

Titus

Paul's letter to Titus was probably written around 64 AD, after the close of Acts, after Paul's 1st imprisonment and trial in Rome. Titus had been a traveling companion and coworker of Paul's when he and Barnabas went to Jerusalem (Galatians 2, Acts 15), suggesting he may have been a convert from Antioch, and was definitely of non-Jewish heritage, a gentile. The hostility Paul mentioned in Titus 3:3 may have been an actual personal experience before Titus became a Christian, or may be a generalization of the two groups, Jews and Gentiles, apart from Christ.

Note the affirmation of Paul's work and authority in the prologue, 1:1-3, along with the focus on God's chosen people. Note also the "before the ages" and "at the proper time" divine plan and preparation for making eternal life available through the proclamation of God's word.

Titus, like Timothy (1:4, 1 Timothy 1:2) was a "true child" of Paul in the faith. Paul loved these younger coworkers and made it a goal to lead them, teach them, encourage them, and give them the opportunity to do what they could do in the work of the Lord.

Similar to Timothy finishing up some work in Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3), Titus was finishing up some work among the churches on Crete (1:5).

We have no record of Paul spending a prolonged time on Crete starting churches, only of a brief stop there as a prisoner on his voyage to Rome in Acts 27:12. Nor is there any likely time frame in what we know of Paul's life to fit such a visit into the years covered by Acts, which makes it likely that this letter pertains to work after 62 AD, and ancient tradition supports the idea that Paul was released after his trial before Nero, had a couple of years of productive work, and then was arrested again when Nero's view of Christians shifted toward hostility.

As in Acts 14:23, "elders in every church," so here in 1:5, "elders in every city" where there were churches on Crete.

The lists of qualities elders ought to have in Titus 1:5-9 is very similar to that for overseers (another description of the same office) in 1 Timothy

3:1-7. One notable difference in wording, 1 Timothy 3:4 and Titus 1:6, is regarding children. The instruction to Timothy has “manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive” and Titus has “his children are believers/faithful and not open to the charge of debauchery of insubordination.” If “believers” is the correct understanding of the word, elders must have children who are Christians. If “faithful” is the correct understanding of the word, children who are generally true to their father’s authority fit the pattern, as in the following clause about unacceptably outrageous behavior. The latter seems more likely, among other things because every person is accountable for their own decision to follow the Lord, or not. No parent by the best of all possible parenting can assure that a child will embrace faith in Christ. Certainly, the most desirable situation has an elder whose household shares his faith and circumspect life in Christ.

Being “able to teach” (1 Timothy 3:2) is expanded in Titus 1:9-11 to instructing, rebuking, and silencing unwholesome teachers who cause upset and confusion in the church. Paul wrote to Timothy that the Lord’s servant should correct gently (2 Timothy 3:24-26) but there is also sometimes a need for rebuking sharply (1:13) and with authority (2:15). Both elders and evangelists can be called upon to rebuke troublemakers.

Citing the Creten poet, Epimenides (1:12, as also in Acts 17:28), Paul refers to him as a prophet. Indeed, there are various sorts of prophets in the world, and various sorts of spirits that inspire them (1 John 4:1).

Some who present themselves as godly are in fact utterly debased upon closer examination (1:15-16), and God’s people, especially elders and evangelists, have a responsibility to pay close attention.

Chapter 2 delineates various categories of Christians by age and sex. Over all, Titus had a teaching responsibility for everyone’s benefit (2:1, 7), and his teaching and example were to equip others to do their part. One group Titus wasn’t directly instructed to teach was the younger women. Older women are particular tasked with teaching younger women in the church (2:3-5) those values and behaviors that will bless them and their families, husbands and children, and contribute to respect for God’s word. The Sister who chooses to live as described in this snippet of overview is uniquely exemplary for the Christian faith.

Note the “not revile” in 2:5; “cannot be condemned” and “having nothing evil to say about us” in 2:8; and living so as to “adorn the doctrine of God our Savior” in 2:10. Christians must aspire to make the gospel attractive to detractors by living it consistently.

Note the description of what the good news of Jesus amounts to in 2:11-14, God’s grace, God’s training, our obedience and hope centered on what Jesus already has done, is doing, and will do.

Titus as an evangelist was endowed with authority in Christ that he was to exercise in his teaching and correcting, 2:15.

Paul repeatedly emphasized good works in this letter, as something Titus should both model and teach others to do zealously.

Submission to rulers may have been especially problematic on Crete, as it is sometimes problematic in 21st century America. Then again, as in Titus 3:1ff so also in Romans 13:1ff and 1 Timothy 2:1ff and 1 Peter 3:13ff, perhaps submitting to rulers and authorities is problematic everywhere and in every generation. The Lord’s message is consistent. Not only obey, but don’t speak evil of governing authorities (or anyone) and show what amounts to good manners toward all, including those rulers.

Paul embraced the reality of being a sinner who needed redemption, right alongside Titus and all of us in 3:3, flowing into a beautiful explication of the gospel message in 3:5-7, highlighting the goodness of God in making our salvation possible and giving us new life. We surely see an allusion to Christian baptism in 3:5, with an emphasis on what the Lord is doing through that process, and highlighting the gift/work of the Holy Spirit for each soul being renewed. The words “poured out on us,” in reference to the Holy Spirit in 3:6, echoes Acts 2:17-18, 33, and Romans 5:5.

As in Ephesians 2:4-10, God’s gift of new life leads into devotion to good works in Titus 3:8.

Again Paul warned against foolish controversies and cites some examples in 3:9-10, with another reminder to silence contentious people, even if it meant withdrawing from them. The church should not be plagued with divisive people who bring confusion into the body.

Artemas is mentioned only here, 3:12, while Tychicus was previously mentioned in Acts 20:4, and in the closing comments of Ephesians and Colossians. Both were coworkers of Paul and Titus. Zenas the lawyer is likewise otherwise unknown, while Apollos we know from Acts 18 and 1 Corinthians. The two of them must have been the letter carriers, stopping at Crete in route to somewhere else. Nicopolis was on the west coast of Greece, north of Achaia, south of Macedonia, west of those cities where Paul had previously preached.

Notice yet again in 3:14 the need for God's people to be devoted to good works for practical reasons and divine purposes. Recall 2:7, 2:14, 3:8 and 3:14. Good works are imperative in the call of Christ.