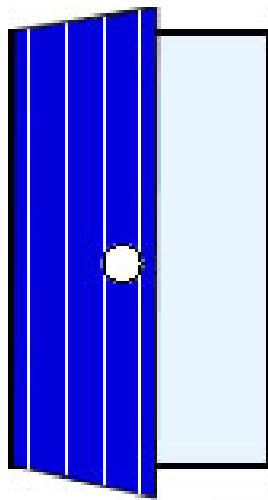


# **BIBLE STUDIES**



**Mill Lane Chapel**

**Titus**

# 1) Introduction

## Read the whole epistle

Paul's two letters to Timothy, together with his letter to Titus, are often referred to as the 'Pastoral Epistles'. This title is certainly appropriate because, while they are full of instruction for all believers, 'yet their message in a special sense concerns those who have the oversight of local churches' (J.Sidlow Baxter). Titus was evidently written at about the same time as 1 Timothy. 'It has much in common with the two epistles to Timothy, but it strikes a different emphasis. In 1 and 2 Timothy the emphasis is upon *doctrine*: in Titus it is on *good works*. First Timothy is a *charge*. Second Timothy is a *challenge*. The epistle to Titus is a *caution* – a strong and urgent reminder that sound faith must be accompanied by good works. The *doctrine* must be adorned by *doing*' (J.Sidlow Baxter).

Like other New Testament epistles, we do not have to look far to ascertain why Paul wrote to Titus. All the information we need is contained in the epistle itself. While extra-biblical sources of information are interesting and helpful, they are not essential in interpreting and applying God's word. The Scriptures are sufficient in themselves. We certainly have nothing to fear from historians and archaeologists or, for that matter, from scientists and biologists. But it is "the holy scriptures" **alone** that are able to make us "wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus". For "all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect (complete), thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3: 15-17). The word "perfect" here (*artios*) comes from *artos*, meaning a limb or joint, and preachers have often said that it means 'all limbs present', in other words, a complete Christian!

There are three prominent themes in the Epistle to Titus. They are **(1)** the conditions in Crete; **(2)** the coming of salvation; **(3)** the conduct of believers.

## 1) THE CONDITIONS IN CRETE

In this connection we should notice the following: **(a)** the purpose for which Titus was in Crete, and **(b)** the people amongst whom Titus worked in Crete.

### a) The purpose for which Titus was in Crete

"For this cause left I thee in Crete" (1: 5). This implies a missionary journey subsequent to Acts 28. No account of Paul's visit to the island has been preserved, but he had evidently gone there, taking Titus, whom he afterward left there to consolidate the work.

**i) The general purpose.** "That thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting" (1: 5). According to W.E.Vine, the words "set in order" (*epidiorthoo*) imply setting right what was defective: restoration after disorder. The word "wanting" translates a word meaning 'to leave' (*leipo*), and therefore refers to

'things left undone'. The word occurs again in 3: 13, "that nothing be wanting (*leipo*) unto them".

There can be little doubt that the expression "the things that are wanting" refers to lack of the instruction necessary to counteract defective teaching and disorderly conduct. Titus was to deal with this important matter. It is **still** most important. The need for such ministry remains. The local church should not be a place of disorderly conduct and deficient teaching.

**ii) The specific purpose.** "And ordain elders in every city as I had appointed thee" (1: 5). The words "as I had appointed thee" mean 'as I gave thee charge'. The connection between setting "in order the things that are wanting" and the appointment of elders is clear. It is the work of elders to ensure God's people are "nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine" (1 Tim. 4: 6), and that "all things are done decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14: 40).

The word "ordain" (*kathestemi*) means 'appoint', and Titus was given clear guide-lines in this connection. The qualifications for eldership are set out in vv6-9. Compare 1 Tim. 3: 1-7. See Acts 20: 28. We must remember that whilst elders are not essential to the **being** of a local church, they **are** essential to its **well-being**. See Acts 14: 21-23, where Paul and Barnabas "ordained (*cheirotoneo*, meaning to indicate by the hand) them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed".

It is sometimes argued that we cannot possibly have elders today because we do not have apostles to appoint them. But we **do** have the apostolic letters to give us guidance. That is why they were written! It is also said that we do not have people today like Timothy and Titus, both of whom were directly commissioned by Paul. But there can be little doubt that a modern missionary, having preached the Gospel, fulfils exactly the same role as Timothy and Titus in pointing out the men who are suitably qualified to act as leaders and shepherds in newly-planted churches.

#### **b) The people amongst whom Titus worked in Crete**

Like us all, Titus was called to work in difficult conditions. See 1: 10-16. The Cretans (this is the usual spelling) themselves are graphically described in 1: 12: "One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, The Cretians are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies" (v12). The rather graphic words, "slow bellies" are elsewhere translated 'lazy gluttons' (JND). The word "slow" means 'inactive, idle, unfruitful, barren' (W.E.Vine) and translates *argos* meaning, literally, 'against work' (*a*, negative, and *ergon*, work).

For the record, this is a quotation from Epimenides, a native of Cnossus on Crete's north coast. He lived, according to Jerome, around BC600. Here is the quotation in full:

They fashioned a tomb for Thee, O holy and high One,  
The Cretans, always liars, evil brutes, idle bellies!  
But Thou art not dead: for Thou art risen and alive,  
For in Thee we live and move and have our being.

In Acts 17: 28 Paul refers to their “poets” (plural), quoting from the above, “For in him we live, and move, and have our being”, and then from Aratus of Cilicia (writing in a poem called *‘Phenonema’*), in adding, “For we are also his offspring”.

Titus had, therefore, to contend with the natural characteristics of the Cretans. But that was not all. He also had to contend with false teachers, and it is striking that they exhibited the character of the Cretans. If the Cretans were “always liars” then the false teachers were “unruly and vain talkers” (1: 10). If the Cretans were “evil beasts”, then the false teachers were defiled in mind and conscience (1: 15). If the Cretans were ‘lazy gluttons’ then the false teachers were “unto every good work reprobate” (1: 16). The ‘religion’ of the false teachers was well-adapted to the islanders.

In summary, Titus had to contend with people who are unsound in three ways. They were unsound **(i)** in speech (vv10-14); **(ii)** in thought (v15); **(iii)** in works (v16).

**i) Unsound in speech, vv10-14.** On the one hand, we have the Cretans (“always liars”), and on the other the false teachers (“they of the circumcision”) who were “unruly and vain **talkers** and deceivers”.

**ii) Unsound in thought, v15.** “Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even (‘both’, RV) their mind and conscience is defiled....”

**iii) Unsound in works, v16.** “They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate...”

We will return to the subject in more detail in future studies, but in the meantime, we should note that all this stands in direct contrast to Joshua 1: 8, “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth (contra the unsound **speech** of the Cretans); but thou shalt meditate therein day and night (contra the unsound **minds** of the Cretans), that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein (contra the unsound **works** of the Cretans)”.

These, then, were the conditions with which Titus had to contend in the island. But not everybody in Crete were “defiled and unbelieving” (v15) or “abominable, and disobedient” (v16). Amongst the population were people who could say, “But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy **he saved us...**” (2: 4-5). This brings us to the second prominent theme in the epistle:

## 2) THE COMING OF SALVATION

Against the dark background already described, Titus is reminded that true believers are **saved** people. They can say “God our Saviour” and “the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour”. Both expressions, or similar, occur in each of the

three chapters. **Chapter 1:** “God our Saviour” (v3); “the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour” (v4). **Chapter 2:** “God our Saviour” (v10); “our Saviour Jesus Christ” (v13). **Chapter 3:** “God our Saviour” (v4); “Jesus Christ our Saviour” (v6).

Amongst other things, we should notice: **(i)** “The **commandment** of God our Saviour” (1: 3), literally, ‘our Saviour God. The word “commandment” means ‘authority’, as in 2: 15. **(ii)** “The **doctrine** of God our Saviour” (2: 10). **(iii)** “The **love** of God our Saviour” (3: 4). Plenty of room for expansion here!

The salvation enjoyed by believers is described in 3: 3-7, and the words, “he saved us”, lie at the very heart of the passage. Amongst other things we should notice that Paul refers to:

**i) The need for salvation, v3.** “For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another”. In other words, we were just like the Cretans!

**ii) The provision of salvation, vv4-6.** The Godhead is involved in the provision of salvation. “But after that the kindness and love of **God** our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the **Holy Ghost**, which he shed on us abundantly through **Jesus Christ** our Saviour”.

**iii) The purpose of salvation, v7.** “That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life”.

This delightful subject will be explored in detail in due course, but we must emphasise again that the words, “he **saved** us”, lie at the centre of the passage.

The question now arises: ‘how should saved people relate to the environment described earlier, with its unsoundness of speech, mind and works?’ This brings us to:

### **3) THE CONDUCT OF BELIEVERS**

In summary, the answer is that they should be completely different to the people around them. If the Cretans were unsound in speech, then believers were to be **(a)** sound in speech. If the Cretans were unsound in mind, then believers were to be **(b)** sound in mind. If the Cretans were unsound in works, then believers should be **(c)** sound in works. Hence the emphasis upon “sound speech”, upon soberness: in most cases the word “sober” comes from *sophron*, meaning ‘to save the mind’, and upon “good works”.

#### **a) Sound in speech**

If in Crete there was unsoundness in speech, then Christians were to be sound in speech. We should notice:

**i) In connection with elders.** They are to be able to use “sound (*hugiaino*, healthy: hence our English word ‘hygiene’) doctrine” (1: 9).

**ii) In connection with Titus himself .** “But speak thou things that become sound (*hugiaino*) doctrine” (2: 1). He was to use “sound (*hugiaino*) speech, that cannot be condemned” (2: 8).

**iii) In connection with older women.** They were to be “teachers of good things” (*kalodidaskalos*), 2: 3. We should notice that they were to “teach (admonish) the young women to be sober” (2: 4). The word “teach” (*sophonizo*) means ‘to train, to cause to be of sound mind’ which, according to W.E.Vine, means ‘to cultivate sound judgment and prudence’.

**iv) In connection with servants.** “Not answering again” (2: 9). Sound speech on the part of employees.

**v) In connection with all believers.** “Speak evil of no man” (3: 2). That means being like the Lord Jesus: “Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered he threatened not” (1 Pet. 2: 23).

As we shall see, Chapter 2 commences and concludes with reference to soundness of speech. But speak thou the things....” (2: 1); “These things speak...” (2: 15). This stresses the importance of the intervening teaching.

## **b) Sound in mind**

If in Crete there was unsoundness in thought, then Christians were to be sound in mind. Hence the galaxy of references to “sober”. The following, with one exception, are based on ‘*sophron*’, ‘to save the mind’. ‘*Sophron*’ is used of the demoniac (Mark 5: 15; Luke 8: 35): “in his right mind”.

**i) In connection with elders.** “For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God...sober” (1: 8).

**ii) In connection with “aged men”.** “That the aged men be sober” (AV). The Greek here is *nephalios*, meaning ‘temperate’. (2: 2).

**iii) In connection with young women.** “That they (the older women) may teach the young women to be sober...discreet” (2: 4-5). The Greek words are ‘*sophonizo*’(AV “sober”) and ‘*sophron*’ (AV “discreet”) respectively.

**iv) In connection with young men.** “Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded” (2: 6).

**v) In connection with all believers.** “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (2: 11-12).

We can see from the above that both sexes, both age groups, elders and all believers, are embraced here. (The reference in 1 Pet. 1: 13, “gird up the



loins of your mind, be sober” uses the word *nepho* meaning, literally, ‘free from the influence of intoxicants. It is used in connection with watchfulness).

### c) Sound in works

If in Crete there was unsoundness in works, then Christians were to be marked by “good works”. Titus himself was to be “in all things...a pattern of good works” (2: 7). “Good” here is ‘*kalos*’ meaning ‘intrinsically good’. God’s purpose in redeeming us was to have “a peculiar people (a people for his own possession) zealous of good (*kalos*) works” (2: 14). Believers are “to be ready to every good work” (3: 1). “Good” here is ‘*agathos*’, meaning ‘beneficial’. If **Chapter 2** commences and concludes with reference to “sound speech”, then **Chapter 3** commences and concludes with reference to “good works”. Titus was to “put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work” (3: 1), and believers are to “learn to maintain good works for necessary uses” (3: 14). At the heart of the chapter lie the words, “These things I will that thou affirm constantly that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good (*kalos*) works” (3: 8).

When Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, he said, “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5: 17). This makes an excellent commentary on the epistle to Titus. Believers should demonstrate that they are a ‘new creation’ in the way in which they speak, in the way in which they think, and in the way in which they act.

In this introduction, we have emphasised the prominent themes in the epistle. We ought to conclude by attempting a chapter analysis. Bearing in mind that the letter has particular reference to the welfare of the local church, we suggest:

- **Chapter 1.** The special responsibilities of elders in the church.
- **Chapter 2.** The particular responsibilities of each class in the church.
- **Chapter 3.** The general responsibilities of everyone in the church.

This demonstrates that the scope of the epistle widens as it proceeds. One thing is very clear. Fellowship in a local church involves responsibility. Our responsibilities may vary, but every brother and every sister is under an obligation to ‘pull their weight’. If our studies in Titus help us to be more effective in this direction, the time spent will be well worth while.