Cretans are Always Liars

Cretans are Always Liars

Men from the island of Crete were present in Acts 2 on the Day of Pentecost when Peter first preached in Jerusalem under the power of the Holy Spirit and 3000 people believed at one time. Some Cretans were no doubt among that number and possibly went back to the island to spread the word that the Jewish Messiah had come in the person of Jesus Christ. In approximately 63-64 AD, Paul had been released from prison in Rome. Paul then went to Ephesus, the main port in Asia Minor, accompanied by his close associates and disciples, Timothy and Titus. After a short time of ministering in Ephesus, Paul left Timothy in Ephesus, and Paul and Titus went on to the island of Crete in the eastern Mediterranean Sea. After a brief visit, Paul left Titus in Crete to help provide leadership for the Cretan churches.

Amazingly, Titus is not mentioned in the book of Acts, but Paul mentions him in several of his letters. In 2 Cor.8, Paul called him a partner and fellow worker, and in Galatians 2:1-3 we are told that Titus accompanied Paul to Jerusalem as an uncircumcised Gentile. Titus was the messenger that delivered the Second Letter of Paul to the Church at Corinth. Titus must have been a troubleshooter for Paul. He sent Titus to the very troubled church at Corinth numerous times, and Paul sent Titus out in front of him on his third journey to prepare the churches to deliver to Paul an offering for Jerusalem. It is clear from the N.T. letter to Titus that Crete was a very difficult assignment, so Titus was the man for the job. In 2 Timothy 4:10 we see that Paul had sent him on yet another tough mission to Dalmatia.

In the Letter of Paul to Titus, Paul had entrusted the church in Crete to Titus. Bothered by an attack of false teachers and declining morality, Paul wrote Titus to strengthen the churches there by appointing elders in every city to teach sound doctrine and do good works. Titus is traditionally remembered by the ancient church as the Bishop of Crete. A final mention of Titus occurs in perhaps the last letter that Paul wrote---2 Timothy 4:10.

In writing to Titus, Paul warned that false teachers in Crete endangered the unity and organization of the church. Paul then offered advice on how to handle them. These men were rebellious, mere talkers, and deceivers. They apparently were of Jewish descent since Paul mentioned they were “of the circumcision” (Titus 1:10). Paul wrote that they must be silenced by church leaders because they were upsetting whole families. Their motive was pure greed. In order to make his point, Paul quoted from a well known philosopher, Epimendes, a Cretan philosopher who wrote, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, and lazy gluttons.” The saying had become a proverb describing the reputations of Cretans. So poor was the reputation of Cretans in the first century that a word had been invented in the Greek language—“kretizo” meaning to lie.

The task now for Titus and the leaders of the church there was to overcome this tendency in the church. Many noble believers in Christ were there, and it was Titus’ duty to put them in positions of authority to lead the church into the new life of godliness, and the newness of spiritual life in Christ. Can you imagine being in the congregation in Crete when Titus read Paul’s letter, and said, “Cretans are always liars” ? That would certainly get your attention, but they got the point that the false teachers met the Cretan stereotype, and this bad influence must be remedied through good leadership and organization.

Tritus 1:5 is a directive of Paul to “set in order” what is left of the organized body of Christ at Crete. Titus is to straighten out what is unfinished, or what remains to be done amongst the Christians on the island. Titus was an apostolic agent acting under the Apostle Paul’s authority. The first order of business to bring order out of anarchy was to appoint “elders” in every city, but who is qualified for such a responsibility? Should it be the tallest, the best athlete, the most educated in the arts, or possibly the most popular? No, that is who dummies like you and I would choose. For this important position, Paul listed the qualifications in Titus 1:6-9, “above reproach, a husband of one wife who has control over his children, not known to be a drunk, not bad tempered, not combative, not a crook, but instead hospitable, just, devout, self controlled, and sensible.” In addition to these things an elder must be ready and able to “hold fast the faithful word of God, that he may be able to exhort in sound doctrine and refute false teachers”. In short, all elders must be knowledgeable in the Word of God and be able to teach it, and they are entrusted to stand up against false doctrine.
Unfortunately it is a fact that every church from time to time is plagued by “rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers” who must be silenced by those in authority to do so. The elders, after they have silenced the false teachers should then reprove the congregation “that they may be sound in the faith” (Titus 1:13). They should not pay attention to men who turn away from the truth, who speak nothing more than “commandments of men”

Why Should Good Men Serve?

The question could come up, “why should I spend my valuable time serving such an unruly bunch?” In Titus 2:11-15, Paul gave a purpose statement for service and righteous living, “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, instructing us to deny selfishness and worldly desires…looking for the blessed hope, and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us…and purify for Himself a people for His own possession…” We should be radically grateful that God has shed His grace on us who did not deserve it, such that we desire to obediently serve Him by serving God’s people (in what ever state we find them in). We so love Him that we deny ourselves, and live for Him. Our perspective should be that we are looking for the glorious return of Christ in the sense that what we do today is based on the reality of that day. What can we do now, how can we serve today to help “purify a people for God’s own possession” who will be ready for Christ’s return?

Deacons, Elders, Overseers, Bishops, Pastors

It may get confusing trying to sort out the different offices of the local church, and the church definitely has changed from the first century, but it may be valuable to try and distinguish the offices in the early church. In Titus 1:5, Paul uses the Greek word “presbyterous” translated elder meaning a mature experienced man who is wise and reputable. In Titus 1:7 he uses the Greek word “episkopon” translated overseer to describe the function of the exact same office. Thus elders and overseers are interchangeable words for the same office. These were the men originally appointed or elected to administer the church, and responsible for sound doctrinal teaching. Peter uses both words in 1 Peter 5:1-2, “I exhort the ELDERS…to shepherd the flock of God and be OVERSEERS…” The Greek word for shepherd or guardian is also translated PASTOR, therefore Pastor became a title for a teaching elder. In the second century, with the growth of the church, the main Pastor in a geographical area was called a Bishop, thus cities like Rome, Ephesus, Antioch, Alexandria, etc. all had Bishops, none of which were considered superior to the others.

It appears that there were two offices in the early church—elders (overseers), and deacons. In Philippians 1:1, Paul addresses the leaders in the church there and distinguishes each by calling them overseers and deacons. In 1 Timothy 3, Paul clearly distinguishes between the two offices and gives qualifications and duties for each.

The Greek word for DEACON means “server” which describes the function of a deacon. This office was first created in Acts 6:2-5, in the first days of the church. The Apostles were devoted to preaching and teaching the Word of God, so they chose seven men of good reputation to serve the believers there in Jerusalem. Paul gave Timothy directions to appoint deacons to serve in the church at Ephesus in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Besides the appreciation of the church, Paul makes it clear that “those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ.”

Yeah but are All Cretans Really Liars?

Absolutely, all Cretans have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God. We praise God that God loves all Cretans and has a plan for their life. God so loved the Cretans that He gave His only begotten Son that which ever Cretan believes in Him should not perish. Yet it is not enough that they know this, they must step up in faith and truly believe in Jesus, and invite Him into their life as Lord and savior. HEY WAIT A MINUTE, I GUESS WE ARE ALL CRETANS IN NEED OF THE GRACE OF GOD.

CHARLIE TAYLOR