

Route 66

Titus: Goodness and Grace

Part 56 – May 8, 2011



Who knew there was a book in the Bible written for pirates?! In the Mediterranean Sea, below and between Greece and Turkey, is the island of Crete. 2000 years *before* Titus, Crete was inhabited by the Minoans; famous for their art and architecture.



Something destroyed the Minoans around 1200^{BC} and the 160 mile island (Olympia to Canada) devolved into a hideout for pirates of the Mediterranean. 500 years before Titus, a Cretan prophet named Epimenides [ep-ih-men-ih-dez] wrote: “The Cretans, always liars, evil beasts, idle bellies!” 130 years before Titus visited, the Romans imposed order.

Just right of that southern coastal point is Fair Havens, the last stop before Paul’s shipwreck (while arrested and taken to Rome).



“Fair Havens” aka “Kaloi Limenes”

We moved along the coast [of Crete] with difficulty and came to a place called Fair Havens ... So Paul warned them, “Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous ...” But the centurion ... followed the advice of the pilot ... Since the harbor was unsuitable to winter in ...
– Acts 27:8-12 NIV condensed



Paul later returned to Crete, with Titus, and saw that, in spite of Roman order, the Cretans hadn’t changed a whole lot.

Even one of their own prophets has said, “Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.” This testimony is true. – Titus 1:12-13a NIV



Ephesus

In the same way that Timothy took charge in Ephesus when Paul had to move on, Titus stayed behind and stepped up in Crete. I think Titus got the better deal! Like Timothy, Titus was a Greek speaking, gentile convert, who traveled with Paul to help establish and manage churches.



Crete

But unlike Timothy, Paul *purposely* left Titus uncircumcised. In fact, Paul took Titus to Jerusalem for show-and-tell proof to the Jewish-Christian leaders that uncircumcised gentiles were receiving God's Spirit and displaying great faith.

... I went up again to Jerusalem ... and set before them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. ... Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek. - *Galatians 2:1-3 NIV*



Titus was known for his boldness and diplomacy.

Paul's most *difficult* ministry was the church in Corinth. When rebellion broke out there, Paul sent Timothy. And when Timothy failed to set things in order, Paul sent Titus, who led the unruly Corinthians back to repentance.

[Titus] told us about your longing for me, your deep sorrow, [and] your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever. - *2 Corinthians 7:7b NIV*



Rethymno Harbor, Crete

So, who better than Titus to take charge in Crete and complete the task on Paul's behalf?

The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. - *Titus 1:5 NIV*

This letter to Titus (along with 1&2 Timothy), are Paul's three surviving Pastoral Epistles. Titus and Timothy had a firm grasp on the Gospel; so, these brief letters focus on church oversight, leadership, and living in response to God's grace. And at the top of Titus' to-do list was finding an elder/pastor for each church scattered around the island, and bishops/overseers of regions. After Paul's brutal assessment, it's kind of funny to read his list of expectations.



[An overseer] must be **blameless** – not **overbearing**, not **quick-tempered**, not **given to drunkenness**, not **violent**, not **pursuing dishonest gain**. Rather he must be **hospitable**, one who **loves what is good**, who is **self-controlled**, **upright**, **holy** and **disciplined**. - *Titus 1:6-8 NIV*

You're probably thinking, "Sure glad I'm not an overseer!"

But, in chapter two, Paul has similar lists for *every* man, woman, and youth on the island! "Okay, Okay, don't capsize your dinghies ..." Paul is certainly aware that *no one* can measure up to the list, especially not constant liars, evil brutes, and lazy gluttons!

But, Paul also knows that when you're surrounded by constant cultural immorality, it's dangerously easy to start relaxing God's standards without realizing how much you're compromising. This is especially true if you're living a "secluded faith", isolated to whatever degree, from fellowship and accountability.



Here's the thing: when you're living on an island, *and* surrounded by "Cretans", a slack effort seems *admirable* by comparison! That's why ye be needin' to chart a course, find a loyal crew, and keep a sharp eye ... Yarr! It's not about *measuring up to the list*, but learning what's *on the list*, so I can chart my course and repent when I capsize.

The "overseers' list" builds to and ends with the *most important* qualification of all in the following verse.

He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group. **They must be silenced**, because they are ruining whole households ... - *Titus 1:9-11a NIV*

The rebellious deceivers that Paul wants silenced are those who teach that we must *live up to a list* to receive God's affection. So, *what* is this "trustworthy message" Paul is referring to? Well, it's a *special* message for *vile* Cretans and *scurvy* pirates.

When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, **not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy**. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been **justified by his grace**, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. - *Titus 3:4-8a NIV*



You see, "devoting [ourselves] to doing what is good" is a *response* to God's mercy and love and grace - not a *means*. All goodness and self-control *must* be rooted in grace.

Five times in three chapters, Paul calls the Cretans to be "self-controlled", and five more times, to "do what is good".

He's not teaching moralism; though virtue is its *own* reward. And, he's not teaching legalism; though obedience *is* expected. At their best, neither of these can change a heart, save a soul, or bring true peace and hope and joy. And at their worst, either can become a self-powered, self-defeating, substitute for grace.

Grace allows me to honestly assess and admit, first to myself, how horribly and fearfully far I fall short, by relieving my reflexive fear of the judgment I know I deserve.

Grace forgives our worst and affirms our best.

The more we embrace God's unmerited favor, the more our love for God grows, and our gratitude turns obedience into a byproduct.

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope – the glorious appearing of **our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ**, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. – *Titus 2:11-14 NIV*

Did you notice how clearly Paul proclaims that Jesus is God?

He first "appeared" to reveal His "grace"; His second "appearing" will reveal his "glory". The power of grace and the hope of glory releases us to be godly; never perfectly, *but substantially*.

Paul says (2:10) that when we live humble, self-controlled lives, we "make the teaching about God our Savior attractive". Just as a picture frame can enhance the beauty of a masterful work of art, your life is meant to "adorn" the Gospel and make it more attractive and appealing and relevant and relatable.

Even as Paul writes this, he's planning to send a replacement to Titus, so Paul can get his trusted partner back by his side.



As soon as I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, because I have decided to winter there. – *Titus 3:12 NIV*

And then Paul closes with the answer to *everything!*

Grace be with you all. – *Titus 3:15b NIV*



Church of St Titus, Heraklion

And the last we hear about Titus (2 *Tim 4:10*) is that he's on a mission to Dalmatia (modern day Yugoslavia).

Tradition has it that he returned to minister among the Cretans for the rest of his life. This is the "Church of St. Titus" in Heraklion [ē-rā'klē-ōn], Crete.



Inside the church, encased in silver and under glass, they claim to have the skull of Titus!

And even though the claim is dubious, and the skull doesn't have cross-bones, it's still a fitting tribute to the man who ministered the grace of God on a former pirate island.