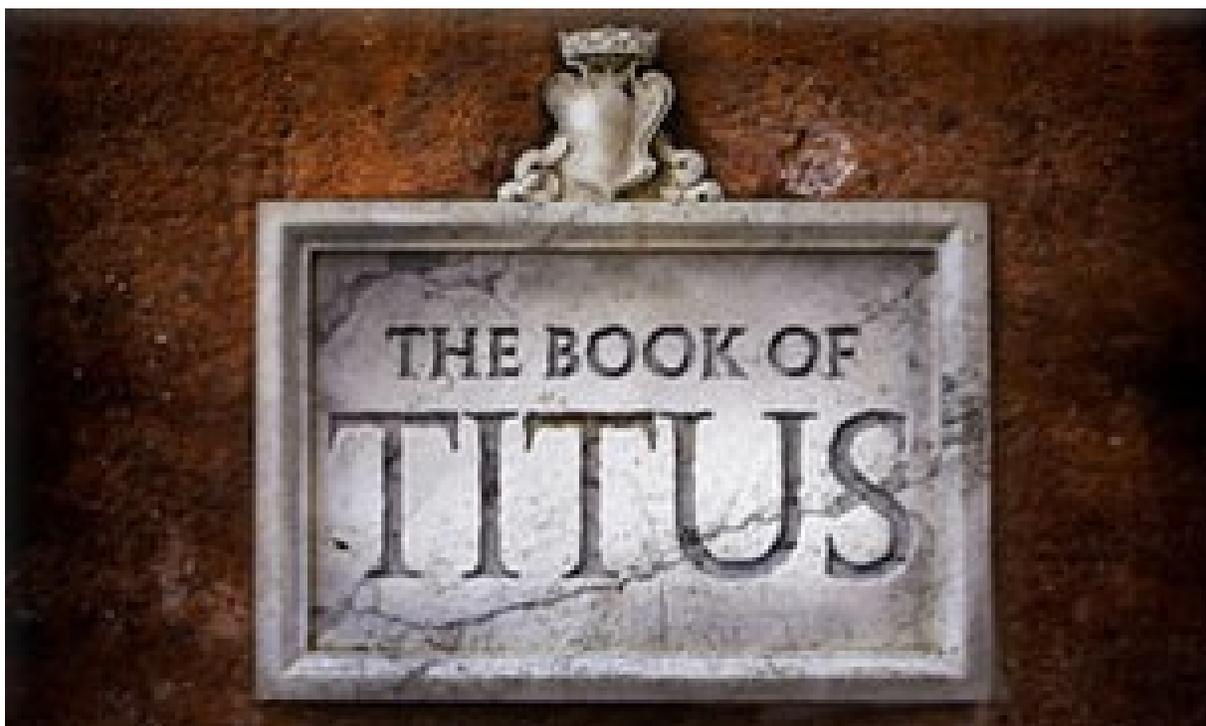


# TITUS



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## Table of Contents

The God Who Cannot Lie	3
Grace, Mercy and Peace	5
Titus 1:5-9	7
Titus 1:10-16	10
Titus 2:1-10	12
Titus 2:11-16	14
Titus 3:1-7	16
Titus 3:8-15	17

## The God Who Cannot Lie

Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect and the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began, <sup>3</sup> but has in due time manifested His word through preaching, which was committed to me according to the commandment of God our Savior; (Titus 1:1-3 NKJV)

Is God a liar? Are all those Bible promises just there to lead you up the garden path, to deceive and disappoint you and mock you? Are all your hopes and dreams and callings just a fantasy? May it never be! God cannot lie – and he keeps His promises and executes His plans from long ago.

Sometime before time began (verse 2) God promised eternal life to humanity and it has been in our hearts ever since. (Ecclesiastes 3:11 NLT) <sup>11</sup> God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end.

The promise of eternal life is planted very deeply in the human spirit and underlies human hopes and fears, and appears in numerous myths and legends. There is a realm “somewhere over the rainbow” where there is no more curse, or sickness or crying or pain. A world where evil and injustice have lost their power completely and where there is no misery – just joy and an incredible sense of being truly alive as you were meant to be alive. A place where you say: “Aha, I am finally at home.”

This sense of the promise of eternal life is either a great big lie, or the real truth. Each of us senses the promise and hears its call, but the bitterness and hopelessness in us squashes it flat. We say it's a rumor – not a promise, but we KNOW it's a promise; it's the one spiritual promise we come hard-wired with as human beings.

And we have to make a decision – is it true or false? Is that promise in our heart the truth – or a cunning fantasy designed to destroy us with hope? In other words is God a liar and is His Spirit a deceiver of men? The answer is no – God cannot lie. Heaven is there and eternal life awaits us and we glimpse it in Jesus.

Either there actually is an eternal city - or we are stuck with earthly cities like Manila and New York. The writer to the Hebrews catches this dilemma and the universal, hopeful choice of men and women of faith:

(Hebrews 11:13-16 ) <sup>13</sup> These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off \*were assured of them, embraced *them* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. <sup>14</sup> For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. <sup>15</sup> And truly if they had called to mind that *country* from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. <sup>16</sup> But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly *country*. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

That huge hope in your heart is not a lie; rather it is the truth. It is the truth that God has put there, it is the true hope that God has placed in all human hearts to make us long for him and for eternity - so that He can fulfill that hope. And hope in God does not disappoint. (Romans 5:5)

For many people this is an important question. Christianity seems not to work for long patches of time. We feel like Joseph in the dungeon or Jacob working for Laban. God's goodness seems remote and His promises rather elusive and disappointing. A televangelist may raise our hopes to fever pitch – only for life to dash them to the ground. You may safely ignore the false promises of some charlatans but you must not ignore the deep promise written in your own heart – the promise of a better world - the hope of an eternal home.

God cannot lie. He is the Truth, in Him the whole world holds together – the whole ancient cosmos, in a constant and lawful order. The creation tells us that the Creator is not a God of sudden changes of mind. His Word stands forever, His decrees and laws are unaltered for thousands of years and the natural order is precise in its seasons and rotations. This deep constancy of the ways of God assures us that He is no liar. The Sun does not suddenly change; the constants of physics are not varying day after day. The Universe is reliable and so is God.

For a long while God's promise was hidden in the hearts of men and women of faith – then it appeared, in Christ, in flesh and blood and was made manifest. As it says above: “in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began, <sup>3</sup>but has in due time manifested His word through preaching.”

The people in Crete never got to see Jesus in the flesh, to them He was “manifested through preaching”, the good news of Jesus came to them in an apostolic proclamation which connected with the hope of eternal life planted deeply in their hearts by God. Thus true gospel preaching manifests Jesus, as the solution to the promise of God, who cannot lie. Jesus is the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden for which we long. We cannot return to Eden, but we can believe in Christ and have eternal life – both now and in the Ages To Come.

This gospel is given to Paul as a trust, committed to the apostle by the commandment of God our Savior – that is Jesus. (This is one of those passages where Jesus is called God.) The message cannot be changed – it is as eternal as the realms it comes from, it can only be passed on as a trust.

Lastly this word is the “truth that accords with godliness”. Heaven is for those who want to be like God in moral perfection – that is according to god-likeness or godliness. Heaven is not run by dark, pragmatic “realpolitik”, for the evil will be totally cast out. Heaven is ruled by love and truth and light. Eternity is a place where only goodness reigns – and where only the godly and truthful can reign. Thus godliness will prepare us to live there where True Quality dwells in Glory. The gospel does not prepare us for the stock market; it prepares us for the Kingdom and for the world of Real And Lasting Things – that is for eternal life.

And that is the Promise of the God who cannot lie.

## Grace, Mercy and Peace

To Titus, a true son in our common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior. (Titus 1:4)

Most of us want happiness and success but God gives us grace, mercy and peace. This can be very frustrating. As a faith missionary I do not own a house or a car or furniture. At the moment my wife and I are living in a small bedroom in the house of a relative. We are fifty years old. We are not alone in such a struggle, tens of thousands of pastors and missionaries, and faithful servants of God have nothing – especially in the developing world. It seems that faithful servants of the Lord often go unrewarded in terms of money or honor in this life.

On the other hand we have someone like Hugh Hefner - the publisher of Playboy magazine. Hugh Hefner has happiness and success. He is wealthy, surrounded by beautiful women and seems to enjoy it. But he does not have grace, mercy or peace - in fact Hugh Hefner is spiritually and morally bankrupt. Profligate sinners can have a lot of fun – but they cannot have Christ.

Lets ask a spiritual test question: “Would you rather be James Bond or the Apostle Paul? “ Do you want fast cars and fast women or do you want holiness, grace, mercy, peace and persecution? You may ask - What’s wrong with “a bit of both” – such as driving a red Ferrari while wearing a monk’s robe? (grin).

Sometimes we turn this into a justice issue “I have been a good boy, so where is my Mercedes? “or something like that. Many a returning missionary has looked at their bank account and the struggle of buying a house and getting health insurance in old age and wondered if God has deserted them. It seems like the “reward” for service is a heavy financial burden in the last years of life. You can’t pay the bills with grace, mercy and peace. So is it unjust? In worldly terms it certainly seems that way. It only makes sense if you see life as a pilgrimage. When you are traveling you don’t take furniture.

If the case is that only this life matters and that “he who dies with the most toys wins”, then we are fools to serve Christ. Paul says as much in 1 Corinthians 15.

<sup>13</sup>If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. <sup>14</sup>And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. <sup>15</sup>More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. <sup>16</sup>For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. <sup>17</sup>And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. <sup>18</sup>Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. <sup>19</sup>If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men... <sup>30</sup>And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? <sup>31</sup>I die every day--I mean that, brothers--just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord. <sup>32</sup>If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die”.

However, if there is eternal life, and if Christ has been raised, and if what we have lost will come back to us a hundred fold...then we will not just inherit justice – we will inherit grace and a Kingdom! Jesus talks about the time of the Restoration of all things and says:

### **Matthew 19**

<sup>28</sup> Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. <sup>29</sup> And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. <sup>30</sup> But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.

Here is the great gamble of faith. Do we believe God or believe the world? Do we walk by faith or by sight? Do we bank on the resurrection? Do we count on the promises of God? Are grace, mercy and peace enough or do we covet the Hugh Hefner lifestyle? Do we belong to Heaven or to Vanity Fair?

For many Christians life does not work out as expected or as promised.

### **Hebrews 11:13**

<sup>13</sup> All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth.

But life does work out well! "For God has prepared a city for them." (Hebrews 11:16)

The gospel does NOT promise wealth, health, riches, happiness and success in this life. It does promise persecution for all who live godly lives and "many troubles". (2 Timothy 3:12

<sup>12</sup> In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted) In the midst of the world, and in the face of this "evil and unbelieving generation" we can know grace, mercy and peace. We can be joyful pilgrims.

Some fine Christians may well have wealth, health, riches, happiness and success in this life – and that is fine, they are not more spiritual or less spiritual for it. But of these things "fill their lives" then a tragedy occurs (for we are meant to be filled with Christ).

I cannot drive a red Ferrari through "them pearly gates", but my wanderings are in God's book and my tears in his bottle (Psalm 56:8) and my faithfulness is recorded in heaven. We will leave the last word to the prophet Malachi.

### **Malachi 3:13-18**

"You have said harsh things against me," says the LORD. "Yet you ask, 'What have we said against you?' <sup>14</sup> "You have said, 'It is futile to serve God. What did we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the LORD Almighty? <sup>15</sup> But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly the evildoers prosper, and even those who challenge God escape.' "

<sup>16</sup> Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honored his name. <sup>17</sup> "They will be mine," says the LORD Almighty, "in the day when I make up my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him. <sup>18</sup> And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.

## Titus 1:5-9

<sup>5</sup> For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you--<sup>6</sup>if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination.<sup>7</sup>For a bishop (lit. overseer) must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money,<sup>8</sup>but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled,<sup>9</sup>holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict. (Titus 1:5-9)

This passage has caused no end of controversy in churches so I will make a few exegetical comments first.

First, we need to note the obvious – that Christian leaders have to high character standards and no grave weaknesses, especially those that would affect their judgment. Popularity is never mentioned and neither are looks, charisma, or wealth. Teaching ability is certainly required.

The “one wife” translation is interesting - the word “mias (Gk.)” for “one” is used later in Titus to mean “first” (Titus 3:10) and its uses are (number of occurrences in brackets): one (62), first (8), a certain (4), a (3), the other (1). Taken literally it seems to definitely rule out single elders, homosexual unions and polygamous elders. The elder seems to be required to have a (one) wife and children. It does not rule out having one wife after the other – as in being widowed and re-marrying. In fact widows are told to remarry in both 1 Corinthians 7 and 1 Timothy 5. Thus divorced people are neither ruled in or out by a literal interpretation of this verse. Other references are needed to determine that.

“Not given to wine” is actually “me paroinos” – not addicted to wine, drunkenness, not an alcoholic. It does not require the person to be a teetotaler.

The characteristics of the elders family are important in that they are a sign of his leadership ability (1 Timothy 3:4-5). Children are to be faithful rather than wild – specifically not dissolute (asotias) and refractory and completely out of control (anupotakta). What is in view is something like a gang member or criminal. The implication is the child has a willful disregard for authority – including that of the elder. (A pregnant teenage daughter is not quite what is in view here. That is more likely to be a sin of weakness than of violent rebellion.) Faithful has dual meanings and may also mean “believing”. The household is to be generally orderly and obedient.

Elders, bishops and overseers seem to be one and the same. Thus elders (presbuteros) in verse 5 seems to point to the (episkopoi) in verse 7. Paul asks Titus to appoint elders, plural, in every city - not an elder in every church. The city-wide network of house-churches and fellowships was to be overseen by a group of elders. If the city has twelve fellowships and if eight city-elders are appointed then some fellowships may not have elders.

Though many character attributes are mentioned the only specified role of the elders is teaching and counseling in line with God’s Word. “<sup>9</sup>holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.” As we shall see later this involved guarding the church from heresy (Titus 1:10-16)

These elders keep the church in line with God's Word and defend the faith from the influence of heretics. They are the equivalent of bible-teachers or theologians operating, in a doctrinal role, to guide the congregations into the truth. The idea of a plurality of elders may have been to keep one person from having all the authority in matters of doctrine and utilizing the corrective balance of a council of wise men.

It is clear that eldership is assumed to be male in these verses but I will not buy into that controversy today.

They are not to be greedy for money or as the KJV puts it "filthy lucre" or NASB "base gain" – a word that denotes corrupt funding. This was possibly to avoid the sale of church positions, which was common in pagan circles then and became known as "simony" after Simon Magus, and certainly so that that would serve God, not Mammon. (Matthew 6:24)

After the long list of weaknesses to be avoided comes the positive qualities that are to be sought in the overseer: "but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled. "in other words a deep and solid person with a certain gravity of lifestyle, not given to impulsiveness or addictions in any way. A rock that can be relied on indeed a "just man" and a "holy man".

Hospitality is to be part of the elder's role; he is to be welcoming, kind, and open to others. Not just an insular and aloof expert but rather someone who cares about particular people and has them in his home. The elder is over a city, and probably has to know many people from different fellowships and have a grasp of the state of the church in its various locations. And the elder must be strong – able to be self-controlled and able to rebuke and correct others (Titus 1:5-16)

What is the purpose of such a list? Was Paul writing to a church telling them how to elect elders? Was he writing to say what should be done to judge elders as they perform their duties? Or is Paul writing to a fellow apostle on how to do the initial selection of leaders on a national scale? It is the latter. Titus, who is often Paul's trouble-shooter (see 2 Corinthians chapters 7,8 and 12), is sent to Crete to appoint spiritual leadership in a morally bankrupt society. Titus is to go from city to city in Crete and appoint elders. No elections are envisaged. Titus will turn up, find leaders, work out who is sound and good, appoint them and maybe train them, and move on to the next city. This list is his guideline for the initial selection of elders over city-wide networks of churches.

Thus this list is intended for leaders who are appointing other leaders. It may guide bishops as they look at ordination candidates and missionary boards as they look at candidates for teaching positions on the field. This list is probably not intended to be used by congregations to critique leaders who are already in office - though it certainly should be consulted at their initial appointment.

As you may guess by the tone of this bible study I have many reservations about how this list and other lists like it in the Pastoral Epistles have been used to judge people whose families go through a rough patch. This list was intended to be used wisely by a mature leader in a certain apostolic situation. It is not a new law for believers or a source of ammunition for critics and accusers. The adage "judge not lest you also be judged" needs to be heeded.

Matthew 7:1-5 "Judge not, that you be not judged. <sup>2</sup> For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. <sup>3</sup> And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? <sup>4</sup> Or how

can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank *is* in your own eye? 5 Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

Elders are to be high quality Christians who work in a team to oversee the churches in a city. They are solid Christians who are appointed for being “just, and holy believers” and living friendly lives of quiet godliness and having good doctrine and teaching ability.

## Titus 1:10-16

10 For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, 11 whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain. 12 One of them, 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 giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth. 15 To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. 16 They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work. (Titus 1:10-16)

As we saw yesterday the main role of the elder/overseer is teaching orthodox doctrine and reproving incorrect doctrine. "Titus 1:9: holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict."

The need for this instructional role is outlined in today's verses: There were false teachers – some merely "idle talkers" and other much more malicious "deceivers" who found the low character of Cretan society at that stage (liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons) meant that people were an easy mark for their scams which ultimately ended up with financial advantage and dishonest gain. These false teachers were primarily Jewish "from the circumcision" and propagated "Jewish fables and commandments of men" and turned people aside from the truth. Titus was told that the task was imperative - "their mouths must be stopped" and he is instructed to "rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith."

This role is known as "apologetics" – making a defense for the faith against error and the people who are skilled at this are called "apologists". The title is from the Greek word "apologia" which means to give a verbal defense, a speech in defense or a reasoned statement or argument. Titus and the elders were to be skilled in apologetics that they may refute cults and false teachers and so keep the faith of the early Christian communities on track.

The phrase "who subvert whole households" (the Gk. is oikous – houses) probably refers to house-churches which were lead astray by these false teachers. It is not unlike today when cell groups and bible studies can be taken over by a powerful personality with divisive views. Satan tends to be fairly repetitive in his methods and uses corrupt men to corrupt others. The pure in heart seem to automatically grasp what is right - but there are others, who Paul calls "defiled and unbelieving", and it is difficult for them to arrive at the truth. "To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled."

If you have ever tried to reason with a seasoned heretic you will be amazed at how difficult it is for them to see logic or to grasp the truth. You can pile up the evidence and all they can do is scorn it. They do not really seek after truth but after followers, money and notoriety. In 1 Timothy Paul describes them as "Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron" (1 Timothy 4:2)

The elders had a role – either change their teaching or stop their teaching. They were first to admonish such a person and then, if after two admonitions the person is refractory then they are to be "rejected" that is expelled from the Christian community: "Titus 3:10-11 Reject a divisive

man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.”

At first glance this is not a kind or gracious approach but even Jesus calls such people “wolves” and is firm with the Jewish legalists of His time. Heresy is serious. It does not justify physical assault or burning someone at the stake but it does mean that such a person should not be part of a Christian fellowship.

For both Jesus and Paul the prime mark of a heretic was hypocrisy: “They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.” They are abominable – that is engaged in abominations; they are disobedient to the precepts of the gospel; and they are disqualified that is “adokimos” that is: Not standing the test, not approved - properly used of metals and coins; that which does not prove itself such as it ought, unfit for, unproved, spurious, reprobate . In other words they are fakes –once their good works are closely inspected they are as bogus as those of some dubious charities.

Fake good deeds, lies, disobedience, greed for dishonest gain, lies, flattery – it’s a toxic brew that is still around today in various “shonky” ministries that prey on people. Responsible church leaders will bring these people to account, expose them and teach their flock not to be ensnared by them.

We also need to add a caveat – not everyone who disagrees with us is a heretic. Christians can have major doctrinal differences but still be Christ-like, honest, sincere, godly and just. Paul isn’t concerned about views of predestination or tongues here - we need to tolerate significant doctrinal differences among born-again, bible-believing Christians. Inter-denominational mission agencies have proved that Calvinists, Arminians, Pentecostals and Baptists can all work together for the Lord.

We are not to ask elders to berate everyone who has a doctrinal difference from us, we are to ask them to defend the faith from predators, con-artists, divisive and greedy people and those who distort the core of the gospel. Paul is mainly concerned about views on morality, lifestyle and the very core of the gospel - such as the resurrection.

Doctrinal purity is more about the quality of our love and our faith in Christ than it is about infralapsarianism or supralapsarianism (I hope I have spelled those words correctly!) and more about how we handle money than how we handle Hebrew adjectives. The role of elders is to teach us how to live out the Sermon On The Mount in the love of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit and to rebuke those who would seduce us into disobedience or distract us into myths and wrong teaching.

## Titus 2:1-10

<sup>1</sup> But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: <sup>2</sup>that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; <sup>3</sup>the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things-- <sup>4</sup>that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, <sup>5</sup>to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed. <sup>6</sup>Likewise, exhort the young men to be sober-minded, <sup>7</sup>in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, <sup>8</sup>sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you. <sup>9</sup>Exhort bondservants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all things, not answering back, <sup>10</sup>not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things. (Titus 2:1-10)

This homely advice about respectable day to day living may seem rather “unspiritual” at first – everyone going around being sober and reverent and never gossiping and being just plain honest good folk. Frankly “just plain honest good folk” aren’t noticed until they are missed – until you live somewhere with a high crime rate and a tough neighborhood where everything gets stolen and the politicians are on the take. It is then that you realize that “just plain, good, honest folk” are a product of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The concepts of “reverence and respect” run right through this passage (verses 2, 3 5, 7, and 9) and to “sound off a little” they are shocking absent from much modern culture and spirituality. As someone said - “attitude sells” and smug, sneering, defiant insolence is now cool and sells jeans. Reverence and respect are now seen as weak-kneed and out of date. But you cannot run a school, a family or even a corporation on defiance and insolence. Creativity and productivity are unleashed when there is deep respect for each other and a reverence for the ethos and values common to the group – and especially for God.

Paul’s advice to older women to keep the younger women in line seems quaint and un-liberated: “that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, <sup>5</sup>to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed. “ Why would Paul issue such direct and almost offensive instructions? One answer may be because of the low state of Cretan society and the average level of family life and ethics. It seems from Paul’s description of Cretans in Titus 1:12 that Cretan society was similar to and as dishonest and degraded as the England of Wesley – or later of Booth. The Wesleyan revival took women, soaked in gin and sin, got them saved and then emphasized clean living, education, home-making and family virtues. This provided real “redemption and lift”. Many rescue ministries working with drug addicts and alcoholics emphasize such virtues today. The fact that Paul has to instruct both elders and older women to be “not given to much wine” may indicate widespread alcoholism in the community.

So we seem to be looking a society which needs rebuilding from the ground up and liberation from lying, laziness, alcoholism and gluttony (Titus 1;12, 2:1-10) , in fact Crete had quite a reputation and gave us the Italian word “Cretino” for its citizens which became later became our English word “cretin”. (I am sure Cretans are not like this today!) So Paul is giving instructions here, which are useful for broken people, drug addicts, alcoholics, and those who need a total rebuilding of their conscience and their moral structures. (And of course which also have something to say to us all.)

Titus is not spared:” in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, <sup>8</sup>sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you.” The Christian worker is to be a template for godly living – a pattern for good works that others can follow. The Greek word is tupos –from which we get “type” as in typology and typography – the imprint, representation, or example. As we might say that the tabernacle is type of Christ - so Titus is to be a type of good works, showing them forth so people can both learn and believe.

Titus is to be solid – showing integrity, reverence and incorruptibility – no appointments of family members, no bribes, no funny accounting, no use of church property for personal use, no pandering to the rich, no deviation from the impartiality proper to a servant of God. God’s workers must “walk humbly with their God” in reverence, honesty and integrity – not in showmanship or in greed. Titus is to have sound speech that cannot be condemned; outbursts have ruined many ministries. Words are powerful – particularly when spoken in public or from a pulpit – and must be chosen with great care and wisdom.

Reverence, respect and honesty are to extend even into the workplace: “Exhort bondservants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all things, not answering back, <sup>10</sup>not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.” In the Philippines having a “helper” is quite common and people still look for these four virtues in a good helper – that the person be obedient, that they are pleasing in their attitude, that they do not answer back and that they can be trusted with money and o not pilfer from the employer. Such a helper is highly prized and will be a good witness in the home and an adornment to the gospel.

Example is everything and the spiritual aspects of honest, reverent and respectful living are uppermost in Paul’s mind. Such virtue is “proper for sound doctrine” (v.1) prevents the faith being maligned: “that the word of God may not be blasphemed.” (v.5) and “that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you.” (v.9) and finally it promotes the gospel: “that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.” (V.10) To be a good witness you have to have these virtues – for they are universally recognized as proper and fitting Christian virtues. Can you imagine a drunken elder or a pilfering servant having any credibility with unbelievers? We are the only bible many people read and they look at our actions and our character first of all.

Being a good Christian example at home and at work and in community is hard work. But we are all representatives of the faith we profess and believe. Being solid, good, reverent and respectful people who are a pleasure to work with and live with is a life-long achievement. It is much easier to be loud and insolent and “cool”. But that is not the path of wisdom or the Way of the gospel.

## Titus 2:11-16

<sup>11</sup> For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, <sup>12</sup> teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, <sup>13</sup> looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, <sup>14</sup> who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works. <sup>15</sup> Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you. (Titus 2:11-16)

The emphasis on applied Christianity continues – Paul says that reason Christ has come is: “that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works.” Simply put – to change us from bad guys to good guys. You can’t live a lawless life and say you are in conformity with the gospel.

Paul says that grace teaches us to be holy. “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, <sup>12</sup> TEACHING us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age,” Grace does not allow loose living. The purpose of grace is holiness. Grace gives stumbling sinners the time, the strength and the opportunity to increase in holiness. Grace is God instructing us to stop sinning, to deny ungodly lusts and to live a godly life “in the present (evil) age”.

Thus grace is NOT a “get out of jail free” card without any moral requirements. Grace comes through faith and is closely associated with repentance. We don’t merit grace, we don’t earn it by repenting, in fact grace leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4) but repenting is required as a fruit of grace. When the work of grace in the human heart is complete we will find a well-instructed disciple, holy in all his or her ways, and without any love of sin. In other words grace makes us like Jesus – that is holy - and any gospel that claims that grace removes the need for holy living is a false gospel.

You cannot read the above verses without sensing Paul’s incredible single-minded focus. Christlikeness is everything. It permeates all of Paul’s prayers, all his epistles, all the groaning of his apostolic heart. In these verses the Christian is to be holy in their attitude to the past, the present and the future. Firstly they are to be holy in what they put behind them – “denying ungodliness and worldly lusts”; Next the Christian is to be holy in their present daily lifestyle – “we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age”; and thirdly we are to be holy in our future hope – “looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,” (Now that would make a good three-pointer for Sunday morning!)

We cannot let verse 13 slip by without comment: “our great God and Savior Jesus Christ”. It is literally rendered “the great God and Savior of us Jesus Christ.” A statement as plain as any that Jesus Christ is indeed God. Jesus is not just a nice Jewish man in a beard and sandals, He is “the great God” – and through Him all things were made that were made. (Colossians 1:15-20, John 1:1-14) We need to remember that Jesus is God and God is like Jesus, and God the Father is perfectly revealed in Him (Hebrews 1:1-3). Thus, contrary to rumor, God is not a grumpy old guy with a beard on a throne with the nice Jesus as the good-guy side-kick. Jesus is God - and God is as nice as Jesus -and loves us.

Verse 11 could start a few theological hares running “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.” Does this mean that all are saved and thus give ground for

universalism? Probably it just means that the grace of God has appeared to Gentiles as well as to Jews. The grace of God is no longer confined to a particular tribe, ethnic group or nationality. Before the cross all mankind knew God's general grace – in sending His rain on the just and the unjust – but only the Jews had any access to His saving grace. But since Christ heaven has been open to all and His special saving grace has been open to every person on earth. The saving grace of God is now available to all men and women though all do not take hold of it. This saving grace is of course mediated through the Savior, which the next verses make quite clear is Jesus Christ alone.

Paul seems to put a dampener on the view of Spirit-filled Christians as “happy hippies” by insisting that “we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age” - which sounds very serious stuff indeed. Paul is insisting on the presence of definite moral fiber in the Christian believer. Christianity is not a justification for irresponsible living or for slack moral boundaries. There is to be a cutting away of the world and an ardent adoption of godliness.

We are to be a pure people – for God's aim is to “purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works.” Like the TV reality show *The Apprentice* where Donald Trump whittles down 16 young people, testing them to find a business leader, God tests and re-tests, forges and batters us and puts us through the fire so we can become pure and special. God wants a certain kind of Christian – one that is “zealous for good works”, not just zealous for blessings! Being zealous for good works means, in Jesus words, someone that “seeks first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matthew 6:33) and who thinks constantly about how to do God's will in the real world.

Good works do not earn us our place in Heaven; rather they are the outcome of Heaven in us. If Heaven dwells in you, then you will be zealous for good works. When the grace of God that brings salvation does its work in us, and makes us a new creation, then that new nature will be eager to do the will of God.

Ephesians 2:8-10: For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Lastly we see the proper exercise of apostolic authority: “Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you.” Godliness is to be firmly insisted on, not just mildly recommended. Titus was to speak with the same force that Jesus would use when insisting on holy living – no more and no less. Authority is good when it is used to enforce God's rules, it goes badly wrong when it is used to enforce personal whims. Those of us in ministry are not to quail before the critics and the liberals. We are not to let anyone despise us - even the “high and mighty”. We can safely insist that our churches forsake worldliness – because the Scriptures tell us to insist on that. God's word is never put to a vote and wins no popularity contest. His standards are simply true and required.

## Titus 3:1-7

Put them in mind to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to every good work, (2) to speak evil of no one, not being quarrelsome, but forbearing, showing all meekness to all men. (3) For we ourselves also were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, slaving for various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. (4) But when the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, (5) not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, (6) whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, (7) that being justified by His grace, we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:1-17)

God changes our heart through the washing and regeneration of the Holy Spirit.

The old nature is described by Paul thus: "For we ourselves also were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, slaving for various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another." (Verse 3) Lust, folly, self-deception, envy, malice and hatred – you can see them clearly in most workplaces: The office Lothario, the self-deceived and pompous supervisor, the envious schemer, the malicious backstabber and the vivid hatred between management and staff in many firms. Paul is not exaggerating our condition prior to Christ – a condition desperately in need of transformation. The unregenerate human heart is the source of so many of this world's ills.

And secular education does not cure it! Both my wife and I have worked as academics and seen spectacular turf fights and heart-breaking folly among people with high intelligence and good education. We have seen graduate students fall into moral sin, and lecturers become alcoholics, and unnecessary divorces and financial ruin. We have seen enough to convince us that no amount of education can cure the condition of the human heart – only Christ!

Now education is good and to be commended – but it does not fully tame the flesh or subdue the ego. Education may train the mind, but even the strongest mind cannot conquer forces such as envy, lust and disobedience to God. Secular education can fit us for earthly service and a career but it cannot fit us for God's service and for Heaven. But this is not a bible study against education - rather it is an exhortation to consider Christ and the Holy Spirit! For it is Christ that change sour heart and our unruly ways and the Holy Spirit that washes and regenerates us.

In verses 4-7 Paul gives a brilliantly brief gospel outline: (4) But when the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, (5) not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, (6) whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, (7) that being justified by His grace, we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

That is almost as close to a creed as you can get! Remember yesterday we saw that Christians were to be practical about their faith and "zealous for good works". Now Paul quickly disabuses any notions that may flow from that by saying that good works do not establish our righteousness with God: "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us." And later "that being justified by His grace, we should become heirs." Our inheritance and our salvation flow from grace and mercy –not from a righteousness we establish by our own efforts at being good.

## Titus 3:8-15

Faithful is the Word, and concerning these things I desire you strongly to affirm that the ones believing God should take thought to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men. (9) But keep back from foolish questionings and genealogies and arguments and quarrels of law, for they are unprofitable and vain. (10) After the first and second warning, avoid a man of heresy, (11) knowing that such a one has been perverted and sins, being self-condemned. (12) When I shall send Artemas to you or Tychicus, hasten to come to me at Nicopolis. For I have decided to winter there. (13) Diligently set forward Zenas the lawyer and Apollos, that nothing be lacking to them. (14) And let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they may not be without fruit. (15) All those with me greet you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all. Amen. (Titus 3:8-15)

Paul outlines the difference between a fruitful life - spent doing good works to meet real needs and an unprofitable life - spent arguing, chasing down bible trivia, legalism and genealogies, and being involved in divisions and heresies.

We have all met people who seem to spend all their life “doing research” into obscure prophecies or genealogies or very minor doctrines which edify no-one. They often draw up charts and diagrams and argue endlessly their particular point. Opinionated, factious, divisive and clamorous they are nuisances. They are seldom involved in constructive living or the fruitful meeting of real human needs.

Quarrelsome Christians are on the wrong track. Life is not about winning arguments or proving points – rather it is about agape love, faith, hope and good works done in the love of God for particular people in need. “Rightness” comes through justification, by grace, through faith, in Christ – and not through correct theology. The “righteous” person is the one that lives in holy love, not the one that splits hairs most accurately.

Paul insists that the Cretan Christians “maintain good works” rather than to “maintain precise theological distinctions”. Now theology is good and is a very worth subject of study – but it should not turn us into cranks or critics. There are good theologians and bible teachers who are called by God to break open His word. But theology is only one of the means God uses to instruct us to live a life of love in the knowledge of God - and thus theology is not an end in itself.

Theology informs living and that living should be fruitful, wise, useful and constructive and full of good works. One area I have seen that occur in is in urban ministry where good theology helps people create models of life and ministry to help the poor in the cities of the developing world. When you minister to the urban poor you NEED good theology and a deep knowledge of Christ to sustain you amidst the pressures of the ghetto and the slum. You need theology to help you get a handle on human suffering and incarnational ministry and prayer and spiritual warfare and biblical economics and God’s idea of justice. Now that sort of theology is done in order to do good works and bless others – and that is theology in the service of people and of God.

But there is another kind of “quack theology” that is argumentative, shrill, and divisive. It is theology for its own sake, knowledge that “puffs up” and tongues that tear down. Such theology does not belong in the household of Christ. Paul is quite clear about what should be done: “(10) After the first and second warning, avoid a man of heresy, (11) knowing that such a one has

been perverted and sins, being self-condemned.” Warn them, then avoid them. Give them no foothold among believers.

While we are to reject heretics and schismatics we should not let them turn us into furious, foaming, raging heresy hunters. There is no place for the Spanish Inquisition or for burning them at the stake. Heresy should not be allowed generate hatefulness in the Church – even in the name of purity.

These good works include the support of those in the ministry “(13) Diligently set forward (on their journey) Zenas the lawyer and Apollos, that nothing be lacking to them.” In other words Titus was to make sure that Zenas and Apollos were well prepared and equipped to travel in the name of the Lord. There seems to have been some problem with the support of itinerant Christian ministers and this is also reflected in 3 John:

3 John 1:5-8 (CEV) Dear friend, you have always been faithful in helping other followers of the Lord, even the ones you didn't know before. (6) They have told the church about your love. They say you were good enough to welcome them and to send them on their mission in a way that God's servants deserve. (7) When they left to tell others about the Lord, they decided not to accept help from anyone who wasn't a follower. (8) We must support people like them, so that we can take part in what they are doing to spread the truth.

Good works include making sure that missionaries, evangelists and others who must travel are properly taken care of on their journey and not “let down” as occasionally happens. The “God will take care of you” attitude is often just a thin disguise for disorganization. Thoughtfulness, charity and careful attention to the detailed needs of others are things that I am sure God will reward greatly and which please Him.

Paul concludes with: “And let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they may not be without fruit.” We want to bear fruit for Christ and earn reward in Heaven. If we perform good works that meet real needs then this verse says that we will not be “without fruit”. One such person who did this was Dorcas who made clothes for widows. (Acts 9) When she died everyone wept so much that the apostle Peter was called to raise her from the dead! Now Dorcas was not an evangelist or a pastor and may not have led a lot of people to Jesus but she was fruitful because of her good works. Fruitfulness does not depend on theology or position in the church - but on being a loving Christian who does good deeds to meet real needs.