

# Notes on

## Paulus' Letter to Titus

### Authorship and Date Issues

The two issues, those of authorship and date, are in some sense tied to one another. Generally speaking, there are three schools of thought regarding the authorship and dating of the two letters to Timotheos (and the letter to Titus):

- The letters were written by a second century follower of Paulus. They were written in his style and therefore in his name.  
Proponents of this view point to what they perceive as an acceleration in the development of positions within the church (e.g., 3:1ff.). Recognizing that the "genuine" Pauline letters do not display this level of structure, supporters of this viewpoint conclude that the letters were written later. Also in support of this view is the fact that the earliest collections of Paulus' letters do not contain the three "pastoral" letters.  
The difficulty with this opinion is that if the assumption is removed that the author was writing about an increased church structure in chapter three, then there is little reason to suppose that the letters were written as late as the 2nd century. The target audience of the three pastoral letters was different than that of his more general letters, so one would expect differences in style and the like, but there also seem to be Pauline themes in the letters.
- The letters were written by Paulus after the end of the book of Acts.  
Supporters of this view contend that Paulus was released from his "chains" and made a Fourth Missionary Journey, which included Spain (since Paulus had intended to visit Spain). They regard the three letters as not fitting into the framework established by Acts and yet as genuinely Pauline. Consequently, the letters must have been written after the termination of Acts.  
The difficulty with this opinion is that there is no evidence of a Fourth Missionary Journey, inside or outside of the New Testament. The fabrication of Paulus' release in order to establish Pauline authorship seems too convenient for some scholars.
- The letters were written by Paulus within the timeline established by Acts.  
Supporters of this view (such as John A.T. Robinson) argue that with little imagination, the events mentioned in the letters may very well have been recent. In Titus' case, we read of Artemas and Tuchikos and of Paulus' plans to spend the winter in Nikopolis (3:12). This reminds us of his trip following Acts 20, where we see that Tuchikos is with him. Titus himself is not mentioned in the Actions of the Envoys, but his second letter to Timotheos refers to him as having departed (4:10). The second letter was written not very long after the first and mentions numerous personal details which would place the letter within the timeline of Acts. In this case, a revision is necessary in the traditional interpretation of various passages (including the identity of Timotheos' opponents).  
The difficulty with this opinion is chiefly that the traditional interpretations of the entire book are labeled "wrong" by its supporters. Additionally, it is quite possible that a later

author would mention genuine events in Paulus' life (like the Makedonian journey) if writing in his name.

This commentator dates the letter to Titus to Winter of 55-56. Although we do not explicitly read of Paulus stopping off at Crete (i.e., in Acts), neither do we read of Titus there, despite the fact that Paulus indicates (Gal 2:1-3) that Titus was a companion at least as far back as Acts 15.

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## Commentary

*Paulus, God's slave, but an envoy of Anointed Jesus, according to the trust of God's chosen ones and a recognition of that truth according to piety, on a hope of eternal life which God (who is not false) promised before the times of the ages. Now he displayed his message in his own seasons, in a heralding with which I was entrusted, according to the arrangement of our savior, God.*

In his introduction, Paulus relates his own work directly to the work of God which started before the creation.

*To Titus, a genuine child according to a shared trust. Generosity and peace from Father God and Lord Anointed Jesus our savior.*

The traditional greeting affirms Titus' standing as a Christian.

**1:5** *I left you in Krete for this reason: so that you might put in order the things that were left behind, and set older people into place according to city as I arranged with you.*

The body of the letter begins immediately. Paulus' reasoning for leaving Titus behind surely must have been known to him, and so this letter represents some ideas regarding "the things that were left behind" -- things that Paulus himself had determined did not need to be done while he was there.

One of those matters was the selection of an overseer in each city, to be chosen from among the older people. The overseer would make sure that the poor Christians of each city were being taken care of.

*"If someone is blameless--a man of one woman, having trusting children; not under an accusation of being imprudent or disorderly."*

This appears to have been the saying that Paulus had left with Titus. As in his first letter to Timotheos, there is a single guideline for selecting the overseer: that person must be blameless. His original advice had left a description of what he meant by "blameless" and "not blameless," but Paulus found that lacking and so he is about to provide further description.

*For it is necessary that the overseer be blameless, as though he were God's house-servant--not self-pleasing, not ruled by emotion, not a drunkard, not one who strikes others, not greedy for shameful financial profit; but a friend to strangers, a friend of goodness, prudent, just, godly, self-controlled, holding fast the true message according to the teaching (so that he may be able both to advise in that sound teaching and to refute those who speak in opposition).*

Some people stumble over the fact that this list is not the same as that in 1 Timotheos, but we must remember that Paulus is only sketching out a description of a single term: blameless. A blameless person wouldn't be a drunkard, for example, but he would be self-controlled. Again these are only examples, given to Titus so that he would know what sort of people he should help choose.

*For there are many disorderly people, those who say useless things and who deceive the mind--especially those of the circumcision. It is necessary to stifle these ones, who overturn entire households, teaching unnecessary things for the favor of dishonest financial profit. A certain one of their own, a prophet, said, "Kretans are always liars, malevolent wild animals, lazy gluttons." This testimony is true.*

Why must the Overseer be blameless? Paulus provided a reason here. The problems with certain Jewish Christians are now present everywhere Paulus goes. In particular, he was aware that various Jewish Christians in Krete were saying bad things about those Christians who did not concern themselves with binding people to the Torah. Paulus lists one of their activities as "overturning households." In other words, families were beginning to argue whether or not gentiles should be bound to the Torah and circumcised. These Judaizers were "teaching unnecessary things," for they were causing additional stipulations to be placed on gentile converts before they could become Christians. Quite likely also (as in 1 Timotheos), they were attempting to bind everyone to the written Torah. Paulus was aware of some of them who were teaching these things because others (non-Christian Jews?) had paid them to do so.

Paulus then quotes a saying (by Kretan poet Epimenides, from *De Oraculis*) to support his case that these people must be watched closely. He does so with an amazingly astute allusion to the so-called Epimenides Paradox.

Epimenides had said, in essence, that he was lying. Paulus refers to this statement as prophetic. What Epimenides meant was that such a statement was an improvable paradox, for he himself was a Kretan. If he had been telling the truth, then he was lying when he said that! The paradox points out that there are things that may be true (or false) but which cannot be proven logically. In short, his saying was meaningless. Paulus' assent "This testimony is true" appears to point out that he did understand the paradox. Consequently, he wasn't telling Titus to watch out because they were all liars; rather, his instruction was to watch these people carefully, because they might seem truthful (or as liars) at times -- and perhaps that their sayings were meaningless. Their true nature was not obvious.

**13** *For this reason, refute them sharply, so that they may be solid in the faith, not holding on to Jewish fables and precepts of human beings who are turning away from the truth.*

Because the Kretan Judaizers were saying things that Paulus regarded as paradoxical -- partly true but meaningless things that could not be easily disproven -- they should be refuted sharply (i.e., rather than simply discussing the issues with them). The Judaizing ideas had already caused great trouble among Christians (witness Acts 15), and after all, circumcision and keeping of the Torah were not only longstanding traditions but also principles found in the Torah itself. Titus was not to debate the Torah with them but to refute them for adhering to elements of Judaism which had been completed in the teachings of Jesus. The Overseer in each city should also be intelligent enough to refute the Judaizers if they challenge him.

**15** *All things are clean indeed to those who are clean. But to those who have been defiled and are untrusting, nothing is clean. On the contrary, both their minds and their consciences have been defiled. They acknowledge to have known God, but they deny him with their deeds, since they are detestable and unpersuaded, and worthless as to every good deed.*

The first sentence explicitly denies the need for ritual observations. Turning the concept of ritual purity -- so important in Judaism -- back on the Judaizers, he flatly implies and then attempts to prove that they are defiled, unclean. First of all, they clearly do not trust their Messiah (who internalized the Torah). Therefore, their deeds represent the fact that they are "unpersuaded" by both the good message and by the Torah itself. Though they think that they know God, they are "detestable" -- a strong word in the Hebrew Bible. Not only are these Judaizers not "clean," they are "worthless." That is, with their current attitudes, they can never be used by God for ANY good purpose.

**2:1** *But you say the things that are appropriate to the sound teaching:*

Paulus wants Titus to advise everyone to behave in an appropriate and blameless fashion, so that the opposition will not be able to malign them.

*That aged men should be vigilant; serious; prudent; sound in trust, in love, in patience.*

It was particularly important for the older people to behave well, since they were well-respected, especially in the Jewish subculture. Here, they are advised to remain several things:

- vigilant -- they must watch out for the Judaizers
- serious -- for the threat posed by the Judaizers is serious
- prudent -- they must make their personal decisions wisely, because the opposition is waiting for them to err
- sound in trust -- Their focus must be on Jesus, and on what Jesus accomplished and did. As we will see shortly, the theme of the letter is that God acted through his Messiah. Consequently, the Messianic internalization of the Torah is what everyone ought to follow.
- (sound) in love -- While they may be tempted to treat their Judaizing brothers and sisters with anger or contempt, Jesus had taught the love of God.
- (sound) in patience -- Just as Jesus had advised his students to be patient under opposition (and even persecution), so also Paulus offers to Titus to advise their brothers to do the same.

*3 In the same way, aged women should be in their standing as is proper for sacred people. They should not be accusers; not enslaved to a lot of wine; good teachers, so that they may foster prudence in the young women. They should be lovers of men, lovers of children, prudent, pure, busy at home, good, submissive toward their own husbands (so that God's message will not be spoken evil of).*

The older women, too, must take care to behave in a blameless manner. In all manners, they should behave as "sacred" -- as dedicated fully to God. Paulus provides a description of what he means. Things like being drunkards would ruin their reputations, but if they are pure, hardworking, and love their husbands, the Judaizers will not be able to point a finger of blame at them.

*6 In the same way, advise the younger ones to be prudent, furthering in yourself a type in all things of nice deeds--in the teaching having a lack of corruption, a seriousness, and a healthy and irrefutable message, so that the one who is of the contrary group might be ashamed, having nothing bad to say about us.*

The young people, both male and female, need to be just as careful (prudent) as their older counterparts. Most importantly, their example should be one of "nice deeds." On top of that, they should teach the Torah seriously and irrefutably. The phrase "without corruption" refers again to the emphasis on the importance of the Messiah. These young people must not leave room for any externalization of the Torah, or else these Judaizers -- who appear to have been quite knowledgeable -- would have a foothold to bring in their rituals and external control.

*9 Slaves are to be submissive to their own masters in all things. They are to be well-pleasing: not speaking against their masters, not burglarizing, but showing all good trust, so that in all things they may adorn the teaching -- that of our savior, God.*

Alternatively, read "God's teaching of our savior," but the reading above conforms to the usage in the greeting. Paulus has already indicated subtly that God brought salvation through Jesus (compare the last words of his introduction and the last words of his greeting to Titus). Here, he is about to elaborate on the theme that God only brought salvation through the Messiah. Consequently, we must follow the teachings of Jesus (without introducing legalistic rituals).

Paulus' mention of slaves seems to mimic the Christian's role in general: to be fully submissive to God's teachings and therefore to be "well-pleasing" to him. That expression is used in the LXX of Henoah and appears to be a popular description of someone who always seeks to do right (see Heb 11:5-6). "The teaching" refers to the internalization of the Torah, which elsewhere comprises "God's message." Paulus' description of it is similar in thought to the manner in which his countrymen think of the Torah, for in Paulus' mind to follow the Torah is to follow Jesus' explanation of it.

*For God's saving generosity appeared to all people, instructing us so that we might live prudently and justly and piously in the present age, denying the impiety and the kosmic strong desires, expecting the blessed hope and appearance of the glory of the great God and our savior,*

*Anointed Jesus, who gave himself on our behalf so that he might redeem us from all lawlessness and cleanse us to be for himself a people for his own possession, jealous of good deeds.*

Living justly and piously is virtually impossible under the Torah, if the Torah is regarded as a set of regulations. We are reminded of Rom 2:17-29, in which Paulus indicates that the true distinction between Jew and gentile is in the heart. As he wrote further in that letter, "And so, no flesh will be justified in his presence out of works of a code, for recognition of sin comes through a code." (3:20). Therefore, living "justly and piously" is directed toward the teachings of Jesus.

Paulus likens the desires of the Judaizers to return to ritual observance to "impiety" -- which opposes the Torah -- and to "kosmic strong desires," which is what they no doubt accuse the gentiles of following. But the kosmos has the additional meaning of signifying the rebellion against God, and here, to fail to follow Jesus' internal principles but to return to an external code is rebellion.

Here once again, God comes through Jesus. Paulus has referred to God as "our savior" and to Jesus as "our savior" because God has only saved his people through the Anointed One and his teachings. Here, the salvation is from the legalism that restricted people who followed the Torah as an external code. Paulus elsewhere refers to the struggle with the guilt which accompanied the Torah as "the code of sin and death" (Rm 7-8).

The Anointed One "cleanse[d] us from all lawlessness" because he set Jews free from the guilt accompanying sin. Thus, Christians are truly clean, since their hearts no longer condemn them. In mentioning the change in the state of affairs, Paulus cites Ex 19:5 and probably alludes to Ezek 37:23, which indicates that the close relationship between God and his people would happen in the new covenant.

*Speak and advise and refute after all arrangement. Let no one have a bad attitude about you.*

Titus should not be afraid to do what was arranged for him to do. In particular, he should not concern himself with the attitudes that the Judaizers harbor toward him if he continues to insist on following the principles of Jesus (which Paulus has just mentioned).

**3:1** *Remind them to be submissive to and persuaded by rulers and authorities, to be ready toward every good deed, to speak evil of no one. They should be ones who do not fight, reasonable, displaying all meekness toward all people.*

Paulus' seemingly offhand comment that Titus should remind the Kretans to "be submissive to and persuaded by" the Roman rulers is an indication that Jesus had not taught nationalism but that his kingdom was "not of this world." As we will read later, his Judaizing opponents appear poised to involve the government in their quarrel -- something that would happen to Paulus himself as well. He urges the people to treat the Romans well, and perhaps he envisions the government siding with the Christians in the event of a conflict with his fellow Jews. The admonitions to be meek and not to fight certainly fall in line with this notion, but whether or not this is an injunction against the Judaizers' litigious actions we cannot be certain.

*For once we too were mindless, unpersuaded, wanderers, enslaved to strong desires and various pleasures, passing through in badness and envy, despisers, hating one another.*

It might seem surprising for Paulus to refer to himself that way, but he certainly remembered a time when he too was unthinking (mindless) and unpersuaded by the Christian message. In being a "wanderer," like the Judaizers he too was a violator of the Torah.

The things that he says here are general enough so as to include both Jewish and gentile Kretan Christians. He concludes with "hating one another" because it is a direct violation of one of the "great precepts" (Lv 19:18) which summarize the entire Torah and because he will contrast it with the love of God, which brought the Messiah.

*But when God our savior's ease and love for humanity appeared, he saved us (not out of right deeds that we did, but according to his mercy) through the washing, regeneration, and renewing of the holy breath, which he poured out on us richly on account of Anointed Jesus our savior, so that we would become heirs according to a hope of eternal life, being justified by that one's generosity.*

Here Paulus lays out exactly how God "saved us." First of all, he did not save us through legalistic obedience to the Torah ("right deeds that we did"). On the contrary, it was God's own merciful generosity that saved. This is evidenced in the holy breath, the accompanying sign of God's people under the new covenant (as to distinguish them from the physical nation of Israel). The holy breath was poured out because of the Messiah, and those Judaizers who knew Joel 2-3 would realize this. Thus, because of Jesus, his students are "heirs" not of a physical land but of "eternal life" and are justified not by deeds but by God's generosity.

The washing, regeneration, and renewing are all functions of the holy breath, but they are not the agent of salvation. The agent of salvation is God's generosity and mercy. The holy breath, however, was a sure sign that Christians and not non-Christian Jews had God's approval and were the beneficiaries of that mercy and generosity.

**8** *This statement is reliable, and I want you to confirm fully about these things, so that: "those who have trusted in God may have the attitude to be an outstanding example of good deeds."*

Instead of worrying about what the Judaizers are saying or doing, and in particular instead of debating them about the meaning of the Torah and Prophets, Titus is to convey that God's people are characterized not by their ability to debate points of the Torah but by their outstanding examples.

*These things are good and profitable to people, but avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and strife, and legal fights. For they are unprofitable and useless.*

Having a reputation for doing good is profitable, but debating with these people whose arguments make little sense is unprofitable. Paulus urges Titus to avoid squabbles over lineage -- i.e., distinctions between descendents of Abraham and gentiles. He should avoid "foolish questions," that is, the tricky logical arguments made by the Judaizers. Further, the people should

avoid strife -- despite the differences in viewpoint, they should make every effort to remain unified. While it appears that the Judaizer faction wanted to bring the government into the matter, and while Paulus wanted the rest to be prepared for that eventuality, they should themselves avoid doing so. As we read in 1C 5 and here, Paulus considers it "unprofitable and useless."

*Get away from a sectarian person after admonishing him a first and a second time, knowing that such a person has been turned away and is sinning, being self-condemned.*

Unity is to be preserved at all costs, but if some of the Judaizers should insist on creating a formal division in the group, then after all attempts at unity fail, the others should regard him as having "turned away" from them. Knowingly and deliberately causing a group to split into two, especially over a matter of disagreement, is "sinning," and anyone who has the attitude to divide is called "self-condemned." Paulus' high attitude for maintaining unity shows through clearly in this passage. As in Korinth, Paulus never considers group division an available option.

**12** *When I send Artemas or Tuchikos to you, try hard to come to me in Nikopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. Send Zenas the lawyer and Apollos ahead of you, diligently, so that they may leave nothing behind. Now let our people learn also to be an outstanding example of good deeds for these pressing needs, so that they would not be unfruitful.*

This is the evidence that establishes a timeline for the letter. Apollos has been converted, but he is not with Paulus. Paulus is travelling and plans to spend the winter in Greece.

He concludes this section of the letter with a further reminder that "our people" -- Christians who truly do follow Jesus' principles -- become outstanding examples of good deeds. This was especially important in the situation that they found themselves in.

*You greet all those who are not with me. Greet those who love us in trust. Generosity be with all of you.*

And so, the letter closes. Paulus seems to assume that Titus will read the letter in part or wholly to the Kretan Christians, and so he concludes with a blessing for them all.