

Titus
Gospel Centered Godliness
Lesson 1 Titus 1.1-4 (1699)
090725

Introduction

- 1 In a world that seems to be descending further into moral decay, how can Christians stand firm in their faith and live lives that honor God and transform culture? This question is as relevant today as it was nearly two thousand years ago when the Apostle Paul answered it in his letter to Titus.
- 2 This morning we are beginning new series in the book of Titus beginning with the greeting which is found in the first four verses.
 - a But before we jump into that it would be helpful to have a little background information in order to get the most out of the text.
 - b Let's begin with the human author, **the Apostle Paul** and the circumstances by which he came to write this letter to Titus.
- 3 The New Testament records three major missionary journeys undertaken by the Apostle Paul, all of which are detailed in the Book of Acts.
 - a At the close of his third missionary journey in Jerusalem he was arrested. He was then transferred north to Caesarea and tried by the Roman governor Felix (AD 58) without a verdict.
 - b After being held for two years a new governor named Festus put back on trial. During that trial, Paul a Roman citizen, exercised his right to make his appeal before Caesar in Rome.



- 4 His journey across the Mediterranean to Rome (AD 60) included a stopover just to the south of Greece on the Island of Crete where there were many harbors, including one on the south side called Fair Havens near the city of Lasea.



- a It's still there today but it's not much of a harbor because, as in Paul's day, not completely protected from the sea.

- b In Acts 27 Luke tells us that Paul spent “considerable time” there while the ship’s crew waited for the weather to clear in hopes they could sail to another harbor that was better for wintering (Acts 27:7-13).



- c That effort actually led to Paul and crew being shipwrecked on another island far to the west called Malta where they remain stranded for three months. But apparently the time Paul spent on Crete prompted a desire in him to return and build the church there.
 - d Apparently there was already a fledgling church that presumably had been started by some Cretans who were present in Jerusalem when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). It is possible that they were among the 3000 saved under Peter’s preaching and return to Crete and began meeting together.
- 5 After Paul arrived in Rome he spent another two years under house arrest. During this time he wrote letters to the Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians and to Philemon. It is at this point the book of Acts ends (AD 63).
- a However, when you read Paul’s letters they indicate he was released from Roman house arrest and a fourth missionary journey ensued. And then about three years later he is arrested again and this time jailed and subsequently martyred under Nero’s persecution (AD 68).
 - b But in that 4 year period between these two Roman imprisonments Paul accomplished a lot including a probable trip to Spain and also a return to Crete, this time with Titus.
 - c A relatively short time after arriving on Crete Paul departs but leaves Titus to carry on the work. And then, sometime after his departure, Paul wrote Titus a follow up letter with further instructions ... a letter we simply know as the book of **Titus**.
- 6 Paul had many ministry associates and as you read the pages of the New Testament you begin to discover them.
- a There was ***Barnabas*** who encouraged Paul early on in his ministry and introduced him to the Apostles who weren’t really sure if his conversion on the Damascus road was legit.
 - b Then there was ***Silas*** who was with him in the Philippian jail and ***Luke*** his beloved physician who was basically Paul’s doctor for many years.

- c There was the young couple *Aquila and Priscilla* along with *Epaphras* and *Epaphroditus* who helped Paul while he was in prison.
 - d There were many more but none were more dear to him than Timothy and Titus both of whom he considered his sons in the faith. In verse 4 he calls Titus “my true son in our common faith.”
- 7 Titus was a Greek follower of Jesus and for years a trusted coworker and travel companion to Paul. Even more he was the guy Paul trusted with difficult situations.
- a He first appears on the scene with Paul at the *Council of Jerusalem* where Paul sets him forth as an unwavering example that a Gentile does not need to observe Jewish law in order to be saved (Gal 2).
 - b The next time we see Titus highlighted in Scripture is when Paul sends him to straighten things out in *Corinth* (a very difficult church) and then receive an offering for the famine relief of the believers in Jerusalem. It takes fairly strong leader to rebuke people and then received an offering from them!
 - c The last time we see Titus in the Scripture is as the recipient of this letter written by Paul who left him in *Crete* to bring order by appointing godly leaders who teach sound doctrine, to rebuke the false teachers and to encourage godliness among the believers.



- 8 And this was no easy task in Crete. Today, Crete is known as a vacation destination with breathtaking beaches and beautiful historical ruins. But in Paul’s day it was a very undesirable place to live.
- a The Cretans were well known in the Greco-Roman world for their treachery, greed and deceit and the island’s cities were and plagued by violence and sexual corruption.
 - b But the island also had many strategic harbors that serviced cities from all over the Mediterranean Sea. From Paul’s point of view, it was the perfect place to start a network of sending churches. And Titus was the perfect guy to oversee it.
- 9 And that brings us to the greeting portion of this letter to Titus. Let’s read verses 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—² in the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, ³ 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, ⁴ To Titus, my true son in our common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior (Titus 1:1–4).

Paul's Apostleship

- 1 This greeting is much longer than in most of Paul's letters. And in it Paul goes to great lengths to describe his apostleship. Why?
 - a Well again because there are big problems in the Cretan church and for Titus to effectively address those problems he needs authority. And that authority has been delegated to him by Paul who was been given unique apostolic authority by God. Ephesians two says he was part of the foundation of the church with Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone (Eph 2:20).
 - b So this letter is not just intended for Titus, it to be read to the Cretan believers to remind them of Paul's unique apostolic calling.
- 2 Again the church was in danger primarily because of two things; False teachers and Cretan culture.
 - a Concerning the false teachers Paul writes in verse 11 that they were ... *"disrupting whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach—and that for the sake of dishonest gain (1:11).*
 - b In regards to Cretan culture Paul says in the next verse, *"One of Crete's own prophets has said it: "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons" (1:12).*
- 3 We will come back to this statement in a later message. But it's hard to move on from it without noting it's relevance when we consider the trend in our own culture that has led people to become more Cretan-like.
 - a No one denies that in the last decade our society has rapidly become less truthful, more brutish and more addicted to things that degrade the image of God.
 - b We've become increasingly rude, abusive and violent. Whether it's screaming at a nurse, accosting a little league umpire or raging against another driver on the road we've become mean.
 - c Coupled with this in our society there is an increasing lack of compassion and empathy for others.

- Nowadays it is not uncommon for someone to video a person being assaulted rather than trying to intervene and protect them.
 - The skills of how to be decent to other people are no longer taught and many have become accustomed to thinking only of themselves
- d The ideas and institutions that use to call young people to a moral order are all but gone and have been replaced by radical individualism. And this absence of what used to be called the Judeo-Christian ethic has led to a breakdown of relationships and a dramatic uptick in depression, loneliness, bitterness callousness and hostility.
- e So in the light of this moral decline in our own culture the letter to Titus is very relevant. It underscores the only answer, the gospel of Jesus Christ. The letter of Titus stands as a guide for godly living in an ungodly world and a blue print of how a culture can be changed for the better.
- 3 Again, it would be an understatement to say that Titus was facing great opposition.
- a And for him to deal with it successfully the Cretan believers need to be reminded that Paul's apostolic authority is from God and that authority has been invested in Titus to carry out his mission.
- b Paul does this in the opening of the letter with one very long, 95 word – run on sentence that reveals ...
- The nature of his apostleship (servant).
 - The goal of his apostleship (godliness).
 - The means of his apostleship (preaching).
- 4 Now in this very long sentence it's hard to determine where one idea starts and stops and the next idea begins. So allow me try to summarize the greeting in two points and then take a closer look at what it says about Paul's apostleship and how that applies to us.
- a Paul introduces himself as a servant and apostle ... an apostleship that is aimed at furthering the faith and knowledge of God elect in such a way that it leads godliness ...
- b This godliness is rooted in the confident expectation of eternal life ... an eternal life that was promised by the God who doesn't lie ... before the beginning of time and now, at his appointed season, is revealing it through the preaching of the gospel entrusted to Paul.

[1] The Nature of Paul's Apostleship - Servanthood

- 1 The first thing Paul says about his apostleship is that it is secondary. Before he is an apostle of Jesus Christ, he is ***a servant of God (v1b)***.
 - a Although he was a brilliant scholar and highly educated Jewish leader ... and although he was caught up in the third heaven and used to perform many miraculous signs ... and although he was chosen to be the human author of over two thirds of the New Testament he chose to first identify himself as a servant of God.
 - b So Paul is firstly a humble servant of God and secondly an apostle with authority from God. The title “servant” denotes humility and the title “apostle” conveys authority.
 - c Humility and authority ... a combination that is a contradiction in our culture but one of the most outstanding characteristics of Jesus Christ and one Paul emulated.
- 2 Concerning this combination of humility and authority Jesus said this about himself, *Take my yoke upon you (submit to my authority) and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls (Matthew 11:29)*.
 - a Jesus had all authority but he was humble in heart. He exemplified both humility and authority and called his disciples to do the same. One day the disciples were arguing about which one of them was the greatest (have the most authority) and Jesus said,

“The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. ²⁶ But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves (Luke 22:25–26).
 - b Paul was given tremendous authority by God but it only functioned properly in the context of humility. Therefore he was first a servant of God and secondly an apostle of Jesus Christ.
- 3 Now the lesson here for us is this: Genuine spiritual authority in the church or in the home or in our personal ministry functions best when it is combined with humility. The problem that often plagues the church today is authority without humility.
 - a If not repented of and corrected over time it leads to a fall and we have seen that story too often in some highly visible leaders in the church during the last few years.
 - b When you get to the bottom of everyone of their stories there is a lesson for us. What you find is a person who has not protected the virtue of

humility and allowed the deception of Satan to penetrate their mind and heart with pride. And this doesn't just apply to leaders, it applies to all believers. This is why James says ... *Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you (James 4:7).*

- c Before you can have a devil-fleeing authority you must have a heart submitted to God. Your ability to stay on track, not be deceived and live a fruitful Christian life is dependent upon protecting the virtue of humility before God. James says, God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble (4:7).
- d The second thing Paul says in his greeting has to do with ...

[2] The Goal of Paul's Apostleship - Godliness

- 1 The goal of his apostleship was to *further the faith of **God's elect (believers)** and their knowledge of **the truth (gospel)** that leads to **godliness** (v1).*
 - a Godliness is the main theme of the letter. The Cretan believers needed to understand what a godly life looked like. And Paul knew that the message of the gospel would make no progress on Crete unless the Cretan believers pursued godliness.
 - b As we will see in chapter 2 Paul was very concerned about professing believers living lives that discredited the message of the gospel. He said to them they/we should live in such a way ...
 - that no one will malign the Word of God (2:5)
 - that no one will have anything bad to say about us (2:8)
 - that the teaching about God our Savior is attractive (2:10)
 - c So in *chapter one* Paul describes godly leaders compared to the ungodly leaders. In *chapter two* he describes godly men, godly women and godly servants or employees. Then in *chapter 3* he describes godly citizens.
- 2 So again the primary theme is godliness which begs the question what is godliness?
 - a The term is derived from the Greek word "eusebeia," and basically means a life centered around God and devoted to pleasing him.
 - b If we were to look at all the scriptures in the NT where this word is used we would discover six basic characteristics of godliness;
 - Reverence for God
 - Moral integrity
 - Devotion to seeking God

- Love and compassion for others
 - Self control and discipline.
 - The hope of future grace.
- 3 Of course none of these characteristics can be truly present in a believers life without the power of the gospel. And the gospel is about what God has done for us through Jesus Christ.
- a What God has done by grace through Jesus Christ is first ... our response to that grace in godly living is second. All genuine godliness is a response to the grace of God revealed in the gospel.
 - b And the importance of that cannot be overemphasized because it is possible to be religious but not godly ... to have a religion-centered life instead of a Christ-centered life.
 - c In 2 Time 3:5 Paul said to Timothy, it is possible to have a form of godliness but not true inward godliness that springs out of the power of the gospel of grace.
- 4 This is why Paul devotes one-third of this letter to reemphasizing the gospel.
- a The Cretans needed to know what a godly life looked like but even more they needed to know that the source of that godliness was found in the revelation of Christ's incarnation, life, death and resurrection.
 - b And that's why in the book of Titus you will find two of the best explanations of the gospel in all the New Testament. And we will spend a good deal of time going through them but for now I just want to acquaint you with them (2:11-14/ 3:3-7).

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. ¹² It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ 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 (Titus 2:11–14).

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. ⁴ But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ 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, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:3–7).

[3] The means of Paul's Apostleship – Preaching

- 1 In these first three verses Paul says he is an apostle who is called to further the faith of God's people through preaching a gospel that was entrusted to him by God at an appointed moment in redemptive history, a gospel that produces godliness and a gospel that holds out the promise of *eternal life*.
- 2 The highlight of the gospel proclamation is the promise of living with Jesus forever, aka eternal life. So the gospel not only saves us from sin and enables us to grow in godliness, it also holds out the hope of eternal life.
 - a In chapter two Paul refers to this hope as the *blessed hope (2:13)*. He refers to it again in chapter 3 when we says ... *having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life (3:7)*.
 - b When hope is used like this in the NT it does not mean a wish or possibility of something but rather a confident expectation of what is sure to come because God promised it.
 - c The **God** of truth, the God who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time that those who come to faith in Him would be given this hope ... the certain expectation of eternal life.
- 2 Paul goes on to say that this hope, this promise of eternal life was made *before the beginning of time*.
 - a That means the promise of eternal life was made by God before the creation of the universe. But to make a promise you have to have somebody to make the promise to.
 - b So who did God make the promise to? He made it to Himself.
 - In eternity past the Father demonstrated his perfect love to the Son by promising Him a redeemed humanity who would serve and glorify Him forever.
 - And the Son demonstrated his love for the Father by offering himself as the sacrifice to accomplish that redemption for the Father's glory.

- c That means the plan for our redemption did not come after the fall but before mankind was even created. This promise to the Son in eternity past is the guarantee of our blessed hope in eternity future.
 - d Over the years God reiterated the promise of salvation and eternal life to many like Abraham, Moses, David, and the prophets. But he made the original promise to his Son in eternity past.
 - e And that is why the promise of eternal life is so infallible, definite and certain. Your salvation is not dependent upon the promise you made at a certain point in your life to follow Jesus, it's based upon the promise between the Father and the Son in eternity past.
- 3 And therefore you can count on it because, as the text says, ***He is the God who does not lie.***
- a Now that's an interesting way to refer to God in the opening of this letter. Of all the qualities of God that Paul could have highlighted in this greeting he chose God's truthfulness. There were multiple reasons for this.
 - b Firstly, the false teachers were liars and taught lies. They were not from the God of truth. Secondly Cretans as a whole were a society of liars. And there was a reason for that. The primary deity worshipped by the Cretans was Zeus, the father of all the Greek gods.



- c And of all Zeus' characteristics the one he was most revered for was his ability to deceive. Lying was his virtue. That's why the Cretans were liars. You become like who you worship.
 - d But now the God who cannot lie has brought his truth to bear on Cretan culture through the gospel preaching of Paul and Titus. And when God's truth bursts on the scene it cannot fail to transform people and produce godliness.
- 4 People in our modern Western world often fall into the trap of imagining a life in which it is perfectly rational to believe or think one way but make decisions and actually live in a way that contradicts their belief.
- a For instance, it is not uncommon in our culture for someone to identify themselves with a religion (Christianity, Islam, Judaism, etc.) but not

- actually hold to the stated tenets of that religion or practice a lifestyle that corresponds with that religion.
- b They are blind to the contradiction. In fact, they may be offended if you say, “But how can you say you are a (Christian/Muslim/Jew) when you openly disagree with what your religion teaches and you don’t actually live according to it’s principles?
 - c This ability to divide belief from action is a relatively new way of thinking on the world stage. Moreover, it runs counter to the way God designed us to live. God designed us to live with a harmony between our inner life and outer life, between our inner beliefs and outer actions.
- 5 And that is the essence of godliness. That is what the book of Titus teaches us. It teaches us that those who have experienced the kindness of God in salvation (3:4), those who have been born again through the Holy Spirit (3:5), are people whose actions corresponds with their beliefs .. a people who have godliness that flows from the gospel ...a gospel centered godliness.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How does Paul's example of being a "servant of God" before an "apostle" challenge our understanding of leadership and authority in the church?
- 2 The sermon mentions six characteristics of godliness. Which of these do you find most challenging in your own life, and why?
- 3 How does the idea that godliness is a response to God's grace differ from trying to be "religious" through our own efforts?
- 4 In what ways does our culture today resemble the description of Cretan culture? How can we as Christians respond to these challenges?
- 5 How does the assurance of eternal life (the "blessed hope") impact how we live our daily lives as believers?
- 6 In what ways can we ensure that our beliefs align with our actions, avoiding the trap of disconnecting faith from practice?