

Christ's Church and the Apostles (30-100 CE)

Letter to Titus

Readings: *Titus 1:1-3:15*

Reflections:

- Letter to Titus: As we will see in this letter, it would appear that Paul is writing this from Macedonia before he heads out to Nicopolis in Greece. He had left Titus in Crete and apparently is struggling to establish order within those house churches. Again, the same questions around authorship of 1 and 2 Timothy apply to Titus. Yet, again most conservative scholars view Titus as an authentic letter written by Paul.
- Salutation: This opening from Paul diverges greatly from his standard opening greeting. He inserts an extended sentence about his calling and the purposes of God through his ministry. The second part of his greeting follows closely his other pattern of combining the Hebrew (peace) and Greek (grace) greetings.
- Concerning church leaders – Qualifications of elders: Paul's words here closely parallel what he wrote to Timothy (see the notes on 1 Timothy 3:1-17). Titus was to appoint qualified elders for the house churches in every city in Crete. We need to keep the importance given to establishing healthy leadership for house churches. With this said, Paul is very practical in his teaching. An elder must possess Christ-like character, healthy relationships and a firm grasp of the message of Jesus so that he can properly engage those that disagree with Jesus' teachings.
- Warning against false teachers: Again, like his letter to Timothy, Paul is very concerned about false teachers. In this case, Paul is focusing on those Jewish Christians who are obsessed with circumcision. Paul states that those who promote this false teaching are ruining house churches (or households) and must be confronted. Paul then quotes a well known statement by one of the poets of Crete, Epimenides from about 600 BCE. This harsh statement against the general culture of the Cretans was not from a Christian prophet but rather from a secular poet from Crete. Anyways, Paul quotes it and agrees. As in other places in his writings, Paul gets fired up and uses very strong language. Like Jesus, he has little patience for those who would impose religious rules and regulations and then claim to follow Jesus. From his perspective, the issue is that they are corrupt, not from immoral sin but religious sin. They see sin in everything because their religious sin has made them judges of everyone and everything. They claim to know God (that is what religion boasts) and yet

they actually deny God by how they act and treat other people. They claim to be righteous but they are good for nothing and only cause problems wherever they go. So Paul holds nothing back and challenges Titus to tackle these false religious teachers head on.

- Teaching various groups – Regarding older men: Paul again teaches Christ-like character first and foremost, starting with the authority figures in the church. Those with influence should set the standard in all areas of spiritual maturity. Sometimes older leaders think they should get a privileged position to sound off on the things that bother them in community. Paul firmly disagrees and says they should set the standard regarding lives of love, serving others and being respectful.
- Regarding older women: Paul teaches that older women have a powerful role in community to disciple younger women, set an example of humility and service. Again Paul is concerned that Christ-followers live in such a way that they will earn the respect of outsiders. Women were expected to live submissive lives within their culture and so Paul encourages them to this out of reverence for Christ and the goal of seeing the message of Jesus reach more and more people.
- Regarding younger men: Paul continues his encouragement towards living Christ-like lives now focused on young men. Our Christ-like character is a key part of winning people's respect and their willingness to listen to our message.
- Regarding slaves: These themes continue as Paul now applies these principles to those who are bondservants. Again our integrity establishes our credibility. Our goal is to make the message of Jesus attractive by how we live our lives.
- Basis for instructions: Paul now reframes the inside out message of Jesus in a new way. God's grace appeared in Christ and it is this grace in us that changes us from the inside out, empowering us to say no to our culture and to say yes to God's righteousness. Now in this statement is a very clear affirmation of the divinity of Jesus. Paul writes, "The glorious appearing of our great God and savior, Jesus Christ." In the Greek, the terms God and savior can only apply to Jesus Christ. Therefore this is one of the clearest statements of the divinity of Jesus. Jesus was proclaimed by the first Christians as "God with us." Paul affirms that the reason Jesus appeared was to create a transformed people for himself who reflect his own character. Paul encourages Titus to keep his teaching completely focused on these core truths and not to let people look down on him.
- The Christian life – Need for righteous living: Paul encourages a humble, other-centered, service oriented, peaceful lifestyle as the basic approach for all Christ-followers.
- Grace demands good deeds: Paul now beautifully summarizes again the core truths of the Jesus movement. We were once completely messed up and enslaved by all the wrong things. Jesus came to save us because of the love, mercy and kindness of God. He saved us by changing us from the inside out through completely recreating us (rebirth and renewal) through the Holy Spirit who he poured into our lives. As we are made right with God through his grace, we become his children and heirs, sons and daughters who will live

forever. Paul then says, just put this core teaching to memory and keep teaching this over and over and over again!

- Quarrelling unprofitable: Paul now warns Titus as he warned Timothy. Avoid people who are obsessed with religious debates. In this context it was debating with Jewish Christians who want to make everything about returning to the Torah and honoring Jewish genealogies. Paul says warn them one time two times and then simply withdraw from relationship with them. Their religious sin has warped their perspective. They bring their own condemnation on themselves because they go around judging everyone only to find that in the end they are the ones who are judged by God for their lack of grace.
- Concluding thoughts – personal matters: Paul lists in his closing remarks many of the key leaders he has worked with. Artemas, Tychicus and Apollos are all well known leaders within the early Christ community. Paul reminds Titus again to encourage his community to be active in doing good, particularly in helping those Christian leaders who need support as a part of completing their calling before God.
- Benediction: Paul's closing is simple and reflects the close, loving relationships shared within their community. A sign of healthy leadership is the bond of love that is formed with those who are under a leaders care.