



journal of biblical
perspectives
in leadership

DEVELOPING VALUES AND ETHICS—PREPARING LEADERS: A SOCIAL AND CULTURAL TEXTURE ANALYSIS OF TITUS 1-3

KAREN D. BOLSER

What was expected of early church leaders, and how can those requirements inform leadership development in modern times? Titus 1-3 gives leaders a deeper insight and understanding of the social and cultural implications of values and ethical requirements of leaders in early Christian communities. The social and cultural values and ethical requirements presented in the book of Titus are examined carefully, as these requirements can provide applicable recommendations in moral leadership development today. The exploration of pastoral letters from Paul's writings in the book of Titus implores Christian leaders to pursue good in all situations. This article examines Paul and the characteristic of his leadership "value system" with respect to his society using social and cultural texture analysis of socio-rhetorical criticism. In addition, the textual analysis examines the requirements of what was expected of early church leaders. It also shows how the application of the values and ethical requirements of that society could inform, as well as benefit, leadership development in today's present organizations.

I. THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO PAUL'S PASTORAL LETTERS

Current studies of Paul's pastoral letters are helping to frame models and methods for assisting organizations in strategic leadership teachings. The examination of the Pauline letters is aiding leaders by showing successful strategies and skills and the benefits of strong values and ethics, as well as signifying the importance of studying the culture and the social atmosphere that exist presently in today's society. However, some argue "whether or not a true application of Pauline theology may be applied to personal situations outside the contemporaneous setting, his teaching is not so absent

that it becomes extraneous and superfluous to current circumstances.”¹ Nevertheless, it is imperative through the lens of social sciences to seek alternative ways to read the contexts of scripture. Michael Gibbons states, “Social practices and relations are themselves expressions of ideas about relations between human beings . . . to understand why certain social events occur, social scientists need to take into account the intentions, ideas, and concepts available to the actors involved in the behavior and institutions in question . . . understanding non-western and pre-modern cultures.”² Social and historical analysis provides an understanding of societal behaviors that emerge from specific cultural environments.

When looking through a socio-cultural lens, it can be determined how the political atmosphere in Paul’s era affected the emergence of his mission and how he directed leaders and the church to pursue those things of Christ. Castelli states, “At the end of the twentieth century and beginning of the 21st, continental philosophers have turned toward the first-century letters of Paul preserved in the New Testament as a resource for thinking about the question of the political in the contemporary moment.”³ During Paul’s era, the Jesus Movement, alongside the battle over traditions in Second Temple Judaism, and the introduction of the Pentecostal Movement, found in the book of Acts, framed Paul’s letters to the church, within its larger historical system.⁴ Paul’s pastoral letters parallel with organizations’ present-day issues, social boundaries, and governmental structures. Bury states, “Paul’s letters aimed to meet the needs of recipient Christian communities, struggling in areas of religious practice/praxis and, as such, they are biased toward the social identity and circumstance of a Mediterranean world dealing with a set of beliefs and values still steeped in Torah.”⁵

In examining the historical background of Paul’s pastoral letters, one can see that Paul’s previous esteemed values of identity, honor, ethics, and reputation were no longer subject to the approval of others, but rooted in the grace of Christ.⁶ This theology during the era of the Jesus and Pentecostal movements was difficult for many Jews, because many of their traditions seemed to be compromised by Christian beliefs and values.⁷ However, Paul could understand the hesitation of the Jews, because before his “Christophany” on the road to Damascus, in which he experienced the glory of God, he too justified the concept of “good works” according to the laws of his society. Thus, in today’s society, there is the same value and ethic system of the law Paul saw in his era. There is hesitation in members of modern-day organizations which are deeply rooted in worldly views; these members feel as though their values are being undermined by Christian leaders. Bury states, “Paul’s polemic against the requirements of the Law certainly suggested that its agenda no longer had a purpose for (Jewish) Christians and

¹ Benjamin Bury, “Rediscovering Paul: An Introduction to His World, Letters and Theology,” *Reviews in Religion & Theology* 16, no. 2 (2009): 178-181.

² Michael T. Gibbons, “Hermeneutics, Political Inquiry, and Practical Reason: An Evolving Challenge to Political Science,” *The American Political Science Review* 100, no. 4 (2006): 563-571.

³ E. A. Castelli, “The Philosophers’ Paul in the Frame of the Global: Some Reflections,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 109, no.4 (2010): 653-676.

⁴ John H. Elliott, “Social–Scientific Criticism of the New Testament: More on Methods and Model,” *Semeia* 35 (1986): 1-33.

⁵ Bury, “Rediscovering Paul,” 178-181.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 179.

rather implies that it was simply a powerful yet temporary, pedagogical basis for life with Christ.”⁸ Paul’s intent through these letters is to inform Timothy and Titus what the qualifications are of those who lead, how to integrate those beliefs in the church, develop future leaders, and how to be on guard against false doctrine.

The role of Paul’s leadership is critical to the examination of values and ethics in modern-day organizations. To this end, this paper: (a) examines Paul and Titus, and their strategic leadership abilities with respect to their society using social and cultural texture analysis of socio-rhetorical criticism; (b) examines through the textual analysis the requirements of what was expected of early church leaders; and (c) shows how the application of the values and ethical requirements of that society could inform, as well as benefit, leadership development in today’s present organizations.

II. SOCIAL AND CULTURAL EXEGESIS

Social scientists, as well as Christian leaders, have a responsibility not only to explore and interpret Biblical text referencing leadership, but also to engage in the analysis of the social and cultural location of the text. According to Robbins, “analysis and interpretation of this location and orientation reveal a fuller understanding of topics that do and do not appear, and they carry implications for the kind of culture the discourse naturally nurtures among readers who take its discourse seriously.”⁹ Through precise examination, answers lie within the text as it provides instruction on leadership qualifications during a transition between governmental powers, principles for dealing with false doctrines and lifestyles, as well as cultivating the mentoring roles of older and younger leaders. The study begins by examining the socio-cultural texture of Titus 1-3.

Historical Background of Titus 1-3

In order to understand the social implications of Titus 2:1-14, it is imperative to grasp the culture and society that existed at the time. Throughout the Second Temple period, there were several shifts in rulers. First, Jews endured a tough battle to obtain freedom from the Roman law while Gentiles (Christians), struggled with how to live in a religion embedded society full of Jewish traditions. The Greek culture Hellenism also dominated this period and instilled cultural norms, philosophies, and rules for moral conduct.¹⁰ In addition, the political–economic facets were inseparable from religious aspects. Hagner states, “Due to political upheaval in Rome (Nero was emperor most likely when this was written), Paul wanted to ensure that the lifestyles of the Christians on Crete accurately reflected the gospel and did not simply react to the culture she was present in. Of utmost importance was the idea of ‘good works’ which he refers to at least six times (explicitly) within the text.”¹¹ Paul and Titus led in a dominant culture encompassing a system of rules, values, dispositions, and cultural norms that “imposed

⁸ Ibid., 180.

⁹ Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (Harrisonburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2006), 71-72.

¹⁰ Julius Scott, *Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 112.

¹¹ Donald A. Hagner, “Titus as a Pauline Letter,” *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* (1998): 556-557.

its goals on people.”¹² The moral and ethical standards of Jewish tradition created tension between all social classes that existed at the time. Paul knew his ministry and journey would face many challenges and depended on the help of others. DeSilva says, “Titus was a coworker who could be trusted with some very delicate matters.”¹³ Paul knew that Titus could be trusted if faced with the Roman imperial order and the political consequences that could come along with it.

During the time the letter to Titus was written, Paul had traveled through the island of Crete where he discovered the morally and gospel-deprived culture. Paul wrote to Titus, his apostolic delegate, and left him instructions on how to handle issues with Corinth and Crete and wanted Titus to organize the chaos and to establish and prepare leaders within the Christian community. Concerning the condition at Crete, evidence suggests that it was a new developing community. Many scholars assert that because the book of Acts offers only a few details about the societal conditions of Crete, it probably was not a long-standing church.¹⁴ However, Titus took the initiative and negotiated with the church, solved the problems, and made peace within the community.

Exegetical Analysis of the Book of Titus

In Titus 1, Paul the Apostle commands Titus to “set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city.”¹⁵ In verses 6-9, Paul continues the letter to Titus by discussing the elements an elder should have. Paul states that an elder should be blameless, faithful, loyal, self-willed, not quick tempered, nor a drunk, not violent or greedy, self-controlled, hospitable, and a lover of good, holding fast to those things of Christ.¹⁶ What do these spoken values say about that era? Where did these values derive from that Paul is speaking? Comblin writes, “The law of Jesus concentrates on internal dispositions, that which comes out of a man . . . from the deep recesses of the heart.”¹⁷ There is a dominant culture present in Corinth and Crete, which asserts its social and political beliefs on the value system members of that society hold.¹⁸ As seen in Titus 1:10-16, the context describes the negative behavior of both Cretan culture and false teachers. Paul used somewhat of a gnostic–manipulationist approach to choose their leaders due to the overwhelming corruption in society. The gnostic–manipulationist approach “seeks only a transformed method of coping with good and evil . . . rejects the goals of society as well as the institutionalized means of attaining them . . . and believes that salvation is possible in the world, and evil may be overcome if people learn the right means, and improved techniques to deal with their problems.”¹⁹ The mindset described in the gnostic–manipulationist approach is what Paul wanted Titus to find in leaders.

¹² Robbins, *Exploring the Texture*, 86.

¹³ David A. deSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods, & Ministry Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2004), 749.

¹⁴ David Moessner and Rekcke Inglasia, *Re-examining Paul's Letters* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 2001), 69.

¹⁵ Ti 1:5. All scripture references are from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.

¹⁶ Ti 1.

¹⁷ Jose J. Comblin, “The Rights of the Poor,” *America* 165, no. 4 (1991): 95.

¹⁸ Robbins, *Exploring the Texture*, 86.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 73.

In Titus 2:1-10, Paul instructs leaders to teach sound doctrine and reveals this teaching by giving a list of virtues and qualities of a sound church. “In all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works, in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you.”²⁰ Thus, a relationship emerges that will occur throughout the pericope: right conduct flows from right doctrine.²¹ Paul states, “Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for himself his own special people, zealous for good works. Speak those things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you.”²²

In this verse, Paul takes a thamaturgical approach by focusing on individuals’ concerns for relief from present and specific ills by special dispensations.²³ However, Paul notes that relief is not only for oneself but also to continue the “good work” of Christ. It is apparent that Paul is trying to show that there is more than just mere salvation. Paul offers contemporaries a vision of freedom and “self-sufficiency” of action by grounding one’s views in a well-developed, supporting ideology.²⁴

Finally, in Titus 3, Paul reminds the church that everyone and everything exists in submission to someone else and that by his grace we are heirs. Paul states, “Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for good work, to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men.”²⁵ In the following verses, he continues to list all of the ungodly characteristics believers once encompassed before they became saved. Paul reminds us “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us.”²⁶ Paul closes the letter with a charge stating, “Avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless.”²⁷ Paul’s teachings direct individuals against temple and Jewish law that keep people in “serfdom.”²⁸ Paul is seeking a willing attitude from the cultural society and a voluntary reform, in hopes of that cultural society pursuing a better way of life based on grace and mercy.²⁹

III. APPLICATION FOR MODERN-DAY ORGANIZATIONS

Through the exegetical analysis of the pastoral letter written to Titus, it is revealed that values and ethics are the basis of every organization. Viinamäki states, “It is becoming increasingly apparent that the full integration of ethical standards into business practice is not only preferable, but also necessary for long-term organizational survival.”³⁰ Paul confirms this throughout the book of Titus. O’ Toole states, “In sum, to

²⁰ Ti 2:7-8.

²¹ Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957), 191.

²² Ti 2:14-15.

²³ Robbins, *Exploring the Texture*, 73.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 87.

²⁵ Ti 3:1-2.

²⁶ Ti 3:5.

²⁷ Ti 3:9.

²⁸ Ernst Brammel, “The Revolution Theory from Reimarus to Brandon,” in *Jesus and the Politics of His Day*, eds. E. Bammel and C. F. D. Moule (New York: University Press, 1984), 14.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 87.

³⁰ Olli-Pekka Viinamäki, “Intra-Organizational Challenges of Values-Based Leadership,” *Journal of Business Ethics and Organization Studies* 14, no. 2 (2009): 6.

be effective, leaders must begin by setting aside that culturally conditioned 'natural' instinct to lead by push, particularly when times are tough. Leaders must instead adopt the unnatural behavior of always leading by the pull of inspiring values."³¹ Paul demonstrated this exactly!

Paul teaches us the importance of value-infused leadership and how it creates a strong organizational culture. Paul shows leaders throughout the book of Titus that values and ethics in an organization motivate behaviors by providing direction, emotional intensity to action, representing standards to judge and justify actions, and to guide leaders on how to organize, develop, and choose for leadership positions.

Like, Paul and his board of elders, today organizations should implement a risk management ethics and values program. These types of programs provide a structured approach to assess and develop ethics and values within an organization. The benefit of such programs is that they provide alternatives and/or solutions to help reduce unwanted or undesired values, as well as encourage leaders, members, and stakeholders to define the organizations.³² Hollar suggest leaders should take the following steps to develop the framework of their risk management ethics and values program:

1. Define acceptable behaviors.
2. Establish a framework of professional behavior and responsibility.
3. Integrate ethical guidelines into decision making.
4. Establish mechanisms for resolving ethical dilemmas.
5. Build and maintain the trust that is the basis for all successful business relationships.³³

As seen in the examination of the Pauline pastoral letters, managing ethics and values in the workplace is a never-ending process and is vital to any organization's success. Hollar states, "The best of ethical values and intentions might be regarded as relatively meaningless unless they generate fair and just behaviors. The actions that generate lists of values or codes of ethics are most effective when they also generate policies, procedures, and training that translates those values into appropriate behavior."³⁴ As Christian leaders, God calls us to be and influence, and to work for justice. We have a special privilege and an urgent responsibility to shape society, the laws within society, as well as the nation.

IV. CONCLUSION

Through exegetical analysis, it is revealed that Christians must live out sound doctrine and model Biblical values and ethics as we wrestle with the continuity and discontinuity between the cultures of our society. It is imperative to remember that sound Biblical doctrine cannot be separated from application in any atmosphere. Christian leaders must be a living sermon and testimony of Christ grounded in Biblical truths of moral conduct. The pastoral letter of Titus fits into the larger framework of

³¹ James O'Toole, *Leading Change: The Argument for Values-Based Leadership* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1996), 11.

³² Marilyn B. Hollar, "Risk Management Ethics," *Rough Notes* 147, no. 8 (2004): 90-91.

³³ Hollar, "Risk Management Ethics," 90-91.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 90-91.

developing leaders' character regarding authoritative positions, but at the same time emphasizing the need to be pliable and teachable.

About the Author

Karen Bolser is a doctoral student in strategic leadership at Regent University. In addition, she holds a master's degree in government/law and public policy from Regent University. Karen has seven years of extensive experience working with the United States military. She has worked in criminal law, affirmative claims, tort claims, personal injury law, and in privatized government housing across all 50 states. She takes a "theory-into-application" approach to strategic leadership and development in the public sector setting, working to maximize organizational leaders and members' progress toward goals and objectives. As the CEO/Founder of the Bolser Group, LLC, Karen also facilitates workshops, seminars, and training on a variety of organizational needs.

Email: karebol@mail.regent.edu
