LIVING WITH OPPOSITION

Believers are accountable for rejecting false teachers and teachings.

TITUS 1:1-5,10-16

Whether we like it or not, truth contains a measure of intolerance. The gospel truth is graciously liberating and offered to whoever wants it, but it also has a measure of intolerance because no one can be right with God except by trusting His Son as Savior. People may view the truth as narrow-minded, but that does not change the reality of truth. We must remain faithful to the truth, knowing that some will reject that truth, and we are called to continue to love them regardless.

*In what ways can believers uphold the gospel message while respecting the rights of others who hold a different belief?*
UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

TITUS 1:1-16
Like Timothy, Titus accompanied Paul on numerous missionary endeavors. Paul was grieved when he did not find Titus during his visit to Troas but was comforted when Titus arrived in Macedonia (2 Cor. 2:13; 7:6). Titus represented Paul to the Corinthians and brought a report to Paul regarding their reaction to Paul’s letter (2 Cor. 8:6-18,23; 12:18).

Earlier, Titus accompanied Paul and Barnabas in visiting the apostles in Jerusalem some fourteen years after Paul’s initial visit (Gal. 2:1-3). As a Gentile, Titus came under pressure during that visit because he was uncircumcised. Paul stood firm on Titus’s behalf as he maintained his mission to the Gentiles.

Titus’s primary ministry took place in Crete. The biblical timeline places Titus, and perhaps Timothy, on a trip with Paul through Crete and Ephesus. Paul left Titus in Crete and Timothy in Ephesus while he traveled on to Macedonia. Sometime between Paul’s first and second letter to Timothy, he penned this letter to Titus.

Similar to First Timothy, Paul’s letter to Titus established guidelines for Titus’ ministry. As a church planter, Titus was responsible for starting new churches around the island of Crete. Since these new believers needed guidance in the faith, he helped with the selection and preparation of the various pastors. Paul’s list of qualifications for ministers was similar to those mentioned in First Timothy.

Another resemblance between Titus and First Timothy involves Paul’s caution against false teachers and others who harmed the church. Certain greedy men had infiltrated the churches, teaching myths and superstitions to defraud the people financially. Consequently, both Titus and the pastors he appointed had to have impeccable character. This first chapter combines both sentiments within Paul’s opening instructions, providing encouragement for churches today.

Read Titus 1:1-16 in your Bible. Write a summary statement of what was happening in the churches of Crete that prompted Paul to write this letter.
SERVANT’S HEART (TITUS 1:1-3)

1 Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness, 2 in the hope of eternal life that God, who cannot lie, promised before time began. 3 In his own time he has revealed his word in the preaching with which I was entrusted by the command of God our Savior:

VERSES 1-2
Paul was a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ. An apostle was a representative sent on behalf of another person. Paul was sent by Jesus to declare the gospel. He spoke on behalf of and by the authority of Jesus for the faith of God’s elect. The term elect emphasized God’s initiative in salvation. God chose us before we chose Him. He loved us long before we loved Him. The relationship between God’s sovereignty and human will is a tension sustained throughout the Bible.

Paul served also for the knowledge of the truth. He encouraged the spiritual growth of believers by increasing knowledge. He was no mere teacher of philosophy or worldly wisdom. His charge involved truth that leads to godliness.

Paul ministered the gospel so people might live in the hope of eternal life. The word hope referred to the assurance of a future reality. It was a certainty guaranteed by Christ. This hope rested on the character of God, who cannot lie. The phrase before time began emphasizes that, before creation, He planned a way for us to have eternal life.

VERSE 3
God’s promise of redemption was planned before time began, but it was revealed in his own time. Paul mentioned to the Galatians that God revealed it “when the time came to completion” (Gal. 4:4). God invaded time with the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, and Paul was entrusted with the proclamation of this good news. Paul didn’t seek that role, but he was entrusted with it by the command of God our Savior. Paul was responsible to God for preaching the gospel to others. He told the Corinthians he was under obligation to preach the gospel because
it was a stewardship entrusted to him (1 Cor. 9:16-17). Similarly, all believers have been entrusted with the gospel message. All believers share a role in communicating the message of salvation to the lost.

Why was it important for Paul to emphasize that the gospel has been entrusted to believers? How should viewing the gospel as a sacred trust impact a believer’s life?

KEY DOCTRINE: Evangelism and Missions

It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle, and by other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ (Acts 10:42-48).

PURPOSEFUL ACTION (Titus 1:4-5)

4 To Titus, my true son in our common faith. Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior. 5 The reason I left you in Crete was to set right what was left undone and, as I directed you, to appoint elders in every town.

VERSES 4-5

Paul affectionately called Titus his true son because he mentored Titus as a father would mentor a son. In other references, Paul called Titus a “brother,” “partner,” and “coworker” (2 Cor. 2:13; 8:23).

The only record in Acts of Paul’s visit to Crete occurred during his first trip to Rome as a prisoner, and it is likely that he and Titus ministered there after Paul’s release from his first Roman imprisonment. Crete was a long mountainous island in the Mediterranean Sea stretching approximately 155 miles from east to west. Crete had a significant Jewish population and some of the Jews were mentioned as being in Jerusalem during Pentecost (Acts 2:11).

Paul expected Titus to provide godly leadership at Crete and to set right what was left undone. The unfinished part of ministry included the establishment of doctrinal truths to correct the spurious ideas
of false teachers. Furthermore, mature believers were needed in the churches, so Paul directed Titus to appoint elders in every town. Spiritually gifted and mature men were crucial to the health and growth of the churches. This could imply that the churches in Crete were recently planted and much less developed than the church at Ephesus, where Timothy ministered.

Why was it necessary for Titus to complete the work that Paul had begun? How do believers today build on the work of previous generations?

BIBLE SKILL: Create a chart of contrasts within a passage.

Create two columns. In one column, list the qualities Paul required of Titus and the Cretan pastors (Titus 1:1-9a). In a second column, write the characteristics of the Judaizers who were trying to corrupt the people (Titus 1:9b-16). What insights do you gain by comparing the two lists?

OPPOSITION ADDRESSED (Titus 1:10-16)

10 For there are many rebellious people, full of empty talk and deception, especially those from the circumcision party. 11 It is necessary to silence them; they are ruining entire households by teaching what they shouldn’t in order to get money dishonestly. 12 One of their very own prophets said, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.” 13 This testimony is true. For this reason, rebuke them sharply, so that they may be sound in the faith 14 and may not pay attention to Jewish myths and the commands of people who reject the truth. 15 To the pure, everything is pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; in fact, both their mind and conscience are defiled. 16 They claim to
know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, and unfit for any good work.

VERSES 10-11
Titus was instructed to oversee the churches at Crete and appoint godly leaders capable of refuting the false teachers who stirred trouble and confusion. Three characteristics marked the trouble makers. First, they were rebellious. Rejecting the gospel Paul had preached, these persons asserted teaching contrary to the truth. The word translated rebellious carries the idea of disobedience. They may have rebelled against God’s Word because they did not want to obey it. Second, the trouble makers were full of empty talk. Their teaching was full of meaningless speculation. Third, they were deceivers. Not possessing genuine truth, they used oratorical tricks to gain influence for personal advantage.

Paul identified them as from the circumcision party. They were Jewish loyalists who believed that the works of the law, especially circumcision, were necessary for salvation. They persuaded others to embrace a salvation earned through works rather than salvation by grace through faith in Christ.

Several years earlier at Jerusalem, church leaders met to settle the dispute about the means and scope of salvation (Acts 15). In that meeting, the leaders affirmed that Jews and Gentiles were saved in the same way—by grace alone, and that Jewish rituals should not be imposed upon the Gentiles. Whether the false teachers at Crete knew about the decision of the Jerusalem Council is uncertain. What is obvious is that they were threatening the faith of believers by teaching a false gospel.

The gravity of the problem is revealed by Paul’s command to silence them. Titus must take immediate action because they were creating chaos in entire households of believers. The motive behind the false teachers was both selfish and mercenary. They had no interest in declaring the truth about Jesus. Instead, they promoted their own warped ideas about salvation to get money dishonestly. Their teaching may represent an early version of the present day prosperity gospel. They sacrificed truth on the altar of financial gain.

VERSES 12-14
The indictment found in verse 12 should not be misunderstood as an ethnic pejorative but should be seen in its context as Paul described...
the greedy false teachers. He quoted one of the indigenous prophets, likely a 6th-century BC philosopher named Epimenides. Born in Crete, Epimenides described some of his people with three derogatory phrases. He called them liars, perhaps attacking their claims regarding guardianship of the tomb of a Greek god. Paul, however, used this accusation to refer to the false teachers who lied for personal gain. The Cretan source also described the people as evil beasts and lazy gluttons, references to their proclivity toward wickedness and the idle pursuit of pleasure.

A forceful response to the false teachers was vital to the health of the churches. Failure to confront those who distorted the truth of the gospel would energize the heretics and lead to devastating consequences. Paul urged Titus to rebuke them sharply. The purpose of the rebuke was to bring the ungodly to a repentance that could lead them to become sound in the faith. Paul hoped that a firm reprimand could either drive the perpetrators to their knees confessing their sin or compel them to withdraw from the churches. His goal was first and foremost redemptive and restorative, but he would not overlook the severity of the problem.

The Jewish nature of the false teaching centered on two errors. First, was the error of giving attention to Jewish myths. This included speculative stories loosely connected to the Old Testament and fabricated doctrines that minimized historic truth by sensationalizing fables. The second error involved the commands of people that focused on extra-biblical rituals and rules not from God. Some of these commandments were likely drawn from rabbinic decrees and were embellished to support the legalism pushed by false teachers.

The sad but clear indictment of the heretics was that they reject the truth. They had heard the truth of the gospel but turned away from it to chase after their own creation of truth.

VERSE 15
Paul challenged a perspective about purity and defilement that was popular with the false teachers. He drew a distinction between the pure and the defiled. The pure were those persons who had been cleansed by faith in Christ alone. The defiled were those who insisted on earning the favor of God through adherence to Jewish rules and dietary regulations. The statement, To the pure, everything is pure, highlighted the reality that believers need not fear moral contamination from foods.
they ate; they could view all food as clean. However the statement, to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure, highlighted the reality that moral pollution works from the inside out and affects a person’s entire perspective. Nothing could make someone pure who has not experienced the transformation that comes from Christ. No rule keeping, no moral effort, no religious achievement, or ceremonial performance, ever how sincere, could remove the uncleanness in the heart. Internal defilement contaminates the mind and conscience with deceptive beliefs that rationalize sin and justify deviant doctrines.

VERSE 16

Cretan false teachers could claim to know God but their impressive God talk was not backed up by godly actions. Their false faith revealed itself in false deeds. They professed what they denied and denied what they professed. They were detestable to God. The word detestable referred to an abhorrent disgust. They were also disobedient to the truth of the gospel and to apostolic authority. Moreover, they were unfit for any good work. Paul’s strong critique was necessary because of the damage being done by the troublemakers. Since they preferred to resist God’s truth and rebel against His saving purpose, they proved themselves to be useless in His kingdom.

What are the dangers of believers failing to address false teachings head on? What might keep a believer from taking a firm stand? Do you think Paul was overbearing when he instructed Titus to rebuke sharply the false teachers? Why or why not?

MAJOR THEMES IN TITUS

- Qualifications of church leaders (1:6-9)
- Sound doctrine (2:1-15)
- The grace of God (3:3-7)
- The importance of good works (3:1-2,8-11)
IN MY CONTEXT

• Believers have a gospel trust that must be shared with others.
• Believers are called on to help establish and strengthen local churches and church leaders.
• Believers must be willing to address false teachings head on.

What barriers must you overcome to confront false teaching that distorts the gospel? How can you overcome those obstacles?

Share with your Bible study group about a time when your faith was challenged by someone who taught false doctrine. How could you be better prepared to face that challenge in the future?

Reflect on ways that your life and voice have been used by God to address false teachings. Thank God for that opportunity and ask Him to help you continue to be a voice for Him in the future.

Prayer Needs