

The Pastoral Epistles – Timothy & Titus

How do the three letters to Timothy and Titus differ from most of Paul's other letters? They are written to individuals rather than to churches. And they differ from the letter to Philemon in that these letters are addressed to Paul's fellow workers.

Timothy was Paul's closest companion and a prominent figure in his ministry. In six of Paul's thirteen epistles he links himself with Timothy in the opening greeting (2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians and Philemon). Timothy is also mentioned in two other letters (Romans and 1 Corinthians) and has two letters addressed to him. So of Paul's thirteen epistles, Timothy features in ten.

Similarly, Titus was a trusted co-worker of Paul. We read about him in 2 Corinthians, Galatians and 2 Timothy as well as having this letter addressed personally to him. We learn from Galatians 2vs3 that Titus was a Gentile convert (probably converted under the ministry of Paul as Paul calls him, "my true child, in a common faith" in the opening to Titus).

What was Paul's purpose in writing these three letters to his fellow workers?

1 Timothy 3vs14-15 – "I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth."

2 Timothy 2vs1-2 – "You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also."

Titus 1vs5 – "This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you."

Although written at different times and in different circumstances there is a common theme that runs through these three letters – preservation of the truth. Paul's principle concern for the young men who worked alongside him and who would one day take over from him was a truth-centred concern. They had to remain grounded in the truth themselves and they had to do all that they could to ensure that those they were caring for and all subsequent generations were grounded in the truth.

Now for the rest of this session I want to focus our attention on the book of Titus. The book was probably written between AD 55 and 60. As we have said, Titus had been a fellow missionary with Paul until Paul left him on the island of Crete to take care of unfinished business and appoint elders in all the churches.

Paul begins his letter – "Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Saviour; To Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Saviour."

Right from the start of his letter Paul alludes to the key messages of the letter in his greeting to Titus. Paul has got the role he has got so that God's people can "know the truth" through the "preaching of God's word".

Paul then proceeds from this introduction to present Titus with two basic challenges: first, get good teachers in place; and second, teach the truth. If you want to have an easy way therefore to remember what the book of Titus is all about think of the word "teach". Get good teachers in place and teach the truth.

Seeing this, we immediately grasp the importance of this letter to you. Our prayer and desire for you is that you will be used by God in the building up of his church. So let's look at each of these in turn.

Get Good Teachers in Place

Paul begins the body of his letter by telling Titus to finish off the business that they had previously begun on the island and to appoint elders. Elders were needed to lead and to teach the local churches.

Following this Paul goes on to describe what these elders should look like. And packed into these four verses (1vs6-9) is an awful of material – "if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it."

We can summarise these criteria for eldership under five categories:

His family: Paul treats a man's leadership within his family as indicative of his capacity for spiritual leadership. If a man cannot behave properly within his own family and if he is not able to properly lead his own family then he is not a suitable person to be a leader in Christ's church.

To be considered for eldership a man has to be faithful to his wife. He must not be a polygamist. He must not be an adulterer. Some would say that he must not be a divorcee. Marital faithfulness is a key quality of eldership.

And the ability of an elder to lead in his family is demonstrated through the behaviour of his children. If the children are out of control and routinely rebellious towards their parents then that is evidence of a lack of leadership ability. The words – "and his children are believers" have caused much debate over the years. Does it mean that someone can only be an elder if their children are also converted? What happens if another child is born to the family? Must he stop being an elder?

An alternative valid translation of believe would be "faithful". And such a translation would fit the context of contrasting a reputation for wild and disobedient behaviour with a reputation for being faithful and trustworthy, rather than with "believing" in a religious sense.

His relationship with others: Paul then turns in vs.7-8 to a person's relationships with others as demonstrating eldership qualities. Vs.7 sets out the negative – he must not be arrogant or quick tempered or violent. If someone is a hothead who would get angry rather than working for a solution then they are not suitable eldership material. An elder will often find himself involved in situations that can be very anger provoking. Pastoral issues can often be like this.

An elder must not be a drunkard. The drinking culture that is all-pervasive across the globe is not something that an elder should be involved in. The loss of self-control which follows the going-along with the crowd is completely opposite to the self-control which an elder must show.

The final negative is that he must not be “greedy for gain”, that is pursuing his own interests – getting what he can for himself, particularly at the expense of others. If a person is only interested in themselves and what they can get out of life then they are evidently not eldership material.

Then in vs.8 we have the positive counterparts to this. They are to be hospitable – caring for and providing for others – putting themselves out and making themselves and their resources available. And then we have all the counterparts to vs.7 – self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.

His love of what is good: Again in vs.8 we are told that the elder must be a “lover of good”. What does “good” mean? It means what is wholesome, what is God-honouring. As Paul’s letter goes on to show, “goodness” is something which should typify the whole church. Older women are told to teach and train the younger women in goodness (2vs3-5); Titus is himself to be an example of goodness to the younger men (2vs7); the whole church was to be reminded to always do what was good (3vs1).

Bearing this in mind then it is no wonder that it is a requirement of eldership. If it is to be a characteristic of the church then it is impossible that elders should be anything else. That is why Paul says they must be “lovers” of good. It is a very strong word to use. Devotion and dedication spring to mind.

His blamelessness: The elder is to be blameless or above reproach. This is so important that Paul mentions it twice (vs.6 & 7). This does not mean he must be perfect or there would be no elders anywhere in the church. A life above reproach is a life which does not bring the man, the church or the gospel into public reproach.

Rather, the life of an elder is to commend the gospel and the Lord Jesus Christ. Elders should make it into the newspaper exposes so that non-Christians respond with a smirk and a “These Christians there all just hypocrites. He must never bring scorn on the gospel.

His firmness in the truth: In vs.9 Paul says that – “He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught.” This is an imperative – “He must...” And his grip on the truths of the gospel has to be firm. It is not something he holds to one day but not the next. His grasp of the truth is to be iron like. Why?

“...so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.” This is what the elder’s role is – giving sound instruction and refuting error. Remember what we said in our introduction to the three pastoral epistles – gospel truth for the whole church across all generations.

We will come back to this teaching role in a bit because, as we have said, it is what Paul was so concerned to write to Titus about. But there are three other truths I want us to see from these verses in chapter 1 about elders. Not only do these verses show us the character of the elders they also show us that:

1. A plurality of elders were to be appointed in every town. The word “elders” occurs in the plural. Every church was to appoint a group of men all of whom met the characteristics of these verses. All of them had to lead their families well. All of them had to have Christlike relations with others. All of them were to be lovers of good. All of them were to be above reproach. And all of them were to

have a firm grip on the truth so that they could teach and rebuke. Paul did not recognise the church model of one leader or one pastor who was the boss.

Why is a plurality of elders so important? Checks and balances; workload; mutual support.

2. The elders were to be appointed. What does this tell us? First and foremost it tells us that an elder was not self-appointed to the role. It was not for someone to turn up at a certain church in Crete and announce that they were an elder in the church. The elders had to be appointed by others in the church. It was not for the individual to say that they met all the criteria therefore they were now an elder. It was for others to recognise that they met the criteria and consequently to appoint them.

Now there is a lot of debate about who does the appointing. Is it the church as a whole that does the appointing or is it the leaders in the church who appoint other leaders? This passage is used to support both views. Some say that it was Titus who identified the men, assessed them and made the decision. Others believe that the churches identified the men in their midst who were suitably gifted and had the right character. Having done this under Titus' guidance, they were then appointed to the task by Titus.

In the context of the whole of the New Testament I personally favour the latter approach – that the assessment of church members for eldership is a task for the whole church to be involved in.

3. The third thing that this passage shows us is how important it is for a church to have elders. As far as Paul was concerned this was to be an absolute priority for Titus. It is the first thing that Paul tells Titus to get on with. Paul knows that in terms of getting a church sorted out, it is foundational for elders to be appointed.

And this makes perfect sense given that most of the rest of the letter is taken up with the subject of teaching. Who will lead and regulate the teaching. Without this in place there is no point in doing any teaching.

All churches need a plurality of elders who are faithful in knowing and holding onto the truth of the gospel. They must also have the kind of lives and personalities, characteristics and qualities which lend themselves to teaching that truth in the church, in the home, in one-to-one conversations, in everyday life.

If you want a specific thing to constantly pray for the church here in Lefkosa and for your church back home, pray that God makes your church rich in such divinely given human resources and that he builds up the church through such men.

So the first challenge to Titus was to get good teachers in place.

Teach the Truth

The second challenge was that the truth needed to be taught. And this challenge takes up the bulk of the book. In looking at this we will do so under three headings each of which are questions: teach whom? Teach how? And teach what?

Teach Whom: Paul instructs Titus to teach two main groups of people – the false teachers and the true believers in the church.

It is interesting that Paul starts with the false teachers. A good and faithful teacher needs to oppose what is wrong. **[READ 1vs10-16]**.

There were problem people in the churches in Crete. They are rebellious, disobedient, deceivers, hypocrites. Paul's descriptive list is extensive. They claim to know God but their actions and message say otherwise. Everything that Paul says about them is the opposite of what he said in vs.5-9. They are unfit for doing anything good.

In vs.10 Paul identifies some of these people as being part of the "circumcision party". That is they were those who said that Jesus was the Messiah but in order to be saved it was necessary to add to compliance with the Jewish law to faith in Jesus Christ. It was a "Jesus Plus" gospel rather than faith alone in Christ alone by grace alone.

Paul knows that any addition to the gospel is a false gospel. And so he tells Titus in no uncertain terms that it is his duty to oppose such teachers and their teaching. Vs.13 – "rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith." Silence them. Deprive them of their teaching positions. Tell them they are wrong and explain to them how they are wrong.

Paul then picks up the discussion on false teachers again in chapter 3, this time in order to warn Titus about divisions in the church – 3vs9-11: "But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned."

Titus must protect the churches from divisions. And he is to do that by not getting involved in pointless arguments. It is so easy to get dragged into discussions which are useless and unprofitable. Titus was not to waste his time in such a way. And he was to warn those who were taken up with these matters – warn them once then warn them again and then "have nothing more to do with him." That is strong language.

Why is Paul so severe? Because such arguments and discussions confuse the gospel message and so people who bring them into church life are enemies of the gospel. They are opposing the gospel work of the Lord Jesus Christ. If the clarity of the gospel is threatened then the life of the church is threatened and such people must not be tolerated. They are to be put out.

This shows us how much God cares for the church. The church is so precious to God – it is so valuable to him – that such measures must be taken to protect it.

This was what Titus was to do and it is what the elders who were appointed were to do. If you are to serve the church of Jesus Christ in an eldership capacity then this is one of the jobs that you will have to do. How imperative it is then that you work hard to know the scriptures in order to protect you from false teaching and to equip you to fight it.

The True Believers: The second group of people that Titus is to teach are the true believers in the church and this is the focus of most of Paul's teaching. Paul mentions four particular groups that require Titus' instruction and one group who someone else is to concentrate on.

First, he tells Titus to teach the older men – "But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness." These characteristics which older men in the church are to display are very similar to those set out for elders.

As the physical body deteriorates but getting old is the time of life a person's spiritual health to really shine through as an example to all. The old men in the church are to expose the world's lie that all of our eggs must be placed in the basket of physical youth and health.

This is what Titus was to exhort them to and teach them about. Sometimes it is very hard to teach someone older than you and to be taught by someone who is younger than you. It takes true humility to accept that God has equipped a younger person to be a teaching elder in a church to whom you should submit and listen to. And it takes courage and great wisdom to be able to teach an older person without being patronising, but that is what Paul calls Titus and all elders to.

Next Paul turns his attention to older women and he instructs Titus to teach them five things – “Older women likewise are to be reverent in behaviour, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.” (2vs3-5).

Just as with the older men, being an older woman means seizing the opportunity for spiritually flourishing. This will be manifested five ways in their lives. Firstly, they will behave reverently, that is not stirring up trouble and rebellion. Secondly, they will not be slanderers. They will not be talking about people behind their backs – gossiping over a cup of coffee. Thirdly, they will not be addicted to much wine – they will not spend their time drinking as so often happens when old age arrives. Being like this they are then, fourthly, to teach what is good.

Here we once again come across Paul's exhortations about goodness – wholesome, Christ-centred living. Who is it that these older women are to teach and train? It is the younger women.

It is striking that Paul's instructions to Titus relate to older men and women and young men. He is given no specific instructions about what to teach young women. Why is that? The reason why is because it is the job of the older women to do this. The older women are to give them instruction and training relating to marriage life, home life, purity and kindness.

There are two very good reasons why this is the case? Firstly, because the older women are best placed to talk about the challenges that young women face in all these areas. They will speak from practical experience and can identify the pitfalls and the temptations because they passed through them.

The second reason for older women teaching the younger women is that it is a very practical way of avoiding sexual temptation. As elders in our church a single elder will never visit a female member of the congregation alone, be they young or old. We must not put temptation into our paths and we must avoid all the appearance of evil as well.

So Titus' role (and the role of all elders) is to encourage the older women to take up this task and fulfil their responsibility. The older women need to be encouraged to look out for and take an active interest in the younger women – to nurture them and develop them in godliness.

And then Paul turns his attention in 2vs6 to younger men. And again it is striking where Paul wants the focus to be for younger men – self-control. This is probably the single biggest area with which younger men struggle whether it be sexual self-control, anger management or anything else. And because Titus was a young man himself (just like Timothy) Paul urges him to set an example – to be a model of good works. Once again we come across this idea of doing good.

Then the final group that Paul mentions in 2vs9-10 is bondservants or slaves. **[Read 2vs9-10]**.

Clearly there were bondservants in the churches in Crete and no doubt they belonged to whole raft of different types of master from the benign to the evil. In particular the focus of Titus teaching is on their work ethic. And this teaching is given regardless of the reasonableness of the master. And a very clear reason is given for behaving in such a way – because such behaviour shows how beautiful the gospel is.

So, when it comes to teaching the truth, Titus is to teach the false teachers and the true believers, in particular the older men and women, the younger men and the workers.

Teach How?

Ch.2vs7-8 give us Paul's instruction to Titus on how he is to teach. What does he say? "In your teaching show integrity, dignity and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us."

Paul writes to Titus about the motive of teaching, the manner of teaching and the matter of teaching. The motive for teaching must be pure. That is why he urges integrity on Titus. Being a teacher/elder in the church is never about financial gain or getting into a position of power so as to abuse that power.

Sadly, we see this far too often. Teaching that is designed to get the pastor fabulously wealthy or to give him status and standing. In the UK we see a lot of abuse of power on the part of leaders in the church – sexual and emotional abuse. Before appointing a person to eldership, a church must do all it can to test the integrity of the person to ensure pure motives.

Secondly, we then see the manner of the teaching – that it is to be serious. Titus was to be dignified. The hearers must know that the preaching/teaching is vitally important. It is God's word. So, a preacher who does nothing other than crack jokes and tell amusing anecdotes for the duration of his sermon is not acting with dignity. God's word is serious and people need to be in a serious frame of mind to listen to it

And thirdly, the matter of the teaching. What is taught must be sound. What does "sound" mean? Without defect or weakness; free from impurity; reliable. Titus had to teach the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

And once more Paul gives a reason for all this – "so that an opponent may be put to shame." Elders are to teach and live in such a way that there is no room for a credible attack. And so Paul sums it up in 2vs15 – "Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you."

Teach What?

And that leads finally to what was it that Titus and all elders are to teach. We have already seen much of this as we looked at who he was to teach. This is behavioural teaching. There is more of it chapter 3vs1-2 – "Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarrelling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people."

But we have not yet touched on the core of what Titus was to teach which is not a command. And it does not differentiate between friend or enemy, young and old, male and female, slave and free. Rather, at the very heart of what Titus and all elders are called to teach is what God has done in Christ.

Paul sets this out in 2vs11-15 – “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. Declare these things.”

The core of our teaching is to be the grace of God shown in the gospel. It is a message of salvation from the world and its ways...salvation that dramatically changes people’s lives and gives them a great and glorious hope for the future. And this all comes to us through the redeeming purifying work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus came as the incarnate Son of God, lived a perfect life and died on the cross to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify us for himself. Paul expands on these ideas again in chapter 3 **[READ 3vs3-8]**.

These verses are one of the great gospel passages of the New Testament and Paul says to Titus – “I want you to insist on these things.” This is the sound teaching that will lead to God’s people doing the good that you are to exhort them to.

It is this steadfastness to gospel truth and proclamation that the church so desperately needs today and that is why the letters of 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus are so relevant to you as Bible students who are considering what role you should play in the church here in Lefkosa and in the church back home.

You need to immerse yourself in these letters so that you may know how you ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. Amen.