

## A Truthful Word from the God Who Never Lies

2026-06-07 – Titus 1

Through the Apostle Paul's thirteen letters in the Bible, the Lord gave His church eternally precious truth. This truth is not abstract; it connects to earthly living and blesses us with a heavenly minded confidence that what we are doing pleases our gracious Lord and Savior. This revealed truth is deeply personal and practical, forming the foundation upon which we can and must build our lives to the glory of God. In fact, every genuine God-fearing Christian must and will eagerly desire to build up their own heart, as well as their family and their local church family, in this truth. God revealed wonderful, heavenly, and practical truth through one of the Apostle Paul's last and shorter letters during his earthly life: namely Paul's letter to Titus. Titus is both theologically deep and practically effective. You will be richly blessed and your faith in Christ deeply encouraged. Join us these next few weeks as, Lord willing, we carefully read, intently study, and wisely apply the truth of this wonderful letter. May Christ be praised! Soli Deo Gloria!

Well, grace and peace from God our Father, from Jesus Christ, our risen, ruling, one-day-soon-returning Lord, the only Savior, Brothers and sisters in Christ, and good morning, friends. It is good to be with you on this Lord's Day, to partake of the Lord's Supper, to sing praises to our worthy God, and to go to God's Word and to consult it and study it and God's truths.

In just a moment, I'm going to read from Titus chapter 1. Titus in chapter 1. I'm going to read that in its entirety. But before I do, let me pray and entrust our time to the Lord, our worthy God. Join me in the word of prayer.

*Almighty God and merciful Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Lord, you are the King of glory. You are the God who is the truth. You are the Lord who never lies. And we thank you, God, that your word is trustworthy. We thank you, God, that though every man should lie about your character, your character is forever true and always faithful.*

*We thank you for these friends at Cornerstone Church, and we pray for your rich blessing upon each and every one of them, deep in their faith, grow their Love. May their knowledge of the truth lead to a wonderful blessing of great godliness that exalts Christ Jesus. God, we thank you for your Spirit who guides us in the truth. We're grateful, God, that your Spirit leads us and convicts us. And we thank you, God, so much that you have not abandoned us or left us to ourselves. Thank you Lord, that your word tells us is so clear—that you will never leave us nor forsake us.*

*And God, we confess that we are still great sinners, those in need of sanctification. We are feeble and forgetful. We are those who still have sins we battle against. We seek to put to death, and God, for so many sins—the word, thought, deed, inaction—even habits, God, that we have yet to be rid of, we entrust those to you and confess them here today, whatever those sins may be upon our hearts.*

*Lord, with those sins on the forefront of our minds, we praise you for the hope of your Word, the pardon and assurance that so wonderfully breathes life into us, that you are the God who says you are faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness as we confess our sins. So thank you, God, for this. Thank you for who you are.*

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Pastor Brandon D. Myers

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*Now we look around our nation and the nations, and we grieve as so many reject Jesus Christ and stand opposed to his Lordship. We know that it is a futile attempt. And yet, God, we long to see those who are right now at war with you and rebelling against your Lordship receiving Christ Jesus and worshiping you, God, in spirit and in truth.*

*And so, God, we pray for the salvation of those friends and family members and loved ones, God, would you sovereignly save them and draw them to yourself? We think of sons and daughters. We think of nieces and nephews. We think of cousins. We think of dear neighbors. We think of parents. The coworkers who are dear to us and yet far from Christ. Please, God, would you sovereignly save them and draw them to Jesus?*

*And Lord, we pray that the gospel would go forth in this nation, that you would help us to be those who make disciples of Jesus and live to the praise of your glory. Help us to do so consistently. Help us to do so faithfully, without any shame in the gospel. And God, we need your help to do this. We will not do it on our own. So help us, Lord, we pray. We need you, and we thank you that you've spoken your word to us.*

*We think of those who are in chains for Jesus Christ around the world. As Hebrews 13 calls us to remember, God, and you invite us to think on, we pray for those who are in chains for their faith in Jesus Christ across the nations. Be with them and help them to persevere. Strengthen them today, and may we support them as best we can, God, and have them on the forefront of our minds.*

*Forgive us, God, for our apathy toward the persecuted church across the nations. And please, God, protect them. May the rule of law prevail. And keep their eyes fixed on eternity, God, should injustice prevail and should they enter into eternity in an unjust situation. Oh God, thank you that you are the God who says, "Vengeance is mine, and I will repay." God, we rejoice at this knowledge. That it is not ultimately up to us to right every wrong, but we look to you, the King of Glory. It is to you our help comes from.*

*And so, God, we thank you for your word. We thank you for your people. We pray for your Spirit through your Word today to strengthen these brothers and sisters in Christ, to convict any sinners who are here today and without hope and without Christ. God, lead them today to saving faith in Jesus. May today be the day of salvation for them. God, all this we ask in the precious and powerful name of King Jesus, and all God's people said, "Amen."*

Well, friends, I invite you to turn to Titus 1 again, and if you are able, would you please stand as I read from Titus 1 starting in verse 1 all the way through verse 16. You know the word of the Lord:

***"Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness, in the hope of eternal life. The God who cannot lie promised before time began. In his own time he has revealed his word in the preaching with which I was entrusted by the command of God our Savior, to Titus, my true son in our common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior. The reason I left you in Crete was to set right what was left undone and, as I directed you, to appoint elders in every town. An elder must be blameless: the husband of one wife, with faithful children who are not accused of wildness or rebellion. As God's overseer of his household, he must be blameless: not arrogant, not hot-tempered, not an excessive drinker, not a bully, not greedy for money, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, righteous, holy, self-controlled, holding to the faithful message as taught, so that he will be able both to encourage with sound teaching and to refute those who contradict it. For there are many rebellious people, full of empty talk and deception, especially those from the circumcision party. It is necessary to silence them. They are ruining entire households by teaching what they shouldn't in order to get money dishonestly. One of their very own prophets said, 'Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.' This testimony is true. For this reason, rebuke them sharply, so that they may be sound in the faith and may not pay attention to Jewish myths and the commands of people who reject the truth. To the pure, everything is pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing***

***is pure. In fact, both their mind and conscience are defiled. They claim to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, and unfit for any good work.***” (Titus 1:1–16)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated.

Well, I wonder, friends, if someone asked you the question, “How is your relationship with God these days?” how you might answer that question. What is your communion with the Lord like these days? How’s your relationship with him? What is your pursuit of godliness like?

Please understand that for true Christians the Lord gives us, in no uncertain terms, phrases and images we can and must hold on to to help us in the Christian life. Christian life is described as a struggle in Philippians 3 by the apostle Paul: “I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.” In Hebrews 12:1–2 we read that the Christian life is like a race. It’s a race where we are called to throw off every encumbrance and the sin that so easily entangles and to run with endurance the race set out for us.

So it’s a struggle. It’s a race. The Christian life is also compared to a fight in 1 Timothy 6. 1 Corinthians 7 speaks of it as training. It requires discipline, same with 1 Timothy 4 and 1 Corinthians 7 for that matter. These are vital images. These are metaphors for us that we’re supposed to hold on to, to grasp and take hold of so that we would live the Christian life faithfully.

We’ve seen 2 Timothy 2: be a good soldier for Christ Jesus, a competitor competing for the prize. Colossians 1 speaks of laboring with all energy. It’s a labor. And then our Lord and Savior Jesus especially spoke often of this idea of being a guard tower, being watchful, be on guard, paying attention, and let no one deceive you. There’s another image of being a guard. 2 Timothy 1. And then there’s battle: “Put to death what is earthly” in Colossians 3. Jude 3: contend for the faith.

There’s also not only running from something but toward something, so you have “flee sin” and then you have “walk in step with the Spirit.” What do I bring up these images and metaphors this morning when introducing the book of Titus? Here is the point.

Under God’s amazing grace in Christ, under the amazing hope of the gospel—the good news that God saves sinners freely by his grace—under this good news that Jesus Christ, through his sin-atonement death on the cross where he took the penalty for our sins in our place, this Jesus who rose again and now lives, who ascended and intercedes forevermore for those who trust in him, all by God’s grace—this wonderful news, this good news that we proclaim and herald and believe in—this good news is not opposed to godliness. It is not opposed to good works. It is not opposed to the Christian life that is devoted to something. It is very clearly marked by a pursuit.

Not at all. Now, to be clear, we do not work for grace. And we’ll say more on that momentarily. But we have to understand that no Christian, no human being, slouches toward or slumps toward holiness. You’re not automatically sanctified when you are saved. When you put your faith in Jesus, it’s not as if everything has been complete in your life. This is very basic to Christian theology, but it’s so important to realize. The grace of God is not an excuse to act like godliness does not matter.

Consider the very late, wise professor Jay Adams, who said the following (and he's correct): *"You may have sought and tried to obtain instant godliness. There's no such thing. We want somebody to give us three easy steps to godliness and we'll take them next Friday and be godly. The trouble is, godliness doesn't come that way."*

D.A. Carson, professor of New Testament and church elder right here in our own state in Libertyville, *"People do not drift towards holiness. Apart from grace-driven effort, people do not gravitate toward godliness, prayer, obedience to Scripture, faith, and delight in the Lord. We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance. We drift toward disobedience and call it freedom. We drift toward superstition and call it faith. We cherish the indiscipline of lost self-control and call it relaxation. We slouch toward prayerlessness and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism. We slide toward godlessness and convince ourselves we have been liberated."*

And that is true for so many self-professing Christians, even self-professing evangelical Christians in this nation. This is a problem. A massive problem.

To point out that this is not something that is bound up here in time: though the late Jay Adams is now with the Lord, and D.A. Carson is nearing the end of his life, from another generation, Charles Haddon Spurgeon said the same thing: *"True gospel preaching does not decry holy living. Nay, it sets up the highest possible standard and declares the way to reach it."*

So understand, friends, this is not something time-bound to our era. The gospel, the good news of Jesus, is not opposed to the pursuit of godliness. Not at all.

Why are we talking about this? Well, there's reasons for that. But today, with God's help, we're going to start a three-week series through the book of Titus (hopefully the book of Romans will whet your appetite—wonderful book that is). Here's another book by the apostle Paul, a short personal letter that Paul writes.

When you think about Titus, there are at least three main themes in the book of Titus. Here's just three of them.

1. Titus first powerfully shows we do not work for God's grace, but from and in and under God's grace in Christ.
2. A second theme in Titus is this: Titus concisely calls us to rightly and diligently pursue godly order through truth to God's glory. It's an important theme. We'll see it especially today in Titus 1. Lord willing.
3. And then third, this is a third theme: Titus accurately details what those who oppose God's truth are like and why they must be rebuked.

So packed into this small, short letter is incredible and wonderful truth. If you've been reading through your Bible reading plan and maybe you just hit Numbers and you're just coming across all these genealogies and you're tempted to give up, here's a great exercise for you. Maybe just consider reading through Titus. It takes seven minutes to read through on this Lord's Day. You could read through it a number of times and read through it again and again and again over these next few weeks. You will be

blessed. You will be strengthened. You will be pushed towards greater godliness under the grace of God. I guarantee it.

So with the Lord's help, today I want to walk through chapter 1 of Titus, and I pray that you are encouraged to pursue godliness under the grace of God. That's the hope. That's the hope for you individually, but also as a local church family. So let's walk through it in three parts.

1. First, a God-centered greeting.
2. Then we will look at an elder's high calling.
3. And then, with the Lord's help, we will close off by looking at this difficult ministry context Paul wrote to Titus concerning.

### **1. A God-Centered Greeting (Titus 1:1-2)**

First, let's look now at this God-centered greeting, and it's really a glorious greeting here. Many scholars point out that other than Romans and Galatians, this is the longest of Paul's introductions, the longest greeting that he has, and it is incredibly God-centered. In just these first four verses you have nine direct references to the Lord over and over again: God, God, God, God, God, God, God, God, God. Paul is a God-centered man. He is gripped by this. He is gripped by the Lord.

And in this God-centered greeting, we see very clearly that this source is from God. This letter of Titus is from God who promised eternal life and never lies. It is the character of God. He never ever lies. You can take that to the bank. You can rely on that forever. There are people in your life who you think he or she would never lie—your mom, your dad, some dear old saint. But every one of us, every single human being, does not, again, naturally drift towards truth. We drift away from it. We have lies in our hearts. Proverbs speaks about this: that folly is bound up in the heart of a child. We are totally depraved. We are sinners by nature and by choice. That's what the Scriptures plainly teach.

So this is the character of One, namely God, who is markedly different from us, altogether different from us, from any of us. He never lies. There's never been a moment when God has uttered half a truth or something partially came through. The Lord's Word stands, and throughout the Bible we can see hundreds if not thousands of times this is the case. Here's just a few of them:

***"God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should repent. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not make it good?" (Numbers 23:19)***

The answer there is absolutely "Yes".

***"And also the Eternal One of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret." (1 Samuel 15:29)***

The character of God constantly throughout the Bible is displayed as truth, is displayed as faithful, is displayed as he does not say something and do something else. And this is wonderfully reassuring for those of us who live in a fickle world, a world where sometimes our best friends betray us. The God of heaven and earth, my friends, can never lie.

And what has he promised? He has promised eternal life. The God who never lies has promised eternal life. And this letter of Titus is God-centered in the sense that it is from him, this God who never lies.

A second characteristic of this God-centered greeting is this: that it is through Paul, who was Christ's apostle and also God's slave. We saw this in the book of Romans that Paul referred to himself as a 'doulos', a slave of Christ Jesus. Here he is a slave of God. But the point is the same. Before he says "I'm an apostle" to Titus and those in Crete, he says what he says: "I am a slave of God." That is, "I'm a servant, I'm a slave. I have a master in heaven. I'm not a man calling the shots in my life as if I'm in charge, as if I'm the Lord. I'm the servant of another. I'm subjected to his word. He reigns and he rules over me."

It's a God-centered greeting. We see that the apostle Paul wants everyone to know, "I'm not first an apostle, a sent one who was chosen by God for this specific task. I'm not first and foremost that. I want you to know I am a slave. I'm subjected underneath God Almighty, just like all."

And remember, as we said a few weeks ago with Romans 1, every time we read an introduction to Paul's letters, we should be amazed. Why? Because the God of all grace to his everlasting glory saved this man, who was a wretched, wicked terrorist of Christ's church. There are people around the world today who are harming Christians for terrorist groups and it seems impossible for God to save. But God saved the apostle Paul. He can save them too. So power of the gospel, friends.

In this God-centered greeting, it is from God. It is through Paul. And a third characteristic is this: in this God-centered greeting we see it is for God's elect who become more godly. Don't miss this—by the truth. By the truth.

Look in your Bible there at that greeting in Titus 1:1: "**Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth, which is according to godliness.**" (Titus 1:1) Your translation might say "which leads to godliness." There is a correlation, my friends, between godliness, growth in grace and Christlikeness, and the truth. They're inseparable. You do not have one without the other. You can't say the Lord's really grown me over here apart from his truth. It does not happen. Don't deceive yourself. You need the truth. You need the Word of God.

And the correlation here is profound and powerful, so much so that we can say this: no truth, no growth. Small truth, small growth. Great truth, great growth. Notice it says "their knowledge of the truth." What truth? Well, first and foremost, the character of God, the God who never lies, the truth of the person and the work of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, who died on Calvary's cross. This truth. This truth that God promised eternal life.

You want a growing godliness, you claim, "I want to grow in Christlikeness and virtue," my friend. Guess what you absolutely, fundamentally, foundationally need. You need the truth. Don't think for a moment you will grow without the truth. So many Christians think it will just happen, as if you don't have to open the Bible and sit under it and learn from it and love it and grow in it. Our Bible study groups should be filled to the brim with every Christian of every local church. We should sit under the authority of the Word. We should love to study the Word of God. We need the Word of God.

There's a correlation for God's elect, those who've been chosen by God's grace. God didn't look down and see that you were worthy. As Matthew West says in his excellent song, "I'm not loved because I'm worthy. I'm loved because God is good. I'm not loved because I'm so good. I'm so worthy. Look at me, God." God is good. God is faithful. Guess what he does? He saves you. He saves you because he's good. And he says, "I will make you what you are not by my grace." That's what he does. It's an amazing, amazing reality for God's elect.

If you are one of God's elect, let me tell you something. You will never for a second be arrogant. You will never for a second walk on this earth and look down on someone as if you're better than them. D.T. Niles, the evangelist from Sri Lanka, once said, "*What is evangelism? What is it? It is one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.*" That's what it is.

The elect of God, those chosen by God's grace, because God is good, not because we are, because he is good, must grow in godliness, and we grow by our knowledge of the truth. We see this all throughout the Bible. Consider just a few other texts:

***"Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth."*** (John 17:17)

***"You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen."*** (2 Peter 3:17–18)

There's a connection between your knowledge of the truth and your godliness. They're related. They're inseparable.

A fourth characteristic of this God-centered greeting is this: it is to Titus, who was Paul's true son in the same faith. So see how God-centered this is. Paul is writing to this true son. Some scholars think this is probably letting us know and alerting us that Paul actually, under his ministry, Titus was converted. He heard the gospel and was saved under the ministry of the apostle Paul. It's very possible.

One of the things we know for certain is that Paul had deep affection for this younger brother. He considered him a son in the faith, in the same faith. We have a common faith in Christ Jesus. My faith is not better than yours because I'm an apostle. We have the same faith. Different ministries, but the same faith, the same Lord.

And so in this God-centered greeting, it's amazing to see: the one this is from—God; it is through Paul; it is also something that is for God's elect; it is for you and me and all the elect of all human history, starting with that first-century group in Crete. And it is to Titus. That is the God-centered greeting here. That is remarkable and astounding.

## 2. An Elder's High Calling

Now let's consider secondly an elder's high calling. An elder's high calling. There are three marks of this, if I had to point out. The first could be summarized like this: that an elder's high calling here in this text is

detailing a qualified man, a biblically qualified man, who is faithful in his family life. That's the first mark, if you had to summarize it.

Paul says in verse 5: *"For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you."* (Titus 1:5) So in Crete, by the grace of God, it seems the gospel had spread and in all these surrounding cities there was a need to appoint in these local churches elders. There was something unfinished that the apostle Paul wanted to have done.

Now understand, every local church has to some extent some disorder. There are some things to work out in every local church because we're sinners. We're sinners saved by God's grace who have not arrived yet. So in every local church there will be some deformities, there will be some problems. There always will be till Jesus returns.

But one of the things we see clearly in the New Testament, particularly here in Titus 1, is that Paul thought something was undone, something was incomplete, something needed to be established. And there are many, by the way, friends—many local churches where they have yet to establish a plurality of elders even in this country. And they have rejected the wisdom of Titus 1 to their own peril.

And so insofar as by the grace of God you have a plurality of elders, and you do—praise God for that—something that needed to be done has happened, and you should praise God and rejoice for that. It is a high calling for an elder, a biblically qualified man, to be in this position. It's important for the life of the church, for the protection of the church, as we will see.

But one of the marks of an elder and his high calling is he must be faithful in his family life. Paul details this so clearly to Titus. Namely, "if any man is above reproach" (means blameless—doesn't mean perfect, as if he's never sinned and doesn't need God's grace; no man exists like that), "the husband of one wife", he's a one-woman man. This is so important in this day where there's not sexual immorality in the local church, particularly with the elders, with the pastor-elders who serve in this capacity.

Far too many times we see this—we see these televangelists who divorce one wife, who go off and have adultery there or re-establish and are restored and God "established" them in their charismatic [ministry] and they bring in all this money. And they have all this "success". My friends, that is not successful in any way, shape, or form. There will be literally hell to pay for those individuals. The Scriptures make it very clear: an elder in his high calling has his first ministry not to the church but to his family, to his wife—to love his wife as Christ loved the church, as Paul puts it in Ephesians 5. One-woman man.

It involves more than just the idea of not taking another wife, of course. That's something that should never be the case. But there's a posture towards others who are women, particularly in the church: "This is my sister in Christ." There's a healthy posture of not flirting with them, not being sexually immoral with them or with any other woman, but of loving their wives.

Additionally, this first ministry to his wife and to his children. We read this: "having children who believe". Now, many throughout church history have said this is those who are believers, born-again Christians. Others, though, would say this means children who are trustworthy, children who are obedient. So maybe

they're not converted yet, but they're not given over to dissipation or rebellion. They're not wild, as we read earlier.

It seems throughout most of church history, as best as I can read, the interpretation has been that they are Christians and there is a certain protection there from this standpoint. If a pastor, if an elder, his own children do not receive the grace of God in Christ and repent of their sins and trust in Christ, there's no sense of them being followers of Jesus. Is it possible then that the church of Christ can be protected as well, and that those outside the body will be protected where there's less influence? But to be clear, there are legitimate interpretations that Bible scholars, faithful, God-honoring individuals hold to concerning this verse.

We have to balance it with the other pastoral epistles where it talks about managing your own household wisely, particularly where there are small children at home, where there are evidences of saving faith, some fruit of the Spirit in a child's life. Praise God for that. We should not go quickly into making an accusation and saying, "Look at this elder's son. He or she or this daughter is not a believer." We should be very careful and cautious before we make that accusation. Absolutely.

But the first ministry of the elders in this high calling that they have in serving Christ's church, the apostle Paul says here to Titus, is that the first ministry is to the family. He will be faithful in his family life.

A second mark of the elders and their high calling is this: he is God's steward with consistently honorable self-control. You will see a consistency in the self-control, and you will see that in his life in a variety of ways. Look there, verse 7: ***"For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward."*** (Titus 1:7)

Now this phrase, "God's steward," is something that we are not always familiar with. We don't use that term "steward" very much. Sometimes when you throw out a word, even a church word or a Christian word, people have different interpretations of it. A story is humorously told (and many pastors have told it, so if you've heard this before, forgive me, but it's worth noting) of a man who was so excited to be baptized and he heard about the importance of Christian baptism, baptism, baptism, baptism. So he finally lined it up to get his baptism. He was so excited and the pastor was excited for him. And that morning when he was going to be baptized he said, "Pastor, I cannot wait to meet Jesus and see him in my baptism." The pastor opened up his eyes wisely. He said, "Brother, how long do you think we'll be holding you under the water?" There's confusion about terms, confusion about words.

So God's steward, what does that mean? What does God's steward mean? Well, here is what Alexander Strauch helpfully says concerning a steward. (Alexander Strauch, by the way, has written probably most perceptively out of anyone in the last few decades on the topic of biblical eldership. He has written extensive volumes on this—incredible scholar and credible brother pastor in the Lord.) And here's what he says: *"A steward is a household manager, someone with official responsibility over the master's servants, property, even finances. Elders are stewards of God's household. The local church elders are also called overseers, which signifies they supervise and manage the church."* That's what's going on here with this term "steward"—a household manager, someone who does not let anything go untouched.

Doesn't mean there's a micromanaging of every single ministry. Not at all. Not at all. But there is a healthy sense of interest, a healthy sense of oversight. Is this ministry growing? Is God being glorified? Is the truth

going forward? Are those in this ministry equipped for this Word? Supported? Those are good things that every pastor, elder, every overseer in Christ's church ought to be about.

The elder's high calling is first and foremost this clear sense of having faithfulness in his family life, but also this consistently honorable self-control as God's steward. And particularly in these different areas: he's not self-willed. He's not saying it's my way or the highway on everything. There's a difference, particularly to brother pastor-elders who serve alongside. He's not quick-tempered, he's not losing his temper and hot all the time. He's not addicted to wine. Not pugnacious. That means always fighting. Not fond of sordid gain.

But the flip side: he's hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled. Now most of those phrases are self-explanatory. You can read them and you can say yes, yes, yes. But we don't use all those terms the same way. What does it mean to be devout? Well, that has to do with godliness. The sense of there is Christlike virtue in that manner. He walked on this earth and he exemplifies Christ, not perfectly—none of us are perfect—but faithfully. And he's worth imitating as he follows Jesus Christ.

And so the elders in the local church, Paul says to Titus, "I want you to appoint them all across Crete and all these different cities and all these different local churches, and then to be first and foremost as you are faithful in their family life, that's their first ministry. Second, they may be consistently honorable men with self-control. Then to be marked by that. Marked by a measured calculation, a Spirit-filled control and a desire to honor God with their lives, with their speech, with everything."

And then a third mark of an elder's high calling is this: he must be a man who clings to and is courageous with God's Word. An elder is a man who clings to and is courageous with God's Word. Look in your Bible at Titus 1:9: "***He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.***" (Titus 1:9)

There's both an instruction—proactive teaching, positive side—and a negative side. With the pastoral interns I've had the blessing of working with the last 15 years or so of ministry, it is amazing to talk to these young men and go to this one verse and ask these young men, "Do you think you can fulfill and do Titus 1:9?" Number of years ago a man, to his credit, said, "No, I cannot do this," and stopped pursuing vocational ministry, and I praise God for that man for his humility. He protected the church. He protected himself and others from doing that.

But this is the call of elders. This is the call of the Lord to the apostle Paul upon the elder's life. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word. He loves the Scriptures. He loves the Bible. And he knows the Bible, and he can give instruction in that sound doctrine from the Bible. But also, as time tells us this will be the case—not really a matter of if but when—he will also refute those and rebuke those who contradict the Scriptures.

Insofar as you have men who are elders of this church who are refuting error and false doctrine—not pugnaciously looking for fights and going out there, but refuting those who would contradict the clear teaching of God's Word, who would stand up for truth in the gospel—you should praise God for that. You should encourage them. You should bless them. That is an important thing, and it protects the church, the health of the church, the vibrancy of your local church.

An elder's high calling is something that clearly the apostle Paul viewed as essential to the local church, not optional. And by the way, it didn't mean that the Spirit was not alive and at work in local churches all across Crete that didn't have elders. But it just meant something was left undone. They were vulnerable. They were vulnerable to false teaching, to error, because no one was in his position to say, "I know the word of God and I can give instruction and build up your faith and help you grow in your walk with Christ, and also if someone comes in as a false teacher, as a wolf, and is lying to you about God, about his character, about the gospel—particularly as we'll look at, adding works and sneaking in works, Jesus plus something, grace plus something, do this and you'll be saved, do this, try harder, be better and now Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. It's always the way it goes with these false teachers: Jesus and something else."

There is no one, no group of men who are there who are biblically qualified to say no. You need to repent or you need to leave. Protecting the flock as under-shepherds under the Lord Jesus Christ. So very clearly Paul has in his mind and heart that an elder's high calling is an essential, protective part of the local church.

Alexander Strauch again, who I mentioned, is this leading Bible scholar on eldership. And here's what he says concerning this verse: *"According to Paul's required qualifications for eldership, a prospective elder must have enough knowledge of the Bible to be able to refute false teachers."* That's a bare minimum. Do they know sound doctrine and can they refute false teachers?

And by the way, every Spirit-filled local church family should take an interest into who their elders are. Insofar as you have men who are meeting this criteria, praise God for that. Praise God for that. It's been my joy to get to know the brother pastors who served here as your elders, and insofar as I can tell, by the grace of God, these are men who meet these criteria, and you should praise God for that and rejoice.

### **3. A Difficult Ministry Context**

The third and final section here is this: a difficult ministry context. We close with this difficult ministry context, reminded of this: that a pastor and overseer who is a shepherd, it's not just a simple rebuke, rebuke, rebuke. That's not what it is. John Calvin perceptively put it this way once: *"that a pastor ought to have two voices—one for gathering the sheep and another for warding off and driving away wolves and thieves. The Scripture supplies him with the means of doing both."* The Scripture is sufficient. It will help your brother pastor-elders here do this—to both gather the sheep and love them and care for them, encourage them, teach them, but also rebuke and drive away wolves and those who come in with ill intent.

Here's the context of what Paul was writing to when he wrote to Titus on Crete, this island. There are three main ways we could characterize this difficult ministry context.

The first was this: there were many in Crete where Titus was who were works-based rebels promoting Jewish myths. Verse 14 in Titus 1 says this: they were paying attention to Jewish myths, not the truth, the commands of people, of men, man-centered. They were focusing on Jewish myths, probably related to circumcision, of what happens when a person is circumcised. Is there some special power that happens or some special blessing that takes place? All sorts of Jewish writers and writings that were reflections upon the Scripture, but then also writings beyond the Scripture. That's what usually took place. It muddies the water on God's grace.

You read these writings from ancient Jews, particularly in the first century, and it muddies the water. It confuses and clouds the nature of who God is over and over again. And so in Crete you have very clearly many who are works-based rebels promoting Jewish myths of “do this and God will save you, do this and God will love you, obey this and God will accept you” instead of proclaiming the powerful gospel of God’s grace in Christ that God saves sinners by his grace alone.

Also in Crete we see this: that many needed biblical rebuke for specific popular sins. Look at verse 12. There the apostle Paul says this: **“One of their very own prophets said, ‘Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.’ This testimony is true. For this reason, rebuke them sharply so that they may be sound in the faith.”** (Titus 1:12–13)

There were culturally respectable or popular, you might say, sins—so much so that in the ancient world to “cretanize” meant to lie. If you say yeah, they cretanized that—they lied about that. That’s what it’s like. It’s similar to sodomize. You hear that from the Bible in the Old Testament, in the book of Genesis, to sodomize connected to the vile sin of homosexuality. Same kind of a thing became a euphemism as a word. This is to cretanize, to lie. Same kind of a thing.

We see this in the Scripture. There is language connected to a certain cultural sin. And to be very clear, this is not something that was bound up in the Cretans as if it was connected to their ethnicity or biology. Nothing like that. Nothing of the sort. This is a specific sin to a specific group of people who Paul says in this island of Crete where you are on, there are many who are doing these sins. And one of their very own prophets, someone who’s reflecting on his own culture—I’m a Cretan—he’s saying, and I say this about my own people, the Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons. He’s saying that about himself and others as a general characteristic of those in Crete.

What does Paul say? What’s the solution to all that sin, all that sin that is happening everywhere? It’s this: rebuke them sharply so they may be sound in the faith. No doubt some of these Cretans were Christians. How do we know that? Because Paul says appoint them as elders. So there were Christians there who probably were caught up in this. They were tempted to lie. They were acting like animals on their animal instincts and not putting to death those sins even though they were in Christ. They were lazy gluttons. That was a part of their culture before Christ. That was a part of who they were. And they need to be rebuked sharply so that they be sound in the faith.

Paul is concerned here about those who needed a sound, sharp rebuke from faithful pastors, from Titus especially as this overseer of overseers, you might say, but also those who would actually stand in the office and serve as overseers and pastors. We see that clearly from Titus 1:9 again.

A third reason this was a difficult ministry context was because of the fact that there were some who said that they followed Jesus. They professed faith in Jesus, but clearly they did not possess a faith in Jesus Christ. Clearly their works betrayed them. Many declared “God, God, God, God. I love God” but denied him by their deeds. And we see this. Titus 1:16: **\*\*\*“They claim to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, and unfit for any good work.”\*\*** (Titus 1:16)

These were individuals who thought everything was impure, probably except themselves and their rituals and their superstitions, their myths. These were individuals who added to the grace of God, who denied that godliness flowed from the grace of God in a believer's life. There were those who abandoned the word of God and the sufficient Word of God.

The apostle Paul to Titus is saying here to his young protégé, his son in the faith, my son in the faith who shares my faith: You are in a difficult ministry context where there are works-based rebels promoting Jewish myths confusing the people of God. There are many in your context, my son of the faith, who need a biblical rebuke for their specific popular cultural sins. And there are many who declare God is their Lord but deny him by their deeds.

But what's the solution to those who are caught up in this group of sins or violating the word of God? It is to hold fast to the word of God, to rebuke them sharply, to hold to the word of truth. Charles Spurgeon said this: *"Keep the Word of God and the Word of God will keep you."* My friends, that is the truth. Keep the word of God. The word of God will keep you. You want to keep in step with the Spirit of God. Keep closely to the word of God. Any kind of change in your life, any kind of promotion of truth in your life or desire to walk in godliness—as you mentioned earlier—it cannot happen apart from the truth. Any change is not going to last.

Jay Adams again, prolific author, biblical counselor, who's gone to be with the Lord in the last few years, said this: *"Apart from God's truth, all change is paper thin, a sham that will not stand the pressures of life."*

So what is the apostle Paul saying to Titus? He's saying stand in the word of God under the lordship of Jesus. Stand in this gospel. Believe this gospel. Rebuke those who contradict this gospel and this word with the word of truth.

It's so interesting, isn't it? To read this ancient context and hear about these works-based rebels promoting myths. We've never heard about that before, right? It's just so foreign to our context. Never heard of that. We've never heard of people who need biblical rebuke for specific popular sins, right? That doesn't happen in our day. Never, ever. And we never hear of those who declare God and post about God all over their social media, but then their deeds betray them and it shows they do not actually have a relationship with God through Christ.

The truth of the matter is this difficult ministry context that Titus was in is very similar to ours. Some of the errors and the leaders might change and vary, but the context is the same. It is a difficult ministry context that needs the word of God.

And so, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, recognize this: that we are those who, under God's grace, work towards godliness. We strive for it. In the next few weeks, Lord willing, we will see this more clearly. But also recognize this as well: that God has called us to not only pursue him in the truth, but to establish that in our local churches as well, to the glory of God. And third and finally, recognize this: that Titus accurately details false teaching that must be refuted. You and I must be those who are unashamed to say no. God's word stands against this. Here is a better way. Here is the true way. Follow the truth. This is in Titus a truthful word from the God who never lies.

A Truthful Word from the God Who Never Lies  
Pastor Brandon D. Myers

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*Let us pray. Almighty God and merciful Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we thank you so much for your word and its truth. We thank you for your gospel that you've saved sinners by your grace alone, without any addition of our own works, our own righteousness, as if we contributed that. We thank you for Titus and this letter here, these charges here, of what churches ought to be about, about what Christians ought to be about, God.*

*I pray that these friends might be infused with a gospel hope and faith in their midst, as they would be in awe of you, your grace and glory, and strive for godliness afresh and anew. So God, help us, we pray. Be glorified in us, we pray, in Jesus' name. And all God's people said, "Amen."*

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