

My name is Steve Hardin, the campus pastor here, and my heart is just overwhelmed thinking about the opportunity to be able to speak through and preach through the book of Titus. I'm just so thankful. God has delivered us from so much, and He has left us in this city to be salt and light. That's why I want to preach through Titus. So turn with me to Titus 1. The Lord has put this on my heart because I think it reminds me of a lot of where we are. Crete is the island that Paul, Titus and Timothy went to around 60 A.D, and they evangelized that island. Many came to Christ, and they started little house churches all throughout the island. So there were brand new churches started throughout the island, and I love that. I just want to send more and more of you out of here who are equipped, encouraged, full of the Spirit and send you out and see the Lord either use you helping with church plants or getting new plants started. So I picked this because here is a work that was established, a brand new work, new converts coming to Christ and Paul wanted to make sure to establish this church so that it would be a healthy church, a strong church and a church that would withstand over the long haul the attack and assault of the world it was in, which Crete was a very pagan culture. It reminds me of Dallas. It was a very pagan culture, which is this city that we live in. This city is full of brokenness, but it is full of beauty as well. This is a city that is full of many opportunities to be able to give back to it and to serve it. But it is also a city that, if we are not on guard, can be lured into worldliness. And that's my concern. We are a young church, just like the church on the island of Crete. Now we have some believers who have been believers for quite some time, but our median age here is around 30 years of age. We are a relatively young church. So my concern with being so young is that, in our youthfulness, without much care and proper oversight in the life of the church, we might give ourselves to this to worldliness and lose the saltiness and the light of the gospel where we are not living as an example of those who have been changed by the gospel. I just want to make sure we are standing firm and that we do that well and for the long haul. So that's why God has put this on my heart. We are to be an example of what it means to be those who have been redeemed in this city and all that this city would lure us away from being and doing. In fact, I love what Stanley Hauerwas, a theologian from Duke University, says. In his book *Alien Residents*, he says this, "The church is a colony, an island of one culture in the middle of another. In baptism our citizenship is transferred from one dominion to another, and we become, in whatever culture we find ourselves, resident aliens. . . .The only way for the world to know that it is being redeemed is for the church to point to the Redeemer by being a redeemed people. The way for the world to know that it needs redeeming, that it is broken and fallen, is for the church to enable the world to strike hard against something which is an alternative to what the world offers. We serve the world by showing it something it is not, namely, a place where God is forming a family out of strangers." So we are left in this world, by the grace of God, for the proclamation of the gospel, changed by the gospel, left in a hostile environment, left in an environment that beats up against the truth, and we are to live as an alternative culture. In fact, one of the things I told our students this week during the youth retreat is that if God gets a hold of this next generation of these kids, there could be an all out revival, an awakening of biblical proportions. And we've seen that in church history. I pray that among our kids, that we would be a compassionate presence in this culture. That's what Paul is writing to Titus about. He is calling this young church, these new believers to be a compassionate presence and a counter-presence. So Paul addresses all of these things.

In the first chapter, he talks about what it means to be led by healthy leaders. So we're going to talk about what healthy leaders look like. Titus was written by Paul, inspired by the Spirit, to tell Titus that it is very crucial and critical that a church needs healthy leaders in order for it to be healthy. To see what a healthy leader looks like is where we're going to go today. I'm going to read the entire chapter to you.

*Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior; To Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior. This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. 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. For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth. To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work. But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine.*

So Paul's remedy of establishing a church in great health on the island of Crete is that he wants Titus to place in every church elders who are men who are qualified and set apart. These are not just any men, not just every man, not men who just say, "I want to be that. I want to do that," but men who are set apart by the Lord to help the church establish a healthy way about them. So let's run through this list real quick. What are these characteristics that Paul lists to Titus? The main theme of chapter 1 is a healthy church is to be led by healthy leaders. What does a healthy leader look like? The first characteristic is they are to be men who are above reproach. Above everything else, these are men who, on the consistent look at their life, there is no ongoing blame attached to his life. In other words, you cannot call a charge out against these men. Paul's making it very clear by saying, "I don't want you to just grab a man who has some authoritative genius about him. You don't need to find a man who is an extrovert. You don't need to find a man who is just brilliant or sharp. You need to find a man who, by in large, is above reproach." This is the overarching characteristic of those who God would place in leadership. These aren't sinless men. If they are married just ask their wives. But these are men who are living above reproach.

They are also men who are married to one wife. These are one woman men. They have an eye for their wife. In other words, they are not womanizers. These men have a heart and an eye for their wife. They're not flirtatious, and these are not men who have a wandering eye. These are men who, if they are married, have a love and a faithfulness toward their wife. If a man cannot love and lead his wife well, how is he to steward the larger household of God? He is to love his wife. By the way, you also have that opportunity and privilege to pray for your elders here that they would be men who are loving, leading and faithful to their wives. Pray for them.

They are also to have children who are possibly believers, who are orderly and who are submissive. In their home, as they give oversight to their house, their house is to be one where you can look in their home and see that their children are submissive, that there is order in the home, that there is responsibility there and that their children are not living a debauched life, a life that is wasteful or a life that is reckless. So Paul is saying, "Find men, if they're married with children, who are faithful to their home." These are men who are faithful in their home. Why? Because verse 7 says they are to be faithful stewards. These men are not to be owners of the church. Jesus Christ is the Owner of the church. He is the blood-bought Savior of the church, but these men are managers. The word "steward" means "to arrange the house." These are men who are to be about arranging the house. This is critical in building a healthy church.

He goes on to say that they are not to be men who are arrogant. In other words, these are not to be men who are self-willed, but these are men who are humble. He is to be able to walk in the spirit of humility. They are not to be quick-tempered. The word "quicktempered" means "short fused." It is so critical that these are men who are gentle.

It is also that you find men who are not drunkards. I would think that's pretty important. The Cretans were gluttonous people, just like we in America are a gluttonous people. They were given to all kinds of things to be able to find their hope in and to mask all of their hurt, their pain and their sinfulness. They found themselves constantly running to something other than Jesus Christ to find their fulfillment in. This is a man who is to be, by the grace of God, not overindulgent or controlled by anything other than the Holy Spirit. So Paul is making this stake and this claim that is so critical.

Let me just take a moment to tell you why I think this is so important for us. This is a transient campus. You're here, and then you're gone. There will be hundreds of you who are here today and then you'll move on. I want you, as you leave, not only to leave here in a right way, but I want you to be able to be so prepared, so versed, so schooled that you will so know what a healthy church led by healthy leaders looks like, that when you go to another city, you will know what an established, healthy church is to look like biblically. But I want you to also know how to refute any doctrine that is contrary to the true gospel. You'll know how to run from that and how to refute if necessary. That's why I love this book.

But he goes on and says, "Find men who are not violent." The word is "pugnacious." This is the guy who, when he gets really angry, is just violent with his words. By the way, these are characteristics that really all of us ought to pursue. But these are the characteristics that must be seen in elders. But these are characteristics that the Holy Spirit has wrought and is working in all of us. You can't imagine how many came last night during the response time. It was just a season of repentance from not lining up with the authoritative Word of Scriptures in these areas of their lives and a season of running to the Lord and saying, "You are my hope in these things." One guy said, "I have just been violent towards my wife in my speech." Elders are to not be pugnacious. The root word of "pugnacious" is pug or boxer. If they had issues in Cretan church, the pastor would just take somebody outside and just beat them. I don't think we want to go that route here, do you?

He is to be a man not greedy for gain. So this is a man who is not involved in shameful, indecent gain. He is motivated by the Holy Spirit to make disciples alone. Money is not driving him. You find that in the church culture in the American west. He is to be hospitable. He is to have an affection for strangers. He is to love those who are not just in the body of Christ but those who are outside the body of Christ. He is to be a man who is hospitable. Paul is saying, "You are to bring in people who are like you and people who are not like you." He is to be a model and exemplary in receiving strangers and welcoming in people. That's what the leaders of the church are to look like. He is to be a lover of good. He has a bent to see good things. He loves what is good. He is a man who walks in self-control. In other words, he is sensible. Paul is going, "Find that guy who is cool-headed, sober-minded and has a proper view of himself and right view of the gospel. He is to be upright and fair." It is critical that this man walks in fairness. He is a man who is holy, devout, given to prayer and given to the daily pursuit of Christ and loving Christ with all of his heart. That's what you're to pray for your leaders. In fact, that's our own pursuit. That's the call that God has placed on your own life. He is to be a man who walks in great self-control.

And then he closes out in verse 9 with this other gift that is another characteristic that would set the elder apart from those who would be members in the church. He is to be able to teach, gifted to teach. Why? So that he can help teach you, train you in righteousness and godliness so that you would have a proper understanding of the gospel, so that you would be able to refute those who contradict the gospel and so that you would live out a proper behavior with your belief

so that the two don't contradict one another. Somebody asked me one time, "It just feels like you spend so much time on saying the same thing at the Village about the gospel." Yes, we do. Because the gospel, in God, in Christ reconciling creation and us is the point. We have been created by God, birthed in depravity to be reconciled through Jesus Christ to the Father by Christ's death, burial and resurrection, hoping in His return that there is no other under heaven that man or woman might be saved. And the only way to God is through Jesus Christ. He is our hope. So trust me when I tell you until you are sick of hearing it, because my job and the elders' job day in and day out is to keep you tethered to that truth, preparing you, encouraging you, exhorting you, rebuking you as you rebuke us, so that we would be men and women ready to see and be in the presence of God in Christ Jesus. This is our charge. So Paul includes ability to teach in requirements for elders. It literally means "hold firm." We're to hold firm. That means to strongly cling, bring to our chest this trustworthy Word. This man who is to teach is to hold fast. So week in and week out, that's why we do what we do here in this church. We want to hold fast, hold firm. It's like what a parent does with his/her child. Every morning at youth camp this week, we took all three of our kids. Hannah was a camp counselor, taking care of your junior high kids. Gracie, who is a senior graduating from high school, was a camper. And then our son, who is 11 and too young to be a camper, we just put him to work. It was great. We had him working the kayaks and canoes. Every morning when I would see my son, I would just run over and grab him and kiss him. I just want to get him up close to my chest. I want him to cling right here. I just love that. And I don't care if he pushes me away. I think about that clinging. That's what we're to do with the Word of God. That's what Paul says to Titus. "You are to cling to this faithful Word."

And then he goes on and says, "This is a trustworthy Word, and you are to give instruction." In other words, "This is the Word that you are to come alongside the people and exhort, encourage and urge. This Word that you're giving is a sound Word." The word literally means hygiene. It is healthy, it protects and it preserves. That's why we preach this Word. So healthy churches need healthy leaders who will preach, lead, teach and exhort in sound doctrine, the truth.

So why is it that a healthy church needs healthy leaders? Now he begins to unpack why this is so critical. Verse 10 says, "For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers. . ." So there are many who have infiltrated the little churches there in Crete, just like I think there are some who could possibly infiltrate the life of the church here. These are guys who are now leading the church. That's why Paul wanted to get these qualified leaders over the church quickly, and not just any guys. He wanted to get the in the church because of "insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party," who were teaching something in addition to the gospel. Jesus + anything else is not the gospel. Jesus only, His substitutionary death, His resurrection from the grave, His taking on and absorbing the wrath of God, if there is anything in addition to that that men are preaching, that is a false gospel. That is a gospel that is in error. And these Judaizers were teaching that there was a gospel that was Jesus + something. That is not the gospel. They were teaching that you had to have Jesus, but you also had to be circumcised. So Paul leaves Titus on that island, who is a Gentile and has not been circumcised, to be able to say to them, "Not only am I not circumcised, but let me tell you something else. I am a man who is standing here to refute your false gospel and to say to you that this is what the gospel really is." That's my concern for you, body of Christ. It's that you will be at times just lured in by smooth-talking, empty-talking, deceiving, insubordinate, rebellious men who look like they say the same thing, men who look good, men who are so smooth and so cool. This is a culture when guys stand at pulpits and look good, sound good and you can become so awed and find yourself believing in a false gospel. That concerns me. And at this church, it is the charge of God in my own life and the elders of the church, just like on the island of Crete, to present every man, boy and girl faithful and mature in Christ Jesus. That's a huge charge. So this is why that is so important. And of these teachers of a false gospel, Paul says, "They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach."

And verses 12-14 really close out with how the elders are to lead in this. "One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." This testimony is true." This is not a racist statement Paul is

making here. Racism is a sin, so Paul is not making a racist statement. He is identifying what one of their own had said about the Cretans. In other words, it is very Cretan of them to lie and to lead people astray like they're doing. So he says, "Therefore rebuke them sharply. . ." Don't let it take any kind of rest in the church. Don't house anything that is contrary to the gospel. He's saying, "Cut with a penetrating force." In other words, it means to call out. That's what we're to do, call that false teaching out. Why? Our hope in rebuking these teachers is that they would be sound in faith. We may find in their response to rebuke that they are converted to Christ and they have been swayed by a false doctrine and need to be corrected. But we also may find that they are wolves and we need to remove them from our midst altogether. But even Paul told Timothy that we even want to preach the gospel to them hoping that God would grant them salvation and that they would come to Christ. But we don't give them house. We don't give them an opportunity to teach. We find them and we set them outside. We silence them. We rebuke them. We cut with a penetrating force with vigor, but we also do that with gentleness. We do that with great compassion and great love. We are to rebuke with great love.

He closes out with this. Essentially these people are still living, still thinking and still teaching that Christianity, that the gospel is to be found from the outside in. They are teaching that if you obey and do certain things, then you're going to be accepted by God. And Christianity is so contrary to that. A true biblical Christianity of the gospel is that God does this work from the inside out. That's what we're to preach, that God, in Christ Jesus, comes and by His righteousness, by His grace, works from the inside out. So now I'm accepted not by my works, but by the works of Christ Jesus our Lord. There is only One who has fulfilled all of these requirements that we talked about today. There is one perfect Elder. There is one perfect One who has delivered us from being the Cretans that we are, namely Jesus Christ. We are to run to Him, we are to steward the church well. He is not the steward of the church; He is the Savior of the church. Christ is redeeming, preparing and reading a people for His own name, zealous for good works. I just want us to be faithful to that end, till the day of Christ Jesus.

So this week ask yourself, "Where have I walked away? Where have I strayed? Where have I given in to that which is not the gospel? Where have I walked in my own life denying Him this week? Where have I been lured into worldliness this week?" Trust me when I say to you that the Savior's grace, His compassion is sufficient.

Let's pray. "Father, I bless Your name. I thank You for the words that are inspired through Paul to Titus for us. I just want to be faithful. We are that in Christ Jesus. We want to have an impact in this city for the name of Jesus. We just don't want to tarry in that or wait around. So thank You for this word today. May it find a place in our hearts, and may there be fruit produced by it for Your glory and for the good of the saints. In Christ's name we pray. Amen."