

PAUL'S LIFE AND TEACHINGS

Lesson 35

Paul's Letter to Titus

If you have occasion to be in our home early in the morning, the chances are quite good that you will find my wonderful wife sitting in her office area next to a big cup of coffee, with a pen in her hand carefully going over a yellow sheet of paper. Becky is a list person. She makes lists of things she needs to do. It seems to me that she has her “To Do Today” list; her “To Do This Week” list; and her “To Do This Month List.”¹

Aside from her affinity for organizing, I believe her lists allow her to get a lot more done than she would otherwise. Each morning she seems to pour over the lists from the day before determining what is completed and what needs more attention.

Are you a list person? Do you know a list person? I am not sure that there were as many “list people” around before the ready availability of paper and pen/pencil. I suspect when writing materials were incredibly expensive, and before literacy was so prevalent, that lists were not so commonplace.

I also suspect that, were he alive in our time, Paul would have been a “list person.” We certainly get that impression in a number of his writings, including his letter to Titus we look at today. Titus is almost one long “To Do” list that Paul wrote later in his life.

Scholars do not call Titus a “To Do” letter; instead they call it a “Pastoral Epistle.” Titus is grouped with 1 and 2 Timothy as Pastoral Epistles because Paul explains in a pastoral manner how Timothy and Titus need to take care of pastoral obligations in their churches. As we study Titus, hopefully we will see why both titles are appropriate. Titus is indeed a pastoral letter, and it is a thorough to do list as well!

We should add here that it is unclear whether Paul wrote I Timothy or Titus first. Both seem to have similar dates of composition. We are fairly confident from Paul's tone that 2 Timothy was written later, shortly before Paul's death. So while

¹ Admittedly these are my observations as an outsider looking in! She has not proofed or approved this lesson. She probably has a “To Do This Year” list as well.

we looked at 1 Timothy last class, we are covering Titus this week. We will finish the life of Paul with 2 Timothy in our next class.

BACKGROUND

Who was Titus?

We know about Titus from Paul's letters to the Galatians (2:1-3), 2 Corinthians (Chapters 2, 7, 8, and 12), and 2 Timothy (4:10). (Of course, we also have the letter to Titus as well.) From these passages, we deduce that Titus was a Greek convert of Paul (Tit. 1:4) who traveled with Paul (Gal 2, Tit. 1:5). Unlike Timothy, Paul never had Titus circumcised. This decision was vindicated by the Jerusalem church (Gal. 2:1-6).

Paul repeatedly used Titus as his agent or representative to churches. We read of Paul dispatching Titus to the Corinthian church for those purposes in 2 Corinthians. Again in Titus, we read that Paul had Titus stay behind in Crete to finish getting those churches in order. We also know that Paul sent for Titus to join him on the Western coast of Greece before Titus headed out into the mission field in Dalmatia (modern Yugoslavia) (Tit. 3:12; 2 Tim. 4:10).

Aside from those factual details of Titus, we get insight into his character by noting both how Paul spoke to him (Titus) and how Paul spoke about him (especially 2 Corinthians). Titus was a man Paul trusted. Paul trusted Titus's doctrine and Titus's ability to work with the church to carry out God's plans. The trust was deep enough to include a great comfort level. Remember that when Paul wrote his harsh letter to the Corinthian church, Paul used Titus as an emissary to the church to work as a mediator. This was no small matter; the Corinthian issues and conflict were particularly troublesome to Paul.²

Titus was an effective and trustworthy tool for Paul in the delicate Corinthian situation. When Titus was finally able to rejoin Paul, and Titus told Paul of the mission's success, Paul was overjoyed. Paul also took delight in how the Corinthians ministered to Titus. That the Corinthians not only took Titus's message to heart, but also refreshed Titus's spirit in their treatment of him conveys a great deal of Titus's ability to handle stressful situations in ways that not only resolved problems but endeared himself to the parties in the process. Titus was a

² Paul was so worried about the Corinthian church and its problems that Paul interrupted his ministry in Troas to go find Titus once he saw that Titus was delayed. Paul says he had no "peace of mind" until he met up with Titus in Macedonia.

peacemaker.

In Titus, we also see a heart that mirrored Paul's. Like Paul, Titus was a self-starter who went about God's work with enthusiasm (2 Cor. 8:16-17). Paul considered Titus both a partner and a fellow worker. It is no wonder Paul gave Titus the tasks we read about in 2 Cor. 8:23 as well as the checklist we will study today.

A number of scholars set the likely historic setting of Paul's letter to Titus as after the history in Acts. Scholars believe that Paul was eventually released from Roman confinement and likely journeyed back to the East. A normal way to go would be sailing from Rome to Crete.

Crete was an island in the Mediterranean, south of Greece. When Paul was being taken to Rome via ship as recorded in Acts 27, Paul urged his Centurion guard to dock the ship at a port on Crete for the winter. The Centurion decided to make for another harbor further west on the island, but a north wind took the vessel away from the island to an ultimate shipwreck off Malta.

The people of Crete ("Cretans") had quite a reputation. They were well known for being dishonest and evil lazy slobs (Tit. 1:12). Those folks would be ripe for the work of God!

As Paul left Rome for Crete, he likely brought Titus along. Paul eventually left Crete, but Titus stayed on the island to help better establish the church.

THE LETTER

Chapter 1

As we typically see, Paul begins his letter identifying himself. Atypically, however, Paul gives a very lengthy discourse as he describes himself to his dear friend Titus. Only in Romans do we see Paul give such a lengthy narrative following his self-identification. To Titus, Paul sets himself out as "a servant of God" and an "apostle of Jesus Christ."

Paul does not stop there, however. Paul adds that his apostleship is for "the sake of the faith of God's elect" and for their "knowledge of the truth" which "accords with" or "leads to" godliness. Even with that add on, Paul still doesn't stop. Paul notes that the "faith" and "knowledge" that lead to godliness do so resting on the "hope³ of eternal life."

³ As we have mentioned in earlier lessons, the Greek word we translate as hope (*elpis*) does not mean "desire," but a "confident expectation." The emphasis is on something not yet possessed, but confidently around the corner.

This eternal life was “promised before the beginning of time” by God, “who does not lie.”⁴ Again, we might think Paul would be done identifying himself, but he is not! He now adds that the God who does not lie, “at his appointed season brought his word to light” through the preaching entrusted to Paul by the command of God (1:1- 3).

Only at this point does Paul address the letter to Titus, his “true son” in the faith they shared. Paul offers his trademark greeting, “Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior” (1:4).

So we pause and ask, “Why does Paul give all that extra information in his identifying opening comments?” Wouldn’t Titus have already known all that? Paul had spent a great deal of time with Titus on the mission field. They had worked together for over a decade.

It is fair to say that Paul was not telling Titus something Titus did not know. These comments were not new insights that had come to Paul since he and Titus had separated. So if Paul wasn’t teaching Titus something new, what was he doing? It seems fair to say that Paul’s unusually lengthy introduction was designed to put matters into focus for Titus to appreciate the import of what Paul had to say, along with how serious it was to Paul.

Paul was not merely writing his own musings about what Titus ought to do and how he ought to go about doing it. Paul was writing as God’s servant, as Jesus’ messenger for the express purpose of the church. Paul was entrusted with the mission of these churches and Paul was passing on to Timothy a directive that was commanded from God to Paul.

God had set Paul about Paul’s work. Paul’s mission efforts were no mere hobby or job. It was Paul’s response to God’s instructions. Paul, in turn, had left Titus behind on Crete to fulfill and finish the work God had commanded. As Paul put it, “I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order.” The letter then becomes Paul details of what Titus needed to do to get the churches in order.

⁴ We have here a little foreshadowing of one of Paul’s concerns about the flock that Titus is working among. We will see that the Cretans have a reputation as “liars” distinguished from God who does not lie.

Let the checklist begin! First up? Titus was to “appoint elders in every town” as Paul had directed.

As in I Timothy, Paul gives a list of traits for those Titus would appoint to the Eldership. They are to be:

- Blameless
- Husbands faithful to their wives
- Fathers with children who are believers, rather than wild and disobedient
- Because the Elders are entrusted with God’s work, it is important they be above reproach.
- Rather than being arrogant, quick-tempered, given to drunkenness, violent, or greedy for gain those appointed were to be hospitable, lovers of good, self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.
- The elders must hold firm to God’s word, capable of teaching good doctrine and correcting false doctrine.

The doctrine was particularly important because there were “insubordinate empty talkers” who talked a great game but were ultimately just deceptive. Most of these were Jewish Christians. Paul wanted these folks silenced. They hurt not only themselves, but also their households and the church. Evidently, these rebellious folks had teachings that lined their pockets with dishonest gain to the detriment of others. Paul has little use for people who use church for means of personal profit.

Paul is saying nothing new about some in Crete. The Cretans actually had a rather long-standing reputation that was not exactly upright and virtuous! In Titus 1:12, Paul quotes a Cretan poet who settled in Athens named Epimenides. Nearly 600 years earlier, Epimenides wrote, “Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.”⁵ Paul wants these folks rebuked “sharply” so that “they may be sound in the faith” and will ignore the false teachings and commands of other Jews.

Paul emphasizes that there are folks who have corrupted their consciences and minds where nothing they do is pure. While some of these people claim to know God, their actions show otherwise. The result was detestable, disobedient folks who were “unfit for any good work”.

On the checklist, Paul moves on from appointing elders to how and what Titus should be teaching; “Teach what accords with sound doctrine.” This teaching took different words for five groupings of Cretans Paul delineated: older men,

⁵ Epimenides was saying this in regard to Cretan claims that Zeus was buried on their island.

older women, younger women, young men and slaves.

1. Older men – Paul wants the older men to be sober-minded, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, love and steadfastness.

2. Older women – The older women are also to live reverently. They are to avoid speaking ill of others or drinking too much wine. They are to “train” younger women to love their husbands and children -- the very traits that they should have themselves.

3. Younger women – Within the framework of the older women training the younger women, Paul sets out matters for the younger women to “learn.” Younger women were to learn what it means to love their husbands and children. They were to learn purity, self-control, how to maintain their homes, to be kind, and to show proper respect to their husbands. These traits were important for the families, but also for beyond the families. These traits would keep others from maligning the word of God.

4. Younger men – Paul wants the younger men encouraged to be self-controlled. Paul wants Titus to set an example for the younger men by his own actions as well as his teaching. Titus was charged to “show” integrity, dignity, and appropriate talk.

5. Slaves – Slaves were to treat masters with honesty, showing themselves trustworthy and respectful. In this way, slaves would make the teaching about “God our Savior” attractive. Paul sees the slaves as evangelists in the hands of God, even as they live in their slavery!


All of this teaching made perfect sense to Paul. Because the grace of God (Jesus dying in our stead) had occurred, there were lessons for us. The cross “teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions. We learn instead to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives. We live thus in the present age because of our confidence in the coming appearance of Jesus. Our redeemer, Jesus, who gave himself not only to rescue us from wickedness but also to purify us as his people “eager to do what is good” (2:1-2:14).

Actions were very important to Paul. They showed the seriousness of the Christians. They showed the genuineness of faith. By actions, Paul could see that people were indeed convicted that Jesus had come, died because sin was deadly, and will come again to take us home for eternity. That truth (not merely as something to “live by” but as real truth) would truly change the lives of people in day-to-day living.

So, Paul puts on his checklist for Titus, “Declare these things, exhort and rebuke with all authority.”

Chapter 3

Paul gave Titus a good list of things to teach the church at large.



TO DO:

- Be submissive to rulers and authorities
- Be obedient
- Be ready for every good work
- Speak evil of no one
- Avoid quarreling
- Be gentle
- Show perfect courtesy to all people

Titus was to teach the Christians to be subject to their rulers and authorities as well as “ready to do whatever is good.” Folks were to live peaceably with consideration to others. They were not to slander others, but to show true humility “toward all men.”

This was not “normative” living in the world. Before the that changes Jesus wrought in his life, even the devout Paul had been “foolish, disobedient, led astray,” a slave to “various passions and pleasures, passing ... days in malice and envy hated by others and hating one another.” But with God’s loving kindness, with God’s appearance in Jesus, things changed, for Paul and for all Christians. We were saved and healed from the passions and evils rampant within us. We were saved, not because we changed, but because of the nature of our God. Our God is merciful. He seeks to save us in our dirty, spiritless state. He washes us clean, setting his Holy Spirit about the work of renewing us and transforming our lives.

In this way, we have been declared righteous (“justified”) and have become heirs confident of our eternity in his loving presence. Here is our motivation for living differently. Here is the reason we are careful to do what is good, excellent, and profitable for everyone. We do not live for today or for our passions and desires. We live as the people of a coming eternity, working for the purposes of our God who continues to work in the lives of others for his destiny. People who claim faith, but live in denial of that faith are charlatans. Maybe they fool others, maybe they fool themselves, but Paul was not fooled. Paul saw them for what they were, “warped and sinful,” – “self-condemned” (3:1-11).

Paul closes his letter giving Titus a few last “To Do’s.” Titus was to do his best to finish up and come see Paul. We would be remiss if we didn’t emphasize Paul telling Titus to “Do everything you can to help Zenas the LAWYER” (Emphasis added). One last time, Paul insists that “our people” learn to devote themselves to productive lives doing what is good. Paul sends final greetings and closes his letter.

POINTS FOR HOME

1. “God, who never lies, promised...” (Titus 1:2).

Have you thought lately about this fact? God never lies. Never. Not once. Never has, never will. Consider this as you contemplate the things you have entrusted to the Lord. Have you ever gone through scripture and catalogued the promises of God? Have you thought through what these promises are? Think of them; hold to them. In so doing, we need to do so in light of the whole account of God’s word careful not to take the scriptures out of context. But once we have been careful scholars, we can embrace God’s promises with confidence. God, “never lies.” Period.

2. “Put what remained into order...” (Titus 1:5)

Paul did not want the church left in disarray. It is not that God does not lead and protect the church; it is that God does so through, in part, human beings! We have a role! We are to see to an orderly church that properly follows scripture and sound doctrine. That does not mean there is no spontaneity in church. Nor does that mean that everything must follow specific form beyond what we are instructed in scripture. But one cannot look through the world without seeing design and order by its creator. Similarly, there is a place for leadership structures and clear teaching in the church for the good of the church!

3. “Remind them to...” (Titus 3:1).

Do you have a checklist? We frequently use juror questionnaires in trial. One of the questions often asked has a list of personality traits and attributes. We will ask a person to check all the boxes that others might say apply to them. I wonder how we do if we put Paul's list into that same format and ask the same question:

Which boxes do you believe *others* would check as applying to you?

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Arrogant | <input type="checkbox"/> Knows God | <input type="checkbox"/> Sound in speech |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Quick tempered | <input type="checkbox"/> Sober minded | <input type="checkbox"/> Honest |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Drunkard | <input type="checkbox"/> Dignified | <input type="checkbox"/> Godly |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Violent | <input type="checkbox"/> Sound in faith | <input type="checkbox"/> argumentative |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Greedy for gain | <input type="checkbox"/> Sound in love | <input type="checkbox"/> Ready for every good work |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hospitable | <input type="checkbox"/> Steadfast | <input type="checkbox"/> Never speaking evil of anyone |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lover of good | <input type="checkbox"/> Reverent | <input type="checkbox"/> Quarreler |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Self-controlled | <input type="checkbox"/> Moderate in drinking | <input type="checkbox"/> Courteous |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Upright | <input type="checkbox"/> Teaches good things | <input type="checkbox"/> Foolish |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Holy | <input type="checkbox"/> Trains others in uprightness | <input type="checkbox"/> Slave to passion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disciplined | <input type="checkbox"/> pure | <input type="checkbox"/> Hated by others |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Insubordinate | <input type="checkbox"/> Kind | <input type="checkbox"/> Hateful of others |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Empty talker | <input type="checkbox"/> Submissive to authority | <input type="checkbox"/> Divisive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Deceiver | <input type="checkbox"/> Integrity | <input type="checkbox"/> Useless |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disobedient | <input type="checkbox"/> Dignity | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unfit for good work | | |

Can you go through and see which ones are the “good ones” we want to have checked? Where do we need to see God more in our lives? He promises to help grow us in those areas, but we are involved in that! And by the way, God does not lie!