



HG183 *Paul's Letter To Titus*
Doctrine And Duty In The Church

Titus 1:5-16

Home Group Study Notes

12 May 2019 - Revd Dr Stephen Dray



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group
with you, along with any previous notes and other
resources which might be helpful for your discussions.*



Welcome (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

If you could be in the movie of your choice, what movie would you choose and what character would you play?



Looking Upwards (10 mins)
Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



HG183 *Paul's Letter To Titus* **Doctrine And Duty In The Church**

Titus 1:5-16

Home Group Sermon

12 May 2019 - Revd Dr Stephen Dray

In the audience chamber of God the Father and Christ Jesus our Saviour.

Tucked away in a remote corner of the apostle Peter's Second Letter is a comment (in 2 Peter 3:16), that it is easy to miss when in a rush. Peter, referring to the apostle Paul's writings, says that 'people distort [them] as they do the other Scriptures.' This is an astonishing claim! Peter, had been brought up from childhood with the Scriptures as he knew them (the Old Testament to us). But here he is claiming that writings by Paul, circulating within a couple of decades of Jesus' ministry, were of the same status! Just as the older writings were the infallible utterances of the one and only God, so, says Peter, are the writings of Paul. So, in them, and unlike virtually any other books that have ever been written, God communicates directly; mysteriously but really using Paul's words to speak God's own words. It follows that, when we come to the little book of Titus, we might think of it as rather peripheral to the books in the Bible we more often read. But like them, Titus brings us into the audience chamber of the God of all; the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We must surely hang on every word!

Hard to Understand! But Peter says something else. He adds that Paul's letters, 'contain some things that are hard to understand'. In our house group we were recently reflecting on this. The New Testament letters of Paul and others often leave us scratching our heads! Why is this? Perhaps, an illustration might help. On a regular basis our home phone rings. Usually it is family members on the phone and, mostly, they expect to speak to Mum first. The problem I have if I am 'listening in' is that I can only hear one end of the conversation; and this can create misunderstanding or confusion (until Anne explains it to me after the phone has been put down)! Now when we read the New Testament letters, we are faced with a number of difficulties. We, too, are usually only hearing one end of a conversation. Who is speaking and to whom? What are their respective circumstances? And... because these words were written nearly two millennia ago, their world was very different from our own. So to even hope to understand what the writers were saying and how their words apply as God's words to us today requires hard work!

Hi, Titus. Now, before we (finally) dive into verses 5-16, we need to briefly notice the beginning of the letter is very peculiar. Paul, is writing to his chum Titus. Typically of a letter from that time we have the addressor (Paul), the addressee (Titus) and a brief word of greeting ('Grace and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ'). But untypically, in verses 1-3, we have Paul's statement of his credentials... and, as we might say, they are given 'in triplicate'. Now this is not the way we write to our chums is it? We might have expected, 'Hi! Titus my old mate. Paul here. Good on you.' So why this weighty introduction? There are probably two reasons.

This was a letter to Titus that was expected to be read out loud to the congregations in Crete where he was the pastor- as verse 5 will tell us. And, secondly, Paul appears to throw his weight behind his credentials because there were those in the church who were questioning both Paul's authority and his message (and by implication, Titus' authority and message). It may even be that Titus needed to be reminded of this himself.

It is also a feature of Paul's letters that his introductions often raise issues that relate to the discussion that follows. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the emphasis he places upon his apostleship and his calling to proclaim a message that placed an emphasis on truth which leads to godliness, his stress upon Jesus as co-equal with the Father and on that eternal hope which Christ alone brings were quite deliberate. Here then, was a congregation, at risk (so it appears) from those who emphasised truth at the expense of godliness, who were selective in the truths they stressed and were more preoccupied with what their so-called gospel did for them in the 'here and now' than see the present life as preparation for the eternal life to come. It is difficult not to recognise that their successors are with us today- and, often, as a brief reflection upon our own hearts reveals, we too can 'loose the plot'! But more of this as we follow through the chapter!

No messing about! Straight to the point. There is one further point to note by way of introduction. Usually Paul appends to his greeting words of thanksgiving and praise. But this does not happen here. So urgent is the message that he feels he has to convey that he immediately gets 'down to the point'.

A mysterious missionary trip to Crete. The NIV helpfully divides verses 5-16 into two sections (5-9, 10-16); however, following the thread of Paul's argument and applying it to ourselves demands we look carefully at what he says. It may not be immediately obvious! We have no mention in the rest of the New Testament of a visit by the apostle to Crete; nor does there appear to have been a time, in his packed itinerary described in Acts, for a trip to the island. We are, therefore, left with two possibilities. Paul may have become aware of the need of the churches in Crete (possibly founded by those who returned to the island after the day of Pentecost) and sent Titus to address the matter. However 'left behind' suggests Paul had been there. More likely, then, this refers to a missionary journey after his first release in Rome (hinted at in Church traditions but not recorded in Acts) but before his final martyrdom (also not recorded in the Bible). Hence, I suggest, these churches were his foundation; but they were, as Paul recognised, still in their infancy and, consequently, in danger of serious shipwreck. The initial work of evangelism and church planting had been completed; the need to establish strong healthy congregations was now vital.

Get on with it, Titus. Titus' task, then, as verse 5 makes clear, was to ensure that the churches were well led by appointing several leaders in every town where a congregation was to be found. To this end Paul provides a list of qualifications (in verses 6-8) before providing a job description in the final verse in this section. Now verses 6-8 leave us with all sorts of questions. Is the implication that 'leadership is male' since no women appointees are proposed? Then, what does 'one wife, a man' (a literal rendering of the Greek New Testament) mean? Again, what does 'having believing children' imply; and, finally, why do the list of qualifications appear to set so low a bar; making reference to no specifically Christian virtues? The answers probably lie in two factors. First of all the churches were still in their infancy and, therefore, finding persons of spiritual maturity was virtually impossible.

Secondly, the church would only damage itself by being too 'querky'. So finding people whose status and quality of life met the best basic standards of surrounding pagan society was vital. In a patriarchal society this presupposed the candidates would (for the time being, at least) need to be men. Then, if the candidates were to be outwardly respectable, their home life was required to be of one piece with their life outside of the home. Thus a potential leader should (if married) be in a mutually loving and committed relationship and, if the couple had children, they should show respect for their parents (a reflection, itself, of what might be called quality parenting). This last point seems the best understanding of the words which, literally rendered, say 'having faithful children'. Simply, Paul recognised that, what we might call, effective 'stewardship' within the home reflects, most clearly, the qualities that Christian leadership requires.

We will come back to verse 6-8 in a moment but I want to briefly emphasise verse 9. The leadership which Paul regarded as vital is simply expressed. It is to pass on the apostolic message that Paul had received and had communicated to Titus so that the leaders in Crete were disciplined in it themselves and able to communicate this to others; both encouraging fidelity to the message and warning those inclined to err. The future success of the Christian church, Paul recognised, lay in faithfully passing on what we might call the 'Gospel deposit'.

Thinking about appointing leaders? This is the crux of this paragraph and offers us the key to applying the whole. For the apostle, a team of leaders (the 'one person ministry' is often a recipe for disaster) with special responsibility to faithfulness to the gospel that was received from the beginning is the primary requirement for leaders. Innovation is not a Christian virtue; certainly not in leadership. Faithfulness is! And, Paul adds, the best qualified to undertake this highly responsible task are those whose conduct before the watching world is unimpeachable and whose home lives reveal them to be persons of integrity. Too often other criteria are used to appoint leaders in the churches; seldom, one must add, with success. In appointing leaders we need to hear what their friends and workmates think of them; we need (without prying) to make an assessment of their marriages and families.

Identifying the Enemy. But what are the dangers to be 'faced down'. The answer to this question lies in verses 10-16. Again, we are provided with less information than we might wish! However, we are told four things about a group of people within the churches in Crete that help us to get to the heart of the problem that was facing Titus. First of all, in verse 16, there is the statement that they 'claim to know God'. In the context, we have to assume that what this implies is that they claim to know God better than Paul and Titus. They have, so they teach, a better version of the Gospel. What, then, we might ask, is better about it? Well, in verses 10 and 14, they are described as the 'circumcision party', teaching 'Jewish myths' and 'merely human commands'. Significantly, Paul makes no reference to Jesus in reciting their emphases; and this is surely the point. Refusing to be subordinate to Paul's Gospel (which is the implication of the word 'rebellious' in verse 10), they teach what they consider to be a superior message in which the central place of Jesus is lost amid claims that certain additional steps will lead to the truly God-pleasing life. But, in so far as their teachings reflected their 'insubordinate' response to Paul's Gospel, they were merely humanly-devised inventions. Their descendants, I suggest, are always with us! Paul's point, however, is any Jesus plus Gospel is no gospel at all; for all the protestations its adherent make to 'know God better'.

Danger, an enemy at work. And his further concern is the twofold dangers such teachings present. First of all, allowed to flourish they can completely destroy the spiritual life of individual churches or house groups. This is what is implied by the phrase ‘whole households’; since in the early days of Christianity the church met in homes. Equally worrying for the apostle is the fact that teachings which makes claims to a superior form of Christianity, in reality, never lives up to these claims and, as with all false teaching, has what might be described as a ‘moral entail’. Insubordinate to the Gospel those who teach the ‘superior gospel’ are subordinate to their own selfish desires and urges; a point the apostle labours to make throughout this paragraph. In this context it is, perhaps, unsurprising that Paul refers in verse 10 to the fact that there are ‘many’ of them. The sinful human heart is all too easily led to reassert itself even among those of us who have been ‘gospelled’. Hence the vital task for those, faithful to the Gospel, who can expose the lies and guide the Lord’s people by, what Paul calls, a ‘healthy’ path to spiritual maturity (this is what the word ‘sound’ means in verse 13). And that message is always the ‘preaching entrusted’ to Paul by the command of God our Saviour’ (verse 3).

And so to us ... As we conclude, we, perhaps, begin to grasp why the early believers considered they heard the words of the Lord in these words of Paul and preserved them in the emerging New Testament writings. The letter might be a small one, written to a friend, but the early church heard a message that they recognised stood as a challenge to every succeeding generation of the disciples of Jesus. The New Testament writers proclaimed a Gospel of grace. Faced with a humanity in rebellion against him, God chose not to act, as he should, in retribution against the rebellious acts of a sin-soaked humanity. In his love, he sent his Son, in our human likeness. He willingly died on the cross to bear our punishment, efface our guilt and restore us to friendship with himself. More than that he adopted us into his family! Then, to ‘top’ it all, he gave us his Holy Spirit so that we might become like him, the holy God! Awesome! And, we might add, complete. We have everything in him, through grace.

So, anyone, however well motivated they may appear and however much their message might appear appealing, must be rejected if they fail to proclaim a gospel consistent with these truths. Every movement of our own hearts away from the Gospel of grace must also be resisted. And, to do so, Paul teaches us, we need the fellowship of God’s people and those to lead us who will ensure that the Gospel they have received is faithfully passed on from one generation to the next; warning and encouraging us along the healthy path to Christian maturity- always in utter dependence on the grace that comes to us through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Emmanuel Church Text for 2019

*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light,
we have fellowship with one another and the blood
of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.*

1 John 1:7



Looking Upwards (40 mins)

Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1. The Scriptures are often ‘difficult to understand’. You might share with the group some of the difficulties you encounter when you read the Bible. How do you/might you overcome these problems?

2. Within Emmanuel we have a ‘team’ of leaders. As we reflect on Paul’s words to Titus, how can we best ensure that they fulfill their responsibilities to ‘encourage by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.’?

3. When considering potential leaders, in what way can we ensure we are aware of their reputation ‘in the world’ and ‘check out’ their families?

4. Gospel plus is no gospel at all. Can we identify teaching/teachers who we believe have ‘added’ to the Gospel only to ‘subtract’ from it?

5. Why might we find Gospel ‘plus’ teaching so attractive?

6. Can we identify ways in which the deceitfulness of our own hearts can lead us away to another ‘gospel’. How can we take steps to prevent this happening?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

Emmanuel Church, Laindon Road, Billericay, Essex. CM12 9LD

P 01277 632120 **E** emmanueloffice@billericaychurches.org

T @EmmanuelCM12 **W** emmanuel-church.info **FB** [EmmanuelChurchBillericay](https://www.facebook.com/EmmanuelChurchBillericay)

Part of The Billericay & Little Burstead Team Ministry