

## *Paul's Epistle to Titus*

### *Introduction*

Paul's epistle to Titus was written at about the same time as *1 Timothy*, and much of its content resembles that of *1 Timothy*. Consequently, much of the commentary on *1 Timothy* will apply here and will not be repeated. Titus is not mentioned in *Acts*, and the first chronological mention of him is found in Gal. 2: 1. Paul brought Titus with him on a visit to the apostles in Jerusalem roughly fourteen years after his conversion (although the exact timing of his conversion with respect to this visit is difficult to determine). Since the controversy with the Judaizers (who insisted on the necessity of circumcision) was not yet resolved, Titus is brought along as a test case for the apostles in Jerusalem. Paul wished to make sure that he and the apostles in Jerusalem were all "on the same page", so to speak, as far as the gospel was concerned. Did they, too, require circumcision? If so, then he would have to oppose them on the basis of the gospel he had received directly from Christ, for he was not in any sense inferior to any of them (cf. Gal. 2: 1-14). As it turned out, all of the apostles were preaching the same gospel which did not require circumcision or legal obedience to the Mosaic Law, a gospel of grace and not works. By refusing to circumcise Titus, Paul was publicly proclaiming that circumcision is not necessary for salvation.

By the time Paul writes *2 Corinthians* in 55 AD, Titus had become a very valuable part of his missionary team. It is clear from 2 Cor. 2: 13 and 7: 6 that Paul had sent Titus to Corinth to settle some of the many problems which plagued the church there (cf. *1 Corinthians*), and that Paul was anxiously awaiting his return in Troas with news from Corinth. Paul goes to look for Titus and is quite relieved when they are reunited, especially when he hears of the positive response of the church (2 Cor. 7: 13-14). Kistemaker argues that Titus was able to accomplish more with his visit to Corinth than Paul or Timothy together, something which reflects upon his ability and character as Paul's apostolic representative (Simon J. Kistemaker, *2 Corinthians*, p. 261). Another proof of his value is this letter in which Paul indicates his purpose of leaving Titus in Crete to appoint elders in every city for the oversight of the church there.

### *Purpose of the Letter*

As Paul had left Timothy in Ephesus to direct the affairs of the church there, so he leaves Titus in Crete for the same purpose as his apostolic representative. It is evident from the letter that some of the same heresies floating around Ephesus—including Gnosticism—were also present in Crete (1: 10-16). Added to this problem was the generally poor character common to the Cretan culture, a character not to be emulated by the Christian church (1: 12-13).

### *I. Salutation (1: 1-4)*

Paul is a bond-servant or slave (*doulos*) for the faith of the elect and the knowledge of the truth. His sole purpose in life was to serve God in the capacity of an apostle who would impart the truth to God's elect people in such a way that their knowledge of the truth would result in godly living. Thus, Paul interpreted his very existence as being in the interest of the church (cf. Kistemaker, *Titus*, p. 340). When the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the church, God gave the church gifts through the Spirit for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry. One of

these gifts was the gift of apostle (Eph. 4: 8-16). Another gift was that of the pastor-teacher. Thus, everyone called to the gospel ministry should see himself as Paul did. God has given pastor-teachers to the church as gifts for the building up of His body. We do not live for ourselves but for the benefit of the body of Christ. Of course, this is also true of every Christian (1 Cor. 12), but it is particularly true of the pastor-teacher whose time is completely occupied with imparting truth which leads to godliness.

## ***II. Paul's Purpose for Leaving Titus in Crete (1: 5—2: 1)***

To “set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city” go together. On some missionary journey not recorded in *Acts*, Paul and Titus had planted some churches in Crete, but these churches had not been officially organized with leadership. It was now Titus' job to organize the church and appoint elders in every city in which a church had been planted. It is worthy of note that Paul does not tell Titus to appoint elders in every “church”. This was no doubt implied, but by expressing it this way, we understand that the church in Crete consisted of many congregations in multiple cities. Thus, a presbytery of churches was formed with Titus as the apostolic representative of these churches—one church, many congregations.

### ***A. Qualifications for Elders (1: 6-9)***

The qualifications for elders are very similar to the list in 1 Tim. 3 and will need no further explanation here. One comment may be necessary. Rather than using the words, “able to teach”, the qualification given here is the ability to “exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict” (v. 9a). Thus, the ability to teach is not simply the ability to impart theoretical knowledge about the faith, but the ability to apply the faith to practical situations, the ability to present arguments against those who attempt to contradict the faith, as well as the courage to confront those who are in error. The elder cannot be a man who is too timid and withdrawn to confront people when the need arises. Being popular as a “nice fellow” is not a qualification for elder, although gentleness *is*. The elder may not be the most likable man in the congregation, but he must be a man who commands respect. There were members of the Cretan church (primarily of Jewish descent—“especially those of the circumcision”, v. 10)—who were “upsetting whole families” and needed to be “silenced” by Titus and by other elders (v. 11). This required courage and the willingness to confront people. From the description given in vv. 15-16, the errors they were propagating were the same as those being taught in Ephesus, including Gnosticism and Jewish myths devised from the OT (see my commentary on *1 Timothy* for a more thorough description).

### ***B. The Particular Challenge of Cretan Culture (1: 10—2: 1)***

Not only was false teaching prevalent, the ***general moral character*** of the Cretans was something to be reckoned with. Paul quotes the general assessment of Cretan culture by one of their own prophets, Epimenedes (who lived sometime between 630 and 500 BC) who had predicted the invasion of Persia against the Greek city state of Athens ten years before it happened. He had also prophesied that the Persian invasion would be unsuccessful and devastating to the Persian forces. Both details of this prophecy were fulfilled; and because of its accuracy, Epimenedes had become somewhat of a Cretan legend recognized by both Plato (who said that Epimenedes was “a divinely inspired man”), and Plutarch (who claimed that he was “a man dear to the gods”). Paul is not acknowledging that Epimenedes is an inspired prophet in the

biblical sense but is simply using him as a convenient spokesman of Cretan culture to make his point (Hendriksen, pp. 352-353). The degradation of Cretan culture was widely known, so much so that even one of their own recognized prophets had admitted that “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons”—not a very “nice” thing to say. We would have expected Epimenedes, a Cretan himself, to present the best side of his own culture; thus, when we hear this scathing denunciation of Cretans, we are more inclined to take it seriously. Maybe he was not overstating the case. Calvin observes, “Nor are these vices charged against one or a few persons, but he condemns the whole nation” (*Titus*, p. 302).

The Cretan reputation for lying and immorality persisted from the time of Epimenedes until Paul’s day. The Greek historian, Polybius (203-120 BC) remarked, “‘So much in fact do love of shameful profit and greed prevail among them that among all men Cretans are the only ones in whose estimation no profit is ever disgraceful.’” The Roman philosopher, Cicero (106-43 BC), also noted, “‘Indeed, (men’s) moral principles are so divergent that the Cretans...consider highway robbery (or ‘brigandage’) to be honorable.’” As a matter of fact, the Cretan reputation for telling lies had given rise to the expression, “Cretism” or “to Cretize” (meaning, “to tell lies”) much as “to Corinthianize” had become equated with “to live immorally like a Corinthian” (Hendriksen, pp. 353-354). While planting churches on the island of Crete, *Paul’s personal observation of Cretan behavior had not contradicted the testimony of the ancient writers*. He concurred (agreed) by saying, “This testimony is true” (v. 13a). Furthermore, the Christian community was not exempt from this characterization, for Paul adds, “*For this reason* reprove *them* severely so that they may be sound in the faith” (v. 13b). Titus was not being charged with the responsibility of condemning ungodliness on the city streets, but within the church itself. Calvin continues,

It was truly a wonderful purpose of God, that he called a nation so depraved, and so infamous on account of its vices, to be among the first who should partake of the gospel; but his goodness is not less worthy of admiration, in having bestowed heavenly grace on those who did not even deserve to live in this world. In that country so corrupt, as if in the midst of hell, the Church of Christ held a position, and did not cease to be extended, though it was infected by the corruption of evils which prevailed there; for here Paul not only reproves those who were strangers to the faith, but expressly reproves those who had made a profession of Christianity. Perceiving these vices so hateful have already taken root, and are spreading far and wide, he does not spare the reputation of the whole nation, that he may attempt the care of those whom there was some hope of healing (p. 302).

Some have criticized the Apostle Paul for characterizing the whole population of Crete in negative terms. Is this not *racism* of some sort? But considering that Paul is speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we cannot brush his remarks aside so lightly. Should we not rather conclude that the *vast majority* of any particular culture can behave so immorally that they earn a negative reputation for the *whole* culture? Consider, for example, the Karamajong tribe of northeastern Uganda which has a well-deserved reputation as violent cattle thieves. To be sure, there are exceptions to this reputation; namely, conscientious *Christian* Karamajong who have been saved from this thieving life-style; but the general characterization seems fair and fitting for the people group as a whole.

I have often heard comments about Ugandan men being lazy. Is this fair? Many of them linger idly in the villages and trading centers playing cards and dice and chatting for hours while their wives are hoeing in the gardens with their babies strapped to their backs. After hoeing, their wives must also cook the evening meal over open fires in unventilated kitchens (smoke

inhalation is one of the leading causes of sickness and death among African women). After cooking the evening meal, they must then clean the dishes. Thus, Ugandan males (not females) have to some extent *earned* a reputation for being lazy. Having observed some of this idle behavior for over five years, I would be ill-equipped to contradict this characterization of Ugandan men, as much as I would wish to describe them generally as hard-working folks. Indeed, *some* of them *are* hard-working (the stone cutters in the quarries, for example), but I could not honestly ascribe this trait to the majority. Of course, I am commenting as an outsider (unlike Epimenedes) coming into a foreign culture, and it could be argued that Ugandan men are not supposed to take part in cooking the meals or farming. This may be, but the relevant issue is the equitable division of labor between men and women. The women seem to have a hard go of it in Uganda—something they seem quick to point out even to outsiders like me. Thus, even if such male behavior is an acceptable cultural tradition, does this make it a biblical practice?

Turning our attention to the US, I regret the characterization of US citizens as selfish, immoral materialists who think only of sex and money. Yet, if one regularly views the Western media and American movies, or living standards in the US for some time, he could easily come to this conclusion. We have lived extravagantly while people in our neighborhoods and next-door nations have suffered, and we have celebrated the human body and human sexuality as something to be worshipped. (Far more money is being spent yearly on weight-loss programs and gym memberships than Christian missions.) But this should not be so surprising since the US is *not* a “Christian nation.” There are, thankfully, millions of exceptions to this characterization; and if you visit the US I sincerely hope you bump into them! It is also a fact that US citizens—including many non-Christians—give more money to charitable causes in developing countries than any other nation on earth (roughly \$37 billion in 2007 alone; \$8.6 billion from churches—*World*, June 20, 2009, p. 85). Nevertheless, our reputation as immoral materialists is somewhat *deserved*.

Paul makes no attempt to “win friends and influence people” by affirming the Cretan culture, and neither should we affirm (give positive assent to) our own cultures uncritically. Wherever we can praise the positive aspects of any culture—African, US, or otherwise—we should do so. There are many rich, positive traits of any nation or people group—like the Ugandan practice of caring for orphans from the extended family. But there are also negative characteristics which must be the target of Christian ministry seeking to transform culture according to the image of Christ. In the final analysis, *Christ did not die to establish any culture as the ideal culture*, but to subject all cultures to the purifying fire of the gospel. Whatever is wood, hay, and stubble will be burned up; and whatever reflects the goodness and holiness of God will be preserved on the Day of Judgment. Therefore, Christians must speak forcefully and prophetically against the sins of their own nation, culture, or people group. This task will not be a popular one—and I will not be popular for what I have just written—but without the consistent preaching and witness of the Christian *subculture*, the entirety of our respective cultures will degenerate to the same despicable (despised) condition of the Cretans in Paul’s day. First and foremost, Christians must be critical of themselves both individually and corporately as the church. Judgment is meant to start first with us (1 Pet. 4: 17).

As “aliens and strangers” (1 Pet. 2: 11) whose citizenship is in heaven and not on earth (Phil. 3: 20), all Christians are living as *expatriates* (foreigners) in their own country or tribe. They are citizens of the kingdom of heaven—living in a land which is not their own among kinsman who do not understand them—waiting for the hope of salvation. They are “ambassadors for

Christ”—representatives from *another* country—entreating men and women to be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5: 20).

At the same time, our evangelism and prophetic ministry should not be in word only, but “in deed and truth” (1 Jn 3: 18). Many of the Cretans were professing Christ as their Savior but by their *deeds* they were denying Him (v. 16). Paul was always insistent upon the necessity of good deeds as the measure of a genuine faith (cf. Tit. 3: 5 with Tit. 3:8; Rom. 6: 1-2), and he was insistent that Titus teach only sound doctrine which promoted sanctification (2: 1).

### ***III. The Importance of Good Deeds by All the Members of Christ’s Church (2: 2—3: 8)***

#### ***A. Good Deeds as Evangelism—Adorning the Doctrines of the Christian Faith***

Throughout this epistle, Paul emphasizes the importance of “good deeds” as the expression of genuine faith (cf. 1: 16; 2: 7, 14; 3: 1, 8, 14). “Good deeds” is used synonymously by Paul for “godliness” (1: 1; 2: 12), for godliness without good deeds is a contradiction in terms. We must not, on this account, accuse Paul of the very thing he vehemently denied—salvation by works (Gal. 2: 16; Rom. 3: 28). While good deeds are important to “*adorn* the doctrine of God our Savior” (Tit. 2: 10, *kosmeō*), they cannot save us, for “He saved us, *not on the basis of deeds which we have done* in righteousness, but *according to His mercy*, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior” (Tit. 3: 5-6). The *fruit* must not be confused with the *root*. The fruit of the tree does not produce the root of the tree but the other way around. First, the root produces the tree, and then the tree produces the fruit. Likewise, the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit (the root) produces the Christian (the tree) who then produces the fruit of the Christian life (good deeds) by the help of the Holy Spirit (cf. Matt. 7: 16-20). Good deeds are the Christian’s *external garment or clothing* (cf. 1 Pet. 3: 3-5; in which the same word, *kosmeō*, is used in v. 5, “adorn”). Unbelievers cannot see our *hearts*, but they can see our *deeds*; and when our deeds match our confession, the doctrines of our faith are properly clothed with visible evidence of their truthfulness. Apart from good deeds, Christian doctrine appears to the world as *naked claims* meaning nothing. As far as possible, believers should strive to have a blameless conscience before God and men (Acts 24: 16).

Good deeds also include good speech (v. 8), and the Christian’s words should be “always be with grace, *as though* seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person” (Col. 4: 6). Those who are “opponents” (i.e., opponents to the gospel) should have “nothing bad to say about us” (v. 8b). This is, admittedly, a difficult task. This is why I say often that the Christian life is not really difficult; it is *impossible!* Left to ourselves, we cannot live this Christian life, but with the help of the Holy Spirit, we will make steady progress in sanctification, thus making the Christian faith presentable to others.

#### ***B. Good Deeds within the Body of Christ (2: 2-15)***

Beginning in Tit. 2: 2, Paul begins to give specific instructions about adorning the doctrine of God with good deeds. He addresses older men, older women, young women, young men, and bondslaves with specific characteristics and behavior designed to adorn the doctrines of the Christian faith. Older men and women should be examples for the young men and young women (v. 4). The design of the family is to have the more mature members of the family live

out the faith before the younger, less mature members. It is not sufficient merely to *teach* propositional truth, as if only by one's intellect he can grasp the meaning and applications of the Christian life. Jesus taught the truth, but through His incarnation He provided a *visible manifestation* of the truth. Through His sinless life in the flesh He left the church an *instructional model* for discipleship which is multi-dimensional. Christians cannot live a sinless life, but they can live in such a way that others will benefit by imitating their behavior (1 Cor. 4: 16; 11: 1).

Thus, as we reflect upon this present passage and similar passages in *1 Timothy*, *we realize the importance of the broader Christian community in the process of individual sanctification*. We exist as part of a family (cf. 1 Tim. and commentary). Left alone to ourselves, our sanctification will suffer, for believers were never meant to struggle alone in fighting the good fight of faith any more than children were meant to be left alone to grow up physically and emotionally. They need parents. (Not boarding schools. Likewise US children need parents, not an endless array of extra-curricular activities, cinemas, and teenage “hang-outs”.) In the same way, spiritual children need spiritual parents. Westerners are especially prone to the error of *individualism and the myth of the “self-made man.”* Sufficient research will prove that even in the secular world there is no such person as the self-made man; everyone, however intelligent or talented, had someone or a number of other people helping him along the way to success. As believers, we must realize that we need one another to maximize our potential as Christians—encouraging us, exhorting us, rebuking us, and teaching us. All of us—even the least of us—has something to offer our fellow believers in Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 12), and they have something to offer us. *Each of us needs the whole body of Christ, and the whole body of Christ needs each of us.* Paul asserts this principle forcefully.

And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; *until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man*, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, from whom the whole body, *being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love (Eph. 4: 11-16).*

Notice in the above passage that Paul uses the singular, “man” instead of the plural, “men”. This signifies that he visualized the church *not as separate individuals living in isolation from one another, but as a corporate body with individual parts*. The whole body, therefore, must grow and mature as a corporate entity. As a chain is only as strong as its weakest link, so the body of Christ is only as strong as its weakest member. Thus, the whole body must cooperate together for the sanctification of each individual member. However, what happens so often is that we live in isolation, depending on our own strength without the help of others. Our sanctification suffers as a result.

In the space below, I have referenced some of the *Titus* passages with similar passages in *1 Timothy*.

Tit. 1: 1-9....1 Tim. 3: 1-7 (Overseers)

Tit. 2: 2.....1 Tim. 2: 2 (Notice that some of the same characteristics are used for elders and for older men who do not serve as elders. Thus the same traits

which are *essential* for elders are also *important* for “aged men.” Being the “husband of one wife” is left out of the list for aged men in *Titus* but is clearly the ideal for all men in the congregation who are not already the husbands of more than one wife.)

Tit. 2: 3.....1 Tim. 3: 11 (According to the requirements of women on the list in 1 Tim. 5: 9, only women at least sixty years of age were allowed to serve as diaconal assistants, and they must not be given to gossip.)

Tit. 2: 4-5....1 Tim. 2: 9-15; 5: 14 (Wives being subject to their husbands. Being “workers at home” may be a reference to the priority of taking care of their children; cf. 1 Tim. 2: 15 and discussion.)

Tit. 2: 9-10...1 Tim. 6: 1-2 (Slaves being subject to their masters. This relationship could exist outside the Christian community if the slave had an unbelieving master. Not only must slaves work hard for their masters and respect them, they must not embezzle funds from them. Note the words, “not pilfering”.)

Thus, we can see that Paul’s purpose in writing *Titus* is very similar to his purpose in *1 Timothy*. Christians must learn how to conduct themselves in the household of God to adorn the doctrine of God (Tit. 2: 10) and to prevent unbelievers from speaking against the Christian faith (1 Tim. 6: 1). ***Proper Christian behavior is the most effective apologetic for the faith.***

### ***1. Greater grace in the new covenant***

Paul’s *first* reason for godly behavior by all the members of the body is found in v. 11, “***For*** the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men” (where “for” is the explanatory *gar* in the Greek text). In other words, the *basis* of Paul’s exhortation in 2: 2-10 is the appearing of Christ and the *accomplishment of salvation*. But what *kind* of salvation has appeared in Christ? It is a salvation which produces the godly behavior of 2: 2-10. Those who are being saved are being saved unto godliness. Understood in this sense, we cannot *universalize* the salvation of v. 11 as if all men *without exclusion* are being saved. The same interpretation applied to 1 Tim. 2: 1-4 may now be applied to Tit. 2: 11. God desires “all kinds” of men to be saved, including kings and those in authority. He has also appeared in the person of His son, bringing salvation to “all kinds” of men including old men, old women, young men, young women, and slaves. No one is outside the potential of God’s saving grace. Notice that grace has *appeared* in the person of Christ—who is grace personified—and is the *necessary condition for godliness*. No one can live a godly life without the instrumentality of God’s grace brought to completeness in the person and work of Christ.

Further, we should note that although grace was present in the Mosaic covenant, it “appeared” in the time of Christ in *greater* manifestation. Greater grace is manifested in the New Covenant than in the Old Covenant because the New Covenant is the *fulfillment of grace promised in the Old Covenant* (cf. Jer. 31: 31-34). Thus, John says, “For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized [or “came” (ASV)] through Jesus Christ” (Jn. 1: 17). The difference is not one of *essence*, as if there was no grace in the Mosaic Covenant—without which there would have been no salvation for anyone. However, in terms of *comparison or degree*, the New Covenant is abounding in grace because of the fulfillment of all the promises of grace in Jesus Christ and His atoning work (2 Cor. 1: 20; 2 Cor. 3). Thus, the writer of *Hebrews*

describes the New Covenant as a “better” covenant (Heb. 7: 22; 8: 6) and the Old Covenant as “obsolete” (Heb. 8: 13).

There is now greater grace in the New Covenant bringing salvation to God’s people. Note further that “salvation” (v. 11) is related to “redemption” (buying back or reclaiming something; v. 14), and that *redemption* is defined in terms of *sanctification* both in its negative and positive aspects—redemption *from* lawless deeds (negative aspect) and purification *for* good deeds (positive aspect) (v. 14). In Gal. 3: 13a, Paul defines redemption in terms of our acquittal from the *penalty* of sin. “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us....” But here, redemption is described in terms of being redeemed “from every lawless deed” and being purified as God’s own possession. The result is that we become the peculiar possession of God “zealous for good deeds” (v. 14). Thus, redemption is not merely freedom from the *penalty* of sin but also freedom from the *dominion* of sin and freedom to *live righteously* (cf. 1 Pet. 1: 18). Any discussion of salvation which omits the transformation of the whole person from someone who is enslaved to sin to someone who is zealous for good works is an imbalanced discussion of salvation. We are saved *from* sin as a dominating power in our lives. We are not saved *in order to sin with impunity* without fear of the consequences. Once again, considered from this point of view, “bringing salvation to *all* men” does not prove the universal salvation of every single individual.

## 2. The eschatological hope of the believer

The second reason for godly behavior is the *eschatological hope* of the believer (v. 13). Notice the connection between *sanctification* and *eschatology*. In the “present age”, Christians should be denying ungodliness and worldly desires and living sensibly, righteously, and godly. The reason we should be doing so is that we have a *hope extending beyond this present age to the age to come*. This present life is not all there is! As we focus our attention on this blessed hope, the fleeting pleasures of this present age will pale in comparison, as the old hymn says, “Turn your eyes upon Jesus; look full in his wonderful face; and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace” (Helen H. Lemmel, 1922). The inescapable connection between sanctification and the eschatological hope is also expressed in Col. 3: 1-5.

Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. *Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.*

The Apostle Peter expresses the same connection when he proclaims,

The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. *Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God*, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. *Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless* (2 Pet. 3: 9-14).



Thus, the proper response toward our eschatological hope is *not* to live recklessly and sinfully, but to live obediently in expectation of the consummation of the kingdom of God—as servants who are awaiting the return of their master (Matt. 24: 45-51). The salvation which produces godly living is a salvation accomplished by none other than the power of God, for no human ability is sufficient to transform the sinner into a saint.

For the reader who is zealous to add more scripture citations of the deity of Christ to memory, Paul eagerly obliges in v. 13. The one who will appear in glory is “our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.” The verse has also been translated, “looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of *the* great God and *our* Saviour Jesus Christ” (ASV). Paul is speaking of *only one* person of the trinity in this statement, Jesus Christ, not two, both Christ and God the Father. There are several reasons for this conclusion (Hendriksen, pp. 374-375). The Granville Sharp rule of Greek interpretation states (1) that if there are two nouns of the same case (e.g. genitive, the possessive case, as in v. 13) connected by the conjunction, *and*; (2) if the definite article appears before the first noun but *not* the second noun, (3: conclusion) the two nouns refer to the *same* person. However, if the definite article is *repeated* before the second noun, the nouns refer to two different persons. But there is only one definite article (*the; tou*) in this phrase which occurs before “great God” but not before “Savior”. Thus, “the great God” and “our Savior Jesus Christ” refer to the *same* person. Jesus Christ is *the* great God and our Savior.

By way of contrast, Matt. 18: 17 reads, “And if he refuse to hear them, tell it unto the church: and if he refuse to hear the church also, let him be unto thee as *the Gentile and the publican*” (ASV). Notice that the definite article “the” (also found in the Greek) is before both nouns, “Gentile” and “publican”, which are connected by the conjunction, “and”. In this case, two different persons are in view, the Gentile as one person and the publican as the second person.

Another reason to believe that Paul is speaking only about the person of Christ is the fact that the word “appearing” is always used in scripture to refer *to Christ and to no other member of the trinity*. God the Father and God the Holy Spirit never “appeared” publicly and visibly in human history, only Christ. Thirdly, there is no reason to believe that Paul could not have referred to Christ as “the great God” considering his other proclamations of Christ’s deity in Rom. 9: 5; Col. 1: 15-20; 2: 9; and Phil. 2: 6.

In faithfully teaching the truths mentioned, Titus must not allow anyone to disregard his authority (v. 15; cf. 1 Tim. 4: 11-12). Considering the fact that this letter was to be read *publicly* to each of the congregations in Crete, it is an explicit command to the multiple congregations to *obey* Titus’ authority (Hendriksen, p. 377).

### ***C. Good Deeds Done before the World (3: 1-8)***

#### ***1. Obedience to the civil magistrate (3: 1)***

As stated earlier, good deeds are the best form of evangelism (although deeds must also be accompanied at the proper time by words, the message of the gospel). Paul not only wants believers in Crete to be obedient to their spiritual authorities (2:15) and to masters, including employers (2: 9), but also to all *civil* authorities (3: 1; “rulers”). ***Christians, of all people, should be law-abiding citizens of their respective countries.*** When Paul wrote this letter; therefore, the ruling authorities of Crete must have been god-fearing men, right? Wrong! Crete was under the

dominion of Rome, and Rome was ruled by Caesar Nero, the lunatic (crazy person) who ordered a large portion of Rome to be burned in order to make room for new buildings. He also blamed Christians for this destruction and used them as human torches to light the gardens of his palace at night. ***It is not likely that the civil rulers appointed in Crete were any improvement over the general population—as is generally true of any elected rulers.***

Why, then, would Paul exhort believers to obey the civil authorities, knowing that such authorities would most likely be godless men? He does not give the answer here, but doubtless he had tutored Titus at one time or another in the relationship between the Christian and the State. For Christians living in Rome, Paul writes a brief explanation for civil obedience.

Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. ***For*** there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. ***Therefore*** whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. ***For*** rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; ***for*** it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; ***for*** it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. ***Therefore*** it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. ***For*** because of this you also pay taxes, ***for rulers*** are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax *is due*; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor (Rom. 13: 1-7).

One ***primary reason*** for civil obedience is given in this passage but stated in a variety of ways (notice the “for’s” and “therefore’s”), and it is not contingent (dependent) on the character or relative merit of the ruling authority. Obedience is required no matter who the authority is—whether good or bad—because there is ***no*** human authority which God has ***not*** established. God is sovereign in ruling the affairs of all men, and no one can come to power unless God permits it (Dan. 4: 25b). Furthermore, once in power, the ruling authority cannot resist fulfilling the ***decreed*** will of God (Prov. 21: 1; as distinguished from his ***preceptive or moral*** will). Thus, if we have complaints about our government, we must first look to God and ask what God is trying to teach us by giving us this authority. It may very well be that God is using this authority to discipline His people or to punish a nation. Idi Amin was clearly given by God to chastise the nation of Uganda as well as to perfect His elect people. The US has had good and bad presidents all of whom were under God’s control to accomplish His purposes.

***Consequently***, whoever resists the existing authority is opposing God’s “ordinance” or His rule for civil authority. The power and authority of the civil magistrate was established at least as early as Gen. 9 after the flood. “Surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from *every* man, from every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man” (Gen. 9: 5-6). This is not a description of vigilante justice or mob justice which is common in Uganda, but justice administered by the proper authorities. Upon this foundation Paul states that the civil authority “is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.” He is not necessarily speaking ***descriptively*** of every human government—some which bring wrath upon the innocent and allow the wicked to prosper (e.g. the Khartoum government of Sudan led by Bashir)—but ***prescriptively*** of what a government ***should do*** and ***should be***. Because of God’s common grace, most people can live in this world more safely because someone is in control; otherwise, there would be anarchy (no rule) and chaos on the streets of every city and country in the world. What we have seen in the Rwandan genocide, and what we are seeing now in Congo where no one is really in control, are prime examples of what can

happen when there is *no rule of law*. Thus, Paul says, “For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil.” This is the *general rule*, and the order that civil government maintains is a manifestation of God’s common grace to all mankind.

*Lastly*, Christians should be in subjection to ruling authorities, not simply because they fear the wrathful consequences of disobedience, but because *conscience* demands obedience to the authority structures which God has ordained (“for conscience sake”). Therefore, the Christian should pay his taxes, not because he will be taken to jail if he doesn’t, but because *Christians should be good citizens* who model the proper response to authority (Matt. 22: 21). For the same reason, Christians should not steal, not because larceny is a punishable crime, but because it is a violation of the law of God. Even if stealing were legal, the Christian should avoid it for conscience sake. In some states in the US, it is still illegal to commit adultery; but as a believer I should not need this law. I should not be faithful to my wife simply to avoid prosecution, but because God requires me to love my wife as Christ loves the church (Eph. 5: 25).

Almost without exception, *those who wish to use violence* to overthrow the existing authority will end up imposing another rule which is equally tyrannical and chaotic as the previous regime. *Considering the last forty years of civil war in many African countries, has armed resistance to authority improved the life of average citizens?* Since 70% of the most impoverished people in the world live in Africa (Paul Collier, *The Bottom Billion*, p. 7), the answer is obvious. For example, when Mobutu was overthrown by Kabila in Congo, the Congolese did not fare any better under Kabila, who was assassinated by his body guard. Kabila’s son has apparently been unable to restore order, and five million people have been killed in Congo in the last ten years since 1998. To complicate matters, both rebel armies and government troops from neighboring countries have made Congo their personal battle grounds. When there is no internal authority sufficiently powerful to keep order, it is quite easy for more powerful expatriate (foreign) forces to move in and fill the void.

For another example, Samuel Doe of Liberia overthrew the reigning president, William Tolbert, in 1980 by having him murdered in his bed. Native Liberians were ecstatic (extremely joyful) over their new leader, but their joy was soon turned to horror as Doe instituted a “brutal reign of terror and his own brand of tribal apartheid” giving top positions in the government, army, and presidential guard to members of his own tribe (George Ayittey, *Africa in Chaos* p. 58). The consequence of his brutality was Charles Taylor who declared war on peace-keeping forces and the interim government resulting in mass rapes of married women and the destruction of Liberian villages (Ayittey, p. 59).

Thus, for good reason the Apostle Paul advises restraint and submission to the governing authority and urges that Christians *pray* for them rather than harbor *anger and resentment* which can easily ignite into civil disobedience, war, and death (1 Tim. 2: 8). Uncontrolled anger will not accomplish the righteousness of God (James 1: 19b-20). Righteous anger, on the other hand, stimulates men to rise up against evil and oppose it (Matt. 21: 12). Thus, *there is a place for civil disobedience within the confines of Biblical law*, and Christians should not sit by passively while multiple evils plague society—abortion, prostitution (especially child prostitution), and government corruption.

However, the *logic and method* of civil disobedience is often not as simple as we would wish. About twenty years ago, a graduate of a well-known US seminary, Paul Hill, gunned down an

abortion doctor with a shotgun as the abortionist was getting into his car. His rationale for killing the man was the protection of unborn babies whom the doctor killed day after day under the protection of federal and state law. After numerous appeals from prison, Hill was finally executed in the gas chamber. This is but one illustration of how an otherwise, rational person can reason his way into what he would consider justifiable homicide—murdering someone to protect the life of another. Doubtless in Hill’s mind, he was doing no more than another protector would do if he shot someone who was murdering another person—for this is what abortion is, murder. In our confused, schizophrenic US society, however, innocent, helpless babies can be murdered with impunity (without legal consequences) while abortionists live as protected citizens.

Yet, *the way of violence is not the Christian way*, and the kingdom of God employs not the steel sword but the sword of the Spirit, the word of God (Matt. 26: 52; Jn. 18: 36; Eph. 6: 17). As you can see, the relationship of believers to the State can be a difficult and awkward one, and I am not pretending to cover the many complicated issues here but only to introduce you to some of the problems. I am also not saying that armed resistance is *always* immoral. I am, after all, the free citizen of a nation, the US, which fought for its independence from Britain. But armed resistance should always be the last resort of the *general citizenry* of a nation, *not the church*. The implements of warfare for the church are *always* the Spirit, the word, and prayer. We must never underestimate the power of the preaching of the word, prayer, and Spirit-changed lives in changing a nation. Even a few people can make quite a difference. William Wilberforce, who led the nation of England to discontinue slavery, is a prime example of one Christian who got involved in politics and instituted astonishing social change without ever firing a pistol.

If Christians wish to change the government and the laws of the land, they should first seek *law-abiding methods* of doing so, regardless of how difficult and protracted (prolonged) the task. Let me suggest we begin where Paul begins, in the church. If Christians will *model the gospel* in all areas of their lives, the impact upon the whole society will be immense. But if Christians *only profess* the gospel without modeling the gospel, their evangelism will fall on deaf ears, and society will not change. The *antinomian* (lawless) Christian (cf. Rom. 6: 1-6) who does not know or understand the moral requirements of the gospel will have no positive impact upon his lawless culture. In fact, he is part of the problem.

On the other hand, while the general rule is obedience to the laws of the State, the Christian’s obedience cannot compromise his obedience to a *higher law*, the law of God. For this reason, when Peter and the apostles were ordered by the Sanhedrin to cease teaching the people in the name of Jesus, they responded, “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5: 28-29). The Christian’s conscience is bound, ultimately, by the law of God rather than the law of man. *Yet, he must obey the law of the State whenever that law does not require him to violate the law of God*. For example, it is very possible in the near future for laws to be passed in the US congress forbidding pastors from preaching against the sin of homosexuality. Such preaching will be interpreted as a “hate crime” against homosexuals punishable by law. If this happens, god-fearing pastors will have to make some serious decisions whether they will obey God’s law or the State. God’s law requires that we love the homosexual as His image-bearer but that we also attempt to bring the homosexual to repentance for disobedience to His law (Lev. 20: 13). Preaching against the sin of homosexuality is not hate, but love; for the practicing homosexual cannot enter the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6: 9-10; 1 Tim. 1: 10).

## 2. Good deeds toward unbelievers (3: 2-

### a. Visible signs of God's mercy incarnated in human flesh

In relation to the general population of Crete outside the church, Christians should be careful “to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men” (v. 2). They should “do good to all men, *especially* [but not exclusively] to those who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6: 10). In short, we should apply the golden rule, to do unto others as we would *wish* for them to do unto us (Matt. 5: 43-48; 7: 12). We should also avoid the desire for revenge (Rom. 12: 19). Why does Paul emphasize the need for “good deeds” applied to unbelievers? Shortly, he will say that good deeds “are good and profitable for men” (v. 8b), but *why* are they profitable? Once upon a time, Paul says, Christians were the same kind of people as the unbelievers in Crete (v. 3). They (and he includes himself; “we”) were “foolish”, “disobedient”, “deceived”, “hateful”. Their lives changed, however, when “the kindness of God our Savior and *His* love for mankind appeared” (v. 4). (The word for “appeared” is the same as the word used in 2: 11, *epiphaino*. Here, as in 2: 11, the appearing of Christ is connected with the coming of the Holy Spirit and the operation of the Holy Spirit in the actual application of salvation to the human heart; cf. v. 5a). Having once lived the same kind of godless existence as other unbelievers, Christians should be merciful and patient toward them, praying that the same kindness extended to them will also be shown to other unbelievers.

The change that took place in the lives of Cretan Christians was *not based on self-help and human effort*, but *mercy* (3: 5). As sinners, they were enemies of God and did not deserve His kindness and goodness; but God was rich in mercy (Eph. 2: 4) saving them on the basis of Christ's atoning sacrifice. Thus, since believers *have been shown* mercy, they must also *show* mercy to others who *do not deserve* their good deeds. As they show mercy through good deeds, the mercy of God once again will be *incarnated in human flesh*—their flesh—as it was also incarnated in the flesh of Christ. Christ is no longer present on earth in the flesh. He is in heaven seated at the right hand of God, but He has left His people on earth to carry on His work. We exist in human flesh, and we are called as Christians to the *incarnational ministry* of Jesus Christ, continuing His work of mercy. For this reason Paul also says, “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and *in my flesh* I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is *lacking* in Christ's afflictions” (Col. 1: 24). Paul is not saying that there is anything lacking in Christ's atoning sacrifice which is once-for-all. What he is saying is that there is much that still needs to be done on the part of Christ's church to *proclaim* this atoning work to the world. Such proclamation, as always, must be not only in *word* but also in *deed* (1 Jn. 3: 18). The mercy of God is made known through the mercy of His people, and if His people fail to show mercy, the mercy of God is hidden to the world. Good deeds are not the basis of our salvation (vv. 5, 7) but they are “good and profitable” (v. 8) to lead men to the knowledge of Jesus Christ. What's more, good deeds are the only tangible proof that a person is a sheep rather than a goat (Matt. 25: 31-46). Christians must be careful to produce good deeds lest by our bad deeds we deny the Savior whom we profess (1: 16).

### b. Produced by the saving work of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit

In this short section the Apostle Paul lays out briefly but brilliantly the economic work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in the work of redemption—the “*Economic or Functional Trinity*”. The “kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind” refers to *God the Father*.

God the Father saved us on the basis of the regenerating and renewing work of the *Holy Spirit* whom He poured out upon His church through *Jesus Christ* who is also, “our Savior”. “Savior” is a designation which applies both to the Father and the Son, and since there is a mutual indwelling of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, all three persons are involved in the salvation of sinners. Thus, Jesus is God our Savior (2: 13) and the Father is also God our Savior (3: 4). The Holy Spirit is also God our Savior although the Bible does not explicitly refer to the Spirit as “Savior”. God the Father is the subject of v. 6, the one who pours out the Spirit “through” the instrumentality of Christ’s atoning work.

But what is the difference between the “*washing of regeneration*” by the Holy Spirit and the “*renewing*” of the Holy Spirit? Are they one and the same; and, if so, why are they mentioned separately with two different words? The word, “regeneration” is the Greek word, *palinogenesis* taken from two words, *palin* (again) and *genesis* (birth); thus, a “birth again” or “new birth”. It is by the operation of the Holy Spirit that we are born again to new life in Christ. The new birth is analogous to one’s physical birth in which he is totally *passive and inactive*. When one is born physically, he is not even aware of what is going on, and all the work of bringing him into the world is done by his mother with no help from him—and perhaps much hindrance! Likewise, our *re-birth* is accomplished with no help from us! It is accomplished completely by the work of the Holy Spirit opening our hearts to the truth of the gospel (Acts 16: 14).

The word, “renewing”, is *anakainosis* (new again). Renewing by the Holy Spirit—in contrast to regeneration—is an ongoing process by which the believer is more and more conformed to the image and likeness of Christ. The word is also found in Rom. 12: 2, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the *renewing* of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” The verb, “transformed”, is present tense indicating the *continuing* activity of transformation while “born again” of Jn. 3: 3, 7 is aorist tense indicating *definitive* action at a point in time. We are born again at a definite point in time, but we are renewed progressively throughout life. Furthermore, the verb, “transformed” (Rom. 12: 2) is imperative, indicating a command. Paul *commands* the believer to be transformed by the renewing of his mind, but he never commands anyone to be born again. Thus, while we are made new creatures in Christ by the definitive action of rebirth in which we are entirely passive, our renewal does not stop there but continues throughout life as sanctification in which the Christian *actively participates* with the Holy Spirit (cf. Hendriksen, p. 391). Further proof of the believer’s participation in the process of renewal is found in 2 Cor. 4: 16 and Col. 3: 10. In each of these verses, the verb *anakainoo* (“renew”) appears in the present tense indicating an ongoing activity which is not yet complete.

#### ***D. Avoiding Foolish Controversies and Factious Men (3: 9-11)***

While good deeds are profitable, foolish controversies, genealogies, strife and disputes about the Law are not profitable either for the church or for unbelievers. Rather, they are quite worthless (v. 9). But why are such things worthless? They are worthless because they do not promote godly living which glorifies God (Tit. 2: 12; cf. 1 Tim. 1: 5). Again, we must be careful to understand what Paul is talking about lest we hinder constructive dialogue—and even constructive argumentation—concerning the proper meaning and application of biblical texts. There is much current dispute in scholarly circles about the proper relationship of OT Law to the NT believer. Such disputation can be positive and constructive if carried on in an atmosphere of Christian love and mutual appreciation of another’s views and motives. Paul is also not

discouraging a scholarly study of the Bible nor a systematic study of Biblical themes—systematic theology. Neither is Paul inferring that every time we read the Bible, we must always walk away with an *immediate* application. Sometimes the appropriate application of a text comes years later as we see how it relates to a specific event in our lives or in the lives of others. Rather, Paul is referring to interpretations of the OT which follow the rabbinical habit of *eisogesis*—reading into a text what is not really there. The same kind of fantastical story-telling in Ephesus was also occurring here in Crete. (For further discussion, see commentary on *1 Timothy*. For a more complete explanation, see Hendriksen).

It is clear from v. 10 that those who were causing trouble in the Cretan church should be warned not to continue. The protocol (method) Christ established for disciplining an erring brother is carefully observed here (cf. Matt. 18: 15-17). The factious man who spreads strife among the brethren should be warned twice. If he continues “sinning” (v. 11) after two warnings, he should be rejected by the church and judged functionally (excommunicated) as an unbeliever (see commentary on the *Synoptic Gospels*, Matt. 18: 15-20, and the broader context of Matt. 18: 1-14. We may assume that a third warning by the entire church is also rejected.). The purpose for excommunication is restoration (1 Cor. 5). Paul’s first desire is not to rid the church of trouble-makers, but to restore them to spiritual health. However, if they refuse to repent, they leave the church no option but excommunication. Further, it is not really the church which is condemning the erring member; rather, he is “self-condemned.”

#### ***IV. Conclusion (3: 12-15)***

##### ***A. Final Instructions (vv. 12-14)***

The Apostle Paul was never a “lone ranger”—one who always worked in isolation from others. He generally worked along with others like Barnabas, Timothy, and Titus; and there are numerous other helpful individuals whom are mentioned throughout his epistles. As the Lord Jesus had sent out the apostles in two’s (Lk. 10: 1), so Paul follows this pattern, being accompanied on all of his journeys by at least one other person and usually more. This is the only mention of Artemas anywhere in the NT. Tychicus, on the other hand, is mentioned five times and is chosen by Paul to deliver letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians (Acts 20: 4; Eph. 6: 21; Col. 4: 7; 2 Tim. 4: 12; and Tit. 3: 12). Paul is now sending both Artemas and Tychicus to Titus in Crete for the purpose of relieving Titus of his pastoral duties while Titus is summoned to Nicopolis. There is no mention of Nicopolis in *The Acts of the Apostles*. This leads to the conclusion that the letter to Titus was written after Paul’s first Roman imprisonment from 59-62 AD (Acts 28: 16-31). After his first imprisonment (and after *Acts* was written), Paul planted the church in Crete and possibly journeyed on to Spain after spending the winter in Nicopolis (Rom. 15: 4, 28; cf. Hendriksen, p. 397).

The important consideration of v. 12 is that Paul needed someone to take Titus’ place while he visited him at Nicopolis. The church was still too young and immature to be left alone without mature leaders, especially in light of the Gnostic heresy and other false teaching assailing it.

The second set of instructions include Zenas (mentioned only here in *Titus*) and Apollos (Acts 18: 24; 19: 1). Making a journey to an undisclosed destination, Zenas and Apollos should be helped by Titus along the way. In spite of Roman law and Roman roads, traveling anywhere was

treacherous; and Christians were responsible to provide safe housing for traveling missionaries—provided they were not heretics (2 Jn. 1: 10).

Thirdly, and worthy of note, Paul *repeats* the message he has been trying to emphasize throughout the entire letter to Titus—the crucial importance of *good deeds* among all the Christians in Crete. Considering the decadence (moral corruption) of the Cretan culture (1: 12-13), Christians should let their light shine in the darkness that men may glorify their Father in heaven. In this way, many Cretans would be drawn to a new subculture, the Christian church.

***B. Greetings and benediction (v. 15)***

Finally, Paul sends greetings from all those who were there with him in Nicopolis along with his characteristic benediction of grace (cf. Rom. 16: 24; 1 Cor. 16: 23; 2 Cor. 13: 14; Gal. 6: 18; Eph. 6: 24; Phil. 4: 23; Col. 4: 18). First and always, *grace* was Paul's constant theme.



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