

Lent Devotional March 6, 2025

Scripture

Titus 1:1-16

1 Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that is in accordance with godliness, 2 in the hope of eternal life that God, who never lies, promised before the ages began— 3 in due time he revealed his word through the proclamation with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior,

4 To Titus, my loyal child in the faith we share:

Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

5 I left you behind in Crete for this reason, so that you should put in order what remained to be done, and should appoint elders in every town, as I directed you: 6 someone who is blameless, married only once, whose children are believers, not accused of debauchery and not rebellious. 7 For a bishop, as God's steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or addicted to wine or violent or greedy for gain; 8 but he must be hospitable, a lover of goodness, prudent, upright, devout, and self-controlled. 9 He must have a firm grasp of the word that is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching, so that he may be able both to preach with sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it.

10 There are also many rebellious people, idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision; 11 they must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for sordid gain what it is not right to teach. 12 It was one of them, their very own prophet, who said,

“Cretans are always liars, vicious brutes, lazy gluttons.”

13 That testimony is true. For this reason rebuke them sharply, so that they may become sound in the faith, 14 not paying attention to Jewish myths or to commandments of those who reject the truth. 15 To the pure all things are pure, but to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure. Their very minds and consciences are corrupted. 16 They profess to know God, but they deny him by their actions. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.

Devotion

Jon Mathieu '21

On the one hand, let's not make too much of religious leaders. There is enough hero-worship of certain pastors, and pastors are no more important than anyone else. On the other hand, a clergy person holds outsized influence in the particular community they shepherd, and sometimes a congregation will either soar to new heights of love or endure shipwrecks of crisis at the hands of its leader. This has seemingly always been the case, and so the first chapter of the letter to Titus gives ample attention to the qualifications of a pastoral leader.

Some of these strictures may seem outdated and draconian, and they certainly aren't followed by most traditions today. At least in my experience, synods or vestries aren't firing pastors who are married for a second time or whose adult children don't practice Christianity. But other items on this chapter's lists of dos and don'ts feel timelessly wise, as relevant in late-stage U.S. capitalism as they were in Rome-occupied Crete. Avoiding leaders who are arrogant, greedy for gain, deceivers. Choosing and forming leaders who are hospitable, self-controlled, lovers of goodness.

Lent is a time when all of us—not just clergy—are invited to reflect on our ways. These lists might help guide that work. Are there any seeds of arrogance, greed, or deception in our lives? How have we, and how will we, show hospitality? How will we love goodness?

Prayer

God, you have shown us in Jesus what a life can look like when it is hospitable, self-controlled, and loves goodness. May our lives show more and more of your ways as your Spirit guides us. Allow us and our communities to soar to new heights together. Amen.