

**THE SERMONS, LECTURES, AND SONGS OF
SIDNEY EDWARD COX**

Paul's Epistle to Titus
Chapter 1
Lesson 5

Editorial Note: What follows is one of a series of Bible lessons on the book of Titus.

These lessons were delivered to the Grace Bible Church in Detroit, Michigan sometime between 1967 and 1972. Sidney Cox was 80 years of age in 1967.

Sidney and Violet Cox resided in Detroit during their retirement years. In 1962, they retired to the Salvation Army retirement home in Detroit, "The Eventide." Violet was in failing health and ultimately died in 1967. Sidney continued residency there until a late in life move to Birmingham in 1972.

During the latter part of his life, Sidney Cox had developed a close relationship with the Christian and Missionary Alliance ("CMA"). CMA operates as a vast network of churches, similar to a "denomination." Grace Bible Church was a CMA church to which Sidney and Violet belonged during their years in Detroit. Sidney was often asked to lead Bible studies such as this study of Titus, and often filled their pulpit to preach.

John Douglas Cox, grandson of Sidney Cox. December 29, 2008.

.....we have been impressed I'm quite sure with its importance. There are various reasons for that, because as we have looked at the letter, in particularly looked at the man who wrote it - this tall man, son-crowned, who stands at the entrance of this letter that we call the Epistle to Titus. How majestic he is and how wonderful is the instruction that he gives to his young friend, and how weighty is the apostolic authority that is there all the way through this letter. And how Titus would need this, need the instruction, need the authority, as he would be undertaking a task so difficult, so enormous, as the correcting of certain things in the churches on the Island of Crete.

Last week, we were speaking of the man himself - the man to whom the letter was addressed, the young Titus. And we didn't spend a great deal of time there. We remembered that he was one of the two men who worked very closely with the Apostle Paul. We remembered that he was a Gentile convert. And we remembered with great thanksgiving the fact that Paul refers to him as, "His son in the gospel," this beautiful, spiritual relationship that is so very precious. And we rejoiced in it. We reminded ourselves of the great truths that are there in the unusual introductory section. Something that is quite unusual. Generally in the Epistles of Paul, you find that he introduces himself, perhaps gives a word about his apostolic position and so on. But, and then plunges immediately into the letter itself. He does not do that in the letter to Titus. But there are great truths that are in the preliminary section, and we have noticed these as they have just leaped to us out of the pages of this letter that we call the Epistle to Titus.

We looked at Titus himself, and then we looked at the place where he was to carry on his mission. We looked at the man and we looked at his mission and we looked at his mission field. And we were somewhat dismayed as we remembered the difficulties on the Island of Crete. We took just a brief glance as to its geographical location. We found it there in the Mediterranean Sea, somewhere to the west of the thumb-like section that we call Asia Minor that juts out into the Great Sea. And between that a little further over, the fingers of what we call Greece reaching down into the same sea area, and in between them, this Island of Crete.

And we noticed something of the difficulties that were there because of the unusual people that were there upon the Island of Crete. Not unusual because of the greatness of their characters or their accomplishments, but just the opposite, because of the lack of character and because of the difficulties that appeared in their personal lives. And it was this place where Titus was to work. And no wonder that such an exhaustive letter with apostolic authority was given to him as instruction as to how to carry the work and then the authority back to enforce what Titus had to say and had to do.

The instructions to Titus are quite unusual. Generally speaking, these young men like Timothy and Titus were sent here and there. Timothy for instance to the church at Philippi. But when you read that, there is no definite instruction as to what he was to do. He was to go there and be Paul's representative, the young man who would think more of them than he would of himself. He would be more concerned about their state, than he was about his own welfare. We know about that. But when you turn to the letter that is addressed to Titus, you find that the instruction is very definite indeed, and it is of such a character that it cannot possibly be mistaken. Here is what he said about it, "I have left you on the Island of Crete that you may set in order things that are wanting."¹

And so here we find a commission that has two sides to it. He is to set in order things that are out of order, and bring into the churches, to the churches, the things that should be there but are not there at all. And you have this two-sided commission that is given to young Titus - things out of order and things that are lacking. And in order that we might know again and refresh our minds with something of the problems that would have to be faced by Titus and those whom he was instructed to appoint as elders and bishops and overseers, let me read for you just a few verses here from the first chapter, from verse five down to the end of verse eleven. And this will give us again, the vivid picture of the real problems that were there facing this task of setting in order the things wanting in the churches on the Island of Crete. This is what it says:

"For this cause left I thee in Crete. That thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting and ordain elders in every city as I had appointed thee. If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children, not accused of riot or unruly. For a bishop must be blameless as the steward of God, not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre, but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men. Sober, just, holy, temperate, holding fast the faithful word as he hath

¹ Titus 1:5.

been taught that he may be able by sound doctrine, both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. For there are many unruly and vain talkers, deceivers, especially they of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not for filthy lucre sake.”

And there are the words from the Epistle itself describing the tremendous task that faced Titus and those who would endeavor to correct things that needed to be corrected on the Island of Crete and in the churches there.

Paul himself knew something about it. He had been there with Titus for a short time, at any rate, just long enough probably to know the immensity of the problem and the greatness of the difficulty. And now young Titus is left there in order that this work might be carried on, and then when he had to leave, those would be appointed from the elderly men and the mature men of the congregations. They would be appointed to carry on the work.

But here in this Island of Crete and in the Christian church, we find two things facing those who would correct the difficulties there - behavior, out of order; belief, out of order. And these two things always go together. When our behavior is out of order, then we tamper with our beliefs in order to justify ourselves in what we are doing. And in the belief, we are under obligation to make it known by our behavior. And if there is something faulty in our belief, then certainly there will be faults in our behavior.

The things that were lacking on the Island of Crete and in these churches, did you notice them? There are three things there. One - folks who refuse to be controlled. Now you notice that unusual word, the gainsayers? And here are these people who refuse to come under any kind of authority. And no matter what is introduced, they are amongst those who oppose it and oppose it in the most awkward and difficult way. And constantly they are in the opposition and refusing to come under control, so that there was that lack. Then there is the obvious lack of courtesy, that is the thing that is the hallmark of the Christian life. We've noticed it so often in this gracious and wonderful life of Paul that has been before us. "I beseech ye therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God." And it all comes down to the particular fact that there was lack of character in these people that are there on the Island of Crete - without control, without courtesy, without character. Now these are the things that we see, and as we view it we are dismayed to think of how great a task would be before young Titus and those who would be working with him.

Now, this matter of handling character problems for that's the heart of it, is a very difficult thing indeed. You do not handle character problems by wielding the big stick. There is cause for great care and great love and great patience and great understanding when you are dealing with these matters that are the product of faulty character. Care must be exercised, or you will do far more harm than good. Kindness and understanding must be manifested. Anyone who sits in the counselor's chair knows something about this. You cannot deal with the difficult problems that come from the inside of a person's life in any rude and awkward way. It must be done with kindness and in care. And the difficulty is set before

us, and the necessity for care is set before us, when we understand the meaning of the words that were given as the commission to young Titus.

Let me repeat them again to you. You are to, here it is, “Set in order things that are wanting.” Now, my dear, “Set in order,” is a medical term. It’s a term that is used in connection with a setting of a broken bone, or the straightening of a crooked limb. And the very thought of it reminds us that if the problems on the Island of Crete are so related that they have to be described by this medical term, then they must be just as difficult. It is no job for an amateur, no job for a novice, to be handling the broken bones that may be in anyone’s life. If you were, ever experienced it, you will know how skillful the hands must be in order to put these two broken pieces together, so that they knit properly. And not only achieve a healing process, but that they knit so well, that the place where the break occurred is even stronger after the process of healing is completed. It’s not merely a matter of correcting something, but of strengthening as well. Any orthopedic surgeon would know about this. It’s not a matter for an amateur, you need skillful hands and mature judgment and the tenderness to deal with frayed nerves that always come when there is a problem that has to do with broken things.

And so this is the thought that is before us. It would take patience and time and skill. We’re looking at the church on the Island of Crete, and when we do so, this is what we see - the broken bones of behavior, the twisted limbs of belief. And here is a young man who is commissioned by the Apostle Paul and will be commissioning others to set in order these things that are broken, and these things that are so badly twisted. How Dr. Titus would need not only his own skill, but that of the Great Physician.

And so would these elders, these overseers, these bishops, who would be carrying on the work when Titus had gone. No wonder that there would be such care exercised in this selecting of men to do a task like that. Only men of character can deal with character problems. Only men of faith can deal with faith problems. How we would need clean hands to bind up wounds of any kind. We do not trust the binding of a wound, or the handling of broken bones to hands that haven’t been properly cleansed. How these men would need constantly to be going to the water of the Word of God, in order that their hands might be clean, free from anything that might cause difficulty afterwards. This water of the Word of God would be quite, would be needed all the time.

Do you remember the operation that you had some time ago? The one that you like to talk about? Do you recall how the doctor prepared for that operation? Did you notice while you were waiting for his attention how carefully his hands were cleansed? How carefully his robes were placed upon him? How carefully that mask was placed over his mouth? How carefully these instruments that he would be used were sterilized? We should be just as careful when we handle the spiritual problems that come in the lives of the individual. And of course that doctor is not only interested in dealing with a problem immediately, but he is also thinking of the after care and the after result, so that not only would the work be completed for the actual need that was there, but in order that that need might never appear again. It’s as if the doctor is working in such a way that he is saying to his own heart and perhaps to the one whom he is helping, “This must never happen again.” And you can see how great is the need for skillful hands and thoughtful hearts and loving patience in the handling of problems like this. If anyone has

ever sat in the chair of the counselor, he knows quite well that this is the only way in which he can possibly be of any help to those who may come to him with the broken bones of their problems, perhaps the broken bones of their homes, smashed to pieces, and their own personal lives involved in the difficulty of personal iniquity.

This is the problem then that Titus was facing. Did you notice the word, "Order" in this? You are to set in order things that are wanting. Now this is more than just a surgical word. It's something that touches every part and point of life. Order, which shall be set in order. It is God's intention that life should be an orderly process, that it should be, everything should be done decently and in order. Order means harmony, of course, instead of discord. When the notes and sounds on a piano or an organ are out of order, then the result is discord. But when the notes and harmonies are brought into the proper order, then beauty is the result. I could go to this piano or to the organ and run my fingers up and down the keys and produce discord of plenty. But there are folks in our congregation who sit there at the organ and the piano, and by the proper arrangement and handling of these notes produce harmonies that are beautiful and help us in our worship service. I wonder by the way if you've ever thanked them for it, for what they do. Have you ever said thank you to those who make such a beautiful contribution to our worship service? Beauty, instead of ugliness. That's what order means. It brings beauty out of ugliness. It brings calm out of the storm. A disorderly life is pathetic, but a disorderly Christian life is tragic. Order, it means power and peace. Have you ever been into the room where the dynamos are working? And the quietness, the almost overpowering quietness, as you listen to them - the gentle hum of the motors as they are moving, and the dynamos as they are spinning. And there's power there, because things are in order.

You remember how wittier the great poets who gave us some of our most beautiful hymns, suddenly the most beautiful hymn I think ever written on the subject of prayer - The Prayer Hymn. Do you remember what he says about it? This is it, just to refresh your memory. And he says, "Drop thy still dews of quietness til all our strivings cease. Take from our souls the strain and stress, and let our ordered lives confess the beauty of thy peace."² Did you hear it? "Our ordered lives confess the beauty of thy peace." Order means God's will and my will are not only blended together, they work together. And here on this Island of Crete, we find not only a general difficulty described, but we find it pinpointed. We find it focused. We find the light shining on the actual difficulty. What was the difficulty? Did you notice it as I read the scripture to you? The difficulty, my dear, had to do with words. And you will find all the way through this letter, particularly the passage that I read to you, that there are people in connection with the church on the Island of Crete, with uncontrolled, empty talk, and they are deliberately endeavoring to mislead, to subvert and bring catastrophe to whole households and they are doing it for filthy lucre's sake.

² *Drop Thy Still Dew of Quietness, by John Whittier.*

Do you know that in the warnings to the Christian church there is five times as much said about the danger of words than almost any other subject that you will find. Check that second chapter of Second Timothy and you will find seven great illustrations having to do with living the Christian life. But when it comes to the question of the dangerous words, the words that have to be arranged in proper order, you will find five times as much said about the danger of words than any danger that overtakes or would beset the soldier or the athlete or the farmer. And here is this danger of words, words that can smash households. You don't have to look around very far, do you? We've all come in contact with it in some way or other. Satan would destroy a home, he doesn't send a wrecking crew in, not at all. All he does is to send some smooth talker, maybe a Christian church member with a smooth, but poisonous word, and the word is dropped in the midst of a household, and the result is catastrophe. And we have seen it over and over and over again.

What's the antidote for this? What would these men have in their hands? What equipment would they have to counteract the danger and difficulty that we've been talking about? Did you notice this as well? While we read it in the hearing of all of us, these are the two things - the faithful word and sound doctrine. Now the faithful word and sound doctrine in the hands of faithful men with soundness of Christian character, blameless, not faultless. These men with this equipment in their hands, this is the way in which God would take care of the great difficulty on the Island of Crete that centers in poisonous words and uncontrolled people. And this is the great task that Titus was to be responsible for. Back of the word and back of the doctrine must stand the man himself. Titus in the first place, the elders as they follow in his footsteps when he is gone. These men blameless - blameless in personal life, blameless in family life, blameless in church life.

And here is a letter that's written to this young man, Titus. These, this man who with others, was to be a living epistle read and known by the difficult people who lived on this difficult Island of Crete and in the difficult churches that had been established there.

And we have reminded ourselves over and over again, that unless we are aware of the fact that in the midst of a message like this there comes to us something of the personal voice of God to each one of us, something of the personal word of God to the Grace Bible Church. What has he been saying to you as you have been listening to the difficulties? What has he been saying to you about the possibility of some something broken or twisted in your own life? What's he been saying to the Grace Bible Church about the possibility of something there that may be broken and need to be corrected? What's he been saying to us about the twisted limbs that may be there? Because it may be there, even though the exterior may not give us any idea of the problem that lies beneath the surface.

What has he been saying to you, my dear? Because unless we have heard this voice of God coming to us personally through this, all you have been hearing is just the sound of a voice without very much importance to it at all. The thing that gives this importance is not that we just hear the sound, but that we respond to the implications of it, and we follow where the voice leads and where the hand of Christ would lead us. And this then is the fifth of our messages of the Epistle to Titus and it has been given in this church service this morning, and if God permits there will be five other messages that will be

following. We pray that God may have said something to you that will bring a real uplift to your heart and something in that close area of your own personal character that will be of value to you and of use to Him.

Our Father we pray that Thou will bless this message. We pray, we have prayed this over and over again, and here we are saying it again this morning. Lord, take this words and use them in some way for Thy glory. Help us we pray Thee, not merely to listen to an outward voice of a man who's talking, but that they may be hearing the inward voice of the God who is speaking personally to us and personally to the church that we love. And so for Thy blessing upon us we pray. In Jesus' precious name, Amen.