

# THE PASTORAL EPISTLES



## Order for the Church: Titus 1

T. M. Moore

*A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

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The Pastoral Epistles: Order for the Church: Titus 1  
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## Titus 1: Introduction

As in 1 Timothy, Paul's letter to Titus puts a strong emphasis on local churches being rightly ordered. In Paul's mind, this means having capable elders to oversee the flocks of the Lord, that they might be grounded in sound doctrine, guarded against false teaching, and fruitful in every good work.

So Paul left Titus on Crete to establish this order in all the churches, and in Titus 1 he reminds the young pastors of the kind of men who are qualified to fulfill this role, and what this role entails.

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T. M. Moore, Principal  
[tmmoore@ailbe.org](mailto:tmmoore@ailbe.org)

## 1 Bondservants and Apostles

*Pray Psalm 82.8.*

Arise, O God, judge the earth;  
For You shall inherit all nations.

*Read Titus 1.1-3*

*Prepare.*

1. How did Paul view his calling from the Lord?
2. What is the relationship between truth, godliness, and the Gospel?

*Meditate.*

In Paul's letter to Titus we are given an inside look at the work of disciple-making. Paul's mandate from the Lord was to bring faith and transformation to those He was pleased to save; his method of doing this was to teach faithful men, who would be able, like Titus, to teach others also (2 Tim. 2.2).

In Paul's dual identification – bondservant and apostle – we get a glimpse of his love for God, Whom he serves, and for the world, to which he has been sent. Paul was commanded by Christ to this calling, as are all believers (Matt. 28.18-20), in their own unique Personal Mission Fields. The difference between us and Paul lies only in the field to which the Lord has sent us, and the degree of faithfulness with which we carry out our task.

Paul's commitment to Titus was to make clear – and make sure – that the work he had begun would come to full fruition.

All the writings we have from Paul are in the form of epistles, either to churches, or, as here, to individuals. But even the form of letter-writing was changed by the power of the Gospel, as we shall see in our next installment. The main characters in this story are Paul, Titus, the elders and people in the churches in Crete, and the unbelievers before whom the Church must live its testimony to God's grace and truth. Paul was on to his next place of service, somewhere toward the end his ministry (mid-60s AD), and he wrote to Titus, following-up on their work together on Crete, instructing him concerning the right order for the churches.

God is present as Architect, Builder, and Supervisor over the work of growing His Church. Paul's remarks about his own ministry are not intended as boasts; rather, he sets up a template for Titus to follow in carrying out his own ministry from the Lord, so that the newness of the Gospel of the Kingdom can have its full effects. And in serving as a template for Titus and the believers on Crete, his words are a template for us as well.

*Reflect.*

1. In what sense are Paul, and all believers, bondservants of God? Is that a good thing? Explain.
2. An *apostle* was one specially sent by Jesus with the mission of living and proclaiming Christ and His Kingdom. In what sense are all believers *apostles* (cf. Jn. 20.21)?
3. God commanded Paul to take up the work of his Personal Mission Field. He has commanded all of us as well. Have you mapped out and begun working your Personal Mission Field?

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*If then it is a commandment, it is not at my disposal. I fulfill what is commanded. For of things to be done, some are in our power; others are not. For what he commands, that is not in our power; what he permits is left to our choice.... But commandments are not left to our choice, we must either perform them or be punished for not doing so. John Chrysostom (344-407), Homilies on Titus 1*

*Lord, I am Your bondservant, and You are sending me into the world today. Help me to prepare for this day by...*

*Pray Psalm 82.1, 2, 8.*

The book of Titus is about church leaders and those who labor with them to bring the Lord's good order to His churches. Use these verses to pray for yourself, your church leaders, and your fellow believers, that we would fear the Lord and live in such a way that we need never fear His discipline or His wrath.

*Sing Psalm 82.1, 2, 8*

**Psalm 82.1, 2, 8** (*Aurelia: The Church's One Foundation*)

God stands amid His people to judge their rulers all.  
How long will they oppress those who on His favor call?  
How long will they the wicked show partiality,  
And treat with scorn the meek who their proper care should be?

Rise up, O God, in splendor according to Your worth!  
Rise up in pow'r to judge all the nations of the earth!  
Rise up, O God our Savior, and hear our fervent call,  
For You possess and rule o'er the nations one and all.

## 2 An Order for the Churches

*Pray Psalm 82.1.*

God stands in the congregation of the mighty;  
He judges among the gods.

*Read Titus 1.4, 5*

*Prepare.*

1. How did Paul regard Titus? Why?
2. What did Paul desire for him? Why do these matter?

*Meditate.*

Paul had evidently led Titus to the Lord, or, at least, was primarily responsible for his growing in the grace and knowledge of the Savior. Titus was his true child in the faith; thus, he must be prepared to receive and act on the instructions of his father.

While this letter contains many instructions, exhortations, and commands, its purpose is to bring the grace of the Lord and His glorious peace to Titus and those whom he had been left on Crete to serve. There is no contradiction between commandments – or law – and grace. Obedience to God’s Law, and to the commands of the apostles as they interpret that Law, is the key to knowing the grace and peace of the Lord. Grace and peace prevail in churches when proper order is established and maintained under the oversight of loving elders.

See how far-reaching is the grace of God: A typical letter during this period began with, “Greetings and good health.” Sounds like mere wishful thinking compared to “Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior” (my translation). The Kingdom makes all things new, even down to the mundane details of writing letters!

In the time of the Kingdom, believers are called to reconsider everything they do in the light of God’s Law, His promised (v. 2) grace and peace, and His order (v. 5) for building His Church. To the extent that we lose sight of any of these, we forfeit or postpone the blessings God wants so earnestly to give us.

Paul had previously instructed Titus in the importance of having *elders* (or *bishops* – *overseers*, v. 7) in every church; now he was simply following-up on that instruction to help ensure that grace and peace would be the happy possession of all the believers in Crete. How we structure our churches for growth and ministry is not a matter of preference or efficiency. God has revealed the order by which He intends to build His Church. In this epistle, Paul is reminding Titus – and us – of what God expects of His people and their shepherds.

*Reflect.*

1. What is our “common faith” (v. 4)? How would you explain this to an unbelieving friend?
2. Why are “grace and peace” not merely wishful thinking for believers? Why is it important to follow Paul in extending these blessings to our fellow believers?
3. God has an order by which He intends to build His church, and elders are a key component of that order. Why? What do elders do that is so important to building the church?

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*Paul here shows that at this time “elders” and “bishops” were interchangeable and that some were put in charge of towns, some of whole regions. These latter became the bishops of later times. Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428), Commentary on Titus*

*Lord, let me be an agent of Your grace and peace today as I...*

*Pray Psalm 82.1, 2.*

As you come before the Lord, ask Him to search the depths of your soul, to judge all your thoughts and attitudes, and to expose any sin or wrongdoing from which you need to repent. Then pray the same for your church leaders.

*Sing Psalm 82.1, 2.*

**Psalm 82.1, 2** (*Aurelia: The Church's One Foundation*)

God stands amid His people to judge their rulers all.

How long will they oppress those who on His favor call?

How long will they the wicked show partiality,

And treat with scorn the meek who their proper care should be?

### 3 Blameless Stewards

*Pray Psalm 82.5-7.*

They do not know, nor do they understand;  
They walk about in darkness;  
All the foundations of the earth are unstable.  
I said, “You *are* gods,  
And all of you are children of the Most High.  
But you shall die like men,  
And fall like one of the princes.”

*Read Titus 1.6-8*

*Prepare.*

1. Paul uses two different words to describe the shepherds of the local church (vv. 5, 7). Why?
2. From the description here, what seems to be the work these men (v. 6) are supposed to do?

*Meditate.*

In the Kingdom era, when Christ is building His Church and fulfilling His covenant, special leaders are required to ensure that the churches receive the full blessing of the Lord and carry out their mission effectively. In the New Testament these men are “elders” or “overseers” (Greek: “bishops”).

An elder must first *be* a particular kind of person before he can do the work for which he has been appointed to lead the church. The attributes Paul describes underscore the importance of the elder’s example. The qualities required in an elder are, first of all, *spiritual* (blameless, lover of what is good, holy, self-controlled); then *personal* (steward, not self-willed or quick-tempered, etc.); then *moral* (self-controlled, faithful to the Word); relational (hospitable, just, loving his wife and raising faithful children); and practical (teach, exhort, etc.).

The elder must also be a good manager of his household, or else he will not be able to “oversee” the household of faith (1 Tim. 3.5). Not everyone is qualified for the important work of leading and building the Church of Christ. Paul wants Titus to be sure he seeks the right kind of men for this great calling.

The practice of appointing elders to lead in the churches was carried over from the Old Testament, where elders were both judges and caretakers of the communities of the Lord. The word, “elder,” suggests long experience in the Lord more than chronological age, as Paul suggests here. We note also that Paul writes in terms of one church per town in Crete. While there were undoubtedly many *house churches* in each of those towns (v. 11, “households”), it was the duty of elders (plural) to oversee the development of the entire Body of Christ in any community.

We do well to remember that the structure of the Church and the qualifications of its leaders have not been left to our own devising. God knows what He wants, and He will bestow His grace and peace where that order is established and faithfully maintained.

*Reflect.*

1. Meditate on the verses for today, together with Hebrews 11.17 and 1 Thessalonians 5.12, 13. How important is the work of elders to a local church? Why?



2. How should a local church make sure it has the elders it needs, both for the present and for the future?
3. What can the members of a local church do to help ensure they have the kind of elders God wants them to have?

*To Titus he gives commandment that among a bishop's other virtues [which he briefly describes] he should be careful to seek a knowledge of the Scriptures. Jerome (347-420), Letters 53.3*

*Lord, let me be an agent of Your grace and peace today as I...*

*Pray Psalm 82.1-7.*

God charges His judges ("the gods", v. 1) with not knowing their job and thus not doing it well. He warns them that His judgment awaits them. We're all judges in God's Kingdom, as are those who lead our churches. Intercede for yourself and your church's leaders, that you might know your calling and do it well.

*Sing Psalm 82.1-7.*

**Psalm 82.1-7** (*Aurelia: The Church's One Foundation*)

God stands amid His people to judge their rulers all.  
How long will they oppress those who on His favor call?  
How long will they the wicked show partiality,  
And treat with scorn the meek who their proper care should be?

Behold the weak and orphaned in need of loving care;  
The destitute and smitten are with you everywhere.  
Do justice, then, you rulers, to all God's needy lambs.  
Redeem, revive, retrieve them from wicked, sinful hands.

They do not understand, they in darkness walk around,  
While Zion's walls are shaken and scattered on the ground.  
God says to them, "My children, the sons of God Most High,  
Though you be high exalted, like all men you shall die."

## 4 Sound in the Word

*Pray Psalm 82.1.*

God stands in the congregation of the mighty;  
He judges among the gods.

*Read Titus 1.9*

*Prepare.*

1. Why do you suppose Paul left this qualification for elders for last?
2. What's the difference between exhorting and convicting?

*Meditate.*

The skillset of the elder revolves around the ministry of the Word. Elders are to minister the Word of God, especially in the area of “sound doctrine” (congregations who choke on that idea only reveal their immaturity). Paul indicates no sense in which elders may fulfill their calling by running committees or managing programs. They are ministers of the Word. This means they must be taught by men like Titus, who are schooled in the apostolic faith.

Elders must first prove themselves to be good students of the Word, not just by their reading or teaching, but by their lives as well (vv. 6-8). The ministry of the Word entrusted to elders is twofold: instruct the faithful and rebuke those who traffic in lies. “Exhort” and “convict” involve additional sub-sets of skills that must be learned, as Titus learned them, by extensive involvement with those who possess them already.

We see in Paul’s instructions an elaboration of his charge to Timothy (2 Tim. 2.2). This is the way true and vibrant life – grace and peace – is translated to the church in each generation. Faithful men seek out faithful men to teach and equip for the work of equipping and defending the flocks of God by the Word of God.

Whenever we lose sight of this template, we practically ensure that the churches will not know God’s blessings as fully as they might. Pastors who do not train elders, and congregations that refuse to submit to them (1 Cor. 15.15-18; 1 Thess. 4.12, 13; Heb. 13.17) consign themselves to minimal relevance in the ongoing redemptive plan of God.

God intends His Truth to advance in His way, precisely as He has laid it out for us in the teaching and example of the apostles.

*Reflect.*

1. What would you recommend as a program for training elders?
2. To *exhort* someone is to *encourage* them to keep growing and serving in the Lord’s strength. Is this the work of elders only (cf. Eph. 4.29)? Explain.
3. In Paul’s mind, “sound doctrine” is both the foundation and capstone of an elder’s life and ministry. Explain.

*If anyone says, however, that if teachers are made learned by the Holy Spirit then they do not need to be taught by educators what they should say or how they should say it, he should also say that we should not pray because the Lord says, “for your Father knows what is needful for you, before you ask him.” Augustine (354-430), On Christian Doctrine 4.16.33*

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*Thank You for the elders and shepherds of our church, Lord. Today, let me encourage one of them by...*

*Pray Psalm 82.1-7.*

God judges His people – and their shepherds – by His Word, not to condemn us, but to correct, confirm, and strengthen us for each day. Pray for yourself and your church leaders, to receive God’s judgment gladly and act on it faithfully.

*Sing Psalm 82.1.*

**Psalm 82.1** (*Aurelia: The Church’s One Foundation*)

God stands amid His people to judge their rulers all.  
How long will they oppress those who on His favor call?  
How long will they the wicked show partiality,  
And treat with scorn the meek who their proper care should be?

## 5 Confronting False Teaching

*Pray Psalm 82.8.*

Arise, O God, judge the earth;  
For You shall inherit all nations.

*Read Titus 1.10-14*

*Prepare.*

1. To what work of elders does this passage refer?
2. Why is it important that elders do this work well?

*Meditate.*

One of the most important works of the elders is to guard the congregation against false teaching. This duty requires that elders exercise oversight of all the formal teaching that goes on in the church – that they select and train the teachers, provide advice and direction for their work, and help them grow in their understanding of sound doctrine. Local churches are built on the foundation of Scripture, or they are not built at all, and elders have the responsibility of making sure the teaching offered in the church lines up with sound doctrine.

There will always be those who want to introduce false teaching. When they get a foothold in a church, their influence can be most damaging (v. 11). Whole congregations can be subverted and divided by their teaching. In the situation on Crete, smooth-talking teachers were attempting to import secular views – such as were espoused by Epimenides – which actually had the effect of confusing the matter of truth. If Epimenides, a Cretan, believed that all Cretans were liars, then he was a liar, too, in which case his teaching about Cretans would be false, and Cretans would then be truth-tellers. But that snags him on the original statement again. And it was true, as Paul insisted (v. 13), that Epimenides actually espoused this confusion. Maybe we can't really know the truth at all?

The elders of the church need to be ready to discern false teaching and put a stop to it with sound teaching in love. They must not allow the churches to become sidetracked to all manner of secondary issues (v. 14), which are blown out of proportion by those who make them badges of true faith. The commandments of men must not be allowed to take precedence over the whole counsel of God in Scripture.

Which, again, is why sound doctrine needs to be the foundation and capstone of the work of elders.

*Reflect.*

1. How does false teaching find its way into a local church?
2. Why is it important that elders provide oversight and direction for all the teaching in the church? How should they do that?
3. Why does false teaching subvert and divide local churches?

*For when God commands that we speak and preach the word and that we refute and condemn “in season and out of season” those who “teach the things which they ought not”—as I can prove by the words of the Lord and the apostles—let no man think that I can be enjoined to silence in these matters. Augustine (354-430), Letters 35.3*

*Guard me, Lord, against all false teaching, and help me to grow in sound doctrine as I...*

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*Pray Psalm 82.8.*

Pray for the unbelievers in your life – friends, neighbors, family members, co-workers – that God might open their hearts to the Gospel. And pray for the elders of your church, that they may guard it well against all false teaching.

*Sing Psalm 82.8.*

**Psalm 82.8** (*Aurelia: The Church's One Foundation*)

Rise up, O God, in splendor according to Your worth!

Rise up in pow'r to judge all the nations of the earth!

Rise up, O God our Savior, and hear our fervent call,

For You possess and rule o'er the nations one and all.

## 6 Words and Works

*Pray Psalm 82.6-8.*

I said, “You *are* gods,  
And all of you *are* children of the Most High.  
But you shall die like men,  
And fall like one of the princes.  
But you shall die like men,  
And fall like one of the princes.”  
Arise, O God, judge the earth;  
For You shall inherit all nations.

*Read Titus 1.15, 16*

*Prepare.*

1. About whom is Paul writing in these verses? Are these people outside the church or within it?
2. What do these verses suggest about the true nature of saving faith?

*Meditate.*

Paul’s use of “pure” here relates to sound doctrine. When our doctrine is what it ought to be – when we truly understand and stand in truth – then everything else in our lives will fall into place accordingly. But when we allow defilement into our soul – worldly ways and thinking – then we cannot know sound doctrine, and our walk with the Lord will be compromised at every turn.

All the more reason for elders to be constant about maintaining sound doctrine in the church.

Professing to know the Lord is no guarantee of possessing eternal life. Those who were threatening to subvert and divide the churches in Crete professed to know the Lord, but they denied him by their works. Not only did they not obey the Word of the Lord, but they practiced those things which God had described as abominations. Because of this, they disqualified themselves from doing the good works every believer should be equipped for and ready to perform.

People who live this way may call themselves Christians, and even sincerely believe that they are; but Paul says they are “unbelieving”. The kindest thing we can do for such people is to “rebuke them sharply” (v. 13) and call them to repent and believe the Gospel.

*Reflect.*

1. Is professing to believe in Jesus all that God requires of us? Explain.
2. Defilement begins in the soul – mind, conscience, and heart. We must guard our soul as Adam was charged with guarding the garden (Gen. 2.15). What does this entail?
3. How can a believer become qualified for every good work?

*By the quality of works is the human heart made known, and outward actions disclose the beauty of souls. There are some, as the apostle says, who “profess to know God but deny him through their deeds.” Truly the guilt of denial is incurred when the ears have heard what is good but the conscience does not hold on to it. Leo the Great (fl. 440-461), Sermons 36.4*

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*Keep me in the truth, Lord, and guard my soul from corruption, so that I may...*

*Pray Psalm 82.5-8.*

Paul's words for today are a strong warning against living a shallow faith. Let this psalm guide you to be renewed in your own understanding of the faith, and in your commitment to serve the Lord today in every good work.

*Sing Psalm 82.5-8.*

**Psalm 82.5-8** (*Aurelia: The Church's One Foundation*)

They do not understand, they in darkness walk around,  
While Zion's walls are shaken and scattered on the ground.  
God says to them, "My children, the sons of God Most High,  
Though you be high exalted, like all men you shall die."

Rise up, O God, in splendor according to Your worth!  
Rise up in pow'r to judge all the nations of the earth!  
Rise up, O God our Savior, and hear our fervent call,  
For You possess and rule o'er the nations one and all.

## 7 Order in the Church

*Pray Psalm 82.1.*

God stands in the congregation of the mighty;  
He judges among the gods.

*Review Titus 1.*

*Prepare.*

1. Why did Paul think it was necessary to order the churches in a particular way?
2. What do elders contribute to church order?

*Meditate.*

As in 1 Timothy, so in Titus, Paul insists that churches must be ordered in a particular way, following the precedent God set for His people in the Old Testament. Judges – in the New Testament, elders – were to be appointed for every city – every church. They were to be the overseers – bishops – of the church, watching over the spiritual lives of the members of the congregation, and guarding against false teaching.

It takes a special kind of man to be an elder. He must be spiritually strong, morally impeccable, and able to teach and shepherd the people entrusted to his care. Elders are not board members; they are shepherds. They should be chosen not because of their worldly success, but because of their zeal for the Lord and His church, and their Christ-like qualifications.

No church is “in order” (v. 5) that does not have such elders. No small part of the pastor’s job is to make sure that elders are trained, in place, and doing the work of shepherding God’s flock – watching over the souls of His people – that they might live fruitful lives for Him.

Like Adam in the garden, elders are appointed to develop the spiritual lives of God’s people, so that they can bear much fruit for the Lord, and to guard them against whatever might want to subvert their faith or divide them.

*Reflect.*

1. Why are elders so important to the order of a local church?
2. How can you tell when false teaching is beginning to establish itself in the church? What should you do then?
3. How are all believers, like Paul, bondservants and apostles of the Lord?

*He again repeats, that they who aspire to the office of a bishop ought to retain an unspotted reputation; and he confirms it by this argument, that, because the Church is the house of God, every person who is appointed to govern it — is constituted, as it were, governor of the house of God. John Calvin (1509-1564), Commentary on Titus 1.7*

*Thank You, Lord, for our pastors and elders. Today, let me encourage them by...*

*Pray Psalm 82.1-8.*

Let this psalm guide you in praying for the judges of your church – your pastors and elders.



*Sing Psalm 82.1-8.*

**Psalm 82.1-8** (*Aurelia: The Church's One Foundation*)

God stands amid His people to judge their rulers all.  
How long will they oppress those who on His favor call?  
How long will they the wicked show partiality,  
And treat with scorn the meek who their proper care should be?

Behold the weak and orphaned in need of loving care;  
The destitute and smitten are with you everywhere.  
Do justice, then, you rulers, to all God's needy lambs.  
Redeem, revive, retrieve them from wicked, sinful hands.

They do not understand, they in darkness walk around,  
While Zion's walls are shaken and scattered on the ground.  
God says to them, "My children, the sons of God Most High,  
Though you be high exalted, like all men you shall die."

Rise up, O God, in splendor according to Your worth!  
Rise up in pow'r to judge all the nations of the earth!  
Rise up, O God our Savior, and hear our fervent call,  
For You possess and rule o'er the nations one and all.

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*Questions for Reflection or Discussion*

1. Why is it important that churches have a specific kind of order?
2. What is the primary work of the bishops or elders of a local church?
3. What qualifications does Paul set forth for elders?
4. Why must elders guard their churches against the inroads of false doctrine?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from Titus 1? How are you implementing that lesson in your walk with and work for the Lord?

*For prayer:*

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Thank you.