

The book of Titus is the Apostle Paul's letter to his friend and co-worker in the gospel, Titus, to whom he had entrusted leadership of the new church in Crete. This book is going to help us, as it helped the church in Crete, to mature in the faith.

Week One

This week, we look at some of the context to the letter, so that we can accurately apply the meaning of the letter later on in the series. [If this process of study is unfamiliar to you, please make sure you attend BBC's Bible 201 course at some stage. It will help tremendously.]

Text: Titus 1:1-4

1. God Saves Rebels

- Read Acts 7:54-8:3 & Acts 9:1-22

"I Paul..."

Saul (who was later named Paul) was a Jewish scholar with power and influence, a threat and real enemy of the church in Jerusalem. He was out to destroy Christianity until Jesus interrupted his life and called him to be his own. As a result of this life-altering encounter with Christ, Paul began preaching to the Jews about Jesus.

God saves those who vehemently oppose him, as well as those who doubt, those who wonder and those of us who are generally rebellious against submitting our lives to his authority. There is no one beyond Christ's reach.

- ❖ *Q: Why is it so important for us to recognize what a rebel Paul was before God saved him?*
- ❖ *Q: Why do you think that some of us struggle to see ourselves as rebels, especially those of us who have grown up in the church?*
- ❖ *Q: Based on this story, why should we never stop praying for someone we know to be saved?*

2. God Humbles The Proud

"I Paul, a servant of God..."

One of the consequences of Paul's radical conversion and experience of the risen Christ, was a sudden turnaround in his posture towards how he saw himself. As a religious and influential person, he had enjoyed a level of worldly success and esteem. But in encountering Christ, he realised the immense privilege of being united to Christ, and how that made him a servant, ready and willing to obey at any point. He gained a spiritual clarity about Christ being in authority that he had never had before, which allowed him to lay down the previous pursuits that had fuelled his egocentric identity. Many of us do not experience the kind of purpose, peace and joy in Christ that Paul did because we have come to Christ with an agenda, one that makes us better off in life. We come to him on our terms, and we do not humble ourselves and become his servants. We then struggle with a constant warring for authority in our lives: ours versus that of our rightful Lord, Jesus Christ.



- ❖ *Q: Why do you think Paul was happy to be a “servant” of Christ, when he had enjoyed a high status in his society?*
- ❖ *Q: Many of us believe that we love Jesus and would do anything for him, but how many of us would truly lay down all of our status, wealth, position, esteem and honour in the workplace, to serve God in an obscure and difficult way? Explain your answer.*
- ❖ *Q: Even though submitting our lives fully to Christ comes at a cost in many ways, why is it worth it? What do we gain (as Paul did)?*
- ❖ **Personal Reflection:** *Are you struggling to submit to Christ’s authority in your life? If so, what is the biggest battle that stops you from full submission? How can we as a Gospel Community help you journey into submission?*

3. God Sends The Weak

“I Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ...”

The word “apostle” means *sent ones*. As Christians, we are all sent out into the world, in order for the gospel to reach the ends of the earth. Paul was designated a particular office of Apostle, which carried with it a significant role to build the original church in the gentile regions. But his credentials were the same as ours: rebel to the core. No Christian has the excuse to use that they are not holy enough, or equipped enough to obey this command. Paul was murdering Christians and then had to preach about Christ. That could not have been comfortable or easy, and would have caused him to be under great threat.

- ❖ *Q: Do you see yourself as a “sent one”? If not, why not?*
- ❖ *Q: What are your current excuses for not being gospel-centered (intentionally discipling people to faith and in the faith) in your life right now?*
- ❖ *Q: How do we begin to live as “sent ones” if we have not been doing so already?*

4. God Unites Natural Adversaries

“To Titus, my true child in common faith...”

The gospel radically alters relationships, and we see this worked out in the way Paul greets Titus in his letter to him. Titus is seen as closer to Paul than a family member. This would have been utterly shocking to the 1st century world, where Jews despised Gentiles, and looked down on them spiritually. But Paul was transformed by the gospel, and as he saw himself differently, he saw others differently as well: all united as one in Christ.

Our church is way behind in this area. The gospel has not yet gripped all of our hearts to the point that we see those who are different from us as being closer than our own family. Accepting that as the truth is the first step to change.

- ❖ *Q: Why do you think it is so hard for us to see people who are totally different from us as equal in Christ – and for that to work itself out in our realities practically?*
- ❖ **Personal Reflection Q:** *Has the gospel transformed this area of your personal thinking, feeling and behavior? [Suggestion: As a group, just answer yes or no as you go around the group. This will allow for a simple confession of sin, and then provide an opportunity for repentance in the next question.]*
- ❖ *Q: For those of us who realise our hearts are still unchanged by the gospel in this area, what do we think repentance and faith looks like in this area of our lives? And what do you think our response should be this evening – while in community together?*



5. God Brings Partners For The Work

Paul loved, led and mentored Titus and others, and then sent them out to continue complex and difficult work. He saw them through the process of maturity, and then they stepped up and took on their share of the gospel work. Some of us are still babies in the faith, and it is our responsibility to grow, so that we can learn to lead others in the near future. But we cannot mature without being mentored, loved and led by others who are mature in the faith. We need to step out and ask someone to walk that path with us, and we need to commit and honour their time to help us. Others of us are already mature, and yet are sitting back because we think the church has it all covered. It is our responsibility as mature believers to step up and start loving, leading and mentoring those who need it, so that they can mature and do the same. We need to be reaching out to those who are younger in the faith, and commit to journeying with them and seeing them through to maturity.

We have many avenues for this in our own church, which makes the process fairly straight forward. Some of these are short term, but still valuable, such as courses, while others are more long term, such as GROW or Gospel Community:

- Bible courses - need to be facilitated so that students are disciplined in their understanding.
- Family courses (pre-marriage, marriage, parenting of little ones & teens, divorce-care, grief-share, single-parenting etc.) – mature believers can disciple others through these valuable life blessings and struggles.
- GROW – mentors walk with students for an entire year, helping them work out the gospel in their own lives.
- Gospel Communities - need to be led well, while training others to grow into leaders.

But there are other avenues as well:

- One-on-one mentoring with teens.
- Children's ministry - where you get to mature children and walk them through to their teen years.

Every area of ministry needs mature, equipped and committed believers to lead and serve in order to mature the body of Christ.

- ❖ *Q: What are you currently doing/ what is your plan to grow yourself in your walk with Christ in 2016?*
- ❖ *Q: In what way, if any, are you serving the church –and what role does that play in discipling others?*

General Reflection:

- ❖ *Q: What is the one big take-away from this message that God is asking you to put into place in your own life this week?*