

## Titus

Like the two letters to Timothy, Titus is considered a ‘pastoral’ epistle – designed to encourage the younger brother and missionary Titus in the task Paul has assigned him: encouraging the new ecclesia in Crete in its early period of growth and establishing elders and principles of ecclesial order there. There are many links of theme and vocabulary with the letters to Timothy, but Titus also has some twists of its own.

---

Like Timothy, Titus was a relatively young man, characterized by Paul as his ‘son after the common faith’ (1:4). After missionary work there alongside Paul, the senior apostle moved on, leaving Titus behind and charging him with appointing elders in the ecclesia, and establishing a level of ecclesial organization. Perhaps most important, he was to instruct them further in their new faith, exhorting and encouraging them to withstand false doctrine and other distractions.

In a number of passages, then, Paul urges Titus to exhort, instruct and command his fellow-believers in Crete (2:6,15; 3:1,8). He is to speak with authority, not allowing himself to be despised (2:15), and must uphold sound doctrine in the face of rival teachings (2:1; 3:9). He will also be responsible for ‘rejecting’ heretics with serious false doctrine after a first and second warning (3:10-11).

Needless to say, these are big responsibilities. Titus will need to call on all the spiritual resources available through God’s word and through prayer, and, in ensuring that he is respected and listened to, his best weapon will be his own spiritual Christlike

example:

*In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works; in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech, that cannot be condemned, that the that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you. (2:7-8)*

*This kind of behaviour and example does not develop overnight. Titus will need commitment and dedication – but Paul has every confidence in him, and looks forward to seeing him again when he arrives in Nicopolis to spend the winter (3:12-13).*

## **Danger and Opposition**

The believers in Crete are in danger. Paul exhorts Titus himself to make sure he is not sucked into irrelevant and unhelpful arguments, but he appeals even more strongly that Titus encourage the Cretians to avoid the pull of false doctrine. He sees this as a clear and present danger, as he does in the letters to Timothy also.

What, though, is the nature of the threat? There are two key passages – 1:9-16 and 3:9-11 – where Paul discusses this. He makes three references to a Jewish problem:

- ‘especially they of the circumcision’ (1:9)
- ‘strivings about the law’ (3:10), which are unprofitable and vain and which subvert the hearers
- ‘Jewish fables’ (1:14)

But the danger may be wider than this, incorporating pagan philosophies as well. In a scathing attack he rounds on

- Gainsayers
- Unruly and vain talkers
- Deceivers
- People who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre’s sake
- The defiled and unbelieving
- The abominable and disobedient whose mind and conscience is defiled
- Those absorbed by foolish questions, genealogies and

contentions

- Heretics

As in Timothy, the church is being threatened by those who see religion as a route to financial gain ('for filthy lucre's sake,' 1:11). There are the libertines whose watchword is 'unto the

## Titus and Timothy

The similarities between the letters to Titus and Timothy (particularly the first, which is thought to have been written around the same time) are significant and worth enumerating:

- Timothy and Titus are given a similar commission by Paul to establish elders and ecclesial organization, as well as to encourage spiritual growth.
- Both letters contain a set of 'entrance requirements' for the office of 'bishop'
- Both contain instructions for different segments of the ecclesial body: young men, old men, young women, old women, servants, etc.
- The importance of sound doctrine is emphasized.
- There is strong warning to avoid false doctrine, and also strife, fable, and pointless argument – particularly about words. Judaism and circumcision are certainly present dangers, but the emphasis is more on destructive arguing.
- Timothy and Titus are both encouraged to stand firm, set an example, and not allow themselves to be 'despised'. They are to embrace their work for the gospel with enthusiasm.
- Both contain set-piece 'faithful sayings' (see the Panel).

But there are also some subtle differences in emphasis, as well as some passages which are unique to Titus.

pure all things are pure' (1:15), but their reprobate works and defiled consciences show their true colours. There is no alternative, for the extreme manifestations of such behaviour, other than disfellowship – as Paul advocates in 3:9-11.

These were times of great spiritual danger, particularly from within – from those who 'profess to know God but in works they deny Him' (1:16). One unique and interesting feature of the dangers warned against in the letter to Titus, however, is the reference to the natural personality of the Cretans which serves to magnify the threats we have been considering:

*"One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, The Cretians are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies. This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith." (1:12-13)*

Such a passage clearly trades in stereotypes, but Paul evidently thought that the national reputation of the Cretians had sufficient truth to it to justify this. They had a reputation for lying, for a self-serving laziness, and for being 'evil beasts' (morally degenerate? Likely to exploit and 'maul' others?). It was largely true, Paul noted (and in his missionary travels he had had sufficient acquaintance with people from different parts of the empire to comment on a generalisation of this sort). He recognizes, then, that there are personality types – that people can be disposed,

## Structure and Shape

Introduction (1:1-4)

Ch 1

- The qualities of a bishop (1:5-9)
- They will teach sound doctrine and help avoid heresy / strife (1:10-16)

Ch 2

- The roles of young, old, man, woman, slave, free (2:1-10)
- This grows out of reconciliation in Christ and the kingdom-hope (2:11-15)

Ch 3

- General exhortations (3:1-3)
- Because of our new status and calling following baptism (3:4-8)
- Closing exhortation to Titus: avoid foolish questions, reject heretics (3:9-11)

whether by genetics, upbringing, national ‘psyche’, or whatever, to have certain attitudes, temperaments, and to behave in a certain way.

But does this excuse the behaviour? By no means. It needs to be taken into account. It needs to be acknowledged, and the challenge of running against the grain of what comes naturally must be squarely faced. But the result of the observation on Paul’s part was rebuke: ‘Wherefore rebuke them sharply!’ he says. An awareness of a potential problem of this sort in oneself, then (for instance, knowing which type of sins to which one might tend to fall prey because of one’s personality-type) brings not a ready-made excuse, but an awareness that we need to apply particular intensity and concentration to fight against this sin. In this case, Paul felt that the danger of false doctrine which he outlines in the previous couple of verses (1:10-11) is exacerbated by the Cretians national characteristics. This led to a doubling of the warning.

## Sober and Sound

In combatting these dangers, Paul uses two terms repeatedly to highlight attributes a disciple will need in his arsenal.

A first is soundness. This term has the sense of being whole or complete, fully-functioning. It was used in a medical context, for instance, to describe a body-part in fit-for-use and healthy condition. This is how our doctrine and speech must be, and, as 1:5 shows, we ensure that we achieve this by ‘holding fast the faithful word’. Here are the references in Titus:

- A bishop must hold fast the faithful word as he has been taught, so that he is able by sound doctrine to exhort and convince the gainsayers (1:9)
- The Cretans need to be rebuked sharply, so that they may be sound in the faith (1:13)
- In contrast to false teachers, Titus must speak the things which become sound doctrine (2:1)
- Titus must show himself an example, with sound speech which cannot be condemned (2:8)

A second attribute for the disciple is sobriety. Being sober, of course, is the opposite of being drunk. Unlike the drunk – out of control, not fully aware of what is going on, feeling that everything is good and that he is more capable than is in fact the case – the sober disciple is alert, quick, able to assess and reason and take sensible decisions.

- The aged men must beridly lusts , we should live soberly (2:12)

The first three references congregate in the section which gives advice to the constituent groups in the ecclesia – in short, sobriety is enjoined upon virtually everyone! The things that distract and disorient us as young or old, man or woman, may be differ-

ent. But the danger is there for all of us, which is why Paul stresses the need for remaining in control, vigilant, and with all senses marshaled to act in a Christlike way.

### The Faithful Sayings

1 Timothy 1:15

This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, That Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.

1 Tim. 3:1

This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.

1 Tim. 4:9,10

This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance. For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe.

2 Timothy 2:11-13

It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he will also deny us: If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.

Titus 3:8

This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.

### Exhortation and Doctrine

Most of Paul's letters follow a basic pattern of doctrine in the first half followed by exhortation and practical advice in the second. Titus is structured rather differently to this. As suggested in the table, the letter seems to divide fairly logically into its three chapters. Each one kicks off with a major practical section (the

pastoral need is thus paramount); this is then followed with a section which gives the doctrinal impact or justification for that exhortation or practical instruction.

Thus, in the first chapter, Titus' instructions concerning the appointing of bishops and their qualifications is followed by a section which explains why such appointments are necessary. The ecclesia requires strong, high-caliber leaders who are well-founded in the Word, precisely because there are currently so many threats to sound doctrine which need to be withstood.

There has to be competent, scripturally-reasoned defense to stand against these challenges, for there is only one true gospel. The second chapter follows a similar pattern, as the table shows. Finally, in the third chapter, the general exhortations in the first three verses are justified by the wonderful description of the cleansing power of baptism. An appreciation of what baptism really means and achieves can motivate a true regeneration of human behaviour.