

Titus – Good Order in the Church

This short book was written by the apostle Paul to Titus, who is described in v. 4 as “my true child in a common faith.” Who was this man? From Paul’s description in v. 4, it would seem clear that Titus came to faith in Christ through Paul’s personal ministry. Galatians 2:3 says that he was a Greek, and 2 Corinthians indicates he was sent on special assignment by Paul to deal with some of the issues in the Corinthian church. It is fairly safe to say that Titus was a trusted agent for Paul, as in 2 Cor 8:23 Paul calls him “my partner and fellow worker among you.” He traveled with Paul to Crete, sometime around 63 AD, and when Paul departed, he left Titus there to develop leadership and good order for the churches there. Some time later, Paul wrote this letter to encourage and direct Titus in his ministry. When Paul later wrote 2 Timothy, he mentioned that Titus had traveled to Dalmatia (modern Croatia). Tradition says that he later returned to Crete and served the churches there until his death.

The salutation gives us our subject matter for today. If you or I were to write a letter to Titus, we would probably start with something like, “Dear Titus” or “My good friend Titus.” That’s not the way Paul wrote. First, he affirmed his identity as the writer. “Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ.” Paul described himself as a bond-slave of Jesus Christ. This is important, because we see in it that he wasn’t full of himself. At least 5 times in his letters, he refers to himself in this way. The first thing Paul wanted others to know about him was that he was under orders to a master – he wasn’t lording himself over anyone. We would do well to recognize this ourselves, so that we don’t get caught up in our own importance. After describing himself as a slave, he adds the position that Christ has placed him in: an apostle. We use that word in reference to the office of authority in the early church, and that is correct, but the root meaning is simply, “one sent forth.” As a slave of Jesus Christ, Paul was sent out with a message and a responsibility. He wanted to be faithful in serving His Master.

What was Paul sent out to do on Christ’s behalf? “For the sake of the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth.” His great purpose was to build the faith of God’s chosen ones. How was that done? By giving them the knowledge of the truth – God’s Word. This really shows what all of us should view as our purpose in life. We could describe his two key purposes as the salvation and the sanctification of God’s people.

Paul’s expression of purpose continues on to say “which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior.” In these opening verses, Paul used the word “kata” four times, though we lose the connection in our English translations. “Kata” is a preposition, a word that shows connection or relationship between two things. What are the connections he emphasizes here? I’m going to read the four phrases, using the wording “according to” as the reference to “kata.”

“According to” the faith of God’s elect; the truth that is “according to” godliness; “according to” the commandment of God; “according to” the common faith. Here is the relationship between ministry and the Word of God. Paul’s ministry was all about declaring the truth of the gospel, so that lives were transformed to godly obedience to the Word of God.

Next Paul identifies a foundational truth about God – He never lies. Why is this important, even before he gets into the text of his letter? Because everything he is about to write, and everything he does, is based on what God has said. We have hope in eternal life because God gave that promise before time

(chronos) began, and God hasn't changed His promise or His plan. God is unchanging, and what He says is what He does. Paul then says that at the proper time, God revealed His Word through preaching. Paul is claiming divine authority for the message he preached, and connecting that message to the plan God made before the world began. The gospel that we have believed is good news because it comes from this God who never lies, and we can exercise faith in His Word.

After all that introduction, Paul says, "To Titus, my true child in a common faith. Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior." This common faith was what Titus had been left in Crete to administer. It was a faith that should result in personal godliness in those who hold it. You and I are recipients and beneficiaries of that same common faith. It wasn't just for Paul and Titus, but for all who will receive it. The word "common" also means ordinary, and stands in contrast to the things which were set apart as reserved for the priests. Our faith in Christ is available to all people, not just a select few. When we receive it, we are set apart as holy, reserved for God's purposes.