



READING RESPONSIBLY

Correctly Handling the Word of Truth

LESSON 08: LETTERS

Who's the Audience?

I. Introduction

Read Titus 1:6–8 and 1:12–13. Are the Cretan elders-to-be liars, evil brutes, and lazy gluttons, or blameless, upright, holy, and disciplined?

→ [Read 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.

→ [Read Titus 1:12-13](#)

¹² One of Crete's own prophets has said it: "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons." ¹³ This saying is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith

II. Overview of Genre & Context: Letters

- Letters
 - Format
 - Originally *heard*, not read.
 - Epistolē = oral communication messengers.
 - Structure: Opening/greeting, body, closing

→ [Read Philemon 1-3](#)

*¹ Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,
To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker—² also to Apphia our sister and
Archippus our fellow soldier—and to the church that meets in your home:*

³ Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

→ [Read Philippians 23-25](#)

²³ Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. ²⁴ And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers.

²⁵ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

- Audience
 - Specific Churches
 - Rom, 1-2 Cor, Gal, Eph, Phil, Col, 1-2 Thess
 - Specific People
 - 1-2 Tim, Titus, Philem, 2-3 Jn
 - Christians at Large
 - Heb, Jas, 1-2 Peter, Jude
- Context

III. Big Issues

A. Occasional Documents

→ Read 1 Cor 1:11

¹¹ My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you.

→ Read 1 Cor 5:1

¹ It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that even pagans do not tolerate: A man is sleeping with his father's wife.

→ Read 1 Cor 7:1

¹ Now for the matters you wrote about: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman."

B. Reading Someone Else's Mail

→ Read 1 Tim 5:23

²³ Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.

→ Read 1 Tim 4:13

¹³ Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.

→ Read 2 Tim 2:3

³ Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

→ Read 2 Tim 3:14-16

¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵ and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,

V. Reading the Gospels Responsibly: Strategies/Encouragement (switched order this week)

A. Read paragraphs, not just verses.

B. Respect interpretational limits.

It cannot mean something for us that it never meant for its original audience.

C. Compare contexts.

The more comparable the contexts (theirs and ours), the more direct the application.

D. Look for what helps vs. hurts the advancement of the gospel.

IV. Specific Examples (switched order this week)

A. Idol Meat

→ Read 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

¹ Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that "We all possess knowledge." But knowledge puffs up while love builds up. ² Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know. ³ But whoever loves God is known by God.

⁴ So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that "An idol is nothing at all in the world" and that "There is no God but one." ⁵ For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), ⁶ yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

⁷ But not everyone possesses this knowledge. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat sacrificial food they think of it as having been sacrificed to a god, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. ⁸ But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.

⁹ Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰ For if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol's temple, won't that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols? ¹¹ So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. ¹² When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. ¹³ Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall.

→ Read Romans 14:1-4

¹ Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. ² One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. ³ The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. ⁴ Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

→ Read Romans 14:13-21

¹³ Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister. ¹⁴ I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean. ¹⁵ If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died. ¹⁶ Therefore do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil. ¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, ¹⁸ because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval.

¹⁹ Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. ²⁰ Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a person to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. ²¹ It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall.

B. Lawsuits

→ Read 1 Corinthians 6:1-8

¹ If any of you has a dispute with another, do you dare to take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the Lord's people? ² Or do you not know that the Lord's people will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? ³ Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! ⁴ Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, do you ask for a ruling from those whose way of life is scorned in the church? ⁵ I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? ⁶ But instead, one brother takes another to court—and this in front of unbelievers!

⁷ The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? ⁸ Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers and sisters.

C. Slavery

→ Read Ephesians 6:5

⁵ Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ.

→ Read 1 Peter 2:18

¹⁸ Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters...

→ Read Romans 13:1

¹ Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

VI. Next Lesson: Revelation

Question: Read Rev 22:12. What does "soon" mean?