

DEAR TITUS...

A 3 WEEK SERIES IN THE BOOK OF TITUS

Connect group questions

Titus 1 – Dear Titus... love what is good

1. *What is the difference between someone who 'loves what is good' and 'do-gooder'?*

TRUTH LEADS TO GODLINESS

Read Titus 1:1-4

2. What difference has knowing the truth of the gospel made to your life this week?
3. In what ways does our church hold to the truth of the gospel?
4. When does your Christian understanding of the truth cause discomfort or friction in your everyday interactions? How well equipped do you feel to discuss ideas like:
 - God is our Creator
 - We are all sinful by God's standards
 - The Bible is true
5. Why does Paul stress the relationship between truth and godliness? Could you live an authentic Christian life with one but not the other?
6. *You have dear non-believing friends whom you pray for regularly. When you catch-up every year or so, there is usually an awkward 'God' conversation. How can you be gracious and loving and yet not miss the opportunity to show them 'the truth that leads to godliness'?*

LOVE WHAT IS GOOD

Read Titus 1:5-9

7. How should we pray for our church leaders? For Mark as our Senior Minister? For our future Assistant Minister? How can we support them to be 'blameless'?
8. Most people, including church leaders prefer to avoid conflict. How can we support our leaders in their God-given role? How can I be more open to being 'disciplined'? How would you respond to a rebuke?
9. *You lead a small group and one of the members has confided that they have a problem with alcohol, but they continue to use alcohol both in public and at home. What is your responsibility?*

REJECT WHAT IS NOT GOOD

Read Titus 1:10-16

10. In what ways might we slip into legalism like the circumcision group?
 - thinking of our Christian life as do's and don't
 - being motivated by trying to justify ourselves
 - confusing being Christlike with not being as bad as other people?
11. Imagine that you were part of a church in which a minister was caught in adultery. How do you think it would affect your faith, your continued membership in the church?
12. *A Christian couple have separated as a result of domestic abuse. The husband, admits to the abuse but is furious that his wife will not have a conversation about reconciliation saying 'she made vows, for better or for worse'. How might Titus 1:16 help him think differently?*

PRAY

Pray for our leaders, current and future that they will hold firmly to the truth of the gospel.

Pray that you would seek to know the truth more deeply and by God's spirit become more and more a person who loves what is good, eager to serve, open to discipline and willing to rebuke for the sake of the gospel.

Love what is good

Introduction

You're probably familiar with the idea of fake news. Did you know it was the 2017 word of the year?

(**Fake news**), is a type of [yellow journalism](#) or [propaganda](#) that consists of deliberate [disinformation](#) or [hoaxes](#) spread via traditional [news media](#) (print and broadcast) or online [social media](#).'

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fake_news

Well as we begin the book of Titus, we are being confronted by fake Christianity.

It looks almost like the real thing but it deliberately spreads lies.

Context

And this is why we have this short letter, the third of what are known as Paul's pastoral epistles.

The apostle Paul is writing to his trusted co-worker Titus, sending him to sort out the problems in the young churches on Crete.

But its not just for Titus, its for everyone, its for us.

We know that Titus was Greek, that he was converted under Paul and seems to have been Paul's 'go-to' guy when there was a difficult issue to sort out.

Titus 1 tells us that churches in Crete are in a mess, that Paul and Titus had been there together at one point but that Paul had had to leave.

Its not completely clear how these churches began.

It may have been that some Jewish Cretans had travelled to Jerusalem and were converted at Pentecost.

And it may have been missionary work by Paul and Titus.

Or a combination of the two.

Either way, Paul gives Titus the task of 'putting in order what was left unfinished' v 5

By holding firmly to the truth and loving what is good.

So we'll be thinking about three things in Titus 1:

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Outline

1. **Truth leads to godliness** (1-4)
2. **Love what is good** (lead, be lead) (5-9)
3. **Reject what is not good** (legalism v godliness) (10-16)

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1. Truth leads to godliness

So we are off to Crete.

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I've never been there and I'm sure its amazing, looks beautiful, doesn't it?

but in the first century there probably would have been DFAT warnings for travel there.

Because even by ancient world standards, Crete had a bad reputation.

It had all the ingredients of a Netflix mini-series: pagan gods, mercenaries and pirates, treachery and corruption, greed and violence.

And worst of all, Ancient Crete was known as 'the liars'.

The Greek word for liar is 'kretizo' literally 'to be from Crete'.

Which is not what you'd want to put in a modern day travel brochure - 'come to Crete and get ripped off'.

So the idea of truth was not just a rare commodity, it was a hard thing to sell.

It makes sense of Paul's language at the beginning of the letter in verse 1.

Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the **truth that leads to godliness** –

Titus' mission is to further the faith of the Christians in Crete and grow their knowledge of the truth.

This truth, the gospel truth will lead people from wickedness to godliness.

And when the gospel changes us, we have the hope of eternal life.

And Paul reminds him that **God does not lie**.

He emphasises the idea of truth again when he refers to Titus as

My true son V 4

because he is true, true to the gospel,

committed to the mission to spread the gospel,

the right person to 'set straight' the problems in the Cretan church

and as a father delegates to a son, Paul delegates authority to Titus.

Titus must appoint leaders who

Hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught v 9

Their understanding of the gospel must be so strong, so sure, so secure, that it will stand up to any dispute, or argument or false claim.

This is part of loving what is good.

And we know that Titus needs to appoint these kinds of leaders because of the problem in verse 10.

Rebellious people are deceiving others with fake Christianity.

Paul quotes the Cretan prophet Epimenides, accusing them of being liars, evil brutes and lazy gluttons, and then he says

This saying is true v13.

It's as if he knows that we'll be thinking 'Really? Surely not!'

And the problem is not just their lies but

They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good v 16.

Worse than useless.

We live in a culture that actively resists the idea of absolute truths, unless they are purely scientific and measurable.

We live in a culture that tells us lies like 'we're worth it', 'if it feels good and doesn't hurt anyone it's ok'.

The truth of the gospel is that God sees all things and knows our sinful hearts and loves us anyway.

And really knowing that truth gives us hope.

So the first question we need to ask ourselves is simple: 'Do I know the truth'?

Do I know that Jesus died for my sins, that I am forgiven, that I have received the unmerited grace of God and now have the hope of eternal life?

And do I use the truth of the gospel to filter out the lies that we all get bombarded with every day in the media, in popular culture?

Hold firmly to the truth.

We should be able to say truth and leadership in the same breath.

But often we look around at the world stage and think really? You're in charge? When you behave like that? When you speak like that?

And Paul's thinking the same thing about the church in Crete.

So he gives Titus a clear brief: to appoint elders who love what is good

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2. Love what is good

I wonder when the passage was being read, whether you thought 'pew, so glad I'm not a minister'.

Blameless? That's tough!

But Paul is not sending Titus out to look for 'perfect ministers'.

He's looking for elders who are growing in the knowledge of the 'truth that leads to godliness'

Who love what is good and has a character shaped by the truth.

Which is interesting for your church here in Noosa and my church in Seaforth, because we are both praying for new appointments.

And it's easy to get caught up in a candidate's resume or qualifications, their past experience or their preaching style.

And while these are important considerations for both our churches, we'd do well to keep things simple and prioritise looking for an elder, a leader who loves what is good.

So what are we looking for? What are Titus' non-negotiables?

Verses 5-9 highlight three things: home, character and doctrine.

Homelife

The first non-negotiable, the first thing to look for in an elder is that he is blameless in his homelife.

Another impossible test!

And again it doesn't mean he has to be perfect. But it does mean that the way he manages his most important relationships reflect the gospel.

He doesn't have to be married – after all Jesus wasn't.

But if he is married though, he needs to be faithful.

You may recall Mark mention in the 2 Timothy series that he knew two clergy who had been stood down for adultery. It sounds shocking but it happens. And it shouldn't.

A good elder also needs to have children who believe. And again you might be thinking that this is a very high bar.

The children of a godly elder ought to be respectful and obedient not wild and disobedient.

This seems to speak more to elders with a young family at home, not so much young adults who might be re-thinking their faith. As mine are doing.

It is expecting that an elder will take parenting seriously, making the teaching and disciplining of their children their first priority.

Because the way an elder looks after his own family, is likely to be the way he'll manage his church family.

Calvin said 'The house of a believer ought to be like a little church'.

Because the values which form his character in one will **overflow** into the other.

Verses 7 and 8 describe the do's and don'ts.

Character

A godly elder must be blameless in character, not over-bearing, not quick tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.

These negative signs are all **reactive**. It's the way we behave when we lose sight of God's grace.

Instead of calmly, sensibly reflecting and responding to something we arc up and pounce. We do what makes us feel better.

Often these responses manage our anxiety in the short term but they're damaging in the long term.

Whereas the positive qualities in verse 8 recommend someone who is hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.

All these characteristics are **responsive**.

It's the way we behave when we have the word of God dwelling in us richly.

They require time and thought and grace to decide what godliness ought to look like.

Its much more work. Its more costly.

I'm sure we all agree that we'd much rather be lead by someone who loves what is good and self-controlled, not quick tempered and violent.

And did you notice that there's no recommendation about skill, or training or experience?

It's all about character.

And character doesn't develop in a vacuum does it?

Doctrine

The elder who loves what is good has a character that is based on sound doctrine.

Doctrine that is based on the truth. A trustworthy message.

Doctrine that can withstand the clever arguments of false teachers because it has come down to us by God's Holy Spirit and faithful teaching.

And having sound doctrine has a purpose. Its not just head knowledge.

Doctrine is only really useful when it's being used to help others grow in godliness, in good character in loving what is good.

The blameless elder would never think himself worthy of the role.

He would loves what is good, allows the truth that leads to godliness to guide his home life, allows it to shape his character, by holding firmly to the trustworthy message.

Never letting it go, no matter the cost.

This is how the churches were to be ordered, to grow and multiply. This was Pauls' vision.

Now if we were to be simplistic, we could just say that this applies to our church ministers.

They should be blameless. Fullstop.

And we should always be praying for our ministers and their families, for their personal faith and leadership.

Stopping there gets lots of us who aren't church elders off the hook.

But many of us have influence, authority, even power, over others: as small group leaders, in your workplace, in a committee, in a neighbourhood organisation, in a club, in your family.

The call to be blameless, to love what is good, to relate to others thoughtfully and graciously not impulsively or selfishly is just as relevant.

We all have a responsibility to hold firmly to the trustworthy message to encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

And the main reason Paul is so clear about the sort of elders that Titus should appoint is because there is a problem that requires loving and strong leadership.

Because between the time the Cretan Christians were first evangelised and Titus' return a problem has developed (v.10).

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3. Reject what is not good

Verse 10 tells us there are many rebellious people.

And their influence was going viral.

In the same way that one godly leader can do so much good, one rebellious one can do so much damage.

Paul seems to be concerned about **two** groups of people: **the influencers and those being influenced.**

Look with me at verse10

Influencers

He's concerned about the **influencers** who are full of meaningless talk and deception (v 10)

who are spreading false doctrine in v11, some sort of fake Christianity

because they have rejected the truth in v14,

they are corrupted and do not believe, their minds and consciences are corrupted in v 15.

They claim to know God but their actions they deny him v16.

These people need **silencing**.

Influenced

And he's also concerned about those who are being **influenced**,

Those households who are being mis-taught for dishonest gain v 11,

Whose faith is being compromised v 13

Who are paying attention to the Jewish myths or human commands of those who reject the truth v 14

These people are vulnerable and need **rebuking**.

to 'put in order what was left unfinished'

And it all comes back to that idea of the 'truth that leads to godliness' doesn't it?

Lies are a big problem in Crete as we've already seen.

Because no one thought that lying was actually a problem.

When your own prophet Epiminedes says 'Cretans are always liars', it almost sounds like a badge of honour doesn't it?

So how had this problem developed?

The influencers were rebellious, wild, literally insubordinate like the children of an ungodly elder.

The worst offenders were circumcision group, people teaching that Gentiles needed to become Jewish, through circumcision, and then Christian.

Ignoring the truth that Jesus had died to fulfil all of the Law, including the laws of circumcision.

And to go back to legalism is really to empty the cross of its value for our salvation.

It's the difference between religion and Christianity.

Between rule keeping and grace.

Rule keeping actually fits totally with the world's values. It fitted Ancient Cretan values and we can't deny that it fits our society's values too.

When we slip into box-ticking, into rule keeping we convince ourselves we are doing ok, but the reality is that without Jesus we are far from ok.

Verse 15 continues this idea. Being religious, legalistic may have appealed as a path to purity, 'look at me polishing my halo'.

But Paul says no, it's the opposite of pure.

In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted.

They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him v 15

The problem is that they want to tick the 'God box' but they don't really know God.

They're making up lies and living by lies.

And as Paul puts in the last verse of chapter 1:

They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good v 16

Wow! Paul is not mucking around is he?

And do you see how the chapter is balanced?

The godly leader who loves what is good is going to be the one who silences – literally stops the mouths – of those who are unfit for doing anything good.

And when we read these words these people sound like monsters, like the bad guys out of some psychological thriller, but they're just people who claim to know God but really don't.

They're religious but they're just not Christian.

They went to church in ancient Crete then. They come to church with us now.

So if we're praying for blameless elders who love what is good and hold firmly to the truth, then we need to be willing to listen when they speak the truth in love. To us.

Because while these are clearly words written to guide the appointment of leaders it's also a word to us all that we should be prepared to be led.

Most of us are willing to be encouraged. That's not too hard.

But it's much less comfortable to be silenced, refuted, to be rebuked to have the trustworthy message held up as a mirror and finding we fall short.

And if that difficult conversation was ever necessary, how would we respond? Would we blame someone else? Would we make excuses?

Hebrews 13:17 says

¹⁷Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.

If we want to grow in godliness, it will only happen as we are refined.

We need to pray for humility and repentance in those moments.

Think how uncomfortable it probably is for them to initiate the conversation.

Tim Chester says 'A loving leader will put your eternal destiny before your present comfort'.

Titus had an important mission – to appoint godly leaders. But even the best of them won't be perfect.

But we do have a perfect leader, don't we? Jesus Christ our Saviour.

The good shepherd whose leadership was marked by humility and servant heartedness, by love and mercy.

He is the truth and he died so that truth would set us free.

Free from the law, free from man-made traditions.

Free to love what is good and to live that gospel truth out whether we are leading or being led, growing in our knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness.

Let's Pray

References

John Calvin, [*Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*](#), translated from Latin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 83 no. 1.