**CHARACTERISTICS OF A HEALTHY CHURCH:**

**GODLY LEADERSHIP**

Titus 1:1-16

This morning we’re beginning a brief 3-part study of the Book of Titus. This works out nicely since Titus has 3 chapters. Let me begin by giving you just a brief overview of this book. Actually Titus is a letter. It was written by the Apostle Paul to – guess who – TITUS. If you’ll notice on the front of our quarterly for Summer 2019 we are in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. These three letters are commonly referred to as the Pastoral Epistles. They were written by Paul, the veteran church planter, to young pastors, specifically to Timothy and Titus. At the time of his writing Timothy pastors the church at Ephesus while Titus is pastoring the church on the island of Crete. The letter to Titus contains many of the same instructions that are in 1 and 2 Timothy. They’re very similar because they are instructions for young pastors. What makes an effective church, what I like to call a “healthy church,” in Ephesus also applies to Crete and for that matter to Rockwall, Texas. So Titus certainly has application for us today.

If you were going to do an outline of this letter to Titus it would go something like this – in Chapter 1 you have Paul’s introduction and then instructions for church leaders, which includes qualifications. Chapter 2 focuses on what is expected of church members with emphasis on our behavior and responsibilities of the body believers within the church. Chapter 3 describes our mission outside the church as we carry out our Lord’s Great Commission by taking the gospel message to the whole world. This letter closes with final instructions and greetings. This morning we’ll be looking at Chapter 1 with our focus on the church leaders. There are several characteristics of a healthy church which we will look at during our study of Titus but it all begins with godly leadership.

So what do we know about this man Titus? He was a Gentile convert from Antioch, probably led to Christ by Paul. He was trustworthy, enthusiastic, tactful and loved people. And Titus, like Timothy, served Paul well helping him out in various ways including trouble-shooting whenever issue in the churches arose. Titus served on the island of Crete. *[Show map, discuss Crete’s location]*. This was not an easy place to minister. It’s 160 miles long, narrow (7-30 miles wide) and, believe it or not, this island has two mountains that are over 8000 ft high. *[Show aerial view of modern Crete with mountainous terrain]* Crete is very mountainous and has quite a rugged terrain. It was known as the island of a hundred cities. So even in the First Century you had small towns and villages scattered all over the island and travel between them was not easy. Each of these locations contained house churches and were led by men whom Paul refers to as “elders.” So when we talk about the church on Crete we are not talking about one centralized church building but rather a series of house churches scattered all over the island. And Titus was the pastor, the spiritual leader in charge of all of these.

As far as the Cretan people themselves -- truth be told they probably weren’t any worse or better than the people anywhere else in the Roman Empire at that time, but they had a not-so-good reputation. We’ll see here later on how one of the Cretan poets described his own people. Not very flattering! The church on Crete was formed by Jewish believers after Pentecost. So it was not started by Paul. However, apparently Paul and Titus visited the believers there in 62 A.D. shortly after Paul’s release from Rome. He left Titus on the island of Crete to get the house churches there organized. Paul writes this letter to Titus about a year or two later.

So with that background let’s get into Chapter 1 and Paul’s introduction.

READ Titus 1:1-4

 So here we have Paul’s opening remarks – fairly typical of his letters. As with most of Paul’s other letters he uses two nouns to describe himself, v 1 – a servant of God (Greek is “bond servant” or slave) and an apostle of Jesus Christ. Paul is always quick to remind his readers that he IS in fact an apostle. The reason he does this is because his critics (he had many) were constantly undermining Paul’s authority. We recognize that Paul is an apostle because he was personally called by Jesus Himself. When did this occur? On the Damascus road (an event detailed Acts 9 and Acts 26 before King Agrippa) So Paul is an apostle and he also a servant. In these verses he lays out 2 reasons why he is a servant. I like to think of these verses as Paul’s purpose statement. (1) for the sake of God’s elect, believers, specifically to lead them to faith and then to teach them God’s truth which leads to godliness; (2) because he was commanded by God Himself to do this. So here we have a fairly typical introduction by Paul – who he is and his purpose statement.

In v 4 we see that this letter is written specifically to Titus who Paul describes as “my true child in a common faith.” So Paul explicitly states that this man Titus is a believer in Jesus Christ as Paul is. Many Bible scholars believe that Paul’s term for Titus as “my true child” means that Paul had personally led Titus to faith in Christ. We don’t know this for sure, but it’s very likely the case. QUESTIONS??

In v 5 Paul jumps right into his first instruction for Pastor Titus.

READ Titus 1:5-9

5 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— *[and now Paul reminds Titus of how he directed him and in doing so lists the qualifications for these elders]*

6 if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife *[a one-woman man, devoted to his wife]*, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination *[a good father who has good Christian kids living in your home]*.

7 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,

8 but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.

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.

One of Titus’ most important jobs as a pastor is to appoint elders in the various house churches around the island of Crete. These elders are also referred to as “overseers” and “God’s stewards,” v 7. They act as spiritual shepherds for a small group of people. As spiritual leaders their character must be above reproach, v 6. A healthy church begins with its leaders. As you look over this list the emphasis is on having strong moral character. Be a man who is a good husband, a good father, not materialistic, not arrogant, self-controlled, disciplined and so forth. In v 9 the emphasis shifts from moral integrity to being grounded strongly in God’s word. You need to understand that false teachers were rampant in the first century, just as they are today. One of the roles of a spiritual shepherd is to be able to teach the people whom he ministers to sound doctrine. So, to summarize, elders need to be (1) men of high integrity and (2) grounded in the truth. This is critical.

Let me just say something about this list, v 6-9. I’m not going to go into a lot of detail about each characteristic Paul mentions. They’re fairly straightforward. But have you ever heard the expression, “you can’t see the forest for the trees”? Sometimes we can become so focused on the minute details and analyze things so closely that we fail to see the big picture, what the bottom line is. The issue here in these verses is NOT what someone may have done 10, 20, 30, 40 years ago. Let’s be honest. We’ve all sinned. We’ve all had moments of weakness. We’ve all from time to time had personal failures. What Paul is doing for Titus, just as he did for Timothy, is giving him guidelines by which he can select the right men for the task at hand. The question is not one’s marital status or past personal failures. The question is really this – What kind of character does the man you are considering to be an elder have today? Is he a godly man? Does he love his wife? Is he devoted to her? Is he a good father? Does he show love and godly discipline toward his children, and so forth. Is this man today, right now, the kind of man who meets these qualifications? Is he spiritually and morally above reproach? That’s the kind of man you want in church leadership. QUESTIONS??

Well Paul has some additional instructions for Titus. Do you think being a pastor is easy? Just listen to what Paul tells Titus next.

READ Titus 1:10-14

10 For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers *[he’s talking about false teachers – they are everywhere, even in the church]*, especially those of the circumcision party *[probably a reference to Judaizers who were converted Jews and who basically promoted faith in Christ plus keep the law (legalists). Judaizers weren’t the only false teachers. There were others who promoted false ideas that had their roots in the Greek philosophy of the day, namely, Gnosticism, Asceticism, Antinomianism and Docetism. So what do we do about all of these false teachers? Paul says---*

11 They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach.

12 One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.” *[Here Paul quotes Epimenides, a poet, teacher and writer and famous Cretan from the 6th century B.C. This poet was not very complimentary of his fellow Cretans]*

13 This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, *[Paul affirms this poet’s assessment of Cretan character. This may have been something that was said in the 6th Century B.C., but it’s still true some 500 to 600 years later]*

14 not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth. *[Paul says to reject them, don’t listen to them. “Jewish myths” refers to those who took the O.T. scriptures and interpreted them allegorically – wild mystical interpretations. “Commands of people” is a reference to ceremonial legalism, traditions and laws added by men and promoted by the Judaizers. Turn away from all that!]*

I believe Paul is saying something along this line: “Dear Titus, the reality of your situation is that you’re surrounded by false teachers and people of low moral integrity. Your job – and it may seem like an impossible mission – is to silence these false teachers and to confront and rebuke these individuals with low moral character. Finally, be sure the people are being taught sound doctrine. It’s a tough job! Yes, it’s a thankless job! You’re probably not going to win any popularity contests as a pastor who does this. You’re going to step on people’s toes. But that’s your job. Preach the word, teach the truth in love.”

What Titus is instructed to do here is still a responsibility of church leaders today. Teach and promote sound doctrine and expose false doctrine. So what about today? Are there any false doctrines being spread that you are aware of in Christian circles today? Are there any false ideas that are slowly finding their way into our churches? Let’s talk about them.

Paul closes out the chapter with some strong words about how God evaluates these false teachers, these “insubordinate” men, these “empty talkers,” these “deceivers.”

READ Titus 1:15-16

So what’s Paul saying? A person who is pure, v 15, who has godly character, exhibits holiness, possesses a high level of moral integrity, they’re clean on the inside, they’ve professed their faith in Christ, they’ve confessed their sin, they’re actively obeying God – what this kind of individual does outwardly reflects who they are inwardly. The truly godly person will exhibit godly behavior. Conversely, if an individual is not clean on the inside, to use Paul’s word, they’re “defiled” – defiled in both mind and conscience, they don’t really believe God’s word; to this kind of person nothing they do externally, not all the good works in the world, will make them pure. Godliness is a matter of the heart.

So, do you want to have a healthy church, an effective church? It begins with godly leadership. As Chapter 2 opens Paul says, “But as for you *[Titus, church leaders]*, teach what accords with sound doctrine.” So important! Sing “How Firm a Foundation”