

Dare to be Different

Titus 1:7-9

For those of you who are just joining us, we are continuing our fall sermon series on the book of Titus today. This is a letter written by Paul to Titus, giving him instructions on how to finish establishing the new church plants on the island of Crete. (Picture) Crete was a rough society, but now there were a few churches scattered around that could shine as lights in the darkness and be a gospel witness to the unbelievers. As the new Christians lived out their faith and experienced the Holy Spirit's transformation in their lives, they would be distinct from the people around them and could make an impact for Christ.

Today we're going to look at the last several characteristics Titus was to look for in the men he appointed as elders in these new churches. We looked at a couple last week, and I noted that they aren't exceptional qualities that only a few super-Christians could reach, these are things that all of us should experience as we grow in spiritual maturity. So even though this was written for the sake of elders, we're going to apply it to all of our lives.

The qualifications we looked at last week had to do with marriage and parenting, and the ones we'll see today are more general, but I think they're related to things Paul saw in the people of Crete. There were dozens of characteristics he could have told Titus to look for, but he chose the ones we'll see today, and I think it has to do with sinful behaviors that were normal in that society. As Paul was telling him what to look for, I think he was telling him the kinds of qualities that would make them stand out. They would mark transformation and change in a man's life – these would show evidence of the Holy Spirit working to bring about spiritual growth because the natural Cretan man wouldn't be like this.

I see many of these same behaviors in our culture today, so I think these will be relevant in our lives as well. They will mark spiritual transformation and growth in us and if these kinds of things are evident in our lives, I think people will notice and we may have open doors to sharing the gospel, especially among the unbelievers we regularly have contact with.

I want you to think about a situation you probably find yourself in from time to time – a situation where the language, conversations, and behaviors of the people you're with are often sinful. There might be swearing, gossip, slander, hatred, envy, defiance, lying, perversion, substance abuse, sinful entertainment. Some of

you face those situations every day at work or at school. Sometimes you face them at family gatherings or when you get together with some of your old friends.

What do you act like when you're in those situations? I've been in some of them and there's a lot of pressure to just fit in with everyone else. No one likes feeling awkward or being ridiculed for being different so there's this pressure to do the same things they're doing. But it's especially in those situations where I think we can let our light shine and make an impact for Christ. I'm not talking about preaching the gospel to those people or confronting their sinful behavior, I'm talking about just being the kind of person Christ wants you to be and not participating in the same sinful behaviors. If you do that, you could likely be ridiculed and feel awkward, but if the Holy Spirit is working in someone's heart and they're seeing the difference in you, your willingness to let your light shine and be ridiculed can make a huge difference in them turning to Christ.

I think Paul expected mature believers on Crete to be like that and one of the big ways they would make an impact on the people around them. And I think that's why he told Titus to look for these characteristics in the men who would be elders. So let's look at them this morning and think about how we can be different too and make an impact for Christ.

Read Titus 1:7-9

For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain,⁸ but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.⁹ He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

I don't think these qualities are random, I think Paul is formulating his words based on what he saw among the people of Crete. Titus 1:12 says: "*Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons*" and I believe Paul is telling Titus that elders should be different. There were certain things they shouldn't do, and that's what I think his point is in verse 7. Instead they should be like Christ, which he describes in verse 8. And then he adds the importance of them knowing and teaching sound doctrine as they helped newer believers to grow in their faith. I want to focus on verses 7-8 this morning.

In verse 7 he starts by bringing up the importance of being above reproach, which we saw last week because he says the same thing in verse 6. Since coming to Christ, it was important that the men who would serve as elders had a track record of godliness and didn't have glaring sinful behaviors people could point to and accuse them of. Here Paul says that's because they were God's stewards – they were caretakers of his church. And as caretakers, they needed to have grown spiritually to the point where they were above reproach.

Paul continues by talking about what that would look like, and he starts by saying what they should do. So first of all, they should not be arrogant. They should not be self-absorbed or engrossed in self-interest. They should realize the world doesn't revolve around them. That's a sign of spiritual maturity. They should not be quick-tempered, or hot-headed. They shouldn't have a short fuse and blow up over little things when they don't get their way. They should not be a drunkard, which obviously has to do with excessive drinking, but also includes brawling which often came with drunkenness. They should not be violent – quick to throw punches and get into a fight. And they should not be greedy for gain, which is talking about money earned in a dishonest way, that could include lying, cheating, manipulating, taking advantage of people, or immoral business practices.

When I read these things, I picture what I think a normal Cretan man would have been like – his whole world revolved around himself. The people in his life exist for him. He demands, threatens, and manipulates to get his way. He gets angry when he doesn't, and resorts to physical violence. He's regularly drunk and out of control, which makes things even worse. He's shady in his business dealings, looking for ways to take advantage of people to get more money.

Mature Christians should no longer be like that. People who have been born again by the Holy Spirit and experienced his transformation in their lives, should not be like that. Elders should not be like that. You and I should not be like that. We should be very different and it should be evident. What should we be like? He gets to that in verse 8.

Mature Christians in Crete should be hospitable. I think this is a contrast to being arrogant. Rather than acting like the world revolves around them, they should pay attention to others. They should show kindness and thoughtfulness, and seek to help other people. That kind of behavior would stand out. They should be lovers of good – not participating in all the evil things in that society, but drawn to and appreciating what is good. They should be self-controlled – this is the godly

counterpart to many of the sinful behaviors mentioned in verse 7. They should be in control of their impulses, emotions, and passions. Not flying off the handle in anger and violence like Cretans often did. They should be upright and holy – there should be a noticeable quality of godliness and righteousness in them. And they should be disciplined, which means they should have mastery over their actions, words, and lives.

If you met someone with these qualities you would notice that they would be friendly, helpful and care about people. They'd be gentle and encouraging. They'd stay level-headed, even in stressful situations, and make wise and good decisions. They'd enjoy and be involved in upright, wholesome things. And they'd be trustworthy and honest so people weren't afraid to do business with them.

If Cretan Christians were like that, I think they would be noticeable in that society. Picture that kind of person at a Cretan party, or a family gathering. Picture them in their work situations or at school. Would they stand out? I think they would. And they should. That's the kind of men Titus was looking for. And if they stood out like that in their social circles, I think it's likely they would be ridiculed. They would have to deal with persecution from friends and family members and coworkers.

But would it make a difference in people's lives if they were willing to be like that? Will it make a difference if you and I are willing to do that? Picture yourself again in those situations where the people you're with are doing normal sinful things. Will it make a difference if you are different and get ridiculed for it? I think Scripture guarantees it. Let me share several verses with you that talk about the difference:

- Matthew 5:14-16 Jesus told his disciples: *"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."*
- 2 Cor. 2:14-16 *"But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. ¹⁵ For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, ¹⁶ to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life."*

- Philippians 1:27-28 *“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,²⁸ and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.”*
- Philippians 2:14-15 *“Do all things without grumbling or disputing,¹⁵ that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.”*
- 1 Peter 2:11-12 *“Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.¹² Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”*
- 1 Peter 4:3-4 *“For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.⁴ With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you.”*

If we dare to be different, we will face ridicule from some. Some of the people you know will make fun of you and probably badmouth you. You might lose friends. You will feel uncomfortable. But you will also make a difference for Christ. The Holy Spirit will work through you in those situations and there will be some who turn to Christ because of your influence. You don't have to preach to them. You don't have to confront their sinful behavior. But you do have to be willing to be different.

Dare to be different. That was vital for the Christians in Crete and it's vital for us today. As wickedness increases, godly character shines brighter. We can make an impact, and God will do that through our transformation. Let's pray that we will have the courage to do so.