

AN AUTHORITATIVE MODEL OF GOSPEL-DRIVEN MINISTRY  
PART 4

TEXT: TITUS 1:1-4

October 21, 2012

**INTRODUCTION:**

As Paul begins Titus, there is no doubt as to what is paramount in his mind: the gospel, which accords with godliness. The gospel is the driving force behind Titus and godliness is what the gospel produces. But, the gospel, for Paul, was of first importance. He declared this to the Corinthians when he reminded them, “<sup>3</sup> For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures...” (1 Cor. 15:3-4).

The good news of Christ crucified, buried and risen was the centerpiece—the sum and substance—of both his life and apostolic ministry. He drives this point home in a powerful way in his opening greeting. Paul sets forth an authoritative model of gospel-driven ministry. He does this to assist Titus in fulfilling his assignment in Crete (i.e., to set the churches in order around the gospel and its implications for life). The gospel is the centerpiece of his detailed description of his apostleship. In this description, Paul gives 4 characteristics of a gospel-driven ministry (Note: We must remember that Paul is not only writing to Titus but to the churches to whom this letter was to be read. Church members need to be able to discern a genuine ministry from a false ministry).

First, Paul shows that:

- 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 goals of the gospel. 1:1c-3a
  - A. Faith, 1:1c

Paul’s apostleship existed in order to bring God’s elect to saving faith. But, his work did not end there. Rather, it just began! Paul was not content just to see God’s people come to faith in Christ. As important as genuine conversion is, Paul was equally committed to establishing believers in “the knowledge of the truth.” This brings us to the second goal of Paul’s ministry.

**LESSON:**

- B. KNOWLEDGE, 1:1D

Paul writes, “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...*” (emphasis mine).

Not only initial faith but also growth in faith comes through regular instruction in the gospel (and observance of the sacraments—see HC, Q. 65). The phrase, “knowledge of the truth,” is a descriptive phrase used throughout the Pastoral Letters as a description of the gospel (cf. 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Tim. 2:25; 2 Tim. 3:7; see also Heb. 10:26). Thus, “truth” (ἀλήθεια) refers to the “truth of the gospel.” The central concern of Paul’s ministry was to establish God’s people in the knowledge of the truth (i.e., the gospel).

For example, to the church in Rome, Paul begins his opening greeting, “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God...” (similar to his greeting in Titus). In Romans 1:15, he tells believers in Rome, “I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.” In Colossians 1:5, Paul reminds the Colossian believers of the hope laid up for them in heaven, which they “have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel...” In Colossians 3:16, he exhorts the Colossian believers, “Let the word of Christ (gospel-J.F.) dwell in you richly...” In Ephesians 1:13, Paul writes, “In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit...” In Acts 20:24 Paul reminds the Ephesian elders that the goal of his ministry was “to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.” Before his departure, he says to the Ephesian elders, “And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, *which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified,*” (Acts 20:32, emphasis mine).

As we learned last week, Paul remained in Corinth for 18 months after having received a vision from God (cf. Acts 18:9-11). During this time he reminds the Corinthians, “I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). Twice Paul exhorts Timothy to “guard the good deposit (i.e., gospel-J.F.) entrusted to you,” (1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:14). In 2 Timothy 1:8 Paul reminds Timothy that the gospel is a message worthy of God’s servant to suffer for, “share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God...” In 2 Timothy 2:8, Paul exhorts Timothy, “Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel...”

In view of such passages, we clearly see that the gospel was paramount in Paul’s ministry. His ministry began with the gospel, continued with the gospel and ended with the gospel. The gospel provided the whole framework from within which Paul lived and served. Just as Paul commended the gospel to the Roman, Colossian, Ephesian and Corinthian believers and Timothy, so he also commends the gospel to Titus (and subsequently the elders Titus would appoint) and the believers in Crete. This is the model that Titus and the elders are to be concerned with following.

*Why was Paul so concerned to establish believers in the knowledge of the truth?*

The answer is the Holy Spirit works through the gospel to not only create faith but also to grow faith. The church is a miraculous, divine creation of the Holy Spirit. Faith comes from the Holy Spirit, who works it in our hearts by the proclamation of the gospel (cf. Rom. 10:17; 1 Pet. 1:23-25). And the Holy Spirit strengthens and matures our faith by the continual teaching of the gospel. Paul is showing us that the gospel is to be the sum and substance of the church's "proclamation" and "teaching." He is providing Titus and the churches of Crete an authoritative model and comprehensive summary of the goal of the church's preaching and teaching ministry.

In 2 Timothy 1:10-11, Paul declares that Jesus "<sup>10</sup>...abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, <sup>11</sup> for which I was appointed *a preacher and apostle and teacher...*" (emphasis mine).

Paul was not only appointed as a preacher and apostle of the gospel but also as a teacher of the gospel. The gospel was the center of Paul's preaching—evangelistic proclamation—with the goal of bringing God's people to saving faith in Christ. And, the gospel was the center of Paul's teaching—didactic instruction—with the goal of bringing God's people to maturity in Christ.

The goal of a gospel-driven ministry is not only to call God's sheep but also to nourish His sheep, which is an evidence of love for Christ (cf. Jn. 21:15-17)! Christ's sheep are well nourished by regular, ongoing feeding of the unsearchable riches of the gospel. In their book, *Grounded in the Gospel*, J.I. Packer and Gary Parrett write, "We ground and grow God's people in the Gospel, for it is, as we have argued from the outset of the book, the content for catechetical (learning/instruction-J.F.) ministry. We may preach it, teach it, and unpack it in a variety of ways, but it is the Faith of the Gospel that is ever our content. We move on in the Gospel, but never from the Gospel," (p. 183).

This is what Paul is concerned to teach Titus and the believers in Crete (i.e., We move on in the gospel but never from the gospel!). A gospel-driven ministry is to be wholly concerned with this goal, namely to ground and grow God's chosen people in the knowledge of the truth (i.e., the gospel).

In a recent broadcast on the White Horse Inn, Michael Horton cites a 2010 Pew study on religious literacy in America. The study he refers to was released by the Pew Research Center on September 28, 2010 at the God in America National Symposium on Religious Literacy in Washington, D.C. The executive summary of the study writes, "Atheists and agnostics, Jews and Mormons are among the highest-scoring groups on a new survey of religious knowledge, outperforming evangelical Protestants, mainline Protestants and Catholics on questions about the core teachings, history and leading figures of major world religions."

The study also discovered that out of 12 questions about the Bible and Christianity the group that scored the highest on questions about the Bible and Christian

doctrine were Mormons! Evangelical Protestants came in second, atheists and agnostics third and mainline Protestants and Catholics last. Referring to previous surveys, the article points out how the Pew Research Center has shown that

America is among the most religious of the world's developed nations. Nearly six-in-ten U.S. adults say that religion is "very important" in their lives, and roughly four-in-ten say they attend worship services at least once a week. But the U.S. Religious Knowledge Survey shows that large numbers of Americans are uninformed about the tenets, practices, history and leading figures of major faith traditions – including their own (<http://www.pewforum.org/U-S-Religious-Knowledge-Survey.aspx>).

This study highlights a grave problem we are facing in the church today, namely a serious absence of gospel-driven ministry. Paul instructs Titus and the churches in Crete to be wholly concerned with grounding and growing God's chosen people in the knowledge of the truth (i.e., the gospel). Yet, sadly, this is not always the case. But, as Timothy Witmer writes, "...green pastures are essential to success with sheep...Meeting the need for God's truth is a key to the health and growth of His people," (*The Shepherd Leader*, p. 140). Quoting Calvin, Witmer writes, "The flock of Christ cannot be fed except with pure doctrine which is alone our spiritual food," (p. 140). Witmer then concludes, "A fundamental responsibility of any and every shepherd is to assure that the sheep are well-nourished," (p. 141). What a tragedy it would be if a sheep farmer sought to raise his sheep in pastures of dirt rather than lush green pastures! The "knowledge of the truth" (i.e., the gospel) is our spiritual food. It is the lush green pasture where God's people are to be regularly fed.

Someone may object, "Why so much talk about the gospel? Can't we move on?" The answer is no! J.I. Packer and Gary Parrett explain,

Evangelicals have long acted as though the Gospel was the right 'medicine' for unbelievers, but that believers need to move beyond the Gospel and go on to other things, a movement from the 'milk' to the 'meat.' But this seems untrue—thoroughly out of step with the biblical witness. We believe, rather, that it is imperative to think of moving on from the 'milk' of the Gospel to the 'meat' of the Gospel. For in fact the Gospel is more profound and multifaceted than our finite minds can ever grasp. *We never move on from the Gospel; we move on in the Gospel, (Grounded in the Gospel, p. 96, emphasis mine).*

Don't miss this, "We never move on from the Gospel; we move on in the Gospel." This is exactly the point Paul is driving home here in Titus 1 by referring to "the knowledge of the truth." We must never forget that the gospel is not only the converting power for unbelievers but it is also the nourishing, spiritual food for believers! The gospel is the power of God for salvation (i.e., the whole package from beginning, middle and end).

Let me suggest 6 reasons why we must continually move on in the knowledge of the gospel.

1. WE MUST CONTINUALLY MOVE ON IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE GOSPEL BECAUSE THERE WILL NEVER BE A TIME IN OUR LIVES WHEN WE DO NOT NEED CHRIST AND HIS SAVING WORK.
2. WE MUST CONTINUALLY MOVE ON IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE GOSPEL BECAUSE WE ARE PRONE TO DECEPTION.

We are easily deceived and easily fall prey to false teaching. By referring here to the “knowledge of the truth” Paul is already anticipating the errors of the false teachers, whom he calls the “circumcision party” (1:10). The presence of false teachers and false gospels pose a serious threat to the health and wellbeing of God’s people—the church (Titus 1:11). Deception thrives in ignorance. When we are first brought to faith, our minds are still wrapped up in much ignorance (see Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.2.19). Thus, Paul exhorts Titus to appoint men who “hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it,” (1:9). In 2:1, Paul exhorts Titus to “teach what accords with sound doctrine.”

We are to preach the gospel to ourselves every day. But, the fact is we don’t do this well! This is why Paul says in Ephesians 4:11 that Christ gives specific spiritual gifts to the church. These gifts are given to deepen believers in the knowledge of the truth in order to keep believers from falling prey to deceitful schemes and to bring every believer into the fullness of Christ. In Ephesians 4:11, Paul writes, “<sup>11</sup> And He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers...” Note carefully that Paul includes “evangelists” in this list (εὐαγγελιστής, i.e., men gifted and empowered by the Holy Spirit to articulate the gospel). What is the purpose for these “evangelists?” Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:12-16,

Christ gave the evangelists,

<sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup> until 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, <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup> from 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.

Clearly the gospel, articulated through evangelists, not only creates the church but also equips and matures the church into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

3. WE MUST CONTINUALLY MOVE ON IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE GOSPEL BECAUSE SATAN CONTINUALLY SPEAKS AN ACCUSING WORD TO OUR HEARTS.

The enemy of our faith accuses us before God just as he accused Joshua the High Priest, who stood before the Lord clothed in filthy garments (cf. Zech. 3:1-5). Because of our continual failures and constant accusations by the enemy of our faith, we are prone to view God as one who is our judge rather than Father. Believers often live with a secret suspicion and fear that God is their enemy and that they are wholly displeasing to Him. The painful awareness of our sin at times overwhelms our consciences and we lose assurance of God's grace and goodwill toward us. At times like this, Christians fail to grasp by faith the fact that Christ has made full satisfaction even for their sins! Christ died for the sins of Christians too!

In His life and death, the just requirements of God's law, which condemned us, are fulfilled and we are no longer condemned. But, because of unbelief, we fail to live in the reality that there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (cf. Rom. 8:1). This is why we need to continually hear the words of absolution that Joshua heard as he stood before the Lord clothed with filthy garments (Zech. 3:3). God says to our accuser, "2 The LORD rebuke you, O Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire...<sup>4</sup> Remove the filthy garments from him." And to him he said, "Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments" (Zech. 3:2, 4). God threw out Satan's case, which was a good one! In God's courtroom, no one can bring a charge against God's elect because it is God who justifies (cf. Rom. 8:33)! In Revelation 12:10, John alludes to Zechariah 3 and writes, "And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God."

We must hear this good news again and again. We must have the knowledge of the truth of the gospel driven deep into our beings so that it dwells richly (cf. Col. 3:16). The reality of our constant struggles and failures accompanied by the incessant accusations of the enemy of our faith demand it.

4. WE MUST CONTINUALLY MOVE ON IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE GOSPEL BECAUSE THE CHIEF AIM OF THE ENEMY IS TO KEEP UNBELIEVERS AND BELIEVERS AWAY FROM THE GOSPEL.

Concerning unbelievers, Paul, in 2 Corinthians 4:4, writes, "the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." Concerning believers, in Galatians 1:6, Paul expresses his amazement at the Galatian believers and writes, "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you in the grace of

Christ and are turning to a different gospel.” In Galatians 4:8-9, Paul reveals that part of the reason for their desertion—though not yet complete—was due to demonic activity. In each case, Paul believed that behind the indifference and unbelief toward the gospel was satanic/demonic activity. Satan’s chief aim is to blind men’s eyes to their need of the gospel for both conversion and growth. Therefore, the gospel must always be our central concern and the sum and substance of our proclamation and education.

5. WE MUST CONTINUALLY MOVE ON IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE GOSPEL BECAUSE WE ARE ALWAYS PRONE TO SELF-JUSTIFICATION.

Due to the Fall, everyone is born a legalist by nature. Our default mode is the ancient heresy of Pelagianism (i.e., self-salvation). Even after our conversion, something of a legalist/Pharisee still remains in all of us. And so we need to continually hear the gospel in order to be driven out of ourselves and away from self-justification. We need to be continually reminded that righteousness does not come by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ (Gal. 2:16; 3:21). The great Scottish preacher, Ralph Erskine, wrote,

It is not easy to get the law killed; something of a legal disposition remains even in the believer while he is in this world: many a stroke does self and self-righteousness get, but still it revives again. If he were wholly dead to the law, he would be wholly dead to sin; but so far as the law lives, so far sin lives.

*They that think they know the Gospel well enough bewray (reveal-J.F.) their ignorance; no man can be too evangelical, it will take all his life-time to get a legal temper (disposition-J.F.) destroyed.*

Though the believer be delivered wholly from the law, in its commanding and condemning power and authority, or its rightful power that it hath over all that are under it: yet he is not delivered wholly from its usurped power, which takes place many times upon him, while here, through remaining unbelief,” (Ralph Erskine, “Law-Death, Gospel-Life,” p. 27, emphasis mine).

Erskine’s reference to unbelief leads us to a sixth reason why we need to continually grow in our knowledge of the gospel.

6. WE MUST CONTINUALLY MOVE ON IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE GOSPEL BECAUSE WE ARE PRONE TO UNBELIEF.

Throughout our lives we continually struggle to believe the gospel! We are like the father of the demon-possessed boy in Mark 9 who cries out to Jesus, “I believe; help my unbelief,” (v. 24)! Like this father, we have a measure of faith but we also struggle to believe. Our faith is weak and we often find ourselves crying out to Jesus to create in us a heart that believes more confidently and steadfastly. John Calvin

writes, "...unbelief is so deeply rooted in our hearts, and we are so inclined to it, that not without hard struggle is each one able to persuade himself of what all confess with the mouth: namely, that God is faithful. Especially when it comes to reality itself, every man's wavering uncovers hidden weakness," (*Institutes*, 3.2.15.). Again, Calvin notes, "...believers are in perpetual conflict with their own unbelief," (3.2.17). Thus, he speaks of the believer as being "troubled on all sides by the agitation of unbelief," (3.2.18).

Is this not true of us? Do we not experience this "perpetual conflict in our hearts?" Do we not feel in our hearts the "agitation of unbelief?" Do we not struggle to believe the "almost-too-good-to-be-true-good-news" of the gospel?

Why do we struggle so? There are various reasons. Jerry Bridges, in his book, *The Gospel For Real Life*, offers a compelling one. He asks,

Why do so many believers, including those deeply serious about their Christian commitment, live lives of quiet desperation? One answer is that we have a truncated (clipped, cut short- J.F.) view of the gospel, tending to see it only as a door we walk through to become a Christian. In this view, the gospel is only for unbelievers. Once you become a Christian, you don't need it anymore except to share with people who are still outside the door. What you need to hear instead are the challenges and how-tos of discipleship" (pp. 12-13).

Rather than a gospel that has been cut short, Paul commends to us the "knowledge of the truth." Moving on continually in the knowledge of the truth is how faith is strengthened and grows. And we must not forget that even weak faith is real faith. Calvin writes, "...When first even the least drop of faith is instilled in our minds, we begin to contemplate God's face, peaceful and calm and gracious toward us," (*Institutes*, 3.2.19.).

#### **REFLECTION:**

The second goal of Paul's apostolic ministry was to ground and grow God's elect in the knowledge of the truth (i.e., the unsearchable riches of the gospel). As we reflect on this second goal of Paul's ministry, there are some important lessons for us to learn.

1. WE ARE NOT ONLY TO TAKE THE GOSPEL TO THOSE OUTSIDE THE CHURCH BUT ALSO TO THOSE INSIDE THE CHURCH.

Paul clearly emphasizes this in his opening greeting. This was his unwavering commitment to the churches. When we gather corporately as a church, it is the gospel that we proclaim and teach and hear and receive. Paul's authoritative model of gospel-driven ministry shows us that the gospel is to always be our central



concern. It is to be the sum and substance of the church's proclamation and education.

## 2. OUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE GOSPEL IS TO GROW.

In 2 Thessalonians 1:3, Paul gives thanks to God for the Thessalonian believers because he says, "your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing." Their love for another was increasing because their faith was growing! Love (as well as godliness) is the fruit of faith.

In 2 Peter 3:18, Peter exhorts, "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Infants are a wonderful gift but it is tragic if they never grow and develop! Spiritual infancy is never set forth in the Scriptures as desirable or commendable (cf. Eph. 4:11-16; Heb. 5:12). In Colossians 1:28, Paul writes, "Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone *mature in Christ*," (emphasis mine).

Paul wasn't just devoted to bringing God's elect to faith in Christ. He was also devoted to maturing their faith in Christ. Paul says we proclaim and teach Christ in order to present every believer mature in Christ. Maturity in Christ comes from the regular proclamation of and teaching about Christ, who is revealed to us in the gospel (see HC, Q. 19).

## 3. BURNING HEARTS ARE NOT NOURISHED BY EMPTY HEADS.

Immediately after having been taught the greatest Christ-centered Bible lesson ever given from the Scriptures, the two disciples on the Emmaus Road said, "Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked to us on the road, while He opened to us the Scriptures," (Lk. 24:32). Preaching Christ from all the Scriptures inflames hearts (i.e., creates, nurtures, strengthens and matures faith)!

Desire for God is not cultivated in ignorance. Unopened Scriptures lead to cold hearts and ungodly lives. The phrase, "knowledge of the truth" refers to the content and cognitive side of faith (see Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, p. 168). Content (Creeds) matters! The fact is everyone is a theologian and everyone has a creed. Some have bad creeds and some have good creeds. But, make no mistake everyone has a creed, which dictates how a person thinks and lives. Creeds are essential to the Christian faith and life. Those who know God's Name put their trust in Him (see John Stott, *1 Timothy & Titus*, p. 169). But, you don't trust in someone you don't know. Faith flourishes when it is fed a continual diet of the knowledge of the truth.

R.C. Sproul writes, "God commands us to love Him with all our heart and mind (Matt. 22:37). We can't love anyone we don't know—even our great God. *Burning hearts are not nourished by empty heads*. We can have heads full of knowledge that never penetrates our hearts, but our hearts can't fully adore the Lord unless we love Him with our minds" (emphasis mine).

And so, we must follow Paul’s authoritative model and continually work to establish God’s people in the knowledge of the truth—the gospel—, which Paul says, “is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified,” (Acts 20:32).

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