

Pastoral Epistles, Session 12: Introduction to Titus and Titus 1

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Abstract

This lecture by Dr. Robert Yarbrough provides an academic and theological overview of the Epistle to Titus, framing it as apostolic instruction for church leaders and their congregations amidst the challenging cultural context of Crete. Dr. Yarbrough analyzes the epistle's key vocabulary—highlighting the frequent usage of terms like 'God,' 'good works,' and 'Savior'—and examines the theological weight of Paul's extended 46-word opening greeting. The session explores historical scenarios for early Christianity on Crete and examines Paul's mandate for Titus to establish qualified, 'blameless' elders capable of fostering revolutionary Christian living. Ultimately, the lecture demonstrates that biblically defined blamelessness reflects gospel-conferred grace and ongoing spiritual growth rather than sinless perfection.

Outline

I. Introduction and Theological Foundation (Titus 3:3–7)

A. Practical ministry counsel grounded in deep theology

1. Combining human relationship management with divine regard
2. Contrast between former unregenerate state and divine intervention

B. Key passage analysis: Salvation by mercy, not righteous deeds

1. Washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit
2. Justification by grace leading to the hope of eternal life

C. Opening prayer for grace and the echoing of God's trustworthy word

II. Purpose and Core Concerns of the Epistle to Titus

A. Apostolic mandate to Titus in Crete (Titus 1:5)

1. Putting in order what was left unfinished
2. Appointing elders in every town

B. Addressing problematic elements and false teachers (Titus 1:16)

1. Individuals who claim to know God but deny Him by actions
2. Characterized as detestable, disobedient, and unfit for good work

C. Paul's strategic concerns for the Cretan churches

1. Stringent qualifications for leadership parallel to 1 Timothy 3
2. Christian teaching permeating behavior so God's word is not dishonored

3. Refutation of the 'domestication document' / 'household code' secular theory
4. Fostering revolutionary living rather than cultural conformity
5. Social engagement rooted in awareness of former unregenerate status
6. Avoidance of useless controversies and unproductive polemics
7. High emphasis on good works and transformed behavior

III. Historical and Cultural Setting of Crete

A. Geography and demographics of the island

1. Over 3,000 square miles located in the Mediterranean
2. Modern population near one million (exceeding Montana)

B. Historical and cultural legacy

1. Ancient Minoan civilization, King Minos, and the Minotaur labyrinth
2. Old Testament associations: Kaphtor (Deuteronomy, Jeremiah) and Philistine origins (Amos)
3. Conquest by Rome in the 1st century BC; administered from North Africa

C. Historical theories on the origins of Christianity in Crete

1. Cretan pilgrims at Pentecost in Jerusalem (Acts 2:11) returning in early AD 30s
2. Early Jewish-Christian synagogue missionaries in 30s–40s
3. Paul's witness during his voyage to Rome (Acts 27) in the late 50s
4. Post-imprisonment visit by Paul and Titus (c. AD 63)
5. Scenario of spiritual stagnation ('nominalism') requiring a gospel reboot

IV. Background and Ministry of Titus

A. New Testament profile of Titus (14 references)

1. Two references in Pastoral Epistles (Titus 1:4, 2 Timothy 4:10)
2. Active co-worker near the end of Paul's life

B. Early ministry and defense of Gentile gospel freedom (late AD 40s)

1. Accompanying Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem (Galatians 2:1)
2. Refusal to compel uncircumcision despite false brothers' demands
3. Stand for gospel truth anticipates Jerusalem Council decisions (Acts 15)

C. Envoy and diplomatic work in Corinth (2 Corinthians)

1. Courier between Paul and the Corinthian church
2. Administering the relief collection for Judean believers
3. Praised by Paul as 'my partner and co-worker'

D. Role in Crete as a seasoned administrator facing high-stakes leadership

V. Linguistic, Statistical, and Textual Analysis of Titus

A. Frequency analysis of key nouns and concepts

1. Prominence of 'God', 'good works' (kalos / agathos), 'faith', and 'teaching'
2. Use of adjectival verb for healthy teaching ('sound doctrine')

B. Theological significance of 'Savior' (soter)

1. Used repeatedly for both God and Jesus Christ
2. Strong affirmation of the divinity of Jesus Christ

3. Contrast with 1 & 2 Timothy's use of 'Lord' due to Gentile context

C. Textual structure of the opening prescript (Titus 1:1–4)

1. Extraordinary 46-word expansion between sender and recipient
2. Paul styling himself as 'servant of God' (doulos) and 'apostle' (apostolos)
3. Dual purpose: Furthering faith of God's elect and knowledge of truth leading to godliness
4. Deep dive on 'God's elect' (sovereign grace) and 'godliness' (practical truth)

VI. Leadership Qualifications and Elders in Titus 1:5–9

A. Directive to appoint elders in every town across Cretan house churches

B. Specific requirements for overseers / elders

1. Family life: Faithful to wife, believing and disciplined children
2. Negative traits: Not overbearing, quick-tempered, drunkard, violent, or greedy
3. Positive traits: Hospitable, loving good, self-controlled, upright, holy, disciplined
4. Doctrinal fidelity: Holding firm to trustworthy message to encourage and refute

C. Deep dive on the definition of 'Blameless' (Titus 1:6, 7)

1. Rejection of sinless perfection definition (all have sinned)
2. Rejection of universal popularity definition (godly suffer persecution)
3. New Testament context (1 Corinthians 1:8, Colossians 1:22)
4. Proper definition: Living consistently with gospel-conferred grace and standing