

INTRODUCTION

Titus 1:1-9 – Apostolic Authority and the Kind of Men Who Must Lead the Church

Paul does not waste words. Right from the opening line he plants the flag of his authority and the solid ground of the gospel, then he tells Titus exactly why he was left on Crete and what kind of men must be appointed to lead the young assemblies there. This is the blueprint for how grace shapes the church from the inside out. We will walk through it carefully, observing the Greek where it sharpens our grasp of Paul's meaning, verifying the interpretation by letting Scripture interpret Scripture, and then drawing out what this meant first for the believers on Crete and what it means for us.

COMPARISON WITH 1 TIMOTHY AND 2 TIMOTHY

Paul opens Titus the same way he opens the letters to Timothy, yet each letter meets a different situation while carrying the same core message. Here is the point-by-point comparison:

- **Apostolic authority** – In all three letters, Paul begins by identifying himself as a δούλος (doulos) – slave / bond-servant of God and an ἀπόστολος (apostolos) – apostle / one sent with authority. The combination shows that every instruction comes straight from the Master, not from human opinion.
- **Purpose of the apostleship** – Titus 1:1 links Paul's authority to "the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness." The same emphasis on sound doctrine shaping godly living appears in 1 Timothy 1:3-4 and 2 Timothy 1:13-14 and 2:2.
- **Elder/overseer qualifications** – The list in Titus 1:5-9 is nearly identical to 1 Timothy 3:1-7. Both passages require the same observable character traits (above reproach, one-woman man, orderly home, self-controlled, hospitable, holding fast to the faithful word). Titus adds the immediate command to appoint elders "in every city," while 1 Timothy focuses on testing and recognizing those already serving.
- **The situation each letter addresses** – Titus: a brand-new work on Crete where Paul and Titus had just planted assemblies; the task is to finish setting things in order and silence false teachers who are already active. – 1 Timothy: an established church in Ephesus that needed order in worship, leadership, and conduct. – 2 Timothy: Paul's final personal charge to Timothy as Paul faces the end of his ministry and urges endurance and guarding the deposit.
- **The consistent heartbeat of grace** – In each letter, believers are called to live sensibly, righteously, and godly—not to gain God's favor, but because they have

already received it in Christ. Titus 1:2 roots this in the hope of eternal life that begins now; 1 Timothy 1:15-16 and 2 Timothy 1:9-10 and 2:1 make the same point. Sound doctrine and qualified leaders are never ends in themselves; they are the way the church adorns the doctrine of God our Savior.

• **Recurring themes that tie the three letters together** – Jesus Christ as Savior, the faithful word, hope of eternal life, grace that has already appeared, and the call to live in line with our identity in Christ appear in all three epistles. The standard does not change from Crete to Ephesus to Paul’s final words to Timothy.

This shows why Paul’s opening in Titus 1:1-9 feels so familiar yet so perfectly suited to the young churches on Crete. The pattern is the same; the application fits the need of the moment.

EXPOSITION

Paul opens by identifying himself in two roles that together declare his right to speak. He is a δούλος (doulos) – slave / bond-servant of God. In the Roman world, this meant total ownership and total loyalty; Paul uses the term deliberately here to show that every instruction that follows comes straight from the Master.

He is also ἀπόστολος (apostolos) – apostle / one sent with authority. The combination tells Titus (and the churches on Crete) that this is not Paul’s opinion; it is the Lord’s directive through His chosen messenger.

The long phrase, “according to the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness,” explains the very purpose of that apostleship.

πίστις (pistis) – faith - this is not personal trust; it is the body of truth that is to be believed.

ἐκλεκτῶν (eklektōn) – chosen / elect points to God’s call. Those who respond to the call are called “the called.” This is not a selection to be believers but a reminder that God has a purpose for all believers.

The goal of this faith is “full knowledge of the truth according to godliness.” Truth and godliness belong together. The ones who carry the knowledge of truth are obligated to live in honor of it (1 Timothy 6:3-5; 2 Peter 1:3).

Truth is understood as proclamation; godliness relates to morality and behavior. Truth stands on its own, but the call of God is to maintain alignment between our proclamation and our behavioral witness. If godliness does not accompany truth, the message is discredited.

Verse 2 roots everything in ἐλπίς ζωῆς αἰωνίου (elpis zōēs aiōniou) – hope of eternal life. Hope is a confident expectation. God, the non-false God, who cannot lie, made this promise before time began.

The hope is in eternal life. This should not be taken as solely the life after this. Eternal life starts now; our hope is in a life of peace and contentment with God now and with the promise of the future of being taken out from this world and into an eternity without regard to sin and death.

Then, “at the proper time,” He manifested His Word the same message entrusted to Paul. The word choice, “manifested” marks a decisive historical moment. Salvation rests on God’s eternal character and His timely action, His grace, and the reality of Jesus Christ.

Paul addresses Titus as a true child in the common faith. This is the same designation Paul gave to Timothy. This indicates that Paul considered Titus to be a long-term faithful fellow servant for the Gospel.

The greeting of grace and peace comes from “God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior,” reminding every reader that favor with God is already theirs in Christ.

Verse 5 gives the immediate reason for the letter. Paul and Titus had been on Crete together, preached the gospel, and started assemblies. Now Paul moves on, leaving Titus to complete two tasks: “set in order what remains” and “appoint elders in every city.” The work was unfinished, and false teachers were already active.

The qualifications that follow are observable character traits that demonstrates a man is already living according to his identity in Christ.

The overarching requirement is ἀνέγκλητος (aneglētos) – above reproach / unable to be accused, repeated in verse 7 for the overseer. These two distinctions (elder and overseer) are the same. One describes the spiritual maturity and the other is the function.

A leader must be “the husband of one wife,” literally translated “a one-woman man” whose fidelity cannot be questioned. His children must be believers and orderly, “not under suspicion of rioting or insubordinate (to government).”

The negatives in verse 7 show what disqualifies:

Self-willed / arrogant, quick-tempered, addicted to wine, pugnacious / violent, fond of sordid gain

These negative qualities are how others see one, how someone is known; this is not rumor or a one-time action, but how someone is known (character trait).

Positive traits are next found in verse 8: hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled. These are self-explanatory and obvious good qualities among leaders of local assemblies. It is the final quality that we will focus on.

“Holding to the teaching of the faithful Word so that he would be able to both encourage with sound teaching and refute those who contradict.” An elder/overseer must cling tightly to the trustworthy body of doctrine. Only then will he be able both to stand by the people and help and encourage with good, sound, healthy teaching and to refute (with the Word) those who contradict it.

The emphasis on holding fast to sound doctrine is the same charge Paul gives Timothy. It is the Word of God as communicated by the apostles that gives objective anchors to Titus and the other leaders.

WHAT THIS MEANT FOR TITUS, CRETE, AND WHAT IT MEANS NOW

Titus was to be reconfirmed as the apostles' hand, given instructions by Paul with the authority of God and Jesus Christ. The letter serves as a credential to Titus, one who is faithful to God, Jesus Christ, the Gospel, the Word of God, and to Paul.

To the believers scattered across the cities of Crete, this letter was both a lifeline and a clear call. They lived on an island with a notorious reputation. Jewish false teachers were exploiting that stereotype, pushing myths and man-made rules, and claiming that Cretan believers were unfit for leadership.

The situation is indeed a mess. Paul tells Titus to finish what he started—to appoint men whose lives visibly adorn the doctrine of God our Savior. The false teachers' slander would be silenced, not by clever debate but by the objective, doctrinally grounded lives of qualified elders and the orderly churches they served. Grace had already appeared; now the churches must live in line with the identity they already possessed in Christ.

For church leaders today, the standard is maintained. An elder is not chosen because he is successful in business, popular with the crowd, or gifted on stage. He is recognized because his private and public life already shows that his life is in alignment with the truth because he holds firmly to Biblical Truth. He must be able to encourage the saints with healthy teaching and confront error with clarity and grace. The home is the first testing ground because leadership begins with self-government under Christ.

For every believer, whether in leadership or not, this passage calls us to live in alignment with our identity. We do not strive to become acceptable to God; we are

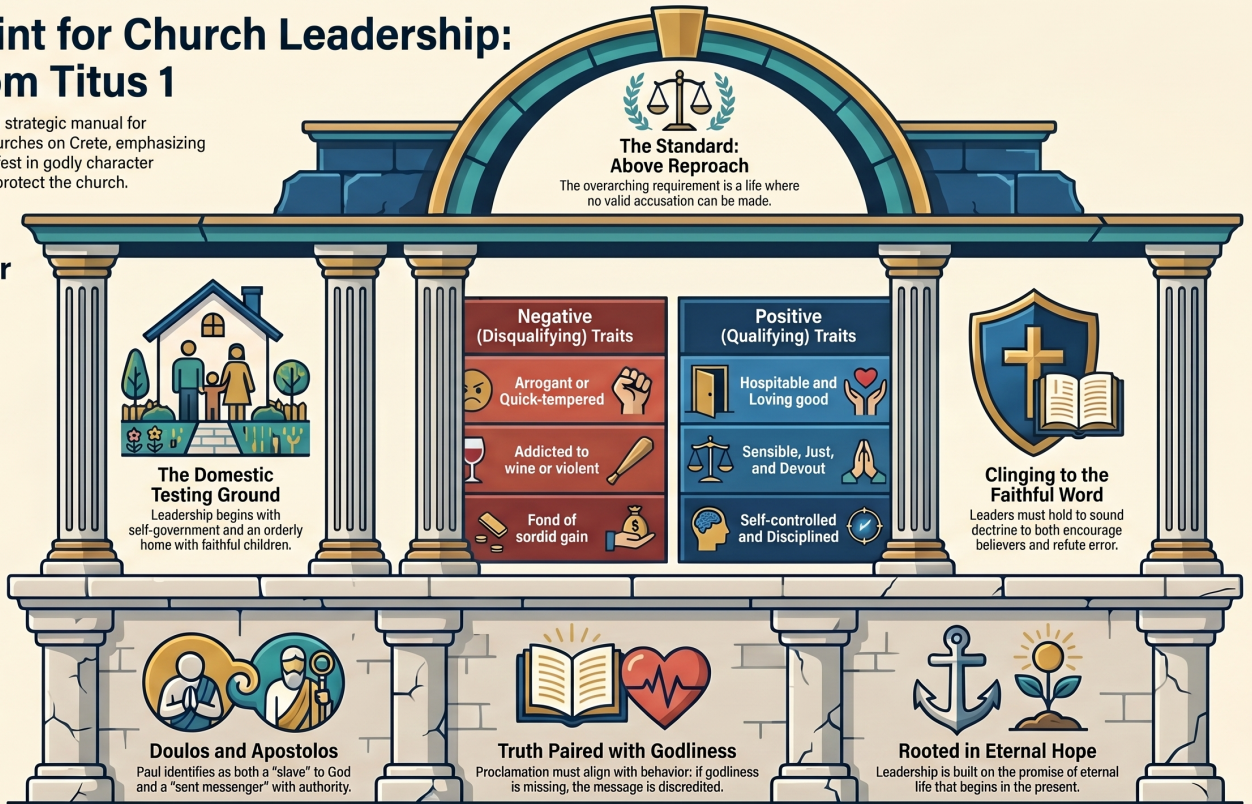
already accepted in Christ. Therefore, we live sensibly, righteously, and godly, not to gain grace or blessings, but because we already have it.

When local churches appoint and follow leaders who meet these qualifications, the gospel is adorned, division is resisted, and the whole body grows up into the fullness of Christ. That is exactly what Paul left Titus to accomplish on Crete, and it remains the pattern for every congregation that wants to display the grace of God in every respect.

The Blueprint for Church Leadership: Insights from Titus 1

Paul's letter to Titus serves as a strategic manual for "setting in order" the young churches on Crete, emphasizing that sound doctrine must manifest in godly character through qualified leaders who protect the church.

The Profile of a Qualified Leader



The Foundation of Authority