

No.23, Titus

The name given to this third pastoral epistle identifies it with a certain man who was a Gentile (Gal 2: 3), a convert to Christ under Paul's ministry (v.4), who then became a faithful and greatly used servant of the Lord. That man was Titus; and while he served Christ in various places it was on the island of Crete that he conducted the ministry that is the focus of this epistle.

Note from v.5 that Paul left Titus in Crete, the clear inference being that the Apostle himself had visited the island. There is no mention of any visit to Crete by Paul in Acts or any of his epistles, thus some mystery surrounds this kind of reference. But, it should be noted that in the Pastoral Epistles there are certain references to journeys that Paul definitely took, journeys that are distinct from the main ones recorded in Acts – his great missionary journeys and the one to Rome where he was imprisoned for two years. It would seem, and obviously so in the light of his zeal for souls and for the work of God, that after his release from that imprisonment Paul did make other journeys to various places, including Crete.

However, Paul's time on Crete was apparently quite brief, thus, as noted, Titus was left there by the Apostle to consolidate and establish the churches. But, while Paul had moved on, he did not forget Titus or the cause of Christ on Crete, thus he wrote this letter in order to give inspired guidance to Titus with respect to the work that he had to do. Moreover, Titus needed all the help and advice available for the island on which he served Christ was a most ungodly place, with its inhabitants being given over to deep wickedness, see ch 1: 12 – these terms clearly remind us of the deep wickedness that prevailed on the island. Crete, therefore, was given over to ungodliness and was a most unlikely place for a work for God to be done. Yet there was a great work done there, with every city experiencing the power of the Gospel, ch 1: 5 – elders were to be ordained “*in every city...*” indicating that there was a church in every city.

Furthermore, while the ungodly atmosphere, the heathen culture, and the wicked behaviour of the people of Crete made it a most inhospitable soil with regard to spiritual things, yet Paul expected the believers to live godly lives. Therefore, *Titus* as a pastoral epistle has a very decided emphasis on the godliness that must mark the Church of Jesus Christ. *Titus* actually combines the emphases noted in the epistles to Timothy. *First Timothy* focuses on the offices and function of the church; and *Second Timothy* focuses on the office and function of the minister. However, *Titus* combines both of these lines of thought. Note in ch 1 instruction about the Church and its officers, namely the elder, his character and the work he is to do. Then throughout chs 2 & 3 Titus is encouraged with respect to his preaching ministry – ch 2: 1, 9; 3: 1 & 8.

But in all of the instruction that Paul gives in this epistle his emphasis is on the need for the Church to live in holiness and godliness in every area of life. In ch 1 the focus is on *congregational life*; ch 2 – *family life*; and ch 3 – *public life*. We should note the clear presentation of these three areas of life with respect to the witness of Christ's Church because these are still the setting in which the Lord's people are to live the Christian life. True godliness is not some dressed-up show that is enacted within the confines of the life of the congregation and is then set aside at home or in public. Rather, when it is real godliness it will prevail in the privacy of our homes as well as in the public domain.

## GODLINESS BASED ON TRUTH

In ch 1: 1 note the expression “*the truth which is after godliness.*” The word “after” means *according to*, thus truth is compatible with real godliness and conversely, godliness is according to truth. The two cannot be separated. Thus, this epistle shows that real godliness is based on truth; and that truth is the central doctrine of the person & work of Christ. In *Titus* there are 6 references to the name *Saviour* – ch 1: 3, 4; 2: 10, 13; & 3: 4, 6. Therefore, this is an epistle in which there is great emphasis on the person and work of Christ as the Saviour of sinners. Note the deity of Christ in ch 2: 13 – “the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.” The grammar of this phrase gives us the decided and clear sense of these words – namely, that our Saviour Jesus Christ is the great God. This is the truth – and any message that is not resting on the absolute deity of Christ is a lie.

Other expressions employed in this epistle about Christ identify what Paul means by *the truth*. See ch 2: 11 – the verb *hath appeared* gives us the English word “epiphany” used with respect to the appearance of Christ, both His first and second appearances. Thus, see v.13 – here is the word again used of His second coming. In v.11 then there is His appearing in relation to grace. The verse teaches that He is the embodiment of grace and that He appeared as such in this world, ch 3: 4 – which took place at His birth. But then there is His appearing in relation to glory, 2: 13 – at His coming again He will appear in glory. Between these two appearances there is of course His great redemptive work, in view in v.14. In all of these details we have the framework of the Gospel. Christ came into the world in His epiphany of grace. Then He went to the cross and to redeem men from sin's guilt and power both. Therefore, since He is risen from the dead & has ascended to glory there will be His epiphany in glory.

This, then, is the truth on which godliness is based; and it is this truth that leads to the experience of salvation and then into the life of godliness. Note ch 3: 4-8 – in this statement are all the elements of salvation. God saves and the Holy Spirit regenerates sinners all through the merits of Jesus Christ our Saviour and by faith alone. But note that in v.8 the Apostle proceeds immediately to urge that “*they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works.*” Thus, he shows that on the basis of the truth of the Gospel the life of true godliness is lived.

## GODLINESS ADORNS TRUTH

Ch 2: 10 – Paul speaks of adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour. The verb, *adorn* means “to arrange” or “to put in order.” Thus, Paul is teaching that by godly behaviour the Gospel is seen to be that which is good, right and beneficial to men. It is godly living that presents the truth in a good light as it were. Profession of the Gospel that is not accompanied by the life of godliness sends out a wrong message about the truth. Inconsistent living does not convince others that the Gospel is true and this can only be damaging to the truth.

This adorning of truth is also in view in ch 3: 8 where Paul exhorts Titus to encourage good works among believers. The outcome of such adornment of the Gospel is implied – it will result in the advancement and promotion of the Gospel and the cause of Christ in the world.