

Titus 1

Establishing the Church

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Quote

“Christianity is the least concerned about religion of any of the world’s faiths. It is primarily concerned about life.”

T. D. Price

IN A NUTSHELL

Paul began by establishing his authority as an apostle—one to whom God had entrusted the message of salvation and eternal hope. He then proceeded to outline for Titus the qualifications for officers of the church. Much of what he said is similar to his instructions in 1 Timothy, including a warning about the false teachers.

Establishing the Church

I. INTRODUCTION

Good Ol' What's His Name

A man and his wife came hurrying up to me one Sunday after morning worship. “We have just been to a terrific course on memory. The seminar showed us how to use word associations and other methods for recalling information. It was terrific!” he enthused.

I listened as he told me the details. His wife nodded excitedly as he described the workshops they attended.

“So, who was the teacher of the seminar?” I asked.

The man looked down, put his finger to his lips, looking rather pensive. I could tell his mind was grinding through the techniques. Finally, he looked at me and asked, “What’s the name of the flower that has red and pink petals, and thorns?”

“Rose,” I said.

He looked toward his wife and asked, “Rose, what was the name of that teacher at the memory course?”

Our methods often fail, even those for living the Christian life. We set up rules and devise systems of belief or practice, only to discover that nothing is working out as we had planned. Some people spend a lifetime working and planning on how to get to heaven. But when the test of truth comes, all strategies and schemes fail. We need the truth and designs of God.

Just as he wrote to Timothy, Paul wrote to another pastor, Titus, outlining the necessity for truth, the need to establish strong leadership, the Christian’s call to godliness, and the essential nature of the church in the life of believers.

Paul called us to remain faithful to the fundamentals of the faith—to focus on truth and godliness as prescribed by God through Jesus Christ. If we do not, we will become entangled in false ideas and systems that will fail us.

III. CONCLUSION

Follow the Leader

“You are a minister, so I know you will not understand this kind of temptation.”

“Pastors are paid to be good.”

“What a privilege for me to introduce to you the Right Reverend Joseph Logan.”

There are many misconceptions, jokes, and formalities related to pastors and spiritual leaders, none of which have anything to do with the gospel of Christ’s kingdom. While their position places them under great responsibility before God, pastors and church leaders are normal, regular sorts of people. They experience temptations common to all people and even some related specifically to their job and position. They struggle like other believers, they sleep at night, brush their teeth, have to pay bills, and navigate through a variety of relationships ... just as we all do.

In his letter to Titus, Paul outlined some specific guidelines and character qualities that pastors and church leaders must exhibit. But these standards are not intended only for the super spiritual or the official leaders of the congregation. The pastor is not held to a different standard than other Christians. Every believer should determine to live a life of progressive holiness. These characteristics should be normative for every follower of Christ.

James recognized that teachers, or pastors, bear a responsibility for which they will be held accountable. They “will be judged more strictly” (*Jas. 3:1*) Those who handle God’s words, who instruct others in divine matters, will undergo a more exacting examination. But this does not relieve all other Christians from the responsibility of ordering their lives in accordance with righteousness. Jesus Christ is our model, our example of how we must live. Pastors may be judged more strictly, but they will be examined by the same standard of holiness.

Anyone who rejects the principles which Paul handed on to Titus is guilty of rebellion and disobedience. Leaders must exemplify a life of godliness but those who comprise the congregation must then follow their lead.

PRINCIPLES

- Eternal life and godliness are part of an eternal plan that God has entrusted to his followers and the church so they in turn can reveal it to the world.
- The church should have multiple leaders to assure accountability and a sharing of duties and responsibilities.
- Those who assume positions of leadership within the church must meet specific standards of belief and conduct.
- Disqualification in either orthodoxy or lifestyle eliminates a person from a position of church leadership.
- All believers are to adopt a pure lifestyle.
- False teachers and their teachings must be eradicated from the church.

APPLICATIONS

- If we claim eternal life and the Spirit's indwelling, we must help share the news of God's truth and power.
- We must apply ourselves to purity and righteousness.
- Divisive and disobedient teachers must be silenced. Speculations, strange ideas, and unfounded doctrines must not be allowed within the church.
- We must always correct people with a view to restoration and redemption.
- Church leaders and pastors should help keep one another accountable so they will develop spiritual strength and health.

IV. LIFE APPLICATION

The Verdict

In Western cultures, a curious phenomenon has developed over the years. Sometimes we call it privatization, the process by which we take some thing which should belong in the public domain and confine or reduce it to personal use. This outlook concludes that almost everything of importance belongs to the personal control of the individual. This approach divorces private and public life. This privatization has shoved religion, morality, community responsibility, and relational commitments to the margins of life.

Such an approach not only confines religion and ethics to individual taste; it also drives a wedge in peoples thinking. Most people do not recognize when a dichotomy exists between their professed beliefs and their behavior. They can espouse belief in God, fidelity, and honesty, while at the same time neglecting prayer, giving, and the authority of Scripture. Without a sense of accountability, they participate in adultery, cheating, and lying as long as it serves personal advantage.

Christians hover on the same precipice, in danger of advocating a divine message while neglecting the necessity of its transforming power. As the divide between professed belief and lifestyle widens, we enter the danger zone of self-delusion, concluding that mere statements of belief are the essence of faith, that declarations of orthodoxy release God's grace upon us, liberating us from the necessity of biblical conduct.

But the Christian faith rests on Jesus Christ. He penetrates the mind with the knowledge of God and invades our spirit, changing the believer into a different person. No longer does the Christian appease his conscience by duty; he expresses his love and commitment to God by a changed lifestyle. To sever our beliefs from our behavior is a denial of the faith we profess.

Belief *and* conduct define the individual. This is why Paul, in speaking of false teachers or those who had wandered from the faith, easily transitioned between their faulty belief system and their discredited behavior. This is also why, when defining the qualifications for Christian service and leadership he addressed both doctrinal purity and ethical behavior.

The unbelieving world longs to see authentic Christianity. Christians are expected to witness to the power and saving goodness of God, to testing to Christ's ability to transform this present life. But

the gulf between what is and what *should be* is sometimes very wide.

Paul urged, “Do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord” (2 Tim. 1:8). What we must recapture is the sum and substance of authentic witness. A witness validates a claim. He affirms or denies a particular position. As Christians, we either confirm or refute God’s revelation. While we cannot achieve the salvation of our soul through hard work, we do verify our salvation by the way we act, the purity of our life, the lifestyle we follow.

In a court of law, when a person is called to bear witness, his testimony is validated by his character. If words and conduct do not agree, behavior always takes precedence over statements. What we do is far more convincing than what we say.

VI. DEEPER DISCOVERIES

A. God's Elect (v. 1)

At the beginning of Paul's letter to Titus, he prefaced his instructions by proclaiming his apostleship. His authority for what followed came from the fact that he was "a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God's elect."

The "elect" encompasses those who trust in Christ to restore the relationship between themselves and God. These are people who depend upon Jesus' death as a substitute for their own deserved punishment for sin. They rely on his resurrection for their hope for life now and into eternity.

Even so, election is not a strictly New Testament concept. Election refers to the sovereign choice of God, especially in selecting people for a particular purpose. What seems to be the underlying necessity of God's election is that his choice remains hidden in the depths of his own wisdom. None of his selections depend upon the actions of the individual or group elected. God chooses. We are not told why or how. But the election of God issues from his love. In addition, it places unique responsibility upon the chosen.

Israel is called God's chosen (or elect) in [Isaiah 45:4](#). As a nation, they were expected to represent God's holiness, his goodness and his love among the nations. Israel, though unimpressive in itself, was picked by God to transmit his nature and salvation.

Paul writes about the election of Jacob over Esau: "Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls—she was told, 'The older will serve the younger'" ([Rom. 9:11](#)). Jacob was selected as the minister of God's promises, in spite of his personal failures.

Looking ahead, Isaiah wrote, "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations" ([Isa. 42:1](#)). This is a reference to God's election of Jesus for the work of salvation. God's selection in this case depended on the perfect holiness of Jesus and his ability to carry out the work chosen for him to do. Even so, God chose him, the perfect image of God, the untainted Servant, before the earth was created, before his incarnation. The election of God occurs as the first action—the initiating movement in the transaction between himself and Man.

How election meshes with free will is a mystery the human mind cannot unravel. What the human mind must come to grips with, however, is that God's call goes forth to all mankind to believe in his Son, Jesus Christ. For those who respond in faith, the issue becomes not "*how* did God elect me?" but "*why* did God elect me? The "why" question must be answered by discovering God's purpose in his selection.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world *to be holy and blameless in his sight* ... in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace" ([Eph. 1:4–6](#), emphasis added). The intention of God has been to create a people who would belong to him, worshiping him freely, loving him intentionally, obeying him joyously. He desires to "purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good" ([Titus 2:14](#)).

B. The Circumcision Group (v. 10)

In each of Paul's pastoral letters, he warned against false teachers. These were people, often from among church leadership, who promoted heresy in some form. In writing to Titus, he portrayed them as "rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers." He went on to point out a particularly troublesome faction: "the circumcision group" (v. 10).

The circumcision group consisted of Jewish converts. Although they had accepted the gospel of Jesus Christ, they continued to hold to their Jewish traditions. As a group, they caused continual trouble, especially for Paul in his ministry to the Gentiles.

To the Jew, circumcision was a sign of covenant relationship with God. Instituted by God, it represented an agreement between the divine and man. In this act an individual was marked and identified with the God of Israel; he was set apart for service to Jehovah. As part of the covenant, God conferred upon the individual all the privileges of belonging to his family. Circumcision remained a sign of God's ongoing relationship and promises to the Jewish people.

At the time of the church's birth, Jesus' disciples had not understood that God was bestowing a universal gift. Christianity was viewed as a strictly Jewish concern. Having been raised with a sectarian understanding of God and his activity among mankind, the apostles initially confined Christ's offer of salvation to Jews. Peter was given a vision in which the prohibitions of Jewish law were lifted. Then he participated in the baptizing of Cornelius, a Gentile believer. Finally he understood the greatness of God's gift: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right" ([Acts 10:34-35](#)).

Even so, there were still believers who could not comprehend that God had begun something new. Later, in defending his interaction with Cornelius, Peter came under sharp attack by circumcised believers for associating with non-Jews ([Acts 11:2-3](#)). These rancorous people belonged to the circumcision group.

The influence of this group, especially among Jews, was powerful. Paul recounted an incident in which Peter, having acted in solidarity with Gentile believers by eating with them, reversed himself and withdrew from their company. The reason was because Peter "was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group" ([Gal. 2:12](#)). These Jewish converts exerted a tremendous amount of power and intimidation.

Paul's experience with these Jewish believers had taught him about their damaging effect on other Christians. This is why he warned Titus against their manipulative power that enslaved believers to Jewish legalism and undercut God's grace.

VII. TEACHING OUTLINE

A. INTRODUCTION

1. Lead Story: Good Ol' What's His Name
2. Context: Paul assigned Titus to establish the churches on the island of Crete. Although the believers were new, leadership was essential, so Paul outlined the qualifications necessary for

those whom Titus must select to help guide the church. The fledgling congregations were also experiencing infiltration and confusions caused by false teachers who were steeped in Jewish traditions and myths. Paul wanted Titus to oppose and refute these people and their followers in order to safeguard the gospel and the Cretan believers.

3. Transition: Paul's message in this first chapter of Titus targets the qualifications required for church pastors and leaders, but he actually addressed all believers. The criteria for leadership has not changed over the centuries. Neither has the demand for a growing righteousness in all believers. The church must carefully guard the fundamentals of the gospel, oppose all ideas and philosophies which violate the truth, and determine to live in godliness. The Christian life penetrates both the privacy of the heart and the public arena of personal lifestyle.

B. COMMENTARY

1. Greeting (1:1–4)
 - a. The apostle's authority and purpose (1:1–3)
 - b. The recipient of the letter (1:4)
2. Establishing the Churches (1:5–9)
 - a. Titus's job description (1:5)
 - b. Qualifications for church leadership (1:6–9)
3. The False Teachers (1:10–16)

C. CONCLUSION: THE VERDICT

VIII. ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

1. Give examples of ways in which Christian belief is demonstrated in daily living. How is your Christian faith evident?

2. Paul limited the position of elder to those men whose children are believers and who are not wild and disobedient. In Western cultures, however, it is expected that teenagers will go through a period of willfulness and rebellion. Is this inevitable? How can individuals and the Christian community assure social and spiritual stability in our youth?

3. If hospitality is more than “entertainment,” what are some ways Christians can demonstrate the sacrificial giving that characterized first-century hospitality?

