

An Overview of Paul's Epistle to Titus

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Introduction

The apostle Paul penned down a good portion of the books in the New Testament among them the book of Titus. The letter was written to a fellow worker Titus asked to remain on the island of Crete to execute a specific function or probably Pastor the Church to a point when it reached sufficient maturity. The book is very clear from the start with the apostle directing the letter to an individual (verse 4) rather than a church or group people. It was thus a pastoral epistle. Clearly, Paul's aim was to strengthen, edify and equip Titus to properly handle the delicate but evidently disorganised church at the Crete. His choice of words and strong language suggests that the Church needed a firm hand to steer it away from trouble as well as put it on the right course by ensuring that the right individuals with the correct credentials took office (verses 5, 12-14). Paul insists that people need to be of a high standard, good tempered, natured and full of integrity within and without the Church.

In short, they should have the right '*mental software*' and inward disposition that adorns the gospel of Christ. Further, Paul urges that Titus should segment his teaching as appropriate so that the church becomes one functional cohesive whole to the end that Christ may be glorified. For instance, Paul states that the gospel is powerful and effectual, affecting the very inner core of an individual resulting in transformed attitudes, productivity and output. A very heart-warming section in the third chapter makes categorical doctrinal statements having stated some ethical outworking consequences arising from the blessed hope. The apostle is alive to the fact that the saints may be tempted to conform to what is around them and thus takes them on a short trip down memory lane. From verse three through to seven, the author makes land mark statements that touch on sin to regeneration and the fruits thereof such as justification, sanctification and favour from God. Paul states that all people regardless of their present state 'were once foolish, deceived and enslaved by kinds of passions and desires'. They were lost without hope and God in the world but when the grace of God appeared (i.e. transformed them), they were saved (i.e. delivered) and snatched from the power of sin transforming them in their subconscious lives having believed the gospel. Regeneration is instantaneous rather than progressive. God monergistically does the transforming work. This transformation, in the case of the Cretans, was so thorough and good in the sense that God declared them righteous having washed and cleansed them so that they would be lovely

obedient children of God. The epistle closes on a sound note that leaves one yearning for more.

Author, Location and Time of writing

The book is attributed to Paul the apostle to the Gentiles for several reasons although some have objected and suggested other possible authors like Barnabas. The language, thought, style and instructions all point to Paul as the author. In addition, there is internal evidence from within the New Testament canon that Paul actually closely interacted with Titus. For instance in II Corinthians 8:16ff, Titus is said to have been sent on some errand by the apostle which he successfully executed. Thus we can safely conclude that Titus understood the apostle and would most likely freely receive instruction from him. As earlier intimated, some reject the overt Pauline authorship because Paul probably never visited the island of Crete on any of his recorded three missionary journeys. This alone makes it uncertain as to whether he wrote the epistle. The argument that Paul had a fourth missionary Journey does not have sufficient proof both from internal and external evidence, although some arguments have been summoned from unclear passages. Had the book of Acts recorded any such an errand or trip to the island, things would have been different. These sceptics suggest other possible authors like Barnabas or even a spurious writer intending to deceive the public by using the apostle's image, pseudonym style. As to the location of the book writing, it is unclear because the epistle is directed at a church in Crete suggesting the scribe was away from it, probably Asia Minor, Corinth or some such place. The writing date is equally unclear because the author does not hint at the timing or key event which we can use as an approximate date. One possible suggested date would be after AD 62 but before AD 68 when the apostle laid down his life for the cause of Christ. The book does not mention any Jewish festivals, rituals or any such things so we can only form an approximate timing of the writing in the Jewish religious calendar.

Purpose of epistle

The book of Titus was written to one of Paul's faithful understudies, Titus. This Pastor had been sent on various errands and probably joined Paul on his other missions. Although the placing of the letter may not squarely fit into the Acts frame work, the apostle probably received freedom from the Roman captors and undertook another missionary itinerary before being re-arrested and suffering a martyr's death. In the said proposed fourth missionary journey, Paul could have travelled to Crete where after working a while with Titus, left him to consolidate the work and moved on to another mission station. In the epistle, Paul writes to affirm some points earlier agreed upon as well as adding some fresh instructions that were to be relevant during his (i.e. Titus') tour of duty. The apostle therefore writes to remind Titus advising him on some key aspects that desperately

needed attention. Paul highlights the all-important issue of high quality leadership that would then order ecclesiastical life prior to Christ's Second Advent in the blessed hope that each lively saint anticipates. Titus is a piercingly short book that addresses a lot of ethical issues while giving a passing comment on vital doctrines such as justification, sanctification, regeneration, grace, mercy and how all these constitute "*sound doctrine*" to which all other ethical issues must accord. The apostle is alive to the varying peculiar needs of each category of church members and thus prescribes a possible approach and remedy. For instance, he knows that young men are peculiarly inclined towards pride, egocentrism and self-importance, hence his singling them out for instruction on humility. The apostle further enjoins Titus to be a role model in the way he deals with young people of different sexes as well as the older folks. In this book, we also discover that the older women are to instruct the young women to be busily industrious and love their spouses in a manner that is fitting and in sync with the impact of the gospel of Christ.

Titus is a small campus presenting important aspects related to the church that the, rather, disorderly assembly at Crete needed to heed. The present and future church does well to pick a leaf from this assembly.

Perceived Problems related to the Book

Titus bears evidence of having been Pauline, one that clearly flowed from the pen of the apostle. Both internal and external evidence points to Paul though some questions have been raised against that assertion. Some of them include the points that follow.

First, the book does not fit into the Acts frame work so the natural question that arises is, who wrote the book and when? How can we be sure that the apostle truly and actually authored it? Second, there is no evidence that Paul actually visited or travelled to Crete. How then can we be sure that he wrote the book? Could it not be Barnabas or some other such author? Third, the proposed structuring and ordering of the Church runs against the grain of other Pauline epistles like I Thessalonians that seemingly suggests that Jesus' Second Advent was/is eminent. Titus and the Timothy epistles evidently point away from I Thessalonians or some other such eschatological inclined write up.

These and several other aspects of the book raise the eyebrows to the curious reader of the epistle. One thing is sure however, the divine stamp rests upon this book for generations to come.

Lessons from the Book

There are many lessons that can be drawn from this short but loaded book. The three chapters constitution this book address a range of issues that arise from time to time in mission work such as setting up the church officers, instruction menu to various age groups among many. Titus was to be a towering example to the youths as a model of purity and diligent submission to authorities expressed in hard work. The apostle touches on some doctrinal aspects such as grace, mercy and regeneration before concluding the book. What lasting lessons can we learn from this little book? The following are some of them:

1. The book is largely practical and ethical rather than doctrinal, although some doctrinal statements are found therein.
2. Paul aligns himself with Titus and other believers when by stating that God saved 'us' from sin and transformed them to Christ. Salvation is a personal encounter and yet the true church of the Lord Jesus Christ consists of collections of believers from different generations, ages, denominations or races. The "us" therefore relates to all people regardless of where they come from.
3. The Church needs to be structured around two established and recognized offices (i.e. Elders & Deacons).
4. A plurality of elders is expected (or implied by the epistle) in the church for effective service.
5. Church officers are to be above board in terms of integrity, disposition and demeanour.
6. The quality of leaders affects the image of the Church and in many senses may or may not advance the gospel cause.
7. Leaders are to be cognizant of the fact that the church is structured at different tiers and segments and each group has peculiar unique needs if the church is to be effective and relevant.
8. The Christian is to distinguish themselves from the surrounding unbiblical cultural context they find themselves in by serving Christ in a particular way unlike the heathen.
9. When a person becomes a Christian, they are transformed and enabled to withstand the pressures or influences of the world. The grace of God is potently effectual on the will to steadfastly stand against sin.
10. Salvation is by Grace through faith not of works as some pundits advance.

11. Regeneration is a monergistic¹ work of God taking place in the subconscious life of an individual. It is more than a mere outward reformation but a transforming work of God wrought by the Holy Spirit.
12. Christians have a moral duty to influence their generation through different causes (social or otherwise) to the end that Christ may be glorified.
13. Culture should be subservient to the gospel not otherwise as appeared to have been the case at Crete.
14. Although Titus cannot be placed in the Acts frame work, Paul most likely wrote it along the other epistles after the Acts 28 window.
15. The letter is very instructive to the Church leader to ensure that in whatever they do or say, God's name must be glorified.
16. The book was accepted as canonical from the early times of church history.
17. The themes in Titus are very similar to those found in I Timothy, and were probably written about the same time (i.e. Between AD 54-67).
18. In the book, the apostle instructs Titus to teach different categories of people as well as model the Christian Life by his sound teaching, life style and deed. His example should be above board so that others may imitate. In chapter 2, Paul urges Titus to teach/treat older men with grace, older women to mentor and teach the younger women domestic management skills among others, relate with the younger women as sisters with absolute purity. He is to win over the young men with a virtuous and serious life style or attitude avoiding pride, self importance of unrealistic demands but rather adorning the Gospel with an objectively responsible life. Evidently, Titus' task is not an easy one nor is it a one day event. He was to commit to this as long as he was at the Cretan mission station.

¹ Though some argue suggesting that regeneration is synergistic rather than monergistic. Others argue that it is elongated while some argue that it is instantaneous and happens all at once in a moment. There are also arguments around the *ordo salutis* whose arguments never seem to end but one needs to have a good biblical mind to arrive at the correct interpretation of the text and authorial intent. The apostle Paul assumes many issues when he makes sweeping statements relating to grace, regeneration and justification. In one sense, it appears that that people are deceived, enslaved and powerless to change or save themselves but in another, it appears that they are in the driving seat thus making them the chief architects and controllers of their salvation and destiny. In my opinion, Titus 3 has one of the clearest statements relating to regeneration and one does well to study that classic passage. Then many of the theological cobwebs will instantly disappear and clear our vision.

Conclusion

The book of Titus, one of Paul's Pastoral Epistles sends a clear message relevant even today. Written with the express aim of strengthening one of Paul's faithful allies left at Crete to consolidate some ecclesiastical work, Titus stands as a monument of instruction for churches in turbulent or changing contexts.

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