

AN AUTHORITATIVE GOSPEL-DRIVEN MINISTRY
PART 8

TEXT: TITUS 1:1-4

November 18, 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 to follow in order to assist him in properly ordering the churches in Crete. What were the characteristics of Paul's apostolic ministry? What are the characteristics of a properly ordered church? In discussing his apostleship, we find four characteristics of a 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

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 of eternal life, 1:2-3a
- III. A gospel-driven ministry is devoted to the proclamation of the gospel. 1:3b-c

We learned that a properly ordered church will be characterized by a high doctrine of the preaching ministry.

LESSON:

- IV. A gospel-driven ministry is devoted to passing on the gospel. 1:4

A key component of the church's education ministry consists in passing on the knowledge of the truth (i.e., gospel) from one generation to the next. After his detailed introduction, Paul, in v. 4, now addresses his letter to Titus. He writes, "To Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior."

- A. Titus

Paul begins by addressing Titus, an uncircumcised Gentile, as his “true child.” The word, “true,” means there is nothing false or illegitimate about Titus’ Christianity. Why does Paul call Titus legitimate from the beginning? As we noted when we began our study of Titus (see Part 1), authority is necessary to properly order a church, particularly when there are competing voices vying for a believer’s commitment (i.e., the false teachers, 1:10-16).

To be sure, Paul wasn’t writing to inform Titus of his apostolic ministry. Titus had been Paul’s apostolic assistant for years. Titus knew Paul quite well. Titus knew the gospel quite well. And so Paul’s purpose wasn’t to inform Titus but to validate him before the churches of Crete. The issue at hand was: How can the Cretan churches distinguish between a legitimate and illegitimate ministry?

Titus, Paul states, was a valid member of the covenant community, the church. His ministry to Crete was legitimate in contrast to the false teachers of the circumcision party who were illegitimate. Thus, the churches on Crete are to recognize that Titus is a legitimate spiritual son (disciple) of Paul.

As Paul’s legitimate apostolic representative and archetypal elder, they are to receive him and the work, which Paul left him in Crete to do. Hiebert writes,

A primary purpose of this letter is to give Titus the needed written authorization for the work which Paul had given him on the island of Crete. Paul was aware that in carrying out his assignment Titus would meet opposition. Circumstances on Crete made it desirable to place in the hands of Titus ‘written instructions to which he might be able to appeal, whenever the occasion should arise, in proof that he was not acting arbitrarily, but in accordance with positive Apostolic directions’ ... In this letter the writer, who describes himself and his message at such length, lends his powers to his helper to act for him in the matters contained in it,” (Titus and Philemon, 16).

There is a second way Paul validates Titus’ legitimacy before the churches. The reason Titus, an uncircumcised Gentile, is legitimate, is because he shares with Paul, a circumcised Jew, “a common faith,” (cf. Gal. 2:3-4; 3:7-9, 14, 28-29). Paul’s designation of Titus is nearly identical to Timothy (cf. 1 Tim. 1:2) except for the addition of the word “common” (κοινός).

Why does Paul add this addition? Again, we must recall that many Jews lived on the Island of Crete and some of them apparently belonged to “the circumcision party” (1:10). The “circumcision party” maintained that it was necessary to be circumcised in order to be a genuine member of God’s covenant community (cf. Acts 15:1). But, Titus was an uncircumcised Greek, which the false teachers could use to claim that Titus was illegitimate (Note: Timothy was circumcised (cf. Acts 16:3) and considered by Jewish law to be Jewish since his mother was Jewish [Timothy’s father was Greek]. So, there would have been less resistance to Timothy at least from a cultural standpoint).

The designation “uncircumcised” was a Jewish term of derision, which signified that a Gentile was outside the covenant people of God. Even though this letter is addressed to Titus, we must not lose sight of the fact that Paul expected it to be read to the churches in Crete. Thus, because of the presence of the circumcision party, it was vital for Paul to validate Titus before the churches on Crete. As Paul’s disciple, Titus shared the same gospel (common faith) as the Apostle himself. Martin Luther writes,

...of Titus, he says that he strove to take the same steps with Paul (2 Cor. 12:18), that he taught the same thing, that in everything he expressed the image of Paul both in word and in deed. If they teach, think, say, do, live and express everything the same concerning Jesus, they never stir up heresies. In addition, they have the same crosses and sufferings, and each has compassion with the other, so that there is no dissembling either in spirit or in public behavior; they have the same attitude, judgment, life, cross, suffering, and compassion,” (*Luther’s Works*, vol. 29, p. 14).

It is important to note here that faith in Christ, as He is manifested through the proclamation of the gospel, is what unites all of God’s people. Contrary to the “circumcision party” now that the Mosaic Covenant was obsolete, the distinction between Jew and Gentile is removed (cf. Eph. 2:11–22). Christ makes peace between Jew and Gentile and unifies both in the church through the gospel. There is, therefore, only one unified people of God.

Titus may have been one of Paul’s spiritual converts but this cannot be known for sure (see Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, p. 382). But, what we do know for sure is that Titus shared a common faith with Paul because Paul had passed it on to Titus, just as he had to Timothy (cf. 2 Tim. 1:13). Titus had been thoroughly grounded in the knowledge of the truth, which produces godliness. He was loyal and faithful to the same gospel Paul proclaimed and passed on. Therefore, Titus was to be received and followed in his task of ordering the churches, which Paul will now proceed to unfold in the rest of the letter (cf. 1:5-3:15) Having begun this letter with a detailed discussion of the purpose of his apostleship, Paul now issues his Christianized greeting.

B. Gospel Greeting, 1:4c-d

Paul writes to Titus, “Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.” This greeting of grace and peace is much more than a fancy way of saying, “Hello.” Paul desires grace and peace for Titus. Grace and peace were the benefits Paul sought to instill in his disciples.

1. Grace, 1:4c

Grace is the “*favor Dei propter Christum*” (God’s divine favor on account of Christ). God’s divine favor on account of Christ is what is proclaimed and manifested in the

gospel. Paul argues that this grace not only justifies (3:7) but it also sanctifies (i.e., it instructs and empowers us to live godly lives, 1:1; 2:11ff; 3:8).

2. Peace, 1:4d

Peace is the benefit that flows from grace. First, Peace is the objective reality that all is well between oneself and God. In Romans 5:1, Paul declares that because the Christian, through faith in Christ, has been justified, he or she no longer lives under the fear of God's judgment but instead now has "peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Second, peace is the subjective reality that our hearts experience as we remain gospel-centered (i.e., focused on grace, Philip. 4:7). Peace is the benefit of spiritual-well being that flows from grace. A Christian is possesses a conscience at peace with God.

3. "Our Savior," 1:4e

Note how Paul reveals that this two-fold gospel blessing comes "from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior." The title Paul applies to the Father in v. 3, "God our Savior," is assigned to Jesus in v. 4, "our Savior." Three times in this letter Paul employs the phrase, "God our Savior," (1:3; 2:10; 3:4). And, three times he refers to Jesus as "our Savior," (1:4; 2:13; 3:6).

The point is that our salvation is equally the gift of both the Father and the Son. To be gospel-centered is to be Trinitarian based. The Father and the Son are united in the work of salvation. Both are Savior and both equally grant grace and peace.

The *origin or fountain* of our salvation is God the Father (1:2). In Galatians 4:4-5, Paul states that the Father sent His Son to merit our salvation (i.e., redemption and adoption). He writes, "4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons."

The *agent* of our salvation is Jesus, who merited our salvation and paid the price of our redemption and adoption. In Titus 2:13-14, Paul writes, "13 ...our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, 14 who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession who are zealous for good works." By His obedience, suffering, death and intercession, Jesus has merited for us salvation and reconciled us to God (cf. Rom. 5:10).

Now, it is significant that Paul attributes the same honor to the Son as he does to the Father. Christ is true God because salvation and the bestowal of grace and peace are the distinctive work of God alone. Only God can save and only God can grant grace and peace. Again, Paul has in mind the false Jewish teachers who most likely downplayed Christ (see Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, p. 383). In a Jewish mindset the

designation, “God our Savior,” would recall thoughts of God’s great saving acts (e.g., the Exodus, His delivering of Israel from bondage in Egypt). In Isaiah 43:11, God reminds Israel, “I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no savior.” It is the God of Israel, who makes the exclusive claim as Savior, to whom Paul attributes the work of salvation to Christ! Paul’s language is clear proof of His conviction that Jesus is God.

God the Father is the source of our salvation and “Christ Jesus our Savior,” is at the center of God’s saving work (i.e., His promise of eternal life, Titus 1:2). Q. 29 of the Heidelberg Catechism asks, “Why is the Son of God called Jesus, that is, Saviour?” Here’s the answer: “Because He saves us from all our sins, and because salvation is not to be sought or found in anyone else.”

There is no greater comfort than the designation, “Christ our Savior.” Christ is not Moses—a law-giver. He is a Savior! An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph and announced to him, “She will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins,” (Matt. 1:21). The name, “Jesus,” means a Savior or the author of salvation. In Hebrews 7:25, the author speaking of Jesus says, “He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” Because Jesus is resurrected and ascended, He lives forever and has a permanent priesthood, unlike the Levitical priests who were temporary and died. Therefore, He is able to save His people to the uttermost (i.e., completely, forever).

By His death on the cross, Jesus once and for all accomplished the work of salvation for His people (Heb. 10:12, 18). But, His work didn’t end there. The author of Hebrews says that He “always lives to make intercession” for His people. Christ our Savior is now sitting at the right hand of God and always intercedes for us. In Romans 8:33-34, Paul writes, “³³ Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.”

As our resurrected and ascended Savior, Jesus lives for the express purpose of interceding for His people. What comfort! What hope! What joy! This is the basis and means by which He, as our Savior, saves us completely! And so in contrast to the false teachers, we see from Titus that a gospel-driven ministry will be Trinitarian and marked by a high view of Christ’s person and work.

REFLECTION:

As we reflect on this fourth characteristic of Paul’s apostleship, we need to carefully consider this observation:

A gospel-driven ministry intentionally seeks to pass on the gospel to each generation.

David Gibson, in his essay, “Assumed Evangelicalism: Some Reflections En Route to Denying the Gospel,” warns how we are all “susceptible to the very subtle drift that can take place from proclaiming through assuming to denying the gospel,” (see <http://beginningwithmoses.org/other-articles/255/assumed-evangelicalism-some-reflections-en-route-to-denying-the-gospel>). We must recognize this tendency to assume the gospel and always strive to remain self-consciously gospel-centered. Passing on the “knowledge of the truth” to share in a “common faith” is vital to ensuring that a church is and remains properly ordered and healthy.

We have seen from this passage that Titus shares with Paul a “common faith.” And, that which Titus received from Paul (“the knowledge of the truth,” “the common faith,” “sound doctrine”) he was charged to pass onto the churches in Crete. Paul exhorts Titus to “teach what accords with sound doctrine,” (Titus 2:1) and to appoint elders who would do the same (1:9).

Though every believer is to be involved in teaching and serving one another (cf. 1 Cor. 12:29; 1 Pet. 4:10-11; 1 Cor. 15:58), the primary responsibility of making sure the gospel is faithfully passed on belongs to the elders of the church. Understanding that Titus’ mission in Crete was temporary, Paul wisely charges him to appoint qualified men—elders—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). The word “sound” means healthy or health-giving. The doctrinal/gospel-nurturing and maturing of a church is health giving. Passing on the gospel produces a healthy church!

Paul understood that appointing of qualified leadership would ensure that the content of the gospel would be faithfully passed on after Titus leaves (i.e., to join Paul in Nicopolis, 3:12). Paul gives the same charge to Timothy, who like Titus, is Paul’s official Apostolic representative and prototypical elder in Ephesus. In 2 Timothy 2:2, Paul exhorts, “what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” This passage best portrays the idea of passing on the faith. This was Paul’s way of working wherever he went.

For example, in 1 Corinthians 15:3, he reminds the Corinthians, “I *delivered* to you as of first importance what I also *received*...” (emphasis mine). What was it that Paul received and delivered? The answer is the paramount truths of the gospel, namely:

1. Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, (15:3);
2. He was buried, (15:4a);
3. He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, (15:4b);
4. He appeared, (15:5-7).

The passing on of the “knowledge of the truth” so that each generation shares in a “common faith” involves receiving and delivering. The point to recognize is that you cannot deliver what you have not received. This is the process of discipleship that characterizes a gospel-driven ministry (i.e., receiving and delivering).

We have learned that Paul’s apostleship began with the goal of bringing God’s chosen people to faith in Christ (1:1c). But, we clearly see that Paul saw the passing on of the gospel as more than a onetime-only proclamation for unbelievers. He was not content to leave believers with a truncated gospel (i.e., seeing the gospel as only for unbelievers). He didn’t move on from the gospel to something else (e.g., endless challenges and how-tos of discipleship). Paul has shown us that he continued with the gospel. He sought to deepen believers in the knowledge of the truth (i.e., the gospel, 1:1d). 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).

Paul has also shown us that such growth in the knowledge of the truth wasn’t simply for knowledge sake but rather for the purpose of producing godliness (i.e., God-centeredness in all aspects of the believer’s life; a life that fears God and walks in holiness doing good works for others; 1:1e).

And so, we learn from this opening greeting in Titus that Paul’s discipleship began with the gospel, continued with the gospel and ended with the gospel. The gospel comprised the content of his proclamation and instruction. His entire apostolic ministry was carried out within the framework of the gospel. He was committed to grounding and growing believers in the knowledge of the truth (i.e., gospel) in order to produce godly believers. This is how we are to understand discipleship (i.e., intentionally reproducing the “receiving and delivering” of the gospel from one generation to the next).

The implications of Paul’s model for our church are numerous. We will briefly introduce and focus on one application. Apart from the centrality of the corporate ministry of Word and Sacrament, one of the most effective methods for formally grounding and growing (i.e. passing on) believers in the gospel and its implications (i.e., godliness) is the biblically based and historically affirmed use of catechisms.

Regrettably, many mainstream Evangelicals wrongly associate the word “catechism” with Roman Catholicism or perhaps with some of the more mainline, liberal Protestant denominations such as the Lutherans and Episcopalians. For the most

part, catechisms and catechizing is a foreign concept among American Evangelicals. But the effectiveness for passing on the “common faith” through the use of catechisms is well documented. Tom Nettles notes that “Julian the Apostate (ca. 360) so feared the effectiveness of this enterprise that he closed all Christian schools and places of public literature and forbade the instructing of youth,” (see, “An Encouragement to use Catechisms,” <http://wwwFOUNDERS.org/journal/fj10/article3.html>).

It was the Reformers (evangelicals) of the Reformation who introduced the use of catechisms in the churches. In his essay, Dr. Nettles notes that the Reformation was the golden Age of catechisms. Both Martin Luther and John Calvin placed a high priority on the use of catechisms and considered the success of the Reformation as virtually dependent on the faithfulness of Protestants to this process. In 1548, Calvin wrote to Edward VI’s protector Somerset: “Believe my Lord, that the Church of God shall never be conserved without catechism, for it is as the seed to be kept that the good grain perish not but that it may increase from age to age. Wherefore if you desire to build a work of continuance to endure long, and which should not shortly fall into decay, cause that the children in their young age be instructed in a good catechism,” (“An Encouragement to use Catechisms”).

To this end, we are working to implement *The Heidelberg Catechism* in our church’s education ministry. One of the reasons we have chosen this catechism is because it is the most widely used of all the catechisms of the Reformation. In fact, the *Heidelberg Catechism* has circulated more widely than any other book except the *Bible*, Thomas a Kempis’s *The Imitation of Christ*, and John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* (see Joel Beeke & Sinclair Ferguson, *Reformed Confessions Harmonized*, p. x).

The *Heidelberg Catechism* has stood the test of time and is still today one of the best tools for grounding and growing believers in the gospel and its implications for life. My wife and I have personally seen the great impact this catechism has had upon our own children.

Another reason we have chosen to use this catechism is because of its easy, threefold division. It is divided into a basic three-part structure: “Guilt, Grace, Gratitude” or “Sin, Salvation, Service.” This catechism provides an explanation of the fundamentals of the Christian faith. It teaches the believer how to live a gospel-driven life and thus avoid the heresies of both legalism and license. The catechism covers the Apostles’ Creed, the Ten Commandments, the Lord’s Prayer, and the sacraments.

The final reason we have chosen this catechism is because of its warm, pastoral tone. What is distinctive about this catechism is how it connects all of the teaching to a single over-arching theme (i.e., comfort). Q. 1 is perhaps the most famous question and answer of probably the most famous catechism of the sixteenth century (see Lyle Bierma, “The Heidelberg Catechism,”

<http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/heidelberg-catechism/>). Q 1. Asks, “What is your only comfort in life and in death?” Here’s the answer,

That I, with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ, who with His precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins, and redeemed me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me, that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, that all things must work together for my salvation. Wherefore, by His Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me heartily willing and ready from now on to live for Him.

This is one of the most beautiful and succinct theologically rich answers ever penned in the history of the church. The word “comfort” refers to our assurance and confidence in the finished work of Christ, for both life and death. In his commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism, Zacharias Ursinus, says that this Christian comfort—both in life and death—is

a comfort consisting in the assurance of the free remission of sin, and of reconciliation with God, by and on account of Christ, and a certain expectation of eternal life, impressed upon the heart by the Holy Spirit through the gospel, so that we have no doubt but that we are the property of Christ, and are beloved of God for His sake, and saved forever, according to the declaration of the Apostle Paul: ‘Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?...',” (p. 18).

Seeking to instill such gospel-comfort is the task and goal of a gospel-driven ministry. Possessing this kind of comfort is only possible by intentionally reproducing the “receiving and delivering” of the gospel from one generation to the next.

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