

AN AUTHORITATIVE MODEL OF GOSPEL-DRIVEN MINISTRY
PART 6

TEXT: TITUS 1:1-4

November 4, 2012

INTRODUCTION/REVIEW:

In Titus 1:1-4, we get a glimpse into the character of Paul's apostolic ministry. He sets forth his apostleship as a model for Titus in order to assist him in setting in order the churches in Crete. What then are the characteristics of a genuine, gospel-driven ministry?

- 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

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

- B. Knowledge, 1:1d

Second, the goal of Paul's apostleship was knowledge of the truth. Paul wasn't content to simply preach the gospel in order to bring God's people to faith. Paul was equally devoted to grounding and growing the faith of God's people in the knowledge of the truth of the gospel. Such knowledge 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," which is the third goal.

- C. Godliness, 1:1e

Paul's ministry was concerned to show that true faith, which is worked in our hearts by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the gospel, naturally expresses itself in "godliness." Godliness, we learned, is God-centeredness, which expresses itself in holiness in daily living. Reverence and love for God and the pursuit of holiness in all of life are the fruits of saving faith. Paul clearly shows in Titus that justification is by grace through faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone (3:7; 2:12-13). Genuine faith expresses itself in godliness. True saving faith means you love godliness as well as the forgiveness of sins.

Now, admittedly, every believer struggles in the pursuit of godliness. The reason we struggle is because as we noted previously (see Part 4) throughout our lives we are prone to unbelief. Our faith is weak and we struggle to believe the gospel. Calvin, as

we previously noted, points out how believers waver and limp and even creep along the ground. We all move at a feeble rate in the pursuit of godliness.

In fact much ungodliness remains in even the most mature of saints (1 Tim. 1:15-16; cf. Rom. 7:14-24; Gal. 5:17). As a result, our faith wavers and our consciences accuse us. Those with sensitive consciences, particularly struggle with despair, fear and a lack of confidence, “Will I really make it?” All of this results in a loss of assurance of God’s goodwill toward us. Therefore, what our faith needs at this moment is hope. This brings us to the fourth goal of a gospel-driven ministry.

LESSON:

D. Hope, 1:2-3a

In Titus 1:2-3a, Paul writes, “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...” (* for see Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, p. 380). Paul’s apostolic ministry was devoted to instilling the hope of eternal life. Instilling hope in God’s people was to be the goal of Titus’ ministry and subsequently the elders Titus would appoint.

In these two verses, Paul spans the entire course of redemptive history. He encompasses eternity past, the present and future consummation of God’s redemptive purposes in the gospel. Hope is the ultimate goal of faith and knowledge (see Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy*, p. 169).

What then is hope? Hope is a “confident expectation” of what a Christian knows is to come, namely eternal life (cf. 1 Tim. 4:10; cf. Mounce, p. 380). What then is the hope of eternal life? First, we note that there are three tenses of salvation: *past* (Eph. 2:8; 1 Cor. 6:11), *present* (2 Cor. 4:16; 1 Jn. 1:7), and *future* (1 Pet. 1:5; Eph. 5:25). The future tense of salvation is what Paul has in mind here. “Eternal life” (ζωῆς αἰωνίου) then is the fullness of life that is available now through faith in Christ, which reaches its consummation in the resurrection. The consummation of the kingdom of God—the resurrection—is the hope of the gospel. Those who place their faith in Christ alone, live in confident expectation of one day being glorified (perfected in godliness). Heaven—as wonderful as it is—is not our home. We are just passing through. The ultimate hope of the gospel is the confident expectation of the consummation of our salvation (cf. Heb. 11:10).

The Apostle’s Creed, “I believe...The resurrection of the body,” (Art. 11) is the confession of the church. This will occur at our Lord’s second coming. In Titus 2:13, Paul reveals how the grace of God trains every believer to be “waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.” In Titus 3:7, Paul says that our future hope is based on our present privileged status as those who are justified (i.e., forgiven of our sin and declared righteous in God’s sight). He writes, “being justified by His grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” The purpose of God’s salvation—justification by grace—is

so that “we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” Because God has rendered His judgment in the present—not guilty and perfectly righteous—believers can wait with a confident expectation of what is promised to them for the future. What a sure foundation the believer has to rest his hope on for the future!

Now, it is important to understand that the Christian’s life is characterized by hope. We live in hope rather than what we see as Paul writes in Romans 8:24, “For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?” In Hebrews 11:13, the author of Hebrews reveals that we are like Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Jacob—We have the promise of eternal life in hope not in sight.

Presently, what we see is not “eternal life” but rather our sin and death, the two enemies of our faith and hope. Martin Luther writes, “Hope means to expect life in the midst of death, and righteousness in the midst of sins,” (*Luther’s Works*, vol. 29, p 11). The gospel promises life in the midst of death. To Martha, who is grieving over the death of her brother Lazarus, Jesus promises, “²⁵ I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

The gospel promises righteousness in the midst of sins. In Romans 4:5, Paul writes, “And to the one who does not work but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness...” Again, Luther writes,

Even though I am aware of my sin, Jesus Christ intercedes, and He does not accuse us.’ His intercession must be grasped by faith, which senses in fact that Christ is accusing, but which expects in hope that Christ is interceding for it. In that death there will be life for me, for Christ is Lord of death...I am a sinner and can never set myself free. I have been ungrateful for the blessings of God. But in the midst of sin I have the hope of eternal life. That is a great proclamation,” (*Luther’s Works*, vol. 29, p. 11).

Thus, contrary to what we see—and we do not deny what we see!—the believer’s hope is awakened by the gospel. Because of the “knowledge of the truth” a believer doesn’t believe that God is wrathful to him because he has been justified by grace (Titus 3:7). And, because of the “knowledge of the truth” a believer doesn’t believe God will abandon him in the grave but waits with confident expectation that Christ has promised to raise him up on the Last Day (cf. Acts 2:24-28; Ps. 16:8-11). Jesus promises in John 6:39-40, “³⁹ 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. ⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

Now, you may be thinking, “But how can one be so certain in the face of such overwhelming obstacles, which seem so contrary to all evidence and reason?” Martin Luther well notes, “For to believe that in hope one has a life that is eternal,

this passes all understanding (Phil. 4:7), even that of the godly,” (*Luther’s Works*, vol. 29, p. 11).

How then do we know that this hope is secure? How do we know that it will come about? Notice how Paul grounds our hope on the eternal promise of God. Believers possess this confident expectation of eternal life because it is based on the God who promises and performs. Paul lists three truths about God. First, the believer’s hope of eternal life is secure because God promised it to us.

1. God promises, 1:2c

Paul writes, “which God...*promised* before the ages began,” (emphasis mine). The hope of eternal life is based on God’s promise. Our faith and hope rest upon the God of promise and performance. All that God gives to us comes by way of promise (cf. Gal. 3:18). When did God make this promise? Paul says God promised the hope of eternal life “before the ages began.”

First, with these words, Paul does away with all merit (*Luther’s Works*, vol. 29, p. 12). God promised eternal life when there was no one to ask or to merit. He promised within Himself before the world began. Again, this brings to our attention the covenant of redemption (see Part 3 of this series). Before the world began, the Triune God—Father, Son, Holy Spirit—made a pact for the purpose of redeeming God’s elect. This pretemporal covenant lies behind all of God’s covenants (promises) with Adam, Noah, Abraham, David and the New Covenant. In fact, this covenant is the basis and driving purpose of all of redemptive history (see Michael Brown & Zach Keele, *Sacred Bond*, p. 24). Since God’s promise of eternal life was given before the foundation of the world, this humbles us and exalts the love and grace of God in Christ. Martin Luther writes, “...He does away with merit. We have not merited it; we are not worthy. God wants us to be humbled and cast down in our glory and our powers, but He manifests His love and mercy. The light was given, not after we prayed for it, but ‘ages ago.’...Therefore the promise is sheer mercy, because no one asked Him to make the promise (*Luther’s Works*, vol. 29, p. 12).

Not only do Paul’s words humble us and strip us of any supposed merit and glorify God’s mercy and grace but they also serve as a source of great comfort. Again, Martin Luther is exceedingly helpful. He writes,

It is the greatest of consolations for weak consciences that He does not base eternal life on our virtues or merits. If He had done that, no one would be saved; for we are so fragile, unstable, and unsure that after one hour we become ungodly and unbelieving. Therefore, in order that our hope might be solid and sure, life eternal is based upon the promise of God, which cannot lie,” (*Luther’s Works*, vol. 29, pp. 12-13).

This brings us to a second reason the believer’s hope of eternal life is secure. Our hope is secure because it is based on “God, who never lies.”

2. God does not lie, 1:2b

These words are intended to impart confidence in God's people. God's promise of the consummation of our salvation—the hope of eternal life—is certain because God cannot lie. God's character ensures the security of the believer's hope of eternal life. It is important to note that God's character stands in opposition to the ungodly character of the false teachers, whom Paul compares to the Cretans who “are always liars” (1:12). Philip Towner notes that “Cretans regarded lying as culturally acceptable, and this cultural tendency lies behind the coining of the term ‘krētizo’ (from the name for the island, “Krētē [= Crete]), meaning ‘to play the Cretan,’ or ‘to lie,’” (*The Letters To Timothy and Titus*, p. 670).

Lying and deceit is a chief characteristic of satan and demons (cf. 1 Tim. 4:1; Eph. 4:14). In John 8:44, Jesus says of satan, “When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” Lying, deceit and broken promises also characterize fallen humanity. Michael Horton writes, “We live in a world of broken promises. A fragile web of truthful communication and practical commitments connect us to one another, and when any part of that web comes under significant stress, the trust on which our relationships depend can easily break,” (*God of Promise*, p. 9).

In contrast to satan, demons and the ungodly culture of Crete—fallen humanity—, God's nature does not allow Him to lie and deceive. When God promises, He promises out of His own character. The Bible teaches that it is impossible for God to lie. For example, the ungodly prophet Balaam, prophesies to the Moabite king, Balak, “God is not man, that He should lie, or a son of man, that He should change His mind. Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not fulfill it,” (Num. 23:19; cf. 1 Sam. 15:29). Balaam reaffirms that the promise God made to Abraham concerning Israel will happen—be fulfilled (Gen. 17:8). In Hebrews 6:17-18, the author expresses how our hope is based on two unchangeable truths: God's promise and oath. In v. 18, the author writes, “...it is impossible for God to lie...” Martin Luther writes, “A negative way of speaking is a more forceful way to express feelings. ‘He will not lie to me.’ Thus the weak should be buoyed up with these words: ‘Do you not think that He will live up to what He has said,’” (*Luther's Works*, vol. 29, p. 12).

That God “never lies” is the negative way of emphasizing the positive truth that God is faithful and trustworthy. Simply put, God can be trusted! He will always live up to what He has said because He is faithful to His promise. Michael Horton writes, “...before, during and after humankind's broken promises, the promise-making and promise-keeping God is present and will not let the web fall apart,” (*God of Promise*, p. 9). The Scriptures repeatedly set forth God as faithful and trustworthy, cf. Ex. 34:6; Deut. 7:9; Ps. 25:10; 31:5; 36:5; 40:11; 86:15; 89; 100:5; 111:7; 117:2; 145:13; Isa. 11:5; 16:5; 25:1; 49:7; Rom. 3:3; 1 Cor. 1:9; 10:13; 1 Thess. 5:24; 2 Thess. 3:3; 2 Tim. 2:13; Heb. 6:18; 10:23; 11:11; 1 Pet. 4:19; 1 Jn. 1:9; Rev. 1:5; 19:11).

God is who He says He is and He will do what He has promised to do because He is faithful. For example, in Exodus 34:6, the Lord passed before Moses and proclaims His Name and reveals His character saying, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness...” In Psalm 86:15, David expresses his faith and hope in the fact that God will not abandon him to his enemies. David declares, “...you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.” Because of God’s character, His people can trust Him to forgive them and to protect and preserve them.

In Psalm 89, the Psalmist reminds us that the covenant God made with David (2 Sam. 7) expresses God’s steadfast love and faithfulness, even when what we see looks like God has abandoned His promise. In the midst of great sin, God promises, “³³ ...I will not remove from him my steadfast love or be false to My faithfulness. ³⁴ I will not violate My covenant or alter the word that went forth from My lips. ³⁵ Once for all I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David. ³⁶ His offspring shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before Me.”

In 1 Corinthians 1:9, Paul reminds the Corinthian believers—who were far from the epitome of godliness—, “God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” To the persecuted believers in Thessalonica, Paul assures them, “He who calls you is faithful; He will surely do it,” (1 Thess. 5:24). In 2 Thessalonians 3:3, Paul assures the believers, “The Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one” (Just as the Lord guarded David against his enemies—cf. Ps. 86—so too will the Lord guard us against the enemies of our faith).

Take comfort in this: God will not lie to you! John Calvin writes, “This expression...is added for glorifying God, and still more for confirming our faith. And, indeed, whenever the subject treated is our salvation, we ought to recollect that it is founded on the word of Him who can neither deceive nor lie,” (*Calvin’s Commentaries*, vol. 21, p. 285). Our consolation is based on God’s promise not our supposed virtue or merit, of which we have none! Martin Luther writes,

This consolation has always been necessary for all believers; for if a man looks about him, he stumbles at the idea of eternal life. Our primary impression is that we are sinners, but it is a sublime thing to believe that God has prepared eternal life. He raises the poor up from the dirt and leads him from sin and death; He crowns the unworthy. Thus He says in John (John 14:1-2): ‘Let not your heart be troubled. In My Father’s house, do not doubt. Eternal life is promised to you. It is a grand thing, but do not fear. You are a little flock, but you should have the courage to believe; for it has pleased the Father. Besides, if dwelling places were not prepared, I would prepare them for you now,’ (*Luther’s Works*, vol. 29, p. 12).

What comfort and joy to know that our faith and hope are firmly founded on the eternal and unchangeable character of God who cannot and will not lie to us! Third, the believer's hope is secure because God fulfills what He promises.

3. God fulfills, 1:3a

Paul writes, "God...at the proper time manifested in His word through the preaching..." We will come back to this loaded phrase. For now, we simply note that because God is faithful and trustworthy, we can confidently expect Him to fulfill and consummate what He has promised. Paul says that God has "manifested" (i.e., fulfilled) the promise of eternal life through the preaching of the gospel. Because eternal life is unseen and still in the future for believers, God makes known the truth about eternal life through the gospel (see Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, p. 285).

The Scriptures reveal over and over again that whatever God promises, He faithfully performs—fulfills. Ultimately, God's promise of the hope of eternal life finds fulfillment in Christ alone. Through the gospel, all the promises (Covenants) of the OT find their fulfillment in Christ. Paul expresses this in 2 Corinthians 1:20, when he writes, "For all the promises of God find their Yes in Him. That is why it is through Him that we utter our Amen to God for His glory." God brings His promises to fulfillment in such a way that He is glorified and sinful man is the beneficiary. It is God who establishes us in Christ (2 Cor. 1:21). It is God who has anointed us (i.e., put His seal on us and given us His Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee of eternal life, 2 Cor. 1:22). All of these gracious actions are based on His promises, which are fulfilled in Christ. This is why Paul responds by declaring his "Amen" confirming what God has done through Christ in order to fulfill all of His promises.

God's people in the OT waited long in hope for the fulfillment of God's promise to send the Messiah to rescue and comfort His people (cf., Lk. 2:25, 38; 23:50-51; cf. Isa. 40:1; 49:13; 51:3; 57:18; 61:2). When Christ appeared in His first coming God's promises were fulfilled. This, as Ralph Erskine points out, "is the greatest instance and indication of the faithfulness of God, that ever was given," (*Redemption By Christ*). Like the OT saints, Paul says we too are waiting in hope for the final consummation of God's promises in the gospel (Titus 3:7).

The guarantee of the hope of eternal life is the gospel (Christ's first coming, living, dying and rising again). Thus Ralph Erskine writes, "...so this (Christ' first coming) is an earnest and evidence that all the gospel-promises shall be accomplished. God hath fulfilled His Word, in giving Christ to the death; then certainly He will fulfill all the other promises of blessing and mercy in the new covenant, which were ratified by His blood," (*Redemption By Christ*).

REFLECTION:

Such a God-centered view of the gospel is an expression of godliness. The hope of eternal life is promised by God, fulfilled by God and consummated by God. Our faith

and hope rest in the truth that God is the God of promise and performance (i.e., fulfillment). God promises. God does not and cannot lie. God fulfills His promises. This equals hope. This is the model for a gospel-driven ministry. This is what a gospel-driven ministry proclaims so as to properly order the church.

Paul's words are life-giving and hope-instilling. They provide unspeakable comfort. Let us remember that God crowns the unworthy. "Fear not, little flock, for *it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom,*" (Lk. 12:32, emphasis mine). It please our heavenly Father to give good gifts to His children. These are Christ's words of consolation to you. God knows we are fragile, weak, unstable, unsure, and unbelieving. He knows our pursuit of godliness is feeble. Thus, our salvation from beginning, middle and end, is based on God's promise rather than our supposed virtue or merit. He gives by sheer grace alone! "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven," (Matt. 9:2). These are Christ's words of absolution. God cannot and will not lie to you. If He declares your sins forgiven they are forgiven! He is trustworthy and faithful even the midst of our sins! This is our consolation and our only hope. Therefore, look with faith alone to the God of promise and performance!

© John Fonville

Permissions: Permission is happily granted to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that you do not revise the wording in any way and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. For web posting, a link to this document on Paramount's website is preferred. Any exceptions to the above must be approved by John Fonville.

Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: By John Fonville