

Elders, 2

Titus 1:7

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, February 17, 2019

If you would turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Titus, that is the book we are in this morning. We are in the book of Titus. And as you're doing that, if you're joining us for the first time today, we're in a series called the "How to Plant a Church" series because that's what this book is about. Titus was written to tell us how to plant a church, how to get it started and off the ground. And the main way they did this was through discipleship. They planted the church here just like we're planting our church, by making disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you look in chapter 1:5, Paul writes and he says, "For this reason I left you in Crete, that you had set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you." That phrase "left you in Crete" could mean that Paul visited Crete and he left Titus behind afterwards or it could mean that he was just passing by the island and he dropped him off. But either way, Paul says there were two main objectives for the work in Crete. "I left you there for two things; to set things in order," which means to disciple the church at large, disciple everybody. And then second, he says "to appoint elders," which means disciple certain men. Train individuals up so they can lead the church in Crete. But either way, Paul says, "Your job, Titus, is to make disciples. No matter how you do it with the church at large or with individuals, your job is to tell people how to follow Jesus Christ."

That's what discipleship is at the end of the day. It is telling people how to follow Christ. It is showing them how to live the Christian life, which is something we're all supposed to be doing. Whether your church is in Crete or in Chilliwack, whether it's in the first century or the 21st century, we're all supposed to be making disciples. That's our job. That's what we do. If you remember, Jesus said in Matthew 28, "Go therefore into the world and make what?" Disciples. Jesus didn't say, "Make them converts," although that's important. You can't do anything if people aren't converted. But He says, "Make them disciples." He doesn't say, "Make them creationists or make them cessationists or make them presuppositional apologists and infralapsarianists." (Go look that up in Wikipedia when you get home and find out what infralapsarianism is.) All those things are important. Doctrine is very important, there's a place for all that, but He says, "Make them disciples. Show them what it means to follow Me," He said, "Show them how to live a Christian life."

This is important because people don't know how to do this naturally. Do they? Are you born knowing how to live the Christian life? It has to be taught. If you think about all the things a person needs to know when they first get saved, it's a long list. I mean, they need to know how to repent of sin, don't they? People don't know how to do that. They have to be shown how to turn from their sins. They need to know what grace means. I still talk to people today that don't understand that when you fail, there is grace for you. There is mercy and forgiveness. They have to be shown that. People have to learn how to read their Bible. I gave a Bible to a neighbour the other day and he started reading in Genesis. He'd never read the Bible before and I thought, "I wonder what's going through his mind when he reads Genesis for the first time. "What is a begat? What does that mean? Genesis 5, right? What in the world?" You have to show them how

to pray, you have to show them how to evangelize, you have to show them how to practice the “one anothers.” So, all that stuff has to be taught, especially in a place like Crete.

If you look in your Bibles in chapter 1:5, it says, “This letter was written to the churches in Crete.” I’ve told you before, that was an island in the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of Greece, which means it was isolated and the isolation had an effect on the people there. It turned them into some rough characters - kind of like the people on Fairfield Island, right? Do you guys know what I’m talking about? They sit in this general section of the church over here...I’m picking on our brothers and sisters from Fairfield Island. But Crete was like that ... people on Fairfield Island, they’re great. But the people in Crete fought all the time. They just couldn’t get along. One author said there were three evil Cs in the ancient world; Cilicia, Cappadocia and Crete. And Crete was the worst of them. Another author said “The Cretans, on account of their innate greed, live in a constant state of war with each other and you will hardly find anywhere a people more deceitful than them.” And yet, this is where the Lord planted a church. This is where He started at work of God, which means Titus had to disciple them. He had to show these people how to live differently. It was a process. It was a day in, day out sort of thing.

You know a pastor was once working on his house and being followed around by a little boy who kept watching him. The boy didn’t say anything, he just stared at the pastor. Until finally the minister said, “Are you trying to learn how to build a house?” And the little boy said, “No, I’m not. I just want to see what a pastor says when he hits his hand with a hammer.” People need to see that, don’t they? They need to see what you’re going to say when you hit your hand with a hammer. They need to see how you handle life. That was Titus’s job on the island. D. L. Moody said, the best way to show that a stick is crooked is not to argue about it, but to lay a straight stick alongside of it. That’s what discipleship is. You’re laying a straight stick alongside crooked ones and giving them an example of a godly life. The Cretans had gotten saved, they were born again, but they needed to know how to live their lives.

Let me say this another way (this is important, and you see this a lot in this letter), you can’t live the Christian life alone. I don’t know where everybody’s coming from this morning. I don’t know your church background or if you’re regularly attending a church, but I want to tell you, you can’t live the Christian life alone. Some of you read the book of Titus, if you’ve read it before, you’ll see how high the standard is for the church, right? It’s kind of a discouraging letter in one sense because you read it and you go, “Who can do this?” Well, nobody can do it by themselves. You need someone to help you. And that was Titus’s job. When the Cretans first read this, they would have been shocked. It was such a high standard and yet, it was his job to train them up. And we might add that it was his job particularly, to train the leaders.

Because so goes the leaders, so goes the church. If you look in chapter 1, you’ll notice the entire chapter is on the subject of leadership. Paul says, if anybody needed to change, it was the men who were guiding the church. It was those who would become (verse 5 says) the “elders.” If you read in verses 5 through 6, he says,

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion.

The word “elder” here is the Greek word *presbuteros*, which simply means “a leader of the church”. It’s from which we get the word “Presbyterian”. That was a denomination based on an elder-led church. The idea is that this is a man who leads with maturity and wisdom, which is what the word “elder” implies. I told you last time, there’s other words that are used for this. There’s the word *episkopos* which is overseer. This is someone who oversees the church. They administrate it. There’s another word for pastor. They shepherd the church in a loving way. But every church in the New Testament had elders, that we know of. Anytime you see a leadership structure in the New Testament, it is this structure.

And there was always a plurality of these men. There was more than one. You had to have several men to make up an elder board, you could not do it all by yourself. And they had to be qualified, which is what chapter 1 is talking about here. You couldn’t just take a man and say, “Do you want to be an elder? Okay, draw straws.” You couldn’t say, “Raise your hand if you want to do this. Okay, you’re appointed.” There were things to look for. And Paul says in verse 6, the first one is that a man must be above reproach.

If you notice, that word means he’s not to be accused or charged with any sin. It’s not that he can’t be charged, it’s just the charge won’t stick. He can be accused, but he will be found innocent because that’s the kind of man he is. This is an innocent man. I just kind of mentioned to you, it would be hard to find an innocent man on the island of Crete. That would be a rare thing. It just wasn’t that kind of place. There were guilty people everywhere. As one author says, it was one of the worst places. So, if Titus was going to find this, he would have to train them up, but that’s what Paul is saying here, “Train this up in a man’s life. Help him work through every element of life, even when he hits his hand with a hammer. Teach them how to be above reproach.”

He also says here, if you notice, “Start with his wife. He needs to be the husband of one wife.” It doesn’t mean he has to be married. The word in Greek means “a one-woman man”. He’s a faithful man to his wife and if he’s single, he’s faithful to God with his mind. Now, Jesus was single. Paul was single, we think Titus probably was. So, this is not about him being married, this is about his standing before God. He is a pure man. You could say it this way, his wife knows him best. And if his wife says this is a godly man, then he’s a godly man. And if his wife says that he’s not, then you have an issue there. And that’s the kind of above reproach life Paul is talking about here.

Then he ties it into his children. I told you last time that children are - I think Stuart Scott called them “little sanctifiers”. They sanctify your life. Paul says, this is the kind of man whose children respect him. He doesn’t come home and kick the dog and yell at the kids. He’s innocent or blameless or above reproach, here at Church and at home as well.

And then Paul goes into some more general qualifications that I want to talk to you about this morning. After mentioning his wife and kids, Paul begins to go into every area of this man’s life, because like I told you before, the people of Crete were a mess. They needed help in everything. There was no area of life that didn’t need some work in the Cretans’ life. And so, Paul now goes, and he tells Titus to train these men up in every area of life. Leave no stone unturned.

I didn't mention to you before, but church history tells us Titus died on the island. And the reason is because this is how deep he had to go into these people's lives. The work was never done. Today, in some circles, he's considered the patron saint of Crete. Because the idea was as he got into this stuff in chapter 1, Titus was just never done with it. It was a never ending task. Paul says, "Work with them in their marriage, work with them in their family." And now he says, "Just work with them in just everything. Cover every corner of this man's life. Build houses with him. See what he does when he hits his hand with a hammer. Shovel snow with him." (You guys like shoveling snow? I don't know, maybe some of you do. I don't.) And that's what we're going to talk about today.

So, if you're taking notes this morning in Titus 1:7, I want you to see have three qualifications for an elder that are more general in nature. That's our outline for this morning. It's pretty simple; three general qualifications for an elder in the church. Paul has talked about specific things. He's kind of zoned in on marriage and the family and issues like that. He's talked about what a man does with his wife and his kids. But now, he's going to just kind of spread the net and talk about everything. He's going to lump it all together. And let's look at that with three general qualifications.

And the first one is this, an elder must not be self-willed. That's the first general qualification he gives us here - an elder must not be self-willed. All the ones we're going to look at this morning are negative in nature. There were a lot of things in Crete that should be avoided, a lot of sins. And so, these are all negative in that sense. But he says, an elder must not be selfish, is the idea. It can't be all about him because nothing can destroy a church quicker than that, right, than if a man thinks the ministry is all about him. And if you look in verses 5 through 7, Paul writes and he says,

5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, 6 namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. 7 For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not being self-willed.

Just a couple of thoughts on this. But I want you to notice as we look through this list of qualifications that they're all moral qualifications. And what I mean by that is they don't refer to a man's ability, they refer to his character. Paul doesn't go through the list here and he says, "This guy has got to be able to balance the budget and kiss babies and shake hands and make everybody happy." It's not about his abilities. There's a few abilities at the end of this list in verse 9 when he talks about holding fast to the faithful word. That's a reference to the man's ability to teach. So, there is some ability involved in this, but most of these things are about his character. "If you get a man with the right type of character (Paul says) everything else will fall into place. If you choose the right kind of man, he will do the right kind of things in office." And so, that's what you're looking for, is the right kind of man.

And I might add as we go through this, these qualifications are all standard for the church. And what I mean is, elders are not super-Christians, they're ordinary Christians who live an exemplary life. It's not that their standard is up here and everybody else's is down here, they have

the same standard as everybody else. They're just exemplary in it. You can follow them. So, all of this applies to all of us in a sense.

Paul goes into a list of their general qualifications and he says, the first one that we're looking at today is that an elder should not be self-willed. He actually says, if you look in the verse, "For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward." The word "steward" there literally means "house manager" or "slave" in Greek. It refers to a slave who took care of the master's house or property. He doesn't own it, he just takes care of it. It's not his, it doesn't belong to him, he just manages it. Therefore Paul says, he must not be self-willed. It's not his stuff anyway. And so, he shouldn't be selfish with it, is the idea. He didn't buy it, and so, he can't be stingy with it.

The word for "self-willed" is *authadés* in Greek, which could be translated "selfish" or "self-pleasing". Some of your translations say "arrogant" there, which is a good word because it captures the idea. This is a guy who thinks "It's all about me." You guys know - what do they say? Power corrupts, right? This is a guy who gets into power and his head swells. Can't walk through the door because his head gets so big. He goes around saying, "Mine, mine, mine" all the time. He's territorial. He won't let you touch his stuff in the church. Paul says an elder shouldn't be that way. Leaders shouldn't be that way. Again, they're not up here and you're down here. We're all slaves. Aristotle, the Greek philosopher wrote about this word. And he said on the one hand, some men are proud because they please everybody. They do what everybody expects them to do because they want to be liked. And on the other hand, some men are proud because they please nobody. They don't care about anybody but themselves. And that is this guy. That's what this word means. This is someone who doesn't care about you, they don't care about me, they don't care about anybody. Just stay out of their way and there won't be any trouble. And I don't have to tell you why this qualification is in here. I think we all know nothing destroys a church quicker than this type of attitude. I mean, nothing can burn the house down quicker than this. I mean, this is like someone pouring gasoline on the pews. It's very dangerous to put a man like this in leadership. I served at a church once with some people who came across a great idea for outreach. They found a great resource for telling people about their church and telling them about the Lord. It was doctrinally sound, it was Biblically accurate, but the elders didn't want to do it because it wasn't their idea. That's what this is describing here. They didn't want to do it because they didn't come up with it. Another friend told me about a church where the elders fought over the pulpit. They had arguments and disagreements about who got to preach on a Sunday. Paul says, "You don't need to put a man like that in leadership." That's not the mindset of a steward. That's not the mindset of a slave. A slave doesn't care who gets to preach as long as the master is pleased. Amen? A steward doesn't care who gets the credit as long as God gets the glory. That's all that matters.

To say it another way, an elder doesn't take things personally all the time. He doesn't go around saying, "Mine, mine, mine, don't touch," because it's not his stuff. If people come and go in the church, he's not offended by that. He's sad and he wants to reach out and understand what's going on and minister to them in that way, but it's not all about him. And so, if people come and go, he doesn't lash out at them and say, "Well, if they were part of the true church, they wouldn't leave. If they were really sincere about their faith, they would have stayed with me." He doesn't talk like that. If people wrestle with certain doctrines, if they wrestle with the teaching of the church, if it takes some time to get on board, he doesn't take that personally. That's not a sign of betrayal.

“Why don't they listen to me? What's the matter with these people? I preached on that one time.” He doesn't talk that way.

And we might add, and this is important, I think for all of us, is that this mindset - this is an expectation for all of us, not just the elders. This is a standard for everybody. We're not to be self-willed, we're all just stewards. Amen? So, we shouldn't take things personally either. It's not our church, it's His.

I've met people who could take anything but a criticism. Do you guys know what I'm talking about? They can take anything but a negative feedback. You talk to them about the weather, you talk to them about sports, you talk to them about their job and it's all okay (and we're all polite and good Canadians because we're very polite here in this country), until you say something negative about them. And then the culture drops. That's not the mindset of a person like this. A slave knows he's wrong somewhere. He's just trying to find out where, and he's okay with the criticism as long as it brings glory to the master.

Hudson Taylor, the famous missionary to China, was once scheduled to speak at a large church in Australia. And the leader of the service spoke about him in glowing terms. He just bragged on Hudson Taylor up and down. He told the people all he had done for the Lord and he introduced him as “our illustrious guest”. That's what he kept calling Hudson Taylor several times in the introduction, “our illustrious guest”. And when he got up to speak, Hudson Taylor didn't know what to say. He kind of stood there quietly. (I've heard other speakers say, “Hey, you just took all my glory away in heaven. Don't introduce me like that.”) But he didn't know what to say. And so finally, he just blurted out, “Friends, I'm not an illustrious guest, I just serve an illustrious master.” Amen? Don't we all serve an illustrious master? Aren't we all just slaves in His household? It's just an honour to be here. Amen? And when you go into heaven, it'll just be an honour to be there. I mean, the greatest thing is going to be the fact that you're standing there. You're not going to look around and say, “Boy, these streets are dirty.” You're going to look around and say, “What am I doing here?”

And by the way, this is why discipleship is so important because we don't get this naturally. We're not born humble people. You need someone to show you how to do this. You need someone to model it for you. So, you need to find leaders who can do that. And that's what Paul is referring to here. You need to find a man or train up men to not be self-willed.

And that leads to the next qualification for an elder that Paul mentions here. You can see how this cuts into every area of life, right? I mean, there's just nothing that's not in these categories here. But a second qualification he mentions for this morning is that an elder should not be quick-tempered. The first one is that an elder should not be self-willed. He shouldn't be selfish or arrogant and think, “This is all about me.” But he should not be quick-tempered.

I think it makes sense that an arrogant man is an angry man, right? A proud man has a quick temper because he thinks it's all about him and he gets angry when everybody else doesn't realize it. That's what anger is. You get angry when you're not getting something that you want. And a proud man has a lot of things that he wants, and when he doesn't get it, he gets angry.

And so, Paul goes on and he says in verse 7, he says, “For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, and not quick tempered.” The phrase “quick tempered” here, it's one word in Greek *orgilos*, which means “a slow burning anger” or a “grudge”. In the Greek language, there were two main words for anger, just like there were two main words for pride. And there was *thumos* which meant an anger that burns quickly and it goes away quickly. Kind of flares up and fizzles out. And then there's this word *orgilos*, which means “a slow burning anger”. It's an interesting translation because quick-tempered gives the idea that it's quick to flare up, but it's slow to burn away. You guys get that? It sparks up quickly and then it hangs around. The anger comes on fast, but it doesn't dissipate, which makes it far more dangerous - very destructive for the church. This is the person that remembers wounds and offenses that are months or years old.

This is such an important issue that Paul repeats it again in verse 7, if you look down, and he says that an elder should not be “pugnacious” or “a giver of blows”. That doesn't mean blows from your fists, that means blows from your mouth. An elder shouldn't hurt people with his words and what he says. I think we've all known men and women who would not hit anybody with their fist, but they wouldn't hesitate to hit you with their words. Right? You start talking and you just kind of, ah, you know? “You don't want to put a man like that in leadership,” Paul says.

This was a real problem in Crete because it was such a violent place. I mean, people were quick-tempered and pugnacious there. It was a very touchy island. I mean, they would hit you with their words and their fists just like a hockey player. Hockey players fight, right? No? They were hard to get along with. And so, Paul says, “You're going to have to show them something different, Titus. You're going to have to teach them a new way, especially the elders. They can't go around holding grudges all the time. They can't lead like that.”

And we can even say it this way, nothing is uglier than a fight among church leaders, right? Nothing is nastier than that. Nothing does more damage. I've met people and you probably have, who spend their entire Christian lives reeling from something like that. They spend their entire Christian life trying to get over a fight they saw in the church. So, Paul says, “Find men who are not going to fight and ruin the whole thing. Find men who can get along.”

Several years ago, I was talking with a family member who told me that they left the Christian faith over a fight that broke out in our church growing up. She was young at the time, 13, 14-years-old, and said that after watching her leaders fight, it took away all her trust in the Christian faith. And last time I talked with her, she was a full-blown agnostic and had been in and out of psych wards and things like that. Now, I'm not saying that there's not other causes for that because I saw the same fights and here I am as a pastor. So, there was a choice that this person made, but it doesn't take away from the fact that those things really affect people. Don't they? They really, really do damage. And so, Paul says you need to find elders on the front end who won't do that. They're not quick-tempered. They can take a licking and keep on ticking. They can take criticism. They can take a negative feedback, they can take problems and it doesn't make them blow up all the time.

A friend of mine once said, you have to have big shoulders in the ministry. You have to carry a lot of stuff and you've got to carry it without popping off all the time. And this is for everybody as well, right? This is another command for all Christians - we are not to be angry.

The Scottish of Angeles, Henry Drummond said, "Anger is the vice of the virtuous." Isn't that a good way to say that? The vice of the virtuous. He says, "It's often the one blotch on an otherwise noble character." There are men and women who are all but perfect, except for anger. They've an easily-ruffled, quick-tempered, touchy disposition. They don't smoke or drink or curse, but they are irritable beyond belief. And hey, let's just be honest, we've all been guilty of that, haven't we? Has anybody here not walked into church irritable on a Sunday morning? You guys don't get your coffee until afterwards. So, I know you come in here a little bit touchy, right? And if you're not careful, you can come into church and you go around, everybody's saying, "Here is my hurt and there is my hurt," like a walking bandaid. "Here's my pain, there is my pain. This is the person that hurt me," holding a grudge. And you can come off as if you want everyone to walk on eggshells around you. The Bible says we shouldn't do that, we got to forgive each other. We have to let things go.

The story is told of a missionary who was once attacked by a friend of hers in the newspaper. And years later somebody asked her, "Do you remember that? Do you remember what this person said about you?" And the missionary said, "No, but I distinctly remember forgetting it." We have got to forget our offences. We have to learn to let things go, especially the leaders, because they set the tone for the whole church. Listen, tone is a big thing in the church. If you're a man in leadership and you make people walk on eggshells around you, that could be very dangerous. You can't do that. Martin Luther said forgiveness is a command, so you can't decide whether you're going to forgive people or not. It's not an option. God forgave you and now you go and forgive others. By the way, isn't that wonderful that God forgave us? Listen, if you won't forgive people this morning, let me tell you something, it's almost like you're saying you're higher than God because God forgives people. Those who are in Christ are forgiven of their sins, and now we all have to go and model that for the world.

And that leads the one more qualification for an elder that we're going to look at this morning. One more general qualification. Just to review these other ones. Paul says, an elder must not be self-willed or arrogant. That's the first one. This guy can't take things personally all the time and think that it's all about him. He's just a steward. He's just a slave. It leads to a second one, he can't be quick-tempered either. This man should not go around saying, "You offended me, this person offended me." He's got to forgive people. He can talk to someone about an offense and then he has to forgive like the rest of us.

And this leads to one more qualification or one more general qualification we're going to look at this morning. And again, there's more in this list. Next week we're going to look at the positive side of all these things, and talk about what an elder should be. What he's talking about this morning is what he should not be, the things to avoid. Next week we'll look at the positive side of this. But one more general negative qualification is that an elder must not be undisciplined. That's what it all really boils down to at the end of the day. An elder must not be undisciplined. He has to keep his sins in check. He has to have self-control over his flesh, over his evil desires. Whatever sin it might be, anger, pride, lack of forgiveness - he can't let it get out of control.

This is why discipleship was so huge. I mean, the Cretans really struggle with this. So, Titus had his work cut out for him. And Paul says this in verse 7, he says, “For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, and not fond of sordid gain.” Those last three qualifications there are all related to the issue of discipline. Discipline with a man's use of wine and anger and money. All of that has to be under control for this man, Paul says. He has to keep a close watch on these areas of his life.

Just to go through these with you, “not given to wine” is translated as “drunkard” in some of your Bibles. It refers to someone who is enslaved to alcohol. And “not pugnacious,” we just talked about that. It's translated “violent” or “a giver of blows”. Sordid gain refers to money. Money that is gained sordidly or greedily. This man doesn't need the money, he just lives for it. And the idea in all of this is that an elder cannot be undisciplined with that. He can't let his passions run wild. Whatever passion or desire it is, he has to be victorious over it.

This is important because the ancient world was a very passionate place. It was totally out of control. I mentioned to you last week, sexual morals were very low in the first century. And so were other things like sobriety. Drunkenness was a real problem because the Romans would have drinking bouts in which they would drink to the point of excess and pass out only to wake up and do it all over again. They would spend days on end in a drunken binge. They would worship their gods like that.

If you went into a pagan temple, part of their rituals sometimes was drunkenness. And they would do the same thing with food. While the poor people were starving in the streets and they couldn't get enough to eat, the rich people would eat to the point of vomiting. There's been some discussion that some of their homes, the Roman homes or palaces even had vomitoriums in there where people could go and throw up their food just so they could eat more. It was disgusting.

We could mention other sins of greed and things like this, but Paul says an elder cannot live that way. The Cretan Christians could not live that way. Despite their upbringing, despite their environment, despite how bad things were on the island, they could not live like the rest of the world. They had to have discipline.

If you notice the word “discipline” has the word disciple in it. The two words are connected. A disciple is someone who follows the discipline of Jesus. They live like He did and they keep their sins in check. Jesus was sinless, and if you want to live a life like His, you have to turn away from your sins, right? It just only makes sense. And the closer you get to Christ, the more sins you turn away from. And if you notice, all the things in this list are sinful. Do you see that? All the things in this qualifications list, being self-willed, being quick-tempered, addicted to wine, pugnacious, fond of sordid gain, all those are evil things. And Paul says you have to avoid them as an elder. And the rest of us are to do the same.

And the good news is that you can do this if you believe in Jesus Christ. Whether you're an elder pursuing eldership or not, you can have victory over sins if you trust in Him. I'm probably going to say a little bit about this next week, but you've got to be careful when you read a book like Titus because you can read a book like this and say, “I can't do this. There is no way.” But Paul's

point in writing this book, is that you can do this in Christ. This book is not written to crush you but to encourage you. If the Cretans could do this, so can we. Amen? If the people in the first century could live like this ... if you were reading this letter in the first century, you would have had your mouth hanging open. "Paul, nobody lives like this in Crete. I've never even met anybody like this before." But Paul's point is that Christ can give you victory over sin. You may not be strong enough, but He is strong enough. Amen? You may not be good enough, but He is good enough. He is holy enough, He is righteous enough and if you trust in Him, He will deliver you from all sin.

It's been said that victory is only possible if you keep fighting. So, whatever sin it is, keep fighting it and trust God to give you the victory. Keep running to Jesus and He will take care of you. It's also been said, you may have to fight something more than once to defeat it. Going back to what we said earlier, discipleship takes time, so hang in there and God will give you the victory.

One preacher said it this way (an old country preacher from the south where I grew up), he said, "I hate sin, and as long as I have a foot, I will kick it. As long as I have a fist, I will punch it. As long as I have a head, I will butt it. And as long as I have teeth, I will bite it." He's not done. And he said, "And then when I'm old and footless and fistless and headless and toothless, I will gum it to death if I have to." He said, "I hate sin." Do you hate sin this morning? Will you gum it to death if you have to? Kick it and punch it and bite it, whatever. Just keep fighting it. Fight your pride, fight your anger, fight your unforgiveness, fight your lack of discipline - fight it. And God will give you the victory.

A poor man once walked into a pharmacist shop to tell them that he had a cold and the pharmacist said, "Do you have a prescription?" And the old man said, "No, but I have a cold, isn't that enough?" Friends, you have a cold. Spiritually speaking, you have a sin problem, and that's enough to condemn you to an eternity in hell. But praise God, He has a prescription. Praise the Lord, He has a cure, and it is found in Jesus Christ. Jesus can defeat your sin. Jesus can give you victory over it. Jesus can defeat anything you're wrestling with today, if you would trust in Him. Will you trust in Him this morning? You'll be so glad you did. Will you let Him give you victory? Let's close in a word of prayer.

Father, we all need victory this morning over some sin. I don't think I'm just speaking for myself when I pray this Lord, but we all live in a fallen nature. We all live with flesh and temptations of the flesh. And so, each of us has come this morning with our own sin burden and yet at the same time, each of us has come knowing that we have a victorious Saviour. At least every Christian in this room knows that, I pray.

And I pray if they're discouraged this morning from some sin this morning, this passage would have given them hope to know that these things are possible. A man and a woman can live in light of Your Word today.

If there's any here who are not in Christ, they've never trusted in Him for the forgiveness of sins, they're not living a life of victory because they don't know the prescription and the cure, Lord, I

pray You would draw them to Christ. Let them know that this is possible in Him. There is forgiveness at the Saviour. There is a way to defeat the flesh.

Lord, thank you for Jesus, thank you for books like this that are not written to discourage us, they're written to encourage us. Thank you for the lives of the Christians of old in places like Crete. We can be so encouraged to see the change that You brought in them. Lord, may You bring a change in us this morning. May this church give You glory forever in all things. We pray in Christ's name, amen.