

AN AUTHORITATIVE MODEL OF GOSPEL-DRIVEN MINISTRY
PART 5

Text: Titus 1:1-4

October 28, 2012

INTRODUCTION/REVIEW:

In Titus 1:1-4, we have been studying the characteristics of a genuine, gospel-driven ministry. First, we saw how Paul reveals:

- 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

The first goal of Paul's apostleship was faith.

- A. FAITH, 1:1C

Paul's apostleship was devoted to proclaiming the gospel in order to bring God's elect to faith in Christ.

- B. KNOWLEDGE, 1:1D

The second goal of Paul's apostleship was knowledge of the truth. Paul's apostleship was devoted to grounding and growing God's people in the knowledge of the truth of the gospel. We learned how the gospel is the sum and substance of the church's proclamation and education (cf. Col. 1:28).

This brings us to the third goal of Paul's apostleship. Paul reveals that the knowledge of the truth (gospel) is not a mere intellectual apprehension that leaves a person unchanged. Rather, the purpose of moving on in the knowledge of the truth is "godliness." The gospel, writes, Calvin "...is a doctrine not of the tongue but of life. It is not apprehended by the understanding and memory alone, as other disciplines are, but it is received only when it possesses the whole soul, and finds a seat and resting place in the inmost affection of the heart," (*Institutes*, 3.7.4.). Again, "...it [the gospel- J.F.] must enter our heart and pass into our daily living, and so transform us into itself that it may not be unfruitful for us," (3.7.4.).

LESSON:

- C. GODLINESS, 1:1E

Paul's ministry was concerned to show that the true faith, which is worked in our hearts by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the gospel, naturally expresses itself in "godliness" (εὐσέβεια). Godliness is one of Paul's favorite designations in

the Pastoral Letters (Note: There are ten occurrences of “godliness,” cf. 1 Tim. 2:2; 3:16; 4:7-8; 6:3, 5-6, 11; 2 Tim., 3:5; Titus 1:1; “godly” is used twice, 2 Tim. 3:12; Titus 2:12). Paul continually sought to deepen believers in the knowledge of the truth so that they might live lives of godliness (i.e., walk in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ (cf. Philip. 1:27; see also Eph. 4:1; Col. 1:10).

As we have previously pointed out (see Introduction to Titus), Paul at once in his opening greeting emphasizes the central message of this letter. God the Father chose us to be holy (Eph. 1:4) and the evidence of our election is expressed in a life of godliness, which is the fruit of genuine saving faith (cf. 2 Peter 1:5-10).

What then is godliness? “Godliness is the reverent awareness of God's sovereignty over every aspect of life, and the attendant determination to honor Him in all one's conduct,” (see *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, p. 1897). In brief, godliness is God-centeredness, which expresses itself in holiness in daily living.

Older theologians referred to godliness as piety. Piety (*pietas*) was a favorite emphasis of John Calvin. In defining piety, Calvin writes, “I call piety that reverence joined with love of God which the knowledge of His benefits induces,” (*Institutes*, 1.2.1.). Note carefully how Calvin joins together reverence and love of God. Godliness comes close to the OT concept of “the fear of God” (see *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, p. 468). Much is said concerning love for God, which is right since this is the Great Commandment (cf. Matt. 22:37). But, even among the so-called “gospel-driven” crowd, little is mentioned and heard of today regarding reverence/fear of God.

To many, the connection between the gospel and the fear of God seems to be at odds. For example, the angel appearing to the Shepherds announced, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people,” (cf. Lk. 2:10; 12:32). Or, 1 John 4:18, “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.” Certainly, the fear of God doesn't mean that we are to be afraid of God or live in fear that in the end we will be judged by God after having trusted Christ for salvation. Jesus confirms this (as do the verses just previously cited) in John 5:24, when He promised, “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.” How then should we understand the fear of God? Calvin writes, “The gist of true piety does not consist in a fear which would gladly flee the judgment of God, but...rather in a pure and true zeal which loves God altogether as Father, and reveres Him truly as Lord, embraces His justice and dreads to offend Him more than to die,” (*Institutes*, 1.2.1. n. 1).

What produces such a profound God-centered life? The answer is the gospel. Godliness defines the nature of the knowledge of the truth (i.e., the truth of the gospel produces godliness; cf. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, p. 379). Godliness is the fruit and end of the gospel (cf. *Calvin Commentaries*, vol. 21, p. 282). The gospel

produces God-centeredness, which is a true reverence and love for God and a consequent holy life. Through the gospel, we come to a true knowledge of God, which in turn produces a God-centered life (i.e., a life ordered around God and His glory). A gospel-driven Christian will be driven to live “coram Deo,” which means “to live one’s entire life in the presence of God, under the authority of God, to the glory of God,” (see R.C. Sproul, “What Does ‘coram Deo’ Mean?” <http://www.ligonier.org/blog/what-does-coram-deo-mean>). John Calvin writes, that the knowledge of the truth of the gospel “has no other object than that God should be worshipped in a right manner, and that pure religion should flourish among men,” (*Calvin Commentaries*, vol. 21, p. 282).

In contrast to this God-centered view of the gospel, there are countless man-centered “gospels” offered today, which leads to man-centered living. Whenever the law is not used to drive sinners to Christ some other reason has to be given for why sinners need to respond to the gospel. Thus, for example there is the personal enrichment gospel, which says, “God wants to make you rich, healthy, and prosperous.” Jeremiah 29:11 is the popular default verse that is taken out of context to support this man-centered view. In this view, God becomes one’s own personal enrichment genie.

In addition, there is the widespread, “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life,” gospel. This popular man-centered view subordinates God’s authority and holiness to His love and places man at the center of the gospel rather than God. Will Metzger notes, “The true reason for becoming a Christian is not that we may have a wonderful life but that we may be in a right relationship to God,” (*Tell The Truth*, p. 98). And, there is the personal life enhancement gospel, which says, “Come to Jesus and He will give you peace, joy, purpose, meaning, fulfillment, true happiness, A Better You.” Here, God exists for our benefit and to meet our needs. Such a man-centered gospel uses Jesus for one’s own personal life enhancement. Jesus is seen as a life coach for meaningful living.

Such man-centered views of the gospel define men’s lives in terms of their felt needs rather than their real need, which is salvation from God! In a man-centered view, man’s fundamental problem is a lack of peace, security, purpose, happiness, etc... But, in a God-centered view, man’s fundamental problem is that he stands under the judgment and wrath of God and is in need of being reconciled to God. As R.C. Sproul has written, we need to be saved from God Himself (see *Saved From What?*)! God, in His righteous wrath, stands against us in our sin. But the glory of the gospel is that the one from whom we need to be saved is the very one who saves us! Sproul notes that we are saved by God, for God, *from* God.

Tragically, those who hold to a man-centered view will never understand why they need Christ and need to be saved from Him. In a man-centered view, sin is seen as falling short of God’s best for your life, forfeiting peace, happiness, failing to reach your destiny and potential, etc... But, in a God-centered view of the Christian faith,

sin is viewed as falling short of God's glory (Rom. 3:23). Sin is any lack of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God (cf. 1 Jn. 3:4; also *WSC*, Q. 14).

In a man-centered view, Jesus is seen as existing for our benefit. But, in a God-centered view, Jesus was whole heartedly devoted to glorifying and honoring God (“I glorified You on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave Me to do.” Jn. 17:4). In a man-centered view, sin is seen as making mistakes or being imperfect. Will Metzger points out how many people “have naturally a bad conscience from a sense of mistakes, imperfection and inability to live up to their own standards,” (*Tell The Truth*, p. 52). But, he cautions how one must guard against equating this with true spiritual conviction of sin. Metzger then notes how J.I. Packer shows that true conviction of sin includes:

1. Awareness of a wrong relationship with God.
2. Conviction of sins—a sense of guilt for particular wrongs.
3. Conviction of sinfulness—a sense of helplessness to do right and consequent need of a new heart or rebirth. Any goodness is not good enough, either quantitatively or qualitatively (*Ibid*, p. 52).

In a God-centered view, a person begins to awaken to the fact that he or she possesses a sinful nature (not just that one makes mistakes or is imperfect). One begins to pray like David in Psalm 51:5, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” So, for example, a Christian characterized by godliness doesn’t restrain himself from sinning in order to not feel guilty or out of fear of the consequences of disobedience or from a selfish desire to get something from God or simply because he or she has a compliant disposition. All such motives are self-centered rather than a sincere effort to serve and worship God out of reverence and love for God.

John Calvin observes that a pious mind restrains itself from sinning not out of dread of punishment. Rather, the pious mind restrains from sinning because he loves and reveres God as Father. He worships and adores God as Lord/King. Then Calvin concludes, “Even if there were no hell, it [a pious mind-J.F.] would still shudder at offending Him alone,” (*Institutes*, 1.3.2.). As a believer moves on in the knowledge of the truth, he or she increasingly shudders at offending God. The gospel relentlessly trains us to renounce ungodliness (cf. Titus 2:12).

A gospel-driven believer sees all sin ultimately as an offense against God, who alone is the Judge with whom he is accountable. Thus, David, confessing his sin, prays, “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight...” (Ps. 51:4). Commenting on David’s confession, Calvin writes, “His eyes and his whole soul were directed to God...This will be the exercise of every true penitent,” (*Calvin’s Commentaries*, vol. v, p. 286). When we are truly awakened by the gospel and move

on in the knowledge of the truth, we begin to see that all our sin is a breaking of God's law and an offense against God, who is holy and righteous. Will Metzger writes,

In a God-centered gospel, grace is central. God is exalted at every point in the outworking in Christ and its application to His people. Our King is assured of a kingdom and will neither be frustrated by human resistance nor obligated to save His creatures because of their supposed rights to His favor. We rejoice in the benefits that accrue to all of us from a gracious God, but we glory in our God alone and the vindication of His honor above whatever good may come to humanity," (*Tell The Truth*, p. 41).

Moreover, the knowledge of the truth is not only God-centered but it is not moralistic. Godliness is not the result of self-effort and self-improvement (pulling yourself up by the boot straps). Godliness is a fruit that flows from a faith grounded in the knowledge of the truth of the gospel (Titus 1:1). In 1 Timothy 3:16, Paul confesses, "Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness." Paul then proceeds to give a beautiful poetic description of the gospel. In Titus 2:12, Paul writes that godliness is the result of being instructed by the grace of the gospel. This is why we must continually move on in the knowledge of the truth.

In contrast, Paul argues how false gospels lead to ungodliness rather than godliness (1:10-16). Paul begins his letter by connecting the truth of the gospel and godliness because of the ungodly Cretan culture and ungodly false teachers. Falsehood is a petri dish, which cultures ungodliness. The false teachers—the circumcision party—professed to know God but lived ungodly lives. In Titus 1:16, Paul writes, "They profess to know God, but they deny Him by their works." God is not truly known where there is no true piety (i.e., godliness; cf. Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.2.1.).

Paul makes a similar statement in 2 Timothy 3:5 concerning the false teachers who were opposing Paul and Timothy. Paul describes them as "having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power." He then exhorts Timothy, "Avoid such people" (cf. 1 Tim. 6:3-5). Genuine piety—love and reverence for God and holiness of life—is the result of God's power (i.e., the Holy Spirit working through the gospel, which produces a truly God-centered life). The gospel is the power of God for salvation—the whole package! Concerning godliness, John Stott writes, "It is an essential feature of truth, and a good test of its authenticity, that since it comes from God it leads to God. Any doctrine which does not promote godliness is manifestly bogus," (*1 Timothy & Titus*, p. 169). The gospel comes from God, was accomplished by God and leads to and glorifies God as Paul exclaims in Romans 11:36, "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever. Amen."

If your regular diet of Biblical instruction is not driving you to reverence and love God and pursue holiness, such teaching is bogus! Godliness is the standard by which the church's message and ministry can be measured. John Calvin writes,

...the only lawful commendation of doctrine is this, that it instructs us to fear God and to bow before Him with reverence. And hence we are also informed, that the greater progress any one has made in godliness, he is so much the better disciple of Christ; and that he ought to be reckoned a true theologian who edifies consciences in the fear of God," (*Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. 21, pp. 282-283).

Paul clearly sets forth the inseparable relationship between sound doctrine ("knowledge of the truth") and godly living ("godliness"). Right belief and right behavior are a common theme in the Pastoral Letters. In Titus 2:12-13, Paul tells Titus that the gospel of grace trains us "to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age and to wait for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ..." (2:12-13).

Godliness adorns the gospel (Titus 2:10). Paul emphasizes throughout this letter how the life of a Christian (godliness) is to be fundamentally different rather than similar to the ungodly world in which he or she lives. Our lives are not to contradict the character of the God we profess to follow. Although our lives do not preach the gospel they can tarnish its reputation and thereby serve as a hindrance to the church's proclamation of the gospel. TDNT writes, "The term godliness plays a role here probably because the author hopes that a manner of life that exhibits *eusebeia* (godliness-J.F.) will elicit a favorable verdict from non-Christians who set store by it," (*TDNT Abridged*, p. 1012). Godliness guards the gospel and the church's reputation in the eyes of an ungodly world.

Ungodliness is rooted in a false gospel and is the fruit of unbelief. In contrast, godliness is rooted in the true gospel and is the fruit of genuine saving faith. Such a God-centered life naturally expresses itself in godly behavior. Godliness is thus "used to express the Christian's religion in action," (Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, p. 117). In Titus, Paul shows how godliness expresses itself in church leadership (1:5-16), church membership (2:1-15) and Christian citizenship (3:1-5). The Christian's life is not divided into religious and non-religious. Rather, all of one's existence is to be lived in the presence of God (i.e., God-centered). Thus, Paul's apostleship was devoted to cultivating godliness in God's people (i.e., a reverence for God and a life of holiness in the world).

REFLECTION:

As we reflect on godliness, I want to leave you with some questions to consider. Do you desire to be a godly person? Do you desire to grow in your reverence of and love for God? Do you desire to live a life that is centered on God rather than yourself? Do you desire to have a life that is characterized by a conscious devotion to God and the pursuit of holiness? If so, then realize two things.

FIRST, THE FEAR OF GOD IS THE SOUL OF GODLINESS. Jerry Bridges writes, “The fear of God is the soul of godliness. That is, the fear of God is the animating and invigorating principle of a godly life. It is the wellspring of all godly desires and aspirations. Do you desire to be a godly person? Then you must understand and grow in the fear of God,” (*The Joy of Fearing God*, p. 25).

SECOND, LEARNING TO LIVE BY THE GOSPEL IS THE ART OF GODLINESS. Walter Marshall writes, “Obey God and do the works of the law by gospel principles and means. This is the rare and excellent art of godliness, in which every Christian should be a skilled expert,” (*The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*, p. 167). Only the gospel can produce a heart that is filled with godliness. (i.e., a heart that reverences and loves God and seeks to pursue holiness of life). Godliness is rooted in and flows from continually moving on in the “knowledge of the truth.” This is why Paul was devoted to grounding and growing God’s people in the gospel. Moving on in the knowledge of the truth drives believers to live godly lives (God-centered) in the church, home and society.

Our problem, as Augustine noted, is that ever since the fall, we are born into this world “curved in on ourselves” (Martin Luther’s *homo incurvatus in se*). Even as believers, because of our flesh, our natural, default tendency is to look to ourselves, to trust in ourselves (legalism) and to establish our own ways (license). But, rather than driving us deeper into ourselves, the gospel constantly calls us outside of ourselves. Q. 155 of the Westminster Larger Catechism asks, “How is the Word made effectual to salvation?” Here’s the answer:

The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the Word, an effectual means of enlightening, convincing, and humbling sinners; of driving them out of themselves, and drawing them unto Christ; of conforming them to His image, and subduing them to His will; of strengthening them against temptations and corruptions; of building them up in grace, and establishing their hearts in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation.

The Holy Spirit, working through the gospel, relentlessly drives us outward to look to Christ alone (*Solus Christus*). The gospel orders our lives in a God-centered fashion. The gospel leads us to be conscientiously devoted to serving and worshipping God alone as He is fully revealed in Jesus Christ. And, the gospel continually drives us to pursue a manner of life that is characterized by holiness (i.e., delight in doing God’s will; cheerfully obeying God’s law; total love for God from your whole heart).

Only the gospel can produce a heart of adoration and love, awe, reverence, honor and worship. Only the gospel can cause such a reflex action in our consciousness of the majesty and holiness of God (Bridges, *The Joy of Fearing God*, p. 25). Only the gospel can create a “conscientious devotion of our lives to God in Christ, the fear of God,” (Hendriksen & Kistemaker, *Thessalonians, the Pastorals and Hebrews*, p. 137).

Simply put, only the gospel can create Christ-likeness. As the faithful Servant, Christ lived a conscientiously devoted life of love and reverence to His Father. He said, "I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that You gave Me to do," (Jn. 17:4). He honored His Father through perfect obedience. The author of Hebrews in 10:7, 9, quotes Psalm 40:6-8 and applies it to Christ, "Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book." Only the gospel can create a loving motive of obedience in one's heart. "We love because He first loved us," (1 Jn. 4:19). Jerry Bridges writes,

When our sense of guilt is taken away because our consciences are cleansed by the blood of Christ, we are freed up to love Him with all our hearts and souls and minds. In fact, not only are we freed up, we are motivated in a positive sense to love Him in this wholehearted way. Our love will be spontaneous in an outpouring of gratitude to Him and fervent desire to obey Him...So if we want to grow in our love for God and in the acceptable obedience that flows out of that love, we must keep coming back to the Cross and the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ. That is why it is so important that we keep the gospel before us every day. Because we sin every day, and our consciences condemn us every day, we need the gospel every day" (*The Discipline of Grace*, p. 123).

By moving on in the knowledge of the truth of the gospel, we grow in love and reverence for God and in holiness of life. Now, you may be thinking, "I do believe the gospel and I desire to live a godly life. But, I see so little evidence of godliness in my life?" Don't despair! As we close, listen carefully to the wise counsel of John Calvin,

...I do not so strictly demand evangelical perfection that I would not acknowledge as a Christian one who has not yet attained it. For thus all would be excluded from the church, since no one is found who is not far removed from it...What then? Let that target be set before our eyes at which we are earnestly to aim. Let that goal be appointed toward which we should strive and struggle...weakness so weighs down the greater number that, with wavering and limping and even creeping along the ground, they move at a feeble rate. Let each one of us, then, proceed according to the measure of his puny capacity and set out upon the journey we have begun. No one shall set out so inauspiciously as not daily to make some headway, though it be slight. Therefore, let us not cease so to act that we may make some unceasing progress in the way of the Lord. And let us not despair at the slightness of our success; for even though attainment may not correspond to desire, when today outstrips yesterday the effort is not lost. Only let us look toward our mark with sincere simplicity and aspire to our goal; not fondly flattering ourselves, nor excusing our own evil deeds, but with continuous effort striving toward this end: that we may surpass ourselves in goodness until we attain to goodness itself. It is this, indeed, which through the whole course of life we seek and follow," (*Institutes*, 3.7.5.).

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