

# Titus 1

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In our work together as a church, we recognize that for any practice of ours, we must find authority for that practice in the Bible. This perspective understandably influences the way that we study Scripture. We pore through the New Testament, looking for evidence about the early church, and when we find it, we conduct ourselves accordingly.

Now, this is something that we ought to be doing. We know that we can only please God as a church if we obey Him as a church. However, this emphasis on the things that we do as a group can lead us to overlook passages that are just as important to us individually. For example, you don't have to be a Christian very long to hear Colossians 3:16 cited, which tells us that we are to sing to one another. We hear just as much about Colossians 3:17, which tells us to do all in the name of the Lord. However, how often do we focus on Colossians 3:14, where we are instructed to put on love as the perfect bond of unity? Love is just as important as authority, but we don't necessarily treat it as being just as important.

We see an example of this uneven attention in the book of Titus. Titus is one of the shorter books of the New Testament. It has only three chapters. However, the way we approach it might lead one to believe that the book is only five verses long, those five verses being the ones that describe the qualifications of elders. We recognize that the qualification text is important because it has to do with our practice as a church. We really study it and zero in on it, but then we overlook the whole rest of the book. This is a pity, because even though we may only see elders appointed on two or three occasions in our entire lives, we work to live godly every day of those lives. For the next three Sunday evening sermons, we're going to remedy that. We're going to study all of Titus, beginning with Titus 1.

## Introduction.

This chapter divides itself quite neatly into three main headings, and the first of these is the introduction to the book. It appears in Titus 1:1-4. As Paul often does, he uses this introduction as another opportunity to give his mission statement. He describes what he is—a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ—but then he moves on to say why he is what he is. Paul wasn't a self-appointed servant. Instead, he is an apostle according to the faith of God's chosen people. This doesn't mean that Paul was an apostle because other Christians believed in Him. It means that he was an apostle according to their system of faith, that Christianity itself defined who the apostles were, and he was one of them. Likewise, he was attested to by the truth that taught men how to be godly.

He tells us that he bears this apostleship for a reason that is familiar to us from Paul's other writings—the hope of eternal life. God has promised him eternal life, and God can't lie, so Paul is willing to be a part of God's plan and preach His gospel to others. In our lives, we need to consider how much we share Paul's hope of eternal life. What is it that we live for? Do we live for the time when we get off work and are able to pursue various interests and hobbies? Do we live for our families? Or do we live for the moment when we leave this life and go to heaven? If this last is actually true of us, it will be plainly evident in our lives. The way we spend our time will show that our priority is heaven. The way we spend our money will show that our priority is heaven. The things we think about will show that our priority is heaven. On the other hand, if our priority isn't heaven, we won't put God first in our time or our money or our thoughts. Brethren, that won't cut it. God is a loving, forgiving God, but He won't tolerate it if we put other things before Him. If we want Him to admit us into His heavenly kingdom, we have to live for the hope of eternal life.

## Elders.

From there, Paul moves to the topic that is most familiar to us of all the topics in Titus: appointing **ELDERS**. We find Paul's guidance for Titus in this in Titus 1:5-9. Here, we see one of the many ways in which Titus is similar to 1 Timothy. Just as Paul had left Timothy behind in Ephesus so that Timothy could properly organize the Ephesian church, Paul has left Titus behind in Crete to bring order to the churches there. The book of Acts, of course, never records Paul having traveled to Crete, so both Paul's preaching there and this letter must date from after his first captivity in Rome.

As part of this organizing work, Titus is supposed to appoint elders in every city, and to help him with that, Paul provides him with a list of qualifications that the men appointed as elders must meet. A couple months ago, we studied a list much like this one in 1 Timothy 3, the list that Timothy was supposed to use to appoint elders in Ephesus. These two lists have a lot in common, and we tend to take the two lists, smooch them together into one big list, and use that one big list to appoint our elders today. However, that method doesn't really reflect a careful approach to the text. Even though the 1 Timothy 3 list and the Titus 1 list have many elements in common, there are just as many ways in which they are different, and we can't really appreciate what God's will is for elders in His church without recognizing those differences.

When we take the two lists and put them side by side, we see that both lists contain a number of concepts that are the same or very similar. Both 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 tell us that the elder must be above reproach, the husband of one

wife, self-controlled, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money, and must have submissive children. However, there are some ideas that are unique to 1 Timothy 3. Paul tells Timothy that in addition to those things, the elder must be sober-minded, respectable, gentle, a good manager of his household, not a recent convert, and thought well of by outsiders. Likewise, only Titus is instructed that the elder must have faithful children and be not arrogant, a lover of good, holy, upright, disciplined, holding the word firm, and able to rebuke.

We can ignore these differences and compile our super-elder list by putting the two together, but that's not faithful to the first-century context. There's no evidence in Scripture that Timothy had Titus' list, or vice versa. Timothy used his list to appoint elders, and Titus used his list. So what happened in the first century if Timothy found a man in the church at Ephesus who met all of the qualifications on his list and appointed the man as an elder, even though he didn't have children who were faithful? What happened if Titus found a man in Crete who met all of the qualifications on his list, and appointed that man as an elder, even though the man was still a fairly new Christian? Were Timothy and Titus somehow able to use these divinely inspired qualifications to appoint men who weren't qualified? Did God set up elderships in Ephesus and Crete that were destined to fail? Or is there something else going on here?

In reality, this is telling us something very important about the way that we need to understand and use these lists of qualifications. God intended these sections of Scripture as a portrait, not a checklist. Even though 1 Timothy 3 uses a number of words that don't appear in Titus 1, and vice versa, both lists paint a picture of the same kind of man. It is that whole man we must consider. When we evaluate a man for the eldership, the only way to evaluate him properly is to ask if all of his attributes, taken together, rise to the level of the blamelessness that an elder must possess.

There are two main ways we can go wrong with that. On one extreme, we can count up the things that we can count, focus on those things, and declare a man elder material because he meets the numerical qualifications, while essentially ignoring everything else the Scripture says. That's a marvelous way to appoint unqualified elders. On the other extreme, we can read these qualifications so stringently that no man can possibly qualify. I've heard of congregations who don't have elders for precisely that reason, because they believe it's impossible for anyone to meet the qualifications. Before we head down that road, we need to remember that Peter is the only first-century elder we know much about, and he was a man who at one point in his discipleship, publicly denied Jesus. Elders are good men, but they're still human.

## **False Teachers**

As we saw a little while ago when we read the section of Titus 1 on elders, Paul's final thoughts concern the prospective elder's familiarity with the word and his ability to use it, not just to teach, but to refute those who held incorrect positions. This was going to be important because of the prevalence in Crete of false teachers. Paul describes these men in Titus 1:10-16. If we judge from this text, the situation in Crete appears to have been even more chaotic than the situation in Ephesus. We catch hints in 1 Timothy that the church in Ephesus had problems with people who taught that Christians ought to be circumcised. Here, Paul comes right out and says it. These men resisted whatever authorities God had emplaced already in the churches of Crete, and they lied to people, upset them, and generally stirred up trouble.

It's easy to see why such men would have caused a great upset. Paul focuses on circumcision a great deal in his epistles, but circumcision was really just the flashpoint issue. The Judaizing teachers didn't just promote circumcision; instead, they said that Gentile converts had to keep the entire Law of Moses, everything from the sacrifices to the rituals of purification. The import of their teaching was that you had to become a Jew before you could become a Christian. It overturned the entire system of grace and replaced it with law. Nor were the motives of these men pure. They created this great distress, causing people to doubt their salvation, because they thought they could make money off of it. That's why Paul advises Titus to deal with them firmly. They could still be saved. There was still hope for turning them back to genuine faith in Jesus. However, for that to happen, they had to be stepped on and forced to understand their error.

Even though we don't have to deal with Judaizing teachers today, there's still a lesson here for us in how we should deal with the false teachers we do have. Sometimes, Christians will be led into error and be so certain of their error that they don't shut up about it, even though they've already been shown the problems with what they're saying. As a rule, we need to deal gently with one another, but with an unrepentant false teacher, sometimes gentleness isn't going to be enough. Like the men of Crete, they may need to be rebuked sharply for their own sakes so they can see the problem.

This section concludes with a discussion of two perspectives on life and their effects. On the one hand, Paul presents the pure, who understand all things as pure. This, of course, does not mean that if we are pure enough, sins like adultery and murder become pure too. Instead, it's a reference to things like the foods that were declared clean under the law of Christ. The pure Christian understood that those foods were clean. On the other hand, though, the party of the circumcision was unable to find those things pure because they didn't believe in Christ's power to abolish the Old Law. They were defiled in conscience, so those things seemed defiled to them too, and their preoccupation with the rituals that Moses prescribed made them unfit for the work that God wanted them to do. The same can be true for us. We can get so hung up on things that God doesn't care about that we become useless for the things that do concern Him.