

Group Study Outline

Titus 1 Theme Sentence

Churches need godly leaders who teach the truth which leads to godliness, and they should silence those who teach otherwise.

Launch Question

Which is more important: knowing the truth or being godly?
Can you separate the two?

READ Titus 1

What do v1-4 tell us about Paul, his job and his message?
What is the link between truth and godliness?
How has God's promise of eternal life started to come true? Is that surprising?
What should this mean for us if we want to be saved and to grow?

Why is Titus in Crete? (v5, 11)
What is it like in Crete? (v12) How does that impact on Titus' role?

What does the world think makes a good leader?
What kinds of things should *churches* look for in their leaders?
Why is a leader's life and character so important?
Why do they have to "hold firm to the trustworthy word"? (v9)
What is the job description for elders?

What does this mean for us in how we select and keep our leaders?
What difference should this make to us, even if we're *not* elders ourselves?

Why is it so important to get godly leaders in place who teach the truth? (v10)
What are these false teachers like? Compare them to the godly leaders described in v5-9.
Can we piece together the kind of things these false teachers taught?
What is the impact of their teaching on their hearers?

How should Titus respond to these 'good-for-nothings'? (v11)
What would that look like?
Is this (and v9b) something we're comfortable with? Can we see why it's vital?

Summing up & applying it

How do we know if somebody really knows God? (v16)
Can we see either the problems of v10-16 or the solutions of v5-9 happening at Emmanuel? Where are their signs that grace is at work? How could we grow?

How do we individually match up to the example our leaders should be setting?
What practical steps could we take in growing in specific areas?
(But watch out for the law creeping in! It's grace which trains us – 2:11-12!)

PRAY

Titus 1



The discipline of grace

Lots of people think that the message of free grace will lead people to live recklessly sinful lives – after all, they're not saved by what they do, so they can do what they like, right? Wrong.

Ok, so maybe it does matter how you behave. But surely grace won't help with that. We'd better switch to a message about rule-keeping and religious observance. That'll sort people out, right? Wrong.

The big message of Titus is that it is the truth of God's grace which both saves us AND changes us. Titus is to insist on this and correct those who think otherwise. 2:11-14 are the central verses, which explain that God's grace to us through Jesus saves us for eternal life AND trains us for godliness while we wait. Grace disciplines us, like a personal trainer, saving us as we are, but not leaving us as we are.

Welcome to Crete

It seems that Paul helped plant a church on the Greek island of Crete but had to move on before everything was finished. 1:5 tells us that Titus had been left behind to tidy things up by appointing elders in these new churches. This was sorely needed because false teachers were already at work, pedalling a kind of religion which stressed outward spiritual practises but actually excused people's natural sinful tendencies. It was a strange mixture of legalism and license.

Titus' mission was clear: establish the truth that God's grace both saves AND changes people – and do that by putting godly leaders in place who can teach.

This first chapter introduces us to the chaos in Crete, outlining what kind of leaders churches need and what kind of people need to have their platform taken away for good.

[NB]

Titus 1 Theme Sentence

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Application

- Grasp the fact that God's grace is meant to lead to godliness.
- Don't allow any other teaching to take hold.
- Uphold and listen to godly leaders who teach this truth.

Commentary

1 Paul, who wrote this letter, was God's servant (literally 'slave') sent by Jesus. Why? For the benefit of Christians, chosen by God. Specifically for their faith and for their knowledge of the truth. His job was primarily about conveying a message.

The key thing to note about this message is that it "accords with godliness." It fits with it and leads to it. Donald Guthrie says, "The essence of Cretan theology was that they thought belief and practise could be separated..." Whereas 1:16 shows that it's a real problem to say you have a relationship with God but not live like it. 2:1 says to teach the lifestyle that goes with healthy doctrine. 2:11-12 says that grace trains us to say 'no' to ungodliness. 2:14 says that Christ came to make us a people "zealous for good works." 3:8 says that if we've believed in God we should devote ourselves to good works. Paul is telling Titus that you can't separate the good news from good works, because the truth of grace leads to godliness.

2-4 The gospel doesn't just lead to change now, however, but brings the hope of eternal life. God reliably promised it before time began and fulfilled his promise... interestingly *not* through the coming of Jesus (at least not in this passage) but through the preaching of the gospel. That's how important the teaching of the good news is – it's the means by which God keeps his promise to give people eternal life. The gospel doesn't belong to Paul. He has simply been entrusted with it and given the job of passing it on intact.

5 Titus' job is to put elders in place in the churches. Churches aren't fully established until there is indigenous leadership. Note that this is elders plural, rather than a one-man band leadership. Paul tells Titus what to look for in a church leader:

6 The first place to look is a man's home life. He doesn't have to be married, but if he is then he should be (literally) 'a one woman man'. He should also know how to keep his kids under control. As 1 Tim 3:5 says, "if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?" Eldership is similar to fatherhood.

7-8 The next place to assess a potential leader is their general godliness. This is a very ordinary list! He's not asking for super-saints but just normal holy living. *All* Christians should live like this, but especially Christian leaders, because they are to be an example of the fact that the truth leads to godliness. Self-control and discipline are key characteristics here, because most of the sins to avoid are ones of being out of control, such as drunkenness, violence and anger. He shouldn't be self-seeking but welcoming and loving to others.

9 So far, the list of qualities for an elder should fit most Christians. But this verse gives something more specific to their role as leaders: they have to have a firm grip on the gospel. Why? Because the main job description of a church leader is to teach the truth which leads to godliness. An unavoidable part of this is confronting and correcting those who teach something else.

10-11 Here Paul gives the reason why the church in Crete needs godly leaders who teach the truth which leads to godliness – because there are loads of ungodly people who are teaching lies which lead to ungodliness.

These people are rebellious. Unlike the sound, healthy doctrine of Titus, there is no nutritional substance to their teaching; it's just empty talk. Titus needs to silence them, using the image of a muzzle to shut the mouth of an animal. Their lies are disrupting and damaging homes and churches. And they do it for what they can get out of it! Whatever the details of their teaching was, it wasn't what they ought to teach and so it should be silenced. The same principle applies today.

12-14 Here Paul quotes 'one of their own prophets' and it's not a pretty picture! Non-stop liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons... and Paul agrees with that diagnosis! Crete must have been a tough place to be a Christian.

The quote is probably from Epimenides, a popular philosopher from 6th century BC. It comes straight after we're told they are teaching what they ought not to teach and is prefaced by saying this is what one of them has said, so I think it's an excerpt from one of the false teacher's sermons. But the teachers are sinful and the result of their teaching is more sin too! So this quote from a sermon isn't there to challenge them to more obedience. It seems to be saying, "People from Crete are brutes but hey, that's just what they're like around here! They can't help it! Boys will be boys, Cretans will be Cretans." This fits with historians from the time recording that people from Crete weren't just famous for their bad behaviour, they were proud of it!

But at the same time, the false teaching seems to have been, at least in part, a Jewish thing (cf 'circumcision party' in v10, Jewish myths v14, quarrels about the law 3:9) which tended towards legalism. How does this fit with excusing bad behaviour? (see the next verse)

15 "To the pure all things are pure" may have been the motto of the false teachers. They saw themselves as pure because they'd been circumcised or done the religious rituals, and that meant it didn't matter how they lived. But the true truth leads to godliness.

Paul takes this motto and turns it around. The false teachers are actually *impure* and so even the 'good' religious stuff they do is tainted by their sinfulness. But they don't even realise it because their consciences have become so dirty and broken.

By excusing people's natural sinfulness and promoting a bit of religion on the side, the false teaching managed to deny both that the gospel is about grace rather than law AND that this message should lead to lives of godliness. They lowered the bar of holiness to let people off the hook, so long as they jumped through a few religious hoops.

16 These are people who claimed to have a relationship with God. They said they knew him. But their lives tell a different story. They are good-for-nothings. The exact opposite of what a Christian should be, let alone a Christian teacher or leader. The truth leads to godliness – they aren't godly so they obviously *don't* really believe the truth.