
For the Sake of the Faith of God's Elect

Titus 1:1-5

Introduction Why did you come here today? What did you expect when you arrived? Is there any rhyme or reason to the affiliation you have with this group of people? Why is this group of people even concerned enough to year after year help meet each others needs, give their money, listen to the teaching, give up Wednesday nights... Youth – why are your parents willing to pass up a nicer car, a weekend at the lake, a relaxing evening at home, your sporting event – for “church stuff?” Who’s idea is all of this anyway? And who has the right to say church life *should* be this way and *should not* be that way...? What about my colleagues comments...

Imagine you were starting from scratch with the one ingredient necessary for the development of a church, believers. What would you do? This is essentially the situation on the first century island of Crete, where Titus is preparing to establish local churches throughout the island. It is mainly this question Paul addresses in the book of Titus – it also happens to be what we will be studying through the month of June. This morning, we’ll doing a bit of an introduction to Titus, discussing the background, setting, and themes, and then covering the introduction to the letter (vv. 1-5) via the outline: The Minister in his Personal and Appointed Capacity, The Minister and his Motives, and the Minister and his Means.

[Read Titus]. Most of you know I teach for a living, and if we were in class together, I would immediately begin questioning you as to what you heard, what are some of the big ideas that came through, why do you think this letter was written, etc...I would especially find someone who was just barely hanging on to consciousness and then surprise you with a “wake-up!” question! In any case, asking these broad questions is not a bad approach at the outset of considering a New Testament epistle. I used to live in Cleveland and while there I attended the church at which Alistair Begg taught. While teaching, he would often say, “Let the main things be the plain things and the plain things be the main things.” So in taking his advice, I think it becomes quite clear, even after a cursory consideration of this letter to Titus, that Paul is writing about the church and how Titus should go about building it on the island of Crete.[Transition]

Background, Setting, & Themes

The letter to Titus is not a “book,” but a letter, written to the very young church on the island of Crete, which Paul and Titus previously evangelized, for the right ordering of the church.

Not a book, but a letter...

Somewhat close to the forefront of our thinking as we begin to study the book of Titus is the fact that it is not really a “book” at all. It is a letter. And hence, it has all the characteristics of an early first century letter written in a Roman culture. For those of you who have sat in our adult Bible education course on genres of the Scripture, you will quickly realize that this fact has many implications. For our purposes today, we will consider only one, and that is, the letter to Titus from Paul represents a *personal* communication written for a *particular* purpose. “Quite profound,” you might be thinking! “Isn’t that true of every letter?” It certainly is. The point here is that we must think carefully about the writer and the reader, because this is a *personal* communication, and we must think carefully about the immediate circumstances and context, because this letter was written for a *particular* purpose. So that is just what we will do, in reverse order however, immediate context first, and then the writer and reader.

It is as if we have intercepted and opened someone else’s mail. Today, that would be considered a federal crime. But not so here. God has intentionally given us this letter for our benefit, that we might know himself and his will. So although what we study over the next four Sundays together *is* someone else’s mail, God, in his sovereignty has included it in the canon of Scripture. The message of this letter, then, was intended for us just as much as it was intended for Titus and the believers in Crete. So we must read and consider this short letter with an intentionality and expectation that it is here that God himself has written to *us* through men as recorded in the canon of Scripture (2 Peter 1:19ff). May we now, as whenever hearing the preaching of the Word, by God’s grace, be both focused hearers and joyful doers of the Word. [Pray]. [Transition]

Written to the very young church...

It is likely that this letter to Titus was written in the early 60s, A.D.. Luke in Acts 2 makes it clear that Jews from the island of Crete were at Pentecost (around A.D. 30) and would have been exposed to the gospel and the beginning of the early church. Assuming that the Cretan Jews returned home, it is reasonable to believe that some witness of the gospel had existed in Crete for nearly three decades.

Probably one of two conditions existed in Crete:

1. Churches in Crete were established shortly after Pentecost. Thirty years later when Paul and Titus arrived, there is an absence of qualified leadership and the church was chronologically older, but spiritually young and immature.
2. Alternatively, Paul and Titus were in Crete for the *purpose* of establishing churches or encouraging new churches recently established, as was Paul’s normal pattern. In this case, the church was chronologically younger *and* spiritually young.

The instruction to Titus to appoint elders (1:5), the presence of identified false teachers (1:10-12), and the admonitions to the community of believers (2:1ff) (older men, older women, young men, young women) suggests that a community of believers

may have been in existence for some time – but NT churches had not yet been established. Whatever the case, it is clear that the believers in Crete were vulnerable to false teaching, had many who were “insubordinate, empty talkers, and deceivers” (v.10) among them, and were in need of understanding the basic structure and function of Christ’s body. Note: Even as believers, we are not self-organizing entities. We require the Word to reveal God’s will in all things.

Part of Titus’ duty then, was to put in place the God-ordained structure that was meant to instruct and protect believers or, as Paul puts it in Ephesians, “*to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes*” (Ephesians 4:12-14). Simply put, believers outside of the local church or in a less-than biblical church are vulnerable as they do not have the protection and watchcare of the body and its shepherds.

On the island of Crete...

These young churches were located on the island of Crete. The island of Crete is located in the Mediterranean Sea, just south of modern day Greece. At the time of Paul’s writing, there were approximately 100 cities on the island and some commentators believe as many churches. Whether 25 or 100 churches, the task that Paul left Titus was no small undertaking. Titus was responsible for the organizing of and ministering to a great many local bodies of believers. Titus was not alone however, Zenas the lawyer and Apollos were there with him. It is worth noting that it is rare in the New Testament that we see ministers working solo. Paul almost always traveled in company as did the other apostles. This theme resurfaces not only in the emphasis placed upon body life, which is a joint effort among groups of believers, but also in the plurality of elders described in the New Testament as the normative pattern of church leadership. When possible, ministers of the gospel should be working shoulder to shoulder with other ministers. When possible, older and wiser ministers should be coming alongside of younger men training and preparing them for the ministry. When possible, believers should be coming along side other believers as we all endeavor to walk in a manner worthy of our Lord.

Which Paul and Titus had previously evangelized...

Paul and Titus had a long history of working together. There is little doubt that Titus had been shaped and formed by exposure to Paul’s work as an apostle.

The Writer, Paul

Paul, likely between his 1st and 2nd prison stays demonstrates an unflinching concern for the church. Unthwarted by the resistance and prosecution he had experienced, Paul continues to plant and encourage new churches throughout the ancient world. As emphasized above, it is clear he is paying special attention to the ongoing development of others who will carry the work beyond the end of his life. Paul is likely responsible for the evangelizing and discipling of Titus. It is clear

that Titus had become a trusted coworker as Paul regularly speaks highly of him and frequently sends him as his representative.

The Reader, Titus

It is very likely that Titus was not a Jew, but a Gentile (Galatians 2:1-3). This fact plays a key role at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) where the issue of the necessity of circumcision for salvation is debated. Titus, either by resistance or by consensus, is not circumcised and seems to continue in ministry with Paul to a largely Gentile population. From that time until the writing of Paul’s letter to Titus in Crete, Titus is involved with Paul in several major ministry efforts. It is likely that Titus has some hand in the work at Galatia (Galatians 2:1-3), Ephesus (2 Corinthians 8:6), and much to do with the delicate work carried out in Corinth (2 Corinthians 8, 12). He is, of course, with Paul in Crete and we see him finally with Paul during his second imprisonment (2 Timothy 4:10). From the council of Jerusalem to the writing of Titus is a period of approximately 10-15 years during which Titus is working closely with Paul in service of the church. So it would be wrong for us to think of Titus as an inexperienced novice. He has done the difficult work of ministry and been integrally involved in the forming of the early church. It is interesting to note that Titus, one of the few uncircumcised evangelists of the early church, is left by Paul on the island of Crete to deal with those of the circumcision party. It is almost as if Paul was saying to those of the circumcision party, “Don’t like the idea of uncircumcised Gentile believers? Well here then, let me Paul, the apostle, circumcised Jew, perfect according to the law, known throughout Asia Minor, appoint an uncircumcised Gentile to shepherd over the churches in Crete...and I’ll be sure to instruct him not to put up with your wrong beliefs and teachings...” This may be evidence of a first century “you’re either with us or against us in the fight against false doctrine” program.

For the right ordering of the church.

A picture, then, of what the context surrounding this letter from Paul to Titus, is beginning to emerge. We have a younger, but experienced, minister left with his colleagues to aid a large group of young and disordered churches on the island of Crete. Titus receives a letter from Paul, his spiritual father, who was with him at the inception of the work on Crete. Paul, in his letter, gives instructions and admonitions to Titus, and effectively the Cretan believers, on how the church is to be ordered.

Paul was never a man to waste words. It could be argued that in these first five verses, Paul touches on each of the major themes in his letter to Titus. [Transition]

Introduction to Letter to Titus

Theme in Letter to Titus

Faith of God’s elect...in hope of eternal life...through the preaching...	Importance of sound doctrine and teaching (2:11ff, 3:4ff)
Knowledge of the truth which accords with godliness	Good works will characterize true believers lives both in and out of the church (1:16, 2:7, 3:1,8,14)
Put what remained into order	The order and function of the NT church (1:5-9, 2:1-10, 3:1-2, 9-11)

There is a distinct sense in which Paul, by alluding to these themes early on, gets Titus' shoulders squared toward the task that is ahead.

And what is this task? As we have already established, Titus has been left in Crete to put the church there in order. And what is the purpose of the church? Peter in 1 Peter 2:9 tells us that we are, "...a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, *that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*" Paul in Ephesians 3:10 tells us that it is, "...*through the church the manifold wisdom of God might be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.*" And how are the purposes of this church accomplished? Paul in Ephesians 4:11-16 tells us

11And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, 12to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. 15Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Is there some sense of awe and joy and trembling when you hear these passages read? *You and I* are part of the God-ordained community, Christ's body, for carrying out his purposes here on Earth. And these are the very high tasks and duties that Paul is calling Titus to prepare the believers in Crete for. In some sense, we are simply listening in on a letter written from an older minister to a younger minister. But in another, more important sense perhaps, through this letter we come to understand God's instructions for the right ordering of this most serious and high, living and growing body, called the church under whose purposes *our* very lives as believers are ordered – how could we not be intently interested in what Paul has to say to Titus. So let's begin with the text. [Transition]

The Minister in His Personal & Appointed Capacity (v. 1a, 3b, 5a)

Paul, in verse 1, identifies himself in two manners: As a servant first, and then as an apostle, speaking to both his personal and appointed capacities. If you were to leaf quickly through the Pauline epistles you would quickly discover that this particular designation is unique to all the other epistles. Paul most often identifies himself as a "servant" or an "apostle" of Christ Jesus. While there may be a number of reasons for this, I believe that at least two should be noted. First, Paul is emphasizing his authority. The self-identification as apostle here is in the strictest sense, that is, the twelve plus Paul. Given the apparent disorder described in chapter 1, verses 10-16, the Cretans needed to know that Paul *himself* was directly behind the interventions of Titus, and that God *himself* was directly behind the interventions of Paul. Titus comes with the full weight of an apostle's appointment behind him.

Secondly, Paul identifies himself as a “servant” or a “slave” of God. More specifically, “one who gives himself up wholly to another’s will.”¹ Paul reminds Titus that the minister must always remember that he is first and foremost a *servant* of God and this *before* his appointed position as minister. The work that Titus has before him is great and perhaps overwhelming. In such a case, would it not be easy to for Titus to “lord it/domineer over them” (1 Peter 5) in efforts to expedite the work? Would it not also be easy to become discouraged, or lazy, or half-hearted? Imagine, a whole island, 100 cities, multitudes of churches, false teachers to counter... I’m overwhelmed by a month of Sunday mornings! But Paul and Titus are *servants* of God – this is their *personal* identity, who they are, and thus as servants, they must not fail to *serve*.

The Minister and His Motive (v. 1-3)

But in every work of ministry, there must be a correctly understood motive. Why should Titus preach? Why should Titus work hard to appoint elders? Why should Titus refute false teachers? Why should Titus teach believers? If Paul is to call Titus to this challenging work in Crete, then surely he must also point Titus to the driving energy behind the work of the minister.

[Read verses 1-3] Verses 1-3 represent the main focus of Paul’s introduction – put simply, Paul does what he does for the church, that is, God’s elect. Having already looked at the purpose of the church this morning, we understand this is in effect bringing glory to God through the human institution He has ordained for such purposes. Paul locates the church as central to his purposes not just as an apostle, but also a servant. **The church is the God-appointed glory-making organism here on Earth.** God has not ordained any other *institution* by which men and women and boys and girls may bring him glory.

So then, we must ask ourselves this very serious question, how much of what I do is for the sake of the church? Do I ever answer questions about my priorities or management of my resources with responses that indicate that I do what I do for the church? Is the church the hub around which my life revolves? Have you and your family ever consciously made decisions that reflect this? Or is church a casual association? Or has your area of ministry, say nursery/giving large sums of money for instance, become a means by which you justify your otherwise uninvolved stance toward the church, something like, “What do you mean? The church is central in my life, I work in the nursery – never mind about flock meetings or Sunday evenings or building community.” Or perhaps there is another Christian institution that supplants the church and its importance – family, Christian school, parachurch ministry, etc. This may sound like, “Sunday evening is family night, we do not go to church for that service.”

Now some may feel that this is excessive – however, I believe that perspective on this line of questioning can quickly be gained by simply asking this question: Are you willing to give up for the church what Christ gave up for the church? What Paul gave up for the church? It is with these questions we must start. Once we have resolved, by God’s grace, the answers to these questions, then we can rightly begin seeing through the many self-

¹ Thayer. *Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament*.

deceits that we entertain in our thinking about our commitment to this local body of believers. We must ask these hard questions early on in this series because as Paul begins to describe the ministry of and in the church to Titus, we will see that nothing less than a whole-hearted, life-orienting commitment flowing from a love of God and his glory is required to be what we are called to be as believers in the church. If the church is not central in your heart and mind, you will chafe in coming weeks as you hear Paul describing what a NT church is to be.

Briefly, then, we can see that Paul works this statement of his motive out in several of specific ways:

1. Paul functions as servant and apostle for the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth which accords with godliness. How the faith of God's elect comes to pass we will cover in a moment, but notice that this precise "knowledge of the truth" is qualified, or made specific, by the fruit of its produce, that is godliness. This theme will be repeated several times in this letter to Titus. It is in stark contrast to the doctrine of the false teachers we will consider next week who, in verse 16, "...*profess* to know God, but [they] deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work." **This IS NOT** the kind of knowledge Paul, and now Titus, labored for. An accumulation of bible knowledge or a professed knowledge of God and his ways, without an accompanying growth in practical godliness is nothing more than a damning deceit that we pray God would protect us from.
2. The "faith of the elect" and "knowledge of the truth" work themselves out in the context of "the hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began and at the proper time manifested in his word..." The hope of eternal life in verse 2, I believe, can be understood as both the expectation the believer has of spending eternity free from the presence of sin and in the presence of God *and* as the person of Jesus Christ, who is our blessed hope in whom our lives are hidden (Titus 2:13, 3:7; 1 Timothy 1:1, Colossians 1:27) and by whom our salvation is secured. So how does this promise stretch through the ages and manifest in His Word? The promise was first illuminated early in Genesis as blood is shed to cover the nakedness of man and the Evangel is declared (Genesis 3:15), then made clearer by the promise to Abraham of making him a great nation and through his offspring blessing all the nations of the Earth (Genesis 22:18). The promise was continued in David, the king, on whom God had set his heart and his son Solomon. Yet they could not fulfill the promise God gave of a *righteous* King ruling over *his* people in *his* kingdom. Ultimately, it is only Christ who can fulfill all of God's promises, in whom all of redemptive history culminated as he fulfilled the promise made to the elect, that God would be our God and we would be his people. This hope then, Paul tells us, was promised by a God who does not lie, that is, it is sure. It is not an empty promise, but one that is full and preexisted time as we know it.

So Paul in the establishing of his position and authority, and describing his personal and ministerial motive, begins to lay the groundwork for what lies ahead for Titus. Lastly,

Paul points Titus to the God-appointed means by which he would accomplish his main work as a pastor: proclaiming Christ, the hope of eternal life, for the sake of God's elect.

The Minister and His Means (v. 2-3)

[Transition] How is it then that the "faith of God's elect" and their "knowledge of the truth" as manifested in "our hope of eternal life" comes to pass? It is through the ministerial action of preaching Christ, who is the manifestation of God's word. 2 Timothy 3:16, 17 tells us that it is God's words that make us wise unto salvation and is profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness, that we might be equipped and competent for every good work. With this in mind, Paul "charges" Timothy in the presence of God who will judge to "preach the Word[!]" that verses 3:16 and 17 might come to pass. In Romans 10 (:14-21) Paul clearly connects the "call[ing]" and "believ[ing]" an unbeliever does to a direct response to the preaching of the word. How beautiful then are the "feet of those who preach good news" for this is God's means of bringing the elect to himself. All throughout Scripture, both Old and New Testaments, we consistently see the pattern that it is always God's word generally brought by God's preacher by which men and women are led to repent, believe, obey, and then to grow in grace.

Paul understands the high and serious duty of his calling to preach – it is a command of God our Savior. It is a command that he passed on to Titus and Timothy and it is a command that is no less authoritative today. If we do nothing else well as pastors, we must do at least this: Preach Christ from the whole counsel of the Word as faithful servants of God.

[Transition] Titus, now left to the duty of establishing churches in Crete, reads the introduction to Paul's letter and perhaps sets the letter aside for a moment and simply ponders the many things that have been said in just one paragraph long sentence from Paul. The words, "To Titus, my true child in a common faith..." communicates the love and support of a father, the trust of a brother in the ministry, and the expectation of an apostle charging one who would carry the gospel ministry forward. Then Titus reads the gracious benediction that Paul gives before laying out the details, "Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior." Titus perhaps exhales and reminds himself that in these good words he has all he needs to carry out the task at hand. With humble confidence, he picks Paul's letter back up, and continues to read. And this is where we will resume next week, but before we end, let us consider several applications of this portion of Scripture.

Observations & Applications

1. God uses his people for his people. A sovereign and electing God who needs no help in keeping his promises throughout eternity, uses people.
2. Do you serve for the church's sake? Do you serve others in the church in a way that encourages: their faith, their knowledge as it yields godliness, their hope in Christ, and their valuing of preaching?
3. Paul in his unique capacity as apostle/minister, served the elect by preaching. Preaching is the means by which the *hope* of eternal life is made manifest. We preach Christ.
4. History is important: 1) Anchors our faith in objective events, and 2) enables us to better understand the text. Can you talk your way through the chronology of the Scriptures?
5. Pastors/we must not forget our personal identity as we carry out our appointed ministry.