

Introduction to Titus Study - REDEEMED TO DO WHAT IS GOOD

Key Verse: 2:14

“...who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.”

Author, Date & Place of Writing; Place in Scripture

Apostle Paul introduces himself as the author of this letter. Most scholars believe he wrote it around A.D. 64, perhaps at the same time he wrote 1 Timothy. It is unknown where Paul was when he wrote this letter. Titus is one of the Pastoral Epistles, along with 1 and 2 Timothy.

Recipient: Titus

Titus' name first appears in Galatians, perhaps the earliest of all the New Testament writings. In Galatians 2:1–3 we learn that Titus accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their journey to Jerusalem from Antioch. From this it seems that early on, Paul was discipling Titus. It is possible that Titus was one of the earliest Gentile converts in the church at Antioch (Ac11:19–21). Galatians 2:3 clearly states that Titus was a Greek and was not circumcised after becoming a Christian. So he is a prime example of a Gentile being included among God's people solely on the basis of his faith in Jesus.

In this letter Paul calls Titus “my true son in our common faith” (1:4). Though Paul was a Jew and Titus a Gentile, Paul had great affection and respect for him. Paul left Titus in Crete to carry out his unfinished task of appointing elders in every town (1:5). Because of this, Titus is uniquely prominent in the New Testament as a Gentile pastor.

In Paul's letter of 2 Corinthians Titus appears as a trusted leader. At Troas Paul was looking for Titus to hear about what was happening in the Corinthian church (2:13). The church in Corinth had had many unusual problems, as well as a conflict with Paul's leadership. Of all the people he could have chosen, Paul sent Titus there to help resolve the matters.¹ When Paul finally met him in

¹ Paul wrote the letter of 1 Corinthians instead of going to Corinth in person, although he planned to visit there at some later date. It was because God had opened the door for effective ministry for him in Ephesus at that time, and he also needed to be in Ephesus to deal with those who opposed him (1Co16:5–9). Later, in the letter of 2 Corinthians Paul explains

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Macedonia, Titus happily reported to Paul about the repentance of the Corinthians (7:5–7,13b). Paul also entrusted Titus with the collection of an offering from the Corinthians for the Lord’s people in Jerusalem, which Titus himself had actually initiated there (8:6; cf. Ro15:25). Paul appealed to Titus to go back to Corinth, and Paul was thankful because God had put into the heart of Titus the same concern for the Corinthians he had (8:16). Titus welcomed Paul’s appeal with much enthusiasm, and he went to them on his own initiative a second time (8:17–18a). Paul calls Titus “my brother” and “my partner and coworker among you” (2:13; 8:23). Titus’ trustworthy stewardship of the offering would win the trust of many people (8:20–21; 12:18). Finally, in 2 Timothy 4:10 Paul says that Titus went to Dalmatia, in modern-day Croatia, presumably to care for some believers there.

Background of the Island of Crete

Crete is the largest Greek Island and fifth largest in the Mediterranean Sea. It has large mountains and a temperate climate with great beauty. According to historians, the ancient civilization of the Minoans began on this island around 2700 B.C. It had a very sophisticated culture and language, and its people built palaces in many places on the island. It may be that these palaces became full of hedonism. Their society was eventually overcome by the Mycenaens around 1600 B.C., and the island suffered from volcanic activity and earthquakes. When its civilization declined, its people seem to have despaired, so much so that one of Crete’s own prophets, Epimenides, popularized a saying: “Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.” After ministering there in person, Apostle Paul concluded, “This saying is true” (1:12–13a). According to a well-established tradition found in Callimachus’ Hymn to Zeus 8 (305-204 B.C.) and Lucian’s Lover of Lies 3 (cf. Timon 6; ca. A.D. 120-180), the reason that Cretans are always liars was that they claimed to possess a tomb of Zeus, who, of course, as a god, cannot have died!²

Purpose of Writing

Paul and Titus had ministered together on the island of Crete. We don’t know much about Paul’s ministry in Crete. Acts 27:7-8 mentions that he stopped by very briefly while on the way to Rome as a prisoner. But he certainly did not

that he did not return to Corinth in order to “spare them...another painful visit” (2Co1:23; 2:1). This seems to be why Paul sent Titus to Corinth in his place.

² Fee, Gordon D., 1988. 1 & 2 Timothy Titus, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, p. 179 .

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carry out an evangelistic campaign at that time. Considering the date of writing, perhaps Paul visited Crete along with Titus after his first imprisonment in Rome. For some reason, Paul had to leave. So he wrote this letter to Titus instructing him to “put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town” (1:5). Titus was to rebuke and silence rebellious people and teach what is appropriate to sound doctrine (1:10–11,13; 2:1). Paul’s goal was that the believers in Crete would live such good lives that outsiders would respect their faith, “not malign the word of God,” and thus they would “make the teaching about God our Savior attractive” (2:5,10; 3:1–2,8). Paul personally encouraged Titus to teach with spiritual authority (2:15) and to avoid foolish controversies (3:9). He also taught him to deal clearly with divisive people (3:10–11).

Characteristics of the Letter

The first unusual trait in Titus is Paul’s rather long identification of himself in 1:1–3, where he clarifies his purpose in being an apostle of Jesus Christ. It is “to further the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness” (1:1b) and to assure them of the hope of eternal life (1:2). In these verses Paul emphasizes God’s sovereignty in his salvation work. God chooses “his elect” (1:1), promises them eternal life before the beginning of time (1:2), and in his appointed season has brought the gospel to light through Apostle Paul (1:3).

Paul’s theology in this letter is very brief but is consistent with his writings elsewhere, that we are saved only by God’s mercy and justified by his grace through Christ Jesus, who gave himself for us and made us heirs of eternal life (2:14; 3:5a,7). Paul does, however, use a rather unique expression in Titus, that we are saved “through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (3:5b; cf. Jn3:3,5; Ac2:38; 19:2,5–6; Gal3:5; Eph5:26). In Titus Paul repeats the expression “our Savior” six times (1:3,4; 2:10,13; 3:4,6). It teaches that God really wants to save all people from their sins and wickedness (2:11,14).

The letter of Titus is very similar to the pastoral letter of 1 Timothy. Because of this, some scholars believe these two letters were written around the same time. As in 1 Timothy, Paul deals with false teachers and their teachings (1:10–16; 3:9–11; cf. 1Ti1:3–7; 4:1–4; 6:3–5,20). He urges us to hold firmly to the trustworthy message and to be sound in doctrine and in the faith (1:9,13b; cf. 1Ti1:10,19a; 3:9). As in 1 Timothy, in Titus Paul lists the qualifications for

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elders, and gives specific teachings for older men, older women, younger women, young men and slaves (1:6–9; 2:2–4,6,9; cf. 1Ti3:2–13; 5:1–6:2a). Paul also mentions in Titus a “trustworthy saying” (3:8a; cf. 1Ti1:15a; 3:1; 4:9; 2Ti2:11). As in 1 Timothy, Paul reminds us of our past sinful lives in order to magnify God’s mercy and his saving grace (3:3–7; 1Ti1:12–16).

The letter of Titus is mainly full of practical instructions for Christian living. These instructions are written in imperatives, giving the letter a sense of urgency. Twice Paul even urges Titus to rebuke his members (1:13b; 2:15).

Major Themes

A major theme of Titus is “God our Savior” and “Jesus our Savior” (1:3,4; 2:10,13; 3:4,6). God initiated, carried out and fulfilled salvation work among people by his grace. God sent Jesus as our Savior. He saved us, not because of any righteous thing we have done, but because of his mercy (3:5a). He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit (3:5b). Jesus gave himself to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good (2:14). This is the trustworthy message and the sound doctrine that Paul urges Titus to hold onto and to teach (1:9; 2:1; 3:8).

A related major theme of Titus is “doing what is good” as a result of believing the gospel message. In Galatians Paul emphasized that we are justified by faith in Christ alone, not by anything we have done, in order to set us free from legalism. But in Titus, Paul emphasizes that faith in Christ results in doing good in order to promote basic morality that should accompany gospel faith. The essence of the gospel message is the same in both letters, but Paul’s emphasis is different according to the context of the mission field. In three chapters the word “good” is repeated eight times. We should “love what is good” (1:8). We should not be “unfit for doing anything good” (1:16). We should “teach what is good” (2:3) and “set an example by doing what is good” (2:7). We should even be “eager to do what is good” (2:14) and “ready to do whatever is good” (3:1). We should “be careful to devote” ourselves “to doing what is good” (3:8) and “learn to devote” ourselves “to doing what is good” (3:14).

Paul suggests what he means by “what is good” in several places. First of all, he says what is **not** good: to be wild, rebellious and disobedient (1:6,10,16;

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3:3), drunkards (1:7; 2:3), “liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons” (1:12), to be “overbearing, quick-tempered or violent” (1:7), “disruptive” (1:11), to pursue “dishonest gain” (1:7b,11b), to be “full of meaningless talk and deception” (1:10; 3:3), “corrupted” in both mind and conscience (1:15), “slanderers” (2:3; 3:2), to “talk back” (2:9), to “steal” (2:10), to say “Yes” to “ungodliness and worldly passions” (2:12) and be “enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures” (3:3), to be “foolish” (3:3,9), to live “in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another” (3:3b), to be “divisive” (3:10), “warped and sinful” (3:11), and “to live unproductive lives” (3:14).

Paul also specifies what it means to do good: to be “blameless” (1:6,7), “faithful to one’s wife” (1:6), “hospitable, upright, holy and disciplined” (1:8), “self-controlled” (1:8; 2:2,5,6,12), to “encourage others by sound doctrine” and refute opponents (1:9), to be “pure” (1:15; 2:5), “temperate, worthy of respect...and sound in faith, in love and in endurance” (2:2; cf. 1:13), to be “reverent in the way [we] live” (2:3), to “love [one’s] husband and children” (2:4), “to be busy at home, kind and subject to [one’s] husband” (2:5), to teach with “integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech” (2:7b–8a), to be subject to one’s master (employer) and to all rulers and authorities (2:9; 3:1), to be trustworthy (2:10), to live a godly life (2:12), “to be obedient...to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone” (3:1–2), and finally, “to provide for urgent needs” (3:14). Paul urges us to “love” these things and be “devoted,” “careful” and “eager” to do them (1:8; 2:14; 3:8,14). To do good, Paul especially emphasizes the necessity of self-control (1:8; 2:2,5,6,12).

Doing what is good comes not just from human goodness but from receiving the gospel of Jesus. Jesus “gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness, and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good” (2:14). Unfortunately, there are people who claim to know God but are not so eager to do good; by their actions they deny him (1:16). If there is no evidence of goodness in one’s life, something is wrong with that person’s gospel faith. Paul is not teaching mere moralism; by living a life full of good deeds, Christians can make the teaching about God our Savior attractive, be a good influence, and even change the environment around them. This is a practical way of lifestyle evangelism (cf. Mt5:16).

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Purpose of our Study

We have to remember that Titus is a pastoral epistle. So through this study we want to learn how to set a good example and how to help God's flock to be eager to do what is good in their practical lives. In our contemporary post-Christian society, many claim to be Christians but are not practicing all that they know; their practical lives do not bear the fruit of goodness that comes from faith. Even prominent Christian leaders stumble. Because of this, many in secular society perceive Christians as hypocrites, and many so-called Christians become a laughingstock. Through this study of Titus may God help us to grow in living a good life that glorifies God and blesses others, and may he help us as shepherds to teach this kind of life to all our members, so that we can make the gospel teaching attractive in our time.

Outline of Titus

- I. Introduction and Greetings (1:1–4)
- II. Appoint Qualified Elders/Overseers (1:5–9)
- III. False Teachers in the Cretan Churches (1:10–16)
- IV. Doing What is Good, to Uphold the Gospel (2:1–10)
- V. The Grace of God Transforms our Practical Lives (2:11–15)
- VI. Teach Believers How to Live in Society (3:1–11)
- VII. Final Remarks (3:12–15)