

Titus 24-07-07a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 7th of July, 2024, pretty close to the anniversary of when many of us started our career at the U.S. Naval Academy. This is within a day or two of induction day back in 1979, and I'm sure others had a date close to that.

But it is the opportunity for us to start a new study this morning in the second of the three pastoral epistles that we are going to study. This is the book of Titus, the epistle of Paul, the apostle to Titus. Let's ask God's blessing as we embark on our journey, and we'll begin.

Father, it is such a privilege for us to have the possession of your word in printed form, so convenient, available to us in multitudes of ways, in versions, in explanations, in explications. We're thankful for the time in which we live. We know that this enhanced access to your word is not an accident.

We have it because we need it. We pray that as we embark on this study together, that your Holy Spirit will guide us, help us to see clearly not just the content and the meaning of what is recorded here, but its purpose and application in our own lives. We pray that in all things the Lord Jesus will be glorified, that we can fitly and adequately represent him as his body on this earth.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. A bit of background on this epistle.

This is, as with all three of the past orals, a disputed book. Modern New Testament scholarship thinks that Paul didn't write it. This, of course, is nonsense.

But there are those who think that it is a spurious epigraphical, that it was written later. But for those of us who accept Titus in its presentation, in the inspired word of God, we believe that this is written in the early 60s of the first century. And there's no reason to doubt it.

There are those who have not only thrown rocks at its authorship, but also at its content, that it is not very substantial, that it doesn't have much to offer. There are those who say it's got little that isn't found in 1 Timothy. But in our pretty common understanding, Timothy, the first letter was written first, followed by this one, followed by 2 Timothy, which is perhaps the last letter that Paul wrote.

So I choose to side with Martin Luther, who wrote a book about Titus called Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to Titus, in which he says, this is a short epistle, but a model of Christian doctrine in which is comprehended in a masterful way, all that is necessary for a Christian to know and to live. That's a very pungent and powerful summary, all that is necessary for a Christian to know and to live. This is an often neglected letter, other than

Titus 3.5, you find very little reference to it.

It is a letter on church health, what makes a healthy assembly, what enables us to function as believers in concert with one another. So it doesn't just apply to when we gather for worship or instruction and fellowship in the formal gatherings of a Sunday or a Wednesday, but our families, and especially in this day, and especially the nature of our church. Our church is divided into families, if you will, in the sense that we're geographically separate in most cases.

And so your portion of the church is in a different place than my portion of the church, which may be in a different place than others in our fellowship. And so the things that are said about the group pertain to whatever part of the group we have physical contact with, as well as our gathering times when we are here together in fellowship in the Word. Because of that, when we see exhortations to elders, you would say, well, when the group gets together, they would be elders.

The group is together anytime two or three are gathered in the Lord's name. Jesus said, when that is the case, there am I in the midst. And so whether it is the full gathering of the church or any part thereof, which means any of us that are rubbing elbows with any of the rest of us, these exhortations, these guidelines, these standards and policies and practices apply.

So when it's talking about elders being apt to teach, refuting error and so on, any of the men of our church functioning in contact with anyone else, primarily their family or their fellow believers in the locality, the guidance applies. We don't get to duck under the machine gun fire and say, well, our group doesn't meet in a building all at the same time. We don't have a daily contact with one another.

So if I was a part of a formal big church, these things would apply. It applies to us. And we've seen this.

We saw it in First Timothy that the teaching that is given to these pastors, Timothy and Titus, are designed to inform, to instruct, to exhort, to encourage and to warn, and in some cases to rebuke all of us all the time. Wherever we are, whatever we are doing, we represent the Lord Jesus Christ specifically, and we represent our fellowship. We have an effect on one another.

And regardless of how many of the others we come in contact with, those that we are influencing and being influenced by are guided by this material. So the background for this letter is that Paul has visited the island of Crete, and Titus and Paul have successfully shared the gospel in Crete and have established fellowships of believers. The people who have responded to the preaching of Jesus Christ and the teaching that is basic and foundational to Christian life and Christian fellowship, these people have responded in town after town, city after city on the island of Crete.

And in each city, these who have responded know one another and have been encouraged to unite and to be bound together by that common interest, that common bond of new spiritual life. And the importance of fellowship for believers, new, adolescent or mature, is seen throughout New Testament scripture. Paul's writings are replete with encouragement to the one another's, to seek out opportunities to be together and to encourage one another, to fellowship, to speak the truth to one another in love, and to not be flying solo when there is the opportunity for Christian fellowship.

And we sometimes have to remember this when we're allocating time, when we're budgeting our efforts and making our plans to not neglect the assembling of ourselves together as the habit of some is. Because the whole is greater than the sum of the parts we benefit from and exercise our own spiritual gift. The gifting that is present in each of us is designed to benefit others.

And you've got to be around others, spend time with others for those Holy Spirit-enabled, empowered, and guided benefits to be expressed. So as Paul and Titus have traveled around the island of Crete at an earlier time, these who have responded now know each other and recognize each other, and they meet regularly for fellowship. There is a new basis and ground for social life, for social contact.

People that might not have known each other previously are now united in this common interest and common recognition of life in Christ, being brought to the Father through Him, and having the witness and power of the Holy Spirit in their souls and in their fellowship. So as Paul and Titus have accomplished this work, Paul has gone on and Titus is left behind. And it is Titus's job to complete what was started, to continue to encourage and to teach and to help these scattered fellowships to grow.

And in order to do that, they are going to not unite into a denomination and spend a lot of time traversing the island talking to each other, but in each fellowship there are going to be those that God has gifted and has raised up and appointed to provide leadership. And the nature of that leadership is going to be detailed in this first chapter and again in the third chapter especially. And what that means for us is not so much that Grace and Truth Bible Church needs to define leadership.

Remember that this is an example. It is a pattern that all of us should be aware of and follow. And whatever group of believers, whatever believers we're associated with, in many cases it is our family members, we are to provide the benefits as those who have received teaching and have truth that we can speak, we fulfill this elder function.

Elders are those who have grown in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who have the witness of the Holy Spirit, who have the witness of the Word and are able to express it for the of others in the periphery who are not as far along, who have more questions than answers, who are younger in the faith. And this has to be done in a way that is beneficial. It's not off-putting.

It's not arrogant. It's not meddling. It's not busybody.

And it also isn't incorrect. We don't provide bad leadership. We don't misinform and mislead people who are near us.

But we have a responsibility not only to know and to practice the Word of God, to be exercised toward godliness, eusebia, as we saw in 1 Timothy, but to be able to be an example, both in action and in word, when occasions arise and God is relying on us to communicate, to speak, to not just be an example, but also to encourage others that are not possessed of the benefits that have accrued to us because of long exposure to the Word and practice in walking in the light, walking by means of the Spirit. This is to benefit not only us, but fellow believers. That is why we are encouraged to fellowship.

We are encouraged to contact with one another. We're not all just hoeing a single row. There is a field, and there are workers, plural, who as a team are working to bring in God's harvest.

And this is the harvest of righteousness, the harvest of good works, the perpetrating of the will of the Father in this earth, which is primarily in our own lives, but also encourages others. So, what is the purpose of this letter? Paul is writing to urge Titus on his mission of ensuring that these believers who have come to faith in Jesus Christ function well, understand the goals and the values and the priorities that define Christian life. And this is particularly difficult because Crete has a reputation.

The setting for these groups is different. Do you remember where Timothy is the pastor? What's his locale? There's a letter in Revelation chapter 2 addressed to these folks. Ephesus.

Timothy is in Ephesus. And there are things that we know about the city of Ephesus. This is different.

This is the island of Crete. Titus is in a quite different environment. The island of Crete was proverbial in the ancient world for moral decadence.

Think Las Vegas, Sin City, San Francisco, a reputation for certain kinds of rife patterns of bad behavior. It is the moral sinkhole of the whole area of the Mediterranean in which it floats, so to speak. Polybius was an ancient historian, and in his histories, he wrote this about Crete.

It is almost impossible to find personal conduct more treacherous or a public policy more unjust than in Crete. Public policy, unjust. Individual people, treacherous, unreliable, deceitful, harmful, out for number one.

In another place, he says, so much, in fact, do sordid love of gain and lust for wealth prevail among them, that the Cretans are the only people in the world in whose eyes no

gain is disgraceful. Any way that you can get ahead. There have been science fiction depictions of little aliens with big ears, the Ferengi or whatever.

If you're any kind of a, I don't know, Star Trek universe fan, it's all about profit. Any way you can get it, any way you can get ahead. Think about mob bosses and crime syndicates and those who by any means, fair or foul, achieve gain.

This is admired in Crete. If you do it by foul means, well, you're praised for being more crafty and underhanded than your competitors. So let me just read this again.

This is Titus. Can you imagine Titus? Here we are, people are responding to Jesus Christ, but this is the world in which we live. This is the little, the little island defined culture in which you're going to try to live, think, act, preach the truth and bring people out of this kind of thing.

Think inner city slums, think the projects, think drug dealers on every corner and prostitution and the worst practices in the world. And pimps who can bring in more income with their string of prostitutes than others are admired and are heroes. People who can get away with more crimes are lauded and looked up to.

So much in fact, do sordid love of gain and lust for wealth prevail among them that Cretans are the only people in the world in whose eyes no gain is disgraceful. Gain is good. Cicero says about Crete, indeed, men's principles of life are so different that the Cretans consider piracy and brigandage honorable.

To be a brigand and a pirate, that's looked up to. That's an achievement. You think about the little boys that grow up in very depressed areas of big cities and they see guys who pull off crimes and get cash and drive fancy cars and they look up to them because in their sordid community that's achievement.

You're pulling yourself up by your bootstraps. This is the island of Crete. This is what this letter is written into.

Now you look around at our culture and our society today and what is celebrated and what is looked up to. You look at glorification of things that are just despicable and reproached beyond all indignation in decades past and now it's admired. Now it is the pinnacle of achievement and fame and so on.

So the letter that we are undertaking to study here addresses the challenge of living as a godly group in this kind of hostile environment. To be a godly person, to maintain godliness and shine the light of the Lord Jesus Christ in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. So the groups that Paul and Titus have established are new.

They don't have precedent. They don't have tradition. They're not growing out of Jewish history, out of synagogues that are converting to messianic Jews.

These people in Crete, they're Greek and they're the dregs of the Greek society. They are the worst. So it's a largely immoral society and so what are the key issues that this letter is going to address given this background? What should believers like you and me be focused on as we find ourselves more and more out of step and out of touch with what is commonly accepted as good, admirable, profitable, worthwhile and yet it's antithetical to Christian faith and to representing the Lord Jesus.

We're not facing legalistic or hypocritical Judaistic Pharisee-ism. We're facing rank immorality and the celebration of what is perverse. You know, dress up story time amongst guys dressing up like women and worse.

So let me give you an outline that we're going to follow and I'm not big on outlines and points and things but there is an opening and a closing and then there's meat in the middle that's kind of like two similarly structured sections. So basically if you think of an introduction and a conclusion then there's going to be a section and then Paul's going to come back and do another section just like the first one in terms of its overall structure. So we have the salutation in the first four verses.

If you have a New King James yours is probably divided kind of like mine where it says greeting in italics at the top of mine and then you have qualified elders just above verse five. So what I do a lot of times in my Bible is I use a number two pencil in case I change my mind later because I usually do this for myself but I just put a little bracket out in the margin to mark off a section and so the introduction is the first four verses. This is the salutation and the greeting and so on but the body of the letter really begins not to say that introduction is not important.

We're going to see why it's important. You know this about every word that proceeds from the mouth of God but the greeting is one kind of communication. Then you get into the meat of the letter beginning at verse five and this is going to start with expressing the need for mature believers.

Here we're talking about these local fellowships and so they are called elders but for our purposes when you see the word elder think mature believer. You are and you should be at this point everyone listening to the sound of my voice you are a mature believer. You're not a neophyte.

You're not new to the faith. In most cases you all have been applying the word of God in your thinking and in your circumstances for a long time. If not if you're a little bit newer or you're listening to me you know from a different set of experiences you want to find these people and cling to them and avail yourself of what God has put in their hearts and in their souls and in their mouths for your benefit.

But mature believers there is a need for believers who are further along to be the mainstay to be the guideposts to be the guardrails to keep certain things in the

fellowship and to keep other things out. In the body of the letter beginning in chapter 1 verse 5 we have the need for mature believers as a benefit to those who are in the group to do two things. One is to exhort in sound doctrine and the other is to refute, oppose, contradict, suppress opponents.

There is a positive side of exhortation and encouragement in sound faith and doctrine and there is equally important the refutation of those who are teaching wrong truth. It's an oxymoron. Wrong doctrine, wrong practice, wrong ideas.

This needs to be refuted. It can't be tolerated as well. Everyone's entitled to their opinion.

These mature believers, the elders in these groups are commanded to refute bad teaching and those who are corrupting and perverting the truth of Christ. It is not go along to get along, it is to be refuted. So this is verses 5 through 9. Teach what is positive, and reject what is negative.

They are equally important. Then Paul is going to spend 7 verses, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16 talking about the problem of these opponents, the difficulties that they cause. We are surrounded in this day and in this time with those who are distorting, perverting, misunderstanding, misapplying the word of God and leading thousands, tens of thousands, if not millions, hundreds of thousands certainly, of believers astray.

There is culpability on both sides. Those who are genuinely asking, seeking, and knocking, God the Holy Spirit will rescue us from being led astray if we are genuinely seeking. But those who are not, they are being led astray in swarms and hordes.

So the problem of opponents, the problem of bad teaching, of those who are leading many people astray is addressed in those 7 verses all the way through verse 16. Then in chapter 2, Paul emphasizes sound doctrine and what is a lifestyle that accords with and reflects sound doctrine, sound practice, a sound pattern of life. Remember we have seen this word sound and we will see it again.

So all the way from chapter 2 verse 1 through chapter 3 verse 8 we are going to see what a lifestyle is, what a daily practice is that is reflecting sound doctrine. So the first 10 verses of chapter 2, a lifestyle that corresponds to sound doctrine. 11 through 14, this is the basis, the doctrinal basis for a sound lifestyle.

Then in verse 15 there is an exhortation, a summary that this is the priority. You've got to know the word, you've got to know the truth, and we have to live out and practice the truth. We have to be an example of the positive side of exhortation in sound doctrine.

It kind of makes sense. There are those things that we should do, that we should represent, that we should promote, that we should communicate, that we should be examples of. You don't just leave it to a couple of elders in the group.

All of us should be doing this, should be cultivating this aspect of our lives. Then in chapter 3, lifestyles that correspond to sound doctrine, what is the doctrinal basis? This is going to be given in the first 8 verses. Then in verse 8 there is going to be another summary exhortation.

So you remember those two center sections I talked about? That first section is in response to acknowledging that there is opposition in this world and in this life in those seven verses, chapter 1, verse 10 through 16. When you get to chapter 2, we've got these two sections. The first one is 2.1 through 2.15. Then we're going to pick up in chapter 3, verse 1, and go through the first part of 3.8, and we're going to have a similar structure.

What is the lifestyle that corresponds to sound doctrine? What is the basis for it in the Word of God? Then there is a summary command or charge or exhortation to carry it out. So that gets us all the way to chapter 3, verse 8. And then we're going to be coming back out. This is sort of a chiastic structure, if you will.

Remember what we had before, the lifestyles that reflect sound doctrine? In chapter 1, we had the problem of opponents. Paul is going to return to that in chapter 3, verses 9 through 11. The problem of opponents, there is opposition.

We are pushing against resistance and friction in this world. And if we don't push against it, we are going to be carried along by it. Another way to think about it is this life and this world is a down escalator, and we have to be walking up faster than it is moving down.

And opponents are constantly pushing against. And if we give up and say, well, just let them talk. I give up.

They're never going to learn. They're just going to sway people along with their ideas and their thoughts. That's not why we're here.

We are here to oppose and resist, to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who are perpetrating falsehood. Then in the closing section of chapter 3, verses 12 through 14, Paul gives some of his travel plans and a concluding exhortation to Titus and wraps up in verse 15. So we've got the opening in a bracket of here is the opposition that you face.

We have this double coverage of a lifestyle that corresponds to sound doctrine. What is the doctrine that that lifestyle is based on and how fervent, how dedicated should we be in accomplishing that mission? It's a beautifully structured and ordered letter, carefully crafted. And at its heart is what we've known for a long time, what we saw in first Timothy.

And that is our life has to be grounded in truth based on truth. And it has to be lived out in a way that reflects that truth. And that truth has to shine like a light to banish

darkness.

If the light doesn't shine, darkness is going to creep in. We have to shine as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. And that means an active opposition to falsehood, to that which purports to be Christianity and is not.

Well, that is our introduction. We'll take our break. When we come back, we're going to dive in at Titus chapter 1, verse 1.