

Titus 1:1-16

I'm sure many of us have seen cowboy films from the wild west, and are roughly familiar with the idea of the frontier town. A rough, basic place which was often lawless. Then the sheriff would be sent in to bring some semblance of order. At tough times he would appoint deputies to help him out. Well as we start look at the letter to Titus we see a frontier situation. The good news of God's love in Jesus had come to the island of Crete, probably through Paul and Titus. Paul had moved on and Titus had been left on the island in this pioneer situation. There were some people who had come to faith, but no real church to speak of, there wasn't even a deanery synod!

It was a pioneer situation and as we see from v5 of our reading Paul had left Titus there, "that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you." He was to try and sort things out and to appoint elders, which was Paul's usual way of establishing a kind of pattern and order in the church.

The need for this was clear in that there were those in the church who were teaching lies and some of the behaviour of so called Christians was far from godly! Paul's description of these men is pretty robust. In v10 he describes them as "rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers" and in v16 as, "detestable and disobedient". Then he sums them up by using a phrase that was in common parlance at the time in v12, "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons." Now I realise that stereotypes are not always helpful such as Germans don't have a sense of humour, Scots are miserly and so on but Paul was aware here that the cap fitted very well. It wasn't just Cretans in general but even those claiming to be Christians who were guilty of peddling lies, presumably, because he spoke of those of the circumcision party and in v14 of Jewish myths, from a Jewish Christian perspective though we are not really told what the lies or empty talk of v10 was. Their so called faith didn't lead to godly behaviour, far from it they were guilty of crude and brutish behaviour and they made no attempt to curb their appetites. Not a great example of the Christian faith. No wonder in v13 Paul called Titus to rebuke them and then in 2:1 to teach and in 3:1 to remind. Much needed to be done to bring this frontier Christian community into line and create some semblance of order that the church might grow and the gospel spread.

This is the heart of this letter with Paul encouraging Titus to seek to establish a true church on Crete. I wonder how you might have gone about that? What might you have written to Titus and in Titus' situation what might you have done?

Well Paul was pretty clear and the main thread of the letter is "teach sound doctrine".

In v9 he speaks about encouraging, "others by sound doctrine", in v13 about being "sound in the faith", then 2:1 again "sound doctrine" 2:5 "no one will malign the word of God";, 2:15 "these are

the things you should teach, 3:8 “trustworthy saying” and “stress these things” and “these things are excellent”.

Paul was making a comparison between true teaching and the lies of these many rebellious people and he was encouraging Titus to bring order to the church on Crete through the sound doctrine passed on by the apostles.

1. The teaching of Paul and the other apostles was central to the healthy life of the church.

Look with me if you will at v1-3.

Talking with the teaching team about this letter and how we preach it a couple of weeks ago, Gordon Randall, who will be doing Chap 3 said, “there’s always a problem with how you deal with the end bit” and indeed there is. However with Titus there is also the problem of how you deal with the start bit!

We can think it is just a bit of Paul’s biography before we get into v5 where Paul tells Titus what to do but actually it is much more than that. It tells us of Paul’s authority to direct Titus and through Titus the church in Crete or the church in Chineham and it shows the importance of the teaching of the apostles.

Paul here refers to himself as a servant or slave of God, one who was bound to do the will of God, and an apostle of Christ Jesus, one of the select few sent out with the gospel message of God’s grace and salvation which are to be found in Christ Jesus.

Why was he a slave and an apostle? Well, for the faith of God’s elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness. His role as an apostle was to lead people to faith in Jesus and through that see them grow up in Christ to live godly lives. He did this v2 based on the hope of eternal life, part of the covenant promise by God and revealed in God’s time through the preaching of the gospel. He knew that God had promised that all who accepted the gospel and came to faith in Jesus Christ would enter into eternal life. What a job to have to be bringing eternal life to people by preaching the gospel and this was the task entrusted to Paul by the command of Jesus.

It was this that gave a solid basis for the church be it on Crete or elsewhere. In Eph 2:19-20, “members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.”

The teaching of the apostles, which we have in the New Testament, is essential for proving a strong basis for the faith of the church and a clear framework for its life. So the call to Titus as we will see more next week was “teach what is in accord with sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1).

However such was the urgency of the matter that Sherriff Titus was urged to appoint some deputies. For it was clear to Paul that the order and strength of the church depended upon

2. true teachers

Titus was directed to appoint elders in every town. Just look with me quickly at the nature of these elders:

V6 they were to be able to manage their own households, presumably as we learn in 1 Tim 3:5 if they can't manage their household how can they manage God's church? The thrust in this frontier situation is that they should have a unity in the household not having one member worshipping this god, another that, and the father following Jesus.

Then v7 he must be blameless, that is above reproach and then we see a list of things to avoid. So he's not to be over-bearing, that is constantly exerting his will over others, not quick tempered, which can so easily damage relationships, not given to drunkenness which presumably was one of the faults of the false teachers, not violent and not pursuing dishonest gain, which as we see from v11 was one of the traits of the false teachers.

But then we see the positives and along with hospitable, upright and loving good we see self-control and discipline which is self restraint. The false teachers had no self restraint, they both allowed and sated every passion but Paul here speaks of a godly restraint based on a knowledge of the will of God and realising that some things are not good and even some good things need to be controlled so that they don't take us over, the love of money may be one along with many others.

We must look for leaders like this and we must encourage our leaders to grow into and display these characteristics. But understand in case you weren't aware that none of us is perfect and there will be times when we fail.

But then Paul completes the list with v9, "He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it."

The elder must be a true teacher, whose teaching is based on the teaching of the apostles and who wisely teaches others and refutes those who are in error. This friend is the mark of the true Christian leader and we must look for it and insist on it in our leaders.

I have to say that over the years I have been blessed by so many Christian leaders and teachers who have held to the teaching of the Apostles. When I first came to faith our Vicar was Tony Rigler, then at theological college men like David Wheaton, Geoff Shaw, David Field and Steve Motyer and since Richard Bewes, John Stott and Dick Lucas. Great men not because they were great men but because they held to the teaching of the apostles sacrificed much to teach it and so helped others like me on in the faith and in Christian ministry.

However the reverse is true and in the church today like the early church there are those who stray from the true doctrine and once leaders stray from the teaching of the Apostles they put at risk the faith of those whom they lead.

We saw this in our recent series from Malachi. Why were the people bringing rubbish animals for sacrifice, why weren't they giving the full tithe, why were they marrying wives who followed other gods, because the teachers weren't doing their job, "the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction— because he is the messenger of the LORD Almighty. But you have turned from the way and by your teaching have caused many to stumble" (Mal 2:7-8).

One of the sadness in our own day is that far too many in the church sit lightly to the word of God and to the teaching of the apostles. Their doctrine is not sound and the health of the church suffers. We must not judge others, as Jesus said, but we must test the teaching of a leader according to the word of God. It is an awesome privilege to preach and teach the word of God, no wonder James said "Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly" (James 3:1) because the spiritual well being of our listeners is in the hands of those who teach.

We must look for our leaders to be those who will teach sound doctrine for the health and growth of the church depends on it.

But then

3. faith leads to godliness

In v15 Paul compares the true believer with those who are not true. To the pure all things are pure. That is, using arguments from elsewhere in Paul it is not what we take into ourselves, such as meat that has been offered to idols, that makes us impure, purity is a state of our heart at one with God. Whereas if we are impure and corrupt then that affects everything. The salt water when it gets into the barrel of fresh water taints the whole.

These teachers were talking about ritual purity but Paul was showing that it is our inner purity that is much more important. Their minds and consciences were corrupt and so was their behaviour.

The knowledge of the truth v1 leads us to godliness. We are to walk the talk to live lives that reflect our faith, honour God and enhance the gospel, that is the true Christian path and that is what sound doctrine produces, the good tree as it were produces good fruit.

Titus was in a pioneer situation with a rag tag and bobtail army of Christians. To that army order needed to come, order from the commander, Jesus, through his general Paul and onto the Brigadier Titus and those instructions needed to be explained by him faithfully to the army, he needed to find others who understood the instructions and were obeying them to stand with him and be involved in bringing the instructions and order to the army and then to help the army obey those instructions for in that lay victory.

Friends for us in our own day our church and lives must be built on the word of God as we have it in the Old and New Testaments. We must look for, encourage, and support those who will teach us faithfully from that word and we then need to be those who, in the words of the collect from Bible Sunday, read mark learn and inwardly digest them and then let them show in the way we live our lives. True teachers based on true doctrine producing godly Christians – that should be our aim and our prayer.