



Living Christian In 'This Present World'

Titus Chapter 1

By

Mark McGee

Introduction

Living Christian is getting harder every year.

Can I get an “Amen”? :)

Millions of Christians have already caved to society and culture and become more like the world than like Christ. Why would any Christian do that if they understand what Christ has done for them and how He told them to live?

Here's one reason:

“... for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world.” 2 TIMOTHY 4:10

The *present world* of Paul's day was not unlike our present world. There are lots of shiny objects to get our attention and living Christian is not shiny. It's hard work and not popular culturally. Let's be fair to Demas. There was a time when he lived like a Christian –

“Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you.”

COLOSSIANS 4:14

Luke and Demas were with Paul when he wrote Colossians from prison. Demas was apparently not afraid to live Christian then. However, we know from 2 Timothy 4:11 that only Luke was with Paul as the apostle's time on earth came to an end – in prison again. Paul's writing of Colossians and 2 Timothy were separated by only a few years, so what happened to Demas during that time? What happened to Demas happens to many Christians – they love this present world (αἰών – age) more than doing the hard work of living Christian. Unfortunately, a growing number of people who identify as Christians are choosing to love this *present* world rather than the *future* world where Jesus Christ will reign Supreme. How foolish.

The effect that loving the present world had on Demas was that he *forsook* Paul. The Greek word is ἐγκαταλείπω and means “abandon, leave in a condition of lack, desert.”

The Apostle John put it this way –

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” 1 JOHN 2:15

The apostles didn't mess around with their words. They learned directly from the Master and knew what He wanted and commanded. We should want the same things whether it's easy or hard, popular or unpopular. Deserting Christ for some shiny objects in this present world is certainly frowned upon by our Savior (e.g. Matthew 6:24-34). He deserves so much more from those He redeemed with His blood.

Living Christian Then and Now

It's easy to romanticize what living Christian might have been like in Bible times. God had been manifest in the flesh. Jesus died and rose from the grave. The Holy Spirit came on Jesus' followers with great power. The apostles preached the Gospel of Christ in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and many other parts of the Roman Empire. What a great time to be a Christian – right?

Well ... it depends on how you define *great time*. Jesus was always honest with His followers. Here's what He said about living Christian then –

“They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me.” JOHN 16:2-3

“In the world you will have tribulation.” JOHN 16:33B

Jesus also said this to His followers –

“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.” LUKE 9:23

Now, wait just one minute! Who said anything about *denying* myself every day? I want to do what I want to do when I want to do it! Jesus shouldn't ask me to deny myself. That's not fair!

Sounds just like Demas. He deserted Paul because he loved the *present world*. We sense Paul's disappointment in Demas' desertion.

If we want to know what it's like to live Christian now, all we have to do is look at the lives of our Lord and His apostles. They were hated, despised, hunted, tormented, imprisoned and, except for John, killed. That's what it was like to live Christian then.

So, what about now? Have you suffered for being a Christian? Have you been hated, despised, hunted, tormented, imprisoned, threatened with death for being a Christian? I know many Christians around the world who have suffered for believing in Christ. Some suffered to the point of martyrdom, so let's be honest here. Most of us know little about suffering for living Christian.

But that's changing and changing fast. Living Christian is about to become very difficult for many Christians who are still standing for the truth of the Gospel of Christ. That's why we need to dive deep into God's Word and hold on to His Truth. We need to pray and depend on the Spirit of God who lives in every true believer. We also need to decide who we want to be like — Luke or Demas. Do we want to stand strong for Christ to the end of our lives? Or do we want to love this present world and desert the One who died for us?

Titus – the Man

You probably noticed an image of Paul's letter to Titus at the top of this article (courtesy Thomas Nelson). What does that have to do with living Christian? Well, we're going to see what Paul and Titus can teach us about living the Christian life in *this present world*.

Let's begin with Titus the man, then we'll look at the time in which he lived and the letter Paul wrote him.

Titus is mentioned 13 times in the New Testament .. always by the Apostle Paul. Here's how the apostle described Titus –

"If anyone inquires about Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker concerning you." 2 CORINTHIANS 8:23

"Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus." 2 CORINTHIANS 7:6

"To Titus, a true son in our common faith." TITUS 1:4

It's apparent from what we read about Titus that Paul had strong confidence in the young man's understanding of Christian theology and his pastoral strengths. Titus had served with Paul from the early days of the apostle's ministry and was a great help to him. Titus was with Paul when the apostle took on the leaders of the Jerusalem church (Galatians 2:1-3) concerning his preaching the Gospel to Gentiles. That happened after Paul's first missionary journey and return to the sending church in Antioch, Syria. Titus, who was a Gentile believer, was not compelled to be circumcised at the Jerusalem council. That was a major victory for Paul and the Gospel of Grace and Titus was an important part of the battle.

Titus continued to fight the spiritual battle with Paul to the very end. Paul mentioned Titus in his final letter (2 Timothy) where we learn that Paul sent Titus to Dalmatia (currently a region of Croatia along the Adriatic Sea). Titus had proven himself to be a trustworthy partner in the Gospel of Christ. Paul often called on Titus to do the hard work of traveling to various cities to help solve problems in churches and teach Christians how to live Christian. Titus was an excellent example of a gracious and loving missionary pastor.

Titus – the Time

Titus was a Christian and church leader during the second half of the first century AD. Christians were in the minority and most of the world seemed either indifferent or indignant about what Christians taught and how they lived. Sound familiar? It should. That's similar to what we find in our world today. Most people either don't care about Christians or they are offended by what we say and how we live our lives.

Titus had to deal with the same world Paul did. That meant paganism and ungodly philosophies. Titus would have been surrounded by people who worshipped idols and lived only for themselves. Titus also had to deal with Jews who strongly opposed the Gospel of God's Grace to Gentiles. It couldn't have been easy to do what Titus did. He certainly depended on the strength of God's Spirit and the power of God's Word during his life and ministry.

Life in the Roman Empire in the first century was hard on most people. The wealthy lived well, while the majority of people lived a hard and often brutal existence. Government officials were often greedy and tyrannical. They abused their positions and their people,

who were often locked into whatever class they came into by birth. Slavery was rampant and women and children were often mistreated. Most people lived in cramped and unsafe housing. Disease was rampant in the cities. Life for most people in the first century was about survival. It was to those people that Paul sent Titus to serve.

Titus – the Letter

The Apostle Paul wrote a letter to Titus sometime after his time in Rome as a house-prisoner (Acts 28) and his final imprisonment in Rome (2 Timothy). We can discern that from Paul and Luke's histories of the apostle's journeys. Acts ends with Paul renting his own house in Rome for two years. He was guarded by a single soldier and was free to receive people who visited him. Paul was also free to preach the Gospel "with all confidence, no one forbidding him."

Paul was apparently released as a prisoner about 62AD and was free to travel. Some scholars believe Paul left from Rome with Titus and traveled to Crete. Paul had wanted to visit Crete on his way to Rome, but problems with weather kept him from getting there (Acts

27). We know from Acts 2:11 that Jewish citizens of Crete were in Jerusalem on Pentecost when the Apostle Peter preached. Some of the Cretans may have become disciples of Christ and returned to Crete with the Gospel message.

Titus was on the Mediterranean island of Crete when he received Paul's letter (Titus 1:5). Crete is located more than a thousand miles from Rome. Crete is a large island (about 160 miles long and 37 miles wide at widest point) and was home to tens of thousands of people living in many cities. Paul had apparently been to Crete with Titus because he wrote that he left Titus in Crete, "that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you" (Titus 1:5). Gortyn was the first century provincial capital and may have been home base for Titus. One of the oldest churches on Crete, located in Gortyn, was dedicated to Titus as the first bishop of Crete. Church historian Eusebius wrote about Titus in Book III of his Church History (early 4th century) –

"Timothy, so it is recorded, was the first to receive the episcopate of the parish in Ephesus, Titus of the churches in Crete." BOOK III, CHAPTER IV, VERSE 6

Paul planned to winter in Nicopolis sometime after leaving Crete and asked Titus to meet him there after Artemas and Tychicus arrived in Crete (Titus 3:12). Nicopolis is located in the western part of Greece, about 240 miles from Athens and more than 400 miles from Crete. Some scholars believe Paul may have traveled to Spain after Titus arrived in Nicopolis. It was something Paul said he wanted to do (Romans 15:24) and Clement of Rome, who knew Paul personally, wrote this –

“By reason of jealousy and strife Paul by his example pointed out the prize of patient endurance. After that he had been seven times in bonds, had been driven into exile, had been stoned, had preached in the East and in the West, he won the noble renown which was the reward of his faith, having taught righteousness unto the whole world and having reached the farthest bounds of the West; and when he had borne his testimony before the rulers, so he departed from the world and went unto the holy place, having been found a notable pattern of patient endurance.”

FIRST EPISTLE OF CLEMENT TO THE CORINTHIANS, 5:5-6

Romans in the first century AD would have viewed the farthest bounds of the West to include Spain. Other ancient writings that mentioned Paul's trip to Spain include the Muratorian Canon (late 2nd century AD), Cyril of Jerusalem (4th century AD), Chrysostom (4th century AD) and Jerome (4th and 5th centuries AD). The New Testament does not confirm that Paul visited Spain.

Paul became a prisoner of Rome again in the mid-60s and was martyred sometime between 65 and 66 AD.

How Should We Live?

How does a Christian live in today's world? Wherever you live on Planet Earth, being a follower of Jesus Christ is difficult. More so in some places than others, but still difficult.

Jesus said it would be this way. He also gave us hope –

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. JOHN 16:33

Jesus *overcame* the world and so can we. How do we do it? That's the purpose of this Bible study series.

We'll use Paul's letter to Titus as a guide to learn how to live Christian in this present world.

Reading Titus

I've been studying the Bible for 50 years and have had the benefit of wonderful mentors and teachers in learning how to “divide” God’s Word “rightly” (2 Timothy 2:15). That means handling and teaching the Word of God *correctly* (ὀρθοτομέω). It is the most important thing a Christian can do if they want to live Christian in this present world. If we handle the Word of God *incorrectly*, we will find ourselves failing to understand God’s will for our lives. That can and usually does lead to very bad decisions as followers of Christ.

Titus is a short letter, so I recommend you read it three times through in a [word-for-word translation](#) (Formal Equivalence). Examples of those translations are the King James Version, New King James Version, New American Standard Bible, and English Standard Version. You may also want to read Titus two or three times in a [thought-for-thought translation](#) (Dynamic Equivalence). Examples of those translations are New International Version and New Living Translation. You may also want to *listen* to Titus on a Bible app after reading through it to keep your mind fresh to what God is saying to you through His Word. Remember that God’s Word

is not just a book. It is THE BOOK. It is God's Word, inspired by the Holy Spirit who lives in you. As Jesus reminded Satan –

It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. MATTHEW 4:4

Allow God's Word to sink deep into your mind and soul as you listen to His Voice. Reading God's Word helps deepen your relationship with the God of Creation, which is His purpose for our lives. Just as you would listen closely to someone you loved and admired deeply, so listen to God as He speaks to you through His Word.

Studying Titus

We move from reading Titus to *studying* Titus. I'll keep this short, but you'll find more about [Bible study methodology here](#).

Bible “study” basically means spending time to determine the meaning of what the Bible says. That means understanding what God meant when He inspired prophets and apostles to write His Word. You'll find hundreds of different interpretations about what Bible verses mean, but there's only one interpretation I'm interested in and that's God's meaning.

Text and context are paramount in studying the Bible. What does each word mean? What do the words of each verse mean? What do the verses mean in context. That process is known as **exegesis** – reading “out of” the text the author's meaning and intent. The opposite way of studying the Bible, which I highly recommend against doing, is known as **eisegesis** – reading “into” the text what the reader/interpreter wants to find. That's a dishonest and dangerous way of studying the Bible.

Unfortunately, it is the method many Christians use in studying the Bible. How do I know that? By listening to what they believe about the Bible. It's also the method many Bible teachers and preachers use in studying the Bible. How do I know that? By listening to what they teach and preach and reading their articles and books. It's one of the reasons that many sermons today are topical (jumping from one verse to another trying to get the Bible to agree with personal, often bad, theology) rather than contextual (verse-by-verse). It's easier to hide a lack of knowledge and understanding about the true meaning of God's Word through topical teaching than with contextual teaching.

We will study Titus contextually with an eye on how to live Christian in this *present age* (αἰῶνι).

... denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age. TITUS 2:12

So, let's begin our contextual study in Paul's letter to Titus.

Titus 1:1-4

Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect and the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began, but has in due time manifested His word through preaching, which was committed to me according to the commandment of God our Savior; To Titus, a true son in our common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior.

Paul the Apostle wrote to Titus during a short period of time between two imprisonments in Rome. A date of 63 or 64 AD is a good estimate of when Titus would have received the letter; most likely close to the same time Paul wrote his first letter to Timothy. You may want to read 1 Timothy when you're finished studying Titus to see the similarities in what Paul wrote to both men.

Paul had been a follower of Jesus Christ for about 30 years by the time he wrote to Titus. Paul was a seasoned apostle with a very special commission directly from Jesus (e.g. Acts 9; Acts 26; Galatians 1; 2 Corinthians 12). He had preached the Gospel across the Roman Empire and spent many years in prison because of his preaching. Paul knew how to live Christian in the world of his day.

Paul was a master theologian, as we will see in our study. However, he was also a humble servant. He called himself “a bondservant” of God. The Greek word is δούλος which means “bond-slave” and was a person with no ownership rights of their own. Paul understood that he had been a slave to sin before Jesus called to him on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). Paul knew that Jesus had purchased him with His blood shed on the Cross (Acts 20:28; Revelation 5:9). Notice how he emphasized being God’s slave before mentioning his gift and appointment as an apostle of Jesus Christ. May we also have that same attitude as we serve God with our spiritual gifts.

God's redemptive plan and its impact on the way the redeemed live in the world is a primary theme in Paul's letter to Titus, so it's not surprising that Paul would begin there. Notice in the first few verses how many themes of redemption Paul mentions:

1. according to the faith of God's elect
2. and the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness
3. in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began
4. but has in due time manifested His word through preaching
5. which was committed to me according to the commandment of God our Savior

Key words concerning redemption include:

- faith (πίστιν – belief, trust, confidence)
- God's elect (ἐκλεκτῶν Θεοῦ – selected, chosen out of by God)
- acknowledgement of the truth (ἐπίγνωσιν ἀληθείας – recognition, perception of that which is true to fact)
- which accords with godliness (τῆς κατ' εὐσέβειαν – leads to a life of piety, devotion to God)

- in hope of eternal life (ἐπ' ἐλπίδι ζωῆς αἰωνίου – in confident expectation of living forever, life unending)
- which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began (ἦν ἐπηγγείλατο ὁ ἀψευδῆς Θεὸς πρὸ χρόνων αἰωνίων – which free from falsehood, God declared a promise that is fitting before chronological time, eternal)
- but has in due time manifested His word through preaching (ἐφάνερωσεν δὲ καιροῖς ἰδίους τὸν λόγον αὐτοῦ ἐν κηρύγματι – revealed, made visible, made clear, now at the opportune time, season, uniquely owned by Him, in the word, speech, in proclamation, preaching)
- which was committed to me according to the commandment of God our Savior (ὃ ἐπίστεύθην ἐγὼ κατ' ἐπιταγὴν τοῦ Σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Θεοῦ – which was entrusted to me according to the instruction, command, order, of the Savior, Deliverer, of us, God)

Paul presents a clear path of how salvation works in the opening verses of Titus. We have God's selection and the preaching of the Gospel, followed by faith, knowledge and godliness. That's a pattern of redemption. God provides everything for salvation. He loves, He chooses, He demonstrates grace to those He chooses, He sends His Son to die and rise, He provides the Gospel, He appoints

people to preach the Gospel, He instills faith in those He chooses, He gives them knowledge and calls them to live godly in this present world.

One of the people chosen by God to be saved and to preach the Gospel was Titus. Titus had been with Paul almost 20 years by the time he received the apostle's letter on the island of Crete. Paul had most likely led Titus to believe on Jesus. You can sense Paul's deep love for Titus in this greeting:

To Titus, a true son in our common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior.

The words "a true son" are γνησίῳ τέκνῳ (genuine, true in origin, child). Titus was a genuine son in "our common faith" (κοινήν πίστιν – shared belief). You may remember that Paul wrote the Corinthians about Titus stating that "If *anyone* inquires about Titus, *he is* my partner and fellow worker concerning you" (2 Corinthians 8:23). Paul did not view himself as being more important than Titus, Timothy or other fellow workers in the preaching of the Gospel. He viewed Titus as a *partner* (κοινωνός – joint-participant, sharer) and *fellow worker* (συνεργός – together

with, helper, associate). Paul had his work to do as an apostle and Titus had his work to do as a missionary evangelist and teaching pastor.

Paul's instructions to Titus in this letter indicate his high regard for his coworker's missionary zeal, as well as his considerable abilities to organize local churches for effective and solid Christian ministry. In a day when many Christian institutions have been marred by financial irresponsibility, lack of integrity, division over nonessential issues, and the ever-present threat of false doctrine, Titus serves as a challenging example of a man of character who was consistently available to do God's work.

*THOMAS LEA, NEW AMERICAN COMMENTARY VOL 34: 1, 2
TIMOTHY, TITUS. B&H PUBLISHING GROUP, 2012*

Titus 1:5-9

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you— if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.

After Paul was released from a two-year home imprisonment in Rome, he and Titus traveled to Crete. They apparently spent enough time together on the large island to preach the Gospel in several cities and see many people become Christians. Paul left Titus on Crete and traveled to other locations to continue preaching. The word “left” is ἀπέλιπόν and means “to leave behind temporarily” (Wuest). Titus’ stay on Crete would be temporary since Paul told

him later in the letter to join him at Nicopolis once Artemas or Tychicus arrived on Crete (Titus 3:12).

First Step in Living Christian

The first step in living Christian is to be involved in **preaching the Gospel**. It is not to join the world in promoting worldly causes. Paul addressed that issue a bit further in his letter to Titus, so we'll wait until we get to those points in the text so everything is presented in context (observing text within context). The world certainly has a lot of causes to promote, but that's not why Paul left Titus on Crete. In fact, quite the opposite. God does not want us to be like the world or become involved in supporting the philosophies and ambitions of the world. We have a much higher calling.

Second Step in Living Christian

The second step in living Christian is to **set in order the things that are lacking**. God does everything in an orderly fashion and expects us to do the same. We find that directive throughout Scripture. One that comes to mind is 1 Corinthians 14:40 – “Let all things be done decently and in order.” The church in Corinth had

lots of problems. The solution? Do things decently and in order. That's what Paul told Titus to do – “that you should set in order the things that are lacking.” Christians need to be orderly in how they live to both glorify God and impact the world for the sake of the Gospel.

Notice that there were things “lacking” in the churches on Crete. The Greek word is λείποντα and means “left behind, abandoned.” What could have possibly been “abandoned” in churches that were fairly young?

The work Paul and Titus started together wasn't finished. Preaching the Gospel is just the beginning. “Making disciples” is a lengthy spiritual process and what was lacking in the churches on Crete were the people who would oversee the work of disciple-making. That's why Paul told Titus “and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you.”

Paul had given Titus a specific directive before leaving Crete – “appoint elders in every city.” He reminded Titus in the letter. It may have been that Paul sensed Titus needed a reminder based on a report Titus may have sent him. It may have been that Paul thought about all of the things he had given Titus to do on Crete and thought

it good to point him toward what was most important as the next steps. It may have been that Paul was simply putting into writing what he had told Titus while they were ministering together on Crete so Titus would have a list he could use and show Christians on Crete. Titus having a letter from the Apostle Paul might have been helpful when facing opposition to his (Titus') authority to appoint elders and share how to live Christian in the present world. Apostolic authority was very important then and continues to be now.

Whatever the reason, we are blessed to have this apostolic guide for how to live Christian. We can also point to apostolic authority when we tell people how God wants them to live.

... and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you ...

Paul may have also been telling Titus that enough time had elapsed since starting churches in each city that some of the new believers would be ready for leadership in their churches. It takes a period of time after a person is saved to see if they have the qualities necessary for leadership. Some people mature sooner than others, but enough time needs to pass in order to watch how people deal with a variety of challenges. Titus would have his own observations,

but he probably talked with church members in every city to learn more about the people who would be candidates for appointment (καταστήσης – set down in place, put in charge) as elders. It's helpful to church leadership when church members trust them. Trust is built over time and through a variety of life experiences.

The Greek word translated “elders” is πρεσβυτέρους. *Presbuterous* is the male term (accusative masculine plural). The feminine singular *presbutera* is not found in the New Testament. The word *presbuterous* was used for men who were “mature.” It meant someone who was experienced in living and had good judgment. Note also that Paul chose to use the plural form of the word – “elders in every city.” He never intended for churches to be under *one-man rule*. Orderliness in the church comes from multiple “elders” who have the wisdom and experience to guide God's people through the challenges of living in the present world.

How would Titus know which men to choose for elder positions in each city? Paul gave him an extensive list, which had similarities to a list Paul gave to Timothy (1 Timothy 3:1-7). Here is Titus' list –

1. if a man is blameless
2. the husband of one wife
3. having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination
4. For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God
5. not self-willed
6. not quick-tempered
7. not given to wine
8. not violent
9. not greedy for money
10. but hospitable
11. a lover of what is good
12. sober-minded
13. just
14. holy
15. self-controlled
16. holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught
17. that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict

Notice the emphasis on an elder being “blameless.” The Greek word is ἀνέγκλητος and it means “not convictable, unreprieveable, irreproachable, not to be called to account.” This was and still is at the core of what makes good church leaders.

Paul then addressed three areas of a man’s life where they were to be “blameless” –

1. marriage and family
2. personality and character
3. devotion to God’s Word and ability to use it when facing opposition

Marriage and Family

- *the husband of one wife* ... literally “of one wife the husband” (μιᾶς γυναικὸς ἀνὴρ) ... Christians have long debated whether this means an elder has to be married (not single), can be married to only one woman at a time (not a bigamist or polygamist) or have been married to only one woman during their life (not divorced or widowed), it seems that “blamelessness” is the key to understanding the meaning

and impact on an elder's qualifications ... would anyone in the city be able to call into account (reprove) a Christian man because of his marriage relationship?

- *having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination* ... literally "children having believing not under accusation of debauchery or insubordinate" (τέκνα ἔχων πιστά μὴ ἐν κατηγορίᾳ ἀσωτίας ἢ ἀνυπότακτα) ... elders who have children need to be both good dads and good *spiritual* fathers ... the word πιστά means "faithful, believing" ... what would it say about the ability of a man to be a church elder if his own children were not believers and/or engaged in acts of dissipation (wastefulness, wantonness, debauchery) and insubordination (unruly, not subject to rule, not submissive, disobedient) ...

Personality and Character

Paul used the word ἐπίσκοπον (bishop, overseer, superintendent, keeps an eye out for) to add to an understanding of what an elder does. An elder *oversees* the ministry of a local church. Paul also used the word ἀνέγκλητον (blameless) a second time, probably for emphasis and possibly for transition from marriage and family to

personality and character traits. Notice that Paul presents five negative traits followed by six positive traits. That is helpful as a church considers whether someone should be appointed as an elder.

- as a steward of God ... elders must be blameless as God's steward (οἰκονόμον – household manager, guardian of a household) ... the Church is the household of God (Ephesians 2:19) and must be protected ... that protective oversight is one of the responsibilities of elders and is a strong reminder that elders are servants of God ... churches belong to God, not elders ... elders serve simply as stewards of God's property ... a good reminder for elders everywhere .. **Paul's list of negative traits begins next ..**
- not self-willed ... elders are not to be αὐθάδη (self-pleasing, self-indulgent) ... elders need to be more interested in pleasing God than pleasing themselves ... pleasing God includes doing what is in the best interest of God's people ... elders should be careful in how they use the oversight authority God gives them ... they should not be overbearing (NIV) in the way they manage God's household ...
- not quick-tempered ... elders are not to be ὀργίλον (prone to anger, quick-tempered, harbor resentment) ... elders who can't

control their emotions should not be in a leadership position until they develop that character trait ... how many churches have been damaged by angry, quick-tempered leaders ...

- not given to wine ... elders should not be πάροινον (drunken, quarrelsome over wine, one who sits long at his wine) ... drinking wine until one becomes drunk is not a character trait for an elder of God's household ... it also goes to drinking of alcoholic beverages in a way that dulls the mind or subdues inhibitions ... "Those who linger long at the wine" (Proverbs 23:29) ...
- not violent ... elders are not to be πλήκτην (a striker, brawler, contentious) ... keep in mind that words can be used violently and cause as much, if not more, injury than fists ...
- not greedy for money .. elders are not to be αἰσχροκερδῆ (greedy of base gain, sordid profit, disgraceful gain, dishonest gain) .. this is a huge problem in the Church around the world today and has been a disgrace for centuries .. getting rich from church leadership is a bad motive and terrible character trait for any man who wants to be an elder .. it must not be allowed .. the best way to keep that from happening is not to appoint someone like that to being an elder in the first place .. this is the last negative trait, but one of the most important ..

greedy elders have ruined many churches through the history of the Church .. **Paul's list of positive traits begins next ..**

- but hospitable ... elders are to be φιλόξενον (loving strangers, friendly toward foreigners, guests) ... elders should demonstrate an interest and concern in the welfare of all people ... elders should be role models for church members in how to show love to strangers ...
- a lover of what is good ... elders are to be φιλόγαθον (loving, friend of what is good) ... an elder should love what God loves ... what is good is based on the character of God ... elders should look to God to see what is good, not the world ...
- sober-minded ... elders should be σώφρονα (of sound mind, self-controlled, balanced) ... this means they are to have control (mastery) of their mind, emotions and will ... that will go a long way in disciple-making ...
- just ... elders should be δίκαιον (righteous, upright) ... this means they are committed to doing right ... that impacts both their personal and corporate (church leadership) life ...
- holy ... elders should be ὅσιον (godly, holy, pious, devoted to God, separated to God's service) ... personal holiness will guide elders in how they live and how they shepherd the flock of God ...

- self-controlled ... elders should be ἐγκρατῆ (disciplined, master of one's self, self-controlled) ... if an elder is disciplined and can control themselves, they are in a better position to help people become disciplined followers of Jesus Christ ...

Appointing the right men to elder positions is second only to preaching the right Gospel. I say the *right* Gospel because there are many wrong gospels being preached today. Qualified elders will recognize false gospels and those who preach and teach it and know how to contradict them. That leads us to the third area where elders are to be *blameless*.

Devotion to God's Word

- holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught
- that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict

“holding fast the faithful word” is ἀντεχόμενον τοῦ κατὰ τὴν διδασχὴν πιστοῦ λόγου ... the word translated “holding fast” means “holding firmly, cleave to” ... the words translated “the faithful word as he has been taught” are literally “according to the teaching

faithful word” ... this is the Gospel message Paul had delivered when he preached in Crete ... Paul was the Apostle to the Gentiles, appointed personally by the Lord Jesus Christ ... Paul preached, taught and wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit ... what he wrote was foundational to the Church and a message elders should “hold fast” ... that means elders were not to veer from Paul’s teaching in any way ... they shouldn’t add to it or take away from it ... they should cling to it as a man would cling to a lifeline in a stormy sea ...

One of the primary reasons an elder of a church should *hold fast* the faithful word as he has been taught is so he could, by sound doctrine, “exhort and convict those who contradict.” The literal reads “that able he may be both to encourage with teaching sound and those contradicting to convict.” Elders should be able to accomplish two things with God’s Word: encourage people with sound teaching and convict people who contradicted them.

That’s a pretty good breakdown of what really happens in churches. Elders minister to all the people who attend their church. Some people want to grow in discipleship, others want to throw stones at those who are doing the discipling. Elders have to know how to help both groups. They encourage the one and contradict the other. How

do they do it? By holding fast the faithful Word and using sound doctrine to encourage those who want to grow and contradict those who oppose.

The word for “contradict” is ἀντιλέγοντας and means “to speak against, to say in opposition.” Opposition to God’s Word is one of the first things I faced in church leadership. I had studied Titus and 1 Timothy and knew what to do in the face of that opposition. I used sound doctrine to contradict those who opposed. However, it’s not enough for one of the elders to use sound doctrine to contradict the opposition. The elders need to be in agreement about using sound doctrine to face opposition in church situations. Not having that agreement among elders often leads to divisions and other problems in the church.

Inside Work

Living Christian begins inside: inside individual Christians and inside local churches. We cannot look to the world for guidance or answers to how we should live our lives. The world is part of the problem, not part of the solution. That’s why Paul told Titus to help build the **inside** of churches by establishing the right kind of church

leadership. The strength, or weakness, of a church is found in its leadership.

Paul demonstrated the truth of this from the beginning of his missionary journeys. As Paul returned to Antioch toward the end of his first missionary outreach, Paul “appointed elders in every church” (Acts 14:23). As Paul ended his third missionary outreach and was headed for Jerusalem where he would be arrested, Paul sent for the elders of the Ephesian church to meet him at Miletus. What he told them is a demonstration of the importance of appointing the right elders in every church and how they would need to defend the people of God against opposition from inside and outside the church –

Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. ACTS 20:28-31

What kind of opposition would elders face in churches on Crete? Any similarities to what today's church elders face? That's the next part of our special study and is an important part of living Christian in this present world.

Titus 1:10-16

For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain. One of them, a prophet of their own, said, 'Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.' This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth. To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.

Depending on how long you've been a Christian, you may wonder what was going on in the churches of Crete almost two-thousand years ago. It's not that different than what goes on in churches in our country today.

I admit to being somewhat naive during my first year as a Christian. I was saved out of atheism based on the [evidence for the truth of God's existence](#), the reliability of the Bible and the reality of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. My view of Christianity became very positive. I enjoyed the teaching of elders and fellowship of believers. It was after that first year as a believer that the reality of opposition to the Gospel reared its ugly head. Where did it show itself? Inside the local church.

Why inside the church? Let's begin with some important insights about what happens after people hear the Gospel.

What Happens When We Preach The Gospel?

Jesus often taught in parables that were difficult for people to understand but He usually explained the meaning to His apostles. Jesus explained that it had been given to them to know the mystery of Kingdom of God.

One of those parables gives an answer to our question – what happens when we preach the Gospel? You can find the parable and Jesus' explanation in Matthew 13 and Mark 4.

The parable was about a sower who went out to sow seed. Some of the seed fell by the wayside, some fell on stony ground, some of the seed fell among thorns, and some fell on good ground. What happened to each seed depended on where it fell. The apostles asked Jesus about the parable's meaning.

Jesus explained that the sower was sowing "the word." That's the Gospel. How people reacted to the preaching (sowing) of the Gospel (the Word) depended on what kind of heart-soil the seed fell. Here are the four heart-soils and results from Mark 4 –

1. "And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts."
2. "These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble."
3. "Now these are the ones sown among thorns; *they are* the ones who hear the word, and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful."

4. “But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept *it*, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.”

Paul and Titus had preached the Gospel in many cities in Crete. They sowed the seed of the Word in many directions and the seed fell on many types of soil (ground). Satan attacked the preaching of the Word and was able to take away the Word that was sown in the hearts of some people. Those people would probably not have become members of the churches on Crete because they had not received God's Word as truth (though some do for cultural or other reasons).

The goal of every church leader should be to disciple church members and guide them to become fruitful. Those are the disciples Jesus pointed out as members of the fourth group. People “hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit.” Fruitfulness is a primary goal of living Christian in the present world. Jesus made that clear many times in the Gospels and the apostles also emphasized fruitfulness in their letters. Paul wrote this to the Colossians –

For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. COLOSSIANS 1:9-10

Fruitful in every good work: that's the goal set for us by the Lord Jesus and His apostles. It should be the goal of every elder to see the people of God bear good fruit – fruit pleasing to the Lord.

What Paul addressed in the text of our current study were numbers 2 and 3 above: those who received the Word with gladness, but endured only for a time, and those who became unfruitful after hearing the Word because of the “the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things” choking the Word.

Elders need to be aware of this truth and be prepared to contradict those who oppose them. It will happen. Elders who don't think it could happen in their church are either unaware of what's written in God's Word or they are fooling themselves to believe they are exempt from reality.

Just as Paul gave Titus a detailed list of qualifications for elders, he also gave Titus a detailed list of people in churches who would oppose the elders and what the elders would need to do to “contradict” (refute) them using “sound doctrine.”

- For there are many insubordinate ... the Greek word for “insubordinate” is ἀνυπότακτοι ... this means they are “unruly, not subject to rule, disobedient” ... the NIV uses the word “rebellious” ... Jesus owns the Church ... He bought it with His blood ... Jesus is building the Church and uses gifted men to accomplish His goals (Ephesians 4:11-16) ... that includes the appointed elders in every local church ... Paul also used the term *bishop* for elders ... they “oversee, superintend” God’s people in their role as elders ... Christians need to understand that church leaders are there to help them become fruitful followers of Jesus Christ ... being subject to the rule of elders is an important aspect of the process Jesus set in motion when He “led captivity captive and gave gifts to men” (Ephesians 4:8) ... church members who disobey qualified elders are actually “rebels” to Christ ... if a church member believes an elder is unqualified to lead, God gives them ways to address that problem ... that’s a different situation than what we find in Paul’s words to Titus 1 ...

- both idle talkers and deceivers ... in addition to being unruly and rebellious, these church members were also ματαιολόγοι (vain, empty, useless speakers) and φρεναπάται (seducers, self-deceivers, leading others into their delusions) ... some of the people who cause the biggest problems in churches are the biggest talkers ... listen to what other Christians talk about ... do they talk about the Gospel, the love of God, the glory of God or about themselves, things of the world? ... many of the problem people in churches, those who oppose the leadership of elders, are often very smooth talkers ... they've learned how to use their mouths to draw other people into their own delusions ... watch out for smooth talkers, especially those who speak poorly of church leaders ... don't fall for their deception ... compare what they say to what God's Word says ... walk away or warn, but don't follow ...
- especially those of the circumcision ... especially (μάλιστα – mostly) of the περιτομῆς (circumcision) ... one of the biggest oppositions to Paul's ministry came from Jews who tried to hold on to their dependence on circumcision and obedience to the Mosaic Law ... that included many Jews who believed Jesus was the Messiah ... since Paul used the word "especially," it's possible that members of the circumcision were the number one problem in local churches ... Paul

included members of “the circumcision” with those who were idle talkers and deceivers ... what did Paul want church elders to do about it?

- whose mouths must be stopped ... the Greek word ἐπιστομίζειν means “silence, stop the mouth, muzzle the lips” ... the word is used only once in the New Testament and is one of the strongest words Paul used in reference to dealing with people in churches, and for good reason ...
- who subvert whole households ... these idle talkers and deceivers, mostly Jewish, subverted whole households with their talk ... the word for subverted is ἀνατρέπουσιν and means “destroy, overthrow, overturn, corrupt, ruin” ... who did these people destroy? ὅλους οἴκους, “whole households” ... the word ὅλους means “all, complete, entire, total” ... the word οἴκους means “family, home, household” ... the idle, deceiving talk of these people were destroying entire families, possibly including house-churches where a number of families may have attended each Sunday ... no wonder Paul told Titus that the elders needed to “silence” them ... these destroyers were working against God’s plan to build up His people ... they needed to be muzzled ... what were these people doing that was so bad?

- teaching things which they ought not ... they were teaching (διδάσκοντες – instructing, directing) things which they ought not (μὴ δεῖ) ... I've been in churches where the elders taught one thing and members taught another ... some of these members were Sunday school teachers, children and youth leaders and church small group leaders ... I've also seen how contradictory teaching can lead to divisions within a local church, even destroy churches ... elders must be aware of what's being taught in every corner of the local church and must be ready to silence those who teach things they shouldn't ... silencing people, especially people who are big talkers and have some position of leadership in churches, is not easy ... it takes courage and knowledge ... that's one of the reasons elders must be "blameless" ... idle talkers and deceivers will use anything to their advantage ... if an elder is not "blameless" in every aspect of his marriage, family and personal life, the opposition will use that to support their opposition to being silenced ... however, if church elders are "blameless" and know how to use "sound doctrine" in their ministry, there is a better chance they will be able to prevail in *convicting* "those who contradict" ...
- for the sake of dishonest gain ... church members who are rebellious often teach things they shouldn't "for the sake of

dishonest gain ... αἰσχροῦ κέρδους (base, shameful, dishonest profit) sounds similar to what Paul said about what elders should not be, “not greedy for money” (verse 7 – αἰσχροκερδῆ, greedy of base, sordid gain) ... there are many reasons why an elder should not be greedy for money, but one of them is that they will have to deal with rebellious church members who will teach things they should not for the sake of dishonest gain ... how could a church leader silence someone for doing the same thing they (elders) were doing? ... elders have to be “blameless” in their attitude about money because money will always be a big challenge in churches ... people who teach in churches and are greedy for dishonest gain must be silenced ... no good will come from their teaching because it comes from a heart bent on evil ...

- One of them, a prophet of their own, said, “Cretans *are* always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons. This testimony is true” ... the Apostle Paul referenced a Cretan philosopher from the sixth century BC ... his name was Epimenides ... Paul agreed with what Epimenides had written about the Cretan people ... Paul made a powerful point from Cretan philosophy that supported his own observation of the people, “This testimony is true” ...
- Therefore rebuke them sharply ... Therefore (δι’ ἣν αἰτίαν – for which cause) rebuke (ἐλέγχε – expose, convict, reprove,

convince through reproof) them sharply (ἀποτόμως – abruptly, curtly, severely) ... Paul told the elders to “silence” those who rebelled against them ... how do you silence someone? expose them, convince them through reproof ... silencing a rebellious person in a church goes beyond getting them to stop talking (muzzling them) ... there is another reason ...

- that they may be sound in the faith ... the reason is that the rebellious people will become “sound in the faith” ... ὑγιαίνωσιν means “be healthy, in good working order, working well, pure, not corrupt” ... Paul wanted rebellious people to become healthy people ... that is the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ ... Paul wanted them to be sound, healthy in their ὑγιαίνωσιν – faith and faithfulness ... he wanted them to be persuaded in their beliefs about what was true and right ...
- not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth ... that included not giving heed (προσέχοντες – paying full attention to, attending to) to Jewish fables (μύθοις – myths, fabrications, fanciful story) and commandments (ἐντολαῖς – law, ordinance) of men who turn from (ἀποστρεφόμενων – turning away from, perverting) the truth (ἀλήθειαν – true to fact, reality) ... this supports Paul’s earlier statement that the opposition to church leadership was coming primarily from members of the circumcision ... some

Jews in the church were teaching Jewish fables as if they were true ... they were not true ... when taught within a church program, we would call them heresies ... though we don't know for sure which Jewish fables were taught on Crete, there were many from which to choose in the first century AD ... fables are sometimes mixed in with truth, similar to Christians today mixing New Age beliefs with biblical beliefs ... "commandments of men" may have also been Jewish similar to how rabbis would add their own commandments to the Old Testament ... Jesus refuted those man-made commandments when He was on earth and wants us to do the same ... (read Isaiah 29:13, Mark 7:7 and Matthew 15:8-9)

- To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure ... in order to understand what Paul meant here, we need to keep these words in the context ... Jewish fables and the commandments of men often included Jewish ceremonial practices ... Paul will address this a bit more later in the letter to Titus, but he also mentioned it other letters (Colossians 2:16-23; 1 Timothy 4:1-5 are examples) ... all things are pure (καθαρὰ – clean, unstained, without admixture) to the pure ... teaching sound doctrine will include that people are not saved by keeping the commandments of men and continuing to practice Jewish

ceremonies ... however, to those who are defiled (μεμιασμένοις – being stained, polluted, corrupted, defiled) and unbelieving (ἀπίστοις – not faithful, faithless, unbelieving) nothing is pure ... what does that mean?

- but even their mind and conscience are defiled ... Jesus stated this truth beautifully in Matthew 15 – “Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man.” ... Jesus was responding to scribes and Pharisees who asked Him, “Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.” Jesus went even further by saying this in the same conversation with the Jewish leaders – “But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are *the things* which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.” We see the same thing in Crete with the unfaithful whose minds and consciences were defiled ... their thoughts, understanding and moral judgments were defiled (polluted, corrupted) ... wrong beliefs lead to wrong actions ... these people were adding to the Gospel of Grace, which is to create

a false gospel of works ... that cannot and should not be tolerated in a church ...

- They profess to know God, but in works they deny *Him* ... these unfaithful people in the churches of Crete professed (ὁμολογοῦσιν – publicly declared, spoke together) to know (εἰδέναι – be aware, consider, perceive, grasp) God, but in their works (ἔργοις – deeds, actions) they denied (ἀρνοῦνται – refuse to confirm, refuse to affirm, refuse to identify with) God ... that's strong language when talking about someone who attends church with you ... you might think that everyone in a church service or Bible study group thinks about God the same way you do ... don't be fooled ... listen to what they say, how they live, how they act and react to situations in life ... the fruit of their life will often speak louder and more truthfully than their words ... their works may actually demonstrate that they deny the God they say they know ...
- being abominable ... βδελυκτοὶ means “detestable, abominable” ... it's a strong adjective, used only once in the New Testament ... being abominable (βδελυκτοὶ) is similar to saying what they think and do is an abomination (βδέλυγμα) to God ...
- disobedient ... they were ἀπειθεῖς, which is similar to what Paul said of them in verse 10 (insubordinate) ...

- and disqualified for every good work ... they were ἀδόκιμοι (unfit, unapproved, not standing the test, counterfeit) for every good work (πάν ἔργον ἀγαθόν) ... the words and behavior of these church members disqualified them for any work in the church ... that included everything from teaching to serving in any capacity ... being disqualified means they can't serve, not that they shouldn't serve ... having people serving in churches when they are disqualified by their words and actions is an affront to the truth of the Gospel ... elders have to make the tough decisions to not allow them to serve until they repent and become obedient to the Gospel of Christ ...

Too many church leaders will give bad people in their churches a pass on what they say, how they say it and how they behave. They often give excuses for bad people because those people are members of their own families or long-time members or big donors to the church. There is no good reason to excuse the words and actions of bad people in church.

Paul's directive to Titus and elders should make that abundantly clear: *stop their mouths! rebuke them sharply!* That's how elders should respond to the bad people in their church. There is way too much coddling of bad teaching and bad behavior in churches today. That's one of the primary reasons so many churches have shut their doors permanently, become extremely weak in preaching the Gospel and making disciples, or become mouthpieces for false gospels. It's the reason so many denominations have become disobedient to the Gospel of Christ and an abomination to God. A quick stroll through Christ's words to five of the churches in Revelation will demonstrate exactly what Jesus thinks about the leadership of elders who put up with disobedient, rebellious people in their church.

... repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.

Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.

Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.

Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.

I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth ... As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

Living Christian must begin in the 'household of faith'. Appoint elders who meet the qualifications of Titus 1 and 1 Timothy 3. Then, support those men as they teach sound doctrine and stop the mouths of those who oppose it. It's not easy to do and is rarely done in churches anymore, but it is God's solution to the massive problems we face inside.

Next eBook

Paul told Titus about ministering to five specific groups of people in the churches in Crete. He also addressed what sound doctrinal teaching can accomplish in a local church. We'll look at that in the next part of our special series, *Living Christian in the Present World*.

Scripture taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Copyright © 1990-2021 GraceLife