

HOW YOUR LIFE CAN MODEL THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL

Teaching Through Titus Verse by Verse - Part two
 Sunday, September 18th, 2011, am - Teaching #1500

HOW CAN WE KNOW WHAT WE BELIEVE IS TRUE?

I said last week there were two terms that set the message for the first four verses of Titus chapter one. The two words are “**servant**” (or **slave**) and “**apostle**.” We’re going to be looking at the second term today, but before we do I couldn’t help but think there would be some who would leave last Sunday’s teaching with a question mark, or at least a let down of discouragement as they walked out of the sanctuary having spent the whole teaching time analyzing and reinforcing Paul’s claim that we are all “**slaves**” of Jesus Christ. And that he really **means** that fact. We **are** slaves of Christ Jesus, the Lord.

And the question I want to deal with before we look at the second term, “**apostle**,” is this. Is the fact that we are called to be **slaves** of Christ Jesus a happy thought, or a depressing thought? Does this make the Christian life exciting and inviting, or does it make it a burden and bondage? Is this gospel - the one that saves us to make us slaves - seriously to be considered “**good news?**”

And I want to say it is the very best news possible. But it’s not good news because we’re not really slaves after all, that Paul didn’t mean **literally** that we should see ourselves as Christ’s slaves. He **did** and we **are**. Jesus was blood serious when He said “**....If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. [35] For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it**”(Mark 8:34-35). And Paul was absolutely resolute when he said “**....You are not your own, [20] for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body**”(1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

But neither Jesus nor Paul was bringing **bad** news with their words. They were bringing a truly **counter-cultural, counter-intuitive** truth that was the very best news we could possibly hear. The myth of our day is that you can possess **absolute emancipation**, meaning freedom from constraint of any kind, the freedom to just put up the sail of your life and go wherever your heart desires. But such freedom is a mirage. Being left to ourselves isn’t freedom at all. The Bible says our own desires are so cancerous since the fall that, without God’s renewing grace, what we delight in brings our own self-destruction.

The truth of the Bible is that only absolute slavery to the Lordship of Christ eliminates the destructive tyranny of the idols of self. So the life our Lord calls us to **lose** - “**....whoever loses his life for my sake....**” - is the self-destructive enslavement to addiction and deceit. And the life He calls us in love to “**find**” is a life of eternal purpose, joy and freedom. But that life can’t be found on my own terms. I must place my heart and will unreservedly in the hands of Christ as my Lord. Our Lord’s sequence is clear. You must lose your self-directed life **first**. Then you discover the joy of His absolute Lordship. But you can’t peek around the corner into His new life without leaving your old life behind.

So here’s the great divine paradox. **Bondage** to Christ is not the **opposite** of **freedom**. It’s the **condition** that makes freedom possible. Christ’s **rule** is my **emancipation**. And we need God’s Word to **tell** us that because our own unrenewed instincts won’t take us to bow before Christ. We are all inclined to cling to our diseased concept of freedom.

Now we continue looking at the second foundational term in that first verse - “**apostle**.”

1) THE SOURCE AND SUBSTANCE OF SAVING TRUTH

Titus 1:1-3 - “Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God’s elect and their **knowledge of the truth**, which **accords with godliness**, [2] in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began [3] and at the proper time **manifested in his word** through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior....”

There is something very important being said here. Paul calls himself an ***apostle of Jesus Christ*** (1). We hear that term all the time. We read it in our Bibles. That's the only way we can think of Paul - "the ***apostle*** Paul. It's like his first name. But Paul wasn't the only teacher after the attention of the people of Crete. He's going to write of many ***other*** teachers with a different message. Also, Paul arrived on the scene long after people were quite settled into different religious convictions. Some of these convictions were held passionately. In today's relativistic church we're almost surprised at Paul's urgency to change their religious minds. He flat out refused to leave them in their own religious traditions.

All of which raises a very important and contemporary question: ***With so many different claims to truth, how can we know what to believe? With so many different crowds - some of which are very large - following different gods, how can we know who's right? Or, more to our own culture's instincts, are they all right, just for different people in different ways?***

Paul is sensitive to those kinds of questions because he came out of a very ***different*** religious system into embracing Jesus Christ. In fact, he came out of a religion that prided itself on its zeal in ***rejecting*** and ***persecuting*** any who proclaimed the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Christianity's founding leaders weren't strangers to being considered narrow-minded deserters of other religions.

And we should be very thankful for this. It means if a persecutor like Paul was going to now start proclaiming Jesus Christ as the Divine Redeemer, the Son of God, the Creator of all there is, there had to be ***good reasons*** for coming to such a faith.

And at the heart of Paul's transformation was this fact. He stated over and over again that he didn't ***make up*** his message and he didn't ***receive it from human thinkers and leaders***. That's what that term, "***apostle of Jesus Christ***," is all about. He actually explains it further in the last part of **verse three: Titus 1:3** - "***....and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior....***"

This is one of the very first marks of a Christian mind. It is tethered to absolute revealed truth. The Christian message is a ***manifested*** message. That's what that term ***apostle*** is all about. The word means ***messenger*** - someone who ***delivers what someone else has revealed***. If people are being called to ***change their beliefs - change their lives*** - because of Paul's message (and through Paul, Titus) they might well ask, "***Why should we listen to you? Why should we give your message special place in our minds?***"

Paul stresses the ***givenness*** of his message. The Gospel was a message about Jesus Christ. It could be ***accepted*** or ***rejected*** but it was not open for ***debate*** or ***alteration***:

Galatians 1:8-12 - "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel ***contrary to the one we preached to you***, let him be accursed. [9] As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. [10] For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? ***If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.*** [11] For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. [12] For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ."

Paul was not ***tolerant*** when it came to truth claims. Nor should you be. We should all be tolerant about ***opinions***. I like chocolate. You like strawberry. But the truth of the gospel isn't in that category. Paul said his message wasn't the ***product*** of human reason or inquiry. His message was the ***measuring stick*** for all competing ideas and religions. It was never meant to be the most ***popular***. Make it popular and you neuter it. It seemed like ***foolishness*** to the world. But it was ***God's plan*** and it was the ***only one He offered*** to get sinful people to

heaven.

2) **BIBLICAL FAITH IS NOURISHED BY A KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH AND THE PRACTICE OF THE TRUTH COMBINED**

Titus 1:1 - "Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness...."

- a) ***A knowledge of the truth is central to living faith.*** Whatever else a church does or does not do well, she **must** major on the teaching of the Scriptures to believers. People should feel warmth and love in a church. But fellowship isn't the **first** thing a church needs to do well. People should reach out to the needy and hurting. But compassion isn't the **first** thing a church must do well. The church must **evangelize** the lost. But even evangelism isn't the **first** thing a church must do well.

The first thing the church must do is **give the flock a knowledge of the truth**. She must have a solid, certain faith to share. She must have a clear message to declare. She must make sure her faith rests on the foundation of Scriptural truth. Faith is more than mere intellectual data, for sure. But **faith won't last in the heart without truth in the head.**

How long have you been a Christian? Do you have a good working knowledge of the truth? Do you know the importance of the Trinity? Do you grasp the basics of Bible prophecy? Can you trace the flow of revelation from the Old to the New Testament? Have you read through Romans lately? Can you trace the main events in the life of Jesus Christ? A knowledge of the truth is central to a strong life of faith. But there is something else Paul stresses.

- b) ***Truth, rightly understood, must lead to Godly living.*** That's what that phrase, "**the truth which accords with godliness,**" means (1). While a knowledge of the truth is the only **starting** place for the life of faith, just **knowing** the truth has no transforming power without **application**.

Many people hearing me right now, right in this church, could bring immediate spiritual transformation to their lives today by starting to do things they know they should do. They could grow beyond any point they have previously reached in their walk with Jesus with no additional seminars or books or CDs. Find the next thing God tells you to do in His Word and start right now.

Without leading to godliness, truth has no value in the life: **James 1:21-24** - "Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. [22] But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. [23] For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. [24] For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like."

It's a simple, potent picture. What isn't immediately used is lost in a fog of forgetfulness or worse, carried under a weight of regret and guilt. Only truth **applied** has the power to produce spiritual life and godliness.

- c) ***Human actions will be measured objectively against the revealed standard of God's Word.*** Human standards fluctuate. There is a terrible tendency, even in the church, to measure our actions by what others do around us. But Paul says there is a **fixed standard of truth** by which all will be judged. There really is such a thing as absolute, revealed truth that **"accords with godliness."**

God will not measure your life by how **sincere** you were. There is something in our fallen concept of

fairness (***that is what we all have***) that says this should be so. But it isn't. God calls us away from the living out of our ***own*** values into the light of His glorious salvation in Christ Jesus.

So ***know*** the truth. ***Live*** by the truth. And remember we will all be ***judged*** by the truth. This is all tied up in Paul's thinking about the message the truth must proclaim.

3) **KEEP YOUR HEART MOTIVATED BY THE HOPE OF ETERNAL LIFE**

Titus 1:2-3 - "...in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began [3] and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior...."

Here is an absolute Biblical principle. Nothing has power over your present actions like your view of the future. This is true for ***everybody***. Reni and I were watching some of the programs produced specifically commemorating the Islamic terrorist attacks of 9/11. In one of them a whole segment was devoted to one American Cleric who was assigned the task of making sure the killers didn't back out of their mission at the last minute.

Now, how would you do that if that were your assignment? What would you do to make sure these Islamic terrorists didn't get cold feet at the very last minute and change their minds? They didn't threaten them. They held out a ***future*** in front of them. The 9/11 terrorists were governed by what they believed to be true about their future.

That in itself, isn't wrong. As Christians, that's exactly the way it ***ought*** to be. But you have to have the right future in front of you. If the future you envision is wrong, you will be shocked when you die. The terrorists believed that the instant they died as murderers of infidels the women of paradise would be waiting. Here's an excerpt from one of their notebooks:

"Purify your heart and clean it from all earthly matters. The time of fun and waste has gone....Those few hours that are left you in your life are very few. From there you will begin to live the happy life, the infinite paradise....Read al-Tawba and Anfal [traditional war chapters from the Quaran] and reflect on their meanings and remember all the things that Allah has promised for the martyrs....Know that the gardens of paradise are waiting for you in all their beauty, and the women of paradise are waiting, calling out, "Come hither, friend of God." They are dressed in their more beautiful clothing...."

That view of the future is what crashed those planes into those buildings.

We too as the disciples of Jesus believe that we should be governed by the future. The basis of our behavior is what we believe about our future. Your reward will be great. But this reward is fellowship with the sovereign, self-sacrificing Christ. And as John Piper says, "...*that* hope makes us joyfully endure persecution. Murdering infidels is not the door to *this* reward. Suffering for the sake of their salvation is. Learn from the terrorists: Don't throw your life away pursuing *their* future. And don't throw it away on the American dream. Fall in love with the final future glory. Rejoice in hope of the glory of God (**Romans 5:2**). In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore (**Psalms 16:11**)."

Paul has the task of motivating ***Titus***, not ***terrorists***. He's trying to motivate Titus to ***lay down his life in love to reach the lost for Jesus***, not ***take the life from others as a murderer***. Titus is facing huge challenges in his ministry. He probably feels he's not even denting the pagan attitudes even in his own ***congregation***, let alone the surrounding ***community***. I can well imagine Titus getting up in the morning and saying to himself, ***"Why bother with all of this?"***

Do you ever say that? The **“Why bother with this?”** and **“Why am I doing this”** questions are the whistle blowers about what you truly believe about your future. And if you can’t find a good answer to those questions the Devil will beat you up regularly in your Christian life. He will focus all your attention on the **present**. That’s his most common attack on your faith. He will cause you to look for **present rewards** when, at the very core of the Christian faith, rewards are given, primarily, **when Jesus comes again**.

The hope of eternal life was a key part of the message Paul was commanded by our Lord to proclaim. **“Paul, people forget about eternity. But they can’t live well if they do that. Tell them about the hope of eternal life!”**

Learn the **2 Corinthians 4:17** principle. Do you know what that is? **2 Corinthians 4:16-18** - **“So we do not lose heart [that’s how Paul is experiencing the present]. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. [Again, that’s Paul’s present] [17] For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, [18] as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. [This is Paul’s focus on his future] **For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”****

Paul learned this secret through much hardship and difficulty. You must learn to make proper comparisons. You must put all of life’s trials on a proper balance. That’s what a balance does. It compares one thing and assigns it a certain mass by measuring or comparing it with something else.

And the whole point is this. Unless your future with Christ is more **urgent** to you than your present, with its material concerns and the influence of friends, you won’t have the motivation to deeply follow Christ.

Verse 17 tells us how Paul did this. He took trials and tests and problems and fatigue and discouragement and persistent doubts and unanswered prayers and physical ailments and loss of loved ones and put them on one side of the balance. Then he put the hope of eternity and reward on the other. Yes, there is a difficult side of life for everybody, including Christians. And if you forget about eternity you’ll be disappointed when those burdens aren’t removed or lifted right away. Many Christians have trouble with that. They forget that God doesn’t have to solve everything right now. They forget the promise of eternal joy and blessing and reward.

But there is eternal hope and reward. Everything wrong will be righted. So Paul says to Titus, plan for conflict each day you live. Plan for things to go wrong more times than you would like. But remember that, faced in faith, each trial and problem is like a **good investment**. That’s **exactly** what Paul teaches. It’s the **2 Corinthians 4:17** principle I talked about earlier: **2 Corinthians 4:17** - **“For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison....”**

God **could** take every trial away right here and now. Just like you **could** spend all your savings on bubble gum if you wanted to. But then you would **lose the greater gain down the road**. Every affliction, and they can seem very painful, is light when compared with what they will produce through patient, loyal faith in future reward. So keep your trust in the bank of God’s promised, certain future grace and reward.

Then, as if for emphasis, Paul restates that all of this was promised by God **“who cannot lie”** (2). He tells us this because he’s describing a process that isn’t visible to the naked eye (just like you don’t easily **see** the growth of the investment in the bank). But, just as surely, the reward of future reward and glory **accumulates** for the faithful. Paul says we must never forget this ongoing process as we follow Jesus in this fallen world.