



Introduction 1:1-4

1 From Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ.

I was chosen and sent to help the faith of God's chosen people and to lead them to the truth taught by our religion, 2 which is based on the hope for eternal life. God, who does not lie, promised us this life before the beginning of time, 3 and at the right time he revealed it in his message. This was entrusted to me, and I proclaim it by order of God our Saviour.

4 I write to Titus, my true son in the faith that we have in common.

May God the Father and Christ Jesus our Saviour give you grace and peace. (TEV)

We all like to get letters. Well, at least, we all like to get letters when they are not bills! Or for that matter when they aren't junk mail, bad news or the like. In fact we like nice letters, letters from an old friend, letters which enclose money(!), letters that include helpful information. This letter we are going to study over the next few weeks was written by Paul to one of his close aides, Titus who he had charged with sorting out churches in Crete who clearly had a mix of issues to resolve.

What do we know about Titus? He's described here *my true son in the faith that we have in common*. It's interesting that in Greek, my true son, means "legitimately born". It's a really important description as we'll see. He was probably a convert of Paul's early ministry. Titus travelled with Paul and got good reviews in Paul's letters being described as Paul's partner and fellow helper (2 Corinthians 8:23) and, his brother (2 Corinthians 2:13). Paul took Barnabas and Titus with him to the Jerusalem, having been sent by the church of Antioch to answer questions concerning converts among the Gentiles (Gal 2:1-10). It was while at the Council of Jerusalem that some Christians with a Pharisee background argued that Gentile converts should be circumcised (Acts 15, Gal 2). Paul refused to circumcise Titus (Gal 2:). After that Titus functioned as Paul's messenger to the troubled church in Corinth (2 Cor 7:6-7; 8:6,16-19) when he acted as postman for Paul. We'll see in a moment that Titus' background had a huge bearing on the content of this pastoral letter we are studying.

The letter opens with an uncharacteristically (for Paul) long salutation to Titus, which introduces Paul's own *bona fides* as it were. Why did he do this as surely Titus would know what they were? Of course he would but although the letter is written personally to Titus, it represented his instructions and delegation of authority to Titus who was going to show the letter to them as evidence of the authority and task he was sent to do. So although it is addressed to Titus, it's Paul's letter of commendation to the churches in Crete.

After all, Titus probably didn't need any advice from Paul on the issues he was going to raise in Crete: he was a senior leader and as an early disciple, already well conversant with Paul's teaching. But the Cretans weren't and they needed to know that if they were going to accept what was tough challenges from Titus, that it all came with the full authority of both Paul and more importantly, God. Everything in this letter was probably a live and controversial issue in Crete.

In fact the letter covers a number of issues and you'll see why Titus needed some oomph from Paul when I list them:

- Qualifications & responsibilities for elders

- Members responsibilities
- Outlines for godly living
- Church doctrine to be upheld in order to be pleasing to God

Paul's contact with Crete is recorded in Acts 27 where as a prisoner his ship wintered there. We don't know what contact he had there or whether he left Titus there at this time (Titus 1:5) or some other time. There is a church tradition that he did a fourth missionary journey that may well have engaged him in visiting all over the Mediterranean as far west as Spain and also to Crete, but we just don't know. What we do know from Scripture is that Paul was conversant with Cretan literature. Where did he get that from? We don't know but what this letter suggests that his name and reputation had some currency in Crete and it is that Titus was going to be relying upon.

Let's have a look at Paul's credentials a little bit more closely as they help us understand the ground of his authority and therefore, Titus' authority and by deduction, what the grounds for truth are in our lives as we accept this teaching as the word of God.

From Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ. That's a good start, Peter, James and Jude also describe them in the same way! He uses the word *doulos* – a bond-servant – to indicate that he was a slave of God, but one who had chosen to take the obedience to a master. Paul usually used "servant of Jesus Christ" in other letters. Why different here? We need to look at why this letter was written. Titus was to teach in churches that had not been set up by Paul. They had received teaching from a number of sources e.g. Peter and James as well as coming under the influence of Judaisers (people like the converted Pharisees of Acts 15 who wanted to get Gentiles circumcised and become Jews if they wanted to follow Christ. Paul has to establish his authority so he uses the same description as Peter or James – a servant of God – as well as their titles – an apostle of Jesus Christ. He's saying: "I'm the real deal". What's more he's then adding in verse 4 that Titus is his legitimate son. He's the real deal too. This dealt directly with Titus' authority. They should accept him because he was Paul's appointed man and therefore by implication God's appointed man.

What else does Paul say about himself: *I was chosen and sent to help the faith of God's chosen people and to lead them to the truth taught by our religion, 2 which is based on the hope for eternal life. God, who does not lie, promised us this life before the beginning of time, 3 and at the right time he revealed it in his message. This was entrusted to me, and I proclaim it by order of God our Saviour.*

What did Paul do?

- ➡ TEACH He was sent to help the faith of God's chosen people
- ➡ EVANGELISE He was sent to lead them to the truth taught by our religion - *the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life* (NIV)
- ➡ ENCOURAGE and sent to nurture the hope for eternal life
 - which God promised before the beginning of time
 - which is revealed in his message which Paul preaches.

This is the basic core of what Paul was about and it is the basis of what we do as church. We have received eternal life in Christ, now we build one another up and speak that hope to others. That's what we are about. That's what Paul was about and that's what Titus was about. Whatever else that Titus was going to teach – and it was pretty challenging stuff – he had to be reminded of what Paul was about because in verse 4 and then beyond we see that authority was delegated and would be at the core of what he was going to teach the Cretans.

So what are we to apply to ourselves here? What's clear that is before we ever look at the detail of church organisation, people's personal morality, the responsibility of members or just theology about godly living, we need to see where the basis lies – and that's in Christ. Because it is only in Him that we have the hope of eternal life. It is only because of His grace that we can now be called the chosen people of God. And it is in His name that we proclaim the hope of eternal life. That's what we are about. Now let's recognise that anchor in our own ministry as a church in this town and neighbourhood, and let's recognise that in our own personal calling.

Challenge.

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