



"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit."

—Aristotle

08-Jul-11

## Paul's 'Politically Incorrect' Advice to Titus (Part Two)

Last time, we saw that the apostle Paul spoke plainly in his letter to Titus, the pastor of the churches on the island of Crete. He was quite blunt—but truthful—in how he characterized the Cretans' well-known traits. He had a higher purpose than to criticize them; he wanted to impart helpful instructions so that Christians there could overcome and grow in the image of Christ.

The letter to Titus contains only three chapters, and in this short span, Paul uses twelve lists of actions the Cretans need to take. For instance, in [Titus 1:6](#), he lists four things that an elder should be: blameless, a husband of one wife, a father of faithful children, and morally upright. Then, in verse 7, he lists an additional six things necessary for a minister: He must be blameless, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, and not greedy. In the following verse, he adds seven traits a minister should have: He should be hospitable, a lover of good, sober-minded, just, holy, [self-controlled](#), and holding fast.

He also pens a list for older men in [Titus 2:2](#): They should be sober; reverent; temperate; and sound in [faith](#), [love](#), and [patience](#). He provides one

for older women, too, in [Titus 2:3](#): They should be reverent, not slanderers or drunkards, and teachers of good things. He does not leave out younger people, instructing young women in [Titus 2:4-5](#) to love their husbands and children, and to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, and obedient to their husbands. To the young men, in [Titus 2:6-8](#), he tells them to be sober minded; show a pattern of good works in all things; show integrity, reverence, and incorruptibility in doctrine; and use sound speech.

In [Titus 2:9](#), servants are to be obedient to their masters and well-pleasing in all things, and they should not talk back or steal. To the population at large, in [Titus 2:12-13](#), he admonishes them to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, to live soberly and righteously, to be godly in this present world, and to look for Christ.

He makes three lists for brethren in [Titus 3:1](#), 3, and 9. They are to be subject to rulers, obedient, helpful, to speak ill of no one, and to be peaceable, gentle, and humble. They were once foolish, disobedient, and deceived, serving their lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, and hateful and hating one another. Now they are to avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law.

In all, 67 items comprise the twelve lists. There is some duplication because, obviously, there are certain things that we should all do or be. In addition, some words, when expanded by other translations, encompass more ground. Using several translations, then, we can produce an extended definition for each word, and from these expanded meanings, we can determine that they fall naturally into several categories. Thus, the items on the twelve lists that Paul gave Titus of things the Cretans should work on, both individually and collectively, can be grouped under five general headings: family, obedience, self-control, good character, and righteousness.

We now have a top-five list of areas to "set in order the things that are lacking" ([Titus 1:5](#)). We will take these from the least to the most items in each category.

**Family** (seven items): Paul tells us to love our spouses and children, be faithful to our mates, and raise faithful children. Women should be homemakers, and we should be teachers of our children and others. Family is

a foundational building block of society. Without strong families, a strong nation is impossible. In the same way, strong families make a strong church.

**Obedience** (nine items): On this list are being subject to authority and not self-willed, insubordinate, presumptuous, or arrogant. We are to be obedient to masters, starting with [God](#) and [Jesus Christ](#) and working down to parents, employers, ministers, government officials, and others in authority. We should no longer be foolish and disobedient. People in general—and Americans in particular—like to think that we are independent and free, beholden to no one. The reality is that it is just not true. We are all under the power of more people than we like to admit. How we submit to those in authority over us goes a long way in molding our Christian lives.

**Self-control** (thirteen items): This list includes things like not being quick tempered or violent, sound in patience, being discreet, and avoiding foolish disputes, contentions, and the like. We are not even to talk back—that often takes great self-control! Instead, we are to be peaceable, gentle, and humble. For "humble," *The Amplified Bible* adds "show[ing] unqualified courtesy toward everybody." Self-control is closely aligned with obedience, and actually, all five categories are intertwined. Family is the basic unit, the first stone laid down in the building, then obedience follows, which covers the family members' interactions with each other and those outside it. We must add self-control to the mix, since there can be no [peace](#) without it.

**Good Character** (nineteen items): Among the items in this category are being blameless, morally upright, moderate in our desires (food, drink, entertainment, etc.), and just in our actions and words—not even so much as speaking ill of anyone. Paul thought these instructions appropriate for everyone: elders, ministers, spouses, old and young men, old and young women, servants, and brethren. All of us must go on to perfection in character ([Hebrews 6:1](#)).

**Righteousness** (nineteen items): The instructions in the first four categories can be done, up to a point, without God. We probably all know people in [the world](#) who have worked hard to achieve some or many of these, seemingly without God's help. They may have left us wondering just who the called-out ones really are! However, true righteousness cannot be done without God.

Being a lover of good, holy, reverent, sound in faith and love, holding fast, having integrity in doctrine, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, looking for Christ, and not being deceived—all are traits acquired only when the Holy Spirit works in our lives.

Paul tells Titus to "set in order the things that are lacking." He then tells him what is lacking and needed. We should look hard at these areas ourselves to see how they might apply to us. The apostle's admonitions are clear and easy to understand. There is no ambiguity.

Which of these have we neglected or ignored? If Paul were reviewing us, what list of instructions would he write for us—one like the Cretans received or one more complimentary? Surely, we would all like one that praised us for our strong families, obedience, self-control, good character, and righteousness! That is the point: If we heed the advice in Titus, that *will* be God's evaluation of us. Adherence to these principles will allow us to complete our race—to win, if I may be so politically incorrect. We are not in this for a participation trophy. We are not hoping for "deferred success." We seek a crown of victory!

- Mike Ford

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## From the Archives: Featured Sermon

### [Titus 2:11-14](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

We are obligated to dress and keep that which is placed in our care, improving what He has given to us. We dare not stand still, but must make considerable effort to grow. The work of the ministry consists of equipping the body to grow and mature in love and unity. Christian growth takes work and effort, individually borne by every member of the body, involving rigorous self-examination, drill, self-control, self-discipline, and actively overcoming the things which separate us from God and our brethren. God's grace teaches us to actively displace our worldly desires or cravings with godly cravings and desires for truth and righteousness.

## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

### **[The Fruit of the Spirit: Self-Control](#)**

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Of all the fruit of the Spirit, God may have left the most difficult for last! Has anyone, other than Jesus Christ, really exhibited self-control? In the end, however, this is the ultimate aim of growing in the character of Almighty God!

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