

The Epistle to Titus

Titus 2.10: That they may **adorn** the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.

A Triplet of Epistles

- Titus is one of three Pastoral Epistles, so called because they were written to *individuals* (rather than *churches*) for the purpose of giving practical spiritual guidance in the shepherding of the flock.
- Timothy and Titus were not 'pastors' (or 'bishops') of a local church, whether in Ephesus or Crete respectively. They held no permanent office in these churches but instead laboured as temporary apostolic representatives (Titus 3.12).
- Generally, First and Second Timothy emphasise *doctrine*, whereas Titus stresses *good works*. Doctrine cannot dwell alone! It must be adorned by doing (Titus 2.10). Healthy teaching begets godliness.
- 1 Timothy concerns the **protection** of divine truth. 2 Timothy is about the **proclamation** of divine truth. The focus of Titus is the **practice** of divine truth – to complement and beautify the doctrine of God in my life.
- Alternatively, the emphasis in 1 Timothy is the **order** of the *house* of God. In 2 Timothy, the **obligations** of the *man* of God. In Titus the theme is the **outworking** of the *doctrine* of God our Saviour.
- All in all, the Pastoral Epistles might be summarised as follows: "*Sound doctrine, applied and promoted by spiritual leadership, produces good works and godliness unto the adorning of the gospel of Christ.*"

The Timing of the Letter

- Paul endured *two* imprisonments in Rome. After being released from his *first* imprisonment in AD62-63 (Acts 28.16, 30-31), he continued spreading the gospel in various parts – both east and west.
- Immediately after his release, Paul likely moved eastwards to Crete (leaving Titus behind, Titus 1.5) before arriving in Ephesus to spend the winter. Early in AD64, Paul left for Macedonia leaving Timothy at Ephesus (1 Timothy 1.3).
- First Timothy was likely written by Paul from Macedonia (possibly Philippi) in the summer of AD64. Titus is likely to have been written about the same time. By the time Second Timothy was written, Titus was with Paul (4.10).
- During Paul's four years of enforced confinement, the enemies of Paul and the gospel had been busy. There were therefore a great number of fronts on which the gospel had to be defended.

The Traditions of Crete

- The island of Crete is 160 miles long and varies in width from 7 to 35 miles. Because of its strategic location, Crete had long been exposed to Greek and Roman civilization.
- Cretan culture was full of paganism, myths and stories – not least about Zeus, the 'king of the gods' in ancient Greek mythology. Zeus was supposedly born on Crete which was an occasion of great pride for the Cretans.
- He was the father of many gods (e.g., Athena, Apollo, Artemis), ruler of the sky and enforcer of justice [*dike*]. Cretans claimed a tomb of Zeus existed on the island suggesting he was mortal and subject to death.
- This was considered heretical and false by other Greeks – leading to the famous lines quoted by Paul from the poet Epimenides (Titus 1.12) – "the Cretians are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies."
- Zeus was perceived differently on Crete than elsewhere in Greece, but his prevailing moral character was that of constant deception, lies, sexual transgression and adultery.
- Ancient Greeks believed power defined justice. His authority made him above consequence, not above wrongdoing.
- Eventually the gospel came to Crete. Paul preached a God who did not lie (Titus 1.2). He presented a Saviour who was eternally divine and became human (2.13). The gospel was intended to produce righteousness and godliness; to solidify marriages and homes. The gospel contradicted the paganism of Crete.

The Task of Titus

- Though Paul and Titus visited Crete together, Titus had been left behind to "set in order" or 'straighten out' what had been left unfinished (1.5). Defective doctrine and behaviour needed to be corrected.

Titus faced challenges from two different areas:

- **Local culture.** The inhabitants of Crete were notorious for their moral destitution – see 1.12.
- Even the Greek verb *κρητίζειν* [*kretizein*], meaning 'to lie' or 'to cheat' (lit. 'to act like a Cretan'), was coined precisely because of the ancient reputation of Cretans as habitual liars and deceivers.
- Mark Sweetnam says, "*It is no surprise that the Cretans were marked by untruthfulness. The god that they worshiped was a liar. The myth of the Cretan Zeus was a litany of deception and debauchery. The Cretans had demonstrated the truth of Psalm 115.8, people become like their gods.*"

- Ancient Greek historian Polybius (c.200-118BC) said, “*It is impossible to find personal conduct more treacherous than in Crete. Sordid love of gain and lust for wealth prevails. The Cretans consider piracy honourable.*”
- As a people, they acted like animals – vindictive, vicious and savage in their attitude towards each other. They were accustomed to telling lies, not working hard, and dysfunctional relationships.
- Their character made society unworkable and unmanageable. Preaching the gospel in a society like that was no easy task. And even more difficult to integrate any believers into a fellowship of loving and living together!
- **False teachers.** Described in 1.10-16, these men were likely Jewish Christians (or possibly Gentiles influenced by Judaism) who had embraced Christianity but insisted on blending it with Jewish legalism and traditions.
- They taught that Gentile believers needed to follow aspects of the Mosaic Law such as circumcision, dietary rules, or ceremonial observances to be saved, and to ‘tidy up’ their lives.
- Thus, the Judaisers claimed to have the answer to the culture of Crete – the ceremonies and commandments of the Law. But according to Paul, the only solution was not law but **grace** (2.11).
- It was the gospel that could transform lives and dress the ‘evil beasts’ of Crete in the beauty of Christ. As believers they would be fitted to “adorn the doctrine of God”. What religion, politics and education could not do – grace could.
- The task of Titus was therefore to set in order what was lacking (1.5), stop the mouths of the circumcision (1.10-11, 14) and develop *sound* (healthy) faith (1.13).

The Terminology of the Epistle

Some of the most frequently occurring words are noted in the table below.

Greek	Transliteration	English	Purpose	References
σωτήρ	sōtēr	Saviour	What the Cretans needed more than anything was a ‘Saviour’. Three times the noun is used of God, three times of Jesus Christ. The noun ‘salvation’ (2.11) and the verb ‘saved’ (3.5) also occur once each.	1.3, 4; 2.10, 13; 3.4, 6
πίστις	pistis	faith	Faith is used both subjectively and objectively. Faith is the means of salvation, not the works of the Law. Believers must also be sound (healthy) in the faith (body of doctrine). The adjective ‘faithful’ also appears three times (1.6, 9; 3.8).	1.1, 4, 13; 2.2, 10; 3.15
ἔργον	ergon	work	Normally used with the adjective <i>agathos</i> meaning ‘good works’. This is evidence of genuine faith and the result of salvation. Believers are to be intent, even eager to engage in good works. The false teachers profess to know God but deny Him by their works.	1.16; 2.7, 14; 3.1, 5, 8, 14
χάρις	charis	grace	The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men in the Person of Jesus Christ. It is grace that teaches godly living and motivates good works.	1.4; 2.11; 3.7, 15
ὑγιαίνω	hygiainō	sound healthy	In contrast to false teaching, Titus must exhort and correct with sound, spiritually healthy divine truth. The scriptures provide wholesome, life-giving instruction.	1.9, 13; 2.1, 2
διδασκαλία	didaskalia	teaching doctrine	Doctrine fosters spiritually healthy believers. Divine truth must be beautified by the way Christians live.	1.9; 2.1, 7, 10
ἐλπίς	elpis	hope	The firm assurance of eternal life, and blessed hope of the glorious appearing of Christ is a basis for godly living and spiritual service. The gospel brought something to live for into the hopelessness of Cretan culture.	1.2; 2.13; 3.7

Other frequently occurring words are:

- **love** (1.8; 2.4; 3.4, 15) – something only the gospel could cultivate in those who were vicious ‘evil beasts’.
- **life** (1.2; 2.12; 3.7) – infused into the old culture of Crete which was dead with depravity.
- **righteousness** (1.8; 2.12; 3.5, 7) – a standard of divine right living altogether missing from Cretan society.
- **appeared** (1.3; 2.11, 13; 3.4) – God has intervened to manifest His word, grace, kindness and love in Crete through the preaching of the gospel. All those who believe the message look forward to the glorious future appearing of Christ.

Titus – The Faithful Partner of Paul

- Titus (which may mean ‘honourable’) was one of three key companions of the Apostle Paul – Timothy, Titus and Tychicus. All are mentioned in the last chapter Paul wrote – they were faithful to the end (2 Timothy 4).
- Titus is mentioned *thirteen* times in the NT. He was a Gentile, taken by Paul to Jerusalem with Barnabas as a sample case of Gentile salvation (Galatians 2.1). When compelled to be circumcised (Galatians 2.3), Paul refused so as not to jeopardise the truth of the gospel – justification is by faith, not the works of the law. Little did Titus know that the controversy of his early days would fortify and fit him for later challenges on Crete.
- Paul calls Titus “mine own son after the common faith” (Titus 1.4) suggesting he was Paul’s convert.
- Titus was a spiritual fire-fighter in Corinth, being repeatedly referred to in 2 Corinthians. There he is called a ‘brother’ (2 Corinthians 2.13), ‘partner and fellow helper’ (8.23) and one who ‘walked in the same spirit’ as Paul (12.18). Paul knew that Titus would deal with things as he would have dealt with them himself.

William Barclay: “*Titus was the man for a tough assignment. When the trouble at Corinth was at its peak, it was he who was sent with one of the severest letters Paul ever wrote (2 Corinthians 8.16). Titus clearly had the strength of mind and character which enabled him to face and to handle a difficult situation. Titus was the man to send to the place where there was trouble. He had a gift for practical administration. It was Titus whom Paul chose to organise the collection for the poor members of the church at Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8.6, 10).*”

- After his labours in Corinth, Titus was left in Crete to be a model to the Christians (Titus 2.7). He was a person Paul could trust to *display*, not merely teach, the truth of the gospel.
- Titus was a vital helper of Paul, yet he is not mentioned in Acts. Bullinger reckons this is “*owing to his being the authority to whom Luke is indebted for various portions of the book.*” Others suggest Titus may have been a close relative of Luke – possibly his brother. The omission of his name was therefore an act of humility on the part of Luke.
- A Christian writer in Crete by the name of Andrea Cretensis [d.740AD] lauded Titus by saying he was “the never silent trumpet of the evangelical message; the exalted echo of Paul’s own voice.”

The Text of the Epistle

- The basic theme of the epistle is *good hygiene* – the production of spiritually healthy saints and assemblies by the teaching of sound doctrine. The instruction of Titus was vital to counteract defective teaching and disorderly conduct.
- The purpose of the gospel is to change men from what they are by nature, into the character of God (1.1).
- The Cretans were liars, but God does not lie. Believers are those whose lives are consistent with the truth (1.1, 14).
- The Cretans were lazy, but God was active in sending His Son. Believers should be zealous of good works (2.14).
- The Cretans were lawless, but God is righteous and holy. Believers should be sober, righteous and godly in their living, careful to maintain good works (3.8).

The Chiastic Structure of the Epistle to Titus

1.1-4: Salutations	
1.5-9: Preservation of the Testimony – order in the assembly	

A	1.10–16	Problem of False Teaching	Deny God by their lives; unfit for good works
B	2.1–10	Practice of Good Works	Ordered life – in the <i>home</i>
C	2.11–15	Power of the Gospel	Grace trains believers for good works
B'	3.1–2	Practice of Good Works	Ordered life – in <i>society</i>
C'	3.3–8	Power of the Gospel	Salvation and renewal by grace
A'	3.9–11	Problem of False Teaching	Divisive persons rejected

3.12-15: Salutations

“In order to show the true spiritual power of the gospel, the most difficult soil was selected, the most difficult circumstances were employed; and of those in the midst of trying and impossible conditions of life the finest possibilities were postulated. Thus the Spirit of God teaches us that the Church of God can be the pillar and ground of the truth in the most dark, desolate, and difficult places of the earth and the saints of God can adorn the doctrine of God in the most ungodly of societies.”

Adapted from **G Campbell Morgan**