

This morning we continue in our series titled, “Five Guys” where we are looking at the five smallest letters in the New Testament, and arguably the five most overlooked writings in the New Testament, as well. So, we’ve covered 2nd John, 3rd John, Jude, and now we’ll spend three Sundays in Titus before giving our attention for a Sunday to the letter known as Philemon.

Now, we may wonder: **Who is Titus, and why is there a letter in the New Testament to him?** Even if you don’t wonder that, I’m going to tell you. 😊 Titus is mentioned in Galatians, 2nd Corinthians, and 2nd Timothy, besides this letter. We know from those other mentions of him (as well as here) that he was a close companion and partner of the apostle Paul’s in the ministry of the Gospel, and Titus frequently visited churches who were having difficulties. So, Paul writes to Titus, who, from the context of the letter as we’ll see in a moment, on the island of Crete. **(Picture)** As you probably know, Crete is part of Greece, in the Mediterranean Sea, Southeast of mainland Greece. However, in the first Century A.D., it was part of the Roman Empire.



The overriding theme of this letter is that sound doctrine continually expresses itself in good works. We’ll see this expressed even in the first couple verses. So, let’s dive into this letter of Titus. It’s three chapters long, and we’ll cover chapter 1 this morning, reading it in three sections. This is all God’s word to you and me today... **(Titus 1:1-4)**

The opening of the letter is an elongated version of standard letter structure of the day. Paul begins by identifying himself. Normally that would just be his name or name and a title, or something along those lines to briefly identify the writer. And then Paul identifies to whom the letter is written: Titus. There are a couple notable things in this introduction.

First, in Paul’s expanded identification of who he is, he gives a fairly complete theological statement from before the beginning of time into

eternity. I mean, it's like a summary of Genesis 1 to Revelation 22 in one sentence! But he starts with this stamen that reads, "Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness" (Titus 1:1). I don't know if Paul intended this to be his mission statement or if the idea of a "mission statement" really even was part of 1st century thinking...but that's essentially what it is. His aim in life is to grow people's faith and their knowledge of the truth – meaning, the truth about Jesus – so that they would live with godly lives. That pretty well sums up Paul's ministry and it articulates what the letter is largely about.

Second, we see the close relationship between Paul and Titus. Titus is not just any old partner in the ministry. Paul calls him "my true son in our common faith." Paul is almost certainly older than him in earthly age, but there's also this sense of spiritual son-ship. Paul has taught and mentored Titus in the Christian faith, and clearly has a deep affection for him as a father (or mother) has for a son or a daughter. Let's continue on with the next section (**Titus 1:5-9**).

So, we can tell from verse 5 that **Paul and Titus had been on the island of Crete together, and Titus was left behind in order to continue working with the Christians there and bring some order and structure to the way they operated.** Things were in a state of unfinished business when Paul left, and he gave directions to Titus about what to do to help the Christians there – and notice this impacts Christians in several towns, so presumably several churches, at least one per town...Titus is to help them get some order and structure so they could be healthy churches with right theology rooted in Jesus and a right living of that theology, as Paul said in verse 1.

Part of that structure is to appoint elders in each town...or within each church, that exists in each town. **Then, Paul goes into the qualifications for elders.** Now, almost exactly two years ago we spent several weeks walking through Paul's first letter to Timothy, another one of his proteges and ministry partners. And Paul has very similar instructions there about the qualifications for Elders, so I would encourage you to watch the message on 1 Timothy 3:1-16 (in January of 2022) if you want a deep dive into this. In

that sermon (and another on 1 Timothy 2:1-15 from January 2022) I especially focused on the role of women in the church in light of what he writes. I'll touch on that topic briefly today, but I want to cover some other things this time as well.

In a nutshell, in regards to women serving as elders such as we have here at Rose Hill and in our denomination: **The overwhelming message of Scripture is that women can be leaders in the church, including in the role of Elder.** If you're going to take the side that women are not to be Elders/teachers/leaders in the church, you have a lot more explaining to do of Biblical passages that show women in groundbreaking roles in their day, such as: women being the first evangelists about the empty tomb and teaching that message to the disciples; Paul acknowledges women leading churches, and serving as co-workers of Paul's; Paul names Junia as "great among the apostles" at the end of Romans, and so forth.

Some of the misunderstanding is that Greek uses the word "man" or "men" when addressing a group of men and women, much as we use the word "guys." "Man" and "men" and "mankind" used to be that way in our language as well, and still are to some degree, but much less than they used to be. In Greek, it's the same challenge of understanding who's being addressed. So, we have to know from context if the Greek word for "man" might also mean to include women. There were women in the church, of course, so it's possible he meant it inclusively.

Lastly, the phrase "faithful to his wife" is really a phrase that more literally reads "a man of one woman" and it could very well be an idiomatic phrase. Idioms are about the hardest thing to translate – like "raining cats and dogs." You may recall from two years ago in 1st Timothy when we looked at this topic, I read to you the basketball rules for playing defense in the Women's NBA, where it talks about playing "man to man" defense. Women coaches in the WNBA and women's college basketball programs talk about "man to man" defense, or will talk about passing the ball to "the open man" – even though they're talking about women's basketball. It's all idiomatic language using masculine words that includes males and females. Many scholars see this "a man of one woman" in much the same way.

But there's so much more that Paul writes here that restrict leadership to certain people, and churches frequently ignore it, including those churches who restrict women from being Elders. So, they'll abide by the letter of the law as they read it in regards to women, but seem to ignore all the ones that pertain to both men and women, which is literally all the other things Paul lists. So, here are people who can't be Elders, if you take all these verses literally: single men, married men without children, married men whose children don't believe or who believe but misbehave. Also, if you occasionally lose your temper or have a beer too many or are overbearing in the home or in the church...then you also can't be an Elder. If you love anything that isn't good – like...the New York Yankees ☺ – or if you lack self-control (too many chips or girl-scout cookies, anyone?) or if you lack uprightness or any holiness or aren't hospitable toward others or are undisciplined on occasion...you can't serve as an Elder.

In fact, in order to serve as an Elder, according to these verses: you have to be “blameless”. It's so important that Paul says it twice! No fault, no blame, of any kind. So, to the Elders here at Rose Hill, if you are not blameless, I expect you'll turn in your resignation from serving as an Elder sometime before or at our next meeting, and I'll make sure the nominating committee finds men who are married with believing kids who behave perfectly, and who themselves are faultless...so we can have a board of Elders that lives up to this standard. And then I'll turn in my resignation, because I'm not faultless, and I probably shouldn't be the pastor. ☺

Look...it's impossible to live up to this standard. In fact, Jesus doesn't even qualify, because he never married or had kids. The Son of God can't serve as an Elder according to these verses. **So, why did God inspire Paul to write this? Because these things – “blameless” really covers them all, and even more – are *still* the standard.** There *have* to be some standards. And what are you going to do: write that losing your temper once a week or once a month or once a year is ok? Or if you are inhospitable every other time you have the opportunity, that that's ok? Or that the standard for holiness is “most of the time, and especially on Sundays unless you're watching a football game?” No. That's ridiculous. So: **The bar is set high, and where we fail**

there is grace and forgiveness, reminding us of our need for Jesus. None of us are without blame, and it is only through Jesus that we have any kind of standing or status in the church or in the presence of God in eternity. This list drives us back to Jesus.

Now, perhaps you realized that many of these things aren't just for leaders, but for *any* of us who follow Jesus. And the fact that Paul has to state what the standards are for leadership kind of makes you wonder what the quality of candidates were within their church, if these things need to be spelled out, right? You get the sense that a good chunk of folks weren't gonna make the grade, otherwise it probably wouldn't need to be articulated.

The point is, our Elders – and really, any leaders in the church, and anyone who follows Jesus...we are called to a high standard of excellence in how we live out our discipleship to Jesus. And we are called to that standard, *because Jesus is the standard*. We are disciples of Jesus, and we follow him. Let's continue reading the **rest of the chapter...**

Wow...that last line. Don't you wish Paul would share how he *really* feels? 😊 And also, the saying about Cretans always being “liars, evil brutes and lazy gluttons,” and then Paul writes, “This saying is true.” To me, this is probably the funniest sentence in all of Scripture. But, what we see in these final verses of chapter one is that: **There are divisions within the body of believers there on Crete.** I'm not going to spend tons of time on this, because a lot of this is similar to the kinds of things we covered the last couple Sundays when we looked at the letter of Jude and contending for the faith, and preventing division in the church, and building one another up in the faith.

But, we see here again people in the church who are rebellious against the teachings of Jesus, yet able to have influence on believers. Non-believers in the church is great. If you've got questions and doubts about Jesus, you're welcome to be here! But we're not going to elect you as an elder or ask you to teach a class. Because this is terribly divisive. Based on Paul's comment, “especially those of the circumcision group” it was probably Jewish Christians who were particularly causing some troubles. We see this same

issue in Paul's letter to the Galatians, where there are divisions in the church between Greek Christians and Jewish Christians. The divisions there were because the Jewish Christians thought the Greek Christians should become Jewish on the way to becoming a disciple of Jesus, and follow the Jewish dietary rules, and be circumcised, and that kind of thing.

And so, for the sake of right doctrine and then unity within the church, Paul says that discipline is needed. Rebuking, even. It's strong language, for sure. The most memorable place in Scripture we see rebuking – though it's a slightly different word that's used – is when Peter rebukes Jesus because of a difficult teaching Jesus gave, and then Jesus rebukes Peter, putting him back in his place because Peter should not have been rebuking Jesus to begin with. So sometimes this is needed in the church in order to help someone get back to right doctrine and right theology or right living in light of the doctrine and theology. And this correction *can* be done with love and humility...in fact, it *needs* to be done that way. Paul writes elsewhere about "speaking the truth in love." And Jesus teaches us to take the plank out of our own eye before removing a speck of sawdust out of someone else's. So, we correct one another with love and humility so we'd be built up in Christ together.

Because: **Ultimately, we want to build people up in Jesus and build up the body of Christ so we're all growing in faith together, working together, and on mission together.** Love and humility and a desire to build people up in Jesus must govern how we correct one another. So, sometimes we correct one another inside the church. Similar to something I said last week, I think the biggest mistake Christians make is taking this kind of discipline and correction outside of the church, so that we discipline and correct people who don't make any claim to following Jesus. Of course, they're not going to have Jesus-centered doctrine or Jesus-centered lives. Let's make sure *we* have Jesus-centered lives, and that we do it *so well* that we are as blameless as we can possibly be, shining like stars in this crooked generation, and we would all be leading people toward Jesus. Let's Pray...Amen.