

"SANCTIFICATION OF THE CHURCH"

(Titus 1)

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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—² in the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time,³ and which now at his appointed season he has brought to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior,

⁴ To Titus, my true son in our common faith:

Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

⁵ 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. ⁶ 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. ⁷ 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. ⁸ Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. ⁹ 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.

¹⁰ For there are many rebellious people, full of meaningless talk and deception, especially those of the circumcision group. ¹¹ They must be silenced, because they are disrupting whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach—and that for the sake of dishonest gain. ¹² One of Crete's own prophets has said it: "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons." ¹³ This saying is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith ¹⁴ and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the merely human commands of those who reject the truth. ¹⁵ To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. ¹⁶ They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.

Core Issue: The church is called to be holy and blameless. In order to accomplish this, we must have Christ-centered identity, God-fearing leaders, and unwavering truth that become the foundation of all that we do.

Opposing Value: We are tempted to follow the standards and examples of this world.

INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon church. Children, I'm so glad that you're with us today. Remember that you're not just a spectator here but you're also called to be a worshiper of God just like everyone else. So, I encourage you to open your hearts and listen carefully to what God has in store for you.

Pastor Peter is away this week; so, we'll take a short break from John and will look at the book of Titus. It's a short book with just three chapters. I'll be preaching from chapter one today; so, if you have your Bibles, please turn to Titus 1. It's found on page 965 in our red pew Bibles. Parents, please help your children to find it as well. Next Sunday, however, we'll go back to John for a few more weeks and at the end of the month, Pastor Tim will preach from chapter two and I'll finish it off with chapter three on the first Sunday of August.

BACKGROUND

So, what's this book all about? Paul was on his missionary journey and decided to visit a small island called Crete with a young pastor named Titus. Now, the Cretans were known for their life of immorality. We read it in 1:12 that they were known as "*liars, evil brutes, and lazy gluttons.*" That's not a good reputation to have. But that didn't stop Paul from preaching the Gospel there; so, Paul and Titus faithfully and passionately preached the Word of God and the Spirit of God moved powerfully. People began to repent of their sins and surrendered their lives to Jesus. And as a result, many churches were planted around the island and Paul decided to leave Titus with them so that he may share the Gospel in other places.

After Paul's departure, the people began to revert back to their old ways for two reasons. **First, they were being influenced by their culture.** The immorality, perversion, and sinfulness of their culture was permeating and penetrating the church. And the Christians began to compromise in their faith. **Secondly, to make things worse, false teachers came in and divided the church.** They taught that "you don't need to pursue holiness. You can do whatever you want with your life because you're saved by grace not by works. It's a gift. So, don't be bound by all these rules." As a result, the churches were being led astray and they were immersed in the life of sin. So, Paul writes to Titus to straighten out all these things – to instruct this young pastor how to lead these people so that they'll clearly know the Gospel, experience the Gospel, love the Gospel, and live out the Gospel in their lives.

I believe that this is a timely book for us to study because we too are living in a world that is becoming more and more irreligious and immoral. Isaiah 5:20 says, "*Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.*" And sadly, this is what we see today. **What is identified as sin is becoming the norm in our society.** We live in a world where the truth is becoming blurry. And the scary thing is that this kind of worldliness is influencing the minds of many Christians. We've learned to compromise and accept certain sins to be okay. We look at lust and call it love. We see anger and we call it passion. We gossip, and we call it prayer. We don't give to the poor and we call it being wise with our money. We're lazy and we say we're resting. We're okay to be mediocre. We think we've done enough. And many of us have concluded that holiness is just an option. **Brothers and sisters, when was the last time you've mourned over your sin?** When was the last time your heart broke knowing that your sin broke the heart of God? If you're having a difficult time answering these questions, then maybe, just like the Cretans, we've bought into the lie that says, "We don't need to pursue holiness because we're saved by grace."

However, brothers and sisters, we ought to be different. Do you know what the church is referred to as in the Bible? **The church is the Bride of Christ.** If you see the bride walking in, she is absolutely beautiful, but we know that she didn't just wake up that day looking like that. It took hours of doing her hair, putting her make-up on, picking out the perfect dress, practicing her walk, and praying that this day will be everything that she's been dreaming about. No bride will ever walk down that aisle unprepared. But maybe that's what many of us are trying to do – and frankly, we don't really care if we're ready for our wedding with Christ or not. Paul says that the church is called to present herself "*without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless*" (Ephesians 5:27). **How is your pursuit of holiness today? How do you think our church is doing as a whole?** Sanctification of the church begins when every single one of us faithfully pursue holiness in our own lives. We must not overlook our own sins but also the sins of others. We must keep one another accountable. **Our belief and behavior must tell the same story.**

Brothers and sisters, my prayer is that as we navigate through the book of Titus, that we would take an honest look at our lives in light of the Gospel and out of that would come worship of Jesus Christ, transformation of our lives, and sanctification of the church.

That being said, let's read Titus 1:1-16:

[TEXT READ HERE]

In this chapter, there are three things that we discover that are essential in building up a church that is healthy, strong, and holy – and I pray that these things will be also evident at City on a Hill.

- Christ-Centered Identity
- God-Fearing Leaders
- Unwavering Truth

1) CHRIST-CENTERED IDENTITY (V. 1-4)

Let's look at verse 1. Paul describes himself as "*a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ.*" He sees himself as a servant. To be more precise, the Greek tells us that Paul is a slave and God is his master. But not only is he a servant of God, Paul also calls himself an apostle of Jesus Christ. The word, "Apostle" means "a sent one." In other words, Paul has been sent by Jesus Christ and he represents Christ Himself as His ambassador. Why is this important to know? It's because it shows us that Paul knew who he was – **his identity was securely found in Jesus Christ.**

Now, why am I talking about knowing our identity when we're talking about sanctification of the church? It's because **understanding our identity reveals our purpose** – by knowing who we are, we discover how we should live. Let me explain by reading the rest of verse 1 again: "*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.*" Paul says that as a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, he is called to further God's people's faith and their knowledge of the truth, so that they'll continue to pursue and grow in godliness, in view of the hope of eternal life, **because that's exactly what God desires for His people.** As a servant of God, what dictates his life is not his own ambition, preference, convenience, or comfort; what dictates his life is God alone – *His Word, His goal, and His mission.* As an apostle of Jesus Christ, Paul will only speak the message of Jesus Christ to others, not his own story. **Our identity shows how we should live.** In contrast, forgetting our identity leads us to forget our mission, our purpose. And that's exactly what happened to the Cretans – they were forgetting who they were and therefore, forgetting what they were here for.

You see this truth even in the movie *Lion King*. Children, have you seen this movie? It's about a young lion named Simba. His father, Mufasa, was the king of the animal kingdom and everything was awesome until he was killed by his brother's evil scheme. Simba mistakenly believed that he was responsible for his father's death – so he decided to run away instead of becoming the king that he was meant to be. He was too sad, too guilty, too discouraged to do anything. This is when Simba meets Rafiki, a monkey who was also a friend of Mufasa. Rafiki tells Simba that his dad isn't dead but that he lives in him. That's when the clouds gathered and Mufasa's spirit showed up and said, "Simba, you have forgotten me." Simba responds, "No. How could I?" Mufasa says, "You have forgotten who you are and so have forgotten me. Look inside yourself. You are more than what you have become." But Simba questions, "How can I go back? I'm not who I used to be." Then Mufasa responds, "Remember who you are. You are my son and the one true king."

When Simba was lost and didn't know what to do with his life, Mufasa simply reminds him of who he is – Simba was Mufasa's son, the rightful heir of the king.

What's our identity? Who are we according to the Bible? Consider these words that Paul uses: *God's elect* (v. 1), *God our Savior* (v. 3), and *God the Father* (v. 4). If we reflect on these words, we learn that **we've been chosen by God and saved by God to become His children**. If you've trusted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, before you're a student, father, mother, husband, wife, son, daughter, or whatever your job describes you to be, **you're a child of God**. And nothing can change this no matter what you've done. Paul says it better in Ephesians 1:4-5, "*For [God] chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love He predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will.*" **Our identity is not defined by what we do but by what Christ has done for us on the cross**. Our value is not found in what we do but in Christ Himself. Do you believe this? If you do, then our mission becomes clear. The Bible tells us that **as the children of God, we are called to imitate God – to be holy and blameless**. This is our mission and call that we are to strive after. We, as individuals and as a church, pursue holiness not because we need it to be saved but *because we are saved, because we want to be holy, and because that's what we were created to be*. Brothers and sisters, is your identity secure in Christ and are you working out of that – to be a good student, father, mother, husband, wife, son, daughter, neighbor, whatever your job demands you to be, or wherever you're serving in the church? **Are you growing in holiness and godliness?**

In order for this church to pursue holiness faithfully and not be influenced by the culture, we must have Christ-centered identity to remind us of our call.

2) GOD-FEARING LEADERS (V. 5-9)

After his greetings, Paul wastes no time and tells Titus of his first task: **appoint elders**. This was the unfinished task that Paul refers to in verse 5. Who are the elders? Other synonymous words found in the Bible are *overseers* or *pastors*, and they all refer to the appointed leaders in the church. Children, at City on a Hill, do you know how many pastors and elders we have? We have ten: Peter, Jane, Tim, Paul, Stephen, Edgar, Grace, Michael, John, and me.

Now, when I read this passage, the first thought that came to my mind was this: **why is this the first thing that Paul tells Titus to do?** What's the relationship between appointing elders and building up a healthy and sanctified church? First of all, Paul is not trying to come up with a model of church government to set some hierarchy of leadership. As you'll see, Paul's central concern is the character, not the structure, of the leadership team. **Instead, God-fearing elders are needed in the church for discipleship**. That's why Paul commands Titus to do this first. We need God-fearing leaders who are first faithful disciples of Jesus Christ themselves and who will spend time making more disciples. They're needed to train, equip, and empower the people in the church. And verses 5-9 will tell us at least two ways of **how they will disciple the people**.

Number one, the elders will disciple the people by example. This is why Paul spends so much time describing the kind of character they must have. These Cretan Christians were constantly tempted by the world around them. The only example they had to follow was the life they knew before. So, Paul wanted these elders to be godly examples for these Christians to follow and imitate and the first thing he says is that they must be blameless.

What does this word mean? It certainly doesn't mean that they're perfectly sinless, or there would be no elders. No leader is perfect – and that's why no leader should pretend to be perfect and the people shouldn't demand perfection from them. **Blameless rather means to have a good reputation so that no accusation can be made against them – or to put it plainly and practically, elders must not only preach the Gospel to others clearly and passionately, but they must also preach the Gospel to *themselves* faithfully.** It's not enough to have the information; it must lead to the transformation of their lives so that they become good examples for others to imitate in all aspects of life.

So, for example, Paul tells us in verse 6 that an elder must be **blameless at home**. He must be committed to his wife – loving her as Christ loved the church. At the same time, he must be a good father – learning to discipline, encourage, guide, pray, and love – so that their children may also believe. An elder must also be **blameless in character**. We won't have time to go through each of them, but in verse 7, Paul gives five negative traits to avoid in a leader while sharing six positive virtues to look for in verse 8. Paul's primary concern is not finding those with the best skills but those with character – character before competence. This is true because skills used for selfish reasons become rather destructive to the church.

Now, considering all these things, when you look at our elders at City on a Hill, how are we doing? Are we good examples to follow? It's definitely true that we all have great strengths that are unique to each of us. But at the same time, all of us have our own unique weaknesses and flaws as well. All of us will confess that we still have a long way to go. That being said, **I invite you to do life with us** – to encourage us, keep us accountable, and speak truth into our lives. Just as you need a community to help you grow, elders also need that community. Elders are not exception to that truth. **I also invite you to pray for us that we will be blameless at home and in our character.** Pray that the elders will confidently proclaim 1 Corinthians 11:1 which says, *"Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."*

At the same time, if the elders are called to be examples for others, every character written in this passage is what the whole church needs to pursue after. In other words, these qualities are not reserved only for the elders but for all believers. This makes sense because the elders are called to excel in these areas in order that the people will also be like them. **So, pray for yourselves that you'll continue to cultivate your hearts and lives in order that you'll be blameless as well.**

Number two, the elders will disciple the people by holding firmly to the truth. They don't just agree with the truth but they're zealous for it. They're called to teach and defend the truth. And they do this so that they can *"encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it"* as verse 9 tells us. In other words, it's the responsibility of the elders to preach the Word with clarity, conviction, and courage. Elders must inspire others to love the truth and correct anyone who misunderstands the truth. Elders must teach the truth to make it applicable for the people because their desire is to see the people grow in godliness and holiness.

That being said, I invite you to pray for us again so that we will continue to love and teach the truth faithfully. Before you criticize us, I invite you to pray for us. Remember that the elders are not performers of the church; we are your brothers and sisters in Christ. Yes, we're not perfect and we may disappoint people in many ways. But do know that the elders are doing their best to minister and serve the church in a way that will glorify God and bless you. So, when this sermon fails to bless you, please don't forget to pray for me.

In order for this church to pursue holiness faithfully and not be influenced by the culture, we must have God-fearing leaders to disciple the people of God.

3) UNWAVERING TRUTH (V. 10-16)

One of the reasons why Paul commanded Titus to appoint elders who love, teach, and defend the truth was because there were many false teachers infiltrating the churches in Crete. Now, how were they to identify these false teachers? Paul gives Titus three things to look for in verse 10.

Number one, they're rebellious. These people don't submit to the authority of the Word. Even though the Scripture clearly says that we're called to be holy and blameless, they have the audacity to say that holiness is just an option for Christians. **Number two, they're full of meaningless talk and deception.** In other words, they talk big but with no substance. They deceive people by painting themselves to be something they're not. Listen to how verse 16 describes them: "*They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him.*" They're hypocrites. **Number three, they are of the circumcision group.** Most likely, Paul's referring to the Jewish Christians who strongly claimed that circumcision and tradition were requirements for your salvation. They're legalistic. They burden people with unnecessary things. And verse 16 summarizes the description of these false teachers well. Paul says, "*They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.*"

Then what are we to do with them? Verse 11 tells us that **we must silence and rebuke them sharply.** Paul is strong with his words because if they don't believe what the Bible says is the way to grow in grace, they'll be crippled in living the Christian life. Pastor Ligon Duncan once said, "False teaching will lead to false living." **Brothers and sisters, we must protect our house – our church.** If we encounter anyone who does not submit to the authority of the Word, anyone who is a hypocrite, or anyone who teaches anything that is not in the Scripture, we must be quick to silence and correct them. In this house, truth of God must be the only thing that matters – it must be the foundation of all that we do.

Now, this kind of thought is very different from the culture we live in. In our pluralistic age, we believe that everybody's opinion matters. We say, "Let's just accept one another; the last thing we want to do is offend them." But if we continue to live this way, it'll surely divide us even more. Let me say this: **it's better to offend them with the truth than to leave them in delusion.** Of course, we must always speak the truth in love and wisdom, but just because we offend them doesn't mean that we hate them. That's why Paul says in verse 13, "*Rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith.*" **The goal of offending them with the truth is to bring them back to the truth.** Unless we do this, this issue will reappear again and again. It's like those dandelions on your lawn. You can't just mow over them. It'll just grow right back. You have to do the hard work of pulling out the roots. In the same way, when we don't deal with false teachers properly and set them straight with the truth, they'll resurface and lead people astray. **The only way to grow in our holiness is to eliminate false teachings and promote the truth.** That's how sanctification works. It doesn't work by ignoring the Bible. It doesn't work by adding or taking away from the Bible. It works only in the context of the truth.

What does this mean for us then? **We, as individuals and as a whole, must be committed to biblical truth, teaching, and doctrine.** It's not enough to know just vaguely; we must study the Word of God so that we may understand it and teach it clearly to one another, our children, and our non-believing friends. Brothers and sisters don't settle for what you know now. Dig deeper; study, reflect, and meditate on the Word more; ask questions; and let us continue to grow to love and delight in the truth. And even more importantly, learn to apply the truth to your lives. Let me ask you, "**How relevant is the Word to your life? Are you consistently examining your life using the Word?**" Hebrews 4:12 says, "*For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword... it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*" Are you using the Word to carve out your life? Are we consistently evaluating if everything we do at church (like worship, prayer, preaching, and fellowship) is Bible-centered?

In order for this church to pursue holiness faithfully and not be influenced by the culture, we must have this unwavering truth at the center of our lives and the church to guard ourselves and mature in the faith.

CONCLUSION

The church is called to be holy and blameless. We are the Bride of Christ. And in order to accomplish this, we must have Christ-centered identity, God-fearing leaders, and unwavering truth that become the foundation of all that we do. Brothers and sisters, let us aim for holiness – not *to be saved* but because those who are saved *are called to be holy*. Remember that grace is not just for the beginning of the Christian life; it's the fuel for the Christian life. May Christ encourage and empower you today "*to live a life worthy of the calling you have received*" (Ephesians 4:1).

Let's pray.