

## Lesson 1: Good Leaders *Titus 1:1–16*

### Hook



**Main Point: We advance the Gospel by teaching sound doctrine and living godly lives as an example to the world, especially our church leadership.**

Let's play a game to show how easily we can let false teaching creep in if we don't know the Scriptures well. There are some things that many of us think are in the Bible that aren't there. Some of them are kind of harmless, but others can be really dangerous false teachings that have crept into our worldviews.

Give each class member a worksheet with these phrases, but with no Bible references. Ask each of them to circle or check off which ones are actually found in the Bible. References have been attached below to the ones that are from the Bible, but don't put those on the sheet.

God helps those who help themselves.

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God. (James 1:5)

Money is the root of all evil.

God won't give you more than you can handle.

Whoever spares the rod hates his son. (Proverbs 13:24)

This, too, shall pass.

A wise son heeds his father's instruction. (Proverbs 13:1)

Cleanliness is next to godliness.

The Lord works in mysterious ways.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. (Proverbs 1:7)

Love the sinner, hate the sin.

Be in the world, but not of the world.

Spare the rod, spoil the child.

The sun stood still and the moon stopped. (Joshua 10:13)

To thine own self be true.

A joyful heart is good medicine. (Proverbs 17:22)

Yea, verily, God wants you to be happy.

There is a time for everything. (Ecclesiastes 3:1)

A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. (Proverbs 15:1)

If you work hard enough, you'll be successful.

Give, and it will be given to you. (Luke 6:38)

Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. (Proverbs 16:18)

If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.

Just follow your heart, and you can do anything.

***Did some of these answers surprise you?***

***Do you think you know enough about the Bible? Why or why not?***

***Do you know enough to recognize something that is not what Scripture says?***

***Why is it important to be able to do that?***

***Why does it matter that some of these things aren't in the Bible, if they ring true to you?***

***Which of these false teachings would make a big difference in what you believed about God and how you lived your life? Why/How?***

## Lesson 1: Good Leaders *Titus 1:1–16*

### Book

**Main Point:** We advance the Gospel by teaching sound doctrine and living godly lives as an example to the world, especially our church leadership.

**Text Summary:** This chapter introduces us to Titus, the Cretan church, and the issues that have arisen there. Paul has left Titus in Crete to set up the church there and to appoint strong elders to lead the church when he leaves. Paul particularly stresses that in order for the church to flourish, they must have spiritually mature, theologically sound leaders who are both above reproach themselves and are not afraid to rebuke false teachers.

### Titus 1:1–4 [Read]

**Sub-Point 1:** Our churches must be based on a solid foundation of the Truth of the Gospel.

*How does Paul describe himself in this greeting?*

*How is it similar to how he opens other letters? How is it different?*

*What does it mean that Titus is Paul's "true child" in the faith?*

### ***v. 1: Paul's Self-Description: Servant and Apostle***

In the letter to Titus, Paul described himself as *both* a servant of God *and* an apostle of Jesus Christ. In Philippians, he had only used the word "servant." In Colossians, he had only used "apostle." In Philemon, he had used the word "prisoner." Paul chose a different self-description to open his letters, depending on the content of the letter that was to follow.

In Titus, he paired servant and apostle for a specific reason. The term "apostle" gave Paul the authority to correct issues in the church at Crete. But he used the term "servant" first to show that even though he is an apostle, he is really a servant of Jesus. He is not there to lord his authority over them; he is there to encourage them, spur them on as a fellow servant of Christ.

Paul will spend much of this letter trying to encourage ordinary believers from all walks of life to consider every facet of their lives as an expression of the will of God. To see themselves as missionaries of the Gospel, no matter what their actual occupation is. To realize that their lifestyle and their reputation will either draw people into their church community or turn them

away from the faith. That Paul calls himself *both* servant *and* apostle reflects both of the challenges he will give to the church at Crete:

- servant – submissive to God’s will in all things
- apostle – one who is sent with a mission

They are to live *both* as servants of God *and* as apostles sent on mission to the world.<sup>1</sup>

#### ***v. 4: Paul’s Description of Titus: “My True Son”***

As we said in the introduction, Titus was Paul’s disciple who had been left in Crete to organize and establish the church there. Timothy and Titus were the only two people Paul called his “true son” in the faith. Paul uses the term “son in the faith” to describe those whom he had led to Christ, of whom he was a “spiritual father,” like Onesimus in Philemon (1:10). But with Timothy and Titus, he added “true” in front of “son in the faith.” The Greek word there literally means “one who is born of a legitimate legal marriage, not out of wedlock.” Though Paul is using this word figuratively; these men weren’t his biological sons. But he is describing the deeper relationship he had with these men. How their mission was so aligned with his that they were like his true sons. They represented and carried on his mission in the same way a biological son would carry on the family business. They had been his companions, had worked alongside him in his ministry, and he had even left them in charge of certain churches, to work as his “fixer” in those areas which needed some help. They were Paul’s most trusted disciples, his *true* sons in the faith. These letters were not only written to Timothy and Titus personally, they were written to give Paul’s apostolic authority to Timothy and Titus as his “true sons.” So the churches at Ephesus and Crete would look at them as just as much of an authority as Paul.<sup>2</sup>

#### ***v. 2–3: His Description of the Church at Crete: “God’s Elect”***

What is noticeably missing from Paul’s greeting to Titus is the typical thanksgiving and prayer report, because this church hasn’t really been established yet. Instead, Paul used that part of the letter to establish their identity from the beginning. Paul went on for more than two verses (v. 1b–3) about his reason for writing—“for the sake of God’s elect” (v. 1). These few verses are quite theologically rich, each point building upon the one before it.

Though he used terms such as “God’s elect” and “promised before the ages began,” this was not necessarily Paul’s trying to build a case for predestination. It is simply Paul’s starting off these new churches in Crete with a firm foundation in the truth, in God’s Word, in the Gospel. He emphasized:

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<sup>1</sup> Philip H. Towner, *1–2 Timothy and Titus, IVP Commentary on the New Testament, Vol. 14* (Intervarsity Press, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (InterVarsity Press, 1995), 626.

- The truth of God’s Word: “knowledge of the truth” (v. 1) and “God who never lies” (v. 2)
- That God’s Word has been true forever – “promised before the ages began” (v. 2)
- That Paul has been entrusted with the preaching of it, and now they would be (v. 3)

This was all to establish the truth of the Gospel as opposed to Greek philosophy such as stoicism and Greek mythology, by which the Cretans would have been surrounded.<sup>3</sup>

***Why is it important to base our churches on a firm foundation of the truth?***

***How would your life be different if you really lived as a servant of God in every single aspect of your life, submissive to God’s will in all things?***

***How would your life be different if you saw it as your mission in life to be an apostle, a messenger of God’s Good News?***

***How is a church based on the truth more equipped to advance the Gospel?***

**Titus 1:5–9 [Read]**

**Sub-Point 2:** Our churches must have spiritually mature and theologically sound leadership.

***Was there anything on this list of requirements for elders that surprised you?***

***Did you see anything that seemed a little over the top, too much to ask?***

***Why is it so important for church leaders to have lifestyles that are above reproach?***

***Why is it so important for church leaders to have sound doctrine?***

**v. 5: “elders in every town”** – They needed local church leadership in each town on the island of Crete. Of course, in our world today, we have multiple churches in each city. In big cities, perhaps hundreds of churches, each with their own elders. But this is the very beginning of the church in Crete. Titus was to establish one church in each town, with a strong leadership team in each church.

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<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, 625–6.

**vv. 6–9: Requirements for Elders** – This is a list of qualifications without much explanation for each one. But, as a group, they describe someone who is:

1. Above reproach in his lifestyle (v. 7)
2. Theologically sound in his doctrine (v. 9)

### **1. Above Reproach (vv. 6–8)**

“Above reproach” means that an elder must be so righteous that no one can say anything negative about him, so that even if his enemies come up with elaborate lies about him, no one will believe them. In 1 Timothy, Paul told Timothy that an elder must have a good reputation with the outside world, too, not only those inside the church (1 Timothy 3:7). Because if he doesn’t, if he has a bad reputation with the outside world, why would they want to join his church? Or even the Christian faith in general?

Hypothetically, imagine if someone invited a friend to visit his church. Upon quick reflection, the friend responds “Oh, I’d never go there! The most crooked lawyer in town goes there. I think he’s even on their leadership board.” What kind of image would people have of that local church? Of Christianity? Of Jesus Himself?

For better or for worse, we represent our church and Jesus Himself to the outside world. The way we live can either bring glory or shame to Jesus’ name. Though none of us are perfect, if we are walking with Jesus, our lives will bring glory to Jesus’ name. Even when we mess up, we can bring glory to His name if we humbly point to Him in our weaknesses.

When it comes to the reputation of our church in the world, of course we can’t control every single person who comes through our doors. In fact, we *welcome* all sinners to come and meet Jesus! But those who desire, and are called to leadership must live a life above reproach.

**v. 6: Regarding His Family:** Paul now moves to the blamelessness of the home life of a perspective elder, specifically his marriage and his children. The elder is to be the husband of one wife, literally a “one woman’s man.”<sup>4</sup>

Concerning the perspective elder’s children, they are to be believers who are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient (NIV). As one commentator notes, “This additional requirement that the elder be capable of influencing his own children to become Christians demonstrates Paul’s conviction that effective spiritual leadership in the home suggests the

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, [1, 2 Timothy, Titus](#), vol. 34, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 280.

probability of effective spiritual leadership in the church.”<sup>5</sup> It seems that the father’s influence should not simply be reflected in his children’s behavior, but also their spiritual commitment.

***vv. 7–8: As God’s Steward:*** As Jesus described in His parables (Luke 16:1–13; Matthew 25:14–30), everything we have belongs to God; we are merely His stewards. That includes our money, our families, our lives and our churches. Everything. Church leaders are representatives of God, ruling the church in His stead, for His glory, just as Adam and Eve were originally commanded to do in the Garden and the leaders and kings of Israel were commanded to do throughout biblical history. They must run the church as God Himself would have run it. It is not their church; it is God’s, so leaders of the church must reflect God’s character.

Note that many of these are similar to the list of the characteristics of love in 1 Corinthians 13, which, because God is love, doubles as a list of the character traits of God. The Corinthians list was not meant to be exhaustive, but is a list of particular traits with which the Corinthians particularly struggled. These lists are also not meant to be exhaustive, especially considering the fact that the lists in Timothy and Titus are not identical. They list some specific examples to make the general point that God cares more about the character of his leaders than He does their resume or skill set.<sup>6</sup>

First, Paul listed the negatives:

- Not Arrogant – humble like Jesus (Philippians 2:5–8)
- Not Quick-Tempered – slow to anger, like God (Psalm 103:8)
- Not a Drunkard – but filled with the Spirit, like Jesus (Ephesians 5:18; Luke 4:1)
- Not Violent – peaceable like Jesus (Isaiah 9:6; Acts 8:32)
- Not Greedy – generous and not loving wealth like Jesus (Acts 20:35; Matthew 19:24)

The references to debauchery and drunkenness are not only important morally, they are also important from a religious perspective. The drunken worship of Dionysus was well known on the island of Crete, and Paul was intentionally trying to contrast the behavior of the leaders of that cultic worship with the leaders of the Christian Church. They were to make it clear to the outside world that their churches were different from the cultic worship of the Greeks. They served a different God and lived a different lifestyle. They were to reflect His character.

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, [1, 2 Timothy, Titus](#), vol. 34, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 282.

<sup>6</sup> Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Lewis and Roth, 2003), 168.

Then Paul listed the positives:

- Hospitable – as God shows His love for the foreigner (Deuteronomy 10:17–20)
- Lover of good – as God is good and loves good (Exodus 33:19)
- Self-controlled – like Jesus, who was tempted in every way but did not sin (Hebrews 4:15)
- Upright – like the righteousness of Christ (Romans 3:22)
- Holy – as God is holy (Leviticus 11:44; 1 Peter 1:16)
- Disciplined – like Jesus, who said, “Not my will, but your will” (Luke 22:42)

An elder should reflect the character of Jesus to the world.

## **2. Theologically Sound (v. 9)**

In this verse, Paul required that elders:

- Hold firm to the truth they have been taught (v. 9)
- Be able to give instruction in sound doctrine (v. 9)
- Rebuke those who contradict sound doctrine (v. 9)

“Hold firm” reminds us of Paul’s encouragement to “stand firm” in Philippians. It means to stay strong even when there is opposition, even in the face of attack. So, when false teachers attack the truth of the Gospel—the firm foundation Paul mentioned in the introduction—a strong leader will hold firm to what he knows to be true. An elder needs to know the truth well enough to teach it to others (v. 9) and to recognize and rebuke falsehood when he hears it (v. 9). This means our church leaders need to really know God’s Word well.

When federal agents are being trained how to recognize counterfeit money, they don’t study examples of counterfeits. There are too many counterfeit possibilities out there for them to study. And as soon as they acquainted themselves well enough with what is out there now, counterfeiters would just create a new fake bill. So what they do is study the real thing. They become so intimately acquainted with real money, with every detail of every line and every image, that they can spot the fake money a mile away. This is the same method church leaders, and all believers really, need to employ to be able to recognize false teachers among us. We don’t have to bother studying all the heresies out there in the world. The more we know God’s Word, the easier it will be for us to spot heresy.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> John McArthur, *Reckless Faith: When the Church Loses Its Will to Discern* (Crossway, 1994).



Ideally, everyone in our churches will be so familiar with the truth of Scripture that they can spot false teachers easily. But at the very least, the church elders should be able to do so. How else can they have the discernment to lead the church if they don't know sound doctrine?

They must also be bold enough to call out false teaching when they hear it. Sometimes, you may have church leaders who recognize false teaching, but they don't want to rock the boat. They may even use Paul's call to unity in his other letters such as Philippians as an excuse not to call out false teaching. But unity does not mean we sacrifice truth for unity. That's not true unity. That's peacekeeping, not *peacemaking*.

***Before we start judging others by this list, let's all examine ourselves by the qualities on this list. Would we meet Paul's standards for church leadership?***

***If not, what things should we change to meet them?***

It would be easy for those of us who aren't church leaders to dismiss these lists as that higher standard that only leaders are held to. "If I don't meet these standards, no problem. I just won't be a pastor. I didn't really want to be one anyway! It's too much work."

But really, the entire church is called to be a *kingdom* of priests, a holy *nation* (1 Peter 2:9). We are *all* called to this standard of holiness. This is the definition of spiritual maturity, and we should all be working toward it. If you're not there yet, that's okay. You're not ready for leadership. Yet. That's fine. But it is something we should all be working toward.

*Let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity* (Hebrews 6:1).

*We are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ* (Ephesians 4:15).

None of us are perfect, nor will we ever be, but we must all continue to strive to grow in spiritual maturity. More and more and more each day.

***How can we move forward in spiritual maturity in our own lives? What practical steps can we take?***

***Why is growing in spiritual maturity important for our own lives?***

***How can our own personal spiritual maturity help advance the Gospel?***

## Titus 1:10–16 [Read]

**Sub-Point 3:** Our churches must rebuke false teachers in our midst.

***Why should false teachers be silenced?***

***What kinds of false teachings have you heard out there in the world or in churches today?***

***How can those teachings be damaging to the truth?***

In these verses, Paul described the false teachers in Crete: insubordinate, empty talkers, and deceivers (v. 10). People who wouldn't submit to the authority of the apostles, of Paul or Titus. People who were going around stirring up dissension and deceiving people for personal gain (v. 11). They are not innocuous; they are intentionally trying to lead people astray.

“Empty talk” would have described many pseudointellectuals in the ancient world. One of the great pastimes of Greek culture was waxing philosophical about anything and everything under the sun in public forums. This would have been a sect of Jewish believers living in Crete though, because they were focusing on Jewish myths (v. 14) and teaching that Gentiles believers must be circumcised (v. 10), which the church leadership had already dealt with in the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15).<sup>8</sup>

In this passage, Paul quotes one of the Greek philosophers of Crete. This saying has been attributed to several sources, but it doesn't really matter who said it first. It was a common saying in Crete by the time of Paul and Titus. Greek logicians played with the claim by a Cretan that all Cretans were liars. If he had told the truth, he was lying. But if he was lying, then they reasoned that all Cretans told the truth. The saying became so ubiquitous that “to cretize” became slang for “to lie.” This seems like a harsh statement by Paul, but he is not saying that all of the believers in Crete are like this. He is simply using this broad brush characterization of a “typical Cretan” to call out the behavior of the false teachers.<sup>9</sup>

**v. 15: “to the pure, all things are pure.”** Paul referred to the words of both the Jerusalem Council and Jesus Himself to rebuke these false teachers. There is no unclean food. It's not what comes into your body that makes you unclean, but what comes out of it (Mark 7:15–20). The pure in heart will reflect purity in their lives (v. 15). The defiled in heart may profess to know

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<sup>8</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (InterVarsity Press, 1995), 627.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

God, but will deny Him by their works (v. 16). Paul revealed the hypocrisy of their hearts as compared to the false religion they try to practice and teach:

- They are *detestable*, though they strive to avoid detestable things
- They are *disobedient* to the spirit of the law, though they try to obey the letter
- They are *unfit for any good work*, though they claim to know God

This is a descriptor of a person who, like many religious leaders throughout biblical history, focused so much on being perfect on the outside that they completely missed letting God change them from the inside—people who focus so much on the religion that they miss the relationship.

Paul did not take this false teaching lightly. He commanded Titus to rebuke them sharply (v. 13). At the end of Philippians, Paul had told two leaders in the church at Philippi that they needed to be unified. He didn't correct one of them or even say what the disagreement was. He just told them to agree in the Lord (Philippians 4:2). But when it comes to false teaching, Paul doesn't tell them to just get along, to just agree in the Lord. He calls out false teaching. He rebukes it, because he knows if it is allowed to stay, it will infect the church just as one rotten apple spoils the whole bunch. As God said in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 17:7) and Paul told the Corinthians, you must purge the evil from among you (1 Corinthians 5:13). Rebuke the false teaching. If false teachers repent and return to sound teaching, great. But if they refuse, they must be expelled from the community.

***Have you ever been part of a church where there was false teaching? Or heard of it happening? How did the church leadership deal with the problem?***

***How can false teaching destroy a church from the inside out?***

***How can false teaching ruin our witness to the outside world?***

***How does rebuking false teaching help us advance the Gospel?***

## Lesson 1: Good Leaders *Titus 1:1–16*

### Took

**Main Point:** We advance the Gospel by teaching sound doctrine and living godly lives as an example to the world, especially our church leadership.

Go back to the list we used at the beginning of class, to see how well we could recognize false teachings. Get into small groups of two or three and go through the list of false teachings, answering the following questions about each one. Or you could assign a different one or two to each small group:

***Why is it false?***

***What is the truth about that topic/statement according to Scripture?***

***How would it change the way we lived if we believed the false statement?***

***How would it change the way we lived if we believed what was true?***

### Challenges

**Grow up! In spiritual maturity.** God doesn't expect us to be perfect, but He does want us to grow in godliness throughout our lives. What steps can you take to become closer to God? Scripture reading, prayer, spiritual disciplines? Choose one discipline to practice in the coming weeks and practice it every day.

**Study the real thing.** Maybe there isn't any false teaching around you right now, but you need to be ready for it when it comes. You need to study the real thing so you can recognize the counterfeit. If you don't already read Scripture every day, start this week. You can start out with just a verse or two or a chapter. If you don't know where to start, start with the Gospel of John. Or get a devotional guide that can lead you through a book. If you already do read Scripture every day, challenge yourself to read more. Either read longer during the time you already set aside or set aside more times per day to read Scripture. Maybe add on a theological book or a Bible commentary. Consider beginning a Starting Point mentorship; ask your teacher how.