

AN AUTHORITATIVE MODEL OF GOSPEL-DRIVEN MINISTRY
PART 1

TEXT: TITUS 1:1-4

September 30, 2012

INTRODUCTION:

Even though Titus is the shortest of the Pastoral Letters, Paul's opening greeting is the longest. Only Paul's greeting in Romans exceeds the content of his greeting in Titus. The Apostle's greeting is comprised of one long, complex sentence in Greek, in which Paul gives a detailed theological explanation of his apostleship. So, we are entitling this first section of the letter (1:1-4):

I. GOSPEL-DRIVEN GODLINESS AND PAUL'S APOSTLESHIP. 1:1-4

The complexity of Paul's opening greeting demonstrate that this is more than a customary greeting (i.e., Author, Recipient, Christianized Greeting format). There is no introductory thanksgiving section (see also 1 Timothy). Instead, Paul launches immediately into the issues for which he wishes to address in his letter to Titus and the Cretan churches. In fact, Paul's greeting introduces the major themes that he will discuss throughout the letter (e.g., "faith" (1:1, 4, 13; 2:2, 10; 3:15); "godliness" (1:1; 2:12), "hope" (1:2; 2:13; 3:7), "eternal life" (1:2; 3:7), "salvation language" ("Savior," "save," "salvation" (1:3, 4; 2:10-11, 13; 3:4-6), "divine disclosure" (1:3; 2:11; 3:5; cf. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, p. 75).

There is no doubt from the outset as to what is paramount in Paul's mind for both Titus and the Cretan churches, namely the gospel, which accords with godliness (1:1). The gospel is the driving force behind Titus and godliness is the goal. And so we learn from the outset that the proper ordering of a church has two major interests: (1) To establish believers in the knowledge of the truth (gospel; 1:1d); (2) To work out the implications of the gospel into every day life (i.e., godliness, 1:1e).

Why does Paul set forth such a detailed discussion of his apostleship? Authority is necessary to properly order a church, particularly when there are competing voices vying for believer's commitment (i.e., the false teachers, 1:10-16). To whom were the Cretan churches to receive and submit, Titus or the false teachers? How can the Cretan churches distinguish between genuine and false ministry? This is why Paul begins by setting forth such a detailed discussion of his apostleship. He is establishing his authority in order to assist Titus in fulfilling his special assignment in Crete. Even though Paul's letter is addressed to Titus, it is really addressed to the churches—since it will be read to the churches. Concerning Paul's detailed greeting, Calvin writes,

...Paul had in view the whole church, and not Titus alone; for his apostleship was not disputed by Titus...Here his design was, to bring into subjection

those who had haughtily rebelled; and for this reason he extols his apostleship in lofty terms. He therefore writes this Epistle, not that it may be read in solitude by Titus in his closet, but that it may be openly published, (*Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. 21, pp. 279-280).

Paul knew that Titus needed the authority to rightly order the churches. Therefore, Paul sets forth his apostleship as an authoritative model of gospel-driven ministry in order to assist Titus in setting the churches in order. He gives 4 characteristics of a gospel-driven ministry.

LESSON:

I. A GOSPEL-DRIVEN MINISTRY IS SUBMITTED TO THE SERVICE OF THE GOSPEL. 1:1A-B

Paul begins his opening greeting with two self-designations, which characterize the nature of his apostleship: submission and authority.

A. PAUL: SERVANT OF GOD, 1:1A

First, by this self-designation, Paul is drawing attention to the submissive nature of his apostleship. Paul's self-designation, "servant" (δοῦλος) means "slave." A "slave" is "one who gives himself up wholly to another's will," (cf. Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, n.p.). The self-designation "servant/slave" in this context refers to the "subordinate, obligatory and responsible nature of Paul's service in relation to God" (cf. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, p. 282). Simply put, in referring to himself as a "servant of God" Paul signifies his full submission to God's authority and will for his life and ministry. Paul was wholly submitted to service of the gospel. He was wholly submitted to God in order to be used by God to extend and advance the gospel among men.

It is important to note that Paul was not using "servant/slave" in a negative manner. For example, his use of δοῦλος (servant/slave) does not correspond directly to the evil practice of the 18th century slave trade, which William Wilberforce, the famous British parliamentarian, helped to end after a difficult bipartisan twenty-year struggle. Paul was a man gripped by Christ and the life-changing truth of the gospel. His Damascus Road encounter with the risen Christ fundamentally altered his entire way of thinking and life. Thus, as one who had been served, Paul now gratefully offered himself as God's servant. Christ's gospel mission (divine service) became Paul's gospel commission (pastoral service). Because of Christ's divine service, Paul's heart and life had been conquered by grace, which brought him into willing submission—not slavish compulsion—to God's authority and the service of the gospel.

In 1:3, Paul says he considered his service of the gospel to be a stewardship, with which he had been entrusted by the command of God (cf. Titus 1:3). In Romans 1:1, Paul writes, "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the

gospel of God..." In Romans 1:15, Paul writes to the church in Rome, "I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome." In 1 Corinthians 9:16, Paul solemnly declares, "...Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship." Paul was faithful to preach the gospel whether he benefitted from it materially or not (cf. this in contrast to the false teachers who were "teaching for shameful gain, cf. Titus 1:11). As God's servant, his responsibility was to faithfully proclaim the gospel and share in its blessings (cf. "I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings," cf. 1 Cor. 9:23). In 2 Timothy 2:4, Paul writes to Timothy, "No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him." A soldier belongs to the military in which he serves. The mark of a good soldier is that he is submitted to his leaders and utterly committed to his mission. In a similar manner, Paul tells Timothy that a mark of God's servant is that he possesses a single-minded desire to serve the interests of His Master and his master's message (i.e., the gospel). He is sold out to the service of the gospel! To the Elders in Ephesus, Paul stated, "But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God," (Acts 20:24). Paul was fully submitted to the service of the gospel even at the cost of his own life. His commitment to the Gospel never ceases to amaze me!

Now, Titus 1:1 is the only place Paul refers to himself as the "servant of God." The only other time he uses this phrase is when he refers to the civil authorities as "the servant of God" (cf. Rom. 13:4; see also Jam. 1:1). Paul ordinarily refers to himself as the "servant of Christ" (cf. Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:10; Phil. 1:1). It may be that Paul used this designation because of the largely Jewish audience he was writing to, particularly in view of the false Jewish teachers. In 1:10, Paul refers to the false teachers as "those of the circumcision party." They took pride in their circumcision and boasted of their special relationship with God and membership in the covenant community. Calvin writes, "...for they [false teachers-J.F.] were wont (inclined-J.F.) to lower his authority by alleging (claiming-J.F.) the law against him," (*Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. 21, p. 280).

The title "servant of God" means more than just submission. It has a special sense of denoting a minister who has received a particular office from the Lord (*Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. 21, p. 280). It was not only used in the OT for the members of the covenant community but also for its special leaders, who were distinguished by this title (e.g., Abraham, Ps. 105:42; Moses, Ps. 105:26; Joshua, Jos. 24:29; David, Ps. 89:3; Daniel, Dan. 6:20; see Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 282.). Christ, Himself, is distinguished by this title and set forth as the chief "Servant of God," ("Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights," Isa. 42:1). Thus, by using this title, Paul may be claiming that he possessed a special relationship with God and shared this honorary title along with the great servants of God in the OT (cf., Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, p. 282; see Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. 21, p. 280).

This title then not only emphasizes the submissive nature of his apostleship, but also the *authoritative nature* of his apostleship. In contrast to the “circumcision party” who were false servants, Paul was asserting that he was God’s true servant. Paul, not the false teachers, had received this distinguished office, in line with the former distinguished servants like Abraham, Moses and David. Just as Moses was God’s authorized “servant-leader” in the OT church, so Paul was God’s authorized “servant-leader” in the NT church. The false teachers were not submitted to the service of the gospel. They had not received a special office from the Lord. They were not authorized to speak on behalf of God. They possessed no spiritual authority in the church. But, as “the servant of God” Paul was submitted to the service of the gospel and he did speak with His master’s authority (see Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, p. 378). Paul’s authority as God’s servant is brought out further by his designation, “Apostle of Jesus Christ.”

B. PAUL: APOSTLE OF JESUS CHRIST, 1:1B

By this self-designation, Paul drives home the authoritative nature of his apostleship. Paul writes to Titus and to the churches of Crete as an Apostle—an authoritative servant commissioned by Christ Himself. An Apostle was one who was an eyewitness of the risen Christ (1 Corinthians 9:1) and directly called and commissioned by the risen Lord (cf. John 20:21; Acts 26:15-18). Paul was directly converted, called and commissioned by the risen Jesus in Acts 9 to be a servant and Apostle to the Gentiles (cf. Acts 9:1-19; 22:6-11; 26:12-18; Gal. 1:1, 15-16). In Galatians 1:1, Paul writes, “Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead.” As Christ’s authorized servant and ambassador, Paul spoke with the authority of his master.

Even though the situation in Crete was different from the situation in the Galatian churches, it was nevertheless important for Paul to establish his authority among the Cretan churches. The situation in Crete required that Paul assert his Apostolic authority. Paul had not spent a long time in Crete. Upon his departure, he left Titus in charge to set in order the things he left unfinished (1:5). In addition, as soon as Paul left, false teachers had crept in and begun upsetting entire households (1:11). The Cretan believers were being led astray by legalism and negatively influenced by the ungodly culture of Crete. So, Paul commissioned Titus to appoint elders, teach, exhort, and rebuke. In Titus in 2:15, Paul exhorts, “Declare these things; exhort and rebuke *with all authority*. Let no one disregard you” (emphasis mine).

Paul had to ensure that Titus was recognized by the churches as possessing full apostolic authority to carry out his mission. As previously noted, this was particularly important in view of the competing voices of the false teachers (who possessed no authority!). Titus, thus, served as Paul authorized apostolic representative in Crete. In contrast to the false teachers, the Cretan believers are to receive and submit to Titus’ authoritative oversight and teaching. By submitting to Titus, the church is submitting to the Apostle, which is ultimately submitting to the kingly rule of Christ over His church. When Titus spoke, Paul spoke, when Paul

spoke, Christ spoke. To be sure, neither Paul's nor Titus's authority rested in themselves. Rather, their authority was derived from their Master who sent them and in the message they were commissioned to proclaim. So, in referring to himself as "Apostle" Paul signifies his divine authorization by Christ, his Master, to carry out the service of the gospel with divine authority.

REFLECTION:

As we reflect on the nature of Paul's apostleship as one of submission and authority, there are two lessons we need to learn.

1. GOSPEL-DRIVEN MINISTRY IS CHARACTERIZED BY SERVICE.

A defining characteristic of authentic gospel-driven ministry is that of service. But, before one can truly serve he or she must first learn to be continually served. Genuine service is grounded in, nurtured by and flows from Christ's divine service. As the faithful Servant of God, Christ devotes us to God by His service and then devotes us to men in the fellowship of His self-sacrifice. Luke 22 unmistakably bears this out. In Luke 22, we see that Jesus is the true Servant who acts wisely (cf. Isa. 52:13). In Luke 22:27c, Jesus says to His disciples, "I am among you as the one who serves." Jesus' statement discloses the essence of His purpose in coming to earth!

Jesus saw Himself as God's Servant and interpreted His mission and especially His suffering and death in terms of Isaiah 53. As the faithful covenant Servant, Jesus declares in Mark 10:45 that He had not come to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many. As the perfect Servant, Jesus was fully submitted to His Father's will. Christopher Wright writes, "He built His own agenda on what He perceived to be the agenda of His Father. Jesus' will was to do His Father's will, so He said. God's mission determined His mission," (*The Mission of God*, p. 66).

In contrast, none of Jesus' disciples, at this moment, understood true greatness and service in the kingdom of God. In Luke 22, we find the disciples arguing as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest (22:24). Misguided thoughts of kingdom greatness rather than humble thoughts of kingdom service filled the disciples horizons. Therefore, on the night of His betrayal, Jesus takes the opportunity to teach His disciples an unforgettable lesson about true greatness and service in His kingdom. Just as membership in the kingdom is contrary to what the disciples thought (cf. Mk. 10:17-31), so greatness and service in the kingdom is also contrary. Rather than possessing a desire for status, honor and power like His disciples, Jesus sets forth a paradigm of humble, selfless service to needy, undeserving sinners. He says to His disciples that the "greatest" is the one who is the "youngest" (i.e., the least in honor). Simply put, he wants the leader to serve. But, before they could serve, they had to first learn to receive His service. And so Jesus says to them, "I am among you as one who serves." None of the Twelve—excluding Judas—were ready to serve until they first understood their need of and dependence on Jesus' divine service.

Here is the point we are making: submission to the service of the gospel is the mark of authentic ministry and such service is grounded in, nurtured by and flows from Christ's divine service. What is true of Paul—as well Titus and the elders Titus is to appoint—is also true of the members of the church, albeit in a more general sense. In a general sense, all believers are servants (cf. Rom. 16:1; Col. 1:7; 4:7; 1 Pet. 2:16). As such, we are also called to live in submission, service and sacrifice for the sake of others. Because we have been bought by Christ to belong to Him (1 Cor. 6:20), we no longer belong to ourselves. We are God's purchased possession. Therefore, Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:15, we are no longer “to live for ourselves but for Him who for our sake died and was raised.”

True servants are leaders who are wholly submitted to Christ and continually receive His divine service. As a result, their lives are driven to live in service of the gospel for the sake of others. Though you may not have been entrusted to be an Apostle like Paul or an apostolic representative like Titus, or called to be an elder, you have been given the responsibility to serve as one who is a servant of Christ. Paul understood that at a certain point, young church plants grow to a critical mass where it no longer becomes tenable for one or two leaders to meet and serve all the needs of the church. This is why it becomes necessary to begin appointing a plurality of qualified elders to assist in properly ordering and overseeing the church (1:5-9). Also, church members are to begin serving “one another” in appropriate ways in the life of the church in order to meet the needs of one another (cf. Titus 2:2-6).

You don't have to be an elder or a deacon or a Life Group facilitator to begin living beyond your own needs in order to serve and meet the needs of those around you. There are at least 54 "one anothers" in the New Testament that teach believers how to serve each other (e.g., Mk. 9:50; Jn. 15:12; Rom. 12:10; 14:13; 15:7; 16:16; Gal. 5:13; Eph. 4:32; 5:19; 1 Thess. 5:11; Heb. 3:13; Jam. 4:11; 5:16; 1 Jn. 4:11; 1 Pet. 3:8; 4:8-9; 5:5). Each member has his or her own gift(s) and role as a member of Christ's body to use by faith and in the strength the Holy Spirit provides to serve others. Paul instructs in Galatians 6:10, “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” We always have opportunities to do good for others financially (which is the context of Galatians 6:10) or in a million other ways.

The gospel drives you to begin to awaken to this gospel-driven servant mindset. The gospel drives you out of your inward focus to begin looking outward to serve the needs of others. *So, if you are not serving you are not receiving!* When Jesus, the Servant, is central in your heart, service will flow out of your life.

This leads to one final lesson we need to carefully consider.

2. GOSPEL-DRIVEN MINISTRY IS CHARACTERIZED BY AUTHORITY.

Gospel-driven ministry, which is characterized by service, does not imply a lack of authority. This authority is not granted to every member of the church. The New Testament makes it clear that Christ has bestowed a diverse authority upon the church offices so as to rightly order the church to fulfill its mission in the world. Nelson Kloosterman writes, “Even as Christ came not to be served, but to serve (Matt. 20:28; Mk. 10:45), so too His office bearers exercise a ministerial authority in the church (2 Cor. 1:24; 1 Pet. 5:2-3),” (*Called To Serve*, p. 175).

This diverse authority in the church offices corresponds to Christ’s offices as Prophet, Priest and King. The office of elder is an extension of Christ’s kingly rule over His church (Note: Deacons, which Paul doesn’t take up in Titus, express Christ’s priestly rule by serving as ministers of mercy/benevolence in order to meet personal needs of church members.). It is through the appointed leadership of the church that Christ the Lord rules His church as King (1:5-9; 2:15). Christ’s kingly rule is expressed whenever the leadership exercises church discipline (cf. Titus 3:10-11). Christ’s kingly rule is expressed whenever the leadership supervises access or bars access to the Lord’s Supper and church membership. In short, through the exercise of the keys of the kingdom—preaching of the gospel and church discipline—the kingdom of heaven is opened to believers and closed to unbelievers (Matt. 16:19; John 20:21-23). Also, the office of elder is an extension of Christ’s prophetic office. The very authority of Christ as prophet is being exercised whenever an elder preaches and teaches the law and gospel, either in the pulpit or the classroom.

To be clear, elders—as well as Paul and Titus—do not serve under their own appointment and authority. Christ’s kingly authority does not reside in the man as a believer but rather as an office bearer. Moreover, church members may be gifted and competent but they exercise no ministerial authority in the church because they have not been appointed (ordained) to office in the church. Failing to submit to the designated authority of the church officers is in reality a failure to submit to the Kingly rule of Christ. It is a breaking of the 5th Commandment, “Honor your father and your mother.” Q. 104 of the Heidelberg Catechism is very helpful here. It asks, “What does God require in the fifth commandment?” Here’s the answer:

That I show all honour, love, and faithfulness to my father and mother and to all those in authority over me, submit myself with due obedience to their good instruction and discipline, and also have patience with their weaknesses and shortcomings, since it is God's will to govern us by their hand.

The idols of American individualism and relativism have certainly had a significant hostile influence on believers and the church in regard to this issue. We will revisit this issue of authority in greater detail when we come to 2:15. For now, we simply point out that Paul understood that such authority is necessary to properly order a church. Elders are the ones appointed by God to order and oversee the church. They are called by God to exercise spiritual oversight and discipline among God’s people

and this cannot be carried without the necessary authority. Ministerial/spiritual authority is expressed whenever an elder proclaims the gospel, pronounces pardon, enacts church discipline, rebukes and silences false teachers, exhorts in sound doctrine, etc...

This authority is not to be exercised under compulsion, for shameful gain (cf. Titus 1:11) or in a domineering fashion. Rather, such authority is to be carried out by example as those who eagerly serve out of submission to Christ's authority (Kingly rule) and service (recipients of divine service/grace, cf. 1 Pet. 5:2-3). Church offices are treated as "special" but not "superior." Paul received his authority as an Apostle from Jesus Christ. Yet, he viewed this authority not as a means of dominating people, gaining prominence or receiving financial gain for himself. Rather, Paul reminds Titus to exercise this divinely delegated authority as a means to ground and grow believers in the gospel (Titus 1:1) for God's glory and the gospel's reputation in the world (2:8, 10).

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