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LEADERSHIP *for* GROWING CHURCHES

Paul's Recipe for Prospering the Church in Crete

Clarence Bouwman

Would a book on how to lead a successful business answer the question of how to grow a church? The Apostle Paul would think not. Taking seriously God's instruction in the Scriptures Paul had, the apostle instructed Titus what he had to do to grow the church in Crete well—and it was not to follow a business model.

This publication seeks to assist today's reader as he works his way through Paul's letter to Titus. Along the way we'll grapple with such questions as:

- *How do you make a church prosper?*
- *What should leadership in a church look like?*
- *What role are individual members to play in the Lord's church?*
- *How does one handle dissent in a church?*
- *How does the church thrive in a culture of deceit?*

A fresh look at this letter's answers can only be beneficial as one seeks to grow God's way in today's business-minded world.

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Clarence Bouwman received his MDiv degree from the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary. He has served congregations in the Canadian Reformed Churches and in the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. He is the author of *Spiritual Order for the Church* (2000), *The Overflowing Riches of My God* (2008), *A Vow to Love* (2008), and *The Privilege of Parenting* (2011).

"There are many solid and helpful commentaries on and expositions of the 'Pastoral Epistles'—1 & 2 Timothy and Titus. Far too often the unique message of Paul's letter to Titus is overshadowed by Paul's more familiar letters to Timothy. Reverend Clarence Bouwman's sound, wise, and fearless exposition of Titus and the controversies it addresses is a great resource for God's people interested in those things 'faithful' churches do to be 'faithful.'"

—**KIM RIDDLEBARGER**, Senior Pastor, Christ Reformed Church in Anaheim (URCNA); cohost of the White Horse Inn Radio program; author, *A Case for Amillennialism*

"Clarence Bouwman has written a readable and thought-provoking book on Paul's letter to Titus. At least three aspects set this book apart from other publications: (1) the discussion of Old Testament background throughout, which often sheds additional light on Paul's exhortations, (2) the practical applications which will be enjoyed by office-bearers and lay people alike, and (3) the author's punchy writing style. Warmly recommended."

—**ARJAN DE VISSER**, Professor of Diaconology, Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary, Hamilton, Ontario

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WIPF & STOCK • Eugene, Oregon

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*Dedicated to
the brothers and sisters in the Orient
where so much needs to be done
to impart the whole counsel of God*

*—and to the brothers and sisters of the West
where so much needs to be done
to embrace again the whole counsel of God*

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Preface

BOOKS ON SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS leadership abound. But how do you lead a church? Can one simply impose a business model on church leaders and expect the church to flourish?

It would seem not. Though the Apostle Paul penned his letter to Titus long before modern leadership gurus wrote their tomes, Paul's work has the singular distinction of being inspired by none less than the Holy Spirit of the very Christ who gathers, defends, and preserves his church. That can only mean that anyone who would seek to provide fitting leadership in the church must of necessity take Paul's instruction about church leadership seriously.

This publication seeks to assist today's reader as he works his way through Paul's letter to Titus. Along the way we'll grapple with questions as:

- What ought leadership in a church to look like?
- What role are individual members to play in the Lord's church?
- How do you make a church prosper?
- How does one handle dissent in a church?
- How does the church thrive in a culture of deceit?

A fresh look at this letter's answers can only be beneficial as the church seeks to function God's way in today's business-minded world.

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Acknowledgements

IT IS FITTING THAT I express a word of appreciation to particular persons and parties, without whose assistance this work would never have seen the light of day. My ever-dedicated wife, Arlene, has unfailingly stood beside me as helper in the task the Lord has given me. That reality has given me the space and the encouragement to complete this publication. I thank the Lord for her. Our children too, be they still at home or already out of the parental nest, have been and continue to be a source of joy and encouragement. I gratefully acknowledge their contribution to my work.

The consistory and congregation of the Canadian Reformed Church of Smithville have also contributed abundantly to this project. I thank them for their stimulating responses to the sermons I delivered on the letter to Titus. Congregation and consistory alike also came to understand that Titus has much to say in today's world, and so readily granted me time away from my regular work to complete this project. I am in your debt.

A number of very capable experts found time in their busy schedules to read carefully through an earlier version of this publication. I publicly thank Arjan de Visser, George W. Knight, Nelson D. Kloosterman, William den Hollander Sr, and Gerhard H. Visscher for their engaging interactions. Needless to say, the final version is my responsibility.

Every work needs its editors. Jolene Bouwman and Amanda Ellens toiled their way through my writing in an effort to remove grammatical weaknesses and spelling errors. Ryan Kampen

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assisted graciously with further editorial work and compiled the indices. Thank you so very much for your diligent labors!

With the work now completed, I thank the Lord my God for the privilege to serve in his kingdom in the capacity he has granted. It is my prayer that the Lord will bless this work, to the benefit of his churches and the greater glory of his most wonderful Name.

Introduction

BY THE GRACE OF God, the gospel of Jesus Christ had come to the residents of the island of Crete, and as a result a number of Cretans came to faith. Their coming to faith, obviously, did not mean that all church building work was now done in their midst—as if church building only involves bringing in new converts. The Apostle Paul understood that much needed to be done to enhance church life on the island. So Paul did two things. First, he “left” Titus on the island to “put what remained into order” (Titus 1:5).¹ Thereafter he wrote Titus a letter with details as to how Titus should fulfill this mandate.

Titus has long since finished his earthly sojourn and received from God the crown of glory. The same Lord, however, has seen fit to preserve Paul’s letter to Titus—and even had it be included in Holy Scripture—so that we today might use this same instruction to ensure that the churches to which we belong be organized in a fashion that pleases the Lord. With that purpose in mind, I propose to take the reader through Paul’s letter to Titus in order to set forth the Lord’s intent for what his church ought to look like through the centuries.

Simply reading Paul’s letter to Titus, however, is not by itself going to show us how the Lord would have his churches function. Preachers also need to communicate Paul’s instructions to Titus to their congregations. How, concretely, does one do that? Before

1. All quotations are taken from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise indicated.

Introduction

we begin to read Titus together, I want to devote some attention to how preachers today ought to prepare sermons on this letter. That is Part 1 of this publication. In Part 2 we will read Paul's letter to Titus with the benefit of the principles learned in Part 1. For the benefit of those who wish to use this publication for study purposes, discussion questions follow each chapter.

Every project has a context, and this publication does too. Some four years ago the Lord directed my path as preacher of the gospel to a church of nearly six hundred members. Together with fourteen elders and seven deacons I was to function as pastor and teacher in this large flock. It was quickly obvious to me that the ship of this church could float only when all hands were on deck, contributing to the needs of the saints. As I considered how to address this need in the congregation, my attention was drawn to Paul's letter to Titus. The further I got into the letter, the more I was persuaded that here was material that had much to say to today's (larger) churches. Being rightly organized is vital to functioning well! Surely one cannot expect God's blessing to rest on the work one does in the church if one ignores God's own instruction on how he wants his churches run. Needless to say, the effort to get the church organized as ought, and then to keep the church organized as ought, is ongoing work; it shall not finally be complete until the day of the Lord's return.

Part 1

Preaching from Titus

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Chapter 1

Making the Sermon

TITUS RECEIVED A LETTER from Paul with specific instructions about what steps he was to take to ensure that the work begun in Crete be completed as the Lord wished it to be. We can imagine that as Titus sought to carry out his mandate, he travelled from town to town to appoint elders (Titus 1:5). More, as he travelled he surely will have made it his business to “teach what is in accord with sound doctrine” (2:1), and have done so with words of encouragement and rebuke (2:15), and all the while flavored his messages with reminders (3:1) and insistence (3:8). But what, we wonder, would Titus’ teaching—his sermons—have sounded like? What resources would he have used to prepare those sermons? We would love to look over his shoulder as he labored in his study, and love also to listen in as he delivered the fruits of his studies. How much we would benefit, we feel, from such an experience!

The Lord has not preserved for our instruction any of the sermons Titus preached. That does not, however, leave us in the dark in answering the question at hand. With but little imagination we can visit Titus in his study as he pores over his books and manuscripts to prepare his sermons. What do we see?

Part 1—Preaching from Titus

Titus at Work

Spread before Titus is first of all the letter he received from Paul. Elsewhere on his desk is a copy of the Old Testament—likely in Greek (see Gal 2:3). Though Titus lives and preaches in the New Testament dispensation, we notice his Old Testament is well used and worn.

Why do I picture a well-worn Old Testament on Titus' desk? I do so because Titus is Paul's "true child in a common faith" (Titus 1:4). That undoubtedly means at a minimum that Titus knows how Paul's mind works. He knows that as the Apostle busies himself with what needs to be done to grow the fledgling church in Crete, he will be studying God's earlier revelation diligently to find God's will. To follow Paul's thoughts as recorded in the letter he received, Titus obviously needs to study the same material Paul studied.

Paul

What makes me so confident that Paul studied the Old Testament as he prepared his letter to Titus? Consider the following:

- From his childhood Paul (then Saul of Tarsus) had been steeped in the Scriptures God had revealed thus far, namely, the Old Testament. In the course of his studies under Professor Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), he increased in Old Testament knowledge beyond his fellow students (Gal 1:14).
- We may safely assume that as he grew up and continued his studies, Saul read widely not only from the Old Testament and existing works and commentaries on it, but also from the Greek literature available in his day; he could, after all, freely quote from the Greek poet Epimenides in Titus 1:12.
- Saul was a student in Jerusalem during the time of Jesus' earthly ministry. We do not know whether he ever met Jesus personally, but it is beyond a doubt that this bright student was as aware of Jesus' words and works as any other Pharisee in the city. Saul, however, did not accept that Jesus was the

Making the Sermon

promised Messiah and therefore the fulfillment of the Scriptures. So convinced was he that Jesus was a false teacher that he consented to Stephen's stoning (Acts 8:1) and led the effort to eradicate those who followed the Way (Acts 9:1, 2; see also Acts 26:9–11).

- After his conversion on the road to Damascus, Paul straightaway understood that Jesus was “Lord” (Acts 9:5) and so was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. As a result “immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, ‘he is the Son of God’” (Acts 9:20) and “proving that Jesus was the Christ” (Acts 9:22). Here his extensive training in the Old Testament and his prior intimate knowledge of Jesus’ teaching and work bore instant fruit; at his conversion the penny dropped so that God’s revelation in the Old Testament and its fulfillment in Jesus Christ now made complete sense to him. Of course, as the years went by, his insight into how Jesus fulfilled Old Testament Scripture will have deepened.

Following Paul’s Thought

Titus was an early associate of the Apostle Paul (Gal 2:1), and over the years witnessed Paul at work, heard his preaching, and followed his discussions. In the process Titus learned from this man—steeped as he was in the Old Testament—how to work with those ancient Scriptures in the post-Calvary and post-Pentecost era. As Titus, then, set himself to preparing sermons on the material Paul mentioned in the letter he received, he could follow *why* his spiritual father told him to teach what he had to teach. He understood that there was a *flow-on* from any given Old Testament passage through to the audience in Crete. This flow-on had the following stations:

- God’s revelation in a given Old Testament passage came first to a particular audience, in a particular historical context, and was subsequently written into sacred Scripture. For example, the Passover instruction in Exodus 12:1–28 was revealed to

Part 1—Preaching from Titus

the Israelites on a particular night a dozen centuries earlier, and for a specific reason.

- Later Old Testament Scripture expanded on, clarified, and/or fulfilled what God had revealed in an earlier passage. For example, some months after Israel's arrival at Mt. Sinai, God instructed Moses to elaborate on his revelation about the Passover (Lev 23:4–8; Num 28:16–25). There could potentially be multiple expansions or clarifications as the years went by. So Moses said more about the Passover after the forty-year sojourn in the desert ended (Deut 16:1–8), and Josiah (2 Chron 35), Ezra (6:19–22), and Ezekiel (45:21–24) recorded still more about this sacrament many years later. These expansions as well were addressed to particular audiences and occurred in specific historical contexts.
- Jesus Christ fulfilled all God's earlier revelation (Jesus' words in Matthew 5:17 were no secret to Paul or to Titus). His instruction during his three-year public ministry expanded on his Father's Old Testament revelation, and clarified what was not sufficiently clear to his hearers within their particular setting. On the matter of the Passover, for example, Jesus celebrated it with his disciples and instituted a replacement sacrament (Matt 26:17–30).
- After Jesus' triumph on Calvary and exaltation into heaven, he gave his servants deep and clear insight into God's Old Testament revelation through his poured-out Spirit. This insight drew out how the Scriptures were fulfilled in him (John 16:13, 14). Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost serves as a clear example (Acts 2:14–36). The Holy Spirit led the post-Pentecost church to act and speak in a certain way in relation to Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42).
- Paul was mandated to carry Jesus' name to Gentiles and Jews alike (Acts 9:15). In fulfilling that mandate, he digested God's Old Testament revelation through the fulfillment in Jesus Christ, and, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, applied it within the context of his hearers in their actual daily setting.

Making the Sermon

To stay with the example of the Passover, Paul applied its ongoing significance to the Corinthians in their specific circumstances in 1 Corinthians 5:6–8 and elsewhere.

- Titus received Paul's (inspired) instruction, and went to work with it in the concrete circumstances of Crete. As it turns out, there is no direct reference to the Passover in his letter. If there had been, though, Titus would have had to take seriously (as any preacher expositing 1 Corinthians 5:6–8 discernibly must) all the above-mentioned Old Testament passages on the Passover as well as what Jesus did and said about the sacrament and how the post-Pentecost church had carried out this instruction thus far.

For Titus to be effective, then, as he unpacked Paul's instruction for the benefit of the Christians of Crete, he needed to:

- Know the circumstances of his hearers. He must, in other words, stand in their shoes so that he knew their needs and heard as they would hear.
- Know Paul's manner of thinking so that he could follow why Paul wrote what he wrote.
- Know how Jesus had fulfilled particular (Old Testament) Scripture passages and what that fulfillment meant for the post-Pentecost church.
- Know how later Old Testament Scripture expanded upon and clarified earlier Scripture.
- Understand the relevant Old Testament passages Paul was building on, and how those passages were themselves (possibly) built upon a deeper foundation in revelation given earlier still.

Spanning all of this is the conviction that God Almighty stands unchangingly above changing times and ages. He is the one constant, who has slowly but surely revealed his will through a series of multiple stages and in differing circumstances through the generations. As Titus grappled with how to bring God's word

Part 1—Preaching from Titus

to bear on the lives of the Cretan believers, he had to wander far beyond the single text in Paul's letter that he wanted to expound. To do justice to Paul's words, Titus had to dig beneath the text of what Paul wrote to penetrate the material that formed Paul's thinking. In short, Titus had to work with the entirety of Scripture.

Of course, any preacher living after Titus adds one more step in this process: he has to get into Titus' skin and follow his thoughts as he unpacks the letter to Titus for the benefit of a twenty-first-century audience. In so doing he needs to recognize that the Holy Spirit has given a complete second Testament—so that the preacher expounding Paul's letter to Titus must not only look *back* (into the Old Testament, the days of Jesus and the early church), but also look *around* (into Paul's other letters as well as those of the other apostles) and even look *forward* (into the prophecy of Revelation and even what the Lord has done in the course of church history).

Preaching Titus

What does this mean for how we preach on Titus?

- A given text from Paul's letter to Titus is never a *dot-devoid-of-context* upon which a preacher may comment with remarks applicable to today's needs. From a dot you can draw lines in any direction. But if you draw lines from a dot into any direction you wish, your application can come across as unfounded and subjective, and therefore lacking scriptural authority. In fact, then you can say equally "true" things based on a well-formulated sentence of a newspaper article, or an agreeable paragraph from Confucius or from Hitler's *Mein Kampf*.
- Scripture is the word of the unchanging God who spans the ages. This means that one passage of Scripture—say a text from Titus—must be read in light of God's earlier revelation. So a given text in Titus is always a *dot-on-a-line*, with the line formed by multiple dots of revelation over the ages, each dot having its own specific context. Recall what I wrote above

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about the Passover. As the preacher traces the line through the dots he needs to understand the context of each dot.

Note: the preacher needs to pick out only those details of each dot that are relevant to the line he is following through the multiple dots. The point here is that multiple lines can travel through any given dot—and the preacher needs to be wary of getting sidetracked by other lines traveling through the same text.

- Once the preacher has connected multiple dots through the span of God's revelation (including texts from various periods of the Old Testament, Jesus' time, and the history of revelation up to and including the apostles' day), he will see where the trajectory of the line he has drawn points in terms of today's hearers. Application built on the trajectory of these connected dots is no longer subjective (and therefore potentially lame), but has objective credibility and even divine authority. To be clear: this does not make the message of today's preachers "inspired" or "infallible" as the writings of Holy Scripture are, but recognizes the blessed consequence of using Scripture correctly.

In the expositional part of this book, I will attempt to do two things. Obviously, I will try to explain what Paul wrote to Titus. But I will also try to stand beside Titus in an effort to follow his thoughts as he digests what his spiritual father (Titus 1:4) wrote to him. Invariably, then, the pages that follow will contain much Old Testament material as well as material drawn from Jesus' instruction and even from the early church.

I should perhaps then also be upfront: the bulk of the material that follows is the result of preaching through the letter to Titus in my current congregation. Typically the sermons fell into three predictable parts:

- The first part looked back into God's earlier revelation on the topic Paul was writing about; here I studied alongside Titus the Old Testament material that formed Paul's thinking on the topic.

Part 1—Preaching from Titus

- The second part looked closely at what Paul himself wrote to Titus on the particular topic Paul raised; here I attempted to hear what Titus-on-Crete would have heard in Paul's instruction and what it meant for the Cretan Christians.
- The third part followed the trajectory of the connected dots into today's circumstances in my current congregation.

Paul's Letter to Titus

I imagine that Titus on the island of Crete was doing his daily work in the churches when he received a letter from his spiritual father, Paul. I imagine too that he dropped all to read the letter, and read it again: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, 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; 4 To Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

5 This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you— 6 if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. 7 For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, 8 but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. 9 He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able

1. Paul's letters had no chapter or verse divisions. These were added many years later for reference purposes. As one reads Paul's letter to Titus, then, one does well to ignore the numbers buried in the text of the letter.

Making the Sermon

to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

10 For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. 11 They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. 12 One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." 13 This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, 14 not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth. 15 To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. 16 They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.

2 But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. 2 Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. 3 Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, 4 and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, 5 to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. 6 Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. 7 Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, 8 and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us. 9 Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, 10 not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.

11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, 12 training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, 13 waiting

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for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, **14** who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

15 Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you.

3 Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, **2** to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. **3** For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. **4** But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, **5** he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, **6** whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, **7** so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. **8** The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people. **9** But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. **10** As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, **11** knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.

12 When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. **13** Do your best to speed Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way; see that they lack nothing. **14** And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful.

15 All who are with me send greetings to you. Greet those who love us in the faith.

Making the Sermon

Grace be with you all.

Overview

That is the letter, short and to the point, yet with much for Titus to think about as he returned to his work. Perhaps he will have noticed that the letter could be broken down into several bite-size bits with each in turn providing access to specific instruction Paul's sender had given in earlier revelation. However that may have been, the following overview of the letter worked well for me as I laid the letter before the congregation:

1. Introduction (1:1–4)
2. Instruction #1—appoint elders (1:5–16)
3. Instruction #2—teach sound doctrine (2:1—3:11)
 - a. In relation to groupings within the churches (2:1–15)
 - i. The older men (2:2)
 - ii. The older women (2:3, 4a)
 - iii. The younger women (2:4b, 5)
 - iv. The younger men (2:6–8)
 - v. The slaves (2:9, 10)
 - vi. The grounds for these instructions (2:11–14)
 - b. In relation to observers from outside the churches (3:1–11)
 - vii. Doing good in the neighborhood (3:1–8)
 - viii. Avoiding foolish controversies (3:9–11)
4. Concluding matters (3:12–15)
 - a. Pulling the preacher (3:12–14)
 - b. Greetings (3:15)

Part 1—Preaching from Titus

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

1. We acknowledge that the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write this letter to Titus. How did that happen? Do you picture Paul in dead-brained fashion picking up his quill and then moving his hand to write word after word as the Holy Spirit moved him? Why or why not?
2. If you answer Question 1 with a No (as you ought to), what alternative process do you imagine Paul followed as he got himself ready to write his letter to Titus? Be prepared to justify your answer. Hint: check out Luke 1:1–4.
3. God’s revelation in the early part of Scripture (say, Genesis) has been compared to a bulb, while his revelation in the later parts of Scripture (say, the epistles of the apostles) has been compared to the blooming flower. The sections in between, then, have been compared to progressive stages of the flower’s development, from bud to bloom.
 - a. Do you think this comparison is helpful? Explain your answer.
 - b. How could this comparison help you to understand why Paul is continually busy with the Old Testament?
 - c. What does this comparison say about how we today can work with the Old Testament?
4. Why does the text of a sermon need to come from the Bible, and not from a wise saying found in the writings of Confucius or Louis L’Amour? Explain your answer.
5. Consider the sermons you hear in your church Sunday by Sunday. Does the study behind the sermon treat the text as a “dot” in isolation from other Scripture, or does the sermon connect numerous scriptural “dots” to form a single “line”? Does it make a difference in how you receive the sermon? If so, how?
6. In your own Bible studies, do you treat the passage under discussion in isolation from earlier and later Scripture or in

Making the Sermon

conjunction with what came before and what follows? How would you evaluate your favorite commentaries in relation to this question?

7. We are daily confronted with the need to make choices, and so turn to the Bible to find answers. In some cases we find a direct instruction that translates obviously into today's situation. For example, the command not to kill human life speaks directly to the question of abortion. In other cases we struggle to find God's will for us. We find ourselves hard-pressed, for example, to find a text that addresses directly the question of whether a mother ought to hold down a full-time job while she has dependent children still at home. How do you use the Scripture, then, to find an answer to a question like that?
8. In your initial reading of Paul's letter to Titus, what allusions have you found to God's earlier revelation? Find some examples of where Paul is working with what he learned
 - a. from Jesus (the gospels),
 - b. from the prophets (the latter part of the Old Testament),
 - c. from Moses (the first five books of the Old Testament).

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Part 2

Unpacking Paul's Letter to
Titus for Today's World

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Chapter 2

The Introduction to the Letter

WE HAVE WITHIN THE body of Holy Scripture more than a dozen letters from the Apostle Paul. They all begin with an introduction of some form, mentioning such details as the author and the recipient(s). What is striking about Paul's short letter to Titus is its comparatively very lengthy and intricate introduction, 1:1–4.¹ Listen:

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;

⁴ To Titus, my true child in a common faith:

Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

⁵ This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order . . .

One wonders why this introduction is so detailed and extensive. With his introduction the Apostle is laying the foundation

1. The only letter with an introduction as elaborate as Paul writes to Titus is in his letter to the Romans—and that letter is five times the length of this letter.

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for what he intends to write in the body of his letter. Though we may be impatient to get to the heart of this letter—what needs yet to be completed to have a church run properly—Paul considers it important that Titus first have some fundamental principles straight in his mind. Titus was, of course, familiar with this material already; he was, after all, Paul’s “true child in a common faith” (Titus 1:4). But if the churches in Crete were to benefit from Titus’ labor, they had to know and accept the God-given authority with which their preacher did his work. Paul’s foundational statement, then, provided Titus with essential preaching material.

Paul’s Self-Description

The man writing this letter introduces himself as “Paul.” From other passages of Scripture we know he was a Jew deeply schooled in the Old Testament. Though his letter to Titus (unlike most of Paul’s other letters) contains no direct quotes from the Old Testament, Paul’s thinking was molded by the upbringing he received as a child, his education in the synagogue, and his studies as the feet of Gamaliel—all of which were concentrated on the Old Testament (see Acts 22:3; Gal 1:14).

The Apostle was undoubtedly aware of Jesus’ work and teaching during his student days in Jerusalem. Jesus, after all, did not do his work in secret, but—as he said at the moment of his arrest—“day after day I sat in the temple teaching” (Matt 26:55). Of course, in his pre-conversion days Paul did not accept that Jesus was the Messiah spoken of in the Old Testament; that realization did not come till Jesus confronted him on the road to Damascus. As far as Paul was concerned, he had all his life been a faithful “servant of God,” the “God” of his upbringing, the God who revealed himself in the Old Testament. This is the God whom Paul knew to be real, the God for whom Paul was so zealous that he went out of his way to persecute those Jews who did not serve this God as Paul thought the Old Testament required (see Acts 8:3; Phil 3:6).

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Servant of God

Paul calls himself “a servant of God”—as our translation has it. We do well to note that the Greek word used here actually describes a slave. A slave in Paul’s day had no rights or liberties of his own, but was fully the property of his master—and therefore obligated to fulfill the master’s wishes in return for the master’s care and protection. The same phrase “servant of God” is applied in the Old Testament to Moses (Ps 105:26), David (2 Sam 7:5, 8; Ps 78:70), the prophets (Isa 20:3; Jer 7:25; 25:4; Amos 3:7), and other leaders (Hag 2:23). By applying this title to himself, Paul consciously placed himself in the same league as these Old Testament figures. As these leaders were expected to lead and teach the people of God in full agreement with God’s ordinances revealed at Mt. Sinai (and clarified through the prophets in the generations that followed), so Paul was to unpack further what God had revealed in days gone by. He had no rights of his own that might allow him liberty to alter what God had said; as “slave of God” Paul was duty-bound to follow God’s instructions to the letter. That Paul understood this very well is perhaps illustrated best by referencing his zeal for persecuting those who, by Paul’s estimation, served this God wrongly (see Phil 3:6; Acts 26:9–11).

God’s revelation in the Old Testament focused specifically on the relation between God and his people-by-covenant. Though the human race had once broken that relation through the fall into sin and so were exiled from God’s presence (Gen 3:6, 23), God was pleased to establish his covenant of grace with the people of Israel (Exod 20:2) and live among them in the tabernacle (Exod 40:34). Holy God as he was, he condescended to live with sinful people in the tabernacle because one day the perfect Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, would offer himself to pay for sin on the cross of Calvary. The sacrifices repeatedly offered on the altar in front of the tabernacle foreshadowed this perfect sacrifice. It was the task of the priests and Levites to explain these daily sacrifices in light of this upcoming great Sacrifice (Lev 10:11). In Paul’s own time, the Lamb of God had come in the flesh (John 1:29), atoned for sin, and

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reconciled sinners to God. After Jesus’ ascension into heaven the triumphant Lamb of God arrested Paul on the road to Damascus and enlisted him to become his preacher to the Gentiles (Acts 9:5, 6). Now it was Paul’s task to show his hearers how the sacrifices of the Old Testament had pointed forward to, and were fulfilled in, Jesus Christ the Savior of the world.

Apostle of Jesus Christ

It is no wonder, then, that Paul next referred to himself as “an apostle of Jesus Christ.” As Lord of all and ruling from the right hand of the Father (Acts 2:33, 36), this Christ was able to seize any person he chose to be his tool. Paul had once been “breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord” (9:1), yet this sovereign Christ had compelled even him to acknowledge the reality of Jesus’ divine identity and victory. Paul, once a tormentor of the church, was now mandated to carry Christ’s word “before Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel” (9:15).

The term “apostle” (from the Greek word for “to send”) captures the thought that Paul was “sent” on this mission, with no option on his part to decline his appointment. As “slave of God” and “apostle of Jesus Christ,” Paul was not his own man, saying or writing what he felt like saying. Rather, he said and wrote what the ascended Christ through his Spirit caused him to say. Behind Paul and his words was none less than the very Christ who laid down his life to save sinners, and whom God anointed as Lord over all. As *his* ambassador, one dare not ignore what Paul has to say—or argue with it.

Intent

Paul mentions the reason for his slavery to God and his apostleship to Jesus Christ. He was enslaved and sent “for the sake of the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth, which

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accords with godliness.” The phrase “for the sake of” catches the *purpose* of his mission.

Those who benefit are “God’s elect,” a term the Apostle borrows from the Old Testament. In passages such as 1 Chronicles 16:13, Psalm 105:6, 43, and Isaiah 65:9, the phrase is used to describe the people of God—those who tasted God’s goodness and care. But the objects of God’s care were not limited to Old Testament generations. His church-gathering work continues through all ages. In the New Testament dispensation, the Lord also has a people chosen to life. Paul acknowledges that he was one of God’s instruments through whom he was pleased to build up the faith of his elect in that first generation after Jesus’ victory and ascension. Paul’s authority to contribute to the Lord’s church-building work is plain: he had been sent “for the sake of the faith of God’s elect” also in Crete, where so much work still needed to be done to organize the church rightly. Titus—and his hearers, too—would ignore Paul’s instruction at their own peril.

Through Paul’s work “the faith of God’s elect” and “their knowledge of the truth” would be strengthened. These two objects of Paul’s labor, “faith” and “knowledge,” again both have roots in Old Testament Scripture. The term “faith” describes here one’s trust (the act of believing), while the term “knowledge” refers to what one believes. The Psalms make clear that believers in fact struggle to trust God in the midst of life’s storms, and at the same time demonstrate that the Lord always gives his own the strength needed to cling to his promises. The saints of Crete experienced the same sorts of struggles as the saints of centuries before, and so they needed to be encouraged and taught to trust God in all life’s changing circumstances.

Again, the “knowledge” of the truth which accords with godliness is not some novel revelation unconnected to God’s Word in the Old Testament, but is built on the work of Moses and those who followed him. The point is that, as Paul seeks to complete through Titus the Lord’s church building work among the elect of God in Crete, he first exposes the foundation upon which he intends to build: God’s revelation in the Old Testament. Titus, then,

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must sift further through that Old Testament material to grasp fully what Paul writes. And the Christians of Crete must expect their preacher to wade them through the Old Testament as they take Paul’s instruction to heart.

Goal

Paul had a particular goal in mind for the work that he wanted done among the Christians of Crete. Titus must complete the work still unfinished on the island “in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began.” The phrase “before the ages began” is a reference to God’s decision before he created the world to save particular people (“God’s elect”) to everlasting life. Notice again that what Paul wrote here is steeped in God’s Old Testament revelation. Even as he looked back into history, he also looked forward to what God has planned for the future: eternal life.

Paul, then, had a vision that spans the ages, a vision that is delightful for people habitually stuck in the here and now. Can the God who oversees the ages, however, be trusted? Paul is quick to answer: “God . . . never lies” (v. 2). With those words Paul echoed the words the Holy Spirit caused Balaam to utter to Balak: “God is not a man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind” (Num 23:19). In fact, so faithful is God to his plans from the beginning that he “at the proper time” (v. 3) ensured that his word of life should go to the Gentiles—and for that reason he made Paul his slave and “entrusted” him with the charge to preach his word. As we will see later on, Paul’s description of God as one who “never lies” contrasted starkly with what was typical amongst the population of Crete.

Paul, then, had *responsibility* in relation to the elect in Crete (and anywhere else). Yet the Apostle, finite as he was, could not bring the good news to all people by himself alone. That is the reason he instructed Titus to remain on the island of Crete with the assignment to do the work required for these “elect of God” to grow in faith, knowledge, and godliness.