

Titus - an introduction

This short letter from Paul is to Titus who assisted him in bringing the gospel to parts of the Roman Empire. He was not a Jew, but a Greek who probably came to Christ in Antioch. He went with Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem when they met with the Jewish Christians to decide what to do with Gentile believers. We don't hear about him again until some 10-12 years later during Paul's 3rd missionary journey: Paul sent him to Corinth to start collecting gifts for the suffering church in Jerusalem. After that missionary journey, Paul was arrested and ends up in prison in Rome where he is when the book of Acts ends. Many scholars think Paul was released from prison and went with Titus to Crete where he preached and planted some churches. He left Titus there and continued elsewhere, perhaps Spain, before he was arrested again and then beheaded a few years after he wrote this letter.

The situation on Crete was challenging

Crete was a little larger than Long Island and was located south of Greece in the Mediterranean Sea. The people there were notorious for being crude and ill-mannered and false teachers made the situation even more difficult for Titus. In addition, these churches were probably small and didn't have organized leadership to enable them to survive, much less flourish in the cultural environment. Titus was not a novice; he had been following Christ for probably 15 years and been in ministry with Paul for probably 5 years, but the situation in Crete was difficult and that's why Paul wrote this letter to him. Paul gave him some key strategic truths that would help him persevere successfully in establishing the church in Crete: they can help us also here at BHOFF.

Key strategic truths to help the church flourish in the midst of negative cultural pressure

First, the gospel message about Jesus and all that is connected to him in the bible is absolutely true and the final authority in everything. Paul says that God commanded him to preach the message of Christ. In effect he tells Titus, this message is not any man's idea – it is from God himself. That's why it matters that people believe it; that's why false teaching has to be refuted; that's why we must live by it. *“Titus, keep a tight grip, a stranglehold on God's word as the absolute authority for life.”* **Secondly**, God doesn't lie – about anything. It's not just that God's word is the final authority – it is true in all parts. What he said in the Old Testament and in the New Testament is exact reality – the way it is. **Thirdly**, God is outside of time. He has chosen his people and it is as certain as his existence that his people will be with him in eternal glory. God has promised that and he doesn't lie, and nothing can interfere with Jesus bringing all his chosen to his eternal home. This effort to be the church is worth it; we are investing in eternity. **Fourthly**, the teaching of the Word of God (the OT prophets, the NY apostles and others) has been designed by God to strengthen the faith of his chosen people – “faith comes from hearing and hearing through the word of Christ.” That growing faith which is informed by the Word of God produces godliness which is evidence of authenticity. ‘Godliness’ is becoming more like God in the pursuit of loving God and loving others with the manifestation of that love in the fruit of the Spirit, which is the character of Jesus.

What Paul wants in Crete, we want in BHOF

What Paul wants to see happen in the churches in Crete is what we want to see happen in BHOF – lives that accord with godliness. But is not just a collection of individuals who are God-saturated (Piper’s word) that Paul wants, but a body, a corporate identity, that produces the fragrance of Christ in our relationships. Two concluding thoughts: 1) This kind of growing faith is the faith common to Paul, Titus and you and me (vs 4). 2) We need God’s grace and assurance of his favor to enable us to move forward... and we have it in Christ.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. This is a short, personal letter. What do verses 1-4 tell you about the kind of man Paul was? What do they tell you what kind of relationship he had with Titus whom he had known for about 15 years?
2. From these verses, what is Paul’s view of the church? His role? God’s word? Jesus?
3. Does Paul’s language (‘hope,’ ‘elect,’ ‘common faith’) have any effect on you? How?
4. How should we respond to the blessing pronounced in verse 4 – “grace and peace”? Is there any way it can be meaningful to us since we are not Titus?