

The Facets Of A Faithful Servant

Titus 1:1-4

Pastor John Miller

Our text is Titus 1:1-4. "Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect and the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began, but has in due time manifested His word through preaching..." I like that "...which was committed to me according to the commandment of God our Savior; to Titus, a true son in our common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior."

Why would I do a series on a letter written to a pastor? Since it is a pastoral epistle, doesn't that mean that it was intended just for pastors? No. It is the pattern that Paul gives us of what Titus is to be and do, and Paul introduces us to his ministry in verses 1-4. This pattern and Paul's ministry is still applicable to us today.

I also believe that "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16), and because of that, we need to study "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). Titus is part of the Scriptures, so we want to study the Word of God; it is profitable for us to grow and to learn by it.

The theme of the book also appeals to me. The theme of Titus is sound in belief and in behavior. I like the fact that it speaks of sound doctrine, which leads to sound living. This short letter penned by Paul stresses that the popular belief of orthodoxy gives the basis of proper behavior, which is orthopraxy.

I think this is very important but is lost in many churches today. What we believe determines how we behave. Everybody wants to hear pragmatic, practical preaching. But Paul's epistles are always laid out the same: doctrine then duty; principles then practice; first what you believe, then how you behave. You cannot separate your behavior from your belief.

I want you to see what I believe to be one of the key—if not the key verse of the book. In Titus 3:8, Paul says, "This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God..." which is our belief "...should be careful to maintain good works," which is our behavior. "These things are good and profitable to men."

So you cannot separate belief from behavior. We first have to have doctrine before we can live the righteous, Christian life. It's the belief that behaves.

In some ways, it's like the book of James. James and Paul were not against one another or contradicting one another, but some say that Paul taught faith alone, and James taught we are saved by faith plus works. No. We are saved by faith alone in Christ alone, but they both believed that the right belief or faith results in the way we behave. It's the behavior of our belief.

What is the place of Titus in the New Testament? We have the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in the New Testament; we have the Acts or the history of the church; and we have the epistles. And in the Pauline epistles, these three of 1 Timothy, Titus and 2 Timothy appear in that chronological order. They are Paul's pastoral epistles; they were written to pastors, Timothy and Titus. Paul is instructing Timothy and Titus how the church should function and be structured. Titus will give us a lot of important truths.

Who was Titus? Verse 4 says that he was "a true son in our common faith." It is believed that Titus was Paul's convert. It's interesting that Titus is not mentioned in the book of Acts, but we hear about him in the other epistles. He was a messenger of Paul and used quite a bit by Paul to go to places to do Paul's ministry. He was a Gentile. Timothy was part Jew and part Gentile, but Titus was a pure Greek or Gentile. He was an interesting traveling companion of Paul.

And it's interesting that he was on the island of Crete, verse 5. "I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you." The island of Crete is a Mediterranean island. It lies about 60 miles southeast of Greece in the middle of the Mediterranean, south of the Aegean Sea. It is about 160 miles long and five miles wide at its narrowest width. Cretans were known to be very wicked and worldly people. In Titus 1:12, they are called "liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." They were really bad people. So no pastor would want to volunteer to be sent to Crete; it was a bad place. But God needed a man like Titus to go to Crete, as we see in Titus 1:5, to "set in order the things that are lacking."

The date of this epistle is about 63 AD. After Paul's imprisonment, he was released and wrote 1 Timothy and Titus. Then he was rearrested and thrown into the Mamertine Prison or dungeon, and before his execution, he wrote his last letter, which was 2 Timothy.

I want to give you four reasons why Paul left Titus in Crete. Number one, he wanted Titus to ordain elders, verses 5-9. And we'll look at the qualifications for pastors next time. Number two, Paul wanted him to rebuke false teachers, Titus 1:10-16. Number three, he wanted Titus to teach sound doctrine, Titus 2:1, which says, "Speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine."

The word "sound" appears a lot in the book of Titus. It is actually a medical term. We get our English word "hygiene" from it. It means "healthy" or "life-giving." So doctrine that is sound will bring health and life.

And number four, Titus was to teach the believers to maintain good works. Those who believe should maintain good works.

What a picture this is for pastors and what a pattern for believers today in the church! Preach sound doctrine and practice sound behavior. A church that is being taught sound doctrine should have sound living. We always want to bring up our practice to our level of our position in Christ. That is the theme of the book of Titus.

Now let's start with this opening salutation, in verses 1-4. It is one of the longest, opening salutations in any Pauline epistle. In the Greek, it is one, long sentence and is full of doctrine and truth. It focuses on Paul and his ministry. I want you to notice that there are several facets of Paul's ministry in its nature or in its faithful ministry of service. So there is a pattern for us in Paul's life of how we should serve the Lord and how the members of our church should be servants as well.

I first want to look now at Paul's position, in verse 1. It says, "Paul." He had two names. First, it was Saul, which was his Hebrew name that meant "asked for." It was believed he was named after the first king of Israel, King Saul. Second, when he ministered the Gospel and traveled among Gentiles, he took on his second name of Paulos or Paul, which means "little," being a Greek or Gentile name. And Paul was the human author of the book of Titus, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Paul identifies his position in two ways: "a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ." "A bondservant of God" lays the foundation for Paul's faithful, fruitful life of service. It is the only place in any of his greetings or writings where he uses this exact expression, "bondservant of God." Normally it would say, "servant of Jesus Christ." But here Paul broadens it to God, no doubt God the Father.

The word "bondservant" is the key here. It's the Greek word "doulos," which means "slave." He wasn't a hired servant, who could quit his job or protest for higher pay; he was a slave. We don't like the word "slave." We prefer the word "servant." But it was a slave concept.

And when you become a Christian, the Bible says, in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, "You are not your own. For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." If you're a Christian, you are to be a slave to God.

One of the definitions I found of doulos is that it is "a person who does not regulate his life according to his own will but according to the will of his master." As a doulos, which we should be as slaves of God, you don't regulate your own life, you don't choose your own life. You actually surrender your will to the will of God. You say to God, "I'll go where You want me to go, I'll do what You want me to do, I'll be what You want me to be and I'll say what You want me to say." You say, "Lord, I'm yours. 'Take my life and let it be consecrate Lord to Thee.'"

Have you done that? Are you a doulos? This is the foundation for faithful, Christian service. We are not our own. Jesus said, "Whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matthew 16:25).

Too many times Christians just kind of take salvation and say, "I'm going to heaven; that's all I need. Now leave me alone, God. I want to live my life the way I want to live it." So they don't see themselves as under the mastery of God; that God leads and guides, and it's His will. Seek the Lord and pray that God would use you for His glory. It means consecrating and dedicating your life to God and to His services. This is a badge of great humility; "I am a slave or a doulos

of God.”

Paul was committed to God's mastery over his life. When Saul, in Acts 9:4-6, was converted, he saw a great light on the Damascus road and heard the audible voice of God saying, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ Then the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.’...So he, trembling and astonished, said, ‘Lord, what do You want me to do?’” I like that. Paul surrendered to the lordship of Jesus Christ. You might think of this as Paul being committed to the mastery of God over his life.

I like Romans 12:1 where it says, “Present your bodies [as] a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.” The word “bodies” here refers to our mind, our will and our emotions; it's our whole being that needs to be consecrated and dedicated to the Lord.

I see this as foundational for Paul's fruitful service. It kept him going in the difficult times of service to God.

The second thing Paul says about himself in verse 1 is that he was “an apostle of Jesus Christ.” It is a title of great authority. He didn't tell this to Titus for Titus' welfare; Titus knew that Paul was a servant of God and an apostle of Christ. But the false teachers that were infecting the church in Crete needed to know that Titus was there under the authority of the apostle Paul. In Acts 2:42, it says that the early church “continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine,” which is the Word of God.

I don't believe there are any apostles in the church today in this sense. They laid the foundation of the church and then all died out. We have the apostles' teachings in the Word of God. Anyone who claims to be an apostle and speaks with apostolic authority is misinformed or confused.

So Paul said that he was an apostle. One of the qualifications of being an apostle was that you had to have seen the risen Christ, which he had on the road to Damascus. And you had to have been directly commissioned and sent out by the Lord. So the title of apostle is one of great authority.

Paul was a man of humble heart, a slave, he was committed to his Master, was a faithful messenger to the sovereign Lord, to whom he was an apostle. So we are slaves of God and servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. We too should be committed to God's mastery of our lives. And we too should be His ambassadors in sharing Christ with others.

The heart of Paul's introduction or salutation is, secondly, his purpose. So we move from Paul's position of servant or doulos or slave of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to his purpose, verses 1-3. He was called “according to the faith of God's elect and the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began, but has in due time manifested...” or “explained” “...His word through preaching, which was committed to me according to the commandment of God our Savior.”

For what purpose had Paul become God's slave and Christ's apostle? Paul lists a fivefold purpose in his ministry. Each purpose is seen in just one word. Number one is evangelism. He says, "according to..." or "in harmony with" or "in alignment with" "...the faith of God's elect." The New Living translation explains this text pretty well. It says, "I have been sent to proclaim faith to those God has chosen." Or to bring those who God has chosen to faith is the idea.

What marked or characterized Paul's ministry—and should characterize ours as well? Evangelism. Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). The church needs to be evangelistic or reaching out to the world with the good news of Jesus Christ. So Paul went to preach, he preached that we need to have faith in Christ and that God elects those who will be saved.

You ask, "Well, how does election work? If God elects people to be saved, why do we need to preach? If they're going to be saved, they don't need me to preach the Gospel to them." The same God who ordains the end, the salvation of sinners, ordains the means to the end by the preaching of the Gospel.

I believe in the doctrine of election. That means that God chooses us for salvation; we don't choose Him. Ephesians 1:4 says, "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world." That's the doctrine of election. I don't want to weaken it. I don't want to deny it. But I also believe the verse that says, "Whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:15-16).

So how do I reconcile a "whosoever" Gospel with the doctrine of election? I don't. I believe they must reconcile in a higher unity. God knows; I don't. God's a lot smarter than we are. I just want to faithfully proclaim what the Bible teaches.

If you're a Christian, He chose you to be saved. What you should do with that fact is just be thankful and live in godliness and true holiness. Don't have a mental breakdown trying to reconcile the two. Don't get all freaked out over free will and divine election. You don't reconcile it; you just accept it. You can't reconcile them, but they're both taught in the Bible. The danger is that we usually camp on one side or the other; we deny one and preach the other. So we need to accept that both are taught.

So Paul was still an evangelist, even though he believed that God elects some to believe in Christ and to be saved. I can't understand that, I can't reconcile that, but I believe that. And I believe that whoever puts their faith and trust in Jesus Christ will be saved. If you repent, God's not going to say, "Sorry; you weren't chosen." But if you reject the Gospel, you're responsible. I can't explain it, but both are taught in Scripture. So they reconcile in a higher unity.

Verse 1 says, "according to the faith of God's elect." There it is in the Bible. So we should be an evangelistic church preaching that "Whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." Notice that the Word of God was part of Paul's ministry—evangelism.

Number two is education. Paul's ministry was that of education, teaching "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). Verse 1 says, "the acknowledgment of the truth." So it says, "according to the faith of God's elect" or preaching to those who God has chosen, that they would put their faith and trust in Christ, and "the acknowledgement of the truth which accords with godliness." The New Living translation renders this, "I have been sent to proclaim faith to those God has chosen and to teach them to know the truth that shows them how to live godly lives."

So what should we have in the church? Evangelism and education. Discipleship and teaching the Word of God, the truth. Every pastor should be a teacher. Faith and reason belong together. Every Christian needs to be educated in the truth of God's Word, the Bible. I read a quote from Warren Wiersbe this week that said, "Every local church should be a Bible school." I like that.

A week from tomorrow we will have a whole week of our school of preaching. We've invited pastors and lay leaders from all over the United States and from other countries. They'll come to learn how to preach the Bible expositively.

The Bible needs to be taught in the local church. Every church should be a Bible school. Youth ministry, adult ministry, women's ministry, men's ministry—all ministries should be based on teaching the Bible, the Word of God.

This is not a social club. We do social gatherings, but that's not the purpose of a church. I used to think the Greek word "koinónia" meant "donut." Because every time we had fellowship, we had donuts. That's all fine and wonderful; I like that Christians love to eat. But we are called to study the Bible. The early church "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine." So we need to be grounded and growing in the Word of God.

Number three is sanctification. Verse 1 says, "which accords with godliness." Again, the New Living translation says, "shows them how to live godly lives." Another translation renders it, "the truth that leads to godliness." There again is the doctrine that leads to duty or the behavior of belief. Teaching the Word of God leads to the sanctification of people's lives. The theme of Titus is sound belief leads to sound behavior. And how are we sanctified? Through the Word of God by the Spirit of God transforming the child of God into the image of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

One of the chief ways that God sanctifies His people is the Bible. You cannot grow as a Christian in Christlikeness, in true godliness, without the Word of God. But it is the Spirit of God, using the Word of God, that transforms the child of God into the image of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. So this is the process whereby we are sanctified, growing in holiness and in likeness to Jesus Christ. The Word of God is involved.

Number four in the facets of Paul's ministry is expectation, verse 2. It says, "in hope of eternal life..." that's our expectation; that we will spend eternity with God in heaven "...which God, who cannot lie..." I like that "...promised before time began."

What does Paul mean by “in hope of eternal life”? You say, “Pastor John, I thought we knew we were saved and had eternal life. Then why are we hoping for it?” The word “hope” in the New Testament doesn’t mean we cross our fingers, grab a rabbit’s foot and say, “I hope, I hope, I hope I’ll go to heaven when I die!” There are a lot of so-called “Christians” who do that. “I hope I’ve been God enough! I hope I’ve been faithful enough so I can go to heaven when I die!” I believe we can be sure of our salvation. I believe in the doctrine of assurance; that you can know you have eternal life.

Remember that salvation has three tenses: I’ve been saved, which is justification; I’m being saved, which is sanctification; and I will be saved, which is glorification. So there is a future glorification, a future hope that I will see Jesus again. In Titus 2:13, Paul says, “looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.” This is one of the great verses in the Bible. So God promised that hope, and He cannot lie.

Years ago I heard Billy Graham preach an amazing sermon titled Things God Cannot Do. One of them was that God cannot lie. That’s because God is perfectly holy, and God will never violate His own nature. I can lie. You certainly can lie. Politicians do lie. But God never lies. Think about that: it is impossible for God to lie. God promised eternal life and He cannot lie.

What else can’t God do? He cannot save someone apart from Jesus Christ. If you want to get to heaven, you can’t go around the Cross. You have to come to Christ to be saved.

When did God promise eternal life? Verse 2 says, “before time began.” Again, that is tied in with election, tied in with God’s plan and purpose. Before the foundation of the world, before man ever was created, before man ever fell in the garden, God planned and plotted out the whole redemptive process.

So the promises of God found in the Bible bring us hope. It is the Word of God that gives us expectation or hope.

Number five in Paul’s purpose of ministry is proclamation. Paul speaks of him being called to proclaim God’s Word, verse 3. “...but has in due time manifested His word through preaching, which was committed to me according to the commandment of God our Savior.” Before the world began, He promised eternal life, but in time and history, He appointed preachers, including Paul, to preach the Word of God.

The preaching of the Gospel is the bridge which spans the two entities of the past promises and the future fulfillment. The place the Word of God had in Paul’s ministry should be the place it should have in our ministry.

So in evangelism, we use God’s Word. In education, we instruct in God’s Word. In sanctification, we are sanctified by God’s Word. In expectation, our hearts are filled with hope based on the promises given in God’s Word. And proclamation, I believe, is a reference to the expositional preaching of God’s Word. Expositional preaching is reading the text, explaining the text in its historical, grammatical and theological context, so the Word of God is understood as it

is preached or proclaimed.

In 2 Timothy 4, which was Paul's last letter before he was martyred, he told Timothy, in verses 2-5, "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching." Then he told Timothy why: "For the time will come..." and has come "...when they will not endure sound..." or "healthy, life-giving" "...doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers, and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things...do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."

I've discovered, in studying this passage again this week, that this pattern for pastors is also the pattern for the church. We are to be doing evangelism, education, sanctification, expectation or looking for the coming of the Lord and keep proclaiming, keeping preaching the Gospel and the Word of God "in season and out of season." So we need the same purposes as Paul: committed to God's mastery, committed to God's mission and committed to God's message.

There is one last point I want to make, in verse 4. We move from Paul's position, Paul's purpose to Paul's personal son, Titus. Paul says, "To Titus, a true son in our common faith" or "we share together a common faith."

It is believed that Titus was Paul's convert. But he was more than that; he was Paul's protégé. And Paul poured himself into others. Paul invested his life into others. So Paul wishes Titus "grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior." This is one of the repeated statements in the book of Titus: His full title is "Lord Jesus Christ our Savior." Again, in Titus 2:13, Paul says, "looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." So Paul closes his salutation or greeting with "grace, mercy and peace."

Some of you may have a translation that omits "mercy," because in some of the manuscripts, the word "mercy" does not appear. But I think it's significant that Paul gives mercy to the pastors; pastors need mercy. "God, don't give them what they deserve; give them what they don't deserve." And they need grace for salvation, grace for service and grace for suffering. We need peace, which is the Hebrew word "shalom." And grace and peace are found in the Cross of Jesus Christ. It comes, as its source, from God our Father and comes through the "Lord Jesus Christ our Savior." It's all because of Jesus.

So Paul's position is that he is a slave; Paul's purpose is that he was preaching the Word of God; and in Paul's personal mentoring, he taught and poured himself into Titus.

As Christians, every one of us should mentor someone. We should be growing and getting stronger in the Lord and finding someone who we can mentor, teach, encourage or pour into. Don't just blast through your Christian life, while not helping someone else. Put your arm around a weaker brother or sister. Gather together to pray. Study the Bible together. Pour into others around you. It will pay great dividends.