

**AN AUTHORITATIVE MODEL OF GOSPEL-DRIVEN MINISTRY**  
**PART 3**

TEXT: TITUS 1:1-4

October 14, 2012

**INTRODUCTION:**

In Titus 1:1-4, we have been studying Paul's detailed description of his apostleship. He begins by setting forth his apostleship as an authoritative model of gospel-driven ministry to assist Titus in setting the churches in order. He gives 4 characteristics of a gospel-driven ministry. First, Paul teaches Titus (and thus us!) that a:

- I. A gospel-driven ministry is devoted to the service of the gospel. 1:1a-b
- 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 in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began 3 and at the proper time manifested in His word..."

"These are extraordinarily outstanding words, and they are full of doctrine," writes Martin Luther. "Here one could discuss the sum total of the Christian life," (*Luther's Works*, vol. 29, p. 6). With these theologically loaded words, Paul discloses for us the goal of his apostleship (i.e., devotion to the goal of the gospel).

The goal of Paul's apostleship is to be the goal of Titus's mission in Crete. It is also to be the motivating concern and goal of the elders whom Titus will appoint to oversee the churches upon his departure (1:9-13). So what then is the goal(s) of the gospel? What is the goal(s) of a gospel-driven ministry? Paul gives four goals: Faith, Knowledge, Godliness, Hope.

A. Faith, 1:1c

First, the 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. In light of this goal, we asked and answered three questions last time.

First, we asked, what is faith? To begin with, faith is a gift. God doesn't save us *because* of our faith in Christ. There isn't anything in us as fallen creatures that causes or moves God to save us. If this were the case, then faith would not be a gift but rather function as some kind of cause/work of salvation. But, the Scriptures speak of salvation as by grace *through* faith not *because* of faith (cf. Eph. 2:8-9).

Faith is not the cause of our salvation but rather the gift through which we receive and rest in Christ and all of His benefits. We learned this from the story of Abraham, which Paul refers to in Romans 4. Abraham highlights God's grace and the gift of faith. 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. The emphasis of faith is on the saving object grasped—Christ!—not on our hand in grasping, which often lets go every time we sin! Thus, faith is a gift. It is not a work.

Second, "Since faith is a gift, where does it come from? How do we get it?" Here's the answer: The Holy Spirit grants faith through the proclamation of the gospel.

Third, we asked, "What constitutes such saving faith?" We learned that genuine faith consists of three elements: knowledge (creed); intellectual assent to this knowledge (creed); trust (a positive disposition toward Christ). All three elements are present in genuine saving faith. Faith is a self-emptying grace that leads a person to renounce all confidence in his or her foolish, imagined virtue and receive and rest in Christ alone for salvation. In Philippians 3:9, Paul writes, "...be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith." The only legitimate object of faith is Christ in His life, death, burial and resurrection. It is Christ alone, nothing added. Rod Rosenblatt, a Lutheran theologian and apologist, defines faith as "a giving up on our supposed virtues as if they were going to count in the end in the face of a holy God and His holy law...It is a giving up on any merit plan...It is a sinner being turned from obsession with self to a particular other self outside of me. The Self who is conceived by the Holy Spirit born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, buried [and raised!]" (lecture titled, "Law and Gospel in the Christian Life").

This brings us to one final question about faith, which Paul highlights in 1:1: "Who hears the gospel and responds with faith in Christ?" In 2 Thessalonian 3:2, Paul reminds the Thessalonian believers, "...For not all have faith," (2 Thess. 3:2). So then, who hears and responds with faith? Paul says those who hear and respond with faith are "God's elect."

This designation raises all sorts of questions and issues: What is election? Why does Paul use this designation in his opening greeting? How does election relate to faith, the gospel and a gospel-driven ministry? And, what does it benefit us to know that God has chosen a people for Himself? We will examine each of these questions in order.

First, "What is election?" To begin with, the word, "elect" (ἐκλεκτός) "pertains to being selected, chosen; generally of those whom God has chosen from the generality of mankind and drawn to Himself," (*BDAG*, p. 306). Paul, clearly states, that those whom God has chosen are the ones who have come to faith through his apostolic ministry.

The truth of election runs all throughout Paul's letters and the NT (cf. Rom. 8:29-30, 33; 9:15, 18; 16:13; 1 Cor. 2:7; Gal. 1:15-16; 4:9; Eph. 1:4-5; Col. 3:12; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 1:1, 2; see also 1 Pet. 1:1-2; 2:9; Rev. 21:27; for Jesus see: Matt. 24:14, 22, 31; Lk. 18:7; Jn. 10:27; 15:16).

In John 15:16, Jesus speaking to His disciples emphasizes that the ultimate factor in their choosing to follow Him was His choice, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you..." In Galatians 1:15, Paul emphasizes God's election as the ultimate factor in his being called and set apart as an Apostle, "But when He who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by His grace..." Similarly, in Galatians 4:9, Paul emphasizes God's election as the ultimate factor in the Galatians coming to know God, "But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God..." Just like Paul in Galatians 1:15, God visited the Galatians mercy when He was the farthest possible removed from their thinking! Like Paul, their saving knowledge of God was not due to their work or knowledge (minds, quite the contrary!) but rather the gracious election of God. God first knows all who know Him!

In Romans 8:33, Paul asks, "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies" (cf. Rom. 16:13). In Colossians 3:12, Paul calls the Colossian Christians, "...God's chosen ones..." In 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14, Paul writes to the Thessalonian believers,

<sup>13</sup> But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. <sup>14</sup> To this He called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ," (Note: Notice how Paul connects election in v. 14 to the proclamation of the gospel in v. 14. Election, as we will come to see, doesn't dismiss the preaching of the gospel it ensures its success!) .

In Ephesians 1:4-6, Paul writes that out of the fallen mass of humanity, God the Father, "<sup>4</sup> ...chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love <sup>5</sup> He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, <sup>6</sup> to the praise of His glorious grace..." Nothing magnifies the mercy, grace and love of God more than His election of rebellious sinners. Graeme Goldsworthy writes, "Whenever God acts for the good of the people He is acting against what they deserve as rebellious sinners, and that action is grace. Election means that God chooses some and not others as objects of His grace," (*According to Plan*, p. 122).

Before going further, we need to pause a moment and understand that the doctrine of election is intended to be of immeasurable benefit to us. Yet, too often it isn't because it is taught apart from a covenantal framework and a Trinitarian, Christ-centered, gospel-centered context. Regrettably, this doctrine is often taught in an abstract way that only ends in theoretical debates and endless speculation on God's

hidden counsels. But we are not to investigate and concern ourselves with God's hidden decrees. As Moses renews the Mosaic Covenant with the people of Israel in Moab, he says to them, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law," (Deut. 29:29). When we come to this doctrine, we would do well to follow John Calvin's advice when he writes,

The predestination of God is indeed a labyrinth from which the mind of man can by no means extricate itself." The Holy Spirit has taught us nothing but what it behooves us to know, the knowledge of this [predestination-J.F.] would no doubt be useful, provided it be confined to the word of God. Let this then be our sacred rule, to seek to know nothing concerning it, except what Scripture teaches us: when the Lord closes His holy mouth, let us also stop the way, that we may not go farther," (*Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. xix, pp. 353-354).

We must dismiss unwise curiosity, all rash discussions, useless questions and contentious debates concerning the secret things of God. Instead, we must approach election the way the Scriptures do (i.e., in a covenantal, Trinitarian context, which finds our election in Christ as He is freely offered to all people in the gospel). Michael Horton cautions, "It is dangerous to talk about the glory and sovereignty of God unless the God we have in mind is the Trinity, to whom we have access only in the Son as He is revealed in the gospel," (see article, "The God-Centered Gospel").

The Scriptures repeatedly locate the origin of the believer's salvation in the Triune God's eternal redemptive plan (cf. Ps. 40:6-8; 110; Isaiah 53; Zech. 6:12-13; Jn. 4:34; 5:36, 43; 6:37-40; 10:18; 17:1-26; Eph. 1:3-14; Rom. 5:12-19). This eternal plan is called the covenant of redemption, which was made in eternity between the persons of the Trinity. To summarize, the Scriptures reveal how the Father gave the Son a people and requires of the Son the conditions for His people's redemption. The Son willingly agrees to fulfill these conditions by signing His death warrant, gladly assuming the office of Mediator between God and man. The Holy Spirit willingly applies the work of the Son to God's elect (see Horton, "The God-Centered Gospel"; Michael Brown, *Sacred Bond*, pp. 24-25).

In Ephesians 1:3-14, Paul's spontaneous outburst of praise emphasizes that believers are chosen in Christ by the Father before the creation of the world, redeemed by Christ and sealed by the Holy Spirit in history, who is the guarantee of the future consummation of their salvation. Salvation from beginning to end is by the work of the Father, in the Son, through the Holy Spirit all to the praise of His glory. Michael Horton makes this vital observation concerning the covenant of redemption, "The covenant of redemption underscores not only God's sovereignty and freedom in electing grace, but the Trinitarian and, specifically, Christ-centered character of that divine purpose. It all takes place "in Christ"; hence, the emphasis in covenant theology on the theme of "Christ the Mediator." And yet, it's not just Christ-centered but Trinity-centered," ("The God-Centered Gospel").

Why is it important for us to understand election in this way? First, it helps us to avoid needless theoretical debates and endless speculation on God's hidden counsels. The covenant of redemption reveals that the hidden God is no different from the revealed God in Jesus Christ (see Horton, *The Christian Faith*, p. 322). Second, the covenant of redemption helps to clear up a popular, misguided notion, which depicts God the Father as an unloving, cold, arbitrary, unjust tyrant who plays "duck, duck damn," with His creation.

To be sure, God is never unfair. He is never unjust! Paul anticipated this objection in Romans 9 (cf. 9:19ff). God's election reminds us that some receive justice and some mercy but no one receives injustice because, due to man's fall into sin, "God is not obligated to be merciful to any or to all alike...(see Romans 9:14-15)," (cf. R.C. Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*, p. 162).

The Scriptures locate unbelief in the total inability of sinners to save themselves. The Scriptures teach that all humans are conceived in sin (Ps. 51:5). All humans come into this world spiritually dead in relation to God (Eph. 2:1-3). Therefore, none are able to prepare themselves for grace because their wills are in total bondage to sin. In response to the papal bull, *Exsurge Domine*, issued by Pope Leo X on June 15, 1520, Martin Luther writes, "... St. Augustine changes the term, 'free will,' in his work Against Julian, II, and calls it 'a will in bondage,'" (*Luther's Works*, vol. 32, p. 92). No man possesses the ability to bring about his own freedom from the bondage of the will. Man's will, which is bound in sin, can only choose according its nature. Such bondage is hardly freedom! Again, Luther writes,

Since the fall of Adam, or after actual sin, free will exists only in name, and when it does what it can it commits sin...St. Paul says in Rom. 14 [:23], 'Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.' Where, then, is this freedom, if of its own power it cannot do anything but sin.' What do you say now, pope? Is it freedom to be without power to do anything but evil? You might as well say that a lame man walks straight, though he can only limp and never walk straight..." (Ibid, p. 92).

As long as man's nature is in bondage to sin and unbelief, he or she is unable to believe—indeed unwilling to believe (Rom. 8:7-8). In John 6:44, 64-65, Jesus tells us why some didn't believe, "<sup>44</sup> No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him... <sup>64</sup> But there are some of you who do not believe." (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) <sup>65</sup> And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."

God's law exists to show man his moral inability to perfectly obey the law (cf. Lk. 10:25-28). Moreover, man's inability to repay his debt (due to his fall into sin for which he alone is responsible not God, cf. Jam. 1:13) to God does not take away his accountability to do so. Man's total bondage in sin is why the Scriptures locate faith

in the unconditional election of the triune God alone. If left to oneself, no man would choose to receive and rest in Christ alone. And so the question is not, “Why did God choose some?,” but, “Why did God choose any?!!!” “Why would God choose to extend grace to me, who has committed cosmic rebellion against an infinitely just and holy God?!!!”

A third reason it is important to understand election in a covenantal framework is because it reveals to us the immeasurable love of God (cf. Eph. 3:17-19). The covenant of redemption reveals how the plan of salvation originated in the loving heart of the Father who “so loved the world, that He gave His only Son” (John 3:16). In 1 John 4:9-10, John writes, “<sup>9</sup> In this the love of God [the Father-J.F.] was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him. <sup>10</sup> In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (cf. v. 14). It is because of the kindness, mercy, grace and love of God the Father that He sent His Son to save us from our bondage to sin and make us into new creations.

As for the Son, He wasn’t a passive victim or reluctant participant. The Scriptures reveal that Jesus willingly and gladly laid down His life for His people out of a love relationship with His Father. In John 10:17-18, Christ states, “<sup>17</sup> For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. <sup>18</sup> No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father,” (Jn. 10:17-18). In John 6:38-39, Jesus says, “<sup>38</sup> I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. <sup>39</sup> And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that He has given me, but raise it up on the last day,” (cf. Jn. 10:29; 17:2, 6–10).

As for the Holy Spirit, His love for the Father and Son is expressed in applying the work of the Son to God’s elect. In Ephesians 1:11-13, Paul reveals that all who are chosen by the Father (1:4-5) and redeemed by the Son (1:7) are immediately “sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory.”

Moreover, the covenant of redemption reveals that God is moved to share His intra-Trinitarian love with His people. In Ephesians 1:18, Paul calls those whom the Father gave to Jesus, “God’s glorious inheritance.” Remarkably, Paul prays that believers will come to know that they are God’s glorious inheritance! This reveals how much our triune God loves His chosen people. God’s elect are the Son’s love gift back to the Father, who gave them to the Son to begin with (cf. Christ’s High Priestly prayer in John 17).

This then is how we are to approach and understand the doctrine of election. We are to locate our election in a covenantal, Trinitarian, Christ-centered, gospel-centered, context (i.e., the covenant of redemption). Salvation is Trinitarian from beginning to end. It is wisely and graciously planned in eternity past and executed in human

history in Christ and applied by the Holy Spirit to the praise of God's glory and our eternal joy.

Now, someone may ask, "How do we know who is elect?" Paul teaches Titus that that all who are elect respond to the gospel in faith. John Calvin writes, "...where faith is, God has there already given an evidence of His election..." (*Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. xix, p. 401). Thus, our election is to be located in Christ, who is freely offered to us in the gospel.

This leads us to a second question about faith, namely, "Why does Paul speak of 'God's elect' in his opening greeting?" Paul's use of this word—ἐκλεκτός—is significant in view of the problem of the "circumcision party," (cf. 1:10; i.e., false Jewish teachers who had infiltrated the churches of Crete with a false gospel). The phrase "elect of God" is a common description of Israel, which refers to God's chosen people in the OT. For example, Psalm 105:6, 43 says, "<sup>5</sup> O offspring of Israel His servant, children of Jacob, His chosen ones..."<sup>43</sup> So He brought His people out with joy, His chosen ones with singing," (cf. 1 Chr. 16:13; see also Isa. 43:20; 45:4; 65:9, 15, 22; Note: In Deuteronomy 7:7-8, the Lord reminds Israel that His election was not based on her own greatness or goodness but on the greatness of His love and faithfulness to His promise—Abrahamic Covenant, "<sup>7</sup> It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, <sup>8</sup> but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers..." ).

In continuation with God's chosen people in the OT, Paul applies this designation to NT believers, who are also God's chosen people (cf. Acts 13:46-47; see also Matt. 22:14; 24:22, 24, 31; Mk. 3:20, 22, 27; Lk. 18:7; Rom. 8:33; 16:13; Col. 3:12; 1 Pet. 1:1; 2:9; 2 John 1; Rev. 17:14). Gordon Fee writes, "The designation God's elect (cf. Rom. 8:33; Col. 3:12; 2 Tim. 2:10) is another typical instance of Paul's referring to believers as the people of God by using OT language... In Paul's view those who have put their trust...in Christ are therefore the true continuation of the ancient people of God. Such a designation is surely intended for the ears of those who are in churches where the errors have a decidedly Jewish cast to them (1:10, 14; 3:8-9)," (*1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, p. 168).

In Paul's view the true people of God are those who receive and rest in Christ alone in contrast to the "circumcision party" (i.e., those who trust in their physical descent from Abraham and circumcision in the flesh, cf. Jn. 8:37ff.). Renouncing one's claim to be God's elect on the grounds of birth and circumcision was a great stumbling to the Jew of Paul's day! Further, claiming to be God's elect through trusting in a crucified Messiah was nearly unthinkable (Note: Not to mention that to pagan Gentiles, it was utter nonsense).

Thus, from the outset of his letter, Paul is already anticipating Titus's responsibility to rebuke and silence the false Jewish teachers (cf. 1:10-16). Paul is establishing the fact that the gospel he preaches agrees with the faith of Abraham! By using this

phrase, Calvin writes that Paul “declares that he teaches no doctrine which does not agree with the faith of Abraham and of all the fathers. So, then, if any person in the present day wishes to be accounted a successor of Paul, he must prove that he is the minister of the same doctrine.” (*Calvin’s Commentaries*, vol. 21, p. 281). Even though the false teachers claimed to teach in the name of God, Paul is showing that they are actually illegitimate. Not all who are physically descended from Abraham or have been circumcised belong to God’s people (cf. Gal. 3:7-14; 5:2-6; 6:15). Abraham was not a circumcised Israelite but rather a pagan Gentile, sovereignly chosen by God from among the mass of fallen humanity and justified by grace through faith alone (Rom. 4:9-11).

A gospel-driven ministry operates in service of this gospel (i.e., the same gospel that God preached to Abraham—in the form of promise—and in which Abraham believed and was justified, cf. Jn. 8:56; Gal. 3:8; Titus 3:4-7). It is by trusting in the promise of the gospel not by law keeping (circumcision) or physical descent that a Jew or Gentile becomes a son of Abraham, who is the father of believers not doers. There has been and always will be one gospel and one chosen people of God who come to salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone. These alone are those whom God has chosen.

The first goal then of Paul’s apostleship (i.e., his gospel-driven ministry) was to proclaim the gospel in order to bring God’s chosen people—Jew and Gentile—to saving faith in Christ alone. This goal was to be Titus’ goal as well as the elders whom Titus was to appoint. As we consider this first goal of Paul’s apostleship, there are two important lessons we need to reflect on.

#### **REFLECTION:**

1. GOD’S GOSPEL CREATES A PASSION TO SEE PEOPLE TRUST IN CHRIST.

The goal of Paul’s apostleship was to see people come to receive and rest in Christ alone. The gospel creates this passion. Paul was passionately convinced of the truth of the gospel. The risen Christ had a profound effect upon him. Michael Green, describing Paul’s conversion, writes,

This encounter with Christ touched Paul at every level of his being. His mind was informed and illuminated: Jesus was not, as he had thought, accursed, but was the Lord. His conscience was reached: he faced up to the fact that he had been kicking against the pricks. His emotions were stirred as he saw the implications of his rebellion against Christ. But this was a mere incidental on the way to his will, Christ’s real goal. His will was bent in trusting surrender to Jesus who had called him, and who was from henceforth to be Lord of his life. And in consequence his life was transformed: in direction, immediately, and in achievement as time went on. His supreme aim henceforth was to live for his Redeemer: ‘I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those at Damascus then at



Jerusalem...that they should repent and turn to God' (Acts 26:19),  
(*Evangelism in the Early Church*, p. 194).

This good news drove Paul to tell others with the goal of their coming to trust in Christ and incorporation into His church. As Graeme Goldsworthy writes, "...evangelism is recognized as a chief implication of the gospel being the gospel," (*Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, p. 131). A passion to see people come to faith in Christ originates from a gospel-driven, gospel-drenched heart (i.e., the gospel being the gospel in our hearts).

This passion to see people come to faith in Christ also characterized the early church. Again, Michael Green writes,

One of the most notable impressions the literature of the first and second century made upon me as I wrote this book was the sheer passion of these early Christians. They were passionately convinced of the truth of the gospel. They were persuaded that men and women were lost without it. They shared in God's own love, poured out on a needy world. They paid heed to Christ's Great Commission. They sought to interpenetrate society with the gospel which had so profound an effect upon them," (pp. xiii-xiv).

Like Paul, we must first be passionately convinced of the truth of the gospel if we are to be driven to tell it to others. If we are not telling others about the gospel we need a renewed filling of the gospel.

Now, we must make one important caveat. Evangelism isn't converting people but rather telling people about the good news of Jesus Christ, with the prayerful goal of seeing them come to trust Christ. Conversion is God's work. Evangelism—proclaiming the gospel clearly and faithfully—is our work. Conversion is not trying to improve one's life or working on overcoming bad habits or attempts at self-justification to hide our guilt before God. Rather, conversion is what Paul shows us here in Titus 1:1c; bringing God's elect to faith in Christ. The goal of a gospel-driven ministry is to faithfully proclaim the gospel in order to see God's people come to receive and rest in Christ alone for salvation and incorporation into the church.

The second lesson we learn is this:

## 2. GOD'S ELECTION GUARANTEES THE SUCCESS OF A GOSPEL-DRIVEN MINISTRY.

This second lesson answers the questions, "How does election relate to faith, the gospel and a gospel-driven ministry? And, what does it benefit us to know that God has chosen a people for Himself?"

A large Jewish population lived on the island of Crete. Some of them were false teachers, ("the circumcision party" 1:10) who were actively opposing Paul and Titus's gospel work. The gospel was an affront to Judaism. The problem of the Law,

circumcision and a crucified Messiah raised enormous barriers to evangelism among the Jews. The Jews were the hardest people in the world to convince that Jesus was the Messiah—that God had come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth (see Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, p. xi, pp. 32ff). Proclaiming Jesus as the crucified Christ (Messiah) was particularly offensive to the Jews of Paul’s day. A crucified Messiah was simply unthinkable. Michael Green writes, “Worse still, this worship of a crucified Messiah was distinctly blasphemous. The Old Testament made it perfectly plain that anyone hanged on a stake was resting under the curse of God. How could God’s Chosen One possibly have been exposed in the place of cursing? We know this constituted an almost insuperable problem to the Jew,” (*Evangelism in the Early Church*, p. 34).

Along side the strong Jewish opposition, was the infamous ungodly culture of Crete, which also presented a big obstacle to the proclamation of the gospel and genuine conversion. Seeking to properly order a church around the gospel and its fruit (godliness) in such a hostile environment is difficult—to say the least! Paul knew that such enormous obstacles would present difficult challenges for Titus to fulfill his assignment (as well as for the elders Titus would appoint after his departure). And so from the outset, Paul seeks to reassure, comfort and encourage Titus by mentioning “God’s elect.”

Election is to serve as a source of consolation, comfort, encouragement and motivation because God will not allow any opposition to interrupt the work of a gospel-driven ministry. Election doesn’t inhibit the goal of seeing people come to faith in Christ. If it did, Paul would hardly include it in a statement, which exclaims that his goal is to see sinners come to faith in Christ! On the contrary, election energizes and guarantees the fulfillment of this goal.

Paul learned this vital lesson during his 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey in Corinth. While proclaiming the gospel in Corinth, Paul encountered strong opposition from the Jews (cf. Acts 18:6-7). Opposition often forced him to leave one city and go to another (cf. 13:50-51; 18:5-8). But, in vv. 9-11, the Lord appears to Paul in a vision and assures him of successful ministry in Corinth because of His electing grace. Luke writes, “<sup>9</sup> And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, <sup>10</sup> for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, *for I have many in this city who are my people.*” <sup>11</sup> *And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them,*” (emphasis mine).

Notice, that Paul didn’t wrongly conclude, “Well, the Lord has His elect so I will move on. I don’t need to teach the word of God. God has His people here.” No! A thousand times no! Those whom God the Father has chosen, He also calls by His Spirit *through the proclamation of the gospel* (cf. Eph. 1:4-13; 2 Thess. 2:13-15; emphasis mine). In reference to God’s use of means, article 17 in the *Canons of Dordt* states,

Just as the almighty work of God by which he brings forth and sustains our natural life does not rule out but requires the use of means, by which God, according to his infinite wisdom and goodness, has wished to exercise his power, so also the aforementioned supernatural work of God by which he regenerates us in no way rules out or cancels the use of the gospel, which God in his great wisdom has appointed to be the seed of regeneration and the food of the soul. For this reason, the apostles and the teachers who followed them taught the people in a godly manner about this grace of God, to give him the glory and to humble all pride, and yet did not neglect meanwhile to keep the people, by means of the holy admonitions of the gospel, under the administration of the Word, the sacraments, and discipline. So even today it is out of the question that the teachers or those taught in the church should presume to test God by separating what he in his good pleasure has wished to be closely joined together. For grace is bestowed through admonitions, and the more readily we perform our duty, the more lustrous the benefit of God working in us usually is and the better his work advances. To him alone, both for the means and for their saving fruit and effectiveness, all glory is owed forever. Amen.

The Lord had determined to use Paul to gather His church in Corinth. God would not allow the opposition to interfere or stop the work of the gospel. Therefore, Paul was not to fear the opposition but rather keep on teaching the word of God because God had chosen many in Corinth though they were not yet saved. Far from producing apathy or indifference in Paul and inhibiting his evangelistic, church-planting mission, God's election motivated Paul's ministry in Corinth—he stayed 18 months!. Election guaranteed its fruitfulness/success.

If others do not trust in Christ, God's elect will. No amount of opposition can thwart God's saving purpose in the gospel. Christ will build His church and not even death itself can stop it (Matt. 16:18). In Acts 13:48, Luke tells us why the Gentiles in Antioch responded with faith to Paul and Barnabas' proclamation of the gospel during Paul's 1<sup>st</sup> missionary journey. He writes, "And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord (i.e., gospel-J.F.), and *as many as were appointed to eternal life believed,*" (emphasis mine). Clearly, the believing response of Gentiles in both Corinth and Antioch was due to God's choice (i.e., grace) alone. Stephen Charnock rightly notes, "Men are not chosen because they believe, but they believe because they are chosen" (cf. Jn. 15:16; Gal. 1:15-16; 4:9). Nearing the end of his life, Paul, in 2 Timothy 2:10, writes, "I endure everything *for the sake of the elect* (ἐκλεκτός), that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (emphasis mine). Paul was willing even to suffer because of his certainty that God would bring His people to saving faith through his gospel ministry.

The lesson that Paul learned in Corinth he is now passing on to Titus in Crete. The goal of a gospel-driven ministry is to keep on proclaiming the gospel for the sake of the faith of God's elect. Just as God had His people in Corinth—and Antioch—, so He

had His people in Crete. Paul knew that Christ's sheep would recognize Christ's voice in the Gospel message and respond with faith (cf. Jn. 10:27). Thus, election undergirds, sustains and guarantees the goal of the gospel (seeing sinners come to faith in Christ).

It also guards against a pastor's discouragement when he encounters difficulties and opposition. To be sure, a gospel-driven ministry will encounter opposition and such opposition can lead to debilitating discouragement (cf. 2 Tim. 3:12). God's election, however, guards against discouragement. Election instilled confidence in Paul's ministry and it was to instill confidence in Titus, assuring him that his labor would not be in vain. And so election, faith, the gospel and evangelism go hand in hand. It is of immeasurable benefit to know that God has chosen a people for Himself. Election prepares the way for and ensures the success of the proclamation of the gospel (i.e., bringing God's elect to saving faith in Christ). God had His people in Crete and the goal of Titus's ministry in Crete was to faithfully proclaim the gospel in order to bring those whom God has chosen to saving faith in Christ (i.e., to ground and grow them in the gospel, which accords with godliness).

If we were left to ourselves none of us would receive and rest in Christ as He is freely offered to us in the gospel. God's election guarantees that some will come to trust in Christ. Charles Spurgeon's words provide a fitting conclusion. He writes,

Our Savior has bid us preach the Gospel to every creature. He has not said, "Preach it only to the elect." And though that might seem to be the most logical thing for us to do, yet, since He has not been pleased to stamp the elect on their foreheads, or to put any distinctive mark upon them, it would be an impossible task for us to perform! Therefore when we preach the Gospel to every creature, the Gospel makes its own division and Christ's sheep hear His voice and follow Him, ("Too Little for the Lamb," sermon no. 2937, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. 51, p. 262).

Soli Deo Gloria!

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