

December 18
Titus

The book of Titus is a personal letter from St. Paul. Titus was an apprentice of Paul, the next generation of leaders in the apostolic church. Anyone interested in Biblical leadership could learn much from this letter. It tells us a great deal about how to be leaders and also about how to make leaders of others!

The very first thing that catches our attention is what Paul has to say about the qualifications for leadership in the church. He says if you are going to be an elder or an overseer (that word is sometimes translated 'bishop') there are some qualifying and disqualifying issues. With regard to character, he must be blameless -- a husband of one wife, a father of true believers, gentle, even-tempered, sober, gentle, honest, hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, disciplined, and holy. What qualifies a person to lead in the church of Jesus Christ is a character that is like Christ's character. The very last thing that Paul tacks on to his list is knowledge related -- the ability to hold and teach sound doctrine. All the other qualifications Paul mentions have to do with the fruit of the Spirit and with the disciplines of a holy life that we as leaders must model and practice.

The passage we read today also gives us a very good look at the method that the Apostle Paul used to develop new leaders -- he took on apprentices and he mentored them! Paul's method for discipling was copied from Jesus. He invited men to go with him, to be with him. They watched him work, he showed them what to do, he watched them work. He dispatched them on short field trips to work on their own and finally he released them to do the same things he had done. He calls Titus his "son" and that is a telling comment. It is possible that Paul had personally led Titus into a saving faith in Christ, but whether or not that was so, Paul had developed such a close relationship with Titus that he was like his "father." The idea of mentoring rings all through this brief letter. Older men are called upon to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled and sound in faith, in love and in endurance. Why? -- So that they can encourage the young men. The older women are called upon to "train" the younger women in the ways of Christ.

Titus himself is encouraged by Paul to "set an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you "can have nothing bad to say about you." The word "disciple" means "learner," but the learning disciples needs comes not only through the mind but through the eyes and the heart as others "see" God's truth and reality in our lives, and master not only the content but the disciplines (the context) of the Christian life by practicing them with us.

Once again in this little letter, we are immediately confronted with the fact that Paul's ministry was still embroiled in controversy and opposition from rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers -- especially from the circumcision group. That is important for us to notice again because leaders are always opposed and criticized by the ones who do not wish to be led. Paul was, Jesus was, Moses was -- every leader is.

Friends, if God raises you up to be a leader in His church, you will be opposed. Some people will not like what you are doing and where you are going. Paul's advice to Titus is "don't get sidetracked, stay focused."

Avoid the Jewish myths and endless genealogies. In fact after you have warned a divisive person for the second time, don't get stuck by continuing to dealing with the same issues over and over again. Leave them alone. Don't get sidetracked. The other side of that same coin of advice is "stay focused." The grace of God has appeared and teaches us to live for Christ. "While we wait for the blessed hope -- the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ ..." Jesus is coming. In light of that great truth, some of the things that Christians choose to argue and debate become unbelievably small by comparison. We are looking for the return of the King -- we dare not lose our sense of urgency or get distracted from our task.

Every one of Paul's epistles teaches, emphasizes and is built upon the glorious truth that justification -- salvation comes by grace through faith. In Titus chapter 3, it is found in verses 5-8: "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, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior. So that having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs, having the hope of eternal life." Not only do those verses spell out very clearly that salvation comes by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ, but they also help us to understand the true meaning of Christian baptism. The outward sign of baptism points to an inward reality, "the washing of rebirth" which has already been administered by the Holy Spirit of God.

There is one last thing I want to point out to you from Titus. In chapter 2:14 Paul says that Jesus Christ "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." Jesus Christ came to redeem us, to purify us and to make us "eager to do what is good." It is not enough just to know that Christ has redeemed us. We must also know that he came to purify us and to empower and motivate us to live to the glory of God.