

THE MESSAGE OF THE EPISTLE OF TITUS

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Introduction

Paul's primary message in the letter to Titus is that the knowledge of the truth which leads to godliness is to be preached to God's elect. It was a work which Paul began earlier and is now being commissioned to Titus (1:1-5). From this, Paul stresses the need to teach sound doctrine and good conduct. He gives clear examples of sound doctrine and good conduct while pointing out that both must be taught to all ages in the church and that false teachers must be openly rebuked and refuted. The primary themes in this epistle which support this message are: a) the need for sound doctrine in the church, b) the need for good conduct in the church, and c) the need for intentional teaching in the church.

The Need for Sound Doctrine in the Church

Throughout this letter, Paul strongly emphasizes the need for sound doctrine. He begins by making reference to the *knowledge of the truth* (1:1) which leads to godliness. In describing the qualifications for an elder, Paul instructs Titus to appoint those who "...*must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught.*" Paul then makes direct reference to sound doctrine (1:9), using the word *sound* five times. The word is first used in conjunction with elders who are to encourage others by sound doctrine (1:9), then he states that sound doctrine is to be used to make those who are rebellious sound in the faith (1:13), next Titus himself is charged to teach sound doctrine (2:1), and finally older men are to be sound in faith (2:2).

Examples of sound doctrine.

Paul not only states the need for sound doctrine but also gives specific examples. They are that: a) it is God's grace that brings salvation to all men (2:11), b) it is God's grace that enables the believer to live a godly life (2:13), c) there is a blessed hope for the believer, the glorious appearing of Jesus Christ (2:13), d) God gave himself to redeem and to purify for himself a people that are his very own and eager to do what is good (2:14), e) we are saved by washing and regeneration of the Holy Spirit, not by works of the believer (3:5), and f) man is justified by God's grace (3:7). Another key doctrinal statement that Paul makes is that man is not saved by works but only by God's mercy and the work of the Holy Spirit (3:5).

The proper use of sound doctrine.

Seven references are made by Paul as to the proper use of sound doctrine and how it is to be expressed. First, it is to be used to encourage others (1:9), secondly, to refute those who oppose sound doctrine (1:9), thirdly, to silence those who oppose it (1:11), fourthly, to rebuke them sharply (1:13), fifthly, to oppose the Jewish myths and commands of those who reject the truth (1:14), sixthly, to avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law (3:9), and lastly, to warn divisive individuals (3:10). These actions are to be taken for the specific purpose of silencing the "rebellious people" (1:10).

The Need for Good Conduct in the Church

Coupled with the need for sound doctrine is the need for good conduct so that believers' actions are consistent with their beliefs. Paul uses the word *good* eleven times in this letter. He compels Titus to be an example to the young men by doing what is good (2:7). Those who are appointed as elders are to love what is good (1:8). Older women are to teach what is good (2:3). All those in the church are to be eager to do what is good (2:14; 3:1, 8). While the word *good* is

not used in conjunction with older men, it is implied when Paul states that they are to be temperate, worthy of respect, and self-controlled (2:1).

Examples of good conduct.

Just as Paul gave examples of what he meant by sound doctrine, he also gives five clear examples of what he means by good conduct. First, an elder must conduct himself and his family in a way that is blameless, by not being overbearing, quick-tempered, given to drunkenness, violent, or pursuing dishonest gain. He is to be hospitable, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined (1:6-8). Second, those in the church are to dispel the Cretan reputation by not being liars, evil brutes, or lazy gluttons (1:12). Third, older women are to be reverent, not slanderous of others, not be addicted to wine, self-controlled, pure, busy at home, kind and subject to their husbands (2:3-5). Fourth, young men are to practice self-control (2:6). Fifth, slaves are to be subject to their masters by making every effort to please them, by not talking back to them, by not stealing from them, but by showing that they can be trusted (2:9-10).

The contrast between good conduct and corrupted conduct

Paul draws five interesting contrasts between bad conduct and good conduct. These include alcoholism contrasted to living reverently (2:3); stealing in contrast to trustworthiness (2:10); ungodliness and worldly passions in contrast to living self-controlled lives (2:12); the behavior of being despised by others in contrast to rebuking with authority (2:15); and malice, envy, and hate contrasted with lives which reflect the kindness and love of God (3:3-4).

The effects of good conduct.

The effects of good conduct by the church will serve to show others that they are not like other Cretans who have a reputation for being liars, evil brutes, and lazy gluttons. Good conduct

will prevent others from maligning the Word of God (2:5); it will make those who oppose the Word to be ashamed (2:8). It will also make the teaching about God attractive (2:10).

The Need for Teaching in the Church

A third theme, which is woven throughout the other themes of sound doctrine and good conduct, is the need for systematic training and teaching in the church. Paul states at the very beginning of this letter that it is the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness, and it is this which is to be taught. Since the words *teach*, *taught*, *teaching*, *teaches*, and *train* are used thirteen times in this letter, Paul must have been concerned with the *process* for establishing sound doctrine and good conduct (1:9, 11; 2:1-4, 7, 9, 10, 12, 15). He makes it clear to Titus that if the church is to understand sound doctrine and to manifest good conduct, then both must be taught. Titus is directly charged by Paul to teach (2:1, 15). He is to teach older men (2:2), to teach older women (2:3), to train younger women (2:4), to teach young men (2:6), and to teach slaves (2:12). It is interesting to note that the teaching ministry is directed to all age groups within the church, and not a select few. The teaching is to be from the mature believers, such as from Paul to Titus, and from Titus to others.

Conclusions

For a godly church to live in an ungodly world, it must clearly demonstrate through good conduct that the knowledge of the truth is attractive and absolute. This knowledge of the truth is sound doctrine which is to be intentionally and systematically taught to everyone in the church so that it will be productive and attractive. Sound doctrine and good conduct are to be the hallmarks of the godly church living in an ungodly world.