

# Titus 1:10-16

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, folks, it's really wonderful to be with you this evening. And as we turn to Titus chapter 1, we're coming to the second half of that very short letter.

But it's a letter that repays your attention. Because in this short letter, which is just two pages on my NIV Bible, there are some gems, some nuggets of truth about the gospel, about Jesus.

Unfortunately, Graham didn't give me those nuggets to preach on tonight. And it would be unfair of me to skip ahead to Titus chapter 2 verse 11 or Titus chapter 3 verse 3. But when we come to this second half of Titus chapter 1, it becomes obvious that the Apostle Paul has not been commissioned by the Crete tourist board.

He hasn't been commissioned to tell Titus what a wonderful place he is going to, the beautiful beaches, the azure blue sky, the wonderful food, the very pleasant temperature and climate. Nor has the Apostle Paul been hired to create a congregational profile to attract a prospective minister. You know, the profiles that highlight we have a worshiping community of friendly, welcoming people who are eager to learn the Bible, eager to grow in faith.

[ 1 : 21 ] That is not what Paul is doing here. What he is doing is saying to Titus, I've got some things that you need to know as you commence your work in Crete.

Titus, there are problems here. Let's read chapter 1 verse 10. And we'll read to the end of the chapter. For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group.

They must be silenced because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach, and that for the sake of dishonest gain.

Even one of their own prophets has said, Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons. This testimony is true.

Therefore, rebuke them sharply so that they will be sound in the faith and will pay no attention to Jewish myths, to the commands of those who reject the truth.

[ 2 : 23 ] To the pure, all things are pure. But to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted.

They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny Him. They are detestable, disobedient, and unfit for doing anything good.

Welcome to Crete, Titus. There are problems in the church. There are problems with the culture. And the problems are people.

And that is who you, Titus, are called to minister to. And that is who we are called to minister to.

We're called to minister to real people.

And real people tend to have real problems. And real churches, as opposed to ideal churches, are also churches with problems. So the Apostle Paul is giving us an honest assessment.

[ 3 : 26 ] He's giving this young man an honest assessment of what lies ahead. And as we read the Bible, the Bible does exactly that time and time again.

This is the truth. This is the whole truth. This is nothing but the truth. And as we read the Bible, there's no sugarcoating here. There's no euphemisms here.

I remember my cousin got a job one time, and he told me that he was a petroleum transfer engineer. That sounded really sophisticated. I said, what does that mean? He says, I pump gas. You know, we have the capacity with language to describe things in a way that makes them sound good. The Apostle Paul does not do that. He tells us what we need to know. He tells us what we need to know about ourselves.

He tells us what we need to know about the church. And he tells us what we need to know primarily and powerfully about the gospel. Imagine that Paul is a consultant, that he has been sent or he has

been commissioned to give an assessment of the prospects of gospel work on the island of Crete and to assess the work of the gospel thus far with the church of Jesus Christ on that particular island.

[ 4 : 44 ] He begins first here with his diagnosis, and then he moves very quickly on to his prescription or his treatment to deal with the problem that is before him.

So let's look together at these verses, and we will be referring a bit more broadly to the context here to understand how this fits with the rest of the letter and with the rest of the pastoral epistles.

Now, the pastoral epistles are 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus. And these three letters belong together. They're not just together in the Bible. They are sequential.

But they have features that hold them together. Just a couple days ago, I was in Amsterdam, and we were visiting the museums. The Van... Well, I can't say the way they say Van Gogh.

So as an American, we always call him Vincent Van Gogh. So the Van Gogh Museum. And as you look at these beautiful pictures, as you look at the pictures, you can see the signature on the bottom of them that says Vincent.

[ 5 : 53 ] Vincent. That tells us that he's the artist, Vincent Van Gogh. But more than that, you don't necessarily need to see the signature because you see the style. You see the color or the brush strokes or the composition.

And you can just look at that and you say, that fits with what I know about this particular artist. And as we look at these pastoral epistles from which we're drawing our lesson today, we'll see that the Apostle Paul has techniques.

He's the artist. He's the author and techniques that draw these three letters together. The content, the audience that he's writing to younger men in ministry.

But also there's a technique that he has where in five different places in these three letters, he has a phrase that he uses again and again. And you only find it here.

And we see this in Titus chapter 3 at verse 8. He says, this is a trustworthy saying. And this little phrase knits together these three letters and he's highlighting for us lessons of life, lessons of the Christian life.

[ 7 : 02 ] And not wanting to spoil the end of the story, but if I read the rest of chapter 3 verse 8, that sets the scene for chapter 1 quite nicely.

Because Paul is saying, this is a trustworthy saying, and I want you to stress these things so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good.

These things are excellent and profitable for everyone. So this is a letter about doing good. Paul is highlighting this fact.

And he says, if you want to understand, Titus, what your message and what your ministry is focused on, it's to, by the grace of God, is to produce a group of worshiping disciples of Jesus who are devoted to doing what is good.

When we turn to chapter 1, we see a very different story. We see a very different description. We see a people who are described as those who are unfit for doing anything good.

[ 8 : 11 ] So how can we understand Paul's intention or his goal or the goal that he's setting for Titus? How can we understand that goal in light of what he's saying here in chapter 1?

How can you end up with people that are eager, who are equipped, who are zealous for good works when you begin with a group of people who are detestable, disobedient, and unfit for doing anything good?

Well, it's been said, I'm not a builder, but I've been told that if you want to build high, you need to dig deep. If you want to establish a well-functioning church of Jesus, if you want to establish Christians, disciples of Jesus, who are well-established and growing in their faith, we need to make sure that the foundation is dug deep.

We need to establish what the problem is and then to understand how the gospel comes to solve and to address that problem. So what's the problem, Paul?

Paul, what's your diagnosis of the Crete situation? Well, it's all about people. That seems to be the crux of the matter here.

[ 9 : 29 ] From Genesis chapter 3 onwards, that's the problem. We are the problem. People are the problem. What we think, what we say, what we do.

You see, Paul is not unwilling to say the negative things that are necessary to get us thinking, understanding the right way of believing, the right way of living, the right way of doing what is right

and good.

Rebellious people, mere talkers, deceivers. They belong to the Jewish or the circumcision group. But the problem here is that these are the people that are in the congregation.

These are the people that are part of the church. And these are the people that are taking a leading role in the church and they're speaking. They must be silenced because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach and that for the sake of dishonest gain.

So problem number one is this group of professing Christians. They are professing Christ, but what they are speaking is that which is contrary to Christ.

[10:50] And Titus, young man, is being sent on a mission to sort out the problem with these disobedient, malicious talkers.

So you see, what we believe is important. If we believe the truth, that is for our own individual benefit. But it's not just for our individual benefit only.

If you believe the truth concerning Jesus Christ, that's for your benefit and for the benefit of everyone connected to you, your family, your friends, the people that you go to school with, study at uni with, work alongside of, your neighbors.

So possessing the truth is of eternal benefit for the individual, but is of a collective benefit for everyone connected to that individual.

The opposite is also true. If you do not have the truth, if you do not believe the truth, if you do not receive the truth, that is for your eternal danger.

[11:54] Not only are you at risk, but you might inevitably put other people at risk. So you either have the truth or you don't have the truth. You are either a benefit and blessing to others, or you might be a curse to others.

And that's what Paul is saying here, that these are people who themselves are deceived, and they in turn become deceivers of other people.

This is why it's so important to know what the truth is. Wherever I go, it was Amsterdam, streets of Edinburgh, you will see people with, you don't need to know the language, but you'll see people with their stands of literature, and they're distributing literature that will tell you about the kingdom. They'll tell you about Jehovah. They'll tell you about the new world. The only problem is, is that they don't really know who Jesus is. The Jehovah's Witnesses have a zeal, but they don't have the gospel.

So what they're doing is not just bad for themselves, but it's potentially bad for others, because they're sharing something that isn't right and isn't true.

[13:07] In the United States, there's a group of law enforcement agents called Secret Service. Now these are men and women who are charged with protecting two things.

The one that we know about more predominantly is that these are the people that protect the president, the Secret Service. But the Secret Service is also charged with protecting the United States currency, dollar bills, tens, fifties, hundreds.

And the way that they train their agents is that they train the agents so well with the original, authentic bills.

They spend no time training them with counterfeits. Because if you know what the genuine article looks like, if you see a counterfeit note, you might not know why it's a counterfeit note, but you'll know it's not the real thing.

It doesn't feel right. It doesn't look right. It doesn't have the right color or the right texture. So if you know the truth so well, when you're confronted with something that's slightly wrong or completely wrong, you might not be able to put your finger on it and say, well, that's what's wrong there or that's what's missing.

[14:17] But you'll say, whatever they're saying, whatever they're preaching or speaking is not the truth. So there's problems in the church. And these are people that are speaking and teaching that which isn't right and that which isn't good.

They're doing it for the wrong reason with the wrong motivation. But then let's look at the wider culture. Because you think, well, if there's problems in the church, what about the culture?

Is the culture open to the gospel? Even one of their own prophets has said, Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.

Again, this is not the tourist brochure that you want to publicize your idyllic Mediterranean destination. This testimony is true.

This is what the people are like of the country, of the culture. This is what they are. They're promoting that which is false. They like to lie.

[15:19] They're promoting that which is evil rather than that which is good. Rather than being active and rather than being energetic and rather than being productive, they're much more ready to eat and to laze about.

Titus, that's your target audience. Titus, these are the people that you're sent to preach to. These are the people that you are sent to proclaim the gospel to. And you might say to yourself, If this is what the church is like, and if this is what the culture is like, why bother?

Why bother? What possibly can be achieved in such a circumstance? Well, let me give you just a little insight. I came to this country 27 years ago to study history, and I'm still a student of history. We often think of our own age. If you're a Christian here today, you might think to yourself, we are living in a tough time. The cause of Christ doesn't seem to be that strong.

The church doesn't seem to be that strong. The culture doesn't seem to be that receptive. Those who are outside are many. Those who are inside are few. Those who are outside are vocal.

[16:35] And maybe those who are inside might be a bit timid. Let me just give you an insight into what England, Scotland, Great Britain looked like at the beginning of the 18th century, 200 plus years ago.

At the beginning of this century, England could be described as a moral quagmire and a spiritual cesspool. Scotland was no better.

Thomas Carlyle from Scotland described his country's condition as stomach, well alive, soul extinct. In London, a famous judge and politician, Sir William Blackstone, visited the church of every major clergyman in London.

And this was his diagnosis. He said, I did not hear a single discourse which had more Christianity in it than the writings of Cicero. Cicero is a pagan Roman author.

In most sermons he heard, it would have been impossible to tell just from listening whether the preacher was a follower of Confucius, Muhammad, or Christ. The culture was no better than the church.

[17:49] The drunkenness was rampant. Gambling was so extensive that one historian described England as one vast casino. Newborns that were unwanted were left exposed in the streets.

97% of the infant poor who were in workhouses died as children. Popular sports included bear baiting, cock fighting. Public executions were, tickets were sold as if to a theater.

The slave trade was booming. And Bishop Barclay, again a famous philosopher and religious figure of the time, he said that religion and morality in Britain had collapsed to a degree that was never known in any Christian country.

What a remarkable state of affairs. The beginning of the 18th century. And you say to yourself, well, what happened? What happened in such a place at such a time?

Was God able to do something in that setting? Well, what God did remarkably was raise up a generation of preachers, evangelists.

[19:05] Men who went proclaiming Christ. The church did not welcome these men. George Whitefield, John Wesley. The Wesley brothers, John and Charles Wesley.

In the United States, you had figures like Jonathan Edwards. It was called the Great Awakening. The church was asleep. The source of the gospel was sleeping, dozing. God raised up at the right time when religion, Christianity was at its lowest ebb.

God raised up a generation of preachers, evangelists, with a zeal for the good news of Jesus Christ. J.C. Ryle, who was a figure at the end of the 19th century, in writing of his colleagues of the previous century, he said this.

He said, It may suffice to say that dueling, adultery, fornication, gambling, swearing, Sabbath-breaking, and drunkenness were hardly regarded as vices at all.

They were the fashionable practices of people in the highest ranks of society, and no one was thought the worst for indulging them. And then these new preachers come along. And Ryle went on to say, Strange and paradoxical as it may seem to some, their first step towards making men good was to show them that they were utterly bad.

[20:27] And their primary argument in persuading men to do something for their souls was to convince them that they could do nothing at all. The apostle Paul is saying to Titus and is telling him that these people, these people are not good people.

These people do not do good things. They are not characterized by an inherent or an intrinsic goodness, but quite the opposite. These are men and women who promote what is evil rather than what is good, who delight in the lie rather than the truth, who would prefer to do nothing rather than something.

And he gives them this devastating summary that they are disobedient and unfit for doing anything good. Their minds, their consciences, their actions, they are completely unfit and ill-equipped for doing anything good.

What a stinging condemnation that Titus is given by Paul and what we are given of ourselves.

Because what we see here is the Bible is holding up a mirror.

And it says, what do you see in the mirror? Do you see a man or a woman who is basically good? Who basically thinks good thoughts, lives good lives, has good feelings in their heart?

[ 21 : 49 ] Or do you see what the Bible says? That you and I are not good people. Our hearts are not good. Our consciences are not good. Our actions, our desires, our motivations in and of themselves are not good.

That is the reality that the Bible presents to us here in Titus, but from the beginning to the end, that we are not good.

We are not good in and of ourselves. We are not equipped or enabled to do what is good.

Something has gone terribly wrong in Crete. Something has gone terribly wrong in Edinburgh.

Something has gone terribly wrong in my life and in your life. But is this a counsel of despair? Is this simply, there's no hope?

There's no light. There's no peace. There's no joy. There is no reason to continue. Now, of course, when we divide up a letter like this, we have to realize that the letter was written as a unit, as a whole.

[ 22 : 59 ] That we have before us a portion of that whole. And the key lesson here is that in and of ourselves, we are not right.

We are not good. We are not pure. We need something else. Not from within us, but from outside of us.

Christianity has been contrasted with every other world religion in these terms. Other world religions and world philosophies will suggest primarily that the problems are outside of ourselves.

Whereas the solution is within us. Whereas Christianity is absolutely clear on this point, that the problems are within, and the solution must come from without.

I am the source of my problems, but I am not the solution to my problems. I can't solve what's broken. I can't fix what's broken.

[ 24 : 00 ] I can't solve this problem, and neither can you. Titus, you are not going to Crete with an educational program. You are not going to Crete with a self-help program.

I'm okay, you're okay. You're not going with the power of positive thinking. Titus, you need something that radically deals with the radical problem of the human heart exemplified in the lives of these people on the island of Crete.

Now, as we see this diagnosis, so Paul quotes from one of the poets. The particular poet here is a person called Epimedes of Crete, who wrote in the 6th century BC.

It's interesting that Paul is aware of culture. He knows the poets. He knows the culture of the Greeks. And he has no hesitation of bringing these cultural icons into his discussion.

So he says, look, even their own people say this. Even their own prophets, their own poets say this. And there are at least five places in the New Testament where Paul draws on the writings of non-Christian authors to amplify and to underline his point.

[ 25 : 22 ] So Paul is saying, even the Cretans themselves can diagnose the problem. But what's the solution? Well, first of all, to those who are speaking the falsehood, you need to rebuke them.

You need to tell them to be quiet so that they will be sound in the faith and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the commands of those who reject the truth.

Now, this word myth is an interesting word in the New Testament. And again, this word appears in 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus. And it's a word that, you know, we could substitute the word fable or a story.

Something that has been devised by people. It might be entertaining. It also might be designed to deceive. But it's not true. Now, many scholars will suggest that the whole of the New Testament is in this category of myth or story.

We have our story, our story of Jesus. Other cultures have their story. Other religions have their story. But what Paul is saying here is not that we have one myth and they have another.

[ 26 : 34 ] But he says that there is something that is true and something that is false. Something that is real and something that is fake. And the Bible constantly makes this distinction.

The truth. The good. The light. The right. As opposed to the wrong. The light as opposed to the darkness.

The good as opposed to the evil. The truth as opposed to the falsehood. The Bible has no problem in distinguishing right from wrong and good from evil and light from darkness. And what Paul is saying here, we need to know the truth.

We need to teach the truth. And if somebody else is speaking that which isn't the truth within the fellowship, they need to be silenced. They need to stop spreading the falsehood.

And they need to be made to embrace or to understand, to become sound in that which is true.

Verse 15 is very important here.

[ 27 : 30 ] To the pure, all things are pure. But to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and their consciences are corrupted.

So Paul says, Titus, you've got two, there's going to be two types of audience here. You're going to have men and women who are pure. They have pure minds. They have pure hearts.

That's not something that's intrinsic to them. But their hearts and minds have been made pure through, as we'll see in chapters 2 and 3, through Jesus and through his gospel.

And there are those who are corrupt. Their minds are corrupt. Their hearts are corrupt. And the difference between these two groups is not education, is not upbringing, is not sociopolitical class. But the difference between the pure and the corrupt is faith. Those who believe and those who don't believe. Those who believe the gospel are pure.

[ 28 : 31 ] Those who don't believe the gospel are corrupt. Because the gospel makes the impure pure. The gospel makes the unclean clean. The gospel makes the corrupted incorruptible.

That's the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. That's what God can do. So God can raise up George Whitefield or John Wesley. God can raise up godly preachers and evangelists to go to England and Scotland to the new colonies with the message of the gospel.

So this spiritual cesspool can be transformed not because of educational advancement, not because of social engineering, but because of the power of the message of Jesus Christ.

So tonight, if you're not yet a Christian, this is God showing you in a mirror what he sees. You see, we're good at covering up.

You wear a nice suit. You wear a nice jacket. You can look the part. But God sees the heart. God sees the mind. God sees the conscience. And without Christ, we are not pure.

[ 29 : 42 ] We are not good. We are not right. But with Christ, you see, that's the key. Jesus is the key here. And faith in Jesus is the transformation.

That the corrupt can become pure. That the evil can become good. That those who are detestable, disobedient, and unfit for doing anything good can become.

Listen to this in verse 14 of chapter 2. Or talk of verse 13. While we wait for the blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own eager to do what is good.

That's the gospel.

His righteousness. This word good works. We probably better understand what good works don't do rather than what good works do.

[ 31 : 11 ] Because Martin Luther, the great reformer, 500 years ago, 95 theses down the door of the Wittenberg Church, made it quite clear that we are justified not by good works.

We are not saved by what we do. We are saved by what Jesus does. But having been saved, the Apostle Paul is absolutely insistent that those who are saved, those who are made pure, those who have faith in Jesus, are now a people who are eager to do good works.

Is this your testimony that not only have you met with Jesus, but Jesus has changed the way you think? Jesus has changed the way you feel. Jesus has changed the way you live.

Jesus has changed the way you act. He's changed the way you react. He's changed the way you deal with your family. He's changed the way you engage with your friends. He's changed your motivations, your desires, your interests, your goals.

goals. And you now have the ability. You now have the desire. You now have the eagerness or the zeal to do what is good and what is right and what is holy and what is pure.

[ 32 : 21 ] You see, we need to be a people who know the truth. We need to be a people who speak the truth. But we need to be a people who live the truth. People want to see something genuine. We can say it, but do we show it? We can believe it, but do we live it? Do we live lives that are characterized by good, characterized by purity, characterized by truth, characterized by love? Or do we find ourselves in this category of those who are simply mere talkers? If we're going to reach the city of Edinburgh with the gospel of Jesus, mere talk is insufficient. Speaking is inadequate. We need to speak and we need to live. There needs to be an integrity of life that demonstrates the reality of the gospel in our hearts and in our lives. As you read through this letter to Titus, notice how often he focuses on what is good, doing what is good. If we give Martin Luther credit for being the great preacher of justification by faith alone, that there's nothing that we can do. It's only about Jesus. We can give credit to another reformer who reminds us of the work of the Holy Spirit. John Calvin reminds us that when the Holy Spirit dwells in the heart of the believer, something happens. When the Holy Spirit takes up residence in your life, one thing is for sure, you will never ever be the same again. Your hearts will be changed. Your lives will be changed. Your actions will be changed. Not because of you, but because of the Holy Spirit. So the gospel focuses our minds and hearts on Jesus. But when Jesus comes to be the center of our lives, the Holy Spirit gives us strength where we previously were weak, gives us guidance and direction where previously we wandered, gives us truth where previously we had falsehood, gives us purity where previously we were corrupted, and enables us to be a people who know what's good and who do what's good. This is the gospel. This is the power of the gospel.

This is the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the believers, where you and I know what's right, know what's true, and do what's good. And when we have that powerful combination of the truth of the gospel and the reality of the gospel in our lives, that people see it, that people hear it, they put two and two together, and they conclude that there must be something about these people. There must be something about their Jesus. There must be something about his message that changes them from the before to the after. Titus chapter 1 verses 10 to 16 is the before. This is what we look like without the gospel. Titus chapter 2 and Titus chapter 3 is the after. This is what the gospel does in the lives of people. And it's the same people, but they are different because they've come to know and to embrace the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us pray.

[ 35 : 34 ] Father, we give you thanks for your goodness, your grace, your love, your mercy. We thank you for your gospel concerning your son Jesus. We thank you for the power of the Holy Spirit to take that which is corrupt and to transform into what is pure, to take what is false and to transform into what is true, and to take what is evil and to transform into good. We ask, O Lord, that we would demonstrate the reality of the work of the gospel in our lives, that we would be eager, zealous to do what is good, that we would be equipped to do what is good, that we would speak and act in a way that we commend our Savior Jesus. For any Lord tonight that are not yet committed to Christ, who do not yet have that faith, might they see that picture of what sin really looks like, of what evil really looks like, about what the corruption of the human heart looks like. And might you convict them of sin, but more importantly, might you convert them to Christ, where they see Jesus as all that is pure, all that is good, all that is right, all that is lovely. And may they find themselves attracted to Him. For those of us who can testify that we know Him, that we've come to meet with Him, may our lives be filled with joy, filled with peace, and filled with love, as we give you thanks in the name of our Savior Jesus. Amen.