

GOD WITH US

Part 11: LATER LETTERS

Message 2 – Titus

Letter to Pastor Titus in Crete

Titus

Introduction

Paul's letter to Titus resembles the first letter to Timothy in several ways. Just as Paul left Timothy in Ephesus to bring order to the churches in Asia Minor, so he left Titus on the Island of Crete to *bring order to the churches* in the various cities there. The issue of dangerous *false teaching* comes up in the opening chapter (1:10-16). Paul lists specific *character qualifications* for leaders in both letters. The need for *sound doctrine* as a corrective against error is emphasized throughout both letters.

As in 1Timothy, the title "*Savior*" is often used of God in Titus (1:3,4; 2:10,13;3:4,6). While Jesus is clearly emphasized as our Savior, there is a corresponding theme sounded uniquely in Titus: the need for *good works* as the proper evidence of *true faith in Jesus*. Note the repeated emphasis on this theme of *good works* (1:8,16; 2:3,7,10,14; 3:1,8,14).

This is important in understanding Paul's theology of salvation. While James is often referenced as the apostle emphasizing good works, and Paul is known as the apostle of grace and faith, it is clear from the letter to Titus that Paul had a very strong view (exactly like James) of the relationship between faith and works. Faith in Christ is the root of our salvation – good works are the fruit of our salvation. Paul uses the word "adorn" (*kosmeo*) in Titus 2:10. This word can mean "*to adorn, embellish, make attractive, decorate.*" This one word fairly well summarizes the unique theme in Titus. Good works are the fitting "adornment" for saving faith. Good works are the outer display that make saving faith look attractive. If saving faith is an inner quality of the heart, good works are the outward embellishment that shows faith to be both real and beautiful. Thus, in the theology of the New Testament, faith and works should never be separated. As John Calvin, the great theologian of the Protestant Reformation, put it: *Faith alone saves – but the faith that saves is never alone.* This is an accurate summary of the theology of *both* Paul and James regarding salvation.

Opening Greeting: 1:1-4

Much like the letter to the Galatians, Paul wastes no space on the papyrus with a lengthy introduction. Rather he jumps into his ‘corrective’ reason for writing this letter- that Titus must appoint elders and teach the new believers around Crete sound doctrine because they were being taught lies. Note that in the opening sentence Paul emphasizes *“the truth that leads to godliness.”* Paul had no interest in promoting the kind of faith that was only intellectual or theoretical. When a person truly apprehends and responds to God’s truth, the result will be ever-increasing levels of godliness in the person’s life.

“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 – in the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, 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, to Titus, my true son in our common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior” (1:1-4).

“*God’s elect*” refers to those who have placed their faith in Christ Jesus as their Savior. Paul wanted to *“further their faith and their knowledge of the truth...”* Titus, along with Timothy, was a true spiritual son to Paul, and chosen to pastor the house churches around the island of Crete. The fact that Paul described God as one *“who does not lie”* points to the very problem in Crete: There were false teachers who were liars (1:12). We find here the first use of the phrase “God our Savior.” As noted in the introduction, this is Paul’s favorite title for God in both of the pastoral epistles.

Note that immediately following “God our Savior”, Paul affirms that Christ Jesus is *“our Savior.”* This is an important point because Paul is affirming the DEITY of CHRIST as SAVIOR and GOD. Again in 2:13, Paul emphasizes Christ’s deity as God, *“while we wait for the blessed hope- the glorious appearing of our GREAT GOD and SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST...”*

One of the key concerns raised quickly is the false teachers who were from a Jewish background (1:10-14). Jews do not believe in a TRI-UNE GOD (3 in 1): God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; rather only ONE God. Paul teaches about all 3 aspects of the TRINITY in

this short letter. One ministry of the Holy Spirit is described in (3:5,6). Even today, the doctrine of the TRINITY and the DEITY OF CHRIST as GOD and SAVIOR is still questioned by many. This letter gives focus to this “*sound doctrine.*”

Qualifications of Elders: 1:5-9

The qualifications list in Titus is a shorter version of a similar list in 1Timothy 3:1-13. The fact that the lists differ on the details indicates that it was not so much the isolated character qualities that needed to be examined and ranked, rather, that *the overall life of the individual needed to be carefully assessed.* Does the leader display a firm grasp on God’s unchanging truth? Does the leader display godliness and consistency in the major areas of life – the home, work, society at large, personal integrity?

Characteristics of the False Teachers: 1:10-16

In contrast to the brief description of the false teachers in Ephesus (1Timothy 1:6,7), Paul gives a more detailed description of the character and actions of those in Crete. He mentions “*the circumcision group*” indicating that he has the Judaizers in view (Jewish teachers who tried to convince Paul’s Gentile converts that they needed to become fully “Jewish” in order to be fully “saved” – the same false teachers he dealt with in Galatians).

“For there are many rebellious people, full of meaningless talk and deception, especially those of the circumcision group. They must be silenced, because they are disrupting whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach – and that for the sake of dishonest gain. One of Crete’s own prophets has said it: ‘Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.’ This saying is true. Therefore, rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the merely human commands of those who reject the truth. To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. They claim to know God, but by their deeds they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good” (1:10-16).

Three times in the N.T. we find Paul citing a non-Christian writer or prophet to make a point (Acts 17:28; 1Corinthians 15:33; Titus 1:12). This is similar to a modern preacher/teacher citing a

contemporary voice to make a point. Here Paul quotes one of Crete's famous prophets, Epimenides (600 B.C.). While it reads like a rebuke of Cretans in general, it would be unlike Paul to so characterize (and insult) the entire population, including the Christians on Crete. In the context, he is talking about *the character of the false teachers* who in fact were "liars" bent on "dishonest gain." Notice again the emphasis on the *outward evidences of true faith*, which in the case of the false teachers, was lacking. "*They claim to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him*" (1:16). One's life (deeds) may either serve as a *display of faith* or a *denial of faith*.

When law enforcement trains someone to detect fake currency, they do so by having them handle true currency over and over. This way their tactile senses will be familiar with "truth" and able to quickly "feel error." In a similar way, the best way to be able to detect a spiritual deception is to be thoroughly familiar with spiritual truth, as found in God's Word. We can never emphasize enough the critical need for Christians to be deeply knowledgeable with the truth found in God's Word. As errors and deceptions abound in our day, the only safe path is to "hold firmly the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that (we) will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it" (Titus 1:9).

Instructions for Various Groups in the Church: 2:1-10

Paul has instructions for older men and older women; for younger women and younger men; for servants (slaves), but unusually, nothing for masters. The overall emphasis is dignified, godly behavior (2:1-6) that reflects Jesus to those in one's sphere of influence.

“. . . so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive” (2:10).

Paul encourages Titus to set the example for all to follow (just as he encouraged Timothy in 1Tim.4).

“In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us” (2:7,8).

“Integrity” = honesty, principle, honor, virtue, goodness (Collins Dictionary and Thesaurus). Paul affirmed that Titus would have

opposition- *“those who oppose you.”* But, due to his sound teaching that was paired with a life of integrity, he would expose those trying to discredit him ultimately resulting in their shame.

Is your life an example so that those who are watching you are able to see the truth lived out? God uses “incarnational truth” along with “inspired truth” to make Himself known. Our lives become “living letter” as Paul said to the Corinthians: “You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all people, revealing yourselves, that you are a letter of Christ, delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts” (2Corinthians 3:2,3). When people look at your life, are they seeing a “letter of Christ” being written, as your life increasingly looks like Jesus?

The Grace of God and Good Works: 2:11-3:8

In the midst of his instructions concerning character, Paul inserts one of the most beautiful extended explanations of God’s ultimate purpose in sending Jesus to be our Savior. This section bridges the chapter divisions (inserted by later editors). It is really one long section, emphasizing the central theme of the letter: the relationship between saving grace and good works. Study it slowly and carefully.

“For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope – the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good” (2:11-14).

Yes, salvation comes to us via the grace of God, and this gift is offered to all people. However, the gift of salvation does not give us a “free ticket” to go on sinning; rather, God’s grace *“teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness”* while saying ‘Yes’ to the pursuit of *upright and godly lives*. As we yield to the control of His Spirit and *“keep in step with the Spirit”* (Galatians 5: 25) He will help us pursue godly behavior. Once again, we see in this letter that Paul is emphasizing the fruit of salvation – good works, which grow out of being transformed by God’s Word, leading to a changed attitude and growth in godliness. Jesus purifies people from the guilt of sin so that they may become people *“eager to do what is good.”*

Paul continues on this theme of God's grace leading to our desire to pursue good works. Note the beginning and end of this section where he mentions good deeds. In the central section, he again beautifully summarizes the salvation that comes to us via the grace of God.

“Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone. At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone” (3:1-8).

God did not save us *because of our good works*, but He saved us *for the purpose of good works*. Based on this letter to Titus, it is difficult to see how some theologians can argue that Paul and James were at odds over the meaning of salvation: that Paul taught salvation by grace while James taught salvation by works. This misses the intricacies of the messages of both Paul and James. Yes, Paul tended to *stress* salvation by grace through faith; but this was because he had come out of a system of salvation through works, and he was constantly opposed by false teachers from this works-based system. At the same time, Paul had much to say (as in Titus) about the need for good works to display the reality of saving faith. In contrast, James (although Jewish as well), tended to *stress* the works that result from faith; but this was because he was seeing a trend among some professing Christians to adopt a “cheap view of grace” – namely, that grace was a free ticket to sin, and a changed life was not necessary. James certainly knew the centrality of the grace of God and faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross. We must remember . . . Jesus was James ‘half-brother’ (one of Joseph and Mary’s earthy children born after the virgin birth- *Matthew 13:55-*

57). When you really study Paul and James carefully, you see they were looking at the exact same gospel message, just from two different angles.

One other note regarding Titus and James is the similarity of description of a believer who embodies truth lived out... *“to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle (show true humility) toward everyone” (Titus 3:2).*

“Wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure, then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere...” (James 3:17).

Back to the False Teacher Problem: 3:9-11

Paul ends his instructions to Titus on the same note he began – warning about the false teachers. This must have been a major problem on the Island of Crete. Titus certainly had his hands full dealing with troublemakers who were upsetting the flock and even *“ruining whole households” (1:11)*. They needed to be removed from the life of the church in each city.

“But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them. You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are self-condemned” (3:9-11).

A divisive person is one who ‘divides’ and brings disunity. Paul instructs Titus and other leaders in how to handle these types of people in a group or church of believers: warn them twice and then have nothing to do with them if they won’t stop being divisive. “If you choose to continue to argue, quarrel and be divisive, then you are not welcome to continue joining with us any longer.” This is hard to say, but the destructive impact is far worse. It takes courage to be clear, direct, honest and respectful. We all need to pay attention to our own way that we relate with others. We also need to pray for wisdom and courage to speak up when someone is being divisive, and follow the steps given to Titus.

Final Remarks: 3:12-15

The fact that Paul had decided to spend the winter in Nicopolis (a city in western Macedonia) indicates that he had been released from

his first Roman imprisonment. We do not know what special mission Zenas the lawyer and Apollos were on; but Paul urged Titus to make sure they were well-equipped for their journey. One final time, Paul admonishes the Christians of Crete to be engaged in good deeds:

“As soon as I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, because I have decided to winter there. Do everything you can to help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way and see that they have everything they need. Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order to provide for urgent needs and not live unproductive lives. Everyone with me sends you greetings. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all” (3:12-15).

Discussion Questions

1. Review the passages on good works (1:8,16; 2:3,7,10,14; 3:1,8,14). How does this letter shape your view of the doctrine of salvation? Discuss this statement: We are not saved *by works*; but we are saved *for works*.
2. Review the passage 2:11-3:8. Focus your attention on the grace of God. How does this section deepen your view of God’s amazing grace?
3. Consider the dangers of false teaching, as emphasized in both Titus and 1Timothy. How do you think this problem is manifesting in the church today? What can we do about it?
4. Although Paul wrote to Titus who was a young pastor, there is much to glean and apply from this letter. What has been most helpful and a challenge for you?

Addendum: Interpretive Reading of 1Timothy 2:8-15

*In the first message on 1Timothy I gave you an interpretive reading, that Shirley and I worked on, of a very complex and difficult passage dealing with the demeanor of men and women in church worship that (2:8-15). Again, I must emphasize that this is not a “translation” of the Greek text. It is an expanded interpretive reading based on multiple factors both in the immediate context and the wider context of biblical teaching regarding the roles of men and women in our world.

I really want to see the men engaged in the life of the church, not falling into the pattern of “the silence of Adam,” male passivity. For example, men everywhere should be involved in the prayer-life of the church. Men should be bowing before God with holy hearts, instead of disagreeing and arguing with one another. Men, you can disagree without being disagreeable and this is a prerequisite for effective prayer. So, get praying and don’t leave the praying to the women.

Women, you have some key responsibilities. Modesty and self-restraint please God and benefit the community. You can put Jesus on display, by not accentuating your outer appearance and drawing attention to yourselves (this will distract people). Instead, you can put Jesus on display through your godly character and by doing good to others.

As for the teaching time, it needs to be orderly and structured, not noisy and chaotic (especially in those homes where you gather). The women should listen and learn with a composed and receptive spirit (as should the men). I do not want the women to overtake the men and always assume the roles of teaching and leading the church. (By the way, you will notice in my use of the Greek tenses that I am emphasizing something important here. I’m talking about women permanently taking on the teaching and leading roles in the church. As you well know from my own work with many female coworkers, I have no issue with godly women giving godly instruction. I certainly learn much from my female coworkers. I just don’t want women lording it over men.) Back to my point: Women should encourage the men to fulfill their God-given responsibility to lead, protect and pray in the church and home. This will require restraint on the part of women because it is your natural tendency to lead in these areas.

Finally, as a reminder, all of this order in the church relates to the order God established at creation. Adam was created first and he was given responsibility to lead and protect his wife. But what happened we all know – the serpent targeted Eve and deceived her. Thus, she gave in to temptation. Nevertheless, the woman’s significant role will be forever preserved (saved) in the church and in the world in that she was the one (not the man) who brought the birth of THE child, THE Christ into the world . . . and she is the one (not the man) who continues to bring children into the world . . . and she has the unique responsibility, through her faith and godly character, to shape the hearts and minds of the next generation. This is why she must be careful to pursue her own set of “character qualifications” – faith, love, holiness and right thinking.