

Titus

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[0 : 00] Titus chapter 1. And as you turn there, let me dive in and ask you a question, a bit of a survey. How is your pursuit of godliness going? How is your mission for holiness moving along?

! Is that something that you think about? It's an important question because it's the question really that Paul wants to get Titus.

To tackle in this church on Crete where he writes this letter to him. Godliness is one of the central themes of this letter. So if you look at verse 1, Paul, a servant of God and apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect, for their knowledge of the truth which accords with godliness. It's a letter about godliness. If you get a highlighter pen and just go through Titus, you'll see dozens and dozens of references to godliness. To good works, turning from ungodliness and so on.

Now we've been going through one Timothy, haven't we, on Sunday mornings recently if you've been here over the last few months. And so you may have been thinking as we turn to Titus this morning, well Chris, where have you been for the last two months?

[1 : 21] Because isn't Titus just a kind of smaller version of the bigger, better letter to Timothy? There are similarities between Titus and Timothy, aren't there?

They're both letters written by Paul to co-workers in the church. We call them the pastoral epistles. There are similar things. In verse 5, Titus is told to put what remained into order in the church to appoint elders.

It's the same in Timothy, isn't it? He's told to teach sound doctrine. Similar again. There are other things that are similar. But I guess we've seen in Timothy that these pastoral epistles are not just sort of manuals for personnel positions.

They're not manuals for human resource management in a kind of church franchise. Paul deals with deeply theological issues.

He deals with our mindset about church and about life. So if 1 Timothy is about church as family, we saw last Sunday morning, I think Titus is about church godliness.

[2 : 36] Godliness in the life of the church. I often find myself searching for an answer to my own lack of godliness. There's a gap between what I believe and often how I behave.

And I think God has given us this letter to help us move forward in that. I think there are dangers about thinking about godliness. We're going to do a bit of Titus 1 this morning and then come back to Titus in a couple of weeks.

There are dangers as we think about godliness. The first thing is, it's probably not the most popular of subjects, is it? As soon as we start thinking about personal holiness and godliness, I wonder whether we get turned off a bit.

We start to think, you know, this is going to mean that my life is just going to get a whole lot worse, isn't it? It's going to mean that my life is restricted and that life becomes strict.

Piety and godliness, they're kind of old-fashioned words, aren't they? We get turned off by them.

J.C. Ryle, 130 years ago, said that godliness is my standard of living.

[3 : 56] It is my standard of living. I wonder if you think he's right. Is my standard of living more to do with my pay packet or my comfort or my lifestyle than it is my holiness, my godliness?

Chapter 1, verse 2, Paul says that this godliness is to do with our hope of eternal life. Growing in godliness is about living a kind of heavenly life, a heavenly perspective now on earth.

So growing in godliness should be a happy thing, should be a joyful thing. It's to live our eternal lives now, in a sense.

I think the second danger, though, is that actually I just feel pretty hopeless about my godliness. It's just not possible to grow in godliness, I might feel.

I've tried it before. I've tried to grow in godliness, but I'm still sinning in the way that I always was. I just feel hopeless about it.

[5 : 10] I think that is another danger. Another danger is, though, that we start to think like Pharisees, isn't it? We start to become legalistic and graceless as we think about holiness.

So godliness is a bit of a minefield, and we're not going to be sinless this side of heaven, are we? We're not deluded about that.

But we should be thinking about growing in our personal godliness as a church. So together, I want to invite you on a quest for godliness as we look through Titus.

And as we do that, our pursuit of godliness, it should be a joyful thing. It should be a liberating thing. An attractive thing. It should be possible as we go through Titus.

So Paul writes this letter to Titus. He's on the island of Crete. And Crete, like many cultures, lived up to its stereotypes. I was trying to think of stereotypical cultures without offending anybody here this morning.

[6 : 18] So the English reserve, it's probably true, isn't it? Welsh sentimentalism, maybe. German efficiency. The Spanish Latin fiery temperament.

Well, what about Cretans? What are they known for? What's their stereotypical image? Just look at verse 12. One of the Cretans said, a prophet of their own said, Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.

Paul adds in verse 13, the testimony is true. Yeah, they're right. It's pretty scathing, isn't it? Cretans were notorious for ungodly behaviour.

Crete was an island. It was full of little towns with factions. It was a popular place for Mediterranean pirates to live.

And the Cretans were famous for sensuality. And so the great enemy of godliness on this island, in this church, was the Cretan ethos of selfishness.

[7 : 25] Of self-scentredness. There is a church here, but they're breathing in this atmosphere of self-scentredness. So whether it's being lazy, or being evil beasts, or being liars, the self was king on Crete.

There was a gap between what the church believed and how they behaved. And next time, we'll see some of the signs of that in chapter 2. There were addictions and family breakdowns.

Chapter 3, the lifestyle was one of individualism. So the self has to be taken out in order for godliness to come in, in the life of the church.

Selfishness has to be taken out for godliness to come in. So how is God going to do that? How is God going to kill off selfishness and bring godliness in?

What does Titus need to know to promote godliness? Well, the first thing, selfishness goes out, godliness moves in, by God's sovereign choice of his people.

[8 : 43] God sovereignly chooses us. Cutting through selfishness will mean resetting their view of themselves.

Paul says in verse 1, that this letter is for the faith of God's elect. Verse 2, their eternal life is promised before the ages began.

Now, that is quite a unique way for Paul to begin a letter. Why does he start the letter in that way?

Why is it that necessary to say? Well, what they need to know is that they are there because of God's sovereign choice, because of his election.

How does a self-centred person go to church? Well, the self-centred person, the Cretan, goes to church and thinks that we are there, that I am there because I've chosen to be there, that I am a Christian because I chose to be a Christian, I am the author of my own destiny, I'm a self-made Christian in a self-centred culture.

But the doctrine of election is a wrecking ball to selfishness. It's a lightning bolt to our kind of autonomous, self-centred mentality, our kind of subjectivism.

[10 : 12] Paul in Romans chapter 9 says that whoever becomes a Christian or not doesn't depend on human will or exertion, but on God who has mercy.

His election says that I am here this morning and you are here this morning because God has made a choice. God has chosen his people, he has elected his people.

Living in a self-centred world, we think we're self-made. But Paul is telling us that the only reason that I am in the family of God is because God sovereignly determined it to be so.

I am part of his elected people because he had mercy. So do you see, through election, God takes the self out of salvation.

He takes the self out of salvation. Now, don't get me wrong at this point, our actions, our choices have consequences, don't they? To quote the gladiator, Russell Crowe, what we choose to do in life echoes in eternity.

[11 : 21] And the call for the Gospel, from the Gospel itself, is to make a decision, isn't it? To repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, to receive the Holy Spirit. It's not a kind of let go and let God thing, the Gospel.

There's a command in the Gospel. There's a responsibility that we have to respond to it. And neither are we to ask the question, am I elect?

That is not a helpful thing to ask. Am I one of these elect, chosen people? Actually, the Bible, the way the Bible tells us to do it is just listen to the call of the Gospel and respond to the call to repent and believe in Jesus Christ.

That's how you know if you're a Christian, actually, whether you've done that. But behind our choice of God is his choice for us.

We are not self-made Christians. It's his work, it's his election, it's his promise. Election, God's sovereign choice of his people, it takes the self out of salvation.

[12 : 33] I wonder if you were God and you could choose who to save, who would you save? Just picture for a moment a 50-floor skyscraper.

And on each floor, it's full of people. And each floor represents a certain kind of level. So at the top, maybe they're the best people, and at the bottom, they're the worst kind of people.

Who would you choose to save? I think I would probably kind of chop horizontally the top two or three floors off. I'd kind of cream the cream off.

Maybe the most good people, or the people with the most faith, or the people that had come from the right sort of family backgrounds, with the right religious heritage.

I would probably cut horizontally off at the top. But if we cut horizontally, God actually cuts vertically down the skyscraper.

[13 : 35] God's cut is always vertical. Amongst his chosen people are good people and bad people. People with great faith, and people with faith the size of a mustard seed.

People who are Jewish, people who are Gentiles, people who are women and men, children and adults. God's cut through the skyscraper.

It's vertical. It leaves no person out. That's why Paul says to Titus in verse 4, to Titus, my true child, in a common faith. There's a commonality amongst believers.

Chapter 2, verse 11, the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people. For all types of people. That is God's choice.

You know, it wasn't as if you were on the top floor, and God kind of creamed you off. No, you can be in the basement, can't you? You can call out to him, no matter where you are on the skyscraper.

[14 : 41] That's why there is a church on Crete. Isn't it? Think about that. That is the only reason why there can be a church. In a place like Crete.

Or in Ealing. Or in Brentford. So God's election, God's choice of his people, it says to us, it says to us as members of this church, God is first.

God is first in all of this. From the least of us to the greatest of us, we are not the cream off the top of the skyscraper. It's not according to human will, or exertion, but according to his mercy.

And his choice came first. His choice undermines my individualism, my selfishness, my one-upmanship, my jealousy, my anger, my grudges.

It destroys self-centeredness. In those moments of godlessness and selfishness, I need to pause, don't I?

[15 : 49] And I need to think to myself, how on earth did I get here in the first place? Why am I here? God's election makes our self-centeredness look so ugly.

Our self-autonomy, it makes us ask, where would I be without him and his choice? It should make us bow down, shouldn't it, and say, why me, Lord?

And as we ask that, we start to move from self-centeredness, from a self-centered mindset to a God-centered mindset.

His election strips the self out of salvation. Secondly, though, God pushes selfishness out and godliness in by giving us his one truth.

He gives us his one truth. Now, you may have noticed that the priority for Titus in this quest for godliness is to get God's one truth established in the church.

[16:58] You'll notice that the appointment of godly elders in verse 5 to 9, they are to be men who exemplify the truth. At verse 9, they must hold firm to the trustworthy words taught.

They may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine, and rebuke those who contradict it. There's a threefold kind of instruction there of fencing off God's truth in the church, isn't there?

Titus himself, in chapter 2, verse 1, he must teach or say what accords with sound doctrine. And later, the church themselves must do that in chapter 2.

God's truth is the centre of godliness in the church. Now, why is that? Why is God's truth so important?

I think there are two reasons for that. I think the main reason is that the truth of the gospel itself, the content of the gospel, is the power to motivate godliness in the church.

[18:02] And if you look at chapter 2, verse 11, we've already seen it, haven't we? The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness, to live godly lives, verse 13.

It's the content of the gospel that trains us to live godly lives. And as we come to that passage in a couple of weeks, I want to spend more time on that, on the content of the gospel.

But the second reason is that in a culture of lies, God's truth stands alone as the one source of reality.

God's truth disarms another form of selfishness in our lives. It's the selfish subjectivism of personal truth.

You see, in verse 2, Paul describes God as God who never lies, who has manifested his truth through the preaching of Paul's gospel.

[19:12] When God speaks in the gospel message, he's revealing the standard of all truth. He never lies. He's revealing the benchmark of reality.

And the truth of God is the destroyer of selfish subjectivism. It's told that the Cretans invented a story.

The story was about the mythical god Zeus. And they said that Zeus had been born on the island of Crete and that his mum had brought him up in a cave and eventually he died on Crete.

That was the story. You can actually go and see this cave today on the island of Crete. But Cretans were experts at making up stories.

They were experts at lying to get one up on everybody else. They were scammers. They were liars. Lies on Crete were something that you could use to sort of get an upper hand to make a fast buck.

[20:18] A euphemism for lying was to Cretanise. It's that old joke, isn't it? How do you know if he's lying while he's moving his lips? That was the Cretan thing.

Truth was dispensable. And again, the self was king of truth. The self was commander of what I could say, what I couldn't say.

You can mould your own truth to fit your own agenda, but God never lies. God deals exclusively with the genuine. What he says is reality itself.

So the quality of God's truth cuts through the self defining, self determined truths of subjectivism on Crete. The idea that you can think what you want to think, can believe what you want to believe as long as it suits your way of living, as long as it gives you an advantage, that's fine, that's the Cretan way.

And again, we're not so different in London, are we? But I wonder if there is a bit of a difference in that we do that in our culture, not just to get a few extra quid by making up some myths.

[21:35] We do it so that we can actually shape our lives exactly how we want them to be. We want to have our individual truths, our individual beliefs.

And individual religions. Because we want to put the self back into salvation, don't we? We want to be in charge of our own salvation in whatever shape or form or religion we determine that to be.

But God's truth says you can't do that. If we just think about that mentality for a moment, the selfish way of abusing truth, truth, that mentality just can't sustain itself.

If truth can be moulded by my own personal opinion, if that's the only thing that matters, well actually there's no point in talking at all, is there?

Nothing I say really matters, does it? language itself means nothing. This sermon means nothing.

[22 : 44] In the end subjectivism with our own personal truths just leads to silence and meaninglessness. Now of course I'm not saying am I that we can't have our own opinions, we can't have our own thoughts, we're not allowed to ask questions and debate things, but it's gone beyond that.

In Crete and in our culture, we've lost any sense of objectivity because the self has become king of truth. The quality of God's truth though, it smashes that and it says there is a reality that you need to know about and it's a reality that has nothing to do with your personal opinion.

God's truth, it smashes our selfishness. It says to us, I can't think what I like. It cuts through my self-centered opinionated subjectivism.

He takes the self out of my salvation by giving us his one truth, his one gospel. I wonder as well whether it's got to make us think about when we feel that we need to lie.

lie. I do that, you do that, I'm sure. What are we doing there when we think that we need to lie?

When we're thinking I can say things that imply something else, that I give a kind of half-truth or I embezzle the truth.

[24 : 16] What am I thinking when I think that I can play fast and loose with the truth, with right and wrong, there's no objective standards. You know, I think we are thinking there that there is no standard.

It's the thin end of the wedge, isn't it, of living in a culture that says truth, yeah, you can do what you like with it actually. Little lies are the thin end of the wedge of the big lie that you can say what you like.

You can believe what you like. But if we are honest people, we are honest people because we have a God who is honest and who has given us the one big truth about himself and his salvation.

And our speech needs to reflect that. It needs to show that. By telling the truth in every situation, we are agreeing, aren't we, that you can't decide what's real and what isn't.

We are saying there is a truth and there is a lie. And what is true and what isn't true cannot depend on what you want it to be to suit your own lifestyle.

[25 : 38] Because God has said you can't choose that. He says in order to be saved, it is my way or it's the highway. I'm going to take the self out of your salvation by telling you what my one truth, the one truth.

He pushes the self out of salvation and pulls godliness back in by giving us his one truth. The third thing and the last thing, God decreases selfishness, he brings godliness in by giving us his grace.

He gives us his grace. It's in knowing his grace that we will grow in godliness. Chapter 2 verse 11 and 12, again, we've seen that the grace of God trains us for godliness.

That is the motivation for godliness in Titus. Paul, in the pastoral epistles, he describes God in a unique way that is nowhere described in the rest of the New Testament.

Something that you might gloss over actually, just look at verse 3, he describes God as God our saviour. And later he calls Jesus our saviour in verse four, doesn't he?

[27 : 07] It's a unique way that Paul describes God as God our saviour. And knowing God as our saviour underpins the quest for godliness. That's the characteristic that Paul wants us to concentrate on.

Not necessarily God our commander, or judge, or lawgiver, but God our saviour. He is the God who cuts vertically down the skyscraper.

He saves all kinds of people. He saves evil people and liars and evil beasts and lazy gluttons.

Knowing God as our saviour and understanding his grace is the answer to a self-centred church.

You can do religion, can't you? And still let the self be king. And that is one of the big problems on Creeks.

That is the problem with false teachers in verse 10 to 16. These false teachers, they're trying to do godliness whilst rejecting God's grace without seeing God as saviour.

[28 : 24] After you look at verse 10, we'll see that they're from the circumcision party, they're from a Jewish branch of religion. And they're devoted religious people, aren't they?

They're devoted, Paul says, to Jewish myths and the commandments of people who turn from the truth. So they probably look pretty religious. Verse 16, they claim to know God.

But they're going around from house to house upsetting whole families, Paul says. They're probably small meetings of teaching and sort of rhetoric of teaching things.

and they're going around upsetting people. And I think verse 15 gives us a clue as to what they're saying. Their argument is about purity, isn't it?

They're going around telling people that there are certain rituals they have to do to be made pure, to be made clean. There are perhaps certain foods that defile you, perhaps certain rules and commandments that you have to follow to be made clean again.

[29 : 40] They're like the Pharisees, aren't they, that Jesus spoke to, that thought spiritual defilement was something that happened on the outside of the body. Do you remember that? Jesus says to them, doesn't he, no, no, spiritual defilement is what comes out of a person, it's what's on the inside.

It's impurity of the heart, of the motivation, of the will. people. And that is only dealt with in God's grace.

To reject God's grace and to remain selfish in your religion, to let self be king of your religion is the big danger here.

Now just notice that these false teachers are not like the weak Christians in Romans chapter 14. So do you remember Romans 14? There's a debate, isn't there, between strong Christians and weak Christians.

And the weak Christians are ones with sensitive consciences. They have scruples about eating certain foods and doing things on certain days.

[30 : 49] But Paul is not banning all scruples. I think some of us may have those kind of things. Maybe we've come from backgrounds, from other religions, and we've got consciences about eating certain foods, doing things on certain days.

But Paul is not banning that. But look at these people. You see, these people are not people with particular scruples. No, verse 15, to them, nothing is pure.

Nothing is pure to them. In their quest for godliness, nothing is pure. They're pharisaic. They're relying on themselves and on the commandments of God to get themselves pure.

Their religion is all about the self. This isn't sensitive consciences. It's why I think Paul quotes that great quote from the Cretan poet in verse 13 here, right in the middle of the discussion about false teachers.

Because the false teachers are the worst kind of cretins, aren't they? This is the worst kind of cretin selfishness.

[32 : 02] Self-centeredness and religion is the worst possible mix. It's the worst kind of enemy against real godliness. Verse 16, they're actually unfit for any good work, aren't they?

It's ironic, isn't it? Their main argument is about purity and godliness, but as they suck grace out of that, they're unfit for godly work.

Their minds are defiled, Paul says. They're the kind of people that turn from God's grace in the gospel, they turn from the truth of what God has done for us in the gospel, and they fill that gap with false rules and regulations.

You see, God has taken the self out of salvation, but they want to put it back in, don't they? And selfish religion is the great enemy of real godliness.

Take away grace and think that God cuts the skyscraper horizontally off at the top, and you have yourself a disobedient group of people who are unfit for any good work.

[33 : 12] God. So, in our quest for godliness, the moment our quest for godliness becomes about our determination alone, when it becomes about extra rules, and as soon as it starts to put the self back into my salvation, it becomes defiled.

world. The great enemy of godliness is the self. Reliance on self, worship of the self, preeminence of the self, thinking that we're the cream.

I was chatting to somebody from this church a couple of years ago, I won't mention their name, somebody worth listening to, and we were chatting about godliness, and they were saying that their battle for godliness as they were young was a real struggle.

But there came a turning point when they realised that their quest for godliness was about God, and about his grace. And that was the turning point.

It was still hard work, but that changed their perspective on their own godliness. Augustine says we are curved in on ourselves.

[34 : 31] And the great enemy of God-centredness in this church is self-centredness. It is our concave hearts bent in on themselves.

It is thinking that we can get here and we can get anywhere off our own backs. It is thinking we can do it. And that is the spirit of the age.

Where the right way to live is to live for the self, where the self is king. To put the self back into your salvation. But the quest for godliness must only be about God himself.

love. Because we are here because of his choice, his one truth and his grace. Isn't it the very essence of godliness to forget the self and to see how much it really is about him?

let's pray