

Letters For Leaders – Titus (Part 2)

In this series we are studying “Letters For Leaders.” Not just “Letters TO Leaders,” to the people who actually received these documents 2000 years ago; but “Letters FOR Leaders,” letters with timeless principles inspired by the Holy Ghost that still speak to leaders in every generation.

Your initial impulse might be to say, “Well, I’m not a leader.” But you would be wrong in the Biblical sense of leadership, because everyone influences someone else, and leadership IS influence. You may be a bad influence or a good influence, but you ARE an influence!

1 Corinthians 4:15-16 For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Wherefore I beseech you, be ye **followers of me**.

To be a good LEADER, you must first be a good FOLLOWER.

The four letters we are studying in this series were written by the Apostle Paul, probably while he was in prison toward the end of his ministry. They are unique among all his writings because they are PERSONAL, addressed to individuals in leadership roles rather than to churches as a whole. Also, Paul has had a “mentoring role” in the lives and ministries of each of these young leaders, so he feels at liberty to speak freely. Here more than anywhere else we see Paul being transparent about ministry.

Two of Paul’s young protégés in ministry are Timothy and Titus. Each of them is a pastor, but they are from different backgrounds, and they minister in vastly different circumstances. While Timothy lives in metropolitan Ephesus, Titus lives on the island of Crete. However, the principles of good leadership taught and modeled by Paul are universal.

Titus 1:1-4 Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God’s elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began; But hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Saviour; To Titus, mine own son after the common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Paul (Romans 1:1) and Peter (2 Peter 1:1) put “servant” BEFORE “apostle” in their writing, just as we must put our RELATIONSHIP with God before our RESPONSIBILITIES in the church. **You can’t LEAD God’s people if you’re not being LED by the Spirit of God.**

Notice Paul’s phrase “the truth which is AFTER godliness (1:1).” This is an important concept in the book of Titus, and everywhere else in the New Testament. If we live “according to” God’s TRUTH, we will live GODLY lives! **Paul emphasizes this constantly to both Timothy and Titus.** 6 times in 3 chapters, he uses the phrase “good works” (1:16, 2:7, 2:14, 3:1, 3:8, 3:14) – because our outward life is important, especially if we are leaders! We lead by EXAMPLE even more than we realize.

God has “manifested his word through preaching” (1:3). Paul believes in the power and preeminence of preaching, though the world mocks it.

1 Corinthians 1:21 For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

This letter is addressed “To Titus, mine own son after the common faith” (1:4). This verse shows the deep affection Paul has for this young pastor, and also uses the term “common” (1:4) to describe the “truth” (1:1) the church shares. Jude wrote about the same definite body of truth deposited by God in His church, calling it “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 1:3). To depart in any way from this “common faith” is false teaching and cannot be tolerated in the church.

Titus 1:5 For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee:

Paul had left Titus on the island of Crete in order to “set in order” the local assemblies and ordain elders (“presbyteros”) in every city. This had been Paul’s policy throughout his travels, but he had not been able to stay in Crete long enough to accomplish this task. The Greek word “epidiorthoo” (“set in order”) is a medical term applied to the setting of a crooked or broken limb.

Titus is to put Apostolic LEADERS in place so the church does not depart from Apostolic doctrine or lifestyle. If we begin to stray from Apostolic doctrine and lifestyle, we eventually lose Apostolic principle and practice – and ultimately, Apostolic POWER.

Titus 1:6-9 If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.

The qualifications for an ELDER (“presbyteros”) listed in Titus 1:6-8 are very similar to those given for a BISHOP (“episkope”) in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, and to those given for a DEACON (“diakonos”) in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. These are “spiritual” positions of leadership in the first century, not merely “religious” positions as we see in many denominations today.

The fact that these standards for leadership applied to Christians on the island of Crete as well as those in the city of Ephesus shows that God’s standards for leaders do not vary according to circumstance or location.

BLAMELESS (1:6) - This Greek term means "nothing to take hold upon"; that is, there must be nothing in his life that Satan or the unsaved can take hold of to criticize or attack the church. No man living is sinless, but we must strive to be blameless, or "above reproach."

THE HUSBAND OF ONE WIFE (1:6) – This is not referring to polygamy, because the New Testament church did not practice that. Rather, it is a higher standard for leaders. A pastor who has been divorced opens himself and the church to criticism. His ability to manage his marriage and home life is an important indicator of his ability to lead the church. This term also indicates a “one woman man,” in the sense that a leader must not have a history or tendency of “flirting” with other women.

HAVING FAITHFUL CHILDREN (1:6) – The children in a leader’s home must not only be saved, but must be good examples to the church. For children still at home to be accused of "riot" (“wild living”) or being "unruly" (“unable to be ruled”) disqualifies their father’s leadership. Too often, new Christians feel a call to ministry and want to be involved before they establish their families in the faith. We would have fewer ministry casualties and backsliders if we paid attention to this principle!

Paul tells Titus, “The most important qualification for any church leader is what goes on in his home life!”

THE STEWARD OF GOD (1:7) – A steward is a manager of his Master’s possessions, and the most important characteristic of a steward is faithfulness in executing his duties (1 Corinthians 4:2). Everything a leader has is on loan from God – time, talent, and treasure – and he must be faithful to use them to honor God and build His church. This applies to all Christians, but especially to leaders!

NOT SELF-WILLED (1:7) – A leader must not be “self pleasing,” always pushing to have his own way. While church members should respect and follow their leaders, **leadership is leadership and not dictatorship!** A self-willed leader is arrogant, will not take suggestions or criticism, won’t admit mistakes, and makes sure he always gets his own way.

NOT SOON ANGRY (1:7) – A leader must not have a quick temper. There is a righteous anger against **sin** (Ephesians 4:26), but much of our anger is unrighteous and directed against **people**. Leaders especially must be on guard for unresolved anger issues in their own lives.

NOT GIVEN TO WINE (1:7) – This Greek term “paroinos” is from “para” (“NEAR”) and “oinos” (“WINE”). TWO kinds of wine are referred to in the Bible – the non-fermented wine recommended to Timothy for stomach problems (1 Timothy 5:23), and fermented wine that is a “mockery” (Proverbs 20:1, 23:31-32). There is a vast difference between non-alcoholic wine in Bible times and today’s alcohol! Leaders need to avoid even the APPEARANCE of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22), so their lives don’t become an excuse to those they lead. Don’t even be “near wine”!

NO STRIKER (1:7) – Leaders must not be “contentious,” or “looking for a fight.” Hitting back (not just physically, but verbally) when others attack you is a mark of immaturity, and disqualifies someone for leadership.

NOT GIVEN TO FILTHY LUCRE (1:7) – It is possible to use the ministry to make money, if a man has no integrity. (Not that pastors are overpaid in most churches!) Covetous or lazy leaders always have “financial schemes” going on, and these activities erode their character and hinder their ministry inside and outside the church.

A LOVER OF HOSPITALITY (1:8) – This Greek term literally means “loving the stranger,” and was especially important in the first century when traveling believers and preachers needed places to stay. Leaders must be “fond of fellowship” regardless of their personality.

A LOVER OF GOOD MEN (1:8) – This Greek term literally means “fond of good” or “a promoter of virtue.” So this is not just about good people, but good activities as well. Leaders must always be careful of their associations, because they impact us personally, and they especially impact those we lead. 1 Corinthians 15:33 says, “Be not deceived: evil communications (‘companions’) corrupt good manners (‘habits’).”

SOBER (1:8) – The Greek word “sophron” can be translated “discreet, or sober minded.” Leaders must have a serious attitude about leadership and ministry. This doesn’t mean they have no sense of humor, or that they are always solemn. Rather, they are careful not to cheapen the ministry or the Gospel message by casual or foolish behavior.

JUST (1:8) – The Greek word “dikaios” can be translated “righteous, or upright.” Leaders must be people of integrity, who keep their word, conduct themselves in a godly way, and who practice what they preach. A “just” person is one whose inward life and outward life match.

HOLY (1:8) – The root meaning of “holy” in the Bible is “separate, set apart, or different.” Here, “unstained” would be a good translation. Holiness is not just inward, but outward – especially for leadership!

TEMPERATE (1:8) – This Greek word means “self-controlled, disciplined, or masterful” and it applies both to inward appetites and outward actions. Both the mind and the body must be under the control of the Holy Spirit at all times in all Christians, but especially in leaders!

HOLDING FAST THE FAITHFUL WORD (1:9) – Because God’s Word is faithful, a leader must be faithful to teach and preach the Word “as he has been taught.” Leaders who stray from the message preached by our elders are not trustworthy! Failure to teach truth usually starts with failure to live morally, because faulty desires lead to faulty teaching. Paul uses the term “sound” (“healthy”) doctrine, because apart from TRUTH there can be no spiritual HEALTH. Sound doctrine builds up the church AND refutes false teachings (“gainsayers” are those who are always disputing, contradicting, refusing, or speaking against sound doctrine). **Paul is not just talking about an “ability to teach,” but a “passion for truth”!**

Paul’s concern is the CHARACTER and CONDUCT of the leadership team in Crete, not a specific structure. He is telling Titus to **identify good disciples who will make good disciples**. That’s Christian leadership!

The question we must ask ourselves, and the question we must always consider when looking for leaders, is this question: **“What behavior do you EXCUSE in your own life?”** We are all prone to justifying our own behavior, but the danger over time is that we will eventually seek to change the truth to suit our own desires, and pretend that what is wrong is really “right.” **When leaders get it wrong, everyone gets it wrong!**

Titus 1:10-11 For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre’s sake.

The “unruly” (“rebellious”) people Titus has to deal with are “vain talkers” (their TALK didn’t match their WALK) and “deceivers” – and many of them teach the same mixture of Judaism and Christianity (“of the circumcision”) that we encounter elsewhere in the New Testament. Paul tells Titus to “stop their mouths” because they are “subverting” (literally, “overturning” or “overthrowing”) the faith of others.

These false teachers are taking support (“filthy lucre”) from God’s people in order to promote their own agenda. That still happens today! If these leaders have such a “revelation,” why can’t they build something on their own? Why must they take people (and their money) away from truth?

A loving leader puts your eternal destiny before your present comfort, and they will challenge and even rebuke you if they see you straying into dangerous territory. **A loving leader knows that what is NICEST for you to hear is not always what is BEST for you to hear!** This is a real challenge for leaders AND followers in our culture, because – like Crete – we live in a culture that resists and questions all forms of authority.

Paul’s solution for the church in Crete is to appoint leaders. Notice the word “FOR” at the beginning of verse 10 ... Paul tells Titus to appoint leaders FOR (“because”) there are many rebellious people. **THE BIBLICAL SOLUTION FOR REBELLION IS MORE AUTHORITY!**

Titus 1:12-14 One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, The Cretians are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies. This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith; Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth.

The quote in Titus 1:12 is from a Cretan philosopher named Epimenides. He was held in high honor by the Cretans, so they could not readily ignore or deny his verdict. And yet, this description of first century Crete could just as easily be a description of our twenty-first century culture! In the Greek language of Paul’s day, “Cretan” became a byword for dishonesty – to “Crete” was to “lie.” The phrase “evil beasts” literally means “dangerous animals.” The island of Crete was famous for having no dangerous animals, but Epimenides said that the human inhabitants of the island were actually more of a threat!

The false teachers (“they of the circumcision” – 1:10) think they are superior to others because they keep the Old Testament law, but Paul compares them to the lawless Cretans (1:12)! They have reduced godliness to checking off a list of rules, but their character is totally unchanged – in fact, they are exactly like the carnal Cretans all around them! **True godliness doesn’t ask, “How much must I do?” but rather, “How much can I give?”** There is no shortcut to godliness – it must grow out of a heart that has been changed by the Holy Ghost.

Paul says, “This witness of Epimenides is TRUE!” He has left Titus in an ungodly society, with ungodly false teachers all around, and yet he expects him to build a godly church! If Titus could build an Apostolic church on Crete, we can build an Apostolic church anywhere!

Titus 1:15-16 Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled. They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.

“Unto the pure all things are pure” (1:15) is one of those verses that carnal people use to defend their ungodly actions. But they’re taking it out of context. Paul is talking specifically about the way these false teachers are using the Old Testament law to put people in bondage (“Jewish fables” – 1:14). They say things like, “If you eat these kinds of foods you will be defiled, but if you refuse them you will be more holy than other people.” Paul deals with the same issue in writing to Timothy (1 Timothy 4:3-5). He argues in both places that it is not the foods that are defiling the teachers; it is the teachers who are defiling the foods!

These false teachers PROFESS to know God (1:16), but their WORKS deny that they know Him. **Good works in the outward life are an indicator of godly character in the inward life.** But these false teachers are marked by three fatal characteristics ...

ABOMINABLE – These false teachers behave in ways that are “detestable or disgusting” to God. An “abomination” to God is as serious in the New Testament as it was in the Old Testament!

DISOBEDIENT – They “cannot and will not be persuaded,” because their minds have been made up and they will not even consider the truth of God’s Word any more.

REPROBATE – This is a frightening word that literally means “not able to pass the test” or “disqualified” in the sense of an athletic contest. Because they refuse to do “good works” they are disqualified, not just from leadership, but from God’s Kingdom! The same Greek word is translated “castaway” in 1 Corinthians 9:27.

1 Corinthians 9:27 But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

Living a life that is godly (“like God”) is serious business with God!

This is not just about LEADERSHIP – it is about DISCIPLESHIP.