

## SLOW PAUL: THE PASTORAL LETTERS - TITUS

Who was Titus? He was a Gentile convert who doesn't appear in Acts, yet he was a key associate of Paul's. We catch glimpses of him in Jerusalem (Gal 2:1, 3) and in connection with Corinth (eight references in 2 Corinthians); he was put in charge of matters in Crete (the present letter) and later went to Dalmatia (2 Tim 4:10). According to the church historian Eusebius (EH 3.4.6) he returned to be bishop of Crete. His character comes across as energetic, resourceful and affectionate (e.g. 2 Cor 7:15), and perhaps stronger than that of Timothy. Paul's letter to him (the genuineness of which is ably demonstrated by Stott) was probably written at about the same time as 1 Timothy, with various details suggesting that Paul was at liberty when he wrote it, following his imprisonment at Rome recorded at the end of Acts. We might therefore place it in the early to mid 60s AD (CE).

Crete is a largish island lying between Greece and Libya. Its Minoan ruins are spectacular even now; in Roman times it had been a haven for pirates until subdued and made a province in 67 BC (BCE). It still has a tradition of sturdy independence and local character. Paul suggested wintering there on his way to trial in Rome but the ship was unable to reach a suitable harbour before being blown out to sea (Acts 27:12). Cretans were among the crowd at Pentecost (Acts 2:11); we can assume that churches began to be founded, and now, some thirty years later, Paul and Titus have visited the island on a mission and Paul has left Titus to bring some structure to the Christian communities in Crete.

For authorship, commentaries and what 'Slow Paul' is trying to do, see the Introduction to 1 Timothy. The version of the Bible reproduced at the head of each section is the *New International Version* (revised 2011).

**1:1-4** <sup>1</sup> Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness – <sup>2</sup> in the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, <sup>3</sup> and which now at his appointed season he has brought to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Saviour, <sup>4</sup> To Titus, my true son in our common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Saviour.

### Who is writing this letter?

[1:1] Greetings from Paul! I bear a message from my Divine Master, the God who is Jesus, Jewish Messiah and this world's King; I serve him with unquestioning obedience like the humblest slave, and yet I have the honour of representing his interests as his apostle and missionary. My appointed task is to seek out God's chosen people, Gentiles as well as Jews, and not only to plant the seeds of faith but to make sure that they mature into sturdy Christians.

People have got it so wrong about God. Once you set your heart to know him, you find he is utterly good, you start to worship him for his transparent holiness, love and passion for justice. [1:2-3] You catch a whisper of his call to share his never-ending life of heaven, a call which went out before time and space came into being, and which has his own indelible signature stamped upon it. You can choose to believe the old lie, that God never intended us to take hold of the tree of life; or you can believe the word that has been there ever since the beginning, Jesus who walked unseen with us in the garden in the cool of the day, the same Jesus who has now become visible in our own flesh and blood.

God is never late: he always knows the precise time to come to the rescue. And the really amazing thing is that the Lord has hauled unsuitable people like me out of the ditch and has told us in no uncertain terms that he depends on us to get the word out!

Which, dear Titus, is how you and I first met. You listened to my preaching and became a true-born child of God. I suppose in human terms I brought you to birth; but what happened

spiritually was a faith-transaction that I brokered between you and God: I gave you a word you could understand and lay hold upon, and you received the new life he was offering you.

So it's not me writing this letter after all, it's your heavenly Father and his Son Christ Jesus telling you that they're here to set you free – otherwise what was the point of the cross? – and assuring you of a steady stream of superabundant love, which makes up for all your (and my) shortcomings. It sets our hearts dancing with relief and joy, because we know that there's nothing to worry about, nothing whatsoever.

**1:5-9** <sup>5</sup> *The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.* <sup>6</sup> *An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.* <sup>7</sup> *Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless – not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.* <sup>8</sup> *Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.* <sup>9</sup> *He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.*

### **Qualities of a church elder**

[1:5] Anyway, let me get down to the practical reason for this letter. When you and I parted a few months ago, we agreed that you had to stay in Crete to sort out the chaotic state of affairs in the churches there. In particular, you were going to go round the townships and find really responsible men to head up each Christian community. Off the top of my head I gave you a list of desirable qualities for a church elder, and I hope you don't mind if I set these down on paper, because I've been thinking about the whole subject of spiritual leadership and we don't want any mistakes in this crucial area.

[1:6] OK, so you are considering a particular person for eldership. First, there are the obvious things: has he been up in court and found guilty of anything? Is he known to have ratted on his wife? What about his children – have they been brought up as Christians, do they know how to behave in polite society or do they go around vandalising the place? [1:7] You can't have anyone who is under the slightest suspicion of being dodgy; if you wouldn't let this man manage your family business, how much less should he be put in charge of the family of God on earth? Test him against the following checklist of characteristics: is he known for pursuing his own agenda without regard for anyone else? Does he fly off the handle easily? Is he moderate in the use of alcohol? Does he bully people or even hit them physically? Is he motivated by how much cash he can make for himself out of it? [1:8] Turning to more positive character traits, is he fond of entertaining people to meals and so on? Is he a helpful kind of person? Does he lead a disciplined personal life? Does he keep on the right side of the law? Does he handle the things of God with reverence? Is he in control of his sexual impulses no matter what the provocation? These are hard questions, but they've got to be asked – none of us is perfect (as I know all too well), but it is asking for trouble not to set high standards in these areas.

[1:9] Then you've got to think about his teaching capability. Is he doctrinally sound? Yes, he may think outside the box, but does he know his scriptures and is he able to expound them in an orthodox manner? He has basically got two tasks in handling the spoken and written word – the first is to build people up in their faith and challenge them to go deeper in their knowledge of God, and the second is to confront opponents of sound teaching and show them clearly where

they've got it wrong. All this applies whether you are selecting someone for overall control of the local church, or for membership of the team of elders.

**1:10-14** <sup>10</sup> For there are many rebellious people, full of meaningless talk and deception, especially those of the circumcision group. <sup>11</sup> They must be silenced, because they are disrupting whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach – and that for the sake of dishonest gain. <sup>12</sup> One of Crete's own prophets has said it: 'Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.'<sup>[c]</sup> <sup>13</sup> This saying is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith <sup>14</sup> and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the merely human commands of those who reject the truth.

### **Under no illusions**

[1:10-11] I've knocked around the Mediterranean world quite a bit, and I'm under no illusions about the kind of people who can masquerade as followers of Christ. Most churches are riddled with people who have no idea of self-discipline in their day-to-day lives, or who talk utter nonsense about the things of God, or even use clever arguments to lead gullible people astray. I'm thinking, of course, in particular of the circumcision-mongers – I'm a Jew myself, nothing wrong in that, but we've got to shut these people up, because you find them everywhere, infiltrating people's homes would you believe it, chatting up the wives when the husbands are out at work, telling stories to the children, upsetting whole families with their pernicious rubbish. Some of them have the barefaced cheek to charge a fee for their instruction!

[1:12] 'But we don't get these kind of people in a backwater like Crete.' Oh yes you do! Let me quote to you from that ancient holy man Epimenides, the famous Cretan philosopher and poet, who was under no illusions about the deceitful character of his fellow-countrymen. This is a hexameter line from his *Treatise on Oracles* (I'm sure you can find it in the library at his home town of Knossos): 'Never trust a Cretan; believe me, if you do, he'll have you for his supper and tear your soul in two. The only thing he thinks of is his monstrous appetite: he'll eat you out of house and home and charge for every bite!' [1:13-14] Of course, God loves Cretans as much as anybody else, and many of the folk you will deal with are the complete opposite – but there's enough truth in that old caricature to keep us on our guard. That's why it might be wiser for you not to try to match their wiliness and cunning, but get straight to the point and quote scripture relentlessly to show them where they're wrong. Always bear in mind your underlying aim, which is to produce healthy Christian fellowships, well-based in their discipleship of the Lord Jesus and behaving with exemplary honesty and integrity. There is absolutely no point in their paying the slightest attention to well-worn stories about Rabbi X or Master Y who are supposed to embody the wisdom of the ages – you know the kind of thing. Once you understand the revealed truth about what God has done for us in Christ, all other teachings are shown up for what they are: human inventions springing from the desperate need to justify ourselves in God's sight by good deeds and holy humility. You have been warned!

**1:15-16** <sup>15</sup> To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. <sup>16</sup> They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.

### **Pseudo-saints and true conversion**

[1:15] Titus, don't be fooled by these pseudo-saints. When they give you impressive soundbites like 'Once you're right with God, nothing can be wrong for you,' just look at their lives. Now, I

yield to no-one in declaring the full and unconditional forgiveness and cleansing available to every true believer in Christ; but that doesn't mean we can henceforth sin to our heart's content, it means coming into the light and letting the Holy Spirit sweep our lives clean and make them new every day. These people's lives haven't changed one bit! They still get their hands dirty with dishonest business deals, stabbing their rivals in the back, flirting with other people's wives and manipulating the law to their own advantage. Probe into what they really think about the authority of Christ and you'll find disloyalty and unbelief. Remember that story of the Lord's about the servant who had a massive debt cancelled and then tried to extort a few pence owed to him by a fellow-servant? He never understood the true nature of forgiveness, and he certainly never let it affect his conscience. He never let the living water sluice through his tainted heart. That's where true conversion happens.

[1:16] Coming to know God in Christ involves a radical remaking of the whole person. It doesn't mean mouthing some pious phrases here or adopting a few religious practices there – it reaches into the depths of your being and brings you up against the reality of God's holiness. 'How could I profess to follow Jesus and still behave and think like that?' These guys have never got on their knees and sorted out their lives. They think they are God's favourites and he's saying 'I can't stand the sight of you.' They parade as loyal soldiers of Christ when they've never been to him for his orders; when he wants real kingdom work done, it's not them he turns to. Even the 'good' things they do give off a hollow sound when you tap them; all their gold and silver is dross, because they've never been refined in the Lord's purifying fire.

**2:1-5** <sup>1</sup> You, however, must teach what is appropriate to sound doctrine. <sup>2</sup> Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance. <sup>3</sup> Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. <sup>4</sup> Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, <sup>5</sup> to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.

### **Appropriate teaching**

[2:1] Titus, I don't want you to think you're powerless against these people's influence. You're to be like a trained healer, moving among the sick, prescribing the correct medication for every ailment, simply telling them what to do and what to avoid if they're going to get better, and if they won't listen first time, repeating it a second and third time. [2:2] Your churches are made up of young and old, male and female, married and unmarried and so on. Give them teaching appropriate to their stage of life. For instance, you can challenge the older men in all kinds of practical ways. Are they setting a good example in the number of times they allow their wine-glasses to be refilled at parties? Do they behave with dignity in mixed company? Do they have a disciplined lifestyle at home? As for taking them further in their Christian faith, you can ask them what they think are the basics of sound gospel teaching. If they start talking vaguely about 'love', take them to the cross and show them what it really means. Some of them may be going through difficult times, or feeling the ravages of ill-health and increasing frailty – well, remind them of the hope set before them and encourage them to keep going to the very end of the race.

[2:3] The older women will need challenging too. Do they have one persona on Sundays and another for the rest of the week, or do they let their lives shine for Christ all day and every day? When they start chatting among themselves, do they spend the time spreading juicy bits of gossip or even trashing people's characters behind their backs? They may think they've got their drink habits under control, but how often do they say 'I've simply got to have another refill'? Do

they have a regular teaching commitment, either reading the Bible with another person, or playing their part (women can be such superb teachers) in training the young in scriptural knowledge? [2:4] As for the younger women, I suggest you don't try to teach them yourself – choose a few of the more experienced wives or widows to run marriage courses, parenting classes, that kind of thing. If you're a young wife there are going to be times when you find it difficult to enjoy your family life as you feel you should: maybe you feel your husband isn't supporting you and has become rather distant or abstracted – might he be starting an affair with that colleague at work? How can you get him onside again without being a complete doormat? How can you give each of the children enough of your personal attention so they don't feel overlooked or undervalued?

[2:5] Family life is under threat today, no question about that. We live in a selfish society where 'my rights' trump every other consideration. This is where the Christian woman can act as a beacon of sanity. People around her can see the beauty of a disciplined and selfless life, where her relationships are chaste and not possessive, her home is a hive of creative energy, and she has a well-deserved reputation for putting herself out for those less fortunate than herself. She and her husband aren't always scoring points against one another, because they operate as a team; she accepts his leadership and encourages him to take the initiative, while he rejoices in her complete loyalty and infinite resourcefulness. Those outside the church need to see that the gospel actually works, and one of the acid tests is whether you can set up a Christian home without getting into the kind of mess that is all too common nowadays. This is where the older ladies in the fellowship can contribute their unjudging friendship and the occasional piece of wise advice.

**2:6-8** *<sup>6</sup>Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. <sup>7</sup>In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness <sup>8</sup>and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.*

### **Teaching young people**

[2:6] You may have some teenagers and young single adult males in your local fellowships: here too the key issue is self-discipline. [2:7] They respond to strong and attractive role models, so you should think hard about the kind of example you are setting them. As their teacher, they need to see that you aren't trying to manipulate them in accepting some kind of party line, but that you really do base your life and thinking on the Lord Jesus Christ. You needn't try to be 'one of the lads'; by all means enter into their sense of fun and (where appropriate) their irreverent humour, but always maintain a critical distance from their wilder tendencies. [2:8] Teaching is such a difficult art! You've got to know your subject really well, so that you can go to the heart of the issue and not leave yourself open to fatal objections from hecklers or clever debaters. One thing I can promise you, and that is that your gospel won't go down well with everyone. There will be plenty of people trying to shoot you down, and they are going to find ammunition in the slack behaviour of other Christians, or the unguarded words of those who should know better. Get your churches to realise that the best defence against cynicism is Christlike character. It makes opponents realise they haven't a leg to stand on, and they begin to see that their own lives are shabby by comparison.

**2:9-10** *<sup>9</sup>Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, <sup>10</sup>and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Saviour attractive.*

## Slaves as witnesses

[2:9] Slaves are key people too. They are stuck with the masters they've got, so why not take the chance to be witnesses for Christ to them? They (the master or mistress) might start telling their friends, 'I've got this accountant, or this slave-girl, who actually carries out my instructions to the letter rather than doing about fifty-per-cent of what I tell them. They are pleasant and courteous, they don't answer back or mutter under their breath, [2:10] they don't squirrel away coins from the strong-box or bits of household equipment ("it was broken," or "I didn't think you needed it"); in fact, they're thoroughly reliable and there's one I'm thinking of promoting because he really does make the household a happier place.' 'How extraordinary!' the friend says, 'I've got one like that, and I found out the other day that she goes along to this pre-dawn gathering of Christians once a week – when I pressed her on the subject, her face lit up and she stammered out about this God-figure they worship who they think came down to earth and got strung up on a cross to atone for the sins of mankind. Of course I didn't believe a word of it, but all the same she's a transformed character from what she used to be, and the others have begun to notice it as well.'

**2:11-15** <sup>11</sup> For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. <sup>12</sup> It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, <sup>13</sup> while we wait for the blessed hope – the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, <sup>14</sup> who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. <sup>15</sup> These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you.

## God is Jesus

[2:11] It's out in the open. Our God isn't a tyrannical figure thundering from Sinai, or a sadistic dictator who couldn't care less about his creatures – he's pure goodness through and through, because he's Jesus. His single aim is to bring fulness of life to absolutely everybody, including those who have never been near a Christian church. Our Lord's diary was full of dinner parties with Pharisees, pub lunches with mafia bosses and picnics with families in their thousands, all so that he could warn them they had a deadly virus and he was the only one who could cure them. [2:12] We need this hammering into our brains, because our default mentality is to rubbish God and religion and all that stuff, and to fling ourselves into the thick of what this world has to offer, its seductive pleasures and dreams of money and power; it takes a real effort of will to push all this to one side and recognise it for the illusion it is, and instead to go for the things that are solid and worthwhile. We used to think it was so boring, being told to tidy up our lives and treat people fairly and generously and go to church or synagogue, as if we were small children; it was such a relief, or so we thought, to be able to think for ourselves and do our own thing without interference from well-meaning adults. Then like the wayward young man in the Lord's story we came up against the real world and found ourselves wallowing in the pigsty. It was such a relief to go back home and start living decently again.

## Future, past and present

[2:13] When I say it's all out in the open, I don't mean we have a direct vision of God or that we've finally arrived at our heavenly home. We live by faith, and that faith has a triple focus, past, present and future. Let's take the future first. Every day we live in expectancy, because the Lord Jesus told us he was coming back again. This isn't just a vague hope resting on a couple of cryptic utterances, it's an absolute certainty which makes us so happy that we're literally singing with joy no matter what troubles we're going through. Just as Jesus was God in all his greatness

coming amongst us as a small baby whom few people knew about, so in a very different way he is going to break back into this world and everybody's going to know about it. He's going to reclaim this earth for himself and confer upon it his own deathless and unsullied beauty. He told us story after story about this so it should be perfectly obvious that it's going to happen. It's all part of his rescue plan, and that brings us to the second focus of our faith.

[2:14] It's in the past now, that shameful and unbelievably awful crucifixion. God allowed his Son (or himself, it makes no difference) to be hammered against two pieces of Roman timber and to bleed to death on a particular afternoon in recent history. This either makes no sense at all, or it's stacked with significance. God was doing something on that Jerusalem hilltop that was quite impossible for any of us to do for ourselves. Because we were under the sentence of death for our deliberate and persistent lawbreaking (for which of us could claim that we have selflessly fulfilled our duty of love towards God and neighbour?), he handed in his own perfect life as payment. Jesus was the only person in the annals of humanity to live a life completely free of self-seeking, whereas even in our holiest moments we have never been free of that fatal taint. We have run up an enormous bill of offences against the holiness of God, and Jesus has stepped up to the line, accepted all the charges as being due to him, and paid the account in full. What was happening on that cross, therefore, was not simply the brutal execution of an undeserving victim; it was the Divine Lover standing in for the people he loved and who had betrayed him, collectively and individually. Yes, Isaiah's vision of the payment of a ransom-price beyond the worth of gold or silver has finally been enacted on the stage of history, in our lifetime.

And this leads directly to the third focus, our present experience as saints in the making. Way back in the book of Exodus we find God purposing to call out from every nation a people of his very own, who would need to go through a process of cleansing. Ezekiel makes this abundantly clear: the stain of uncleanness is all but ineradicable, but the Lord is going to make sure through the work of his Spirit that this is achieved. No salvation without sanctification, in case we ever thought there could be. Somehow God is going to turn us from individuals absorbed in our own pleasure and ego-centredness, into a kingdom people who are passionate to worship him in the beauty of holiness, and who are determined to do everything it takes to establish his will upon earth.

### **Just joking?**

[2:15] This is the essential message that you've got to keep repeating until you're blue in the face. It must be the subject of your talks in church, your person-to-person instruction and your public debates. A few, admittedly, will grasp what you're saying immediately and hang on to it for dear life. But most people will need a regular injection of reminder, encouragement, warning and rebuke. We've got lies in our bloodstream and truth is the best, indeed the only antidote. You have the full authority of Christ and your commission is to make disciples. Never, ever give anyone the impression that you take this commission less than utterly seriously. They should never be able to say, 'I thought you were just joking.'

**3:1-2** <sup>1</sup> *Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good,* <sup>2</sup> *to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle towards everyone.*

### **Cheerful obedience**

[3:1] Now you can't use 'holiness' as some kind of mantra – it will need spelling out in detail. As you and I know all too well, Cretans are an independent and quarrelsome breed, and they don't like doing what the government says. You've got to bang it into their heads that if they become

Christians they will have to stop moaning about the system, rubbishing authority and fiddling their taxes. Jesus taught his disciples to give Caesar what was due to Caesar and to God what was due to God. We may be citizens of heaven, but we've still got to fulfil our duties as citizens of earthly powers. Things like traffic laws and building regulations may be human creations, but if even a few people disregard them there will be a lot more accidents. Cheerful, constructive obedience is the theme you've got to emphasise. In fact we want Christians holding responsible positions in society, then instead of corrupt officials and heavy-handed policing we would get proactive compassion and a cascade of goodness. [3:2] So teach them to model their behaviour on the Lord Jesus Christ: he didn't go around swearing like a trooper and spreading scandal (though he was fearless in telling people the truth about themselves to their face); he didn't fly off the handle and start laying into those he disagreed with (though he could express himself forcibly when his Father's honour was at stake); he was approachable, never considering himself more important than even the lowliest person he came into contact with; he wasn't standoffish or overbearing, but treated everyone, particularly women, with gentleness and courtesy. We can't start drawing lines if we are to be Christlike – everybody without exception is included in the rule of love.

**3:3** <sup>3</sup> *At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.*

#### **What I used to be like**

[3:3] After all, the Lord included you and me in his circle of grace! We preachers sometimes make it sound as if we're different from the general ruck of mankind, but we're not. I know a bit about you, but I know a good deal more about myself. The longer I go on in the Christian race, the more clearly I see what I was like before I started. I may have been a distinguished scholar in the world's eyes, but in reality I was a mindless idiot, because I left Jesus, the fount of all wisdom and knowledge, completely out of the reckoning. I may have obeyed the Law in all its minute particulars, but I was offending against the greatest laws of all, the requirements of love and justice and humility. I considered myself a guide to the spiritually blind, while being thoroughly lost myself. I thought I had attained an enviable freedom from the grosser lusts of the flesh, while being a slave to the subtler pull of envy, covetousness, avarice and damnable pride. You have no idea of the malice and in-fighting that was a regular feature of the theological schools in Tarsus and Jerusalem, day in and day out. We were thoroughly beastly to one another, and of course 'we' were always right! When the blessed Stephen told us the truth about ourselves we physically gnashed our teeth at him and tore into him with a hail of rocks. It was his desperate plea for forgiveness – for me, his judge and executioner – that tormented my conscience and finally brought me to my knees before my Lord and Master. When we talk about the sin of the world, as talk we must, let's never forget that our own sins were part of the burden he carried to the cross, and our own jeers could be heard among the catcalls of the crowd as he suffered in our place.

**3:4-7** <sup>4</sup> *But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared,* <sup>5</sup> *he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,* <sup>6</sup> *whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour,* <sup>7</sup> *so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.*

#### **The real nature of God**

[3:4] Yes, I was totally blind, as all of us are blind to begin with, to the real nature of God and to the actual route he was planning to take for the world to be hauled back from the brink of destruction. I used to think, 'God is too holy to come into direct contact with human corruption,

and if he were to send his Messiah in my lifetime, he would certainly not allow him to lose his life at the hands of the very oppressors he had come to annihilate.' I had completely misunderstood the depths of patience, forbearance and sheer loving *tolerance* that characterise our wonderful God. Only if he became human and shared in our pain could our eyes be opened to what he is truly like.

[3:5] I had been trained, as all of us were, to think that God graded people according to the spiritual footprint they left on this earth: the closer we matched up to the demands of the Law and led lives of unselfishness and piety, the more chance we had of making it into his kingdom. Maybe only a few would make the grade, but I was determined to be among them. Oh yes, I knew I needed forgiveness for the occasional lapse, but I could earn the right to be forgiven by doing a bit extra to atone for my sin; and if that extra effort included eradicating the entire Jesus movement, then I would be found spearheading the assault. If I had heard the words of the Lord as he was nailed to the wood, 'Father, they're all deluded – please blot out their sin', I still wouldn't have applied them to myself. And all the time God was saying, 'A free pardon is something that cannot be earned – it's because I love you despite your misguided attempts to show me that you're worth saving!'

### **A new person entirely**

Another thing I had failed to grasp was the necessity of the new birth. Even first-class theologians like Nicodemus couldn't understand how an adult person could start life all over again like a little child, simply by being ritually washed in the water of baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit. Surely the Spirit was reserved for those whose lives showed that they were close enough to God to be worthy of his love and honour? I now realise that the power to remake a life belongs to God alone, and that he does it by giving the water of life completely freely to those who ask, by entering their existence and reconfiguring their personality to include himself. I'm a new person entirely once Christ makes his home with me! It's not the outward washing that counts – even though it's a powerful symbol of God's forgiveness – but the inner irradiating of a deeply flawed human life with the Divine holiness of the Spirit.

[3:6] Let's never underestimate or restrict God's breathtaking generosity with the Spirit. The Day of Pentecost was the first, spectacular outpouring, fulfilling the great prophecy in Joel; but it was only the first of innumerable outpourings that have been happening ever since, not necessarily in spectacular fashion (God's gifts are often secret and silent, as was his supreme gift at the birth of the Christ-child) but always inducing a deep sense of wonder and gratitude. The other mistake is to isolate the giving of the Spirit from the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Pentecost is Calvary part two. It is all part of the self-giving of Christ in order to save his people. He died for us so that he could live in us – it's as simple, and as wonderful, as that.

### **Justification by faith**

[3:7] I've often preached and written about justification by faith, but this too must never be separated from the grace of God. The faith that truly saves isn't a kind of mechanical action like signing a cheque – it's understanding enough of the incredible goodness of God to cast oneself unreservedly upon his mercy, which one has not deserved and could never earn. I said at the start of this letter that God's offer of eternal life predates time itself. He has always intended us to come into the full inheritance of partnership with himself; we may have forfeited it through a catastrophic failure to follow his instructions, but his plan still stands unchanged. Thus my eager anticipation of a glorious and unending future isn't based on my proving that I'm worthy of it,

nor on my ticking boxes marked 'repentance' and 'faith' – it's based entirely on his promise through Christ, which is more solid and irreversible than even the most solemn and sacred human legal contract.

**3:8-11** <sup>8</sup> *This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.* <sup>9</sup> *But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless.* <sup>10</sup> *Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them.* <sup>11</sup> *You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are self-condemned.*

### **Theology and life**

[3:8] This prospectus hasn't been drawn up by someone as erratic and volatile as myself, nor is it a provisional scheme like the Old Covenant, destined to be replaced by something better. It's God's final word. You can have complete and total confidence in its validity. I'm asking you to show the same infectious confidence in your teaching of these truths; I'd feel seriously let down if you stopped proclaiming them for even one moment. But don't preach them on their own, as a little theological bundle disconnected from the obligation to lead a really useful life in this world. This is an absolute priority for anyone who has professed trust in God. Don't let them dissociate personal faith from exemplary behaviour. People today need good role models, particularly the young; they are going to get into all kinds of trouble, and it's the practical and attractive witness of Christians that is going to be of most help to them. [3:9] What is emphatically not going to help is the usual rubbish served up by both Greek and Jewish clever charlies – you know the kind of thing: speculative philosophies which posit a universe of ideal reality quite apart from the one they live in; or long and complicated family trees proving that we're all descended from Abraham, or from God himself, so we don't need to become children of God through faith in Christ; or public debates where the two sides end up slanging one another and even exchanging physical blows; or scholarly wrangles about minute points of legal nicety which entirely miss the main point of the law which is a just and fair society. Don't accept any invitations to take part in these, because even if you out-argue everyone else it won't be the slightest use in your day-to-day dealings with the people you meet in the market-place. I've tried it myself, and it always ends up where it should have started, at the resurrection of Christ. So stay on firm ground of your own choosing and don't chase ideas up blind alleys.

### **Heretical teaching**

[3:10] You may find that a supposedly Christian lecturer turns up to run a course for the church and unloads peculiar theories of his own on the unsuspecting congregation. When it becomes obvious that this guy is departing from the classic apostolic gospel, take him aside and explain why you are concerned about his exposition of the scriptures. If you have to repeat your warnings a little later, the situation is serious: if he persists, you will have to ask him to stop teaching. This may be painful, especially if he is a gifted personality and has attracted a following among the church members – but it's got to be done. [3:11] The important thing is that you should be convinced in your own mind that his doctrine is heretical. It isn't just a question of a few phrases here and there – it's a serious distortion arising from unfaithfulness to the Lord. The famous Song of Moses anticipates that God's people are going to be attracted to idolatrous ideas which lead them to deviate from the rock-like God who truly saves. Actually you will find this kind of teacher condemns himself out of his own mouth, so all you need is to wait for him to contradict scripture, note down what he says and confront him with it. Do you know the word of God well enough to be able to do this?

**3:12-15** <sup>12</sup> As soon as I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, because I have decided to winter there. <sup>13</sup> Do everything you can to help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way and see that they have everything they need. <sup>14</sup> Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order to provide for urgent needs and not live unproductive lives. <sup>15</sup> Everyone with me sends you greetings. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all.

### **Plans and people**

[3:12] You'd better get a move on with all these church reforms, because you haven't got long! The fact is, I've got plans to spend the coming winter at Nicopolis: it's a nice sheltered spot on the Bay of Actium and a good launching-point for my next mission to the West, on which I hope you're keen to join me. Church maintenance is all very well and necessary, but church-planting has got to be done too. The moment to release you will be when either Artemas or Tychicus arrives – both of them are sound and energetic characters whom I can rely on to continue your work in Crete, but it depends on what plans the Lord has for their next assignment.

[3:13] This letter is being brought to you by two first-class men: Zenas is an expert in Roman law, so you can pick his brains while he's with you. Apollos of course you know well from all that business at Corinth; yes, he's still that golden orator whose gifts the Master has used to bring so many people to Christ and build them up in the deep knowledge of the scriptures. I'm sure you will be looking forward to their arrival; however, I'm afraid they're not going to stay long in Crete as they are on their way to – well, they can tell you themselves! Give them a good time and make sure they have everything they need for the next leg of their journey.

### **Lives that count for Christ**

[3:14] I'll be sorry to lose these men because we've been having such interesting chats about the interpretation of the scriptures and lots of other learned matters. But that brings me to the final point I want to emphasise, and which I've been hammering at all through this letter: the key thing that every Christian and every community of believers needs to get hold of is, let your lives count for Christ! It's all very well to know your Bibles and be able to engage in intellectual discussions, but there are people out there who need helping, either because they are in desperate financial need or under pressure in other ways. It would be terrible to turn up on the great Day of Harvest and find that you've won every argument in the debating chamber yet hadn't made the slightest difference to anyone's life. All that fruit withered on the branch – so sad.

[3:15] I've got a crowd of people here who want to be remembered to you but the post's going so I must sign off. Pass on my love and best wishes to everyone I know on your lovely island and who were so warm-hearted towards me when I was last there. There's nothing like true Christian fellowship. We share something completely invaluable, and that's the rich experience of God's love, resourcefulness and forgiveness in Christ. I'll end as I began – with such a God, what's to worry about?!

## TITUS CROSS-REFERENCES

Underlined direct scriptural reference. \* probable allusion.

**1:1-4** *Start to worship him* Isa 33:5-6. *Before time and space* 2 Tim 1:9. *Tree of life* Gen 3:5. *Cool of the day* Gen 3:8. *To come to the rescue* 1 Tim 2:6.

**1:5-9** *Eldership* 1 Tim 3:1, 5:17.

**1:10-14** *Masquerade as followers of Christ* Mt 7:15-20. *Infiltrating people's homes* 2 Tim 3:6.

**1:15-15** *New every day* 1 Jn 1:5-10. *Owed to him by a fellow-servant* Mt 18:23ff. *Can't stand the sight of you* Mt 7:23, Rev 3:16. *Purifying fire* Mal 3:3.

**2:1-5** *Challenge the older men* 1 Tim 5:1. *Younger women* 1 Tim 5:2. *Infinite resourcefulness* Prov 31: 28-29. *Won't go down well with everyone* 2 Tim 2:25-26.

**2:6-8** *Shabby by comparison* 1 Pet 3:16.

**2:9-10** *Slaves are key people too* Col 3:22. *Didn't think you needed it* Josh 7:1, Acts 5:2.

**2:11-15** *Thundering from Sinai* Heb 12:18-24. *About his creatures* Jon 4:11. *Dinner parties with Pharisees* Lk 7:36. *Wayward young man* Lk 15:13. *Arrived at our heavenly home* Phil 3:12. *It makes no difference* Jn 1:1-2, 18, 2 Cor 5:19, 21. *Perfect life as payment* Ps 130:8. *Worth of gold or silver* Isa 52:3, 1 Pet 1:18. *Book of Exodus* Exod 19:5. *Of his very own* Dt 7:6. *Ezekiel* Ezek 36:25, 37:23. *Work of his Spirit* \*Ezek 36:26-27, Tit 3:5-6. *Beauty of holiness* Ps 29:2. *Full authority of Christ* Lk 10:19. *To make disciples* Mt 28:18-19.

**3:1-2** *What was due to God* Mt 17:24-27, Mk 12:17. *Citizens of heaven* Phil 3:20. *Citizens of earthly powers* Rom 13:1ff, 1 Pet 2:13ff. *The truth about themselves* Mt 23:13ff. *Those he disagreed with* Mt 26:52-53, Jn 18:26. *Father's honour was at stake* Mt 21:12. *Came into contact with* 2 Cor 10:1. *Gentleness and courtesy* Lk 7:36ff.

**3:3** *Mindless idiot* 1 Cor 1:20. *Justice and humility* Mic 6:8, Mt 23:23-24. *Spiritually blind* Rom 2:19. *Covetousness* Rom 7:8. *Truth about ourselves* Acts 7:54. *Plea for forgiveness* Acts 7:60.

**3:4-7** *God is too holy* Hab 1:13. *Words of the Lord* Lk 23:34. *Theologians like Nicodemus* Jn 3:3-8. *Water of life completely freely* Isa 55:1. *Makes his home with me* Gal 2:20. *Prophecy in Joel* Joel 2:28-32, Acts 2:33. *From the grace of God* Acts 15:11, Rom 3:24. *Start of this letter* Tit 1:2, 2 Tim 1:9.

**3:8-11** *Exemplary behaviour* Mt 5:13-16. *Tried it myself* Acts 17:17ff. *Song of Moses* Deut 32:5, \*20.

**3:12-15** *Tychicus* Col 4:7. *Business at Corinth* 1 Cor 16:12, 2 Cor 2:13. *Withered on the branch* Jn 15:2.

Mark Greenstock

Sherborne January 2015.