



CATHOLIC SCRIPTURE STUDY

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SERIES V

WISDOM LITERATURE AND NEW TESTAMENT LETTERS

Lesson 24 Commentary Titus and Philemon
Lesson 25 Questions Hebrews 1-6

A GENTILE APOSTOLIC DELEGATE Titus and Philemon

INTRODUCTION

This letter, like those to Timothy, is a “pastoral” letter—written to a pastor and about being a pastor. Titus was the only Gentile of the New Testament appointees of Paul. He accompanied Paul on his third missionary journey, and after evangelizing Crete, Paul left him there to organize and appoint presbyters. Later, Paul wrote this letter to Titus addressing him as “true child of mine in the faith.”

Timothy and Titus are called legates by Paul, a title and an office higher than the episcopoi and the presbyters, whose titles are interchanged at times. Paul had passed his powers, called “the laying on of hands” to Timothy, Titus and others who replaced him, so that apostolic powers received from Christ continued in the Church. In these apostolic times we see the structure of the church being laid as it has come down to us: apostles and successors of the apostles (bishops today) and those whom they “lay hands on” (priests and deacons today) (Acts 1:8, 1 Thessalonians 5:12, 1 Timothy 5:17).

Most scholars today place Titus after 1 Timothy in time. Some even suggest 150 A.D. for the language, style and themes are so different from Paul’s.

I. THE TEACHING CHURCH (Titus 1:5-6)

A. God’s Representatives

1. Qualifications (Titus 1:5-9). Paul lists the type of men whom he wanted chosen for presbyters and bishops:

- a. Irreproachable character
- b. Married only once
- c. Believing children, well-behaved
- d. Hospitable
- e. Moral, devout, self-controlled
- f. A firm grasp of the changing message of the tradition.

2. Married Clergy. Among the Jews, it was all-important to continue God’s Chosen People, to marry and have children who continued God’s People. After Christ came, the whole world became the chosen people, and we find Jesus and

Paul, who lived celibate lives for the sake of the kingdom of God. This continued in the church, along with married clergy, but was not legislated until a situation arose in feudal times when men became priests only to inherit land which had been given to the church. This brought Church legislation for celibacy, for many of such married men were quite unworthy of the priesthood, uneducated, and neglectful of offering Mass.

3. Role. A church representative must teach the authentic sound doctrine while refuting those who contradict it. By the time of the letters to Timothy and Titus, there seems to have been a standard of teaching based on Apostolic Tradition and Scripture, as the Deposit of Faith. Therefore, some scholars date these letters in later times.

B. Irresponsible Teachers (Titus 1:10-13). Among the newly converted, Jewish Cretans were some who insisted on Old Testament regulations, thus “upsetting whole families.” The worst of it was that they did this “for sordid gain” (Titus 1:11). Paul quotes a Cretan teacher who describes such people among the Cretans: “liars, beasts, and lazy gluttons.” “They have swerved from the truth, though they claim to know God.”

Christians through the ages have had the same problem. In every age there have been teachers whose teaching or doctrine can not, upon investigation of Church authorities, be acceptable as inspired and according to the Holy Spirit. These aberrations were called “heresy” and their believers “heretics.” When they had deceived many, the bishops of the church were called together to investigate the teaching and approve or disapprove it. These authoritative meetings are called “councils”—there have been twenty-one councils through the 2,000 years of Christianity.

Large divisions, such as Eastern Orthodox, split from the authority of the bishop of Rome, successor to St. Peter. This division occurred about 1000 years after Christ, and has not been healed yet. It was largely caused by political mo-

tives, in the sense that the Eastern Christian nations were the foundation of the Church, and wanted their Patriarch to be their Pope. But, since Peter had made his headquarters in Rome and was martyred there, this fixed forever the successor of Peter, the head of the church.

C. Modern Divisions. A second large division occurred in Europe in the 1500’s when a German priest-monk revolted from the authority of the church centered in the bishop of Rome, traditionally called “Catholic Church” (“Universal” church). The European Catholics had just been through the Renaissance, a discovery of pagan Rome and Greek civilizations with their marvelous achievements in cultural arts. This discovery was a jolt to Europe and its kingdoms whose culture grew from the Barbarian Invasions of Teutonic tribes from east of Europe. These had, one by one, been converted to Christianity by the teachers of European civilizations—the monks of St. Benedict, a saint and scholar of Rome. The renaissance (rebirth) culture swept away much of the simplicity, the austerity, of Catholic western culture. The Church was sadly affected by the Renaissance, especially by the wealth that surrounded the papacy, and was badly in need of a religious rebirth.

Martin Luther’s revolt and his ninety-five reasons were, we could say, 90% right, but the other 5% was doctrinal error and led to a continuous splitting of one group of reformers from another. This is called the Protestant Reformation, but it really did not reform the Church, for it was more nearly a revolution. Today, the largest denomination in Christian churches is the Roman Catholic Church, but there are around 400 differing Christian churches outside it, with “selectivity” of the doctrines that came down from the beginning. One of the difficulties these churches have is that they do not realize the development of the doctrines left by the Apostles and written in Scripture; they are not familiar with the earliest documents preserved in the Vatican Library. Another is that they do not accept the authority come down

from Peter who died in Rome. Copies of these documents are now available in modern English. One of the CSS members generously gave me a three-volume new printing of these historical documents, very useful to me.

We must realize, however, that all these differing churches accept Jesus of Nazareth as Christ the Divine Lord, and that some live Christian values and virtues to degrees higher than many Catholics. They study the written word of God so totally that they know it and live by it better than many of us. Their example draws many born Catholics to them to study the Bible. The Catholic Scripture Study was started to provide a comparable program for daily reading and questions/answers to share with each other, with a lecturer to add knowledge and insight.

Paul directed Titus to “act with authority: Admonish them sharply” (Titus 2:15). He adds to this the much desired effect: “in order to keep them close to sound faith.” Paul’s action here is like a bishop today who directs a priest to correct and teach what has come from the authorities of the church as “sound doctrine.”

II. LIVING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE (Titus 2:1 - 3:8, Romans 15:1-6, 1 John 2:15-17)

A. Advice to Age Groups (Titus 2:1-7)

1. Older Men (Titus 2:2). “Teach them to be temperate, serious-minded and self-controlled; sound in the faith, loving and steadfast.”

2. Older Women (Titus 2:3). Act as those who have chosen to belong to God. Avoid the great temptation of older women: gossip, especially when it reveals or charges sins or faults; we are surprised to read “or be slaves to drink” (verse 2b). There are other instances in the New Testament that point to this common habit. The main word here is “slaves”—under the control of alcoholic drink.

3. Young Women. Another important role for older women is not too general today: “Teach the younger women...” Is this custom for our mothers and daughters? “...to love their husbands and children... to be busy at home (!) and submissive to their husbands.” Thus the Word of God will not fall into disrepute” (Titus 2:4-5).

In the case of younger children, not of school age, patterns of life today, separation of husbands and wives, divorce, ambitions of women, are bringing child care centers, pre-schools, etc., as solutions. A mother-child relationship is one of the most important aspects of the future life of a child as a man or woman. As an often mistaken notion, the custom of working mothers has grown and grown, and our society has more problems with youths. God’s plan here is the very best, even if life has to be with fewer other advantages.

4. Young Men. “Keep yourself completely under control” (verse 6). Adolescent youth have struggles that need solid guidance, love and good self-image. Without control under God, many go wrong! To Titus himself, Paul continues to give advice, then he brings another class of Christians to mind:

5. Slaves (Titus 2:9-10). “Be submissive to their masters, pleasing them, having constant fidelity.” It was a nation of free citizens that changed that injustice to other human beings, but even then it took a civil war between two forces to bring it about. This fact, and justice and freedom for all, may explain our country’s blessings from God compared with so many others.

B. Transformed Lives (Titus 2:11 - 3:8, Romans 13:1-7, 1 Peter 2:13-17). Catholics will recognize a familiar saying at Christmas midnight Mass from verse 11: “The grace of God has appeared, offering salvation to all.”

This, Paul explains, “trains us to reject godless ways and worldly desires...” As we go through his teaching here, the Word of God for us, ask your-

selves, “Have I achieved this description of a faithful Christian? We might especially check ourselves on “worldly desires.”

Like a gifted teacher, Paul brings out the reward of this effort: Jesus and His glory, awaiting us forever, and the love He has for us to go through the great Sacrifice He made for us (Titus 2:14).

1. Christians and the Government (Titus 3:1). Paul takes up several aspects of life as Christians, and begins with the government. Remember that the Romans had overcome all free nations and ruled wisely in many ways. Roman law and government were in the main, the best of the ancient world. Paul states the attitude of a Christian: “Be loyally subject to government officials, obey the laws, and take on any honest employment (Titus 3:1). Such character traits dissolved suspicion of Christians by the government and probably along with the Christian heroism of the martyrs, who refused to worship the emperor in the times of dissolute emperors and tyrants claiming to be a god, and with the peaceful love for all in the Christians, even enemies, finally won the Roman Empire for Christ. Christians inspire new Christians.

2. Employment (Titus 3:1b). In this world of “get ahead,” “go up higher” and hope for a higher lifestyle, this simple aim is often looked down upon.

When we hear of much unemployment, it is puzzling to see in the “Help Wanted” section, ad after ad that is “honest employment” that our lifestyle could not accept. Even when people are truly in need, they shun employment that would be lesser than their last job. Have we been affected too much by America’s consumer society? What would Our Lord call this society?

Some call our system the “rat race.” There is a delightful, telling lesson for us in the story call “Hope for the Butterfly,” a modern tale of ambi-

tion and its effect on our after-life. Could Paul say of us, of our lifestyles, “the slaves of our passions and of pleasures of various kinds” (Titus 3:3b)? Has Paul’s teaching, “the renewal by the Holy Spirit” through the words of Scripture and the Word-Made-Flesh, come to be in us so that we are justified (make just, holy) by His grace?

The great Apostle next finishes his directions for the new delegate he is appointing: “Lay great weight on these things I have been saying” (Titus 3:8).

3. Last Advice (Titus 3:8b-11, Romans 5:5-8, Ephesians 5:25-27). We can tell the main hope, the central ideal of Paul: “that those who have committed themselves to God may be careful to do what is right, for this is good and advantageous for all.”

And yet one more: “Warn a heretic once and a second time; after that have nothing to do with him.” Christ died a painful death with great love for each heretic and lost soul that He loved. Such is a soul, as the poet Francis Thompson’s poem so wonderfully portrayed; never abandoned.

“From those strong Feet that followed, followed after,

But with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbed pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat—and a Voice beat
More instant than the Feet—
“All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.”

A POWERFUL MESSAGE (Philemon)

This is a rare look into the Roman society’s system of slavery of man to man (and not of a different color or culture!). We see the effect on Christians in this system when confronted by the teachings of Christ.

This letter would make a good plot for a one-act play:

Slave robs and escapes from his master; slave meets Christians, and attracted to the noble ideal, asks for Baptism. The “bishop” hears of the situation and counsels the escaped-slave-become-Christian to return to his master. Then the bishop writes a powerful, effective message to the Christian slave-owner, to receive the errant slave as “a beloved brother” (Verse 16).

Again we see the turn-about that baptism in Christ brings to a society. Although Paul does not

attack the institution of slavery, his letter reflects its injustice. The idea of a slave as a “brother” was a radical change in a relationship. The trust Paul put in Philemon as one of his beloved converts led to a noble response and probably a changed relationship between Onesimus and Philemon.

The fact that this very personal letter was preserved and placed in the Christian holy books as the Word of God is amazing and gratifying: an example for many of our own relationships when one has deeply offended the other.

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Day 4 Read Hebrews 4:1-11.

- a. How do we “hear his voice” (Hebrews 4:7) today?

- b. What movement in our country is actively run by Jews who “hear his voice today”? If you know about it somewhat, share with your group.

- c. Read Hebrews 4:14-16. Why can Jesus, our high priest, sympathize with our weakness and temptation to sin?

Day 5 Read Hebrews 5, Leviticus 9:7.

- a. In what way does Hebrews 5:1-4, 6 refer to Catholic priesthood today?

- b. Has anyone in your family received this call and answered it? Share briefly information on this favor to your relatives.

- c. What lesson can we learn from verses 8 and 9 for ourselves?

Day 6 Read Hebrews 6.

- a. In verse 1-5, what is the “foundation” we all have had as Christians?

- b. In verses 4-8 and Matthew 12:43-45, what reaction do you have to these verses?

- c. In verses 9-20, so full of encouragement for us, share a verse or two that helps you.