



Paul's Troubleshooter

It is about 62AD. Paul, we presume, has been released from his imprisonment in Rome and is once again out and about on his missionary travels. He has been to the island of Crete and having seen the state of the churches there has left his troubleshooter, Titus, behind to “set things in order.” His letter to Titus spells out what needs to be done.

The letter opens with what you will recognise as a form of Paul’s standard introduction.

“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, which was committed to me according to the commandment of God our Saviour; To Titus, a true son in our common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour.”

Titus 1:1 – 4

It’s the way they started letters in those days, but none of Paul’s words were ever mere formality: These verses say some significant things about Paul himself, Titus and God.

Paul

Paul calls himself both a servant (more accurately translated a slave) of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ.



What is an apostle?

Why do you think Paul calls himself both a slave and an apostle?

He is a slave and apostle with a purpose — two purposes in fact — for the faith of God’s elect¹ and for the knowledge of the truth. Those are the things he has been assigned to promote. He expands upon them by saying that the truth he promotes leads to godliness and godliness is lived out in the hope of eternal life;

¹ The literal translation of verse 1 designates Paul as an apostle “according to the faith of God’s elect.” It is not altogether clear therefore what the relationship between Paul’s apostleship and the faith of the elect is. The meaning could be that their faith characterizes Paul’s apostleship but it seems more likely that his apostleship promotes their faith.

hope which rests on a promise God made before time began and which Paul himself preached at the Lord's command.



Paul will have more to say about the kind of godliness knowledge of the truth leads to and about the hope of eternal life later in the letter. For now the ideas are there to whet our appetites and start us thinking.

Why do you think Paul emphasises these two particular aspects of his own calling: the promotion of faith and knowledge of the truth?

How are faith and knowledge related to each other?

What does the phrase “the truth which accords with godliness” tell you about the nature of truth?

In what ways does the hope of eternal life promote godly living?

Titus

Paul calls Titus “a true son in our common faith.”



What does this tell you about his relationship with Titus?

Titus was Greek by birth and one of Paul's own converts. Strangely he is not mentioned in the book of Acts. He gets his first New Testament mention in connection with the controversy over Gentile converts and circumcision.

“Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me... Yet not even Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised... we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.”

Galatians 2:1 – 5

The occasion appears to have been the Jerusalem Council of about 50AD (Acts 15). It appears that Paul made a test case of Titus. After this it is likely that Titus continued to accompany Paul on his journeys.

When Paul's crisis with the church in Corinth arose during his third missionary journey, after other attempts at reconciliation including a personal visit had failed, he entrusted Titus with the task of delivering a letter to the Corinthians in which he rebuked them for rejecting his apostolic authority. He was distressed by the delayed return of his messenger.

“I had no rest in my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia.”

2 Corinthians 2:13

Titus' eventual return with good news from Corinth gave Paul great joy and led to him writing in 2 Corinthians.

“Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus...Therefore we have been comforted in your comfort. And we rejoiced exceedingly more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all.”

2 Corinthians 7:6 and 13

Paul then sent that letter by Titus' hand entrusting him with a second diplomatic mission to Corinth. This one related to the collection Paul was organizing among the Greek churches for the benefit of the churches in Judea. Paul assured the Corinthians of Titus' sincerity and commended him as his partner and fellow-worker.

“So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well... thanks be to God who puts the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus... If anyone inquires about Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker concerning you.”

2 Corinthians 8:6, 16, 23

“Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not walk in the same spirit? Did we not walk in the same steps?”

2 Corinthians 12:18

After the end of the story recorded in the book of Acts it is presumed that Paul was released from prison in Rome and continued his missionary travels. It was probably in the course of those later journeys that he left Titus in Crete with instructions to complete what had to be completed and appoint elders in the churches (Titus 1:5).

After Crete, Titus was to meet Paul at Nicopolis, once his replacements had arrived (Titus 3:12).

The last we read of Titus he was in Dalmatia.

“Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica—Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia.”

2 Timothy 4:10



What can we learn about the character of Titus from what we read of him in the Bible?

Clearly, Titus was one who Paul held in high regard; one who could be entrusted with difficult tasks that called for tact and wisdom.

God

Paul's opening words also introduce some important thoughts about God, His character and His purposes.



What can we learn about God and His ways from verses 1 – 4?

Notice This

Already, before He has begun any serious instruction Paul has thrown in a number of ideas that may well have been challenging to people steeped in the culture of Crete — of which we will have more to say in later studies — and which certainly run contrary to the thinking of much of our world today.

He designates himself a slave to God when the minds of most are set upon serving self. He speaks of election, with all its connotations of privilege for some and a God who makes choices that affect the lives of men. He talks about truth, pointing up the possibility that there are things that can be known to be right with certainty: absolutes; fixed reference points. That truth, he says, leads to godliness; a life that is centred of God and not self (that is what the word godliness primarily means). He emphasises hope — something that can be looked forward to with confidence and believed in. He even implies that God has a plan that He is working out in the world.

You may consider these points unremarkable. Perhaps they do not strike you as being in any way out of the ordinary but stop and think. How many unbelievers do you know who would accept any one of them without question and, as for your own thinking, would you want to qualify them in any way?