

Route Sixty-Six

Part Fifty-Six

Titus

Practicing the Message

(John 5:39; Titus 3:8)

With Study Questions

*Pastor Paul Viggiano
Branch of Hope Church
2370 W. Carson Street, #100
Torrance, CA 90501
212-6999
pastorpaul@branchofhope.org
www.branchofhope.org
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(John 5:39; Titus 3:8)

You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me (John 5:39)

This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men (Titus 3:8).

Introduction

Years ago, a science fiction movie came out named *Stargate*. It was about this interstellar teleportation device found in pyramid in Egypt which lead to another planet or dimension. Upon entering the pyramid, one would come into contact with the stargate which lead to the other dimension. Jesus said to “**enter by the narrow gate**” (Matthew 7:13) and by this we understand that gate to be Jesus Himself. But what is the pyramid in which this gate is found? I suggest that pyramid, in which the gate is found, can be likened to Christ’s church.

Our current series, based upon John 5:39, has focused on how Jesus Christ is the central figure in all of Scripture and truly the central figure of all there is. The Old Testament consistently and reliably anticipated the work of redemption through the promised Messiah! The opening of the New Testament revealed Christ as the fulfillment of that promise. The New Covenant church would now begin and stretch its hands of love, truth and redemption to all nations.

It would not take long though for that New Covenant church to find itself with a target on its back. In the same way Herod would unsuccessfully seek to quell the birth of the Savior with his nefarious plot to kill any child who might possibly fall into that category (Matthew 2:16-18), the enemy would ever seek to warp and pervert the body of Christ, the church. The infant Christ was a target in the scope of evil as was the infant New Covenant church.

The Gospels and Acts communicated the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ along with the birth and establishment of the New Covenant church in His name. In Romans through 2 Thessalonians we learn of the spiritual, moral, doctrinal instructions and corrections given to those early churches. What we are learning in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus has more to do with how those churches are to function. The pyramid, appealing to my earlier illustration, is of little value if the gate within it can't be found.

These are pastoral epistles written to individuals, but for the benefit of all. Churches are only valuable to the extent that they herald Christ. They are the primary institution ordained by God for that very purpose. To neglect the doctrine of the church has severe consequences.

Here we have Paul writing to Titus, who was thought to be one of the most able and reliable ministers in the early church. The ministry was in Crete, a horribly immoral island off the southern coast of Greece heavily influenced by Greek mythology. Their mythology was not merely influential in their culture, it was making inroads into the fledgling church as well.

We see great similarities in this letter to 1 and 2 Timothy, but distinctions of emphasis as well. It's been said that the emphasis of 1 Timothy was to *protect* the message, the emphasis of 2 Timothy was to *proclaim* the message and the emphasis of Titus was to *practice* the message. The key verses in Titus are found in chapter three:

This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men (Titus 3:8).

And let our *people* also learn to maintain good works, to *meet* urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful (Titus 3:14).

Lofty doctrine accompanied by low conduct is intolerable to New Testament Christianity. This is emphatic in Titus.

Survey of Titus

It is not as if Paul merely baldly urges better behavior. He opens his letter with one of the heftier greetings we read in any of his epistles.

Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect and the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness, ² in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began, ³ but has in due time manifested His word through preaching, which was committed to me according to the commandment of God our Savior (Titus 1:1-3).

Bondservant (a willing slave) is a common designation Paul uses for himself in his service to Christ. His service would be the means by which God would bring His elect to Himself. He touches early on his reason for writing, that truth accords with godliness.

He then digs deep. Our hope is of eternal life which God (who cannot lie, unlike Zeus, who was quite comfortable lying) promised in eternity past. Christians are to know that their inclusion in the heavenly promise did not find its beginnings in our ability to make wise decisions, but in the eternal decrees of God. Paul is quick to add that the means by which this all unfolds is through the preaching of the word.

Similar to 1 Timothy, Paul now lays down the qualifications for elders to whom God has given authority in the church and for which they will be accountable to God.

Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you (Hebrews 13:17).

One is hard-pressed to find a more critical task for the church than to assure that those who have the office of elder are qualified for the task. While maintaining a spirit of love and respect, the congregation should also be willing to investigate as deeply as reasonable. Titus 1:6-9 requires these men be evaluated *domestically* (how does he handle his own household), *personally* (is he selfish, quick-tempered, intemperate, greedy, etc.) and *doctrinally* (does he know the scriptures well enough to exhort and see and address error).

Paul then offers a conjunction with the qualifications leading us to consider the elder's task. Crete had no shortage of insubordinate loudmouths and deceivers, **"whose mouths must be stopped"** (Titus 1:11) and who needed to be **"rebuke[d]...sharply"** (Titus 1:13). We should not view these

words as an excuse to be unduly harsh to an erring brother or sister. The people Paul had in mind were not merely the immature or the honestly erring, but those **“who are defiled and unbelieving” (Titus 1:15b).**

They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work (Titus 1:16).

Somehow the west has arrived at a very soft and feeble view of the faith. To be sure, this can be tricky terrain to maneuver. But if the elders allow poor behavior and false doctrine to go unchecked in the church, there will be severe, even eternal, consequences.

Such actions, as loving as they are (for what could be more loving than a willingness to confront sin and error?) are not, and should not, be a source of unhealthy power or unseemly enjoyment. These actions should be done, so to speak, with a broken heart.

Recently I received a correspondence where a person suggested that our elders must have been terribly excited about the opportunity to denounce a sinner. I have never once taken some unhealthy joy at the prospect of confronting sin, nor have I seen it in any of our current elders. And if such a disposition does exist, it would be enough to disqualify a person from such an office.

I might add, that insufficient domestic, personal or theological qualifications does not constitute church discipline. All to say that a person who might be found (currently) falling short of these requirements enumerated by Paul, should not view themselves as the object of accusation.

Paul moves from the elders to the qualities of a sound church in general. **“The older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience” (Titus 2:2).** This may be obvious but Southern California is notorious for breeding perennial adolescence. Paul also encourages the older women to develop relationships with the younger women, especially as it relates to their husbands, children and households (Titus 2:4, 5).

When our children were younger my wife would often take advantage of her relationships with the older women in our church, especially as a home-schooling mom. Scheduling life was so difficult, and she often felt overwhelmed. In time, she has become a resource for others. Sometimes these types of relationships happen spontaneously. Other times people in our church will seek to organize events to facilitate these types of things.

Paul also addresses the young men:

Likewise, exhort the young men to be sober-minded, ⁷ in all things showing yourself *to be* a pattern of good works; in doctrine *showing* integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, ⁸ sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you (Titus 2:6-8).

Youthful joy, play and enthusiasm is a fine thing. But we should always seek to be inculcating in our youth a godly maturity.

A healthy church is made of souls who deny ungodliness, worldly lusts and live soberly. We are to ever remember Christ...

...who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works (Titus 2:14).

As we move into the final chapter, we see Paul focus his attention on one of the great themes of God's love and grace. This would be the theme of *guilt, grace* and *gratitude*. The godly patience Christians are called to is performed in the light of remembering our own past (or for those raised in the church, where they would no doubt have ended up) and God's rescuing of our souls.

We were redeemed from all that was around us and within us...

...not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:5-7).

Guilt was the verdict, grace is the remedy and gratitude should ever guide our hearts in our love for God and others. This is the prescription for a healthy church, a church which will practice what it preaches.

Questions for Study

1. Jesus compares Himself to a gate, what is the institution by which this gate is presented to the world? What are some of the more critical elements of this institution (page 2)?
2. In what ways can we compare the infant Jesus to the infant New Covenant church (page 2)?
3. What kind of letters are 1, 2 Timothy and Titus? How are they similar? How are they distinct (page 3)?
4. Discuss the meatiness of Paul's greeting to Titus. Why do you suppose he goes into such depth (page 4)?
5. Elders are mentioned a great deal in the New Testament. What are some qualifications and tasks for elders (pages 4, 5)?
6. What are the attributes of a healthy church (pages 5, 6)?
7. Explain the notion of guilt, grace and gratitude. Why is this critical in the Christian's life (page 6)?