

## Paul's Epistle to Titus

Our daily readings have taken us to consider the letter of the Apostle Paul to Titus. Evidently a Gentile, his name means "honourable," and this appears to be also the main theme of the Epistle: to walk upright and in an honourable way, against the background of false teachers, who would subvert the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Epistle commences with the introductory words: "Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness" (Tit. 1:1). The expression "after godliness" can also be rendered "leads to godliness," and refers to the way in which the Truth must have an impact upon the lives of its hearers. In Romans chapter 2, the Apostle uses a similar expression:

"... Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God **leadeth thee to repentance?** (Rom. 2:4).

The Goodness of God is revealed in the Gospel, a word which literally means "Good News". The goodness thus expressed leads the hearer to repent of their sins, and be washed in the waters of Baptism. So it is, that the system of Truth that it involves leads to godliness, and a life devoted to heavenly things (Col. 3:1).

But the Romans to whom Paul spake did not know, or recognise this principle. Even so, to Titus he spoke of those who "profess that they know God; but in works they deny Him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate" (Tit. 1:16). In their case, the goodness of God did not lead to repentance and godliness, for in works they denied the Lord who purchased them with the shedding of his blood.

The ecclesia at Sardis was in danger of being like this. They were told by the Messiah: "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead" (Rev. 3:1). They professed to know God, and had a name, or reputation, for being faithful – yet that faith was not demonstrated in works, hence they were dead. As it is written: "even so, faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone" (Jas. 2:17).

Paul continues to describe how that God "in due times manifested his word through preaching" (Tit. 1:3). It so pleased the Lord to impart a knowledge of His Grace, and an extension of His Mercy through the medium of the spoken word. There are those who suppose that they can be given understanding through a mystical infusion of Holy Spirit power, yet this was not the approach of the Apostle, who did have such power: "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent?" (Rom. 10:14-15). There is then, a need to "hear" the word preached, for there is no other way to become wise unto salvation.

But the preaching must be according to the Truth. So the Apostle gives one of the primary qualifications for being an overseer (bishop): "... **holding fast the faithful word** as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort, and to convince the gainsayers" (Tit. 1:9). So Timothy was also taught: "take heed unto yourself, **and unto the doctrine**, continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (1 Tim. 4:16).

Notice that here, doctrine is said to "save". This is vitally important in a world in which doctrine is downgraded to being not of any fundamental importance. Churches join together as part of the ecumenical movement, irrespective of doctrinal difference. The ecclesias of Christ, however, must

remain separate, hold fast to the doctrine that saves, and eschewing the corrupted gospel of the churches.

One of the themes of this Epistle, is the need to maintain soundness in the faith. So we read:

“but speak those things which become **sound doctrine** that the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, **sound in faith**, in love in patience” (Tit. 2:1-2).

“... in all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works; **in doctrine showing uncorruptness**, gravity, sincerity, **sound speech** that cannot be condemned ...” (Tit. 2:7-8).

“A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject ...” (Tit. 3:10).

But also, there were those who needed to be silenced: “there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, especially they of the circumcision: **Whose mouths must be stopped**, who subvert whole houses” (Tit. 1:10-11). In these words, there appears to be an allusion to the Psalms – both of which evidently refer to the kingdom to come:

“... the king shall rejoice in God; everyone that sweareth by him shall glory: but **the mouth** of them that speak lies **shall be stopped**” (Psa. 63:11).

“... the righteous shall see it, and rejoice: and all iniquity **shall stop her mouth**” (Psa. 107:42).

In the kingdom, false teachers will not have a platform upon which to air their opinions. And they should not be permitted to address the ecclesias in our day either! Just as in Paul’s day, those who speak lies – i.e. those things which contradict the word of Truth – should have their mouths stopped, and the opportunity to influence others taken away from them.

Titus chapter 2 brings us to consider the circumstances and roles of men and women in the ecclesias, both old and young, bond and free. The young men are exhorted to be sober minded (vs 6), and servants to be obedient to their masters (vs 9). But the reason given is: “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men” (Tit. 2:11). Salvation, therefore, is by grace, and it is that fact which has the effect of “teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world” (Tit. 2:12). The believers are “justified by his grace” (Tit. 3:7), finding forgiveness in His Sight.

The fact of salvation being by Grace emphasises the certain nature of our hope. So Paul wrote to the Romans: “... therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace, to the end the promise **might be sure** to all the seed ...” (Rom. 4:16). Here is a most important principle: if salvation was something that depended upon works alone, then no man could attain unto it. But being as that it is by Grace, and not works (cp Rom. 4 – whole chapter), the promise is “made sure” to those who had the faith of Abraham. There is no uncertainty there: so long as we have faith in the true Gospel, and trust in the Grace of our God, we will be saved – that much is certain. But contriwise, if we do not believe the Gospel that the apostles preached, our faith is in vain: a false Gospel cannot save.

Yet not withstanding this, our faith does need to be demonstrated in action, as Titus was told: “in all things showing thyself **a pattern of good works**” (Tit. 2:7). As we saw earlier, faith without works is dead (Jas. 2:17). In presenting a pattern of good works, we must “abstain from **fleshly lusts**, which war against the soul” (1 Pet. 2:11). Or as Paul taught Titus: “denying ungodliness and **worldly lusts**, we should love soberly ...” (Tit. 2:12). These lusts from which we must abstain are expressed by John as being all that the world around us is composed of:

“For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world” (1 Jno. 2:16).

The true believers experience the lust of the flesh within their members: “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would” (Gal. 5:16-17). This is an internal warfare (Rom. 7:23), which all the faithful experience, and they look towards the day when the war shall be over, and the victory obtained.

What gives the believers strength to overcome in the warfare of faith, is a vision of future glory. So Paul wrote to Titus, that he should be found: “Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Tit. 2:13). We are told of the coming of the Lord elsewhere, that: “unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation” (Heb. 9:28). We must occupy the position of watchers, waiting patiently (2 Thes. 3:5), looking for the appearance of Messiah.

This verse presents a problem to some, as it appears to combine the glory of God and His Son into one “appearing”. The problem dissipates, however, when we realise that the Saviour shall come with the glory of God: “For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then shall he reward every man according to his works: (Mat. 16:27). We have the same idea in the first Epistle of John:

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the Sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 Jno. 3:1-2).

We look forward to the appearing described here – but notice who it is that is appearing! The “he” in this verse is evidently referring to the Father – yet the expression “he shall appear,” is evidently speaking of the return of his Son. In actual fact, it is “he” – the Father – all the way through: Jesus is the “express image of his person” (Heb. 1:3), and so when he appears in glory, it will be the Father that is seen through him. We therefore look toward the single “appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ”.

Titus chapter 3 describes what action must be taken towards the false teachers that have crept in unawares (cp. Jude 4):

“a man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject”

Notice, that the heretick is not instantly dismissed: an opportunity for repentance is given first. This is the pattern of the Lord in speaking of the Jezebel influence in the ecclesia: “I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not ...” (Rev. 2:21). There must always be the opportunity for the one in error to have “space” to repent.

This aspect of rejecting after the first and second admonition follow the pattern of the Leprous house in the law of Moses. Leviticus 14 describes how there were three stages in dealing with the plague in a house. Verse 37-38 was the first inspection. Verse 39 was a second inspection, to see if the plague had spread. And if the plague remained after the second inspection, then there was a third visitation, when the house would be entirely rejected:

“... he shall break down the house, the stones of it, and the timber thereof, and all the mortar of the house; and he shall carry them forth out of the city into an unclean place” (Lev. 14:45).

We see this pattern with the Lord, and his Father’s House in Jerusalem. Firstly, he visited it, and overturned the moneychanger’s tables – as per John 2:15. Then towards the end of his ministry, he did so again – as per Matthew 21:12-13. And finally, when the spiritual leprosy remained, he came against it in AD 70, and the house was made desolate: “There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.” (Mat. 24:2).

This is the correct way to deal with those who the Apostle regarded as “hereticks”. It wasn’t simply that they had another perspective, or a different point of view, which they could continue to teach: the ecclesia needed to “stop” their mouths, and “reject” them – after giving them opportunity to repent.

This third chapter recounts how that the believers were living in a state of sin, yet obtained mercy of the Lord:

“For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared ...” (Tit. 3:3-4).

Here is the point to always bear in mind. Whilst it is necessary to deal with errant members – even sometimes rebuking them sharply (Tit. 1:13), it must always be done with a sense of one’s own need for grace, kindness, and love. We must be “kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another” (Rom. 12:10). Desiring to do all things to the glory of God, and not ourselves, we submit to our Father’s revealed Righteousness, and seek first the things pertaining to His Kingdom and righteousness. Seeking to maintain our faith in a day of evil, we look forward to the coming again of Messiah to judge the world, and reward those who have sown to the spirit with incorruptibility (Gal. 6:8).

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