

Titus and Philemon

Listed Scriptures

Titus; Philemon; 1 Timothy; Colossians

Lesson Aim

- 1) To exercise self-control over ungodly actions and pursue God-glorifying deeds.
- 2) To forgive others as Jesus Christ forgave us.

Memory Verse

"This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men." (Titus 3:8)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Tit 1-3 and Philemon

B I B L E B A C K G R O U N D



Titus was a Greek Christian (Gal 2:3) who, after his conversion, assisted Paul on his second and third missionary journeys, and became one of Paul's closest and most trusted aides. Thus when Paul saw the need for someone to handle the Cretan churches, he chose his "true son in our common faith," Titus.

The churches in Crete were established during Paul's first imprisonment. Crete, the largest Greek island at 160 miles long and 35 miles wide, is situated south of the Aegean Sea. The people of Crete developed a thriving agricultural and trading economy and made the island one of the premier business centers of the ancient world. However, this prosperity apparently led the Cretans to an excessive lifestyle. As Paul quoted the Greek poet Epimenides in Ch 1:12, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." Paul wrote this letter to Titus around the same time as 1

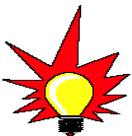
Timothy (62-64 AD), between his first and second Roman imprisonments. This epistle constitutes one of the three Pastoral Epistles of Paul; the other two are 1 and 2 Timothy, which have already been studied. It is very similar to 1 Timothy as it addresses the themes of false teachings, church organization and christian living.

The Book of Philemon, written around 60-61 AD before Titus or the other Pastoral Epistles, constitutes one of Paul's four Prison Epistles (the other three being Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians). Tychicus and Onesimus delivered this letter along with Paul's letter to the church of Colosse. Philemon, a Colossian (Col 4:9, 17) and one of Paul's converts (Phm 19), was a wealthy man who opened his house as a meeting place for worship. Included in Paul's greeting are Philemon's wife, Apphia, and son, Archippus, who also helped out with the church. Although his name meant "useful," one of their slaves, Onesimus, was quite the opposite as a thieving runaway. But God led Onesimus to Rome where he met Paul and after becoming a Christian, lived up to his name.

The epistle to Philemon gives a personal glimpse into the relationship of the early church and the institution of slavery. Slavery was an essential part of the Roman Empire and it was not uncommon for a household to have more than one slave. Rather than relegating them solely to menial or physical labor, masters educated some of their slaves to work as doctors, teachers, accountants, etc. But still, as commodities, running away from one's master was a crime punishable by death in most cases.

Although the New Testament does not condemn the possession of slaves, it does promote the benevolent treatment of them and purports the spiritual equality of slaves and their masters (Phm 16; Gal 3:28; Eph 6:9; Col 4:1; 1 Tim 6:1-2).

W A R M U P



In both letters, Paul points out that the Cretans, Titus and Philemon should be inclined to do good as converted Christians. They cannot remain in the ways they were before, however good, but need to press forward to a Christ-like image. What changes have you made as you mature spiritually as a Christian? Think back to your strengths and weaknesses. What have you fostered? Overcome? What remains a challenge? What has developed into a challenge?

Even though Titus is a short epistle, it covers the same themes as 1 Timothy. A church needs good organizational structure, sound doctrine and truthful teaching in order to fulfill her God-appointed mandate. Refer to Lesson 10 for particular details.

Paul tells Titus that through the grace of God, which promotes good works among His people, the church members can exercise self-control and build up the church. By practicing Christian qualities such as the "salt of the earth" and "light of the world" (Mt 5:13-14), they emulate Jesus Christ and glorify Him.

Paul's short letter to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus emphasizes forgiveness and re-examines a Christian's slave-master relationship in Jesus Christ. Just as Onesimus faced his Christian duty to mend the wrong in his past and to return to his master, Paul entreats Philemon to respond with similar Christian goodness, receive Onesimus, now a fellow brother in Christ, and show him love and mercy.



Part 1

The Teachings of Titus



A. Church Leadership

From the early apostolic days in Jerusalem, we know the importance and impact of effective leadership in the church.

a. Elders and Overseers (1:5-9)

Since Paul's visit to Crete before his first imprisonment was brief (Acts 27:7-9, 12-13, 21), Titus was assigned to continue the work of improving the organizational structure of the churches, mainly by appointing qualified men to be elders. They are the same qualifications that Paul lays out later to Timothy in 1 Timothy 3:2-7.

Note in verse 7, Paul uses the word "bishop" in the NKJV translation, which means overseer but also refers to elders.

b. False Teachers (1:10-16)

While pastoral leaders were initially established to evenly distribute the food

amongst the Grecian and Hebraic Jews (Acts 6:1-7), by the time Paul wrote the letter to Titus, they served a more spiritual purpose in addition to their administrative ones. Church stability and effective leadership were important because they better protected members from falling away in faith. Paul impressed the significance of this role to the Ephesian elders, analogizing them as shepherds, the members as the flock and false teachers as wolves (Acts 20:28-31).

Paul wanted Titus to learn how to detect the false teachers and how to challenge them. They were mostly rebellious talkers and deceivers, similar to the false teachers in Ephesus, but in Crete Titus also had to face the “circumcision group”—the Jewish Christians. They were imposing Jewish laws upon the gentile Christians for the purpose of dishonest gain.

B. Godly Living

In 2:11-14, Paul says the grace of God can teach us to turn away from ungodliness and worldly passions, and to be self-controlled and upright. Jesus Christ’s life exemplifies this grace, that godly lives can be achieved through Him who gives us strength. And this grace motivates Christians to strive for godly lives in light of the debt of love we owe. Jesus Christ sacrificed Himself to redeem us from wickedness and to purify Himself for people. Redemption alone does not make us one of His own; holiness is necessary too.

a. Self-Control (2:1-10)

In the NIV translation of this chapter, the word “self-control” frequently appears and can be used as a focal point for behavior amongst the different church groups.

In addition to the previous lesson, most J2 students are familiar with Galatians 5:22-23, the fruit of the Spirit, and know that self-control is one of the traits. It can be hard to exercise self-control at any age. We want to enjoy life and sometimes, by exercising self-control, we feel like we’re missing out on something. But self-control is meant to sway the balance away from our sinful nature and towards pleasing God (Rom 8:5-8).

Paul encouraged Titus to teach the older men and women in the Cretan churches to exercise self-control as role models to the younger men and women. The younger men and women and the slaves should exercise self-control in order to glorify God and to spread Jesus Christ’s salvation, showing they are His followers in conduct and not only in name.

b. Doing Good (3:1-11)

The idea of being submissive and meek is difficult for modern youth to accept. In part, it may be because words like weak-willed, trampled-upon or no backbone come to mind when we think about submission. But we know it isn’t a bad thing. Otherwise, God wouldn’t have asked this of us. Submission involves trust (Eph 5:24), reciprocation (Eph 5:33), and most importantly, obedience to God. It is also difficult to slander no one, to be peaceful and considerate, and to show true humility. But no matter the trends in society, most people are drawn to those who do good.

Paul also reminds Titus to encourage the Cretans to do good deeds as a sign of themselves as new creations in Christ (2 Cor 5:17). If their “before” picture included foolishness, disobedience, malice, envy, hatred and lust, then their “after” picture should be of them only doing good. Paul also mentions, as he has in other letters, that our doing good is a speck of dust in contrast to what Jesus Christ did for us. He saved us without us deserving or earning it. And though we were far below, He raised us up to be heirs of eternal life with Him.



Part 2

The Teachings of Philemon

A. Forgiveness

Interestingly, Paul uses a fairly passive-aggressive tone in this personal letter to nudge Philemon in the right direction (8-9, 13-14, 18-19, 21). That could explain the absence of the word “forgive,” even though it is what Paul wanted Philemon to do. From Jesus Christ’s seventy-times-seven conversation with Peter and the parable of the wicked servant (Mt 18:21-35), we know the importance of forgiveness. But with Onesimus’ elevated status as a fellow brother in Christ, we can see that a Christ-like forgiveness includes humility. Paul did not encourage Philemon to forgive Onesimus from the lofty height of a benevolent master, but rather at an equal position as a spiritual brother. It takes humility to ask for forgiveness; it also takes humility to accept it and let grudges go.

B. Slaves to Christ

The relationship between Onesimus and Philemon echoes the relationship Christians have with Jesus Christ. We are the slaves and Jesus Christ is our Master.

Living our day-to-day lives, it's easy to forget that we are not our own. But we were bought and redeemed at a price (1 Cor 6:19-20), by the blood of the Lamb. We belong to God and one of the ways He wants us to acknowledge that is through keeping our bodies, His temple, holy. As Christians, we are no longer slaves to sin but slaves to righteousness (Rom 6:15-23).

C H E C K F O R U N D E R S T A N D I N G



1 Why was Titus left in Crete and what was the goal of his work?

2 What is the goal of self-control?

3 Why should we do good deeds?

4 What are the similarities and differences between the books of Titus and 1 Timothy?

5 Why should Philemon forgive Onesimus?

L I F E A P P L I C A T I O N



Part A: Exercising Self-Control

When faced with a situation where students should exercise self-control, what can they say or do?

Step 1:

Ask the students to give examples where they face temptation and need to exercise self-control. You can do this anonymously with strips of paper the students can write on, fold and give to you, or you can discuss it openly in class.

Step 2:

Divide the students into groups with 2-4 people in each group. It's skit time!

Step 3:

Take the scenarios the students shared in step 1 and ask the groups to select one to act out. Give them time to come up with how the scene unfolds, how self-control does or does not come into play, and the result.

Part B: To Forgive or Not to Forgive

It isn't easy to ask for forgiveness and it isn't easy to genuinely give it, but that's what God asks us to do. That doesn't mean He wants us to forget and be naive in the future, but He wants us to learn to forgive as He forgives.

Divide the students into two groups. It's debate time! Flip a coin and let the winning team decide which side they want to argue.

Option 1:

One group will argue for Philemon to forgive Onesimus and the other group will argue for Philemon not to.

Option 2:

Create scenarios for the students to debate for or against forgiveness. Examples: someone talking behind your back, someone dropping you as a friend because he/she has a boy/girlfriend or new friends, someone stops being a good friend to you, someone you share church work with leaves all of it to you, someone takes advantage of you (for rides, money, homework, notes, etc.), someone steals from you, someone lies to you, etc.

Note: Remind the students that debates are not arguments. There is no name-calling or degradation. They are about smart and sound arguments and finding weaknesses in your opponent's points. In these debates, one side will be arguing for what God wants but students shouldn't necessarily "win" the debate without arguing well. The teacher will be the judge.

R E F L E C T I O N & P R A Y E R



As students are gaining more independence and freedom from their parents year after year. They are getting their driver's licenses and they are starting to face leaving home and going to college. So the thought of exercising self-control and of being slaves to Christ probably doesn't seem appealing. They're entering a period of self-discovery and limits sound constraining. But students may not realize that people experiment and adopt vices in an attempt to fill insecurities or emotional voids. If you look to God for fulfillment, He will provide. And if students reflect on their own great experiences from SSCs, many of them can probably understand how He satisfies.