

Godliness in the assembly Titus 1

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English Standard Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Over the next three weeks, we will study the book of Titus.

- Titus 1 – Godliness in the assembly.**
- Titus 2 – Godliness in the home.**
- Titus 3 – Godliness in the world.**

Godliness is simply “being God like”, which should be the desire of every believer. Godliness relates to truth, and it will be seen by the way that we conduct our lives.

Titus 1 can be split into three sections.

Verses 1-4: Paul’s greetings to Titus.

Verses 5-9: Instruction concerning the appointment and recognition of elders.

Verses 10-16: Action that needed to be taken to restore church order.

Introduction

Paul was probably in Corinth, after his release from prison, when he wrote to Titus who was serving the Lord in the island of Crete. Crete is the largest and most populous of the Greek Islands and the fifth largest island in the Mediterranean Sea, after Sicily, Sardinia, Cyprus, and Corsica. Crete lies 160Km south of the Greek mainland. The island has a coastline of 1,046Km; and is long and thin in shape. It was well known to sailors in Bible times as ships used to shelter in its many bays during storms.

From Acts 2 v.11 we learn that some inhabitants of Crete were present on the Day of Pentecost and heard Peter preach. These Cretan Jews may have brought the Gospel to the island. Paul had visited Crete with Titus and after a short time left him there to correct the things that were wrong and to organise the assemblies in every town. The book of Titus is one of the pastoral epistles in the New Testament. Paul an old man was writing to Titus who was a young man. Titus was a Greek and Paul’s true child in the faith, v.4. This probably indicates that Titus had come to know the Lord through Paul’s preaching. Paul loved Titus, he was his friend and he trusted him. It is good for older believers to be interested in shepherding younger believers by encouraging them, praying for them, serving along with them, and trusting them with responsibility.

Paul wrote to Titus because he knew of the problems in the Cretan churches. Most of the problems were coming from the believers who had turned from Judaism. Some of their behaviour was not appropriate for Christians and it was affecting others, we shall touch on that later. Titus was charged by Paul to do two things. Firstly, to set in order the things that were wrong; and secondly, to appoint elders in every city. Titus’ task was to find suitable men to take leadership roles in the

churches in each town. Then he was to exhort the believers in each church to recognise those he had appointed as elders.

Verses 1-4: Paul's greetings to Titus

“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.”

In v.1, Paul announces himself to Titus as a servant of God. There were no airs and graces with Paul as he was the self-confessed “chief of sinners” (1 Timothy 1v.15, AV). Paul had persecuted Christians before he was converted on the road to Damascus. Paul’s attitude of humility is a lovely attitude to have, and we must remember that every true believer is a servant of God. We are all equal no matter what God would have us to do for Him. Servants regulate their lives not according to their own will, but according to that of their Master. Paul then goes on to say that he is an apostle of Jesus Christ. The word “apostle” means “one who is sent out.” In the New Testament there are two usages of the word “apostle.” The first specifically refers to the Twelve Apostles and Paul, all of whom the Lord personally chose and commissioned. The second includes the first but also other individuals who are sent out to be messengers or ambassadors of Jesus Christ. There were three qualifications for the first type of apostle:

1. To have been a witness of the risen Christ (Acts 1:22 and 1 Corinthians 9 v.1).
2. To have been chosen by the Lord (Acts 9 v.15).
3. To have the ability to perform signs and wonders (Acts 2 v.43 & Hebrews 2 vv.3-4).

These apostles were responsible for laying the foundation of the early church. So, given their necessary qualifications, there are no such apostles today.

Paul, although he was an apostle of Jesus Christ, humbly recognised himself as “a servant of God.” Paul was indeed “one who was sent out.” Paul came from a strict Jewish sect, but when he was converted, the Lord told Ananias in Acts 9 vv.15-16:

“Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”

Throughout his life, Paul suffered from ill health and at the hands of others. But nothing deterred him from serving the Lord and he used every ounce of energy he had to do what he was commanded to do by God our Saviour.

The word “Saviour” occurs six times in Titus, twice in this chapter (v.3 and v.4). The phrase “God our Saviour” is a lovely thought.

“God our Saviour who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2 vv.3-4).

Consider the awesomeness of God as well as the mercy, grace, and humility the Lord Jesus showed by coming into this world and dying on the cross to become our Saviour. To go out of His way to rescue us from sin and bondage. What a gracious and loving God we have!

According to v.1, a Christian with the knowledge of the truth of God should live a godly life. Truth and godliness belong together. If truth is given up or not held, then godliness is also given up: truth must be seen in godliness. The Bible tells us that we can become proud with our knowledge. Sometimes we think that we are greater, or we have a more important role to play, than others. This attitude may cause us to mistreat others, tell lies, or engineer things for our benefit.

We are dealing with a God who does not lie, who promises the believer eternal life, v.2. A promise that He made before even time began. Eternal life is given to everyone who repents from their sins and accepts God's way of salvation through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. Believers enjoy eternal life now, but it will be fully manifested when they go to be with the Lord. That's what Paul, in v.2, means by "in hope of eternal life." Contrariwise, the unbeliever will face eternal torment.

In v.4, Paul addresses Titus, "My true child in a common faith." As we said earlier, Titus was a Greek who must have been converted under the preaching of Paul. Titus had served the Lord along with Paul previously and he had gained Paul's trust. Paul greets Titus with "grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Saviour." Grace is God's unmerited favour which has been delivered by Jesus Christ. We are unworthy sinners who have come to salvation; and we are not just saved, we are also blessed with every spiritual blessing. The name "God the Father" brings in our new closer relationship with God. It is a wonderful thing to be able to call God "Father." Knowing God as Father brings peace. We have peace with God, and we have the peace of God throughout our lives.

At the end of v.4, we have the next mention of Saviour: "Christ Jesus our Saviour." This would indicate the Risen One who came to save but is now in heaven at His Father's right hand in glory having completed the work that He was given to do. It is a wonderful thing to claim Christ Jesus as our Saviour. The words of a hymn come to mind in praise, "My Jesus, my Saviour, Lord, there is none like you, all of my days I want to praise the wonder of Your mighty love."

Verses 5-9: Instruction concerning the appointment and recognition of elders.

"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 - 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."

Paul and Titus had served in Crete together and Titus had been left to put things in order. There must have been a tremendous turning to Christ in the island that there were so many churches! Titus was finding things difficult, and he needed the encouragement and specific authority from Paul. Titus had to find men who had the desired qualifications for leadership in each church in each town. Verse 6 gives us the qualifications for the role,

"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."

It seemed that there were not too many men in the Cretan churches who were like that! All these characteristics should come naturally to a believer who has received the new nature of Christ. But our old nature continually rises, and Satan uses this to attack us. Leadership in a church is a vital thing as it affects the whole church in one way or another. The word "elder" suggests a man of spiritual maturity, not someone who has recently been converted. A man with experience of life. A

man who runs his family in a godly way. A man who no one can point a finger at and accuse him of any wrongdoing. A man who is married to one-woman, a truth which God sets out clearly in the Bible.

Verses 7-9: "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."

The overseer's role as God's steward must be carried out in a godly way. Being God's steward would indicate that he is responsible to God to be a leader of His people. We must remember that every individual believer is very precious to God. Therefore, the overseer must be faithful in every practical thing he does. He must also know his Bible to be able to give good instruction from it. The list of things that he must not be is the same for any Christian. Jesus is our perfect example to follow. He always spoke with gracious words. He had a loving heart for everyone. He healed the broken hearted and gave sight to the blind. Jesus led His disciples with direction, love, care, and sometimes discipline, when it was required.

1 Corinthians 2 gives instruction as to how the Holy Spirit gives wisdom. We spoke earlier about an elder being a mature man, but maturity does not always bring wisdom. In 1 Corinthians 2 v.16, Paul tells us "we have the mind of Christ." So, every Christian because the Holy Spirit lives in them, has the mind of Christ. We should be wise in situations just as Jesus was. An elder on many occasions requires spiritual discernment.

We may not all agree about the formal appointment of elders today but there are those in church who should be taking up this role. There is a need for true leaders to take this responsibility in every local church today.

Verses 10-16: Action that needed to be taken to restore church order.

"For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth. To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work."

Godly order was required in each Christian church in Crete. Paul points the finger particularly at the Jewish teachers who claimed to have accepted Christianity but worked evil in the assemblies and this was causing trouble in some families. In v.11, Paul tells Titus that "they must be silenced." Titus seemed to have been a timid young man, but Paul expected him to be ruthless with the troublemakers. They were teaching that godliness was a means of gain (see also 1 Timothy 6 v.5), but Paul reminds us in 1 Timothy 6 v.6 that only "godliness with contentment is great gain" (AV). Christians must assess teaching by what the Bible actually says. 1 Corinthians 14 v.29 tells us that everything any preacher says you should individually judge against the Bible. The danger is that those who are weak in the faith may follow others without checking what the Bible says. For the

Cretans, Titus was required to rebuke sharply the false teachers, then appoint leadership who would teach what is correct and who would encourage the assemblies.

V.12 states that the Cretans were known to be natural liars, evil beasts, and lazy gluttons, according to one of their own prophets. So, with such a sinful nature, and all the baggage of Judaism, it was difficult for those believers to cut away all this stuff. Judaism has a rich heritage of law, culture, and tradition. But Christians live by faith in the knowledge of grace that is given to them by God through Jesus Christ. Paul reminds us in other parts of the Bible that we must put to death our old man (our sinful nature) by the Spirit so we can have the freedom to live purely for Christ. If believers have pure consciences, godliness will be evident in their lives.

Conclusion

To summarise, leadership is all-important for the good of every church to run both spiritually and practically. We can debate whether it is right or wrong to appoint elders today since there are no apostle to appoint them. But no matter what our persuasion may be, it is the responsibility of those who meet the qualifications of an elder to do the oversight-work. It is vital we have strong leadership in our churches today. Men who will hold onto the truth and are prepared to stand out against others who may be leading the church away from Biblical teaching. Men who will protect weak believers. Men that will maintain godly order amongst believers.

Recently a group of us did some white water rafting in Aberfeldy. There were ten of us in each boat with an instructor to guide us down the river. There were smooth times when we meandered slowly down the river and the instructor did not have to say anything. But when we came to the rapids in the river, we were told to paddle together in the same direction so that we would pass the rapids without the boat capsizing. There is nothing worse in a church than people pulling in different directions. There needs to be a working together, respect, support, love, and care for each other. We need to look out for each other rather than focusing on ourselves. An assembly works well when the pure teachings of the Bible are held. Jesus said,

“For where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them” (Matthew 18 v.20).

The atmosphere of having Christ among us is a very special experience.

We need to be on our guard as Christian companies can easily be torn apart by various means. The problem in Crete was quite specific but I have seen many things that cause division. Just to name a few: accusations of false teaching; the leadership telling lies to cover their backs; the appointment of elders who have virtually no experience in the Christian faith so they can be controlled or manipulated by others; and families supporting their own family members at the expense of the truth. God must look down and see such deceit of even His own loved ones; and He must grieve. If we were all to take the attitude of Paul and recognise ourselves as humble servants of God who are willing and ready to serve the Lord, and others, then our assemblies will be places where the Lord will be seen; and blessing will flow in His goodness.

I am always reminded of an illustration that determines the temperature of a church. As each one comes in the door, we stop and pour a cup of water into a bucket. If our hearts are warm toward others and, with the anticipation of gathering to the Lord Jesus, our contribution will be warm. If not, it will be cold, and we will bring the temperature of the gathering down. A church consists of every believer, and it is up to each one of us to come in the correct spirit. Don't just rely on the leadership for church meetings to function. Theirs can be a hard and thankless task. The Bible encourages us to pray for, and encourage, our leaders. So, let me encourage you to play your part in your local church.

May the Lord bless and encourage you today.

Thank you for listening to the Truth for Today talk on The Epistle to Titus ch.1, Godliness in the assembly, Talk number 1237.

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