

Titus

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, July 14, 2024
PASSAGES	Titus 1; Titus 2; Titus 3
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:29:26 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Paul left Titus on a hard island to put young churches in order — and the order he had in mind was not administrative. It was leaders and households whose ordinary lives showed the gospel instead of only announcing it. And what trains a person to live that way is not a rule book. It is grace.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ Crete had a bad reputation even among the Cretans. That is exactly where Paul saw an opening for the gospel — not a place to survive, a place to plant.
- ◆ Paul's qualifications for elders are mostly about character and household, because a church plant needs leaders who both stay on message and embody it.
- ◆ The letter opens on a God “who never lies.” In a culture whose gods were famous for trickery, truthfulness was not a minor virtue but the center of a counter-cultural identity.
- ◆ Whether Titus 1:6 means an elder's children must be believers or merely faithful is a live translation question, and Matt left it open on purpose. What he would not leave open is the idea that another adult's unbelief is your fault.
- ◆ “Evangelical panic” — cutting corners or raising your voice to manage someone else's response to Jesus — will burn you out, and it rests on something that is not true.
- ◆ Ritual does not purify. To the pure all things are pure; to the defiled, no amount of external observance gets there.

- ◆ The home is not the leftover part of discipleship. It is where the gospel proves it has the power we claim for it — in how you talk to your spouse and your kids.
- ◆ Grace is the teacher. Titus 2:11 says it is the grace of God, not hard rules, that trains us to renounce ungodliness.

► 1:29:26

This one was a tour of a tiny text — the whole letter of Titus in a single sitting, read mostly straight through with Matt stopping where it earned a stop. His recommendation before he started: go home and read it out loud to yourself. It is short enough that you can.

1. Why Crete

► 1:30:03

Titus had been left on an island off Greece with multiple cities and multiple church plants, and Paul wanted all of them put in working order. Matt was candid that he was leaning on historians here, but the picture the commentaries give is consistent: Crete had a bad cultural reputation. “I know that it’s not often appropriate in the modern era to criticize another culture,” he said, “but other cultures were definitely criticizing Crete. And their behavior was so bad, they criticized themselves.”

► 1:31:01

That is precisely why Paul liked it. In that kind of dark environment he saw an opportunity for the gospel to permeate a society — not a place for churches to merely survive, but a place for them to thrive. What Paul is after, Matt said, is gospel-inspired, Jesus-powered transformation: “We’re not just floating heads that need to make a decision.” The goal is not a signature on a card, as though we had voted for Jesus. It is a whole life, in community, visibly changed.

Which is why so much of the letter is about leadership. You want leaders who will stay on message and also embody the message — “establishing beachheads of counter-cultural communities that will show the gospel, not just spread it.”

2. A God who never lies

► 1:34:50

Paul’s greeting names the faith of God’s elect, their knowledge of the truth, and the eternal life promised by a God “who never lies”. Matt flagged that as deliberate. Set it against Zeus and his family — gods known for playing tricks and deceiving not only people but each other, with worshippers who

behaved the same way. The Christian difference in that setting was not arbitrary etiquette. It came from the core of who God is. Our God is a truth teller, so his people know truth.

3. The elder's household, and the verse nobody can settle

► 1:35:20

“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 — if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.”

TITUS 1:5-6 ↗

► 1:35:51

Here Matt stopped and showed his work. Put that verse into Bible Hub and you will find dozens of translations that do not agree: the New King James and the Holman Christian Standard, among others, render it *faithful* children rather than *believing* children. The Greek word is the same one Paul uses a chapter later of bondservants “showing all good faith”, which is not a statement about their theology.

Both readings are linguistically available, and he said so plainly. An elder with believing kids is obviously an asset. On the other hand, you cannot control what your children believe — but you can establish a family culture that is not chaotic, “because if you have crazy rebellious kids, then it’s like, well, you can’t manage your own household. And if your interpersonal life is chaotic, what if you have no business running a church?” He also pointed out the obvious wrinkle in reading these lists too rigidly: Paul had zero wives and zero children, and it would be strange to disqualify him from the churches he planted.

4. Evangelical panic

► 1:39:24

The one reading he did push back on is the version that makes your child’s unbelief your verdict. Follow that logic far enough, he said, and you have to blame Jesus for Judas. Do adults make their own choices, or don’t they?

He named the failure mode: “sometimes what I call evangelical panic. When we freak out to the point of maybe cutting corners, compromising our beliefs so as to let people stay in the believing — I want you to believe so bad and I want to manage your response so bad, I’ll cut corners or do whatever or start screaming at you.” We can govern ourselves, our words and our houses. “You cannot adopt

responsibility for how somebody else responds to Jesus. That will crush you, it will burn you out, freak you out, and it's also just not true."

5. Overseers, and the courage to rebuke

► 1:40:28

The list that follows is almost entirely about character — not arrogant, not quick-tempered, not a drunkard, not violent, not greedy, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled — and it ends with a working requirement: hold firm to the trustworthy word, so as to instruct in sound doctrine *and* rebuke those who contradict it. Matt did not soften that second half. Rebuke takes courage, and a church needs leaders willing to do it, in communities that are otherwise safe and hospitable.

6. The people Titus has to shut down

► 1:41:33

Empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party, are upsetting whole families for shameful gain. These are the people insisting Gentile converts submit to Torah and be circumcised. Paul goes after them at length in Galatians, and Matt drew the line where Paul draws it: we want peace, we want hospitality, and there are still a few topics Paul will draw swords over. This is one. There is freedom in Christ, and no condemnation, entirely because of Jesus — by grace, through faith.

► 1:43:04

Then the famous line: "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons. This testimony is true." Matt acknowledged that this lands badly on the mercy-hearted people in the room, offered the range of readings — from "yes, they really did say that" to "there may be something to it" to the fully hardcore version — and then declined to settle it. "You ask Paul when you see him."

What he did work with is the instruction attached to it: rebuke them sharply, so that they may be sound in the faith, "not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth." Those commands of people, he thought, are still the circumcision party — and the argument is the freedom argument again. "When Jesus declares you free in him and yet you submit to ordinances because of men, you're submitting to people." Which is a great many regulations in the Torah, most of them about purity. That, he said, is why Paul turns the corner where he does.

“To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.”

TITUS 1:15–16 ↗

To those who are in Christ, not condemned, trusting him — including the uncircumcised — all things are pure and the conscience is clean. To the defiled, no number of rituals, festivals or regulations will get there: “no matter how many times you put on the ritualistic this, you go to a festival that, you submit yourself to this regulation.” They profess to know God with all these external things and deny him by their works. Matt read the verdict twice and then grinned at it: “Man, Paul can really turn a phrase, can he?”

7. What the households are for

► 1:44:46

Chapter two opens on a hinge — “But as for you, Titus,” as in, unlike all that: teach what accords with sound doctrine. Then older men, older women and young women — sober-minded, dignified, reverent, self-controlled, not slanderers or slaves to too much wine, teaching what is good. He paused on that last pair long enough to wonder aloud whether Paul had somebody specific in view: “I wonder if he had certain women in mind, I don’t know.” Then the harder lines — working at home, that is, not lazy; kind; submissive to their own husbands — which he acknowledged might be hard for some people to hear before explaining why he reads it the way he does. In [Ephesians 5](#) husbands and wives are acting out, theatrically, the gospel of Jesus and his church. We are showing the gospel, not only saying it.

► 1:45:51

And the bride, he insisted, gets the good end of that deal. Does she get more out of it than she puts back in? He let the question stand — and then handed the floor to someone who had pushed back on him the last time he made the observation: you cannot really measure what God gets out of it, “because his heart is full of delight for having a bride.” Fair enough, he said. He still wanted it clear how lopsided the ledger looks from our side. “He’s giving us dignity and forgiveness, even sharing in his glory, and I’ve given — I can just, I’ll speak for myself — I’ve given him problems and lists. You see how many lists you give the Lord of things that you want?”

► 1:46:16

Which is why husbands cannot lift the verse out of its context and land on *I’m the boss*. Jesus served humbly and did humiliating things. He is not domineering; he actually makes fun of men who are,

with their best seats and their greetings in the marketplace, and he told anyone who wants to lead to serve like the youngest.

► 1:48:03

A chaotic home in a young church tells the watching city something false. What are the Cretans going to make of a whole community of this new faith that talks constantly about transformation and is a total mess? “It’s not gonna change the gospel, it’s not gonna make the gospel not true, because it is true, whether we’re completely screwy or not. But it’s really, really impeding people’s ability to hear it or see it.” So let the transformation go deep — into the private place of the home, the way you speak to your spouse, the way you interact with your kids. That is Jesus’ territory too, not just the sanctuary. He wants it to be his territory.

8. Younger men, and the opponents who are watching

► 1:48:44

“Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled” — and Matt stopped on *likewise*. Likewise to what? To everything he just said: self-controlled, pure, working hard, kind. “So in that same way for the young fellows too.” Then Titus himself: a model of good works, and in his teaching integrity, dignity and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, with nothing evil to say about us.

Why so fixated on that? “Because there are opponents looking for an opportunity to criticize. And he’s saying, Titus, you gotta watch yourself.” It is the same concern in a different key — the gospel mission reaching down into behavior. “It matters that we let Jesus speak to us about our self-control. That’s a perfectly adequate battleground for the gospel. It may be in the secret place, but it’s totally a good place for the gospel to duke it out with dark forces in your own heart.” The way we love our kids, the way we work at our jobs, the way we talk to our spouse.

9. Adorning the doctrine

► 1:50:14

“Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.”

TITUS 2:9–10 ↗

Matt was careful about the setting here: slaves were treated as equals in Paul's churches, and Paul is also being careful not to look like he is fomenting a rebellion. He also stopped on "showing all good faith" long enough to close a loop he had opened an hour earlier — that is the same word Paul used of an elder's children back in 1:6. "There's that same word again... that's why I really mean it. Linguistically, it could just mean faithful and obedient."

But the phrase he wanted was the last one. Have you ever thought about how you get to live your own life, and yet, because you belong to Jesus, it touches his mission? All that inconvenient material — well pleasing at work, not argumentative, not pilfering — exists so that our lives *adorn* what we say we believe. And he would not let it stay theoretical: "It's a good opportunity here just to reflect, to pause and reflect: do I wanna let the gospel transform me in these hidden places? The gospel is a motivation behind our little choices."

10. It is grace that teaches

► 1:51:25

"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ."

TITUS 2:11-14 ↗

Matt put the question directly to the room: what is doing the teaching in that sentence? "Hardcore rules? No, it's grace. See in verse 11, it is the grace of God that teaches us to say no to ungodliness." And what grace produces is not merely restraint — it is a people Jesus redeemed from all lawlessness and purified for his own possession, zealous for good works. Then, dryly: "Imagine how much that would stick out in a dark culture." And a beat later, to the room: "I wonder if you can relate."

11. What we were, and what was poured out

► 1:52:43

Chapter three asks for submission to authorities, readiness for every good work, and speaking evil of no one — where Matt interjected, "you got me on that one" — along with avoiding quarreling, being gentle, and showing perfect courtesy toward all people. Then it turns to what we ourselves once were: foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to passions, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others

and hating one another. That is the before picture, and Matt read it as Paul showing his work — the cost of the transfer out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of his Son.

“He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

TITUS 3:4–7 ↗

► 1:53:44

The letter ends in logistics — see that

Zenas the lawyer and Apollos lack nothing, and let our people learn to devote themselves to good works — and Matt caught the verb. *Learn*. “That would be something you’d have to learn. We don’t all come out rearing to do that.” And the learning has a use attached: so as to help cases of urgent need and not be unfruitful. Then greetings, and the last four words of the letter, which are the same ones it started with: “Grace be with you all.”

Where he left it

► 1:54:24

His hope for the letter was that it would be encouragement and wisdom for people trying to live out the gospel in an environment that is arguably as full of madness as Crete was — without becoming judgmental about it, since we were foolish and hating and hated ourselves not long ago. The aim is to stick out in a way that is appropriate, showing that gospel transformation carries the power we claim for it.

And if you suspect it is not carrying that power in your life, his counsel was not to try harder in private. It was to preach to yourself and go to the cross on behalf of your family: “Lord, have your way in us. Have your way in my mouth. And then my kid dynamic.” Not only for the sake of the people at home, though that matters, but for the community watching. He closed by taking the pressure off the outcome without taking it off the effort: God is merciful and no fool, and he knows that the moment we try we will stumble. “Don’t worry, he will shine brighter than we do, and he’s not incompetent. However, we should make every effort to shine the light of his gospel all the same.” Then he prayed it rather than restating it: “God, thank you for today. I ask that you speak to us, give us wisdom, help us by living in the transformative power of Jesus Christ.”

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- [Titus 1:1–4](#)
- [Titus 1:5–6](#)
- [Titus 2:9–10](#)
- [Titus 1:7–9](#)
- [Titus 1:10–11](#)
- [Galatians 5:1](#)
- [Titus 1:12–14](#)
- [Titus 1:15–16](#)
- [Titus 2:1–5](#)
- [Ephesians 5:22–33](#)
- [Luke 20:46](#)
- [Luke 22:26](#)
- [Titus 2:6–8](#)
- [Titus 2:11–14](#)
- [Titus 3:1–3](#)
- [Colossians 1:13](#)
- [Titus 3:4–7](#)
- [Titus 3:13–14](#)

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Paul saw Crete's reputation as an opportunity rather than a reason to withdraw. Where do you currently see your own city or workplace as too far gone to plant anything in?
2. Matt described "evangelical panic" — cutting corners or raising your voice to manage someone else's response to Jesus. Where have you carried a responsibility that was never yours?
3. Titus 1:15 says purity comes from being in Christ, not from observance. What external practice are you quietly relying on to make you feel clean?
4. If your home is where the gospel proves it has power, what would someone learn about the gospel from a week of watching how you talk to the people you live with?
5. Grace, not rules, is what trains us to say no. Name one thing you have been trying to white-knuckle — and what changes this week if you let grace teach it instead?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel's senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church's governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope's own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c4hG9SH3oQ8&t=5366s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.