



Paul's Letters to Titus & Philemon

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Titus 1:1 through 3:15 and Philemon 1:1-25

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.”
(Titus 2:11-12)

BACKGROUND

The Book of Titus was written by Paul around A.D. 64, between his first and second imprisonments in Rome. Titus and the two epistles to Timothy were letters of instruction for these two new overseers of churches. They were also the last of Paul's writings in the Scriptures.

Titus was a Greek man who became a believer and then was carefully mentored by Paul. He accompanied Paul on some of his journeys and traveled as a messenger for Paul on occasion. Eventually, Titus was given the responsibility of overseeing the churches on the small island of Crete.

Crete had significant pagan influences because it was a training ground for Roman soldiers. The people of Crete were known for their laziness, gluttony, and lying. To combat these cultural influences, the churches needed to be founded on sound principles, including that of a disciplined life.

Many Jews lived in Crete. Some of the Christians there probably witnessed the Day of Pentecost more than thirty years before this letter was written (Acts 2:11). There were, however, other Jews who tried to put unreasonable requirements on the Christians of these fledgling churches by forcing them to observe points of the old Law that had been fulfilled in Christ, as well as hundreds of Jewish traditions that had been created independent of the Law. In this epistle, Paul challenged the younger man to uphold sound doctrine in order to withstand these harmful influences.

The Book of Philemon was a letter from Paul to his close, personal friend, Philemon. It was written about A.D. 60, during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome. Onesimus, a runaway slave belonging to Philemon, had become a convert through Paul's ministry in Rome.

Paul wrote petitioning Philemon to forgive Onesimus and to receive him as a brother. Paul felt compelled to return the slave to his rightful owner under the Roman law. Yet, Paul asked Philemon

OPENER

to consider a higher law, that of Christian love and brotherhood, and to extend mercy to his slave.

Though this letter was to Philemon, it was also addressed to the elders and the church, which is thought to have been the Colossian church. Thus, not only did the subject of the letter pertain to an individual circumstance, but also to the principle of equality of individuals within the church.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. In Titus 1, Paul outlined to Titus the qualifications needed for leaders in the church. It was not enough to possess an intellectual knowledge of the Scriptures; leaders in the church needed to be people of integrity, character, and service. List and describe the attributes necessary for church leaders (verses 6-9). Are these to be exemplified by pastors and preachers only? Explain your answer.

1. *Blameless – Conscience without fault toward God and man; of good reputation and character.*
2. *Husband of one wife – Morally pure; having a proper marriage.*
3. *Having faithful children – Showing ability to lead and guide the family.*
4. *Steward of God – A good manager of one's household and resources.*
5. *Not selfwilled – Does not put his own desires above those of others; has a heart of love.*
6. *Not soon angry – Is not easily riled; makes thoughtful judgments based on reason rather than emotion.*
7. *Not given to wine – Temperate in all things.*
8. *No striker – Not heavy-handed or violent.*
9. *Not given to filthy lucre – Does not receive "dirty money," bribes, or ill-gotten money.*
10. *Lover of hospitality – Warm; welcoming guests; eager to share; generous.*
11. *Lover of good men – Surrounding one's self with good companions rather than evil ones.*
12. *Sober – Having self-control; discreet; serious-minded.*
13. *Just – Fair; honest before God and man.*
14. *Holy – Devout; sinless; godly.*
15. *Temperate – Moderate; disciplined.*
16. *Holding fast the Word – Unmovable; stable; sound in doctrine.*

Bring out that every Christian should strive for these attributes, for we are all “ministers” of God, whatever our calling may be.

2. In Titus 1:10-16, Paul warned Titus that there would be false teachers who would try to deceive the brethren. Some, for their own selfish ambitions, would

try to force these Christians to follow rituals of the old Law. There are voices today, too, that would attempt to lead us astray. How can we know for sure what is truth and what is error?

Verse 14 tells us not to listen to fables or commandments of men that conflict with the truth. We are to measure all teaching by the Word of God. In such honest seeking, His Spirit will guide us. He promised there would be a voice behind us if we turned to the right or to the left from the straight path of truth (Isaiah 30:21).

One illustration you might mention is that bank employees study genuine currency in order to recognize counterfeits. The more we study the truth, the less likely it becomes that we will believe lies.

3. Sound doctrine is much more than a creed—it is a way of life. Our lives are epistles to others. We can be either a spiritual encouragement or discouragement to those around us. Paul was concerned that those in the body of Christ be an influence for good to others in the church. He admonished those who had experience to be mentors and teachers to those who were younger. Why do you think the senior saints are of great value in our church? See Titus 2:2-8. What are some of the things we can learn from them? Why is it important for a person of any age to be a good example?

God placed a high responsibility and value on older men and women. He indicated that they were to teach the younger people. What a wonderful asset the testimonies of seniors are to a Gospel meeting! The older saints are a valuable resource to encourage the young. Because of their years of experience, they can teach the younger ones to be temperate, to be sound in faith and charity, to show holy behavior, to have patience, to be loving and respectful spouses, and many other good things. You may want to discuss with your class some practical applications of these virtues. If your class members are young people, encourage

If your class members are young people, encourage them to get acquainted with some of the elderly saints. Many of the seniors have wonderful stories to tell.

We need to be good examples, whatever age we are, because there are those who observe us. They may be children, new converts, the unsaved, or those who look up to us in some other way. We all need each other in this Gospel!

4. We know good deeds will not take us to Heaven. We read, “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us” (Titus 3:5). Yet, verse 8 tells us that we should “be careful to maintain good works.” How do these two statements fit together?

It is true that nothing “good” we can do will make us worthy of Heaven. Only our surrender to Christ and the receiving of His righteousness will bring salvation. That godly righteousness within us will then motivate

us to do good works. We are admonished to be careful to continue these good works, as it could be easy to become lazy or distracted by the cares of life.

You may ask your class to name some of the good works the Lord would have us do. Examples could include: feed a brother who is hungry, help someone who is in need, visit the sick, be faithful in our church duties, write a note of encouragement to the lonely, reach out to a lost world with the hope of the Gospel. There is so much to do and the laborers are so few!

5. Paul was an Apostle and instructor of many churches. In his letter to his friend, Philemon, he had the authority to demand that Philemon forgive and restore his slave. Why do you think Paul, rather than commanding, pled with Philemon to forgive Onesimus and accept him as a brother?

Bring out that in our relationships with other people, a soft touch usually has more influence than a demanding, overbearing manner.

Discuss the fact that the Gospel is based on free will—God made man with the power of choice to do good or evil. God wanted a friend, not a robot. God loves the sacrifices of obedience from a willing heart. Paul was wise to give Philemon the choice of how to deal with his slave. A sacrifice from a willing heart is so much more valuable to God than one that is coerced. Ask the students to think of the things they have given to the Lord, such as money, time, talents, an act of forgiveness, etc. Have these offerings been given with a willing and cheerful heart?

6. Paul asked Philemon to forgive Onesimus, who had been Philemon's personal property before he ran away—an act which was punishable by death under Roman law. Philemon was asked not only to forgive him, but to receive him as a brother. We may be asked to forgive someone who has done us a great wrong. Is it always easy to forgive? What should we do if we find it difficult to forgive?

It may not always be easy to forgive. However, it will help us to remember how much Jesus forgave us. We may have to spend time in prayer, asking God to help us see the matter from His perspective. As we pray and surrender the hurt to God, we will find a release. This is a form of consecration, of submitting our will to God. As we do this, we will grow stronger in grace. We must then remember not to pick up the burden of unforgiveness at a later time. We must keep the matter consecrated to God.

Your class may want to share times in which the offering of forgiveness was difficult, but brought peace.

7. In Paul's day, the Roman, Greek, and Jewish cultures had strict levels of position within society. Slaves were demeaned and women had few rights. However, the Gospel restores human dignity. As Christians, we are to treat all people with honor and respect. What are

ways we can show respect to people who are different from ourselves? What are ways we may show a lack of respect without intending to do so?

We must always remember the Golden Rule. If we try to put ourselves in the place of others, we will have insight on how to act. Others usually desire to be treated with fairness, with no importance given to the differences between them and us. People of different income, education, gender, age, appearance, race, or ability can experience wonderful love and fellowship.

We need to avoid ethnic and gender jokes that are negative and humor that exploits any particular group of people. The criterion should be: does this disrespect the other person or people? Godly love to all should be our guideline.

CONCLUSION

Paul's letters to Titus and Philemon now serve as admonitions to us. Let us take heed and use these words as encouragement in our Christian walks.