

INTRODUCTION

We now come to the final letter in our study of the Pastoral Epistles. Having walked through 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy together, we turn to Titus to complete the picture of how the Apostle Paul equipped his trusted coworkers to lead local assemblies for the next generations and beyond. The letter is short—only three chapters—but it carries the same urgent tone we saw in the other two: sound doctrine must shape sound living. Paul writes to make sure the young churches on the island of Crete stand firm against false teachers and display the grace they have already received in Christ.

AUTHOR AND RECIPIENT

The author is unmistakably the Apostle Paul. He identifies himself right at the start as “a bond-servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ” (Titus 1:1). The Greek word for *bond-servant* is δοῦλος (doulos) – slave / bond-servant, the same term he used in Romans 1:1 and Philippians 1:1. Every line that follows bears the marks of Paul’s vocabulary, theology, and Apostolic message. Conservative scholarship has always accepted Pauline authorship without hesitation, and the internal evidence lines up perfectly with what we observed in 1 and 2 Timothy.

The recipient is Titus, Paul’s “true child in the common faith” (Titus 1:4). The adjective γνήσιος (gnēsios) – legitimate / true, emphasizes a consistent spiritual father-son relationship (similar to Timothy). Titus was a Greek believer, uncircumcised, whom Paul took along with him to Antioch and then to Jerusalem as living proof that uncircumcised Gentiles are to be welcomed into the administration of God (Galatians 2:1-3).

Over the years, Titus became one of Paul’s most reliable theological fixers. He helped straighten out the chaotic situation in Corinth, delivered 1 Corinthians, and returned with a glowing report of the church’s positive response (2 Corinthians 7:6-7, 13-14, 8:6, 16-17). Paul could drop him into a difficult spot and know the work would get done. That same trusted character is why Paul now leaves him in Crete.

WHEN AND WHERE

The historical setting is straightforward once we read the text in its plain sense. Paul and Titus had traveled together to the island of Crete after Paul’s release from his first Roman imprisonment (the one that closes the Book of Acts around 62 AD). They preached the gospel and planted assemblies in several cities. When Paul needed to move on, he deliberately left Titus behind with these instructions:

“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).

The aorist verb is καταλείπω (kataleipō) – to leave behind, marks a completed action. This Crete visit does not appear in Acts; the only time Paul touched the island in Acts was as a prisoner on his way to Rome (Acts 27:7-13), with no ministry or mention of Titus. The events of Titus 1:5, therefore, belong to the post-Acts period, most likely late 62 AD or very early 63 AD.

Paul wrote the letter a short time later while traveling through Macedonia and heading toward Nicopolis on the western coast of Greece. He tells Titus, “When I send Artemas to you or Tychicus, make every effort to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there” (Titus 3:12).

This is in the future tense μέλλω (mellō) – I intend / I have decided. With the reference to winter, this points to a date in 63 AD. This places Titus after 1 Timothy and before 2 Timothy.

OCCASION AND PURPOSE

The occasion that prompted the letter is clear from the opening verses. New churches had sprung up across Crete, but they were unfinished. False teachers were already stirring up division, promoting “Jewish myths” and commandments of men (Titus 1:14). The main culprits were Jews who had a great disdain for the Cretans and wanted to take leadership roles in the churches.

The believers needed structure, qualified leaders, and clear teaching on how grace trains them to live properly. Paul’s purpose is therefore twofold: first, to instruct Titus to finish organizing the churches by appointing elders who hold fast to sound doctrine; second, to remind all the believers that they already possess every spiritual blessing in Christ and must now live in line with that identity. Good works do not earn God’s favor; they come from good volition based on an identity that is motivated by grace.

KEY THEMES

Several key themes run through the letter and tie it tightly to 1 and 2 Timothy. Paul stresses *sound doctrine* (ὑγιαίνω διδασκαλία hugiainō didaskalia – healthy teaching) as the foundation for everything.

He repeatedly calls for *good works* (καλός ἔργον kalos ergon – advantageous / beneficial deeds) that display the grace of God. The word *grace* itself appears at crucial points (Titus 2:11, 3:7), showing that our motivation for godly living is not fear of losing favor with God but the settled reality that we already possess it in Jesus Christ.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

Geographically, Crete was the largest island in the Mediterranean Sea, stretching roughly 160 miles from east to west and lying about 60 miles south of the Greek mainland. In the first century, it formed part of a Roman province that also included the small North African territory of Cyrenaica. The island was dotted with several important cities (Cnossus, Gortyna, and Phaistos among them) that served as centers of trade, agriculture, and shipping. Paul and Titus had moved from city to city planting the new assemblies that the letter now seeks to strengthen.

Culturally, Crete carried a notorious reputation throughout the ancient Greek and Roman world. Cretans were widely stereotyped as habitual liars, dangerous, fierce (“evil beasts”), and lazy gluttons.

Paul quotes this very reputation in Titus 1:12 when he writes, “One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, ‘Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.’” The saying came from the Cretan poet Epimenides in the sixth century B.C., and the Greeks even coined the verb κρητίζω (krētízō) – to Cretanize / to lie, as a synonym for deception.

Yet when we observe the grammar and flow of Titus 1:10-14, Paul is not making a blanket statement about the actual character of every Cretan believer. The context makes this plain. Right after describing the qualifications for elders, he turns to the problem at hand: “For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision” (Titus 1:10). These men, particularly the legalists pushing Jewish myths, are the ones upsetting whole families and teaching for sordid gain. Paul states that they are using this reputation to claim that Cretans are unqualified to lead or teach: “This testimony is true. For this reason reprove *them* severely so that they may be sound in the faith” (Titus 1:13).

The “them” that must be silenced and rebuked is the rebellious group causing division, not the Cretan believers.

In other words, the false teachers slandered or pre-judged the new Cretan assemblies. Into this setting Paul and Titus had brought the pure gospel of grace. The letter, therefore, gives us a living example of how the early church, planted in a pagan environment with its share of cultural stereotypes, was called to “adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect” (Titus 2:10). Sound doctrine and living righteously were not optional; it was the way these young assemblies could stand against the division being sown by men who turned away from the truth.

MAIN VERSE

Titus 2:11-15 – For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you.

OUR METHOD OF STUDY

As we have done with 1 and 2 Timothy, our method will remain strictly literal-grammatical-historical. We will begin each section with careful observation of the text in its original Greek, paying close attention to vocabulary, syntax, and the historical-cultural setting the first readers would have understood.

We will verify our interpretation by letting Scripture interpret Scripture through cross-references. Our exposition, explaining the meaning, will be accelerated. I won't strive to prove every explanation (since the text is easier than others), but we will highlight nuances and show how the text first impacted the original churches on Crete.

OUTLINE

- I. Salutation and Apostolic Commission (1:1-4)
- II. The Organization of the Church on Crete: Elders and the Threat of False Teachers (1:5-16)
- III. Instructions for Godly Conduct Within the Church (2:1-15)
 - A. Teaching That Accords with Sound Doctrine (2:1)
 - B. Specific Instructions for Various Age and Social Groups (2:2-10)
 - C. The Theological Motivation: The Grace of God (2:11-15)
- IV. Instructions for Godly Conduct in Society / Reminder of Grace (3:1-11)
 - A. The Believer's Responsibility to Civil Authorities and to All Men (3:1-2)
 - B. The Reminder of What We Once Were and What God Has Done (3:3-7)
 - C. The Emphasis on Good Works and the Warning Against Division (3:8-11)
- V. Personal Instructions, Final Greetings, and Benediction (3:12-15)