



TIME OF GRACE®

The Power of "And": Spiritual and Religious

Study Notes

Summary

Those who lead the church have a high and holy calling. They can bring many people to Jesus or damage those whom God loves dearly. Therefore, Paul gives Titus (and us) high standards for their message . . . and their personal lifestyle.

- **Titus 1:5:** The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.
- God wants people to be _____.
- **Titus 1:6-8:** ⁶ An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. ⁷ Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. ⁸ Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.
- God wants pastors to be _____.

Points to Ponder

1. Compare Titus 1:5-9 with 1 Timothy 3:1-7, another list of qualifications for a pastor. What is similar? What is different?
2. What are your expectations for a pastor (be honest)? How does your list compare with God's lists in Titus 1 and 1 Timothy 3?
3. Jesus is called the "Overseer of your souls" in 1 Peter 2:25. In what ways is Jesus the perfect pastor?

4. **Challenge:** Pray for your pastors each day this week in light of today's message.

Homework for Next Week

Read Titus 1:10-16.

Time of Grace Ministry
The Power of "And": Spiritual and Religious
Titus 1:5-8
September 27, 2020

Pastor Mike Novotny

If organized religion was a social media platform, it wouldn't be a rising star like Snapchat or Instagram. It'd probably be something like MySpace; something that used to be popular - used to be - but not much anymore.

But before you end that thought with a period, let me pose a question to you: Have you ever seen anyone in any area of life achieve the highest level of excellence without organization? When it comes to education, athletics, music, or just raising kids to be functional adults, have you ever seen less organization lead to greater thriving? Like, we all know there are some jacked up moms and dads, there are some immoral and corrupt teachers, there have been abusive teachers and professors, and yet, have we turned our backs on organization in general? And the answer is no. I mean, no parents have a kid and say, "Well, you know, he's kind of cute. I'm sure he'll be fine by himself so let's throw out this bedtime, this chore stuff, this discipline, this higher authority. Let's just let him be this little magical being that he is." That doesn't work, does it? We never say about a second grader, "Well, he can learn a lot of stuff on a boat or in the woods so this whole Monday to Friday, Mrs. Kramer's second grade homework stuff, like that's out the door. I'm sure he'll be fine." Look at an athlete. Is anyone playing in the majors, in the NFL, in the NHL, professional soccer, rocking it for Barcelona or Man City or the US National team who's never had a coach, who's never had someone to tell them when to run and how far, who's given up on structure and organization, just gone solo and made it professional? And you know the answer is no. Despite the faults and flaws of human beings, we still know the power of organization; that human beings thrive not when given total freedom but given structure, even authority, to tell them what's good and what's not.

So here's my question for you: Is it possible that your faith is the same? That there's a level of spiritual maturity you will never have if you go solo? That there's a place that God wants you to get when it comes to your faith that you will never get to without organization and structure? Is it possible that God doesn't just think it's nice, but necessary, for all of us to be part of an organized religion? And if so, what about the stories we know? What about the corruption and what about the hypocrisy and what about all the stuff that God hates? Well, if you're going to figure out that tension, then you have to use this powerful little conjunction, the three letter word "and," which is exactly what I want to do with you today. Today, we're going to open up to the start of Paul's letter to a pastor named Titus and we're going to see Paul making this big push with the authority of God that there's something you need and there's something men like me need. There's a structure that is a requirement for the Christian faith and there's a standard that's a requirement for those who lead it. So let's get past our either-or thinking in our modern time and let's discover today in the book of Titus the "and" of organized religion.

If you want to follow along on the screen, let's jump in at Titus chapter one starting with verse five. Paul says this: "The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town as I directed you." Wherever there were Christians on the island of Crete, Paul wanted elders. Wherever people claimed to have the Holy Spirit and be following Jesus, Paul wanted elders. If you were a Christian on Crete, Paul did not want you to go a single day without a God-given appointed authority overseeing your soul. It might sound a little bit threatening and cold and hierarchical but it's not because think of what happens when a man like me gets to stand up here in a place like this. Or maybe let's start from the other side of that: What would happen if I wasn't? Like if I didn't stand up here at some different level during the church service but I sat down here at your level - hey guys, what's up? Like there'd be something to this, right? I mean, I'm a person just like you. I sin and I struggle just like you. I love Jesus and trust in him just like you. But do you know the problem with being down here just like you? I can't see you. I can see a couple of you and I'm 6'2" and I still can't; I can't see you.

But what would happen if I could? What would happen if the Holy Spirit appointed me to step up and to stand in a position to oversee you? Then I could see you and I could see you and I could see you there in the back and you in the corner and back in the shadows. Every one of you who gathers in this place, I can see you now because I've been called to step up and be an overseer, which is the amazing part of organized religion. Show of hands here today - how many of you in the past year have read The Core's church directory? Just me? How many of you have prayed through The Core's church directory? Just me? How many of you get up to speak the name of Jesus after thinking deeply about the members in The Core's church directory? Just me? The blessing of this calling is that I get to spend time with you. I get to counsel you. I get to text with you and email with you; not just the little circle that I do life with but with the church. So when I stand up here to teach, I'm not just googling sermons.com, copying, pasting, and preaching. I get to preach out of what I've seen as I see you. See, organized religion sounds really cold and impersonal but actually, when done right, it's the opposite; it's the most personal thing of all; when someone who knows you deeply and has studied the word deeply connects you to the word as we gather for worship. So if you're taking notes, here's the first big point that we learn from the book of Titus: That God wants people to be religious. Not just spiritual, not just faithful; he wants people to be organized and religious.

And friends, this is the "and" that is really, really important for us and especially for many of the men in our lives. You know what's classic male behavior? To put a period where God prefers a comma. You ever heard this from some guy that you love: "I'm not going to church but I feel really close to God when I'm in the woods and in my boat." Yes, and? And who's overseeing your soul when you're in the boat? And who's bringing you to the cross when you feel guilty in the boat? And who's praying for you personally when you're sitting in the woods? Who's calling you out when you're acting like an idiot and not like a Christian? And? Becoming a member of a church doesn't make you a good Christian, does it? No, it does not. And? Being a member of a church can make you the best kind of Christian; one that just isn't in it for themselves but does life in community and loves real people and gives to real causes and bears real burdens and extends real forgiveness. There are hypocrites in the church, aren't there? Yeah, there are. Do you know who knows that best? God. And do you know what God still commanded every

person who follows him? To be organized. To live under the appointed elders who will oversee their soul.

Jump back to Titus chapter one and look at what Paul says, verse six: "An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless." And notice where he starts: He must be faithful to his wife and he must manage his own household well. It's kind of interesting to me. Out of all the things that you would expect out of a pastor, like what would be on the top of the list, would you expect that? If he's married, he's got to be good at home and if he has children, he has to manage them well.

I was kind of wrestling with that thought this past week. Why would Paul start there? And I think the answer's this: Because a guy like me can trick people like you. Like an hour, two hours max, on a Sunday? I could fake that all week long. But do you know who I couldn't fake? My wife. Who sees all of me? The best of me, the worst of me? The Facebook me and the real me? If I'm not good at home, it's a true test of my character. Now Kim doesn't have to laugh at my jokes and normally she doesn't, right? But if she doesn't feel loved and cared for and safe, then I need to think about that first before I try to care for the bride of Jesus himself. If I'm trying to raise little kids who have different sins and struggles and gifts and talents and I'm just in it for myself, you're messing with daddy's schedule, daddy's wants, daddy's needs, if my home is a me-first mess, how could I stand up in front of a church and say, "You first," and make you blessed? What happens at home is like this little microcosm of how a man will be in his church. Not perfect, he'll need loads of forgiveness, but if he can be selfless enough to make those few people feel loved, hopefully he can be selfless enough to make the entire church feel loved.

That's one of the things that I actually respect so much about Pastor Tim. Do you all know Pastor Tim, the lead pastor of our ministry? Every Monday, I have a one-on-one meeting with Pastor Tim and he was late to our meeting this past week and since he was late, I started looking around and I decided to take a picture in his office without his permission and I'm going to show you. This is the picture. It was Tim and his daughter, Miranda, at her wedding and I believe she bought him this as a gift that stands on the little table in his office. And when I read through the words of that piece of art, I thought, "This man is blameless." As a pastor, I've done enough weddings to realize you can learn a lot about a man at his daughter's wedding; whether he cared for her well, whether he loved her deeply. You can't fake that when she walks down the aisle and plans for the weekend. And so when I see this gift, when I see the expression of joy on her face and pride on his, I think this is what God wants! I pray Pastor Tim is always blameless like that and I pray that I am, too.

So that's where Paul starts; a pastor must be blameless. But Paul's not quite done. I mean, honestly, I can be a rock star husband, an amazing dad, if I worked here five hours a week but you probably wouldn't be happy with that, would you? That's why Paul keeps preaching. Look what he says in Titus 1:7. He says, "And the overseer must not be overbearing, not quick tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined." Now this isn't like a one and done kind of checklist for your pastor. Like, "I saw him lose his

temper at a television screen back in 2008." No, these are like character qualities that have become such a concern that it's kind of hard for you to listen to the message without thinking about the man. If the pastor's an overbearing bully that you're afraid to express your concerns to, if he's the man who drinks so much at a confirmation party that you're concerned he's going to get behind the wheel, if he lacks self-control and can't keep the secrets that you confess in his office, he can't be a pastor. If you wouldn't trust him to babysit your kids or be alone with the teens on the youth group trip, he can't be a pastor. No, what he must be is hospitable; a Greek word that means to love other kinds of people. If he can't love republicans and democrats, Catholics and atheists, if he doesn't care about black and white, male and female, young and old, if he's not hospitable, he can't be a pastor. He has to love what's good, the people of God, the word of God, the commands of God, and he has to be self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. You know, that's huge for your pastor because as I said before, most of what I do most of you don't see. In the Bible, the top things on a pastor's to do list are study the Bible and pray for people, which normally doesn't happen with other humans around, alright? So I'm putting in dozens of hours every week doing those things, you hope, but if I'm not holy or upright, if I don't have self-control, well, I could put like Call of Duty on the big screen and grab a controller and you could show up Sunday and hey, I could preach another sermon so you have to trust the pastor. You have to trust he's been faithful with your gifts. You have to trust he's going to guard your closest secrets. You have to trust him when you give him a church credit card. You have to trust him with the authority and responsibility of standing right here. And this is the "and" of Paul's teaching. He wants every one of you to be absolutely religious but write this down - Paul also wants pastors to be righteous.

Which is why today I want to ask you for a rather bold prayer. I would like you to pray for me and for Pastor Tim, for Pastor Michael, Pastor Bill, and Pastor Jim every day for the next seven days. The five men that God has called to oversee this ministry, I want you to pray specifically for their integrity. Because here's what you know: If I became the next story, it would be a train wreck, right? Our church has been blessed, things have been growing, we have new partnerships and opportunities with television ministry and media. God has expanded our platform, which would be amazing for the message of Jesus and amazing for the work of the enemy. The bigger things get, the more ugly the fall. And it would take one drink too many and I'm fine to drive. It would take one click that was discovered. It would take one stupid night and some flirtatious comment for it to all fall apart. It could take one moment of lack of self-control on the soccer field where things would turn violent. It doesn't have to be 100 times so pray. Pray that God is so good and the work of the Holy Spirit is so strong, pray that our roots produce the fruit of self-control so never - not today, not next week and not next year - not ever, ever, ever would we have to think, "I wonder if he's worthy?" But instead, as you gather as religious people, that nothing would stop you from clearly hearing the good news. Pray that we'd be blameless because friends, do you know what happens if we are? If you keep being religious and I keep being righteous? It means I can see you and you can hear me. That when I stand up here to speak and you sit there and listen, nothing gets in the way besides the word and the message God wants you to hear. So that I can look out at all of your faces and I know what you've been through. I know about your fears as a mom, I know about your grief as a grandmother. I know you're battling a new disease and you're scared. I know you're worried for your son's spiritual health. I know you feel anxious when you come to church. I know you're dealing with grief in a

whole new way. I know you've been through the divorce, the addiction, the abuse. I know you. And here's what God says, the God who appointed me to be here, to oversee your soul, that God says in the book of Titus alone that you're chosen. The kids at school might not have chosen you, the girl at work might not have chosen you, your husband might not have chosen you, the world might not have chosen you, but through Jesus you have been chosen by God. You will walk out of this organized gathering knowing that you are chosen and he will never leave you and he will never forsake you. God has appointed me right here to tell you that you have a living hope, an eternal life, through faith in Jesus Christ. That everything else in your life won't last - not your health, not your finances, not your best friendships or your closest family - but there is something that cannot be touched or taken away and that is the life you have with God. God has called and appointed me to preach grace to you today. Some of you feel like you don't deserve a place in God's family, you've messed up too much to be worthy of his love, but grace doesn't care how you feel. Grace is grace. It's the gift you don't deserve but you still get because of Jesus. That's why we're here! That's why I guard my character, that's why you gather week after week, because when we keep doing this, we get to experience a few moments like this final picture.

This picture that I want to show you comes from the book of Ezra and Nehemiah. It happened at an organized gathering of religion about 450 B.C. God's people had come to Jerusalem, they had rebuilt its destroyed walls after their 70 year captivity. They built a big platform so Ezra the priest could stand up and see the crowd. And he unrolled the scroll and he read and do you know what the people gathered there did? They wept. A simple reading of the word of God made them realize how far they had fallen, how many times they had sinned, how little they deserved the love of God, which is why I love organized religion because the Bible says after Ezra was done reading that scroll, he said to the people, "Do not grieve because the joy of the Lord is our strength." And the Levites, as part of their structure of religion dispersed throughout the crowd and they taught the people what the word of God actually meant and the story ends that the people scattered and they went on their way rejoicing.

That's why we do it. Because as long as you sit down there and listen and as long as I stand up here and preach the gospel, we don't have to grieve. Instead, we can leave rejoicing. So brothers and sisters, until the day you die, God insists - he wants, he demands and commands - that you be organized and religious. And he says to all of us who stand up here, it's just as essential that you be righteous because when that "and" that happens, people grow, people get saved, people see God. So let's pray.

Father, thank you for this privilege of standing here and sharing your word. Thank you for the honor of overseeing people's souls and being such an integral part of their spiritual lives. On behalf of every pastor, every overseer, God, we are grateful and humbled by the opportunity.

Heavenly Father, I know your heart is broken with what's happened in America. So many people have lowered the standard for their religious leaders and it backfired. Now we have to sow what a previous generation has reaped and so I pray for our church, God, that for the sake of someone's personality we would never compromise integrity. And I pray that you would help us to see the necessity of being in a place like this, to be known, to be loved. God, many people

will find this odd, many people will think it's weird, but help us to remember that excellence, in anything, and especially in following you happens when we gather here together.

I pray today, God, for Pastor Tim, for Pastor Michael, Pastor Bill, Pastor Jim and for myself. Help us to be rock star husbands, amazing dads, shepherds and pastors who give your people just a little glimpse of your compassionate loving heart. Without you, God, we can't, but with the prayers of your people and the help of your spirit, we can. So let it happen for our good and for your glory. We pray this all in Jesus' name and all God's children said Amen.