

SEQUOYAH HILLS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“Titus: So Help Us God”

Rev. Ben Garris

Titus 1: 1-4

June 2, 2024

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One of the realities of living under the influence of the Greek culture was that as new Christians in Crete began to learn about the Jesus and the God of Christianity, they often learned through the lens of what they already knew about the Greek gods of their time. For example, Cretans would boast that the Greek god Zeus was born on Crete, and it was also known that Zeus would seduce women and that he would lie to get his way. When Paul includes in his opening salutation, that the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ is not a liar, this is a very intentional and specific jab at the gods of Cretan culture. By saying that **God never lies**, Paul is upholding that God the Father is not a god who gets his way by seduction, lying, and deceptive uses of power, but rather God the Father is THE God of faithfulness and truth.

What affect does that have to know that God is trustworthy? That the hope of eternal life is trustworthy? Does it not change how you live and respond to such a promise? It is no wonder that Paul calls himself a SLAVE of God. A bondservant. One who willingly does the will of their master. God is trustworthy. God has saved us from sin and death and has entrusted to us this knowledge of Jesus that is reliable and true.

What kind of conviction should we feel about deceptive behavior, knowing good and well that God NEVER acts in that way? It's one thing to try and lie and get away with it when everyone knows "your pants are on fire" and that you're lying. As bad as that is, at least everyone else won't become victims to the lie. Yet it's another thing entirely to lie when others do not know that you're lying. When you can benefit from untruth and the only person that knows about it is God and you. How many marriages have been undone from such lies? How many jobs compromised? I recently heard of a church that Paige and I knew of back in Hickory NC where it was found out that the treasurer/secretary had been skimming money weekly for decades. What kind of hurt and distrust did that cause for that congregation? What kind of stain did that leave on the gospel of Christ being preached there?

Exodus 20:16 told us one of the Ten Commandments, "*you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*" Bearing witness is a phrase best understood in a court of law when you're called forward to testify in a court of law. The administering officer today asks the witness, "do you solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, **so help you God?**" What an interesting phrase to include, '**so help you God.**' Much like the words during installing officers, we might add "I do, with God's help." We're thus appealing to God, who never lies, to be our example, our strength, our encouragement to tell the truth because our sinful nature defaults to deceit. We can override our factory settings to lie and be deceitful if we choose to allow God to work God's truth in us.

This commandment to not bear false witness has been translated many times simply as "**thou shalt not lie.**" Still, in utilitarian ethics, one might be prone to ask, "but what if the lie leads to a greater good?" Or someone else might ask, what about white lies, "a harmless or trivial lie, especially one told to avoid hurting someone's feelings." To that Paul reminds us "**God never lies**", and God still manages to create the greatest good. We should learn how to do the same from God.

What might healthy, honest, true, and faithful relationships look like? I wonder what the divorce rate would be if people would commit to never lying to their spouse in word or in deed? I wonder how governance and politics would look without lies and deceit. I wonder what relief an individual might feel when they commit to cease from lying, because you can't both live a lie and live the life God wants for you at the same time. I wonder who here in Knoxville might be more curious about Jesus if deceit was never found in the church that claims to follow Jesus Christ? No doubt others thought the same on the island of Crete.

So help us God, to be a people of integrity and honor. **So help us God** to be faithful followers of Jesus and to give an honest witness to your grace and mercy in our lives. **So help us God**, when we do ere and sin, to confess our sin and acknowledge our failures and to be willing to live with the consequences. **So help us God** to be men and women of faith who encourage Godly values in ourselves and in our families and in our work places and in our schools. **So help us God**, and keep our trousers from fire. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.