

Books of the Bible Series

Titus

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Intro:

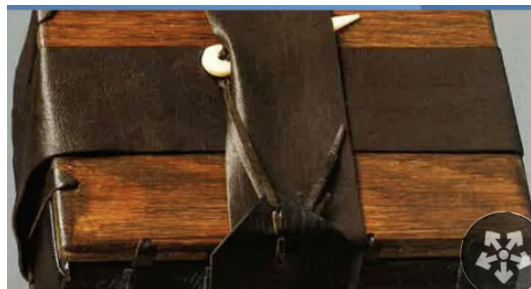
I like pulpits in churches because I can lean on them. They are vehicles, like Toyota Tacomas, which are reliable and steady. Phoenix Christian Reformed church had a 7-foot wide pulpit similar to a Lincoln Town Car: I could hide everything and all my insecurities. Another church has a steel thing like a rafter which I compare to Honda Civic: steady but if I got side-swiped I could die. It's very vulnerable and not my preference to have people know how I ate last week. Here at the Village, you have a music stand which feels like riding a unicycle in front of you. So if this sermon doesn't make sense, I blame it on the pulpit.

I am in super-teach mode right now and there is so much in the book of Titus to teach. However, in my studies this week, something didn't emerge to hyperfocus on. Maybe that is not what Titus is supposed to do anyways. So we will march through the book in order and then I'll tell you a story and then answer questions.

History:

We don't know a lot about Titus: it was supposed to be shared more widely than just one person. The written word was very rare: hard to make and highly valuable. It was not like the way we view Bibles today where I can go to Wal Mart and there are a bunch of Bibles. Everyone is giving away paper books today! But then, a letter to Titus would have been spread to many other people.

A precursor to a bound book looked like this:



This was a container for a collection of unbound handwritten papers called a codex. Anything written was highly valuable in the first century. Letters were distributed in this way. It wouldn't have been crazy to imagine at that time that this letter could have been written 1,000s of years ago but still useful to us today! The tradition says Paul wrote this to Titus, and therefore, to all of us.

Paul writing to Titus is mentor to mentee, preacher to convert: like your pastor Rod writing a letter to me. Rod came into my life when I was thinking of planting a church and came alongside me.

On the first-century map, Crete is a small place in the middle of the map



Paul had been coming from Sidon on the left (a secular canaanite port city) sailing to Crete amid a lot of weather issues. Then he was off to Italy where he was trying to go. It's hard to imagine from Acts 27 that much discipleship would have happened. It's like Eric headed to speak in Tennessee but got a flat tire in Texas. Oh, did he plant a church in Texas? No, he had a flat tire there. Paul, though, decides that there needs to be a leader in Crete to set up churches in every town on this island. He has been there and has seen emerging communities of believers there.

Titus's First Task:

The first thing Paul wants Titus to address is the idea of finding qualified elders. This is counter to the order I would establish a church. I didn't want to get a group of experienced people together to shake out my idea: I had an idea and wanted to do it. I talk a lot with people who are starting churches now: the big trend is to start churches with as few elders as possible. This is unstated but assumed: the idea is that people who have a previous tradition of Christianity will get in your way. They will want you to be a puppet and talk about annoying things (but no one says this!). They say to just start a church!

Although I am not that experienced, I have tried this approach and run into some issues. Looking back now, I think that maybe we do need communities that have authority and submission from the very beginning. In fact, Rod has said this to me from the very beginning.

Imagine if elders in Tucson could vet out other elders in Tucson: this is a wild thought but this is really what was going on in Crete. There was a lot of community input.

Titus's Second Task:

Next, Paul wants Titus to silence insubordinate people (actually "empty talking" people). What does this mean? In this case it was Jewish leaders who wanted people to be circumcised. Titus

Titus 1:10-16

10 For there are many rebellious people, full of meaningless talk and deception, especially those of the circumcision group. **11** They must be silenced, because they are

disrupting whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach—and that for the sake of dishonest gain. **12** One of Crete’s own prophets has said it: “Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.”**13** This saying is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith **14** and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the merely human commands of those who reject the truth. **15** To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. **16** They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.

Imagine if Rod called Eric and said he heard that churches in Tucson were forcing people to get married inside of church and to silence them. Does this seem harsh? As a culture, though, we are really into this. We do it behind a profile behind something: social media, magazines. But to do it in person and relationally feels very rough. It’s important that Paul and Titus would only do this silencing with wisdom: They would have taken into account the local culture. For example, I could criticize The Mission Church but you cannot. Locals have a little more right to do this.

Titus 1:12 One of Crete’s own prophets has said it: “Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons

We think the poet was Epimenides and that local people knew his poetry. Insider critiques are different: they were not slow to speak. Then the circumcised people had been stalking Paul for some time and he knew them. Maybe this helps us understand what was happening.

Titus’s Third Task

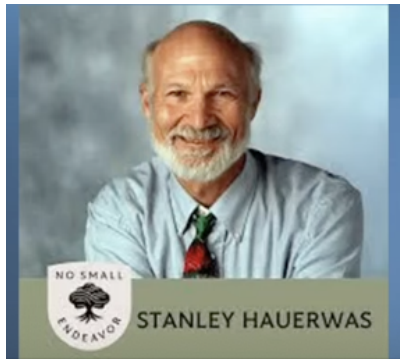
Finally, Paul wants Titus to teach sound doctrine. In my mind, teaching sound doctrine means to walk to the bookshelf and take down the theology book and research the fine doctrinal points to make sure they are right. If someone told me my doctrine was off, this is what I would do.

However, Paul doesn’t mention finer details of truth but immediately launches into what people should practically DO: wives should submit to husbands, young men should be self-controlled, etc.

Titus 2:1 Teach things that are in accord with sound doctrine:

Paul wants Titus to teach doctrine *through actions and patterns* that ultimately teach the doctrine. This is different from the way I think. Consider the “fruit of the Christian life” Paul suggests the beliefs are in the fruit-bearing. Do I believe something when I’m not putting my weight and my actions into it? Do I believe in the peace of Jesus when I’m complaining?

We think agreement with facts is all we need but what if our behavior is the thing which changes us?



Recently, I heard a podcast given by Stanley Hauerwas from Duke Divinity School. After having a long career there, he was asked if he had held onto his faith. He talks slowly and reflectively: he said his father was a bricklayer but **when** was he actually a bricklayer? There was an assumed series of events that had to happen first. You are not a bricklayer on the day you show up to be a bricklayer's apprentice. There is a technique of picking up the block, handling the trowel, scooping the mortar: You become a bricklayer when you are a bricklayer and the only way to become one is to act like one, to do the work.

This illustration applies to beliefs: you have to let the language and movements sink in and impact you. That is what Stanley Hauerwas said: his beliefs have become what he is and he has learned that he believed them as time went on.

Paul often says he thanks God for the people he is writing to. I say to you, The Village, "I thank God for you: you are habitual believers and practice what you believe."

But what doctrines are you learning? Paul does mention these beliefs and we can assume that there are solid beliefs under the actions he talks about. Here is what Paul says:

Titus 2:11-14

11 For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. **12** It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, **13** while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, **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.

Paul goes on and says more things they should do:

Titus 2:15 These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you. **3:1** Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, 2 to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone.

They shouldn't get involved in foolish controversy:

Titus 3:9 But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. **10** Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them. **11** You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are self-condemned.

I think the American church should meditate on this for the next year~!

If you warn a person three times and there is no change, then Paul says to walk away. Paul says action evidences a problematic belief and if it continues, he's done. You fire the bricklayer who lays poor layers of bricks. The undergirding beliefs form and create the pattern: if they are not laying bricks correctly, they must not believe the creed, right?

If you can't get along with the leaders, it's because you don't realize they are just Cretan liars. If they make you angry, it is evidence that you must have another savior and are elevating them far higher than they should be.

Another set of undergirding beliefs:

Titus 3:3 At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. **4** But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, **5** he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, **6** whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, **7** so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

Doctrine of identification: with Jesus (mercy) and with sinners (we are apart of them).

Consider this quote:



“Forgiveness flounders because I exclude the enemy from the community of humans even as I exclude myself from the community of sinners. But no one can be in the presence of the God of the crucified Messiah for long without

overcoming this double exclusion — without transposing the enemy from the sphere of the monstrous... into the sphere of shared humanity and herself from the sphere of proud innocence into the sphere of common

sinfulness. When one knows [as the cross demonstrates] that the torturer will not eternally triumph over the victim, one is free to rediscover that person's humanity and imitate God's love for him. And when one knows [as the cross demonstrates that God's love is greater than all sin, one is free to see oneself in the light of God's justice and so rediscover one's own sinfulness." — Miroslav Volf

Paul then reiterates the types of people they should be:

Titus 3:9 But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. **10** Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them. **11** You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are self-condemned.

The three strikes rule is also evident here. Why does this matter? The **doing** of such things speaks volumes louder about what they really believe. The way you treat others is important.

In cases of urgent need... **Titus 3:14** Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order to provide for urgent needs and not live unproductive lives.

Titus is being called to teach people to exemplify their doctrines. The Village is called to exemplify what you believe to Tucson: focus on your actions because these actions will go on to teach you the beliefs.

A Story of Actions and Belief:

When I was 17, I had a moment where I felt I HAD to follow Jesus. I thought the only way to do this was to get a new job and that this job should be at a church. Instead, I went to the local Christian bookstore. Gospel Supplies, and got a job selling books, Bibles, music, and chintzy Christian gifts. I was in the music department and was passionate and became a purist about Christian music: for example, I hated mainstream WOW albums even though I had to sell them. One day I took down the WOW posters and was called into the office and the owner asked why I thought I could do that. I told him I wanted to highlight quality music but he reminded me that this was his store. Eventually, Mercy Me put out a new album at Christmas time and everyone wanted it but I was not a fan. I gave a Mercy Me special order to someone and I was let go on Christmas Eve. I was mad and convinced I was right. I harbored this for a while.

One day a year later, I had to pick something up at Gospel Supplies and I ran into the owner. I decided to try something new for me: I apologized. When I did so, he threw his arms open and gave me a huge bear hug and told me he had hoped this would happen. He offered me a job to come back there any time. So I ended up working there again the following Christmas Eve. The owner believed some things, so did I. I think of this moment whenever I read the prodigal son. I didn't just believe in apologizing and the idea of forgiveness, I took action.

Paul does care about what we believe and that's why he cares about our actions. Paul holds them together very tightly: if you believe something, you need to live it.