

05. Titus 2:6 – 3:15

65AD

Letter to Titus

(from Nicopolis
to Crete)

(To young,
mainly Jewish,
communities)



Titus 2:6

Likewise, appeal to the younger men to exercise good judgment.

One of the qualities required of an elder as a leader of the community is that he be able to communicate to the congregation the appeal of the risen Christ. Paul asks Titus, therefore, to appeal (παρακαλέω) to the young men to be sensible in their thinking (σωφρονέω). Like the older men and the women, the young men are to have ‘the mind of Christ’. Since they are to model themselves on their elders, the list of virtues required of the older men is for the education of the younger men as well.

Titus 2:7-8

Show yourself in all respects a model of good deeds, and in your teaching let there be integrity, showing a reverence for the sacred and sound speech that cannot be censured; then any opponent will be put to shame, having nothing evil to say of us.

Since Titus himself is one of these younger men, he is to be a model for them. His deeds are to be **'good'** (καλός) in the sense of beautiful and attractive. Paul's concern in this letter with 'knowledge of the truth' and with 'godliness' (see 1:1) is apparent as he focuses, once again, on **'teaching'** (see 1:9; 2:1). The 'truth' proclaimed in the gospel is about God. His teaching must show **integrity** (ἀφθοροῦ), **a reverence for the sacred** (σεμνότης), and be **'sound'** (ὑγιής), not like the corrupting teaching of those who are disrupting the community. Those criticising the church should find no grounds for their criticism in Titus's behaviour or teaching.

Paul would have been pleased if Titus and those whom he was to appoint as teachers would have caused the kind of admiration that is expressed by the famous pagan philosopher-physician, Galen, writing in the latter part of the second century, in his summary of Plato's Republic: 'We now see the people called Christians ... sometimes acting like the philosophers. For their contempt of death is patent to us every day and likewise their restraint in cohabitation ... and they also number individuals who, in self-discipline and self-control in matters of food and drink, and in their keen pursuit of justice, have attained a height not inferior to that of genuine philosophers.'

Titus 2:9-10

Tell slaves to be submissive to their masters and to give satisfaction in every respect; they are not to talk back, not to pilfer, but to show complete and perfect faith, so that in everything they may be an ornament to the doctrine of God our Saviour.

Domestic slavery was part of social life in the Roman, Greek and Jewish world. Paul speaks here of the kind of behaviour expected of Christian slaves. He does not address the behaviour of Christian owners of slaves. Presumably he judges that what he has already written concerning the qualities expected of the older men and women adequately covers their relationship to any slaves that may be in a Christian household.

When Paul insists on slaves respecting their proper place in the home, he is assuming what he has declared elsewhere concerning the freedom which they have been given in Christ. They are to ‘give satisfaction’ – to their masters, but also to Christ and to God – by the way in which they carry out what is expected of them. Paul is speaking here on the assumption that their masters are treating them justly. He is not speaking in the context of cruelty, or of their carrying out commands which contradict their faith. The history of the martyrdom inflicted on ‘disobedient’ Christian slaves is sufficient proof of this.

Paul recognises the important place which Christian slaves have in the missionary outreach of the church. Their lives are an ‘ornament’ adding lustre (κοσμέω) to the Christian community as they demonstrate to the world the beauty of Christian teaching. In his address Paul highlighted the saving activity of God (1:3) and of Christ (1:4). It is significant that in speaking of slaves he once again refers to ‘**God our Saviour**’. God, who liberated the Hebrew slaves from Egypt, has given to the slaves of Crete a freedom that transcends their social position.

Titus 2:11

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all

Titus can urge the older and younger men and women in the Christian community to live the kind of life that Paul has been describing, not because of a special capacity which they have for virtue, but because of something that God has done. Like the sun shedding its rays upon a previously dark world, God's grace has **appeared** (ἐπιφαίνω) in the person of Jesus '**bringing salvation to all**'. Paul is expressing here a conviction that lies at the centre of thirty years of missionary commitment. No one is excluded from God's offer of salvation. Paul's use of ἐπιφαίνω here is echoed by Luke: 'By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light (ἐπιφαίνω) to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death' (Luke 1:78-79).

Both Paul and Luke may be quoting from early liturgical texts which were themselves influenced by the following psalms which speak of God's face shining upon his people and bringing them salvation. All the following texts use ἐπιφαίνω:

‘Let your face **shine** upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love’ (Psalm 31:16).

‘May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to **shine** upon us’ (Psalm 67:1).

‘Restore us, O God; let your face **shine**, that we may be saved’ (Psalm 80:3,7,19 (refrain)).

Similarly in the priestly blessing: ‘The Lord make his face to **shine** upon you, and be gracious to you’ (Numbers 6:25).

The 'grace of God' that has appeared is described by Paul as 'bringing salvation'. He has already spoken of God and Jesus as 'our Saviour' (1:3,4; 2:10). We are reminded of the scene where Luke has Simeon take the child Jesus into his arms and say: 'my eyes have seen your bringing of salvation' (Luke 2:30). As we listen to this hymn-like acclamation, our eyes, too, are to be upon Jesus, and, like Simeon, we are being asked to welcome him in faith, for it is Jesus who is God's gracious gift to us and it is through Jesus that salvation is offered to everyone.

Titus 2:12

training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions

‘**Training**’ (παιδεύω) includes the idea of discipline and suffering. As Paul uses it, he is thinking not only of the discipline required to renounce ‘**worldly passions**’, but also of our sharing in the suffering of Jesus as we share his cross. The terminology echoes that of the suffering servant of the Lord who ‘was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment (παιδεία) that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed’ (Isaiah 53:5).

Paul refers here to the experience of conversion that comes with embracing Jesus. It is Jesus who makes it possible for us to say No to a life of ‘**impiety**’ (ἀσέβεια), a life that lacks respect for God, and is spent in all kinds of self-indulgence.

Titus 2:12

in the present age to live lives that are of sound judgment, upright, and godly

Paul gives a summary of the moral life of a Christian. We are to be ‘of **sound judgment** (σωφρόνως), thinking in ways that are wholesome because based on the truth that has been received in faith (see 1:8; 2:2,4,5,6). We are to have the mind of Christ. We are to be ‘**upright**’ (δικαίως), obedient to the will of God. We are to be ‘**godly**’ (εὐσεβῶς), living in the presence of God, contemplating God’s face as revealed in Jesus and being sensitive to the presence of God in the events, the things and especially the people around us.

These three virtues were highly regarded among Greek and Roman moralists. Paul the missionary is forging links between a Christian way of life and what was best in the surrounding culture.

Titus 2:13

while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus the Messiah.

Having described the kind of life Christians are able to live ‘in this present age’ because of the appearance of Christ, Paul speaks of another appearance, a ‘**manifestation**’ (ἐπιφάνεια) which we await. This is ‘the manifestation of the coming (παρουσία) of the Lord Jesus’ (2 Thessalonians 2:8). We live in the hope of being with Christ in the ‘eternal life’ (1:2) that transcends ‘this present age’. This hope is ‘**blessed**’ (μακάριος), because, unlike other hopes that are deceptive, this hope rests in a person, Jesus, and is founded on God’s word.

We are awaiting the manifestation of Jesus ‘the Lord of glory’ (1Corinthians 2:8). It is he who is ‘**the glory of our great God and Saviour**’, for it is he who reveals the radiant beauty of God. Now we know in faith that he lives in the radiant glory of God. We look forward to the day when he will be revealed in glory. For the third time Paul speaks of ‘**God our Saviour**’ (see 1:3; 2:10). The glory that will be revealed when the risen Jesus is manifest for all to see is the glory of God. The final salvation that will be enjoyed by all who wait for him in hope is the gift of ‘**our great God and Saviour**’, for God has chosen to offer ‘salvation to all’ through ‘the Messiah Jesus our Saviour’ (1:4).

On ‘the day of the Messiah’ (Philippians 1:6,10; 2:16), we hope to be ‘with the Lord forever’ (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Our hope is to ‘belong to him at his coming’ (1 Corinthians 15:23). The goal of Paul’s proclamation of the word is ‘to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus’ (2 Corinthians 4:6). On that day we will see him as he is, and in seeing him we will see manifested ‘**the glory of our great God and Saviour**’.

Titus 2:14

He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

He who will one day appear in glory is he who 'gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father' (Galatians 1:4). Jesus declared that he came 'to give his life as a ransom' for us (Mark 10:45): 'This is my body which is given for you' (Luke 22:19). Paul is echoing the psalm: 'O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem. It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities' (Psalm 130:7-8).

In this present age we are to be ‘zealous for good (καλός) deeds’ (see 2:3,7). Such deeds have their source in God who has made us his own ‘treasured possession’ (Exodus 19:5). Christian excellence transcends anything dreamed of in the pagan world, for it is the life of Jesus in us – Jesus, the graciousness of God, the radiant splendour of God’s beauty, and the manifestation of God as Saviour.

Titus 2:15

Declare these things; exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one look down on you.

Verse fifteen introduces a new section in which Paul's focus is on instructing Titus on how he is to 'exhort' believers to live in the world, and how he should 'reprove' the Jewish Christians who are disrupting the community.

These were the same two verbs which he used earlier in describing what an presbyter needed to do (see 1:9). They provide a nice balance. To 'exhort' (παρακαλέω) is to be an instrument of Jesus calling (καλέω) people to repentance and to communion. To 'reprove' (ἐλέγχω) is to correct people's wrong thinking and wrong behaviour. Paul is once again letting the community know that he is behind Titus's exercise of authority.

Titus 3:1

Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work

If we are correct in attributing this letter to Paul, he would be writing about the time of the outbreak of the Jewish- Roman war in 66AD. This would add an urgency to his instruction. The Christian communities are not to be used as forums for whipping up anti-Roman sentiment. In his earlier description of the troublemakers Paul called them ‘rebellious’ (1:10). Titus is to remind the believers that, in principle and where possible, they are to be ‘**subject**’ to the civil authorities. In his earlier description of the troublemakers he called them ‘**disobedient**’ (1:16). Titus is to remind the believers that they are to be obedient. In his earlier description of the troublemakers he said that they were ‘unfit for any good work’ (1:16). Titus is to remind the believers that they are to be ‘**ready for every good work**’.

Titus 3:2

Remind them to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarrelling, to be gentle, and to show every courtesy to everyone.

Divisive and disruptive talk and behaviour must stop. When Paul was attempting to deal with the troublemakers in Corinth, he wrote: 'I myself, Paul, appeal to you by the meekness (πραΰτης) and gentleness (ἐπιείκεια) of the Messiah' (2 Corinthians 10:1). He instructs Titus to try to inculcate these same virtues of being gentle (ἐπιεικής) and courteous (πραΰτης), in the communities under his charge.

Titus 3:3

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray

Paul lists the kinds of vices from which people have been freed through baptism into the Christian church. They stand in stark contrast with the virtues which Titus is to try to inculcate.

In view of the accent in this letter on ‘knowledge of the truth’ (1:1), we are not surprised that Paul would begin his list with ‘**foolish**’ (ἀνόητος). Paul has already described the troublemakers as ‘**disobedient**’ (1:16), and instructed Titus to call them to obedience (3:1). Their foolishness and their failure to obey is because they are ‘**led astray**’.

Titus 3:3

enslaved to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, despicable, hating one another.

Instead of being 'slaves of God' (1:1) like Jesus, they were once enslaved by their own impulses, 'sold into slavery under sin' (Romans 7:15). They failed to experience true life because the seed of life was choked by their giving themselves up to 'pleasures' (see Luke 8:14). 'Envy' (φθόνος) has a special power to destroy trust and communion. The final vice, mutual hatred, is the opposite of Christian love. We recall Jesus' solemn words: 'I say to you that listen: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you' (Luke 6:27).

Titus 3:4-7

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, which he poured out on us richly through Jesus the Messiah our Saviour, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is sure.

Paul seems to be quoting from a liturgical or catechetical source, perhaps a baptismal liturgy. Perhaps the vocabulary of this quotation accounts for some of the language which Paul has used earlier in the letter.

In speaking of God's saving action, Paul highlights three attributes of God. The first is 'goodness' (χρηστότης). The second is 'loving kindness' (φιλανθρωπία). Because the Jews held themselves aloof from a lot of public life, they were accused of hating their fellow human beings. Paul's accent in this letter on the appearance of God's grace, 'bringing salvation to all' (2:11) helps explain his describing God in this way. The third quality is 'mercy' (ἔλεος).

Paul is speaking about the new way of life into which they were introduced through Christian baptism. There are echoes here of his words in the Letter to the Ephesians in which he speaks of ‘the washing of water by the word’ (Ephesians 5:26). The effect of this ‘washing’ is described in a word that had wide currency in Paul’s world, ‘rebirth’ (παλιγγενεσία), the meaning of which is clarified here as a ‘renewal’ (ἀνακαίνωσις) that is brought about by the Holy Spirit: ‘You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus the Messiah and in the Spirit of our God’ (1 Corinthians 6:11).

It is a progressive, organic, renewal which occurs daily as we are 'transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another' (2 Corinthians 3:18). God, who is 'generous to all who call on him' (Romans 10:12) has poured out his Spirit upon us 'richly'. We have been 'justified' (see 1:8; 2:12; 3:5) by his 'grace' (see 1:4; 2:11); that is to say, we have been welcomed into divine communion by God's generous gift of the Spirit. United to Jesus and living by his life we have become children of God and so 'heirs according to the hope of eternal life' (see 1:2), 'joint heirs with the Messiah' (Romans 8:17).

Paul has been insisting throughout the letter on the importance of 'sound doctrine' (1:9; 2:1). Having quoted from basic baptismal catechesis Paul insists that 'this word is 'sure' (πιστός, 'to be believed'). This is 'the word that God revealed through the proclamation with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Saviour' (1:3).

This is 'the word that is trustworthy (πιστός) in accordance with the teaching' (1:9). For 'the Lord is faithful in all his words' (Psalm 145:13). We are reminded of the emphatic way in which Jesus himself used to underline important teaching with 'Truly (Amēn), I say to you'. The Amēn offers the ultimate reassurance that his words are founded on the fidelity of God.

Titus 3:8

I command that you insist on these things, so that those who have come to believe in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works; these things are excellent and profitable to everyone.

Those who have come to believe in God must ‘be careful’ (φροντίζω), that is to say, they are to think carefully about what Paul has said and take care to do something about it. They are to ‘**devote themselves** (προΐστημι) **to good works**’ (see 2:7,14). Good works are to be their priority. Such good works are ‘**excellent**’ (καλός) for they attract people to the faith of which they are the fruit. They are also ‘**profitable**’ because they connect with people’s real lives. Notice again the accent on universality; they are profitable to ‘everyone’ (see 2:11).

Titus 3:9

Avoid stupid controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless.

To argue about the meaning of the sacred scriptures without grasping the mystery of the cross is to argue foolishly. One example of this is the focus on ‘genealogies’. The Torah has a lot to say about genealogies for they establish who is and who is not part of the people of the promise. The universal scope of God’s saving love as shown in Jesus has put an end to all such speculation, for ‘the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to all’ (2:11). The controversies fomented by the troublesome group of Jewish Christians are causing ‘dissensions and quarrels about the law’. This is the opposite of the kind of behaviour that is the fruit of faith. It is ‘unprofitable’. It is empty and valueless (compare 1:10), rather than excellent and attractive. As Paul, quoting Psalm 94, wrote to the Corinthians: ‘The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile’ (1 Corinthians 3:20).

Titus 3:10

After a first and second admonition, have nothing more to do with anyone who causes divisions

One of Paul's abiding concerns is for the unity of the church. Factions break communion, disturb love and obscure the gospel. In itself, the Greek αἰρετικός, translated here as 'causing divisions', refers simply to the making of choices, selecting among alternatives. Paul's use of it here is one of the reasons why, in early Christian writings, it came to stand for selecting some aspects of the truth while neglecting others; whence the connotations of the English 'heretical'.

Titus is to encourage in the community an openness to the whole truth as revealed in Jesus. Those who believe are to avoid fastening on to those aspects of the gospel that suit their prejudices or that favour their faction. It is not easy to be open to the whole wisdom of God's revelation. It is clear, however, that sectarian behaviour comes from a lack of docility, a failure to recognise the Spirit in others, and a failure to keep in touch with the whole body of the church.

Titus 3:11

since you know that such a person is perverted and sinful, being self-condemned.

Paul is advising Titus on what to do when, after continued efforts on his part to point out the errors in their teaching, those responsible continue to engage in 'stupid controversies'. There comes a point where Titus must use his energy in teaching and supporting the community. He should leave off debate till those in error show signs of wanting to learn.

We are reminded of Paul's advice to the Romans: 'I urge you, brothers and sisters, to keep an eye on those who cause dissensions and offences, in opposition to the teaching that you have learned; avoid them' (Romans 16:17).

Titus 3:12-15

When I send Artemas to you, or Tychicus, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. Make every effort to send Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way, and see that they lack nothing. And let people learn to devote themselves to good works in order to meet urgent needs, so that they may not be unproductive. All who are with me send greetings to you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with all of you.

Helping the travelling missionaries is an example of what Paul meant earlier when he said that it was important that ‘those who have come to believe in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works’ (3:8). It is to bear such fruit that they have been graced with ‘the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit’ (3:5). One fruit of the Spirit is the affection of friendship that arises between those who share the same faith. Paul wants the grace of which he has been speaking in this letter (see 2:11-14; 3:4-7) to be with all the Christians in Crete.