

~ The Study of the Life of Paul~

The Epistle to Titus Overview: A Call to Holiness

We are continuing our study of the life of Paul and we have now come to the time in his life when Paul has been released from his first imprisonment in Rome after being under house arrest for two years. This time period of Paul's life, namely the last 3-4 yrs from 63-66, is very obscure because we don't have a narrative like the book of Acts to guide us on this journey. So far in our journey with Paul, it has been like a man walking with a clear view of the horizon and an open path ahead, knowing exactly where to go, but then as we journey off the pages of the book of Acts as we have done using his five prison epistles to help guide us, it is as if we have descended down into a valley and the view isn't as clear. But now that we have finished his prison epistles and move on to this time period after his first imprisonment it is as if we have turned a corner and now there is an enormous wall that stands before us with only small cracks that we can peer through. This is how it feels trying to piece together Paul's remaining 3-4 years. The only source we have to this time frame are his last three epistles, Titus and 1-2 Timothy. These are known to us as the pastoral epistles of Paul and within these short epistles, we can get some idea of the happening and life of this great man.

It is clear that Paul's appeal to Caesar Nero was successful and he was released as a free man. There is no historical record that Paul actually stood before Nero, but I believe he did because of the promise the angel gave Paul on his way to Rome, Acts 27:24- *"Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar..."* There is no doubt Paul was released from his first imprisonment in Rome because these last three epistles cannot be reconciled before or during this time frame. All the historical events and travels that take place in these three epistles have to be after his first imprisonment. Here is a list of specific places that Paul mentions that help us piece this narrative together:

- Crete, Titus 1:5
- Asia, specifically Miletus, Ephesus and Colosse, 2 Tim 4:20; 1 Tim 1:3; Philemon 22
- Troas, 2 Tim 4:13
- Macedonia, Philippi and Thessalonica, 1 Tim 1:3; Philippians 2:24
- Corinth, 2 Tim 4:20
- Nicopolis, Titus 3:12
- Spain possibly??? Romans 15:24; Clement 1.5
- Ephesus and Troas again, maybe Miletus, 2 Tim 1:6; 4:13; 4:20
- Arrested and brought to Rome to be martyred, 2 Tim 1:17

The grammar and syntax of these three pastoral epistles are different than Paul's other letters. The writing style is that of Luke much like the epistle to the Hebrews, the Gospel of Luke and Acts. Therefore, it is my conjecture that Luke co-authored these epistles with Paul just as he did with Hebrews.

Paul was released after being under house arrest for *"two whole years,"* Acts 28:30, and now unfettered from a Roman guard, he steps foot in Rome as a free man and travels, as he always has, back to visit the churches. Many people have come to visit him in Rome, some may still be in prison, such as Aristarchus and Epaphras. Others have been sent to the churches, Tychicus and Onesimus to Asia; Epaphroditus and Timothy to Philippi. Those who seem to be traveling with Paul are Luke, Titus, and Trophimus. Paul's first stop in my estimation is Crete where Paul ordains Titus as the bishop or overseer of the island of Crete.

So today we are going to take an overview of the book of Titus and see the commission Paul places on his young protégée here in the island of Crete. Titus has been a faithful man and a fellow-worker with the Apostle Paul. Titus is mentioned 13x in the Divine Record and the first in chronological order is in Galatians 2:1-5, when Paul took Titus along with him to the Jerusalem Council meeting in 50ad. Titus was a Greek, an uncircumcised Gentile, who Paul took along with him in refutation to the Judaizers who

had traveled to the church in Antioch claiming that you must follow the Law of Moses and be circumcised to be saved, Acts 15:1-5. We are not sure when Titus became a Christian. It was probably in Antioch, but Paul saw the heart of Titus as a heart of compassion and encouragement and brought him into a very hash environment to reconcile these matters. We see Titus show up again in 2 Corinthians when Paul mentions him 9 times and sends Titus to Corinth with the “severe letter.” Paul had many dealings with this rowdy bunch in Corinth and finally Paul had enough and sent a very harsh letter that we no longer have extant by the hand of Titus. Paul was deeply troubled by the Corinthians behavior and determined within himself that he wouldn’t make the painful visit back to Corinth again unless they straitened up, **2 Cor 2:1-4**. So Titus delivered this letter for Paul and took it upon himself to admonish the Corinthian church and it seems his efforts paid off because later in the letter Paul rejoices in the report from Titus, **2 Cor 7:5-7**. Titus had a great character and a gifting of comfort and encouragement. But it seems he had great patience in working with people and helping them get back on track, **2 Cor 8:16-17**. I mention that because it is this heart that Paul needs in Crete to help this church get back on track as well.

The church in Crete was being infiltrated by the Judaizers. There is no record of Paul starting this church in Crete, but by now it seems there are churches throughout the island, Titus 1:5 (every city), but they are swaying from the Truth. This is why Paul is sending Titus there, **Titus 1:5, 10-16**. Paul had sent Apollos to Crete earlier, sometime after 56ad, and we see that Apollos is still there when Titus arrives, 3:13, but Apollos didn’t have the patience for an unruly church. We saw that with church at Corinth. Paul wanted Apollos to go back to Corinth, but Paul says, “He was quite unwilling to go at this time,” 1 Corinthians 16:12. And then Titus went to Corinth. I think the same thing is happening here in Crete, Apollos can’t seem to get these people in line. Even though he is an eloquent speaker and mighty in the Scriptures, he doesn’t have the gifting that Titus has. So Paul brings Titus to Crete to straighten them out.

This epistle to Titus is a call to Holiness to shine the Light of Jesus Christ. A letter to establish the church in sound doctrine which will result in godly men purifying the church, which produces godly living and sanctification. All through this letter, Paul will emphasize the importance of preaching the Word. Notice how he begins, **Titus 1:1-3**. Just as the elect and truth is according to godliness, namely faith in Jesus, so also is Paul’s service as a slave and an Apostle in accordance with the elect and the truth because he was sent to preach the Word.

Paul continues in verse 4 greeting Titus, a true son, according to the common faith we all share in Christ. Verses 3-4 begin a main theme that carries through this epistle, namely that Jesus is our God and Savior. Six times in this epistle Paul mentions God our Savior, and he uses God and Jesus interchangeably, **1:3, 4; 2:10, 13; 3:4, 6**.

Paul gets right to the point of addressing the purpose of this letter; one, to reiterate what he had already said to Titus, but also to validate this authority to the churches from Paul the Apostle to Titus, **2:15**. Paul is giving Titus the authority to function as overseer of the churches in Crete to purge the heresies infiltrating the church, specifically the heresy of the Judaizers. And the way to refute heresy is to preach the Word. Notice how Paul describes the qualifications of these elders in the church, **Titus 1:5-9**. These are all attributes of godly character. They are not a list of do’s and don’ts, but rather the one who is founded on the Word of God. The one who holds fast the Faithful Word will grow in godliness. He continues describing a godly church in chapter 2, **Titus 2:1-10**. It is sound doctrine, sound teaching from the Word of God that produces godly men purifying the church to produce godly works.

Good works is a main theme throughout this epistle. Notice verse 7, “*in all things **showing** yourself to be a pattern of good works.*” This idea is repeated in verse 10, “*not pilfering, but **showing** all good fidelity, that they may **adorn** the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.*” And this theme continues in **2:14; 3:1, 8, 14**. Eight times in these three chapters Paul emphasizes good works. And I believe he is doing this to refute the

Judaizers who say that salvation comes from doing good works and following the Law. So what are these good works Paul speaks of? Paul tells us they are **NOT** works of righteousness which we have done to attain to Salvation, **2:5**. We don't do good works to become a Christian... we do good works because we are Christian. Good works are the fruit of being a Christian. But it is even deeper than that because it is not even our good works that Paul is speaking of. Good works are not produced by our life, but rather they are produced from the One we are living out from, namely Jesus Christ. We live out from Jesus and His faith just like a branch connected to a Vine. Its not the fruit of the branch, but the fruit of the Vine.

Notice that Paul describes these good works as adorning or displaying the doctrines of God our Savior, **2:10**. It is an outward display of Christ- likeness. These good works are not so much of what we do, but the character of Jesus Christ flowing out from us. Notice how Jesus describes His good works, **John 9:4-5**. He equates His good works as shining His Light to the world. And remember Jesus said in Matthew 5:16, “*Let your light shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*” These good works are so much more than just doing good things, but rather this is the work of God shining out from us and through us. Remember when Jesus made the amazing statement in John 14 about doing greater works than Him, **John 14:12**. These greater works are happening because we as His body are shining His Light to the world in greater measure and we are shining the Light of the Truth of Salvation, even life from the dead, **John 5:20-21**. The Gospel message is a message of Life and we have the opportunity to shine that Light on His behalf, all He wants us to do is connect ourselves to Him, and we do this by faith, **John 6:29**; 1 John 3:23; Romans 4:5, faith in His work. We are saved and made a new creation in Christ because of the work of Jesus on the cross, **Ephesians 2:10**. We weren't created “for” good works, but rather “upon” good works; upon the good works of Jesus. In Revelation 2:25-26, Jesus says to the church at Thyatira, “²⁵ But hold fast what you have till I come. ²⁶ And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations.” Notice it is Jesus' work that we hold fast to not our good works. When we hold fast to Him and live out from Him, then His Light, His good works shine through us.

There is something else that happens when we earnestly hold fast to Jesus. He promises to come back and catch us away in His Glory, **Titus 2:11-14**. The earnest expectation of our Blessed Hope, to be caught up with Jesus in glory forever when He returns will purify and cleanse our hearts, **1 John 3:2-3**; **1 Peter 1:22-23**. This letter to Titus is a call to Holiness and we do this by teaching sound doctrine which in turn keeps our focus on Jesus. That is the call of a good shepherd... to keep the flocks focus on Jesus at all times; to keep the bride focused on her Groom.

Paul then summarizes this letter in chapter 3, **Titus 3:1-8**. This is the message of the Gospel, by grace through faith, not according to our works, but only in accordance with His work on the cross. Verse 8 is the key to the whole letter. He says, “This is a faithful saying, (πιστὸς ὁ λόγος- the Word is faithful) and in connection with His Word, concerning these things (referring to verses 4-7, this is the work of God) I desire that you be, διαβεβαιόμαι, thoroughly established and unwavering, so that those who have believed in God take careful thought to, προΐστημι, stand good works as first place (to regard as first place His good work of Salvation and shine this Light to the world).

Paul then goes on in verses 9-11 to make a contrast between what we should be embracing, προΐστημι, standing as first place, this is Jesus and His good work of Salvation, versus what we should be avoiding, περιΐστημι, **Titus 3:9-11**.

Paul wraps up his epistle with the promise of sending Artemas or Tychicus with this letter. Tychicus has always been Paul's faithful messenger. He delivered the three prison epistles to Asia: Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon. Paul is writing this in the summer or fall of 63ad, and he is planning to leave Macedonia, travel through Corinth and then winter in Nicopolis and he asks Titus to come join him

there. This may have ended Titus' time in Crete, because later in 2 Timothy Paul tells us that Titus was sent to Dalmatia. Paul tells Titus to send Zenas the lawyer, probably a Jewish scribe, and Apollos on their journey. This means these two men were already on the island of Crete.

Verse 14 is a final admonition in which he uses the same wording from verse 8, **Titus 3:14**. He implores Titus to disciple and train, *μανθάνω*, the brethren in Crete and remind them to stay focused on Jesus and regard Jesus' works as first place for the urgent needs so that they may not be unfruitful.

There was an urgent need in Crete to bring their focus back to Jesus instead of focusing on themselves and earning their salvation through the works of the Law. This is what a good shepherd does for the flock, he keeps the bride's focus on Jesus and out from this yearning for Him, we shine as Lights to the world bearing His glory until He returns.

Paul ends as he does all his letters saying,

Grace be with you all. Amen.