

Challenges for the Cretian Church

Titus 1: 10-16

Following the charge to ordain elders in every city, and providing detailed instruction regarding the qualifications needed for an elder, Paul revealed the great need within Crete. The challenges facing the church there were many – thus affirming the need for solid, biblical elders in every city to lead the churches in the midst of false doctrine, idolatry, and immorality. These men needed to understand the challenges they faced and prepare to address these issues within the church. Titus would serve to equip them for such a daunting task.

As you study Scripture that was given and recorded thousands of years ago, the relevance for our day is amazing. While cultures and societies change, the basic tenants and desires of humanity have remained largely the same. The issues that Titus and the elders in Crete faced continue in our modern day. There are certainly differences, but when we get to the truth of the matter, the challenges are very similar. The instruction Paul offered Titus is relevant and needed in our day as well. As we examine the [difficulties](#) Paul knew Titus would encounter, I want us to consider: [Challenges for the Cretian Church](#). Paul warned of:

I. A Deceptive Message (10-11) – Immediately following instruction on ordaining elders in every city, who would be able to proclaim the Truth of the Word, Paul revealed the presence of those who taught a deceptive message. Consider:

A. Their Diversity (10) – [For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision](#). Paul warned Titus of the abundance of false teachers within Crete. There were many of them, particularly Jewish legalists who taught that circumcision and adherence to the law were essential for salvation. Paul described these as unruly, literally *rebellious and insubordinate toward the Word of God*. Their speech was empty and worthless, leading to much deception and confusion among the church. (We are experiencing an increase of such false doctrine being promoted today. Few preach the truth of the Gospel – salvation through Christ alone by faith alone. They seek to add additional expectations and works of the flesh to secure salvation.)

B. Their Destruction (11b) – [who subvert whole houses](#). Titus could not underestimate the damage and destruction brought about by false teachers. These were subverting, upsetting and disrupting, entire houses. No doubt this wreaked havoc on entire communities, with many families being entirely polluted and corrupted by such false teaching. The damage was immense and far reaching. The church had been well established in Crete, but Titus could not ignore the damage inflicted by these false teachers.

- We too need to sense the urgency regarding the damage of false teaching in our communities. Once false doctrine is embraced by a few, the poison tends to spread, affecting others, many of whom are unsuspecting. It is imperative that we proclaim and defend the pure Gospel of Christ in our day.

C. Their Desire (11c) – *teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre’s sake*. Paul revealed the true motivation and desire behind those who spread false doctrine. The majority of them used their teaching for financial gain. They were not concerned with the spiritual condition or needs of those to whom they ministered; they taught a message that served their financial interest. This was not about promoting the Gospel for the false teacher – it was about financial profit.

- Unfortunately, such an approach has gained momentum today. We are inundated with big-name, well-known pastors and evangelists, who never preach the true Gospel. Some hardly, if ever, read from the Bible. They use their fame and influence to motivate people to contribute to their ministries, with the promise of God’s favor and blessing for their contribution. The “prosperity gospel” is rampant in America and many other places around the world. These are in it for the money, seeking to gain all they can financially, at the expense of the spiritual needs of people.

D. The Disruption (11a) – *Whose mouths must be stopped*. Paul was a man of great courage and commitment to the Gospel. He was not shy in calling out false teachers and taking a stand against heresy. He instructed Titus that the mouths of false teachers must be stopped. He does not advocate physical violence, but to stop the flow of false teaching. This would involve confronting the false teacher and exposing the error and danger of his message. Heresy and false doctrine could not be ignored and left unchecked.

II. A Depraved Culture (12-14) – In a few, short statements, Paul revealed the depravity prevalent in Crete. He mentioned:

A. Their Character (12-13a) – *One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, The Cretians are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies.* ^[13a] *This witness is true.* As Paul wrote to Titus regarding Crete, he revealed that one of their own, a Cretian himself, had described the character and lifestyle of the majority. Having been there and experiencing their conduct, Paul declared this witness was in fact true. The Cretians had a reputation that was widely known. They were known to be liars, those who refused to declare and embrace truth. They were considered evil beasts – men of depravity and wicked in character. They were viewed as lazy and determined to satisfy the lusts of the flesh. Clearly, the Cretians did not have a good reputation. (Titus had to admit the difficulty of the

situation and the character of many in Crete, if he expected to positively impact the culture. Denial of the present condition in our world will never lead to fulfilling the mission we have been given. We too must admit the needs of our day, while being aware of the depraved tendencies of men.)

B. The Confrontation (13b) – [Wherefore rebuke them sharply](#). Paul challenged Titus to rebuke those who practiced open sin, especially if he found it among the church. While this would not be easy or comfortable, as a man of God, he was responsible to stand for truth and confront sin. Being aware of the needs around him, but refusing to tackle the situation would not be profitable for his ministry or the church as a whole.

- Such a challenge is little heard today, and seldom embraced if it is given. We live in a culture that has lost all moral bearing and refuses to rebuke any behavior or activity, no matter how sinful or harmful it may be. Such rebuke is never easy, but we too must be willing to boldly stand for truth, while confronting sin, if we expect to make a positive impact in our day. Many church-goers are unaware of what the Bible teaches about sin and accountability to God because few pastors are willing to preach passages that address sin.

C. The Correction (13c-14) – [Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith;](#) ^[14] [Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth](#). Paul knew the value of sound, biblical preaching, and the spiritual deterioration when it was lacking. Titus was to offer a loving, yet firm rebuke, being willing to preach the truth, so those within the church would be sound in their faith, not succumbing to fables or the dictates of men. Biblical instruction was essential to confront sin, while also settling young believers in the faith. There was nothing that could take the place of godly men, faithfully proclaiming the truth of the Word. Such teaching would bring conviction and result in transformed lives. (I am certainly thankful for a pastor who was willing to preach what I needed to hear, not what he thought the congregation wanted to hear!)

III. A Defiled Conscience (15-16) – Paul warned Titus that sinful behavior resulted in unbiblical thinking and doctrine. Often such behavior was the result of such thinking. The two typically go hand-in-hand. Notice:

A. The Committed (15a) – [Unto the pure all things are pure](#). Fortunately, all was not lost in Crete. Paul knew there were solid, biblical believers in Crete. Titus would know them by the fruit their lives bore. Those who were pure would reveal purity in their character and behavior. They sought

to please the Lord, and such a desire impacted every aspect of their lives. (Even though we live in a dark day, I am thankful for those who desire to serve the Lord and reveal His grace!)

B. The Confusion (15b) – *Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled.* In contrast to those who were pure, Paul knew there were also many who were corrupt. Just as purity impacted men's lives, so would sin and depravity. For those defiled in sin, refusing to believe the Gospel, nothing was pure. Every area of their life was directed by their sinful desires and lusts of the flesh. Such defilement even affected their mind and their conscience. These had never embraced the truth, living in defilement and rebellion.

- We see this in a lot of people today as well. You don't have to be around an individual long until you see where his/her loyalties lie. Their words and deeds will reveal their heart. Those who are bound by sin will reveal depravity in every area of life.

C. The Corruption (16) – *They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.* Titus would encounter those who professed faith in Christ, but their lives would affirm otherwise. The works of their flesh would reveal they were abominable, disobedient, and reprobate.

- They were being *abominable*: vile, detestable, and repulsive to both God and true believers. They were corrupting the truth, and corruption always sends up a foul smell. They were being *disobedient*: refusing to submit to God and to follow and teach the truth of Christ and of God's Word. They were *reprobate*: unfit, useless, and worthless; failing to meet the test of God. In God's eyes they were of no value. They were fit only to be rejected. ⁱ You will have to agree that we too are surrounded by many who fit this description as well. We should not be surprised. They behave the way they do because they are sinners, apart from a relationship with God. That is the life we all lived prior to salvation. These need someone to share the truth of the Gospel with them, revealing the love and transforming grace of God.

Conclusion: Crete would not have been an easy place to minister, and yet they needed the Gospel. Paul sought to prepare Titus for the challenges he would face there, in order to prepare him for effective ministry. The world in which we live shares many similarities with Crete. We too must be aware of these challenges, while also being willing to embrace the work we have been called unto. Time is short, and lives hang in the balance. I pray we will be faithful to the Word and work of our Lord.

i Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible - Commentary - The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible – 1 & 2
Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon.