



# *Inscribe These Words*

## BIBLE STUDY

### **Titus**

Lesson 1: Titus 1

Handed out Jan. 17 for discussion on Jan. 24

### **Introducing Titus**

Visit most Christian bookstores, and you'll find a variety of plaques and posters that summarize biblical truth in pithy statements. For example, "Truth not translated into life is dead truth" or "The greatest homage we can pay to truth is to use it."

Both of these statements by anonymous authors are apt summaries of Paul's letter to Titus. This letter, along with 1 and 2 Timothy, are often called "the Pastoral Epistles" because they are concerned with the pastoral care and pastoral oversight of churches.

The three chapters of Titus relate to the three main contexts of Christian living, namely the church, the home, and the world. In all three, St. Paul emphasized the relationship between doctrine and duty, belief, and behavior.

St. Titus was a Gentile believer whom Paul had led to the Lord. He accompanied Paul on his missionary journeys and spent time on special assignment in Corinth while Paul was elsewhere. Later Paul left him on the island of Crete where he received this letter with specific instructions about practicing truth. Titus' task is to develop the church on the large Mediterranean island of Crete.

Paul's letter to Titus has always been a popular little New Testament document, especially among Christian leaders who hold responsibility in the church. For although the letter is directed to Titus as an individual, it also looks beyond him to the churches he supervised. It does not require much imagination to sit down beside Titus to read Paul's letter as if it were addressed to us. For the apostle's instructions to his trusted lieutenant have extraordinary contemporary relevance.

## Truth in Church

Deceivers, empty talkers, speculators, divisive controversialists, and hypocritical liars were among the false teachers influencing the church. Paul was profoundly disturbed about the prevalence of false teaching. He refers to it in all his letters.

Paul refused to give in to the false teachers. Neither did he remain idle or silent on the grounds that everybody has a right to their own opinion. In response to the false teachers, Paul tried to correct the heresies and bad ideas that were creeping into the church. So what was his strategy in fighting the good fight of the faith? It was this: when false teachers increase, we must multiply the number of true teachers. Titus was to appoint elders in every town who would hold fast to God's reliable Word, teach it faithfully, and refute those who contradicted it.

### OPEN

1. On a scale of one to ten (ten is highest), what score would your church, Bible study group, or fellowship group obtain in the area of practicing God's truth? Why?

### STUDY

Like Timothy, Titus was entrusted with the care of churches to complete what Paul had started. After he accompanied Paul on his missionary journeys, Paul left him on the island of Crete with instructions to complete what had been left incomplete.

2. Read Titus 1:1-4. What does Paul's description of himself tell you about him?
3. Describe the "truth that leads to godliness" (v. 1).

Read Titus 1:5-9. In order to be sure God's truth continued in Crete, Paul told Titus to "appoint presbyters in every town" and described the kind of men to select. Sometimes the word "presbyter" is translated as "elder." The word "presbyter" is where we get the word "priest" from. Paul also speaks in the section of "overseers" or "bishops."

Although this list is similar to the one in 1 Timothy 3, the emphasis here is on blamelessness as the overriding requirement for bishops and presbyters. This does not mean, of course, that

candidates must be flawless or faultless, or everyone would be disqualified. Instead, the Greek word used means "without blame" or "un-accused."

4. Paul emphasized that presbyters and bishops must be blameless in a number of areas. What are they?

5. Why is blamelessness so important for church leaders?

6. What positive qualities of presbyters and bishops are highlighted?

7. What functions or responsibilities of these church leaders did Paul mention?

Neither of these responsibilities will be possible unless pastors maintain their firm hold on the sure word of the apostles, the "trustworthy message as it has been taught." This is the truth we now have in the New Testament.

8. Read Titus 1:10-16. Having given an ideal picture of true bishops and priests, Paul by contrast described the false teachers in Crete. How did he describe them?

9. What kind of influence do false teachers have?

Church fathers identified the author of the saying in verse 12 as the sixth-century BC Cretan teacher Epimenides of Knossos, who was held in high honor by his compatriots as both a prophet and a miracle-worker. His threefold estimate of the Cretan character was decidedly unflattering, but there seems to have been some confirmation of it. As for their reputation for

lying, the Greeks coined both the verb for “lie” and the noun used for a “falsehood.” As for being “evil brutes,” Epimenides himself went further and joked that the absence of wild beasts on the island was supplied by its human inhabitants (Thomas Oden, *First and Second Timothy and Titus* [John Knox, 1989], 61).

10. How did Paul tell Titus to deal with the false teachers? Why?

11. According to verse 16, how can you determine whether someone truly knows God?

## SUMMARY

Looking back over this chapter within the context of the contemporary church, there are two major lessons we need to learn. First, let’s copy Paul’s strategy in relation to false teaching. When false teachers increase, we must multiply the number of true teachers. Second, let’s maintain Paul’s high standards of eligibility for pastors, particularly blamelessness. The church will be in a far healthier condition if we do.

## APPLY

12. Rate yourself according to the standards of leadership in this chapter. Are you blameless in your marriage and family life, character and conduct, and doctrinal orthodoxy? In what areas do you need to improve?

13. What specific steps will you take this week to become blameless in one of those areas?

## PRAY

Verse 16 says, “They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him.” Reflect on this before the Lord. Ask God to help your actions be in alignment with your faith.