

AN AUTHORITATIVE MODEL OF GOSPEL-DRIVEN MINISTRY
PART 7

November 11, 2012

TEXT: TITUS 1:1-4

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 to follow in order to assist him in properly ordering the churches in Crete. What are the characteristics of a properly ordered church? What were the characteristics of Paul's apostolic ministry? What are the characteristics of a genuine, gospel-driven ministry? Such questions are vitally important as we consider the doctrine of the church. First, we have seen 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

Paul was committed to cultivating in God's people:

- A. Faith, 1:1c
- B. Knowledge (of the truth), 1:1d
- C. Godliness, 1:1e
- D. Hope, 1:2-3a

Hope, we learned, is a confident expectation of one's future glorification (perfection in godliness at the resurrection; the consummation of God's kingdom). This hope is secure because it is based on the eternal character of God. God promises. God does not and cannot lie. And, God fulfills His promises. This trustworthiness and faithfulness of God equals hope. But, what good would it have done if God had promised but not manifested (fulfilled) His promise to us (see *Luther's Works*, vol. 29, p. 13)? Therefore, notice what Paul writes in v. 3. God at His own determined time, "manifested in His word (the promise of eternal life-J.F.) through preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior..."

This is an unusual statement because Paul normally speaks of Christ as being manifested (e.g., His Incarnation, 1 Tim. 3:16). But, here Paul says that God has manifested His promise of eternal life in "His Word through preaching," (i.e., the proclamation (κήρυγμα) of the gospel; cf. 2 Tim. 1:8-10). God's promise of eternal life was manifested (fulfilled) through the first coming of Christ. His first appearing

is the greatest instance and indication of the faithfulness of God that was ever given! Now, the means by which God's promise of eternal life to the elect is manifested is through the proclamation of the gospel. The coming of Christ to fulfill God's promise of eternal life is now made known through the proclamation of the gospel. This brings us to a third characteristic of a gospel-driven ministry.

LESSON:

III. A GOSPEL-DRIVEN MINISTRY IS DEVOTED TO THE PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL. 1:3B-C

Paul's focus quickly changes from promise to preaching. The question is why? We must not lose sight of the context. Remember that Paul is discussing his apostleship. He is setting it forth as an authoritative model to assist Titus in fulfilling his mission (i.e., to properly order the young churches in Crete). Thus, Paul is setting forth a high doctrine of the preaching ministry. Paul shows us that "apostolic preaching*" is an indispensable method in properly ordering a church (*Note: (i.e., Apostolic preaching is Christ-centered, expository preaching that focuses Biblical interpretation on Christ and shows Him to be the center of Scripture and the key that unlocks the meaning of Scripture from Gen-Rev.; Christ is the fulfillment of all God's promises).

The Apostles were committed to preaching because preaching was a central method in Jesus' mission (Matt. 4:17; 11:1; Mk. 1:14, 38-39; Lk. 3:18; 4:43-44). Jesus said that He was sent by the Father for this very purpose, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose," (Lk. 4:43). In Mark 1:14, Mark writes, "Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, *proclaiming the gospel of God...*" (emphasis mine). In Mark 1:38-39, Jesus says to His disciples, "Let us go on to the next towns, *that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.* And He went throughout all Galilee, *preaching* in their synagogues and casting out demons," (emphasis mine). Jesus wanted His disciples to be with Him so He could train them for their apostleship, which included the priority of preaching. Just as Jesus came preaching the gospel, so He sends out His disciples to preach as well. In Mark 3:14, Mark writes, "He appointed twelve (whom He also named apostles) so that they might be with Him and *He might send them out to preach,*" (emphasis mine).

Having been trained by Christ, it is no surprise to find that the 1st century church was characterized by preaching. In Acts we learn that Christ-centered proclamation of the gospel was a central activity of the church. There are 10 major Christ-centered sermons recorded in Acts (3 by Peter, 2:14-36; 3:11-26; 10:34-43; 1 by Stephen, 7:1-53; 6 by Paul, 13:16-47; 17:22-31; 20:18-35; 22:1-21; 24:10-21; 26:1-29). Immediately following the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, we find Peter preaching the gospel (Acts 2:14-36). In Acts 4:29, the church is praying for Peter and John that they might "...continue to speak Your word with all boldness." Paul makes the same request in Ephesians 6:19. He asks the church to pray for him "that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the

gospel.” It is precisely because the gospel is not simple but profound that Paul asks the church to pray that words may be given to him in order to boldly make known the mystery of the gospel (cf. Eph. 6:19). In Acts, Luke reports that the growth of the church is attributed to the fact that the word of God kept on spreading (6:7; 13:49). In Acts 19:20, Luke writes, “the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.” This spreading of the word of God came especially through the proclamation of the gospel.

Following this Christ-modeled pattern of preaching, Paul is teaching Titus that a gospel-driven ministry will be devoted to the proclamation of the gospel (cf. Eph. 1:13; Phil. 1:12, 14; Col. 1:5). That God’s promise of eternal life is now manifested “through preaching” raises an important insight for us regarding the church and its ministry. It is often said, “The message doesn’t change but the methods do.” To be sure there are cultural contexts that must be taken into account in the gospel-ministry (cf. 1 Cor. 9:19-23). Paul was willing to temporarily adopt a Jewish or Gentile to gain a hearing of the proclamation of the gospel. But, it is important to note that Paul never relativized or set aside the preaching of the gospel! Paul not only reveals the content (gospel) but also the method (preaching) of a gospel-driven ministry (see Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, p. 285).

It is imperative to understand that the gospel not only defines the message of the church but also determines the methods of the church. The method (preaching) is consistent with the message (gospel, cf. Michael Horton, *People and Place*, p. 48). God, in His wisdom, has ordained preaching to be fundamental for grounding and growing God’s people in the knowledge of the truth.

In proclaiming the gospel, God’s promise of eternal life is manifested. Through preaching of the gospel, the church hears the voice of Christ Himself. Thus, Paul is teaching Titus (and us!) that a gospel-driven ministry seeks to expose God’s people to God’s voice. A properly ordered church will be characterized by a high doctrine of the preaching ministry.

REFLECTION:

As we consider Paul’s high doctrine of preaching, we need to reflect on these questions: Why preaching? Why is preaching to be central in a gospel-driven ministry?

1. THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL IS NECESSARY FOR FAITH.

We have learned that the goal of Paul’s apostleship was for the purpose of bringing God’s elect to faith in Christ. Therefore, the gospel must be proclaimed for the sake of the faith of God’s elect (1:1). We need to hear the Word of Christ in order to have faith in Christ—and to keep believing in Him! “Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ,” (Rom. 10:17). In 1 Corinthians 1:21, Paul writes “For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it

pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.” In discussing the value of preaching, John Calvin writes, “God breathes faith into us only the by the instrument of His gospel, as Paul points out that ‘faith comes by hearing. Likewise, the power to save rests with God [Rom. 1:16]; but (as Paul again testifies) He displays and unfolds it in the preaching of the gospel” (*Institutes*, 4.1.5.).

If faith is to flourish in the church, preaching of the gospel must be paramount. Again, Calvin writes, “In order, then, that pure simplicity of faith may flourish among us, let us not be reluctant to use this exercise of religion which God, by ordaining it, has shown us to be necessary and highly approved,” (4.1.5.). Thus, Michael Horton concludes, “The choice of preaching as a medium is not incidental. This puts us on the receiving end of things; not only does justification come through faith alone, but faith itself come through hearing,” (*People and Place*, p. 47).

2. THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL IS NECESSARY FOR GROWTH IN GODLINESS.

We have learned that we need to continually hear the gospel in order to grow in godliness. The knowledge of the truth (i.e., gospel) is that alone which truly sanctifies. The one that hears and believes the gospel possesses rightly the knowledge of the truth, which issues in godliness. God’s word of grace (gospel) is that which offers and produces in us godliness. It certainly isn’t God’s word of law (cf. Gal. 3:3, 21). Even though God’s word of law is holy and righteous and good, it cannot produce the godliness of which Paul is speaking. Further, there is nothing in us from which godliness can proceed. We cannot, by our own powers (bootstraps!) fulfill what the law requires of us (i.e., godliness). The outward keeping of law cannot and does not purify the heart. Godliness is nothing else but a genuine faith in the knowledge of the truth. And so believers must always be moving on in the knowledge of the gospel, which is the doctrine of godliness.

3. THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL IS NECESSARY FOR HOPE.

As we learned last week, we need to continually hear the Word of Christ proclaimed to us for assurance; to have the confident expectation of the consummation of our salvation. We must repeatedly hear God’s promise proclaimed to us in the corporate gathering week after week. We must be continually reminded that there is forgiveness, reconciliation, justification and hope of eternal life even for lifelong believers who continually sin. Where in the service does this chiefly occur? The answer is in preaching! The entire corporate worship service is designed to expose us to God’s word of law and gospel. But, the law and gospel are especially heard in proclamation. When the gospel is proclaimed, God assures His people—through another who speaks to them—that He remembers the peace treaty He has made with them through Christ. It is this proclamation of good news that becomes an incomparable assurance for the Christian (see Horton, *People and Place*, p. 50). Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, “The fact that others assure me of God’s grace makes the church-community real for me; it rules out any danger or hope that I might have fallen prey to an illusion. The confidence of faith arises not only out of solitude, but

also out of the assembly,” (quoted in *People and Place*, p. 50). Hope is created, nurtured and increased through the proclamation of the gospel in the context of the gathered community of believers. Thus, Calvin can write, “...believers have no greater help than public worship, for by it God raises His own folk upward step by step,” (*Institutes*, 4.1.5.).

4. THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL IS NECESSARY BECAUSE THE CHURCH IS A SUPERNATURAL CREATION OF THE WORD.

In 2 Corinthians 4:6, Paul says that the church is created by the gospel, “For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” In preaching the gospel, Paul asserts that the glory of God shines in the face of Christ and brings into being that which is spoken (see *Institutes*, 4.1.5.). In 1 Peter 1:23, 25, Peter says that dead men are brought to life through the preaching of the gospel, “you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God... And this word is the good news that was preached to you,” (1 Pet. 1:23, 25). In Acts 20:32, Paul reminds the Ephesian elders that it is the “word of His grace” that “is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” Not only is the church created by the gospel but the church will always remain a “creation of the word of His grace” and thus be completed by this word of grace.

5. THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL IS NECESSARY BECAUSE IT PLAYS AN INDISPENSABLE ROLE IN THE PROPER ORDERING OF A CHURCH.

In Ephesians 4:11-13, Paul states that God gave gifts—primarily speaking gifts—to the church to build up the church to attain the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God. Commenting on this passage, Calvin writes, “...the church is built up solely by outward preaching, and that the saints are held together by one bond only: that with common accord, through learning and advancement, they keep the church order established by God [cf. Eph. 4:12]...(4.1.5.). By the preaching of the Word the ministry instituted by Christ is preserved (*Calvin Institutes*, 4.1.7.).

6. THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL IS NECESSARY BECAUSE IT IS A MARK OF A TRUE CHURCH.

There are true churches and false churches. Just because a church claims to be a church doesn't mean it is a church. This is why, for example, the Reformers taught from Scripture that there are two undeniable marks of the true church. A true church is where the Word is rightly preached and the sacraments are rightly administered. For example, Calvin wrote, “Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists,” (*Institutes*, 4.1.9. Note: Discipline is added as the third mark, cf. *Belgic Confession*, Art. 29.). Simply put, the pure preaching of the law and the gospel must be clearly affirmed and proclaimed, if a church is to be considered a true church.

In Galatians 1:8-9, Paul warns that if a church rejects the gospel, it commits apostasy and is no longer part of the visible body of Christ and comes under the curse of God's law. Theodore Beza, writing to his father, says, "...where there is no Word of God but only the word of man, whoever he be, there is no faith there, but only a dream or an opinion which cannot fail to deceive us (Rom. 10:2-4; Mark 16:15-16; Rom. 1:28; Gal. 1:8-9)," (*The Christian Faith*, p. 17). The mark of a true church will be characterized by the pure preaching of the gospel.

7. THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL IS NECESSARY BECAUSE IT IS THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

In 2 Corinthians 3:8, Paul speaks of the gospel as the ministry of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 3:8). The Holy Spirit takes action through the proclamation of the gospel. Michael Horton writes, "There can be no activity of the Holy Spirit independent of the Word, and any activity of the Word depends on the Holy Spirit for its effect," (see "Finding a Church," *Modern Reformation*, Issue: "The Church" Nov./Dec. 1993 Vol. 2 No. 6 Page number(s): 25-30).

The power of God's Word lies in the Holy Spirit. This is why God's Word is "living and active" (Heb. 4:12). This is why God's word accomplishes every mission for which it is sent (Isa. 55:10-11). The gospel is "the power of God for salvation" (Rom. 1:16; cf. 1 Cor. 1:18, 24). The Holy Spirit working through the proclamation of the gospel creates, sustains, nurtures and grows the church. Michael Horton writes,

The gospel does not merely tell us how to 'get saved,' as though it were an instruction manual (another command); it is the means through which God actually saves sinners. Preaching is not a downloading of information from one mind to another. God not only tells us about Christ, but delivers Him; not only explains our sinful condition and His saving purposes, but judges and justifies; not only speaks of a new world that we might enter, but brings us into it. God's Word not only tells us to believe—it is the means by which the Spirit gives us faith," (*The Gospel Commission*, p. 167).

8. THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL IS NECESSARY BECAUSE IT DRIVES US OUT OF OURSELVES.

Preaching is designed by God to drive us from an inward focus on ourselves to an external focus on Christ. Both the message and the method drive us out of ourselves (see *People and Place*, p. 49). Q. 155 in the Westminster Larger Catechism says, "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...*" (emphasis mine).

9. THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL IS NECESSARY BECAUSE IT PROVES OUR OBEDIENCE AND PROVIDES FOR OUR WEAKNESS.

God could in a moment perfect our faith (Note: all that follows comes from the Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.1.5.). But, Paul, as we saw in Ephesians 4:11ff., reveals that in His wisdom He has willed that believers grow in godliness under the preaching of the gospel by those whom He has entrusted and commanded to do so. It is God's will to teach us through human means (4.1.5.). Now some, out of pride, refuse to listen to those whom God has entrusted and commanded to proclaim the gospel. However, by teaching us through the weakness of other sinful men, God, writes, Calvin, "proves our obedience by a very good test when we hear His ministers speaking just as if He Himself spoke," (4.1.5.). And so, with a gentle and teachable spirit, God's people are to allow themselves to be governed by those who have been entrusted and commanded by God to proclaim the gospel. When God's servants are faithful to proclaim the gospel, it is just as if God Himself spoke. John Calvin counsels, "when you hear that this is attributed to them, recognize that it is for your benefit." The author of Hebrews in 13:17 writes, "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you."

Moreover, by the preaching of the gospel, God provides for our weakness. He does so by addressing us through men rather than directly. John Calvin writes, "...He [God] prefers to address us in human fashion through interpreters in order to draw us to Himself, rather than to thunder at us and drive us away. Indeed, from the dread with which God's majesty justly overwhelms them, all the pious truly feel how much this familiar sort of teaching is needed," (4.1.5.).

10. THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL IS NECESSARY BECAUSE IT IS A SACRED TRUST AND SOLEMN COMMAND.

False teachers had infiltrated the Cretan churches. They were claiming to be called of God and to be speaking on behalf of God. They may have been questioning Paul's apostolic ministry and authority. This is why Paul writes at the end of v. 3, "with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior..."

Unlike the false teachers, Paul had been entrusted with the proclamation of the gospel by the authoritative command of God who brings salvation. It was God, Himself, who entrusted and commanded Paul with the proclamation of the gospel. Paul repeatedly alluded to his calling to proclaim the gospel as a sacred trust (cf. 1 Tim. 1:11, 2 Tim. 1:11; 1 Cor. 9:17; Gal. 2:7). Paul didn't place himself in his apostolic ministry. Paul didn't qualify himself to be a servant and apostle. In fact, before God's called Paul by grace, Paul was violently seeking to destroy the church (cf. Gal. 1:13-14). He who had formerly breathed out murderous threats was now speaking forth words of life. The chief enemy of the gospel and persecutor of the church was entrusted with the task of proclaiming the gospel! This is an amazing display of grace!

Paul's preaching of the gospel was in keeping with God's command. Thus it was marked with divine authority in contrast to the false teachers, which could not claim equal authority. Paul is saying that his message and calling comes from God! It is of divine origin. As a servant and apostle, He is God's official ambassador. When Paul proclaims the gospel, the voice that is heard is God's voice! Calvin writes, "For, among the many excellent gifts with which God has adorned the human race, it is a singular privilege that He deigns to consecrate to Himself the mouths and tongues of men in order that His voice may resound in them," (4.1.5.). Such an amazing reality is why Paul regarded his apostolic ministry as a sacred trust and privilege as well as a solemn responsibility, which must never be compromised. Concerning this solemn responsibility, Paul exhorts Timothy, "¹ I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: ² preach the word..." What a solemn charge and responsibility! J.C. Ryle writes,

We have no right to expect anything but the pure Gospel of Christ, unmixed and unadulterated, the same Gospel that was taught by the Apostles, to do good to the souls of men. I believe that to maintain this pure truth in the Church—men should be ready to make any sacrifice, to hazard peace, to risk dissension, and run the chance of division. They should no more tolerate false doctrine—than they would tolerate sin. They should withstand any adding to or taking away from the simple message of the Gospel of Christ," (*Warnings to the Churches*, p. 105).

Like Timothy, Paul is seeking to encourage Titus to regard the preaching of God's Word as a sacred trust and solemn responsibility, which must never be compromised (see Milne, *1.2. Timothy and Titus*, p. 199). The church is to understand that when Titus—as well as the elders Titus will appoint—proclaims the gospel, it is God's voice that is heard. God's promise of eternal life is manifested through the preaching of the gospel. Such a manifestation of good news creates, nurtures and deepens faith, godliness and hope. It is fully authoritative and thus of paramount importance for properly ordering (and maintaining the order) a church.

During the Spring of 1969, D. Martyn Lloyd Jones, delivered six weeks of lectures on the subject of expository preaching to the faculty and students of Westminster Seminary. He began his address by saying,

...the work of preaching is the highest and the greatest and the most glorious calling to which anyone can ever be called. If you want something in addition to that I would say without any hesitation that the most urgent need in the Christian Church today is true preaching (expository- J.F.) and as it is the most urgent need in the Church, it is obviously the greatest need of the world also," (*Preaching and Preachers*, p. 9).

I agree with Lloyd Jones. Thus, may our prayer ever be for the Lord to grant us the grace to have heralds who do not trouble our consciences but rather lift burdens in

Christ's Name by proclaiming the word of His grace. May God consecrate to Himself on our behalf the mouths and tongues of pastors in order that His gospel will be the salve that alone can heal our soul's sores. May we by God's grace be a ministry of life that rejoices that Christ has given His servants the keys that unlock His kingdom (Adapted from, Michael Horton, "Comfort Ye My People A Reformation Perspective on Absolution (Reformed View)," "Naked and Ashamed: Does anyone feel guilty anymore?" Nov./Dec. 1997 Vol. 6 No. 6 Page number(s): 22-26).

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