

An Authoritative Model of Gospel-Driven Ministry

Part 2

Text: Titus 1:1-4

October 7, 2012

INTRODUCTION:

As Paul begins this letter, there is no doubt as to what is paramount in his mind: the gospel, which accords with godliness (1:1e). The gospel is the driving force behind Titus (of all the Pastoral Letters) and godliness is the goal. To emphasize the centrality of the gospel and its fruit, Paul begins this letter by setting forth a detailed description of his apostleship.

The reason he does so is to assist Titus in fulfilling his special assignment in Crete. Paul knew that Titus needed the authority to properly order the churches in Crete, particularly when there were the competing voices of 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? How did they know who to follow? What was to characterize Titus' ministry and subsequently the elder he would appoint? In answer to these questions, 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.

First, we saw last week:

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

Paul begins his greeting with two self-designations: servant of God and Apostle of Jesus Christ. These two self-designations characterize the *nature* of his apostleship: submission and authority. A gospel-driven ministry will be wholly submitted (out of gratitude!) to the service of the gospel. The leadership willingly and cheerfully submits to God in order to be used by God to extend and advance His gospel among men. Second, a Gospel-driven ministry is characterized by service. This service does not imply a lack of authority. Rather, it is carried out through the appointed leadership of the church, through which Christ rules His church as King (1:5-9; 2:15). This authority is to be exercised not in a domineering fashion or for shameful gain (1:11) but rather as a means to ground and grow believers in the gospel (1:1) for God's glory and the gospel's reputation in the world (2:8, 10). This brings us to the second characteristic of a gospel-driven ministry.

LESSON:

II. A GOSPEL-DRIVEN MINISTRY IS DEVOTED TO THE GOAL OF THE GOSPEL. 1:1C-3A

Paul writes, “¹ Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, ² for the sake of the hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began ³ and at the proper time manifested in His word...”

With these theologically loaded words, Paul discloses for us the *goal* of his apostleship. The goal of Paul’s apostleship is to be the goal of Titus’s mission in Crete, which is then to be the motivating concern and goal of the elders whom Titus will appoint to oversee the church upon his departure (1:9-13).

It is vital to note how Paul reveals that the goal(s) of the gospel determines the goal(s) of his apostolic mission. Michael Horton writes, “The gospel not only determines the message, but also defines the ministry and mission of the church...The message determines the mission,” (*People and Place*, p. 249).

So what then is the goal(s) of the gospel? What is the goal(s) of a gospel-driven ministry? In vv. 1-3, Paul gives four goals of the gospel and thus a gospel-driven ministry: *Faith, Knowledge, Godliness, Hope*.

A. FAITH, 1:1C

The first goal of a gospel-driven ministry is “for the sake of,” (ESV) or “to further the faith of God’s elect,” (RSV). The goal of Paul’s apostleship was for the purpose of bringing God’s elect to faith in Christ. This raises a vital question: *What is faith?*

First, we need to understand that faith is a gift. In Romans 4:4-5, Paul writes, “⁴ Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. ⁵ And *to the one who does not work but believes* in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness...” (emphasis mine). Paul maintains that if salvation were based on works, then God would be paying what he owed a person, just as an employer gives a worker wages for his work. But, Paul says a right standing with God (justification) doesn’t come to those who work for God. Rather, it comes, just like it did with Abraham, who believed in rather than worked for God’s promise.

The narrative account of Abraham in Genesis highlights God’s grace and the gift of faith (see Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, pp. 122-123). It shows that God was not responding to Abraham because of his goodness. On the contrary, Genesis is brutally honest in portraying Abraham’s sin and failures. For example, on two separate occasions, Abraham is willing to lie about his wife in order to preserve his own life (Gen. 12:11-20; 20:1-18). By putting his marriage at risk, Abraham demonstrates his lack of faith in God’s promise. Further, he actually works to undermine God’ promise to Sarah that she would be the mother of the promised descendants (see the account of Hagar, Gen. 16)! Clearly, the narrative reveals that Abraham didn’t earn or deserve anything from God. His faith was weak and imperfect and at times bordered on disbelief (Gen. 15:2-3)!

Such sin and weakness highlights the grace and faithfulness of God in keeping His promises. The *key* to the story of Abraham is not the strength or perfection of his faith but the strength and perfection and faithfulness of the God he is trusting in. Since Abraham deserves nothing of what God has promised, clearly faith must be seen as a pure gift. This is why Paul says in Romans 4:5, “to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly (i.e., Abraham-J.F.), his faith is counted as righteousness...” (Rom. 4:5).

This raises another important question about faith. Since faith is a gift, which alone makes us share in Christ and all His benefits, *where does this faith come from?* The answer is that faith comes from the Holy Spirit, who works it in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel (see Q. 65, *Heidelberg Catechism*). This is why Paul says in Titus 1:3 that he was committed to preaching the gospel. In Romans 10:17, Paul writes, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” Peter, in 1 Peter 1:23-25, describes the gospel as the seed of regeneration. Peter writes, “²³ since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; ²⁴ for “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, ²⁵ but the word of the Lord remains forever.” *And this word is the good news that was preached to you*” (emphasis mine). The living and abiding word of God Peter has in mind is a specific word—the good news that was preached to you! Not all of God’s words bring about faith (i.e., the law).

The Holy Spirit breathes faith and life into us by the preaching of the gospel. John Calvin “Without the work of the Spirit, the word would fall on deaf ears, but the Spirit opens deaf ears through the external word” (see Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith*, p. 759). The methods of the gospel—preaching—is no accident. The method of preaching is consistent with the message. In fact it is the message (gospel) that determines the churches methods! Preaching puts us all on the receiving end rather than the working end because faith comes through hearing. So, then the preaching of the gospel not only describes salvation but also conveys it as the Holy Spirit uses it to drive us out of ourselves and grant us faith, which receives and rests in Christ alone (see Horton, p. 759). This believing response is impossible without the miraculous and gracious work of the Holy Spirit.

This raises a third vital question about faith. *What is involved in this believing response* (Note: In this context “faith” (πίστις) refers to “a believing response” rather than a set of beliefs (cf. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, p. 379)? The Reformers rightly taught that saving faith is comprised of three essential elements:

1. KNOWLEDGE—*Notitia*; content of faith; Creed
2. INTELLECTUAL ASCENT—*Assensus*; assurance/conviction that the content of faith is true
3. TRUST—*Fiducia*; a positive disposition of one’s soul toward the truth—Christ.

Each element is necessary to constitute a genuine believing response (i.e., saving faith). James, in James 2:19, hits on this when he writes, “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!” James’ point is that demons have knowledge. They recognize and are aware of the fact that there is one true God (cf. Deut. 6:4; Mk. 12:29). Demons even recognize the true identity of Jesus as the Son of God, cf. Lk. 4:41). They have orthodox beliefs! Furthermore, demons intellectually assent to monotheism and Jesus’ identity. So, demons have both knowledge and intellectual assent. But, they do not possess saving faith because they do not have trust (i.e., a positive disposition toward Christ).

Demons place no trust in Christ but rather hate, resist and oppose Christ. The disposition of their whole being toward Christ is entirely negative. There is no affection for Christ. Satan and his demons are clearly aware of who Christ is—the Son of God full of grace and truth—and they detest Him. But, the faith that Paul labors to bring forth in God’s elect is far different.

True saving faith, which is produced by the Holy Spirit, leads a person to receive and rest in Christ alone. True faith awakens a dead heart to the excellency and desirableness of Christ. In his work, *Communion with God*, John Owen characterizes genuine saving faith as awakening to the loveliness and desirableness of Christ. He writes,

...He is all wholly to be desired, to be beloved;”

Lovely in his person, — in the glorious all-sufficiency of his Deity, gracious purity and holiness of his humanity, authority and majesty, love and power.

Lovely in his birth and incarnation; when he was rich, for our sakes becoming poor, — taking part of flesh and blood, because we partook of the same; being made of a woman, that for us he might be made under the law, even for our sakes.

Lovely in the whole course of his life, and the more than angelical holiness and obedience which, in the depth of poverty and persecution, he exercised therein; — doing good, receiving evil; blessing, and being cursed, reviled, reproached, all his days.

Lovely in his death; yea, therein most lovely to sinners; — never more glorious and desirable than when he came broken, dead, from the cross. Then had he carried all our sins into a land of forgetfulness; then had he made peace and reconciliation for us; then had he procured life and immortality for us.

Lovely in his whole employment, in his great undertaking, — in his life, death, resurrection, ascension; being a mediator between God and us, to recover the

glory of God's justice, and to save our souls, — to bring us to an enjoyment of God, who were set at such an infinite distance from him by sin.

Lovely in the glory and majesty wherewith he is crowned. Now he is set down at the right hand of the Majesty on high; where, though he be terrible to his enemies, yet he is full of mercy, love, and compassion, towards his beloved ones.

Lovely in all those supplies of grace and consolations, in all the dispensations of his Holy Spirit, whereof his saints are made partakers.

Lovely in all the tender care, power, and wisdom, which he exercises in the protection, safe-guarding, and delivery of his church and people, in the midst of all the oppositions and persecutions whereunto they are exposed.

Lovely in all his ordinances, and the whole of that spiritually glorious worship which he hath appointed to his people, whereby they draw nigh and have communion with him and his Father.

Lovely and glorious in the vengeance he taketh, and will finally execute, upon the stubborn enemies of himself and his people.

Lovely in the pardon he hath purchased and doth dispense, — in the reconciliation he hath established, — in the grace he communicates, — in the consolations he doth administer, — in the peace and joy he gives his saints, — in his assured preservation of them unto glory.

What shall I say? There is no end of his excellencies and desirableness; — 'He is altogether lovely. This is our beloved, and this is our friend, O daughters of Jerusalem,' (*The Works of John Owen*, vol. 2, pp. 77-78).

The gospel reveals to us that there is no end to the excellencies and desirableness of Christ because His riches are unsearchable (Eph. 3:8) and His love is immeasurable (Eph. 3:18-19). This is the faith that Paul labors to bring forth in God's elect. It is a faith that issues in genuine conversion—receiving and resting in Christ and His perfect merits as He is freely given to us in the gospel. This faith is a sure knowledge, which accepts as true everything God has revealed to us in His gospel concerning the person and work of Christ. It is a faith that is a firm confidence that believes not only to others, but also to me, God has granted forgiveness of sins, everlasting righteousness, and salvation, out of mere grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits (cf. Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 21).

And so to bring about this believing response, Paul was wholly submitted to the service of the gospel. He was committed to proclaiming the gospel (Titus 1:3b-c) since faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of Christ (cf. Rom. 10:17; Titus 1:3).

REFLECTION:

Since genuine saving faith is the goal of the gospel, let me ask you a few questions:

Do you realize that, because of your sin, your situation before God is desperate? Do you know that your only hope of surviving God's perfect judgment is by trusting in the fact that God the Father sent His only Son to live a perfect life, die on the cross and rise from the dead and ascend into heaven for you? Jesus now offers you this gift of salvation if you will accept this gift with a believing heart.

Maybe today you are thinking, "But I am just too bad. I have really blown it. Christ would never receive me." Listen to these words of wisdom from Walter Marshall,

Christ wants you to believe in him who justifies the ungodly; He does not require you to be godly before you believe (Romans 4:5). Jesus came as a Physician for the sick. He does not expect them to recover their health before they come to Him (Matthew 9:12). The vilest sinners are properly qualified and prepared for the gospel's design, which is to show forth the exceeding riches of grace when God pardons their sins and saves them freely (Ephesians 2:5-7)...Jesus loved you in your most disgusting, sinful corruption, and He died for you. He will receive you when come to Him for the salvation that he has purchased for you. Jesus has given full satisfaction to the justice of God for sinners, so that they might have salvation, righteousness, and holiness through fellowship with Him by faith" (*The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*, p. 103).

Further, we need to add that this invitation to believe doesn't apply only to unbelievers but also to believers. In 2 Corinthians 5:20, Paul writes, "We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." We would do well to remember that Paul directs these words of exhortation to believers! Too often we forget that the gospel is as much for believers as it is for unbelievers. Thus, we think that such a gospel appeal to be reconciled to God is only aimed at unbelievers. But Paul is pleading with wayward Christians! Remember this: Jesus died for the sins of Christians too!

Paul says that Jesus died for believers so that "that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (cf. 2 Cor. 5:15). Godliness, Paul says, is the true goal of the gospel! Paul directs this exhortation to the Corinthian believers who were living for themselves—not walking in a worthy manner of the gospel (cf. Phil. 1:27). Instead of being marked by visible godliness they were marked by arrogance, license, sexual impurity, selfishness, etc... And so it is to these wayward believers that Paul is urging to be reconciled to God! This is the good news of the gospel, namely that Christ died for the sins of Christians too! Just like unbelievers, believer can aksi come to Christ and find forgiveness, cleansing and renewal.

Coming to receive and rest in Christ alone is the great change that takes through the gospel and by the Holy Spirit. Such genuine faith is the goal of the gospel and a gospel-driven ministry.

This brings us to the Lord's Supper, which has everything to do with faith. If your faith is weak and wavering this morning, then this sacrament is for you! Through the gospel, the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts and He strengthens our faith by the use of the sacraments (see Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 65). How does the Holy Spirit use the Lord's Supper to strengthen our faith? The Heidelberg Catechism in Q. 75 asks, "How does the Lord's Supper signify and seal to you that you share in Christ's one sacrifice on the cross and in all His gifts?"

Here's the answer,

In this way: Christ has commanded me and all believers to eat of this broken bread and drink of this cup in remembrance of Him. With this command He gave these promises: First, as surely as I see with my eyes the bread of the Lord broken for me and the cup given to me, so surely was His body offered for me and His blood poured out for me on the cross. Second, as surely as I receive from the hand of the minister and taste with my mouth the bread and the cup of the Lord as sure signs of Christ's body and blood, so surely does He Himself nourish and refresh my soul to everlasting life with His crucified body and shed blood.

We need this kind of assurance because God's presence is not always a joyful thing. God present in law, apart from the gospel, is not good news but really bad news, particularly when we are acutely aware of our sin and failures. So, we regularly need the assurance that God comes to us in peace. Christ instituted this sacrament to assure our troubled hearts that He—the King—comes to us in peace! Michael Horton writes, "Every time the gospel is preached and the sacraments are attached as signs and seals, we receive our own answer to Abram's query, "How can I know that this will happen," (*The Christian Faith*, p. 785). In this sacrament Christ is present by the Holy Spirit, truly giving Himself to us not in judgment but salvation (see Horton, p. 785). Such assurance is what strengthens our faith.

This Supper is for weary Christians (not professing unrepentant Christians) who struggle and groan over their sin and recognize their need to be reconciled afresh to God and one another. The chief benefit of the Lord's Supper is the Holy Spirit's granting us assurance of our salvation. The Lord's Supper is designed to assure us that Christ is gracious to us and that all the promises of the gospel are "Yes and amen in Him" (2 Cor. 1:20a). In preaching, we hear the promises of the gospel announced to us. And in the Lord's Supper, we see the promises of the gospel assured to us. So, as we prepare for the Lord's Supper, let us remember that in corporate worship God in Christ by the Spirit is present to serve us at His table—the Divine Service. First, we gather together to receive. So, as we come to the Lord's

Table today, let us remember that we all come as recipients sitting around Christ's table to be served by the faithful Servant who acts wisely (cf. Isa. 52:13).

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