

Text: Titus 1:1-4

Title: Paul's Greetings to Titus

Truth: Paul's ministry aimed to bring salvation to God's elect.

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Introduction

Here is a high-level outline of the letter to Titus:

- I. Introduction, 1:1-4
- II. Installation of Elders on Crete, 1:5-16
- III. Sound Teaching for the Churches, 2:1-15
- IV. General Exhortations for the Churches, 3:1-11
- V. Final Instructions and Closing, 3:12-15

The function of the opening verses in the book of Titus is simple: it is the greeting section of a letter from Paul to Titus, providing some information about author, some about the recipient, and a prayer from the author on behalf of the recipient. It is of the normal structure (From Paul...To Titus...Grace, peace, and mercy). If you "opened the mail," this would allow you to know where the letter should go.

You might think that these verses can be quickly skimmed before moving onto the "real meat." But we must not overlook the greeting. Why? First, because this bit of text is inspired by God. Second, it contains some significant theological statements that lay groundwork for the letter.

This is a fairly elaborate introduction to the author. The fact that this information is placed early in the letter indicates that it is important. It is not placed here because there is nowhere else to put it. It describes the general mission of Paul. These things characterized the man who was writing to Titus and showed things that he thought were important about his ministry—and in turn, things that should be important to us.

The three-fold structure of the greeting forms our outline:

I. From: Paul (vv. 1-3)

A. His Call (v. 1a)

1. As a servant or slave of God. Did you know that this exact title is only used of three people in the Bible? They are: Moses (1 Chron. 6:49, 2 Chron. 24:9, Neh. 10:29, Dan. 9:11, Rev. 15:3), Paul (Titus 1:1) and James (James 1:1). Obviously the title of servant is meant to convey the humble state of one who is doing the serving (or slaving) but what is often overlooked is that the servant of the highest Person in the Universe is himself exalted. What a privilege to serve the King of kings!¹ As a slave, Paul saw himself as one transferred *out* of slavery to sin and *into* slavery to God. There is no middle ground. All Christians are slaves of Christ (Eph. 6:6).
 2. As an apostle of Jesus Christ. An apostle is one sent as a representative. Paul was called by Christ and sent by Him to do a particular job. We will see what the job was just now. Along with the job came authority derived from Christ as His messenger.
- B. His Purpose. (v. 1b) The key connective word is the first word in the phrase, “according to” or “for the sake of.” It is from a Greek word used hundreds of times in the NT (twice in Titus 1:1, once in verse 3, and once in verse 4). You might imagine that, as such a workhorse word, it has quite a range of possible meanings. In this instance, I believe best to understand it as “for” in the sense that Paul’s call was with the three-fold *goal, intention, or purpose* of:
1. Bringing the elect to faith... The phrase “faith of God’s elect” means “faith exercised by God’s elect.” Election is the theological term that means that God chose all believers, before the foundation of the world, to salvation in Christ with all its attendant blessings and obligations.² As such, there are a group of “chosen ones” called “elect” in the Scriptures. This term is

¹ There are similar titles “servant of the LORD” and “servant of the living God” and the first is used of Moses (Deut. 34:5, Josh. 1:1, 13, 8:31 33, 11:12, 12:6, 13:8, 14:7, 18:7, 22:2, 4, 5, 2 Kings 18:12, 2 Chron. 1:3, 24:6), Joshua (Josh. 24:29, Judges 2:8), and David (Ps. 18:1, 36:1), while the second is used of Daniel (Dan. 6:20). Paul also calls himself a “servant of Jesus Christ” (Rom. 1:1, Gal. 1:10) as does Jude (Jude 1), and Epaphras is called a servant of Christ as well (Col. 4:12). Finally 2 Tim. 2:24 speaks of Timothy, and in general the pastor of the church, as a “servant of the Lord.”

² This definition is from Rolland McCune’s Systematic Theology course at DBTS.

used in several places this way (Rom. 8:33, Col. 3:12, 2 Tim. 2:10, 1 Peter 1:2, 2 John 1, 13). This purpose of the apostle's work was laid out in Acts 26:14-19. The concept of the elect, and the work required to "find" them, is mentioned in Acts 18:10. We trust that not all who will exercise saving faith have yet done so, and therefore believers must continue to do the work necessary to bring them to Christ.

Hear this again: it is not enough that someone is elect. God also requires that the *means* He has elected are used appropriately also, to bring the elect to faith. A person who is elect, before they have exercised trust in Christ, is no different than the non-elect insofar as is humanly observable. In fact, the divine pronouncement upon such people is that they are under the wrath of God (John 3:36) and children of wrath just like those who are not elect (Ephesians 2:3; note carefully the comparative word *as*).

2. ...And the knowledge of the truth. This is the larger body of Christian truth than "the gospel," as the reductionist tendency of recent years in American evangelicalism. Having "faith" is not the end of the Christian project; we also need to *understand* what we believe, why we believe it, and its implications. This truth leads to the third part of Paul's goal, which is...
 3. ...And bringing these elect to godliness. You could call this the "godly living" kind of truth. Right thinking should lead to right living. Wrong thinking leads to wrong living (Mat. 12:34). Paul's whole purpose in life was to further God's work so that people would know the truth and this truth would induce them to live godly lives. This was not just to get people saved, but that people would in fact be holy.
- C. His Hope (v. 2). This is the encouraging endpoint of Paul's work; it serves to drive him forward in the apostolic mission and it strengthens the Christian converts to persevere in the midst of difficulty. The preposition "in" indicates that his service and purpose are aiming toward the ultimate hope of the gospel, namely eternal life. Without such hope, the entire system of Christian faith crumbles and becomes useless. If we only have an

earthly, man-made system of religion, then it is worthless. But God takes us beyond the present life to a far better everlasting life. We confidently anticipate the fullness of life eternal because we know it is coming.

This hope was fixed from eternity past because the “unlying” or “unfalse” God promised it then. It was arranged by the Triune God amongst themselves that they would redeem many people to an eternal existence with God. God is the definition of and source of all truth. His moral character does not allow Him to lie; and His infinite power does not allow Him to fail to carry out His intentions. Numbers 23:19 teaches the same thing about God in an Old Testament context.

- D. His Commission (v. 3). In contrast to the time of the promise (eternity past) from the last verse, here what we learn is that at just the right time (the when) God manifested His word (the what). He did so “through preaching” (the how) and this preaching was specially entrusted to Paul as his ministry job description. He was commanded to be a preacher by God.

God was using Paul as an important cog in the machine that takes (1) the plan promised before time began; (2) delivers it through the means of a person preaching; (3) to people broadly, but especially to God’s chosen ones; (4) so that they would believe the good news; (5) and know the truth; (6) to the end that they would be godly people; and (7) would end up in the state of eternal life.

For parents, pastors, missionaries, and every Christian, we cannot sit on our laurels and say, “Well, if they are elect, they’ll figure it out!” That is wrong. Paul teaches us here the pattern: God brings people to faith and godliness *through* the agency of people proclaiming the truth. Paul *existed* for the purpose of being a link in this chain. We too are a link—get this—bringing the glorious gospel message from eternity past into the present.

In other words, Paul was called by God to preach to bring about the salvation, sanctification, and glorification of God’s people. This is what the apostle Paul was all about and he knew what he was supposed to be doing. We can safely say that we are similarly commissioned—under the terms of the Great Commission.

II. To: Titus (v. 4a)

A. This is a fascinating little verse. Titus is called a true/genuine child. Herein is Paul's confidence that Titus is really a born-again believer in Christ. He should be, if he is going to lead churches to appoint pastors and teach them sound doctrine and so forth.

Are others so impacted by your testimony for Christ that they say about you, "he is a genuine disciple." I am not talking about your own *personal* assurance; I am talking about the assurance of *others* regarding your faith.

B. The common faith referred to here is the rule or standard by which someone becomes a true Christian and is known as such. Titus is a true son—so he "has faith" in "the faith." His belief is in accordance with, up to the standard of, matching that of Paul's gospel.

"Common" does not mean "widespread" in this context. You have heard about common sense – it is not so common (widespread) anymore. This "common" has to do with the idea of "shared" among all Christians. Only in that sense is it common—common to all Christians. Unfortunately, people tend to think of Christians as holding a wide variety of beliefs. But there is a common or shared base of content shared by true believers from which, if one varies, he is not a Christian.

III. Greeting (v. 4b)

I understand the greeting to be a prayer for the following three items to be given by God and Christ to Titus:

A. Grace: unmerited favor, not only the "saving" kind but also the "sustaining" and "service" kind. Grace is the disposition of God that is unearned, totally free and "not of works" so that we have nothing to boast about.

B. Mercy: The kindness or compassion of God that is expressed toward someone in need, or withholds from them what they deserve. This word is not in many Greek copies of Titus. It may be a scribal addition because it was common in other Pauline greetings. However, it is in the majority of manuscripts, so I keep it here.

- C. Peace: The blessed state of the saved, a state of harmony or lack of conflict between God and the believer, and between believers.
- D. These gifts are “from God” and “the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior.” Note “our Savior” is used of Jesus here and of God in verse 3. Isaiah 43:11 and Hosea 13:4 teach that there is no Savior beside God Himself. Jesus is “Jehovah who saves,” based on the meaning of His name. It is evident that for Jesus to be Savior like God is Savior, He must be of equal deity with the Father. The doctrine of the Trinity is thus supported. Both the Father and the Son are deliverers of grace, mercy, and peace.
- E. These things—grace, mercy, and peace--ought to be reflected in our lives because of our receipt of them from Heaven.

Conclusion

Paul is a servant and apostle whose goal is to see God’s elect come to faith and knowledge of the truth. This is founded upon the hope of eternal life which God has promised, and He cannot lie. The promise was made from eternity past, but has been manifested at just the right time through the vehicle of preaching. To Paul this preaching was entrusted according to the command of God our Savior.

May you desire to live with the same kind of purpose as Paul—to help people be saved, sanctified and glorified. Furthermore, may you be one who can be called a “true child according to the standard of the commonly received Christian faith.” Simultaneously, you yourself need to be being sanctified so that your life reflects godliness. Finally, may God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ grant you grace, mercy, and peace.

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