

A LOOK AT A BOOK: Titus

September 23, 2012

Paul wrote this epistle from Nicopolis, on the west coast of Greece, to Titus, whom he had left on the Island of Crete to organize the church there. As in 1 Timothy, he warns against false teachers and issues instructions to various classes of Christians on proper conduct. The doctrinal basis for these instructions is God's grace, which brings salvation, leads to godly living, and offers the "blessed hope" of Jesus' return (2:11-14). The experiential basis for the instructions is the regeneration by the Holy Spirit (3:3-7).

A Summary Outline of Titus

Theme: The organization and administration of the churches in Crete by Titus

Introduction: Greeting (1:1-4)

- I. The appointment and qualifications of bishops (1:5-9)
- II. The suppression of false teachers (1:10-16)
- III. The teaching of good conduct (2:1-3:8a)

Conclusion (3:8b-15)

- A. Summary (3:8b-11)
- B. Request for Titus to come to Nicopolis and other instructions (3:12-14)
- C. Greetings and benediction (3:15)

God cannot lie (1:2)

Paul affirmed that the God "who does not lie promised before the beginning of time" this eternal life for which the Christian believer now hopes. The promise of God is a central element in the history of redemption. In the Old Testament, God's promises of redemption were sometimes direct, sometimes veiled, and sometimes amplified by ceremony and symbolism. As the writer to the Hebrews stated, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways" (Hebrews 1:1). Yet the New Testament is best understood in light of the fulfillment of all that the Old Testament awaits. Jesus himself traced the thread of promise for his companions on the road to Emmaus: "Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself." God's trustworthiness is vividly demonstrated as the promises are fulfilled in the unfolding plan of redemption.

I was entrusted (1:3)

God has revealed “his word.” In this context, “his word” is simply “his message” (i.e., “the gospel of Jesus Christ”). Paul did affirm that the historical person Jesus Christ, encompassing both his teaching and complete redemptive work, is “the gospel” (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:23; 15:12; 2 Corinthians 1:19; 11:4; Philippians 1:15-18). The coming of Jesus Christ into human history constitutes the visible fulfillment of God’s promise of eternal life for humanity.

My true child (1:4a)

The term “true son” (literally “true child”) is one Paul also used with reference to Timothy (1 Timothy 1:2). The term “son” can be used as an expression of affection, or it may suggest that Titus was one of Paul’s own converts. This relationship is further defined by Paul’s addition of the phrase “in our common faith.” In this way Paul also alluded to the legitimacy of Titus’s authority to receive and implement his instructions in Crete.

Personal facts known about Titus are not extensive. He was a “Greek” (Galatians 2:3), probably one of Paul’s own converts (Titus 1:4) and subsequently one of Paul’s “co-workers” (2 Corinthians 8:23). We can reasonably infer from 2 Corinthians that Titus possessed considerable people skills (naturally acquired or Holy Spirit given) and that he was a man of unquestioned integrity, especially with regard to financial resources.

Crete (1:5)

Crete, although relatively small, is one of the larger islands in the Mediterranean Sea. By the second century B.C., Crete had a substantial Jewish population, powerful enough to obtain the protection of Rome. Acts 2:11 reports that Cretan Jews were among those visiting Jerusalem who witnessed the unique moving of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. The large and influential Jewish population on Crete, as well as the initial exposure of Cretan Jews to the gospel at Pentecost, suggests that Crete was a fertile location for missionary work.

Paul’s statement (1:5), “the reason I left you in Crete,” suggests that Paul and Titus had actually been involved in a joint missionary effort on the island. For unknown reasons, Paul left Crete before the churches were fully organized. However, Paul temporarily left Titus behind (3:12) in order to complete the organization.

Qualifications for Elder (1:6-9)

The qualifications presented require acceptable conditions in three basic areas of the prospective elder’s life, namely, (1) his marriage and family (v. 6), (2) his

personality and character traits (vs. 7-8), and (3) his devotion to God's Word and his commitment to teaching and protecting the true gospel message.

Nothing bad to say (2:8)

Paul's desire that the opponents "may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us" does not imply that he thinks the communication of the gospel can be so good that it will be unchallenged or uncriticized. Paul's own experience as a teacher or preacher of the gospel demonstrated that this would not be the case. Rather, his concern was that no legitimate challenge or criticism be offered. Of course, criticisms will be made; yet hostile critics will ultimately be "ashamed" in the sense of publicly suffering loss of respect as it becomes apparent that their criticisms are groundless. Interestingly, Paul included himself by stating "they have nothing bad to say about *us*." Titus was thus reminded that his teaching, both by word and example, would reflect not only on himself but on Paul as well, since he functioned on Crete under the apostle's authority and as his personal representative.

Only his mercy (3:5)

The biblical fact that people cannot earn salvation strikes at the very heart of human pride and thus denies people the opportunity of exalting themselves. It is a reflection of this pride that popular conceptions of attaining salvation revolve around "keeping the law," "doing more good deeds than bad deeds," or living up to some (usually undefined) "moral standard." Theologically, the purpose of the Old Testament law is *not* to show how humans could save themselves. Rather, the purpose of the law is to show humans that they *cannot* save themselves and that their only hope for salvation is in the gracious promise of God (Galatians 3:10-27).

Help the lawyer (3:13)

If Zenas and Apollos were presently on Crete (as seems likely), they probably delivered this letter to Titus. This is the only reference to Zenas in the New Testament; however, the additional description "the lawyer" reveals a common Pauline literary trait (cf. "Luke, the doctor," Colossians 4:14; also Romans 16:23; 2 Timothy 4:14). The term "lawyer" in this context indicates that Zenas was either an expert in Jewish law (e.g., Matthew 22:35; Luke 7:30) or perhaps a Roman civil jurist. Undoubtedly, Apollos was the converted Alexandrian Jew known from Acts 18-19 and 1 Corinthians. Paul instructed Titus, "Do everything you can to help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way." Using the same Greek verb *propempō* ("help send forward"), this appeal for Christian aid along the journey is found in Acts 15:3; 21:5; Romans 15:24; 1 Corinthians 16:6, 11; 2 Corinthians 1:16; and 3 John 6. Titus was also to "see that they have everything they need." Supplying the needs of those who traveled from their homes to proclaim the gospel

was a reasonable and evidently honored expectation among Christians. Even though Paul specifically placed the obligation to help Zenas and Apollos upon Titus (“do everything you can to help”), his example of this good work should be a lesson to other Cretan Christians.

Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1981)

Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, Jr., *The New American Commentary: 1, 2 Timothy, Titus* (Broadman Press, 1992)