

A Foundation for the Church (Titus 1)

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, let's go. Titus 1. Let's follow along, guys. I'll be reading from NIV. Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness in the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, and which now at his appointed season he has brought to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Saviour, to Titus, my true son in our common faith. Grace and peace from God the Father in Christ Jesus our Saviour. The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town as I directed you. An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless, not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.

He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. For there are many rebellious people full of meaningless talk and deception, especially those of their circumcision group. They must be silenced, because they are disrupting whole households by teaching them, teaching things they ought not to teach, and that for the sake of dishonest gain. One of the Crete's own prophets has said it, Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons. This saying is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply so that they will be sound in their faith and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the merely human commands of those who reject the truth. To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupt and do not believe nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted.

They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny Him. They are detestable, disobedient, and unfit for doing anything good. Okay, Isaac. Let's welcome up Isaac.

Okay. Go Isaac. Hello. This is quite sad. William never gets a clap when he preaches, but thank you everyone.

Let's give it up for William for his faithful, faithful speaking day, week in and week out. Good afternoon, everyone. How are we doing? Good. Three people are good.

[3 : 0 1] Good afternoon, everyone.

A few weeks ago, I was teaching my parents about online scams. That's just something we millennials or some Gen Zs, that's just another responsibility we have to do for our parents is they get a little bit older and they become targets of things like this.

So I don't know if you remember the Nigerian print scams, but those are no more. And there are a lot more voice changes and deep fakes, right, where they can take your face, your voice, project it onto a photo or a video and send it out to people you know.

So scammers could sound like anyone. They could look like anyone, talk like anyone. So I told my parents, you know, if someone called you in the middle of the night and pretended to be me, never believe it, right? Don't give them any money. Just hang up.

And then we set up some secret passwords and phrases that only our family would know. So I'm not going to tell you what they are today. I can't because I've already forgotten all those phrases.

[4 : 36] Ah, so we probably have to come up with some more, yeah, some more robust methods of security in our family. Yeah, but no one has any money anyway, so it doesn't matter. So that's just something we have to deal with in today's internet age, right?

But we aren't special. This is something we as humans, we've always dealt with. From Cain lying about his brother's whereabouts to Pinocchio's ever-growing nose, we know that the truth can be a rare commodity sometimes.

And as we've just read, it was no different in Paul's time. So in the book of Titus, we'll see today how important truth was to Paul. In the next couple of weeks, we'll also see truth as a foundation of the church and also the truth in the gospel and grace.

This week, we'll see truth that mixes instruction with encouragement, with guidance, and with the gospel. We'll see today how Paul values the truth as a foundation for the church and how it can help us choose leaders and to keep the peace.

All right. So cool. I'm excited. Let's pray. Father God, we thank you for your holy word. We thank you that you have not changed since the beginning of time and neither has your word.

[6 : 02] May your spirit be here and speak to us as we read and understand the truth of your word and may it change hearts and minds tonight. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. So I don't know when the last time you wrote a letter was, but when I write a letter or an email or send an MSN message a very long time ago, it usually starts off by saying, Dear someone or hi to someone, right?

But not Paul. How does he start off? He says, Paul, a servant of God and apostle of Jesus Christ. So actually, this is not the first time that Paul does this.

Paul and his other writings in Galatians and in Timothy and Ephesians, he doesn't just introduce himself or the person he's talking to.

He introduces the God that he serves. In Galatians 1, Paul, an apostle sent not from man nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father. In Ephesians, we see Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, and similarly in Timothy.

You see, to Paul, it wasn't so important that he introduce himself or address Titus or address Timothy or the Ephesian church. To Paul, it was more important the reader knew the one who sent him.

[7 : 29] So this introduction that we read today in Titus is one of the longest in Paul's writings and includes many concepts about Christianity, about faith, about truth, about godliness.

God the Father, Christ Jesus, our Savior. It's a lot to pack into four short verses. Paul introduces his mission as one to further the faith and knowledge of the truth.

We see here Paul lay out the key theme for his letter to his companion Titus. That's what this whole book is about. It was the letter from Paul to this guy called Titus.

So Paul here is stressing the importance of knowledge, but not just earthly knowledge, not just general knowledge. He specifically mentions knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness.

So as disciples of Jesus Christ, we often focus on faith as the key pillar of our belief, and for good reason. Hebrews 11.6 tells us that without faith, it is impossible to please God.

[8 : 37] 2 Corinthians reminds us that we walk by faith and not by sight. So faith is very important. But part of our responsibility here as Christians, as Paul is reminding us, is that we must also further our knowledge of the truth as this leads to godliness.

That's very biblical as well, right? 2 Peter also tells us to make every effort to add to your faith goodness and to goodness knowledge and to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance and to perseverance godliness.

And that, godliness leads to mutual affection and to mutual affection, love. So these are very, very important concepts, right? Godliness, truth, faith.

But brothers and sisters, Paul has placed the big idea of this letter sandwiched right between those two ideas of faith and works, the truth.

Paul here repeats the truth many times. Throughout this whole letter of Titus, he repeats the truth in many different ways. He refers to God as one who does not lie.

[9 : 48] He reminds us of trustworthy messages and sound doctrine in verse 9. He calls out those who reject the truth in verse 14. He mentions being sound in faith, soundness of speech, and a trustworthy saying later in chapter 2 and 3 of this letter.

So whenever we see repetition in the word of God, especially so many times, we know how strongly that idea matters to the writer.

Paul really wanted Titus to understand the importance of truth. And this topic of truth mattered so much more because of what Titus was sent to do.

So Titus was one of these early church leaders. He has served with Paul on journeys to Jerusalem. He served in Corinth. And now, as verse 5 tells us, he was left in this place called Crete for work that was unfinished.

We aren't sure exactly what that work was, but verse 5 reminds us that Titus was left in Crete to put what remained into order. So he was sent here to make something out of quite a messy situation.

[11 : 02] So we all have disorder in our lives sometimes. Our rooms pile up with clothes, with the used clove chair. Our counters get buried under dirty dishes.

Our home screens and emails, our WhatsApps, our WeChats fill up with thousands and thousands of messages. And disorder seems to attack as soon as our back is turned.

And for churches, they're sometimes the same. We're no different. The church in Crete, for these guys, disorder was being caused by, as verse 10 tells us, people who were full of meaningless talk and deception.

Rebellious people. These people were identified as a circumcision group. These guys were a group of people who believed and taught that circumcision and the law of Moses were required to live as followers of Christ.

They were teaching things they weren't supposed to teach, disrupting many others, doing it for dishonest gain. These were the type of people that Titus was sent to help out.

[12 : 11] So at this point, in verse 12 we see, Paul actually gets a bit angry. He says, these people must be silenced. He even quotes a famous philosopher from Crete.

This guy, this philosopher called Epimenides, says, all Cretans are liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons. This saying is true, Paul says.

Harsh words, right? Imagine someone saying that of us who live here in Auckland. All Aucklanders are liars, evil savages, good for nothing losers.

Ouch. Now imagine if someone said that about PCBC, about our church. This is how worked out Paul was getting. He was so angry at these people.

Some of these so-called believers said they knew God, but by their actions, they were denying him. Paul later on says that they are detestable, disobedient, and unfit for doing anything good.

[13 : 16] And Paul actually mentions this group again later on in Galatians 2, verse 5. Titus, this guy Titus, was being forced to undergo circumcision, even though he wasn't a Jew.

He was a Greek. Paul says they didn't give in to a minute. They didn't give in to them for a minute. PCBC, we no longer practice circumcision, right?

But are there any traditions that we may cling to? Are there any customs that we force onto other members of our church? Are there any stereotypes against cultures or discrimination against doctrine that might be slightly different to ours?

Are there any of our own personal truths that we put over and beyond, above the truth of the gospel? For Paul, this guy Paul, the writer of this letter, the truth mattered so much more because he himself was once part of this group called the Pharisees.

So this group, they were an expert in traditions. They were a student of the law of Moses. And Paul, this guy, was number one. He was one of the best and brightest of his generation.

[14 : 32] But Paul actually spent much of the first half of his life persecuting Christians, bringing punishment and violence to those who accepted Jesus as the Messiah.

He was, in his own words, one of these evil brutes. But one day, on the road to Damascus, Paul was completely transformed by the Lord.

And Paul came to know the true gospel, that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died on the cross for his and our sins. Before that, Paul was just like these people described here, detestable, disobedient, and unfit for doing anything good.

But it's not just Paul, you see. You, me, our friends, our family, no one who has ever lived or ever will live can do anything good by their own hands, by their own efforts.

This problem of sin affects everyone. It taints our lives like a poison and makes us detestable to a holy, holy God. But God, in his mercy and grace, was willing to give his own Son as a substitute for our sins.

[15 : 49] Jesus Christ, the very opposite of us, perfect when we were detestable, obedient when we weren't, mighty in power, he gave up his life on the cross so that sinners like you and me could have, as verse 2 says earlier on, the hope of eternal life which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began.

That is the good news. That is the truth. If you don't really understand, or maybe one of the first times you've heard this, let me encourage you. Speak to the friend who brought you here, or to any of the leaders around, I think they'll be more than happy to share with you this hope for eternity.

But if you do know the truth, and you're here in PCBC today as members of one body, may I just encourage you with three quick points on how to really solidify and build ourselves on this truth as the foundation of our church.

So, I recently changed jobs, well, when I say recent, it's been a year, but it feels quite recent. And I moved from the engineering sort of field and design into the construction industry.

And that was actually quite difficult for me. I don't know why they hired me. But I was learning all these new concepts and new words that clients and colleagues were just throwing out in meetings and I had no idea what they meant.

[17 : 20] But one thing that I've learnt, and maybe you know already, is that in order to build a good building, you need a strong foundation. Makes sense, right?

Just chuck some concrete on the ground and there you have it, a nice strong foundation. But it's not that simple. What if your ground was too soft? Or too sandy?

Or what if it got wet all the time? I've learnt to build a strong foundation, you need these things. piles. Yeah, I thought a pile was just a lump of sand or a bit of dirt on the ground.

But no, you drill a whole lot of holes deep into the ground, 10, 20, 30 metres. And then you put in wood or steel or like this picture shows, concrete.

So after you have these piles in store deep into the ground, then you can build on top. It can be a long, difficult, and very expensive process.

[18 : 23] But because it's so important, it's worth getting right every time. And our lives are just the same. Church is more than a building.

It's more than just four walls and a roof. In fact, where two or more gather in his name, Jesus is already there. So in order for us to have a strong foundation for the church, if that's what we really want, we ourselves must have a strong foundation in the truth, in the word.

Like the piles shown here under the building, we ourselves must have a deep understanding and knowledge of this life-giving gospel. As Christians with a personal relationship with the Lord of the universe, we must have a personal faith, a personal knowledge of the truth.

It can't be your mom's faith or your dad's knowledge, not your pastor or your leader's faith. It needs to be yours. And you tell me, yes, Isaac, this is all simple, it's Christianity 101, read your Bible, pray your prayers, go to church.

But brothers and sisters, how much do we actually pursue this knowledge of the truth? And do we marvel at these holy words? how often do we delight in what God breathed?

[19 : 45] Or how often do we put off our devotions or our quiet times just because something else is flashier, more entertaining? And I'm talking to myself here, right?

My brain is sometimes so unfocused, so used to scrolling past and scrolling through these purpose-built algorithms that just send entertainment direct into my brain.

It feels like quieting down myself and studying the word of God is the furthest thing from my mind. But PCPC, we don't want to be like these deep fake Christians back in Paul's time, but also in our time today.

Looking like one thing, but being and acting like something completely opposite. We want to be real followers of Christ, no cap. It may take sacrifice, like charging your phone in a different room or giving up a few extra minutes of sleep in the morning, or maybe leaving your phone in your pocket during worship and sermon.

But if the foundation of the church is built on believers who love the truth of God, then it's worth every little bit of sacrifice. Secondly, a church with a foundation on the truth appoints godly leaders.

[21 : 06] verses 5 to 9 talk about another task Titus was appointed to perform. He wasn't just sent to straighten out these people who were disrupting whole families, but also to appoint godly leaders.

Simply put, to sum it up, leaders should first be able to lead their own households well. They should exemplify the characteristics of Jesus Christ, and they should hold firmly to the trustworthy message.

For those of us sitting here that may lead in any capacity, it's a pretty clear list of do's and don'ts. But I think more than that, it's an invitation to assess our own characters against.

How many of the do's I don't do, and how many of the don'ts I do do. We can't be perfect, but only the Lord Jesus is.

We definitely fail sometimes, or many times, and we miss the mark that a verse like this so clearly lays out for us. But do we see as leaders sanctification at work in our lives?

[22 : 22] Do we see an increase of self-control over the years, of increase in discipline or holiness? I think we can all earnestly ask God for more of these things and work towards being a faithful steward of God.

But maybe you're not a leader, right? You don't really see yourself as an overseer. But let me tell you, I think we have responsibilities being a member as well.

As a Baptist church, we believe the Holy Spirit inspires all of us and gives us discernment to make choices and decisions as a body of Christ. So when the time comes for us to elect new leaders or review how the church is run, do we make an effort to know these guys and girls?

Do we pray for our leaders? Do we care for our leaders? If the foundation of the church is built by godly leaders, then these leaders are also supported by godly members.

Our QMMs, our AGMs, all our different MMMs, are the starting blocks of this firm foundation. Speaking like a leader, acting like a leader, I think these things can all be deep faked.

[23 : 41] But the character that qualifies us for leadership, the growing and nurturing of the seed of the gospel, these things can't be faked. They must come out of the Holy Spirit's work in us.

So whether you are or you aren't a leader, Paul's guidelines in this letter to Titus are true benchmarks for us to work towards. And lastly, a firm foundation can only be built if we confront those that endanger that foundation.

As mentioned earlier, Paul was speaking against those of the circumcision group. These people were upsetting whole families. They were empty talkers and deceivers.

They must be dealt with and corrected as soon as possible so that they may be sound in the faith. Part of our job as foundation builders in the truth is to know the truth.

By knowing the truth, we also know when someone isn't telling the truth, right? Even if they are saying something that sounds like the truth, Paul reminds us that we will be able to spot these people by the way they act.

[24 : 51] They deny God by their works. So what are we to do as a church? How are we to understand? Think what Paul is telling us is that firm, loving correction is for their own good.

And there are many ways to confront sin in the church. The book of Matthew tells us to confront that person privately. If they still don't listen, take someone with you, escalating that to church leaders if necessary.

Jesus tells us in Luke 17 to rebuke them and if they repent, forgive them. Whatever way we confront sin, we do it out of love.

Love for the body of believers and love also for that person who may have wronged you because Christ also died to save them.

But church, we cannot tolerate sin with an open for all to see, or hidden away in private. Unfortunately, the global church has long been hurt by things like sexual misconduct, financial crimes, spiritual abuse.

[26 : 04] We see this in the news or we may also have experienced it ourselves or know of others that have. Paul is clear in this letter.

In order to build a strong foundation for our church, we cannot allow these sinful things to happen. So in this letter, Paul has outlined for us a couple of ways to build our church, PCBC, with a strong foundation in the truth.

And next week, we'll be looking at how the truth is used as a foundation for our lives and our families.

Titus here today, we learn, was a guy sent to help bring order to an unruly church in Crete. And we may sometimes feel like we need a guy like Titus as well, to help bring order to a chaotic life.

If only we had a guy like Titus to come into our church and set everything in order, maybe things would be better. But brothers and sisters, I think we already have something better.

[27 : 14] we have this book, God Breathe, Spirit Inspired. We have Jesus Christ himself, guiding us towards truth that leads to godliness by the power of the Holy Spirit.

So let's continue to build our foundation in him. Thank you very much. Let's pray. Dear Heavenly Father, once again, Lord, we just thank you for this wonderful, gift of the gospel that has saved us, that has repaired and reconciled our relationship with you.

And Lord, will we just continue to understand deeper how you want us to build this foundation in our own lives, Lord, and how this may be able to help build a strong foundation for the church.

God, help us not to be deep-faith Christians, help us to be real in our words and in our actions. And may everything that we do, that we say, that we think, be built on you or for your glory.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[28 : 37] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.