



PIPELINE

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An Introduction to Paul's Letter to Titus



VINTAGE PRESS

Pipeline: An Introduction to Paul's Letter to Titus

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SERIES DESCRIPTION

Leadership matters. Everything rises and falls on leadership. We've all experienced and seen the importance of good leadership in life. While we can learn about leadership from all kinds of sources, where better to turn than the Bible. The Bible has much to teach about the importance of strong leadership. The Apostle Paul understood the significance of leadership when he wrote to young pastors and leaders like Timothy and Titus. The wisdom and advice Paul gives about leadership is no less true and important today as it was then. So, how do we become leaders? Join Vintage Church as we learn from Paul on leadership and discover how Vintage Church develops leaders.

ABOUT TITUS

The apostle Paul wrote this letter to his co-worker and companion, Titus. Titus was a Greek Christian whom Paul had given the task to organize a group of house churches on a small island off the coast of Greece called Crete. Titus is referred to twelve times in the New Testament, most notably in 2 Corinthians 8:23 and Galatians 2:3. From these two verses, we learn that Titus was Paul's companion in the Corinthian church and remained uncircumcised as a testimony to Gentiles, showing them that God accepted people by grace through faith, not by obeying the Law of Moses.¹ From the letter to Titus, we can see that Paul left Titus on Crete to strengthen the churches on the island (1:5). According to an early church historian, Eusebius, Titus served as a bishop on Crete till his old age.²

THE PASTORAL EPISTLES

Titus belongs to a unique set of letters known as the "Pastoral Epistles," which also include First and Second Timothy. Together, these epistles, or letters, stand out as unique among Paul's other letters in at least three ways. First, the Pastoral Letters are unique in that instead of being addressed to churches, like Paul's other letters, these letters are addressed to Paul's coworkers, Timothy and Titus. Second, the subject matter of these letters is very similar—all having to do with false teachers, church organization,

as well as having similar theological themes. Third, these letters are among the “disputed letters” of Paul since many scholars believe that the Pastoral Letters were not written by Paul at all but were written instead by a pseudonymous author who used Paul’s name—an issue which will be addressed below.³

AUTHORSHIP

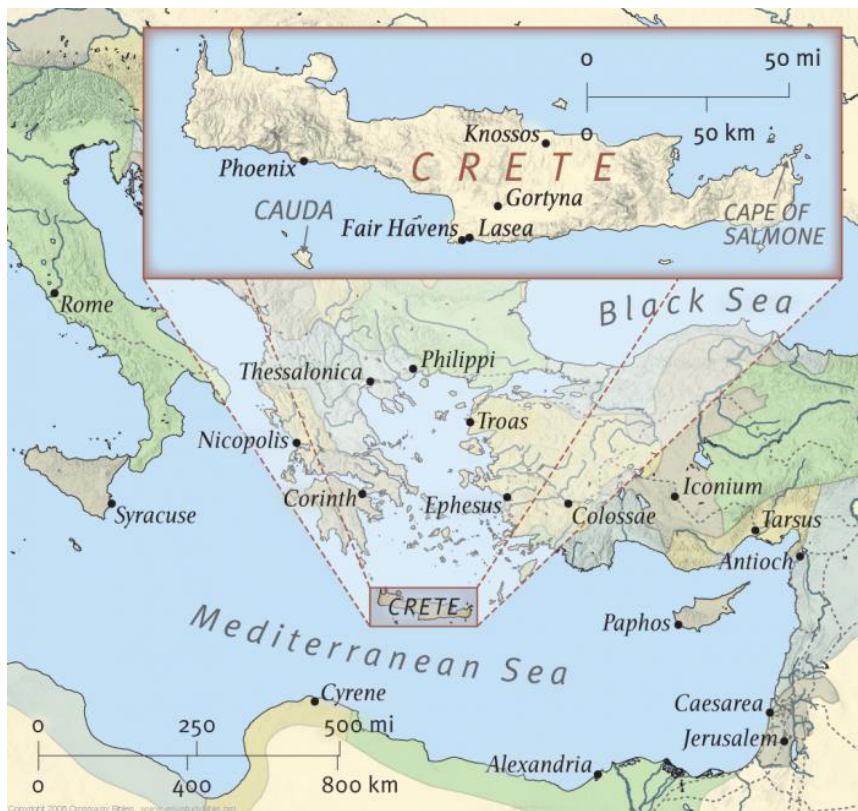
Paul wrote thirteen of the New Testament books.⁴ According to a virtual consensus among New Testament scholars, Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon, are all considered “undisputed,” because no one doubts they were written by Paul. The remaining six letters (i.e., Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus), however, are “disputed” because scholars throughout the modern era have claimed that these letters were not really written by Paul.⁵

Many scholars believe the Pastoral Epistles were written by a pseudonymous author.⁶ Why do scholars think this? Scholars have at least two reasons. First, these scholars believe the events recorded in the Pastoral Epistles do not match what we know of Paul’s historical setting. Rather, the pastorals reflect a later time after Paul’s death. Second, it is believed that the language, style, and theological content of the Pastorals differs significantly from Paul’s undisputed writings.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING

What we know of Paul’s historical setting comes from the book of Acts. From the book of Acts, scholars can outline a general chronology of events that put Paul’s missionary journeys into historical perspective. They cannot sketch a complete picture, but scholars can know with a reasonable amount of certainty when and where Paul traveled, and when he wrote some of the New Testament letters.⁷ The problem with the Pastoral Epistles is that many scholars have trouble fitting them into Paul’s missionary timeline. This is why many believe that the Pastoral Letters were written at a later date by someone else. They hold that a later writer composed these letters and then tried to attach authority to his letters by claiming to be Paul the apostle.

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Taken from the *ESV Study Bible*

Some scholars are not so sure. Some believe that the Pastoral Epistles do sound like the Paul of the seven undisputed letters but also believe that the Pastoral Epistles were composed after Paul's death. This is called the "fragment theory." This theory proposes that the Pastoral Epistles are composed of some genuine "fragments" of Paul's writing, but was "copied and pasted" and then "stitched" together by the additions of a later writer to address the concerns of his own contemporary audience.⁸

Some scholars, however, still believe the Pastoral Epistles are genuine writings of Paul. These scholars try to keep in mind that the book of Acts does not contain a comprehensive chronology. According to strong church tradition, Paul was first imprisoned at the end of Acts 28 (62 AD), and then imprisoned a second time shortly before his martyrdom (64–67 AD). According to these scholars, the Pastoral Epistles were written sometime in between Paul's first and second imprisonment.⁹ On this theory, these

epistles would have been written closely to each other, which would account for why they have so many similarities.

LANGUAGE, STYLE, AND THEOLOGY

While the Pastorals have many similarities with each other, they do have differences with Paul's other letters. As an example, the Pastorals have 175 words that don't occur in Paul's undisputed letters.¹⁰ There are a number of phrases in the pastorals, like "faithful is the saying" (ESV) that occur nowhere else in Paul's letters.¹¹ The Pastorals are also missing Greek theological terms that are characteristic to Paul's writings, like *euangelidzomai*—I preach/proclaim the Gospel; *eucharisteo*—I give thanks; and *pneumatikos*—Spiritual/ being filled with the spirit.¹² Moreover, the Pastorals don't use the term "Son," for Christ, and there is not a single reference to the cross.¹³ These differences supposedly show that someone other than Paul wrote the Pastorals.

According to Bible Scholar, Donald Guthrie, these differences cannot conclusively prove non-Pauline authorship. The Pastorals are unique in that they were written to colleagues, not churches. The Pastorals were also addressing problems unique to Ephesus and Crete, which meant that Paul needed to apply the gospel in a way that met the churches' particular theological needs. Guthrie writes, "If full allowance is made for dissimilarity of subject matter, variations due to advancing age, enlargement of vocabulary due to changing environment and the difference in recipients as compared with other letters, the linguistic peculiarities of the Pastorals can in a large measure be satisfactorily explained."¹⁴ George Knight III concurs: "The PE [Pastoral Epistles] were written to different recipients... Much of what he writes about is different. Furthermore, his method of communication, style, and vocabulary are also different because of the difference in recipients and content. Thus, the differences themselves are not unexplainable, but rather prove to be appropriate authenticating marks of letters by Paul to two of his colleagues."¹⁵

LETTER WRITING IN THE FIRST CENTURY

Several features of writing letters in the first century are different from how we write letters today.¹⁶ One such feature was the coauthor. It was not uncommon for multiple people to contribute to a letter, and to have their names listed in the introduction. Paul often listed multiple coauthors in his letters, which means that Paul was not the only one who contributed to the letter writing process.¹⁷ Since the opening verses of Titus do not list any other names, we can conclude that Paul likely did not have a coauthor for his letter to Titus.

Letters took a long time to write, especially long ones like Paul's. Romans, for example, was a lot longer than the typical letter. A normal letter would have looked more like Philemon. Because his letters were such large projects, Paul would likely have worked with his secretary and fellow travel companions to create the letter over a period of time in order to get the wording just right.¹⁸

Another feature of first-century letter writing is the use of a secretary. The secretary could hold different roles in letter writing depending upon the setting and requirements of the letter. The secretary could serve as a transcriber, contributor, or as a composer of a letter.¹⁹ Because of the scope and style of Paul's letters, we can surmise that his secretary did not serve as a transcriber. Because of the seriousness of the letters, we can assume that his secretary did not compose letters in Paul's name; his secretary likely fell into the middle ground of the contributor.²⁰

No reliable system of mail delivery existed in the first century, therefore the use of a letter carrier was required. A letter carrier could be whoever was available for the task, or they could be an individual specifically chosen to deliver a particular letter. Paul might have used whoever was available for his early letters but transitioned to something more intentional as he developed connections across the Mediterranean.²¹ As Paul's missionary team grew, he was able to send out intentional letter carriers who could describe the contents of his letters.²²

WHY DID PAUL WRITE THE LETTER TO TITUS?

Paul wrote this letter to remind the Cretan believers that God never lies but teaches truth about godly living and eternal life (1:1–2). In 1:10–11, Paul warns Titus of false teachers in the churches. The emphasis Paul put on God’s truthfulness contrasts with what Paul and Titus were up against in the Cretan churches. Cretans were notorious for lying and for getting their way through deception, so much so that the Greek word for “lying” was “kretidzo” which literally meant “to play the Cretan.”²³ Because such lying was proverbial among the Cretans, Paul quotes the Cretan philosopher Epimenides in 1:12, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.” Paul encouraged Titus to take a stand for the truth of the gospel.

Paul also wrote this letter to inform Titus about the type of men who belong in church leadership. Paul was concerned about the leadership of the churches on Crete, so he told Titus to appoint elders and overseers—men of the church who were mature husbands and/or fathers who had righteous and upstanding character. These men were to be humble, faithful to their wives, free of drunkenness, and lovers of God and were to replace the corruption that was so prevalent in the Cretan churches.

Paul’s letter to Titus contains a lot of instruction about right behavior. The Cretan way of life had infiltrated the church which discredited the gospel of Jesus (2:5). Paul wanted the Christian life to be so characterized by the truth of the gospel that the Christian message would be commended by the surrounding Cretan culture.²⁴ In Titus 2, Paul lays out instruction for five groups of believers: elderly men and women, younger men and women, and slaves. By laying out these instructions, Paul cast a vision of the Christian community that was counter to the cultural norms of the time.

Paul also wrote about the importance of public Christian life. Paul believed the gospel transformed culture, and if the gospel was going to do this it had to be lived out in the public square. Paul told Christians to be submissive to the governing authorities and to be ready to do every good work (3:1). If Christians were characterized by what their Cretan culture valued, the gospel message would lose its distinctiveness and beauty, and the mission of the church would be compromised. Paul commanded

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Christians to exemplify the goodness and loving kindness that Jesus demonstrated in his life. By doing so they demonstrated what it meant to be a model citizen of both the kingdom of the world and the kingdom of God.

THE THEOLOGY OF TITUS

Though Titus is a small letter, its theology is huge in practical importance. Titus contains instruction on appointing church leaders, living a godly life, as well as how Christians should interact with the non-Christian world around them. The depth of Titus' theology is also important. Titus lays out the theological foundation for Christian ethics, along with providing the groundwork for the doctrine of the Trinity. Titus also has a theology of salvation, which is linked to the Trinity in an interesting manner. Salvation, in Titus, is shaped in a tri-uniform pattern of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

THE TRINITY

The doctrine of the Trinity is that God is one being who exists in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. While not explicitly taught in the New Testament, the doctrine is implicitly taught in various ways throughout Scripture. Titus has some of the most striking trinitarian statements in all of Scripture. In Titus 1:4, Paul writes of “God the Father and Christ Jesus our savior,” making a personal distinction between the Father and Son. In Titus 2:16, Paul calls Jesus, “our great God and savior.” Though the Father and the Son are distinct, Paul ascribes divinity to both Father and Son, who share, in a mysterious way, the single reality that is God.

This truth has great apologetic value for Christians because many today believe that Christians only decided that Jesus was God some 300 years after the New Testament was written. Books like Dan Brown's *The DaVinci Code* have popularized the belief that Christians decided on the divinity of Jesus in 325 AD at the council of Nicaea. The letter to Titus demonstrates that this popular notion is false. Christians believed Jesus was God well into the first century of Christianity.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

According to Paul, the gospel produces authentic Christian living. This is what Paul meant when he told Titus to teach what accords with sound

doctrine (Titus 2:1). The Cretan church was being attacked by a false gospel that produced “empty talkers and deceivers” (Titus 1:10), and Paul emphasized that authentic Christian living was all about integrity—who Christians are in public should match who they are in private (Titus 2:6).²⁵

Paul believed that authentic Christian living commends itself to others.²⁶ In Titus 2:5–10, Paul instructs believers to live in a manner that does not bring contempt to the gospel. If Christians live in a way that was typical for Cretans to live, they prove to others that the gospel is not life-changing and thus compromise their witness. In everything, Christians should prove that they really believe what they teach through their actions so as not to hinder others from knowing the God who wants to save them.

Titus also provides the theological foundation for Christian ethics. For Paul, there is a theological reason why Christians should pursue good works.²⁷ In chapter 3, Paul speaks of the kindness and goodness of God, and how he saved Christians due to his grace, not because they deserved it. Therefore, Christians are to be kind to non-believers, and should do good toward others because God was kind and good toward believers even when they were enemies of God (Titus 3:4–8). The gospel motivates Christians to pursue the good because of what God did for them through Jesus Christ.

CHURCH GOVERNMENT

Paul stressed the importance of Christian leadership in his letter to Titus. Because of the false teachers in the church, people’s lives were being wrecked because of the variations between lifestyle and doctrine. Paul wanted the church to be led by men whose life and doctrine matched, otherwise, they were no better than the false teachers who “profess to know God, but they deny him by their works” (Titus 1:16).

In Titus 1:6–9, Paul lays out the qualifications for these leaders. He uses two terms to describe these leaders: elders and overseers. These two terms appear to be interchangeable.²⁸ These elders/overseers were to be faithful husbands of one wife, whose home life was managed according to holy living. They were to be self-controlled, abstaining from drunkenness, and were to be humble, teachable, and above reproach. The main idea, again, was that a leader’s home life was consistent with their private life because their lives had been changed by a God who “never lies” (Titus 1:2).

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SALVATION

The doctrine of salvation features prominently in Titus.²⁹ Titus bears witness to the universal reality of sin (Titus 1:11–16; 3:3). All humans, regardless of culture, race, and gender, are sinners in need of a savior. God also desires to save all people from sin (Titus 3:4–7). The introduction of Titus declares that God promised salvation “before the ages began” and then manifested this salvation at the “proper time” by sending Jesus (Titus 1:3). By implication, salvation was willed by God and achieved by God. Because of Jesus’ sacrifice (Titus 2:14), Christians can be saved. Paul wrote, “Not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:5–7). Titus’ theology of salvation is some of the richest in the New Testament.

Titus teaches that salvation is a work of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Earlier it was said that the doctrine of the Trinity is not explicit in the New Testament; no statement in Scripture says, “God is one being in three persons.” The doctrine of the Trinity, however, was an appropriate development of New Testament theology by later theologians. This doctrine is more than just a statement about the mysterious nature of God’s tri-unity but is also a shorthand way of encapsulating what all of Scripture teaches about salvation—God the Father wills salvation, God the Son accomplishes salvation, and God the Holy Spirit completes salvation.

OUTLINE

- I. Greetings (1:1–4)
- II. Instructions to Titus (1:5–16)
 - A. Appointing Elders (5–9)
 - B. Opposing False Teachers (10–16)
- III. Instructions for Godly Living (2:1–15)
 - A. Instructions to Older Men and Women (1–3)
 - B. Instructions to Younger Men and Women (4–8)
 - C. Instructions to Slaves (9–10)
 - D. The Basis of Godly Conduct (11–15)

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- IV. The Church in the World (3:1–8)
 - A. Christian Living in the World (1–2)
 - B. The Basis for Christian Living in the World (3–7)
 - C. The Motive for Christian Living in the World (8)
- V. Final Instructions and Greetings (3:9–15)
 - A. Confronting False Teachers (9–11)
 - B. Closing Personal Notes (12–15)³⁰

RESOURCES FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY

Below we have included some study helps, aids, and resources for our series through the book of Titus. We encourage you to study the book yourself outside of our sermon series.

TECHNICAL COMMENTARIES

Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006.

William D. Mounce, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 46. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000.

NON-TECHNICAL COMMENTARIES

Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 2nd Ed., Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990.

Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, Jr., *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*. New American Commentary. Nashville: Holman Reference, 1992.

Walter L. Liefeld, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999.

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Philip Towner, *1–2 Timothy and Titus*, IVP New Testament Commentary Series. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1994.

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¹George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 8.

²*Ibid.*, 9.

³Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 1.

⁴Hebrews is anonymous, though traditionally Paul is thought to be the author. If Paul did write it this would make for 14 New Testament letters; Thomas D. Lea and David Alan Black, *The New Testament: Its Background and Message*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2003), 334.

⁵Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 243.

⁶I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, International Critical Commentary (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2000), 57–58.

⁷Lea and Black, *The New Testament*, 352–353.

⁸Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 2nd ed. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 29.

⁹Ray Van Neste, “Titus,” *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 2346.

¹⁰Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 54.

¹¹Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 36.

¹²*Ibid.*, 33.

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¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 54.

¹⁵Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 51.

¹⁶E. Randolph Richards, *Paul and First Century Letter Writing: Secretaries, Composition, and Collection* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic. 2004). This is an excellent and highly readable source for anyone who wants to find out more about letter writing in the first century and how this impacted Paul's ministry.

¹⁷Ibid., 35.

¹⁸Ibid., 58.

¹⁹Ibid., 80.

²⁰Ibid., 92–93.

²¹Ibid., 200.

²²Ibid., 209.

²³Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 298–99.

²⁴Ibid., 316.

²⁵Neste, "Titus," 2346.

²⁶Ibid., 2346.

²⁷Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 335.

²⁸Thomas D. Lea, Hayne P. Griffin, and Jr, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Holman Reference, 1992), 50.

²⁹Ibid., 51.

³⁰Outline adapted from Towner, *1–2 Timothy and Titus*, 216, and Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 192.

