers will point out the hypocrisy of Christianity and give valid reason for their rejection of the gospel.

Older men do not abdicate their responsibilities for ministry. Rather, they set the standard for how ministry is carried out. Unfortunately, I have seen older men walk away from ministry leadership positions with the excuse that they are tired of doing it and want to let younger people take over. In truth, they sat idly in meetings, argued among themselves, ministered minimally to the spiritual needs of people, and then retired into passive existence in the church with a critical spirit. The younger generation may eagerly jump at the opportunity for control of a church, but they often merely want to change methods rather than perpetuate holiness and truth. They rarely consult older men and typically follow the same path of ministry disillusionment.

The goal of younger men is not busyness and more responsibility. The goal is greater godliness and gospel advance built on the testimony of their own transformed lives. They do not act the part of Christian in church settings and then switch to a cheating, selfish, and impure person in

the workplace or home. The world quickly spots fake Christians and rightly rejects them. I have heard it said that the one place not to be a hypocrite is in prison. Those prisoners that claim to follow Christ and earnestly do such receive respect. But, those that claim to follow the Lord and abandon holiness are subject to violent reprisal. It is dangerous to play the hypocrite in the world. God allows unbelievers to be judges when the church drops its standard of holiness.

- Employees

⁹ Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative,¹⁰ not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.



The final category involves “bondservants.” These are servants or slaves who are either working to eliminate debt or are prisoners of war. They may work themselves out of their status or rise in ranks, receive education, and actually take on bondservants themselves. It has been estimated that a third of the Roman Empire consisted of slaves. Thus, many of the believers in the early church were in this status. This is why Paul writes so frequently about it. His comments typically are not to reject the system, but he does not refrain from encouraging slaves to gain freedom. If they cannot because they owe money or are not able to purchase freedom they must continue to work in their position. It becomes their employment. That is how it should be understood. Paul was not endorsing brutal human trafficking as many practiced it throughout history. He was also not encouraging social revolution and violent insurrection.

Paul’s main concern is testimony of life to influence those over them. Instead of being rebellious and uncooperative, servants/employees are to show a submissive spirit with good faith. Plus, they show themselves to be trustworthy. They do not steal from those over them, whether in work time, material goods, or income. This kind of trustworthy and pure spirit brought such servants as Joseph and Daniel to prominence, divine blessing, and greater responsibility.

When those serving in humble positions act in honesty and purity because their conscience is bound to their heavenly Master, they “adorn” the truth they profess. God appears beautiful. Those under earthly masters are not defiant. They obey a greater master who produces faithfulness in work and business. Unless an employer is corrupt and pressures his hirelings to cheat others an honest worker is greatly valued. God becomes valued to transform people to become this kind of man or woman of excellence.

The Outcome

Two negative phrases and one positive phrase trail several of these injunctions. The young women are to fulfill their responsibilities to God in the home with the right spirit “that the word of God may not be reviled” (v. 5). The younger men are to display self-control and good works “that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us” (v. 8). This refers not only to Titus’ teaching but also to the young men’s behavior. When bondservants show themselves respectful and trustworthy they “adorn the doctrine of God our Savior” (v. 10).

God wants the outside world to look at the church. The redeemed elect people comprising this small portion of the population represent what God can do with human lives. They are not perfect, but they are progressing in that direction. This is attractive. Those who are not growing in maturity and purity are not attractive and misrepresent God and the gospel. Thus, obedient behavior is not an end in itself. It is an evangelistic tool that brings glory to God.

HEALTHY CHURCHES FOCUS ON THE SOURCE OF THEIR TRANSFORMATION

Titus 2:11-15

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, ¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you.



“Before and after” photos flood the internet and loom large in advertising posters. They dramatically promise desired changes in appearance. The “before” portrait displays an undesirable state of existence or appearance. The “after” photo highlights the culminating wonderful alteration from following a prescribed path. Anyone desiring the same changes can likewise go through medical, exercise, diet, or other specialist attention to gain such results.

The gospel is also a “before and after” advertisement. But, this is not an empty promise and the cost has been paid. Nonetheless, there are stipulations involved. Life transformation does not happen quickly or easily. The people in Crete will become prime examples of divine power working miraculous change. They used to be like the prophets they produced. They were deceptive and pleasure loving. Their work ethic was bad and no one trusted anyone. That is the “before” picture. The “after” portrait is still progressing.

Paul again utilizes the connecting word “for” in verse 11 to connect his next thoughts with the previous passage. The apostle now explains the source for the transformed lives of the Cretan believers. They contrast false teachers and provide an entirely new portrait of what Cretans can become instead of lazy liars. Their transformation is nothing short of the remarkable grace of God working in them. God is the one who has done this. He brings them salvation, trains them in righteousness, and provides a steady hope that settles them in life. Instead of being restless, they wait patiently for Christ’s appearing. The text covers the ministry of Christ. His salvation is past accomplished. His training is a present work. His future return has yet to transpire. The regenerated Christian lives in all three worlds. He/she rests on Christ’s completed work in the

past; grows in maturity through his careful training in righteousness in the present; expectantly waits for his glorious return in the future. Theologically, we could label these three stages as salvation, sanctification, and glorification. Personal spiritual renewal involves all three simultaneously.

How Does God's Grace Bring Life Transformation?

God's past grace: He brings salvation (v. 11)

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,



God's grace "has appeared." It manifested itself in the person and work of God's Son, Jesus Christ. Otherwise, the change in the lives of these Cretans is inexplicable. The verb is aorist indicating an established fact. The act of salvation is done. Salvation has been granted to humanity and no one is excluded. This does not mean everyone receives it or that it is a salvation available if anyone desires it. Scripture makes clear that no one desires God or His salvation (Rom 3:10-18). This is why it is an act of grace that anyone receives it. God must grant them faith to believe and desire it (Rom 2:4).

Furthermore, the extent of this saving grace is to "all people." God brings saving faith to all people in every place, including Crete. They are not so far gone in their deceptive and pleasure loving ways that it is hopeless to think anyone would be interested in Christ Jesus and his restrictive lifestyle. There are multiple churches of transformed people living on the island of Crete!

Moreover, the salvation that God grants is from His wrath and judgment. They are not saved from destructive lifestyles. They are rescued from eternal judgment in the lake of fire. They do not merit this salvation. God gives it to them. This is an act of amazing grace upon undeserving people.

God's present grace: He trains us in righteousness (v. 12)

¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly

lives in the present age,



The previous sentence in verse 11 has not yet ended. Verse 12 continues the thought of the grace of God providing. It not only brings salvation. It also offers "training." The Greek word *paideuo* is the classic term for child rearing and education. It involves both information and discipline. It is both pleasant and painful. It is the shaping of a life. The gospel message not only saves souls.

It trains them and transforms them. This is the why the sentence has not yet ended. We cannot separate salvation from life change.

Salvation grace is instantaneous. The training process is life long. It takes place “in the present age” while we are living. It involves two parts. One part renounces or denies something while the other part operates and lives out something different. These two parts form a contrast or replacement process. We do not add self-control, uprightness, and godliness to ungodliness and worldly passions. The latter replace the former. This is not easy and requires discipline and training. We could not make this alteration of lifestyle apart from God’s grace.

- Out with the bad (“ungodliness and worldly passions”)

God’s grace trains us to “renounce” that which is not of God and of this present sinful world. Galatians 5:16-24 set up the contrast between the that which is of the sinful flesh and that which characterizes the spiritual life. With Christ, we have “crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (v. 24).

Christ has paid the penalty for these sinful inclinations, but he has not eliminated their presence in our lives. Therefore, we must renounce or deny them expression. We cannot excuse their continuance because we are too weak to resist temptation or impulse. Our anger, envy, lust, gossip, selfishness, profanity, lying, and ambition are sinful expressions originating from self-worship in our heart. These desires constantly call for attention and expression. But, we must deny them legitimate operation. They are evil beasts lurking in the basement of our hearts seeking to escape and take over the whole house of our existence. Through training, we lessen their volume and weaken their power. The grace of God helps train us to do this.

John also teaches us on this subject of importance. We are not to “love the world or the things in the world” (1 John 2:15). This includes “the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life (v. 16). Note how worldly passions is described as “desires.” There are natural desires of the heart for self-promotion. The eyes are the conduits that draw attention to items that the sinful heart can allow sin to express itself. The eyes may see something desirable and draw upon lust, envy, and selfish ambition to gain. Denial of satisfying these desires may create anger, jealousy, violence, and slander. We cannot deny our eyesight, but we can be alert to what reactions our sinful hearts may arouse when we see things or people that may tempt us.

- In with the good (“live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age”)

It is not enough to eliminate sinful habits. They must be replaced with righteous ones. This is part of the transformation. There is an exchange and not merely a vacuum. The reason Timothy could flee youthful lusts was because he was at the same time pursuing righteousness, faith, love,

and peace (2 Tim 2:22). Sinful thoughts must be replaced by godly ones. Lack of control is replaced by self-control. Violation of opportunities to love others must be replaced by deliberate acts of service and care for others.

Our emotions may not always agree with our conscience. We may not want to do the right thing or sacrificially care for another. This is where training comes in. It is painful to live godly and upright lives because our natural bent is towards self and not God's honor. Over time, our hearts become trained to love God more and our conscience rules our actions. The whole training process can be illustrated as follows:

Before	TRAINING	After
Selfish	-God's grace-	Love others
Lustful	-God's grace-	Pure thoughts
Easily angered	-God's grace-	Patient
Rebellious	-God's grace-	Submissive
Envy others	-God's grace-	Contentment
Uncontrolled tongue	-God's grace-	Self-control
Resentment	-God's grace-	Forgiveness

God's future grace: He motivates us for the future (vs. 13-15)

¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you.



The culminating portion of this passage provides the believer motivation for being trained in righteousness. Paul mentions three specific points that cause us to actively wait, become zealous

for good works, and boldly proclaim God's will. These points include Christ's glorious return, his redemptive work, and his right of ownership.

- His glorious return motivates us

The training takes place in the present, but the motivation to "live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age" is founded on the prospect of the return of Christ. This is described as glorious.

The statement, "the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" has a storied historical debate concerning its implication for the deity of Christ. Five arguments convince us to see it this way instead of noting separate members of the Godhead in this appearing. First, there is no definite article preceding "Savior." This automatically ties the subject of Christ together with the prior statement of God's glory and thus equates the two. Second, earliest interpretations overwhelmingly combine the two together. Third, the wording of the "appearing" of God the Father's glory is never used anywhere else in Scripture. It makes it suspect here. God the Son will appear, not God the Father. Fourth, the context of the passage focuses on Christ and his work. He is the one who sacrificed himself and purifies his people. He is the one who will appear in glory. Last, "God and Savior" became a common phrase in early Christianity to describe Christ.¹⁶

Jesus, as the great God and our savior, will return in "glory." This word is often used in Scripture but unfortunately misunderstood by people. Many shout, "Glory!", over any positive event. Soon, the idea of glory becomes diminished in people's mind and anything but motivational. Yet this is what Paul points to for hope and incentive for pure living and patient enduring in the present life. Our waiting is eager and for good reason.

Many people will wait for hours to gain admittance into a concert, movie, or sporting event. The anticipation of a glorious time with astonishing feats of sound, sight, and excitement fill people's minds and highly motivate them to make great sacrifices in order to be present. Some people wait in line at amusement parks for hours to enjoy a 90 second ride. Others will queue up in crowds to purchase favorite foods that are consumed within minutes.

Nothing compares to the anticipated event of the creator of all things making an appearance in full disclosure of might, majesty, and the blinding perfected light of his emanating glory. The sight, sound, and emotional fulfillment is beyond description. We are told that the redeemed will be presented "blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy" (Jude 1:24).

¹⁶ Stott, *1 Timothy & Titus*, p. 194; Towner, *1-2 Timothy & Titus*, pp. 247-248; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, pp. 426-431.

- His redemptive work motivates us

Paul sets the work of Christ in two appearances. He first appeared to give himself “for us to redeem us from all lawlessness.” This prepares us for his second appearing already noted. The idea of redemption (*lutroomai*) is transactional and denotes financial arrangement for freedom. When someone pays off a condemning debt on someone else’s behalf, they have graciously purchased their freedom. But, there is obligation to this. The gracious party now has right over the one they purchased off a slave market or from prison.

The concept of God redeeming Israel out of captivity to be His unique people plays into the idea of redemption throughout all Scripture. This idea is vividly illustrated in God commanding the prophet Hosea to marry an unfaithful woman with full awareness that she would commit adultery. When this occurs multiple times, she ultimately becomes abandoned by one of her lovers for the slave market. At this point, Hosea goes to the market and purchases her freedom so that she becomes his wife again. He redeems her.

When Ruth’s husband died, she inherited nothing because of her gender. According to Israel’s Law, females were not in line to inherit family wealth or property. She could be “redeemed” and cared for but only through family connections. The book of Ruth traces her ultimate redemption into Israelite society through a kinsman-redeemer named Boaz.

In the New Testament, God fulfills all the prior types that foreshadowed a future eternal redemption not based on ethnicity. Christ pays the price of judgment meted out by God in order to spare humans who are guilty of “lawlessness.” In other words, we violate God’s perfect Law in thought and deed and deserve His wrath. Jesus pays or redeems us as guilty prisoners by presenting his own life for judgment. Since he is perfect, his sacrifice satisfies God the Father as judge once and for all.

Our motivation to live for him is not only based on our anticipation of his return, but due to his completed historic sacrifice on the cross. He gave his life for us to gain us. We are motivated as we understand our predicament and respond to His grace that appeared bringing salvation to every kind of humanity on the globe.

- His ownership motivates us

Christ did not redeem us to send us back into our sinful patterns. We are not free to be re-enslaved to our passions again. Rather, we are owned. We are now his possession and he is our Lord. He does not leave us in our regenerated but unrefined condition. He purifies us. We become motivated or “zealous” for good works.

Some of these good works have already been mentioned earlier in this chapter. Believers eye the future anticipating Christ's second appearing while reflecting on his completed work at his first appearing. Paul tells us that our freedom from slavery is freedom from ourselves and our sinful nature. Having been freed from sin we become slaves of God (Rom 6:17-22). He changes our hearts so that we desire good works. They are not drudgery. They are necessary. We grow to love purity and righteousness. We increasingly despise anything that stands against His glory and holiness. We are Christ's possession and in his ownership of our lives we thrive and find joy.

It is these truths that Titus is to "declare," "exhort," and "rebuke." He is to proclaim these theological doctrines about Christ and the implications for our lives. This includes the charges to the men and women in the congregation. He is to do this "with all authority. Let no one disregard you." Titus preaches the Word of God and leaves people to argue with God about it. Some people in the church may "disregard" him and what he says. They will look for ways to get around the plain meaning of God's revelation. Titus cannot back down or excuse anyone from applying this truth.

HEALTHY CHURCHES PROMOTE PEACE

Titus 3:1-15

¹ Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, ² to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. ³ For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. ⁴ But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. 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. These things are excellent and profitable for people. ⁹ But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. ¹⁰ As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, ¹¹ knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.

¹² When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. ¹³ Do your best to speed Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way; see that they lack nothing. ¹⁴ And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful.

¹⁵ All who are with me send greetings to you. Greet those who love us in the faith.



One of the greatest challenges in the world is to establish and maintain peace. Encouraging harmony and relational stability has proved elusive through the centuries. An entire division of historical studies is devoted to military history documenting wars and armed conflicts. In fact, the study of history is primarily a record of human conflicts. This certainly is the biblical history of humankind. Only when people are at peace with God can they sustain any sort of peace with one another.

Paul moves into the final chapter of his short epistle to Titus by clarifying to the believers in Crete the implications of their spiritual transformation. Titus 3 is modeled after Titus 2. In both

chapters, Paul describes practical life changes followed by an explanation of the gospel that brings about genuine transformation. The difference in the two chapters is the environment. Titus 2 speaks of the believer's behavior around other believers. Titus 3 broadens this out to reveal how believers live in society at large. Both alterations of behavior are linked to divine grace working on their hearts and minds.

One of the immediate marks of a gospel-transformed life is peace. A person is at peace with God and lives with peace with others. Christians noticeably live in unity with other believers and promote such peace in society at large. Revealing the power of the gospel mandates peaceful relationships.

Titus 3 is devoted to peacemaking. The words are not overtly stated, but the idea of submission, avoiding needless argumentation, and considering others are all vital components for peaceful relationships. This is not limited to the church. It begins in a congregation and then spills out to society at large.

How do we promote peace in an unbelieving world?

Believers promote peace with their words and actions; by humbly recalling God's making peace with them; by protecting peace in church leadership.

Believers promote peace with their words and actions (vs. 1-2)

¹ Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, ² to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.



In Titus 2:1, Paul tells Titus to “teach” the people behavioral codes consistent with sound doctrine. By the end of the chapter, he was to “declare . . . exhort and rebuke” (Titus 2:15). Now, he is to “remind” people of these gospel implications. This does not suggest nudging someone in a certain direction or jogging their memory during a mental lapse. It carries with it the idea that true instruction involves repetition. We are prone to forget correctives, especially if we are bent habitually in certain sinful ways.

Peter boasted that he would never deny Christ. Then, he forgot about his bold declaration of commitment. He struck out with sword in Gethsemane, but he faltered in the high priest's court. The cock crowing painfully caused him to recall or be reminded of his foolish words (Luke 22:61).

Thus, the believers in Crete may have received prior guidance on public living as a follower of Christ. Titus is to bring up the subject again and repeat it. Christianity is not a cloistered faith.

While believers display a testimony and adorn the gospel in the way they treat other believers, God also shines the truth through them as they enter the public arena. They adorn the gospel as they publicly promote peace with their words and actions. There are three main virtues provided in this list: respect for the law, proactivity in good deeds, and consideration of others.

- They respect the law

The first two injunctions point to submission to governing authorities. To be “obedient” is literally to have confidence in or be persuaded by governing authorities. This does not mean believers blindly obey government dictums that contradict or deny Christ who is the true King and governing authority. But, it also means that believers are law abiding citizens. Donald Hiebert states, “A Christian cannot be an anarchist.”¹⁷

While Christians may object to social injustice or national promotion of unrighteousness, they do not plan insurrections or foment violent revolutions. Jesus repeatedly rejected this idea. Our obedience, including paying taxes, is a testimony to our faith in Christ and his kingdom. We cannot justify rebellion against the government or civil disobedience when there are no biblical injunctions at stake.

- They are proactive in good deeds

Believers go beyond performing good deeds. They are “ready” for every good work. This matches the previous chapter’s ideal of being “zealous” for good works (Titus 2:14). These good works are not the character traits listed at the beginning of Titus 2. The flow of thought indicates these referring to public acts of benevolence or care that bolster community harmony and well being. While Christians are not called to overthrow local governments, they also do not avoid promoting public welfare. In this, they are aggressive and ready to help.

- They are considerate of others

Believers in Christ not only build up and stabilize communities at large, but they also bring peace to those around them. In this, they use their words carefully to affirm others and avoid needless conflicts. They speak no evil (*blaspheme*) and are not constantly engaged in quarrels or verbal battles. This does not mean they lack conviction. Rather, they are not so defensive that others find them difficult to get along with or work alongside.

Contrasting an argumentative spirit, followers of Christ are “gentle” and courteous “toward all people.” These two traits refer to external tenderness and internal self-control. In fact, the word for “courtesy” is the word for meekness. Meekness is a marvelous display of controlling one’s

¹⁷ Hiebert, *Titus and Philemon*, P. 65.

temper, tongue, and personality when interacting with others. Instead of dominating, overpowering, and intimidating others, believers adorn God's gospel by refraining from such worldly tactics that typically prevail in business deals and co-worker relationships. They consider others and their concerns in matters of importance.

Believers promote peace by humbly recalling God's peace with them (vs. 3-8)

³ For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. ⁴ But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. 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. These things are excellent and profitable for people.



We as believers should not consider ourselves superior to unbelievers in society. If we shine the light of the gospel with our words and actions and promote peace with difficult people, we must remember that we are no different in our sinful state than anyone else. God rescued us from both His eternal judgement and our own sinful disposition. By recalling our own depraved nature and God's mercy on our souls, we carry out our peace mission with humility. This includes recalling our natural state and God's love in sending His Spirit to regenerate and cleanse us. This leads us to resolve living out our lives according to the truth.

- Recall our natural unclean state

Paul begins verse 3 by noting a believer's natural sinful state prior to conversion. They "once were." He then lists seven human conditions caused by the sinful flesh. This not limited to false teachers. It includes "we ourselves." We were "foolish." The word indicates lack of comprehension. It does not mean we are stupid. Rather, we do not realize how errant and damaging our thoughts and actions actually are. How often in embarrassment have we said to ourselves, "I can't believe I said that!" or "What was I thinking?!" We may wonder if we have lost our minds for a moment. This is the ongoing condition of people who do not have the mind of Christ. They may be intelligent in every area of life, but they are foolish in spiritual and eternal matters.

In addition to this, we are "disobedient." This involves our deliberate rejection and violation of what we recognize God requires of us. Foolishness is lack of understanding. Disobedience is resistance to comply with something clearly understood. We disobey God because we do not believe He is holy and powerful.

All of this is part of spiritual deception. By nature, all humanity is “led astray.” Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44) and blinds the whole world to the gospel truth (2 Cor 4:4). Our natural state creates an illusion about reality. We believe something that is not true about God and ourselves. Some unregenerate people believe larger lies than others and are enslaved by them. They do not perceive the gospel truth at all and have perverted ideas of its nature.

Without any compass to truly navigate towards God or believe His revelation to discern our sinful hearts, we easily become “slaves to various passions and pleasures.” We are prone to be controlled by emotions and motivated by selfish pleasures instead of God’s glory. Our emotions also become destructive socially if we are denied our pleasures. Thus, we succumb to temptations to do acts of “malice and envy.” Our blindness towards God leads to dissension with others. We live for ourselves and whatever pleases us most. It is not surprising that we were at one time “hated by others and hating one another.”

Not everyone is affected to the same degree in their sinful nature, but this trend is in everyone. Every believer is subject to deception and selfish pursuits to fulfill personal pleasures (James 4:1-3). Those denying them this stand to become hated and they hate in return. Personal vain glory drives some people’s lives. For others, it is sexual pleasure. For others, it is pride and superiority through achievement. Some people live for revenge. Nothing blocks and counters their unregenerate heart.

This sad state of humanity is revealed over and over again throughout history. Believers in Christ have no reason for pride. They are just like everyone else if not for the grace of God.

- Recall God’s goodness to cleanse us

Verses 4-7 present God’s intervention in the world to alter our destructive pursuits in life and eternity. Nothing would prevent our condemnation if God had not displayed “goodness and loving kindness.” The latter word is literally, “lover of man.” While God is love, He is not some floating and aimless love emotion drifting around like a cloud. Paul points out that God’s love takes action and has a focus, a target. He loves humans. He displays good towards them because He loves them by saving them in point of time.

We did nothing to merit this. It certainly is “not because of works done by us in righteousness.” These works are the requirements of the Law. It involves proactive acts of love and restraint from acts of destruction and self-idolatry. God’s mercy changes us to be able to fulfill His will and qualifies us to become heirs of eternal life.

No one is deserving of His loving kindness. He does not change those who are the least evil in society. Rather, He changes people of all levels of expression of their sinful nature. Some

expressions are more damaging in society. Some are murderers, rapists, thieves, and brutal tyrants. Others are equally sinful though less noticeable in their vice. They are selfish, greedy, gossips, lustful in mind, and proud. All kinds of sinful expressions arise from equally sinful dispositions. No one is a greater sinner than another because they were born with more evil in their heart than someone else. It is the grace of God that anyone has not acted in more evil ways than they have.

The mercy of God takes our unclean state and cleanses us. This is the idea behind the phrase, “by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.” Paul uses this same idea in Ephesians 5:25-27. He writes,

²⁵Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

Note how the idea of our sanctification, holiness, and being unblemished link with our cleansing and washing with water. The water is the personification of Scripture. Scripture has a purifying effect on the human soul like water does on the human body. It is thus best to understand Paul’s phrase to indicate the work of the Holy Spirit regenerating and renewing us. These are not two separate phrases with the first implying water baptism. Nothing in the context points to water baptism. Plus, water baptism does not regenerate a person. Both activities are works of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit creates new life in us and continues to renew it.

Homer Kent points out that the word “renewal” refers to something entirely new in kind and not in time.¹⁸ We are becoming entirely new people. Verse 6 explains that through Jesus Christ who saved us, we received the Spirit of God in abundance. He justified us and prepares us as heirs for eternal life. This brings this verse to a rightful contrast to the previous verse. We are all born in sin and act according to its desires and deception. The Spirit of God takes the gospel message of Christ and washes away our guilt before Him by giving us life. The Spirit continues this work of renewal beyond conversion. This is all humbling because we are unable to alter our depraved nature. God has to clean up our mess and make completely different people!

- Resolve to live for good works

Verse 8 points to the previous passages of this chapter. Paul calls for present action based on God’s generous grace. All that he has written in this chapter “is trustworthy.” The truth of God’s

¹⁸ Homer A. Kent, Jr., *The Pastoral Epistles* (Rev. ed.; Chicago: Moody, 1982), p. 234.

work in our lives to put us in a position of being gospel peace promoters in society is so vital that the apostle charges Titus to “insist on these things.”

Those who listen to both his exhortation on deeds and words and the gracious spring of the gospel from which they burst forth are to “be careful to devote themselves to good works.” Devoting oneself is to make a confident assertion (1 Tim 1:7). Believers are to be “careful” to be bold or confident in their good works. God does not want passive people in society. He wants aggressive acts of righteousness that promote peace, display the gospel’s power on human lives, and adorn His truth. Kent states, “Persons who have put their faith in our Savior God are expected to take the lead in good works. . . . They should be in the forefront in good works, not dragging their feet while others take the lead.”¹⁹

It is not surprising to see how Paul concludes. He writes, “These things are excellent and profitable for people.” Everyone benefits from having believers work alongside them. They help resolve problems instead of creating them. They bring peace to relationships instead of producing tension and anger. They display holy standards in their speech that encourage instead of inciting wrath or confusion.

Having said this, we should not misunderstand our predicament. Some people want to trip up Christians because they have some vengeful or spiteful antagonism towards Christ. Persecution and tension may arise because we are followers of Jesus regardless of our efforts to be peaceful people. If some people are hated by others in the workplace the believer cannot join in the chorus of hateful speech against them. They may struggle in their restraint because others may judge them for not joining in with sinful antagonistic activities. In such cases, we have to carefully navigate through the conflicts and resolve to tell the truth while trusting in God’s power.

My friend Andy is an airline pilot with a major international carrier. During a flight, a male flight steward approached him in the cockpit and asked him a pertinent question. “I understand you are a Christian. Tell me, what is your opinion of gay people?” Aware of the volatility of this question, he backed off and said, “I’m in the middle of a flight and you need to return to your place.” The flight steward refused to budge until he got an answer. With that, my friend frankly said, “The Bible calls it an abomination.” With that, the flight steward stalked off and wrote an official complaint to the airline. Despite my friend, as pilot of the craft, protesting against this steward’s act of insubordination during a flight, he was nonetheless reprimanded for his opinion. He did not seek conflict and tried to be peaceful. But, he had to be truthful above all. Not everyone wants believers to bring peace.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

Believers promote peace by protecting peace in church leadership (vs. 9-15)

⁹ But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. ¹⁰ As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, ¹¹ knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned. ¹² When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. ¹³ Do your best to speed Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way; see that they lack nothing. ¹⁴ And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful. ¹⁵ All who are with me send greetings to you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all.



Promoting peace in public should not cause believers to neglect peace in their local church. The letter to Titus concludes with three ways to nurture peace in a church and its leadership. This includes confronting false leaders who threaten peace; developing leadership teams devoted to the health of the congregation; congregation assistance in supporting the work of church leaders.

- Protect peace by confronting false leaders who threaten peace

At first, verses 9-11 appear to make a subject change. But, confrontation of false teachers and their potential disruptive effect on believers in a local church makes this warning all the more pertinent. William Hendricksen notes that the warning and ultimate expulsion of the divisive teacher is not merely for their return to the faith. The welfare of the church and God's glory is also at stake.²⁰ Sinful people always threaten peace among God's people, especially false teachers.

Paul brings up the same Jewish perversion of the gospel as noted in chapter 1. It is unknown exactly what they were teaching and whether it was legalistic ("quarrels about the law") or mystical misinterpretations of Scripture ("genealogies"). Ultimately, they contrast what is "profitable" (v. 8) by insisting on something "unprofitable." Their teachings make no difference in lifestyle or influence in society. The opposite is the case. It sidetracks believers into debates among themselves.

Hayne Griffin understands Paul's point of placing this confrontation of false teachers in this passage as defending peace. Believers are not to become so engaged in disputes over trivial matters that they expend their energy needlessly being distracted from the gospel of peace. Griffin writes,

. . . the false teachers with their erroneous teaching motivate their followers to works that in essence "deny" a true knowledge of God (1:16) and destroy the doctrinal unity of the

²⁰ William Hendricksen, *Thessalonians, Timothy, and Titus* (6th print.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), p. 396.

church. When the church cannot agree on the essentials of Christianity and is characterized by conflict and divisions, it is displeasing to God and ineffective to a lost world.²¹

More people are turned off to the gospel of peace by Christian disunity than by anything else. For this reason, Paul protects peace where it counts the most: church leadership. This begins by confronting bad or false leaders who cause division.

The confrontation process prescribed by Paul offers grace. It allows time for repentance and indeed focuses on winning a sinning person back to the truth. But, persistence in error reveals a hard heart that will not unify a congregation. Apollos received correction from Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:24-28) and now becomes a useful model for church unity. If warnings do not bring about repentance, the false leader must be avoided and rejected.

- Protect peace by building leadership teams devoted to the health of the congregation

Paul then notes a number of men involved in the leadership of this church. In addition to Titus, he refers to Artemas, Tychicus, Zenas, and Apollos. Little is known about Artemas or Zenas apart from the statement that he was a lawyer. Due to his Greek name, his vocation most likely involved civil Roman law and not Jewish Law.

Tychicus and Apollos were more renowned. We have already noted Apollos as a gifted orator and defender of the faith, especially after receiving doctrinal correction. Paul mentions Tychicus elsewhere as the most likely courier of the letters to the Ephesians and Colossians (Eph 6:21-22; Col 4:7-8). As an apostolic representative, he held a high responsibility for church unity. By the end of Paul's ministry, he was back in Ephesus (2 Tim 4:12).

Paul bids Titus to do his utmost to come to Nicopolis where Paul would ride out the winter storms. It is likely Titus did just that and then departed for Dalmatia (2 Tim 4:10). If the church itself was to help send out Zenas and Apollos, it appears they were in Crete and may have been the bearers of this letter. Thus, Paul has a team of five church leaders work together to build these young and vulnerable congregations on this island.

The apostle does not thwart growth of the church by building dependence on his presence. They are to grow in Christ no matter who leads them. The leaders themselves must be at peace with each other and hold to a common vision of fulfilling the words in this letter. Titus will not remain in Crete. Who will lead them next? Will that leader be true to apostolic witness? This list of names and some parting instructions to them indicates more than part of Paul's network. It

²¹ Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, Jr., *1,2 Timothy, Titus* (NAC 34; Nashville: B&H, 1992), pp. 328-329.

reveals how vital team leadership is and how important that each one granted oversight responsibility carries a shared biblical vision for the church. False teachers do not work well in teams. They prefer to stand alone and be above authority and accountability.

- Protect peace by congregation assistance to church leadership

The final words of the epistle address the congregation as a whole. Zenas and Apollos would not stay. Artemas, and possibly Tychicus, will replace Titus. What are the people to do? They are not to sit passively by and wait for someone to take care of them. They are to minister directly with those present. They are not to complain selfishly about Zenas and Apollos leaving for another church. They are to carry the larger picture in mind of God's work in the world. He would care for them, but they were to help Zenas and Apollos. This includes financial assistance.

While giving funds is not the only way a believer ministers to its leaders, it is a significant factor to free them up to give necessary time to cultivate spiritual maturity in the church. This is one of their "good works." Failing to do this implies being "unfruitful."

Thus, members of each local congregation participate in the work of the leaders by helping support them as best as possible. They are not to spend time criticizing every little thing they do or don't do since they receive funds. Rather, members of the congregation join in doing good works as prescribed in this epistle and live out their faith. Church leaders oversee this and encourage them on the path they forge.

When a local church has a unified team of leaders who protect them from false divisive leaders and the people are committed to following and supporting their lead, the whole congregation promotes peace in a community. Conversely, divided churches with factions that malign their leaders and refuse to follow them become community scandals and a pariah to the gospel witness.

Paul's affection for the believers in Crete is evident by his parting words, "All who are with me send greetings to you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all." This short letter is for the church and for the gospel witness. God graciously intervenes conflict ridden and deception based towns and sets up a group that operates by completely different standards and motives. They are unified, truthful, pure, and faithfully led. Their homes and their workplaces become stages where they display divine power transforming their families and work habits. Instead of cursing God, they now adorn Him. Only an amazing God can create such people and put them together in small gatherings to live out their earthly existence in such radically different fashion that the world either joins them or violently disrupts them.

May we put such words as these into practice today!

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