



“THE CULTURE OF CHRISTIANITY” (Titus 1)

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Intro: Titus was an uncircumcised Greek who Paul had led to the Lord, and became a partner in ministry with him. When Paul writes this letter, Titus, he is on the island of Crete. It is a mountainous island with one large mountain called Mt. Ida, believed to be the place where Zeus was born. Crete was steeped in Greek Mythology. Greek gods were always lying. For example, Zeus would wrap himself in a fog in order to ravish some maiden, then later lie to his wife Hera about the affair. Cretans did a good job of becoming like the Greek gods they worshipped. Greek historian Polybius said, “on account of their innate avarice (excessive greed), Cretans live in a perpetual state of private quarrel, public feud, and civil strife...and you will hardly anywhere find characters more tricky and deceitful than those of Crete.” They were deceitful, dishonest; they loved money, and would cheat and lie for it. The Annals of the World (survey of world history) record that the Cretans sided with pirates against Rome for “dishonest gain.” Afterward, they tried to bribe Roman officials in order to pacify Rome’s actions against them. Rome stopped this by making a law that no one was to lend any money to a Cretan.

The gospel invaded this very pagan culture, and churches sprouted across the island. We do not have details on how these churches were planted, or who planted them. They could have begun with Cretans who were at Pentecost when Peter preached (Acts 2). Or Paul may have gone to Crete after being released from his first Roman imprisonment. Whether begun directly through Paul’s ministry or not, he certainly plays an important part in the establishment of these churches. The responsibility he gives to Titus here is essential for the continued health and spiritual growth of these churches.

THE TEXT

v.2b As mentioned in my introductory comments, the Greek gods were always lying and deceiving, so the Holy Spirit guides Paul to comment here about the integrity of the true God. God promised eternal life for mankind “before the beginning of time.” That’s some promise, and the fact that God promised it before the beginning of time is fascinating to me. See Genesis 1:26. Before creation, God spoke and made a promise of eternal life. Sometime later he spoke regarding the fulfillment of His promise. See Heb.1:5 (Ps.2:7). Amazing! The plan of God becoming flesh in the man Jesus, the Christ, was laid out *before time began!*

v.3 The word spoken in eternity past is now preached by Paul, as a result of Jesus’ command (Matthew 28:19). And we are privileged and commanded to proclaim the same message.

v.4a Right away it is clear that their faith did not rest in religious observance or attainment, but in the simple, powerful, and profound message of the gospel. See Gal.3:26-29; 5:6. The church is to be the most unique gathering of people anywhere in the world. See Ephesians 2:14-18; I Cor.6:9-11. The church of Jesus Christ is a wonderful kaleidoscope of incredibly diverse backgrounds and cultures all brought together through the gospel message. And it is imperative that every local church has leaders who represent the gospel, and ensure the purity of its message. That brings us to v.5.

vv.5-9 Blameless (v.6a) means not open to community accusation of unbiblical living; speaks not of sinless perfection, but of lifestyle. The husband of one wife; literally means a one woman man. This does not mean one cannot be an elder that is not married (Paul and Titus). Godly parent; refers to children in the home and under the parent's care and supervision. Not overbearing, not quick tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain, not a lover of money, hospitable, loves what is good, self-controlled, upright, holy, disciplined.

A Christian leader's example demonstrates to others that the gospel and its power are real.

- “Beneath their surface courtesies, many people are burdened by dissatisfying marriages, enslaved to lusts and addictions, entangled in patterns of thought and habit that they desperately hope - but can hardly imagine – they can escape. They are ensnared in dead end pursuits of money and power that control their lives without satisfying their souls...Godly leadership proves that freedom from the slavery of sin and selfishness is possible.” (Hughes, p.299).

Please note that these elders are not Bible College or seminary graduates. Rather, they are men whose lives have been changed through the timeless message of the gospel. Their leadership is essential to the spiritual health of the congregation they belong to. Everything rises and falls on leadership. These are men who have believed a message that changed their lives completely. They lived in a Cretan culture, but now they represent a culture unique to any culture, the culture of Christianity. Culture is the behaviors and beliefs characteristic of a group of people. Once the gospel makes its impact, behaviors and beliefs change. Paul is concerned that the leadership of each local church rightly represents the message of the gospel, and is sure to maintain its purity. Paul himself is a leader who rightly represents the message of the gospel. Remember how drastically his life had been changed? See I Tim.1:12-17. That brings us to v.10.

vv.10-16 Paul refers here to people who were perverting the message of the gospel. The main group doing this are called “the circumcision group.” Paul had run-ins and problems with them pretty much everywhere he went. They did great damage to the church in Galatia, and they even had an impact on the church in Jerusalem (Acts 11:2-3; Acts 15, Gal.2:11ff). They taught that the message of gospel was inadequate for salvation, that a person must also be circumcised according to the Law of Moses. Even those did not completely believe this still maintained that one who is circumcised (etc.) is closer to God than someone who is not. So they mixed law with grace, and by doing so perverted the message. Some Cretan Christians were obviously buying in to their message, and whole households were being ruined.

When we look at the characteristics of the people Paul refers to, it's easy to see their resemblance to the Pharisees. The Pharisees claimed to know God, but by their actions they denied him. They loved money. They believed one was righteous based on His keeping the Law of Moses. They taught rules of men (myths), etc. etc.

Anyone who bought into this message forfeited the possibility of further spiritual growth. They went backward instead of forward. As a result, they ended up with a religious front on the outside, but no inward reality of heart changed by the grace of God.

The quote in verse 12 was said by a man named Epimenides. He was a very revered Cretan., one of their most famous in history. He was a poet, a teacher, and a writer. He was born in the city of Cnossus on the island of Crete. He was ranked as one of the seven wise men of Greece, had a profound intellect, and was a very gifted orator and poet. He was a hero. Paul uses his quote to confirm the character of Cretans. They are base animals. They function on the sensual level. They are ruled by passion and instinct. Literally in the Greek, two words: slow bellies. They are big bellies that go slow. It pictures somebody who has overindulged, is over-satiated, fat, doesn't work, has uncontrolled lust, uncontrolled greed, and self-indulgence.

The point in the context is that those who were believing a perverted gospel message were forfeiting the power of the gospel to lead them to genuine godliness. They would maintain an outward religiousness about their lives, but the reality of Christ-likeness (godliness) would elude them. They would end up like the Pharisees, looking good on the outside but a lot of problems on the inside.

Verse 15, "To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure but both their mind and their conscience are defiled." Now remember, the context is Jewish, and these people who were perverting the message of the gospel believed that if you did all the ceremonies and kept all the traditions, etc., you would purify yourself. In other words, they were working from the outside in. That's, by the way, what religion does.

Jesus said, "It is not that which comes into a man that defiles him but that which comes out of him." If you're pure on the inside, then everything you do is pure. Everything you touch is purified because the issue of true religion is on the inside, not on the outside. If you're pure on the inside and you're right with God, everything you do is pure, everything you touch is purified. But to those who are defiled and unbelieving on the inside, then nothing is pure. If your insides are rotten, you'll make everything you touch rotten. If your inside is impure, you're going to make everything you touch defiled. You're going to desecrate everything you touch. Jesus said the Pharisees would travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when they converted they made them twice as much a son of hell as them. As religious as they made them, they yet defiled them, because all they did was make them religious.

Anytime we put make the focus outward religious conformity rather than inward Christ-like character, we not only misrepresent God, but we pollute the message of the gospel. The message Paul preached is one that can be preached in any culture, because the message was not focused on outward religious conformity, but rather an inward reality of repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. This is the timeless truth that will lead people to genuine godliness.

See Rom.2:28-29; II Cor.3:17-18

Legalism arouses my flesh rather than crucifies it (Rom.7:8; Col.2:20-23). Legalism makes me a slave, but the grace of God grants me liberty. The grace of God that comes through the message of the gospel changes my heart, and produces godly desires within me that help me overcome the ungodly desires of my flesh.