

# FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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**SERMON:** *Where in the World?*

**SERIES:** *Titus*

**SCRIPTURES:** *Titus*

**SPEAKER:** *Shaun Kipe*

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*\*Credit to Bible Gateway; Bible Project; Gordon Fee; NT Wright; John Ortberg*

Well good morning and welcome to Five Forks Church, to everyone here in the room and also to those of you tuning in to the livestream.

Back when I was younger there was a cartoon series on television, that had a catchy opening song. It was called, “**Where in the world is Carmen Sandiego?**” I don’t remember much about the cartoon specifically, just that in each episode, the main character, Carmen Sandiego, ended up at a different location all around the globe and you never knew where she was going to end up. So to get us started this morning we’re going to play “**Where in the world is this picture from?**” I’ll show you an image of a well-known landmark around the world, you tell me where we are. Ok, sound fair?

**Stonehenge** (Wiltshire, England)

**Great Wall** (Northern China)

**Taj Mahal** (Agra, India Palace in India to house tomb of wife of emperor)

**Machu Picchu** (Inca’s Cusco, Peru)

Ok, last one...

**Knossos Palace** on the island of Crete! Modern archeological studies suggest that the original Palace was built in about 2,000 BCE.

What book of the Bible is centered around or features, the Island of Crete?

### **Titus (Sermon Series Graphic)**

That's exactly right. If you have your Bible with you. Go ahead and get it out. And open to the book of Titus.

To find it you'll be getting close the end of your Bible. And, just encouragement to you. While we do put most of the Scriptures on the screen behind me. I do think it's helpful to try and locate the various passages in your own Bible so that you know where they are. It helps you to become familiar with and comfortable using your Bible. Whether you do that digitally or have your paper copy in front of you. And if you don't have a Bible, we have some located on a table out in the foyer, in future weeks, feel free to grab one on your way in.

Over the last few years, as we've moved into the fall months, I've tried to take one sermon series and focus specifically on a book or characters, in the New Testament. Last year, if you recall we did a series called "**Sisters Acts**" talking about the significance of Priscilla and Lydia, two of the leaders of the early church movement. And two years ago, we did a series walking through **Paul's letter to the Philippian** church.

This year we're gonna take 4 weeks and walk through Paul's letter to

#### **I. Titus.**

I want to help you become more familiar with this book and what it's about and what it has to teach us in our lives today. Let's just start with a little bit of...

#### **A. Background/Context**

As you may have guessed Titus is the name of a follower of Jesus. A Greek Christian, who Paul picked up on one of his many missionary journey's.

Take a look at this map for a moment.

**(MAP)** This is **Jerusalem**, kind of the center of Jewish life. Jesus spent much his time in around here.

After Jesus death and resurrection there was a lot of persecution for anyone still claiming to be his follower. And the persecution caused people to leave Jerusalem. And as they did, they took the "Good News" message of Jesus...his life, teachings, resurrection with them.

And little communities of Jesus followers, called churches, began to spring up. And a man named **Paul**, a Jewish leader, who initially was leading much of the persecution against Christians, has a transformative experience and becomes a follower Jesus. And he becomes one of the first missionaries. He begins planting churches all over the ancient Mediterranean world...in **Corinth, Colossae, Philippi, Ephesus** and **Rome**.

There may be an important lesson here for the church. I wonder if sometimes our faith has become "too comfortable." Here in the US, for example, for the most part, Christianity is pretty comfortable. We kind of fit, "following Jesus" into and around our lives. In Scripture it seems, however, that it's often during persecution and discomfort that the community of Jesus and individual followers grow the most. I sometimes wonder if the story of Jesus doesn't go too far in our lives, because it would be uncomfortable. One author suggests that...

*"God comforts the disturbed and disturbs the comfortable."*

Back to our story, on one of these of journey's Paul picks up Titus. Who becomes a trusted companion and co-worker. Titus' name is mentioned in the letter to Galatians and also the second letter to Corinth. I'll show you some of the things that Paul says about Titus in a few minutes.

The book of Titus, then, is a letter from Paul to Titus. In this letter, we learn that Paul assigned Titus to go and restore order to the churches located on **the Island of Crete**. (Titus 1:5).

That's why, I showed you an image earlier of the Knossos Palace.

So, that's just a little bit of the backstory to the book of Titus. What we want to do for the rest of our time this morning and then for the next few Sundays, is find out what Paul wrote to Titus and then think through how it impacts our lives. If you have your Bible again, Titus 1, and let's just take a look at the first 4 verses.

## **II. Titus 1:1-4**

**Titus 1:1-4 – Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness—<sup>2</sup> in the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, <sup>3</sup> and which now at his appointed season he has brought to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior,**

**<sup>4</sup> To Titus, my true son in our common faith:**

**Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.**

Two phrases, I want to highlight for us and talk a little bit about this morning.

First, did you notice the emphasis on

## A. Truth and Lies

Paul says, he's writing this letter...

**“to further the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness— <sup>2</sup> in the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time,**

Now, what’s going on here? Well, first it’s important to be aware that in the ancient world, most **gods** were seen as **unreliable, unpredictable and dishonest**. You never knew if you could fully trust them. The only thing you really knew about the gods was that there were a lot of them, and that at any moment this god or that goddess, might think well of you and do something nice or dislike you and punish you.

This is in fact, part of what leads to many of the elaborate sacrificial practices in the ancient world. Think about it. You want the “gods” to be happy with you so that they bless you. Give you rain, crops, bless you with children. So to make the gods happy, you offer them something...sacrifices. If we offer this, the gods will make it rain for us. And so your view of the “gods” tends to be influenced by weather patterns. And you and I know, that even today, with modern meteorological technology, the weather still seems so unpredictable. This becomes the character you associate with the gods.

But more than that, the **Cretans**, were notorious in the ancient world for **bad behavior; treachery, greed**. Most of the men, settlements on the Island, had served as mercenary militia. Basically men who would offer themselves to fight wars for the highest bidder of their services. The Island was known for being dangerous, violent and sexually immoral. Great place to start a church plant! In some ways, this Island represents the epitome of “evil” in the ancient Mediterranean world.

And almost above all else, what the Cretans were known for was lying! If you jump down just a few verses to...

**Titus 1:12 - 12 One of Crete's own prophets has said it: "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons."**<sup>[a]</sup> **13 This saying is true.**

Now, if you think about this for a minute it's kind of ironic. A Cretan says, that all Cretans are liars. And then Paul says...and he's telling the truth. Kind of ties you in knots almost.

This is why Paul is placing such a significant emphasis on "truth and lies" in the first few verses of his letter. Paul is drawing a clear distinction between the character of the ancient god's (their dishonesty and unpredictability) and the Cretan culture (of lying). Contrast that with the Hebrew God, Yahweh and the culture he expects of his people.

NT Wright says, **The God Paul writes about is unique because He is honest, trustworthy and reliable.** (NT Wright Commentary).

Aren't you glad that as followers of Jesus today, we no longer have issues with dishonesty?

*It turns out that though, we can be pretty hard on the Cretan way of life, this whole dishonesty problem is common to all of humanity. Think about it like this. What is the one thing you don't have teach a child to do? You have to teach them to feed themselves, how to clothe themselves, how to use the potty...what is the one thing you don't have to teach them. How to lie.*

*Developmental psychological studies suggest that at least by age 2 children are learning how to be dishonest. (Ortberg, Become New)*

Perhaps we don't think about our own levels of dishonesty because maybe we aren't as blatant with our lying. We would say we tell little white lies. We don't give the whole truth, but it's not serious.

Have you ever done this before? *You're in a conversation with somebody and they mention to you a person, or a book or a location or something you felt like you should have known? Even though you didn't, you pretended like you did. Ever done that?*

Or how about this one? *You're driving in your car and the person in the other lane is trying to catch your eye so that you'll let them over. You have no intention of letting them over. So you pretend like you don't see them. Instead of looking like a jerk, you make it look like you're just an unobservant nice guy.*

These are the evidences of dishonesty lurking in our lives

*I was actually thinking about this, in relation to not just our individual lives, but to the kind of culture we are part of in the United States. You are probably familiar with this story but kind of like the classic example of American honesty and truth-telling is a story about **George Washington (PIC)**. It's from a book by Parson Weems. He was a Pastor and he wrote the first biography of George Washington and he tells this story about how when George was 6 years old he got this little hatchet. And one day his dad came home and saw that his beloved cherry had been cut down and said, "Who chopped down my cherry tree?" And finally little George comes up and says, "I cannot tell a lie. It was me." And then in Weems book, his father responds "Oh George, come run into my arms. You have repaid me a 1000 times over. Your truthfulness is worth a 1000 trees with silver blossoms and golden fruit." The ironic thing is that that story was almost certainly made up by Parson Weems. The most famous story about truth-telling in our culture, it turns out is not true. (Ortberg, Become New)*

And you see this is deep inside of all of us. Stories of human lying are all throughout Scripture, aren't they?

The serpent lies to Adam & Eve in the garden, who in turn lie to God.

Jacob's lies to his father in order to receive his brother's inheritance.

King David lies to Uriah.

Ananias and Saphira lie to their church community.

Jesus speaking about the character of his Adversary the devil says: **When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. (John 8:44)**

Lying characterizes a lifestyle that is in contradiction to God, who does not lie. As followers of Jesus, Paul says, we are now joining a community where truth matters. Where honesty matters. It's the character of our God and it's the character of His community.

Peter, one of Jesus closest disciples wrote these words 1 Peter 2...

**<sup>21</sup> ...Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. <sup>22</sup> “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.”<sup>[e]</sup>**

Paul tells the Colossian church...

**Colossians 3:9 - <sup>9</sup> Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices <sup>10</sup> and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.**

The way of life of Christians means knowing the truth and living lives of truth and integrity.

Can I just give you one more example closely related to real life, where many of us are failing on this...passing along bad information... *“something you heard someone say”* *“something you heard on the news”* or *“something you read on the internet”*...do you go and check out the reliability and accuracy of your sources?

You read an article or a post that is circulating on social media. The article supports your side of an argument. Wow it's really good. Other people need to hear this and read this, so that they'll think like I do. And so we immediately share it...pass it along...



Sadly, you find out later that the information you shared wasn't completely accurate. Now what do you do? Do you try to justify? Do you remove it quick? Do you do anything to try and correct the record? Do you apologize for the misinformation? When we see that kind of character trait, we can be sure, this is not acting according to God's design or character. God's character traits are truth and honesty. God's people are those who take seriously pursuing honesty.

So today, this week...in light of Paul's words to Titus about the character of God and his people...where do you need get honest? Maybe you need to start by getting honest with yourself. Maybe you need to be honest with someone else. Maybe you need to be more thoughtful about the kind of information you are listening to and passing along.

Ok, second thing I want to highlight for us from this opening section in Titus.

### **B. The power of influence.**

If I were to ask you **who are the people that have had the greatest influence in your life.** Who comes to your mind? Can you start picture certain people? Parents or grandparents. A close friend or mentor. Teachers. Coaches.

Look at this phrase here...**To Titus, my true son in our common faith.**

Now, again background is important to understanding the significance of what Paul is writing. *Anyone reading this letter in the first century would have been struck by the fact that Paul was a Jew and Titus was a Gentile. In that time, and culture these two groups of people were sworn enemies. It would be like a white and black man being best of friends at the height of apartheid in South Africa. Just unheard of.*

*In fact, a devout first-century Jewish Rabbi would pray every day thanking God that he had not been created a Gentile. He wouldn't touch a Gentile, speak to a Gentile, or*

*even consider eating with a Gentile. Some even believed that contact with the shadow of a Gentile made them ceremonially unclean and if they were on their way to worship, would go home cleanse themselves again. (Spiritual Influence pg. 18)*

Are you starting to get the picture of animosity in your mind? Here is Paul, a Jewish rabbi, relating with Titus like he is a friend, a trusted confidant – even a family member.

In the ancient world, this word son, is a familial term, a term of endearment. It was the same word that Jesus used when he said, let the little children come to me. Jesus had so transformed Paul that he no longer saw Titus as a Gentile enemy or an outcast, but rather as if he were his very own son. Their close-knit relationship and Paul's radical acceptance of Titus as a brother had a huge impact on Titus. It's almost astonishing that a former Rabbi and a gentile are now working together as "partners in the gospel".

I told you I was going to read a few of the other references to Titus that Paul makes in his other letters. And I just want you to soak in...get a feel for the kind of relationship or friendship Paul and Titus must have had. Listen to how Paul speaks of Titus:

**2 Corinthians 2:12-14 - <sup>12</sup> Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me, <sup>13</sup> I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there.**

**2 Corinthians 7:5-6 - <sup>5</sup> For when we came into Macedonia, we had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn—conflicts on the outside, fears within. <sup>6</sup> But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus,**

**2 Corinthians 8:16-17 - <sup>16</sup> Thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same concern I have for you. <sup>17</sup> For Titus not only welcomed our appeal, but he is coming to you with much enthusiasm and on his own initiative.**

**2 Corinthians 8:23 - <sup>23</sup> As for Titus, he is my partner and co-worker among you;**

You read these passages and you begin to catch a glimpse of just how highly Paul thought of and talked about Titus and therefore the kind of influence Paul must have been exerting in Titus' life. To the degree, that when Paul needed someone to go to the Island representing the epitome of evil...the person he thought of was Titus.

Following the example of others and then being that example for others to follow is at the heart of our faith. Jesus most common invitation was **“Come, follow me.”** Follow my example. Learn from me. Be influenced first and foremost by me. In his first letter to the Corinthian Church Paul wrote: Follow me as I follow the example of Christ.

Have you stopped to consider the kind of influence that you are having on the people around you? By your love, by your support, by your words of encouragement to them...by the way you are living your life in front of them.

I was reading a story recently about a former Jr. High teacher. Helen Roswell. She has actually written a book called “Becoming a Person of Influence.” (Spiritual Influence pg. 15) Helen writes about a particular day in class, that her students were learning a new and difficult concept. And they were struggling and becoming frustrated and edgy with themselves and each other. And so she wanted to do something to encourage them. She had the students write down the name of every other person in the class. Then she told them to write down the nicest thing they could think to say about each of their classmates.

As the students left that day, each one handed Helen their paper. Over weekend, Helen wrote down the name of each student and then listed what all their classmates had written about them. On the following Monday she gave each student his or her list, of what all their classmates had said about them. She says, *“No one ever mention the papers in class again. I never knew if they were discussed after class or with their parents.”*

Many years later, Helen discovered that one of her former students, who had been in that class, Mark, was killed serving in Vietnam. And she was invited to attend the funeral. After the service, Helen says, *“Most of Mark’s former classmates gathered for lunch.”* Mark’s parents were also there. *“I want to show you something.”* His father said, taking a wallet out of his pocket. *“They found this on Mark when he was killed. We thought you might recognize it.”* Opening the billfold, he carefully removed two worn pieces of notebook paper that had been taped and folded and re-folded many times over.

*“I knew without looking that the papers were the ones on which I had listed all the good things each of Mark’s classmates had said to him.”*

*“Thank you so much for doing that,”* Mark’s mother said. *“As you can see, Mark treasured it.”* She goes on to write, Mark’s classmates started to gather round us. Chuck smiled rather sheepishly and said, *“I still have my list. It’s in the top drawer of my desk at home.”* John’s wife said, *“John asked me to put his in our wedding album.”* *“I have mine, too.”* Marilyn said, *“It’s in my diary.”*

What would make so many grown adults hold on to a little piece of paper they had received so many years before as kids? It’s that, **“The human soul feeds on, grows, matures in the midst of the loving influence of the people around them.”** This concept is clearly seen in the relationship that Paul had with Titus.

Kind of makes you wonder if Titus had that list of Scriptures we read earlier on a scroll that he carried around with him, doesn't it. And it kind of make you wonder, what are the strongest influences in your life? And what kind of influence are you having on the people closest to you?

The relationship between Paul and Titus is a reminder that every follower of Jesus has been blessed with people in their life who have had a positive spiritual influence on them and every follower of Jesus should also be using their God given influence in the lives of those around them.

We don't know when or how Titus began his journey of faith, just that it appears Paul had a significant impact on him and because of that he was sent to the Island of Crete to help those followers of Jesus get back on track.

A little bit later on in the letter Paul says to **Titus 2 - 7 In everything set them an example by doing what is good.**

In other words, Titus now becomes an example to the church at Crete. Who is being influenced by way you are living out following Jesus?

So this is the beginning of coming to understand Paul's letter to Titus. An important reminder to all of us about becoming aware of and dealing with the dishonesty that so often inhabits our hearts and then thinking through the kind of influence we are having on those around us.

Let's pray...