

**TITUS
FOR YOU**



TIM CHESTER
TITUS
FOR YOU



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Titus For You

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SERIES PREFACE

Each volume of the *God's Word For You* series takes you to the heart of a book of the Bible, and applies its truths to your heart.

The central aim of each title is to be:

- Bible centred
- Christ glorifying
- Relevantly applied
- Easily readable

You can use *Titus For You*:

To read. You can simply read from cover to cover, as a book that explains and explores the themes, encouragements and challenges of this part of Scripture.

To feed. It can guide you in your own personal regular devotions, or use it alongside a sermon or Bible-study series at your church. Each chapter deals with a section of the Bible book and is divided into two shorter parts, with questions for reflection at the end of each.

To lead. You can use this as a resource to help you teach God's word to others, both in small-group and whole-church settings. You'll find tricky verses or concepts explained using ordinary language, and helpful themes and illustrations along with suggested applications.

These books are not commentaries. They assume no understanding of the original Bible languages, nor a high level of biblical knowledge. Verse references are marked in **bold** so that you can refer to them easily. Any words that are used rarely or differently in everyday language outside the church are marked in **grey** when they first appear, and are explained in a glossary towards the back. There, you'll also find details of resources you can use alongside this one, in both personal and church life.

Our prayer is that as you read, you'll be struck not by the contents of this book, but by the book it's helping you open up; and that you'll praise not the author of this book, but the One he is pointing you to.

Carl Laferton, Series Editor

INTRODUCTION TO TITUS

It's A Wonderful Life is recognised by the American Film Institute as one of the 100 best American films of all time. It stars James Stewart as George Bailey, a man who in his youth dreamed of travelling the world. But along the way, he's made sacrifices for other people that mean he never got to leave his small town. Now he's a weary, broken man who, through no fault of his own, is going to be declared bankrupt. So he stands on the town bridge, about to commit suicide.

But then his guardian angel intervenes. The angel gives him a vision of what life would have been like if he'd never lived. He sees that his life counts, that it has made a difference. He has truly lived a good life—a wonderful life—touching the lives of many people in small but decisive ways.

In many ways, this is what Paul is doing in the letter he writes to Titus. He is giving us a vision of a life that touches people in small but decisive ways—a life that has eternal consequences. He is setting out the truly good life.

Paul was a man called by God, for the sake of God's people: "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" (1:1). His job was to give people a vision of the truth, and to show how that truth will lead to a wonderful life, a life of godliness.

What is that truth? "The hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, 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" (1:2-3). The truth that creates a good life is the gospel. That is the truth that brings life and then changes life.

This is the truth that brings life and then changes life.

And so that is the truth that matters for all of life—in chapter one, Paul warns that those who depart from the gospel become “unfit for doing anything good” (1:16). In chapter two, he underlines that the grace of God teaches us to live godly lives (2:11-12). In chapter three, he tells Titus to stress the gospel so that people “may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good” (3:8). We are to give one another a vision of the gospel that creates a life of good works, that changes our lives so that we are profitable in God’s service.

And this good life overflows into others’ lives, too. A gospel-changed life “will make the teaching about God our Saviour attractive” (2:10). The good life is a missional force.

The Setting

Paul and Titus’ visit to Crete is not mentioned in Acts; but Titus 1:5 makes clear that they had preached the gospel together, that people had been saved, and that as Paul had moved on he had left Titus behind, in order to appoint elders. Now, some years later (and probably between AD63 and AD65), Paul is writing to encourage Titus to ensure the gospel permeates throughout the church, especially its leaders.

Living the good life of the gospel is always a challenge when we live in a wider culture that defines the good life in other ways. It is particularly hard in a culture where newspapers cannot be trusted and politicians are corrupt; a harsh, selfish, racist culture in which there is a fear of crime; a culture where people are reluctant to do manual work, which is therefore left to migrant workers; a culture in which people routinely overeat.

And that was the culture of first-century Crete: “One of Crete’s own prophets has said it: ‘Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons,’” Paul points out (1:12). The quote is from a Cretan philosopher, Epimenides. Epimenides was held in high honour by Cretans—so they could not readily ignore or deny his verdict. And yet, of course, this description of first-century Crete could just as easily be a

description of twenty-first century western culture. How do we live as Christians in a dishonest, harsh, selfish culture? How can we survive without adopting those attitudes? How can we live the good life in this situation? These are the questions the letter of Titus addresses, and these are the questions we need help with each day as we seek to live a gospel-changed life in a society that seeks change and finds truth in many places, but so rarely in the gospel.

The Pastoral Letters

Titus is one of three so-called “pastoral epistles” in the New Testament, along with 1 and 2 Timothy, written by Paul to two of his protégés. It is sometimes said that the pastoral epistles represent a shift towards a more organised and regulated form of church life after the breathless vibrancy of the book of Acts. The argument runs that the enthusiasm of the first years of the church was waning and being replaced by a more “grown-up” Christianity. The white-hot evangelistic heat was fading, to be replaced by something more sensible and sustainable. This argument is often used to dismiss the idea that the early church gives us any kind of pattern for the Christian life. The mature model for the church is found in the pastoral epistles, and that model is more institutional than the naive enthusiasm of the early days. Calls to return to enthusiastic evangelism and everyday community life are thus downplayed or dismissed.

This argument makes the pastoral epistles sound boring, as if they were some kind of manual on church administration. Worse still, it makes Christianity after the days of the apostles sound boring. Instead of an energetic gospel movement, we’re told we have to operate within a restrained institutionalism.

But the real problem with this argument is that this is not what we find in the book of Acts, nor in the letter of Titus. In Acts, there is a concern for order and organisation, even in the early days of the church. Acts 6 describes the apostles putting structures in place to ensure they can continue focusing on the word of God while also

ensuring a proper care for those in need within the church. Structures mattered, even in the early days. But structures were not a replacement for evangelistic zeal. They were designed to promote it: the purpose of handing over the care for the needy was so the apostles could “give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word” (6:4). The result of these changes was that: “the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith” (v 7).

We find the same concerns in the book of Titus. It is true that Titus has been left in Crete to appoint leaders. But there is no discussion of leadership structures or institutional processes. Instead, it is all about ensuring the gospel is central to the everyday life of the church, so that the world can be reached for Christ. Chapter one is about keeping the gospel central—Titus is to counter false teachers

by appointing gospel-centred leaders who can encourage and rebuke with the gospel. Chapter two is about ensuring the gospel is central to everyday life—everyday life is the context both in which the gospel is to be lived and in which it is to be taught. Chapter three is about ensuring the gospel is central for the sake of mission—keeping the gospel central to everyday life so that the world is reached.

Titus is all about ensuring the gospel is central to the everyday life of the church.

So in Acts we find a concern for organisation to ensure that the gospel mission continues. In Titus, we discover the same concerns. The overriding passion of the first-century believers was to be church in a way that kept the gospel central for life, growth, and mission. Reading Titus in our time will inspire and equip us to make sure our lives and churches do the same.

1. TRUTH LEADING TO GODLINESS

Paul is not a man who wastes words, and in his letter to Titus, his first sentence, which runs from **1:1-3**, is rich in **gospel** truth as it sets before us the goal of **gospel ministry**. **Verse 4** tells us that Paul is writing to Titus, his younger partner whom he has left in Crete, and who has been part of his mission and ministry teams in the past (see Galatians 2:1-3; 2 Corinthians 7:13-16; 8:16-21). Paul describes him as “my true son in our common faith” (Titus **1:4**); verses 1-3 are a description of the faith that they have common; of the “**grace** and peace” that they share.

But who is Paul? “An apostle of Jesus Christ” (**v 1**). Meaning “sent”, the word “apostle” is used in two ways in the New Testament. It is used to refer to pioneer church planters. Barnabas, for example, is called an apostle (Acts 14:14). But the more significant and prominent way it is used is to refer to people who were witnesses to Jesus and whose **testimony** is the foundation of the church. These were the twelve **disciples** (with Judas replaced by Matthias in Acts 1:15-26) plus Paul. Paul had not known Jesus when Jesus was on earth, but he had met him on the Damascus Road and received a special calling as the apostle to the **Gentiles**.

In what sense does Paul use the term in Titus 1:1? Probably both. In 1 Corinthians 9:1 he combines both senses: “Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord?” Why is Paul called an apostle? For two reasons:

* All Titus verse references being looked at in each chapter are in **bold**.

† Words in **grey** are defined in the Glossary (page 117).

he had seen the Lord and he had planted the church in Corinth. Now he writes to Titus, both as the man who had planted the church in Crete and as one of the foundational apostles.

Succession Planning

Paul begins by describing the nature of his apostolic ministry. In one important sense this ministry was unique to the apostles. The testimony provided by the apostles could not be replaced by other people when the apostles died because the next generation had not known Jesus directly. Instead, the apostolic testimony became the New Testament—it was replaced by the written account of their testimony in the Bible.

So the so-called pastoral epistles (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) are concerned with the issue of succession. Paul has planted churches (in Ephesus and Crete respectively) and is now concerned to ensure leaders take over the care of the church, and that those men are leaders who will be faithful to the gospel message and the gospel task. He is concerned, too, for Timothy and Titus. Why the urgency? Because he knows his ministry is coming to an end: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7). He needs to prepare Timothy and Titus to take over his pioneering role.

So Paul’s description of his ministry in the opening verses of this letter is given to set a model for Titus, for the church in Crete and for all churches throughout history. This perhaps is why he does not begin by describing himself as an apostle—a role unique to his generation and the result of a specific commission from Christ. First and foremost, he describes himself as “a servant of God” (literally *doulos*, slave). The

model of ministry described in Titus is a model for all of the servants of God.

Paul is looking back and looking forward. He is looking back on his ministry and trying to distil its essential core. And he is looking forward to the ministry of

Paul is trying
to distil his
ministry’s
essential core.

those who will succeed him to give them a pattern to follow. This is what is to be at the heart of gospel ministry—and so this letter provides us with an opportunity to recalibrate our lives and the lives of our churches.

What, then, is that model of ministry that Paul outlines at the beginning of Titus?

The Faith of God's Elect

Paul is a servant and apostle “for the faith of God’s **elect**” (Titus **1:1**, NIV 1984 translation). This could be translated: “according to the faith of God’s elect”, but it is hard to see what Paul could mean by saying his ministry is based on the faith of other people. It is much more likely to be talking about the *goal* of Paul’s ministry; to bring those whom God has chosen to saving faith. He preaches the gospel to everyone, confident that those whom God has chosen (God’s elect) will respond with faith.

And faith brings people from real death to real life. Paul tells the Ephesians, and all Christians: “You were dead in your transgressions and sins” (Ephesians 2:1). We were lifeless. We had neither the desire to change, nor the ability to change. Preaching to us was like preaching to a corpse. Imagine seeing a dead man in the street and asking him to improve his life—no matter how persuasive your arguments might be, he would not change. Of course not—he’s dead! It is the same with the preaching of the gospel. No matter how persuasive our arguments, people will not turn to God... because they are dead.

Yet this death is not the end of the story: “But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved” (2:4-5). We were dead, but God made us alive. He breathed his Spirit into our hearts and gave us new birth. The Spirit gives the desire and the ability to respond to the gospel. Because God has made us alive, we hear the gospel and respond with faith: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves,

it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (2:8-9). We are saved by faith. But God has to give us this faith. And he does this by making us alive through the Spirit.

Why are some people saved and not others? Why do some people respond to the gospel with faith and other people reject it? Is it because Christians are more clever or godly or deserving? No, it is all of grace. It is always and only because God chooses to give us life by giving us faith.

This has always been the way God works. In Ezekiel 37, Ezekiel proclaims God’s word to a valley of dry bones. The dry bones represent Israel. Israel is dead. They are unable to live for God. Ezekiel preaches and something happens: the bones reconnect and flesh covers them. “But there was no breath in them” (Ezekiel 37:8). They may have looked more human, but they were still dead corpses. It is only when the Ezekiel calls on the breath of God to come that things really change. God’s breath (or God’s Spirit—it is the same word in Hebrew and Greek) breathes life into the corpses and they become God’s people.

Some people think the **sovereignty** of God acts as a disincentive for mission. Why should we preach the gospel if people’s responses are ultimately in God’s hands? But for Paul it had the opposite effect. He knew there were people out there whom God had chosen to make alive. All they needed was someone to preach the gospel. And he could be that person. If he preached, then those whom God had chosen would put their faith in Christ. It might be a long process, but God would save his elect. All Paul needed to do was preach the gospel.

When Paul first visited Corinth he started, as he normally did, by preaching to the Jews. But, the book of Acts tells us: “they opposed Paul and became abusive” (Acts 18:6). So Paul set up shop next door to the synagogue in someone’s house. Many people were saved, but Paul seems to have been discouraged, or weary, or scared. One night the Lord spoke to him in a vision: “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack

and harm you, because I have many people in this city” (v 9-10). As a result of this vision, Paul taught God’s word in Corinth for a further eighteen months.

What enabled Paul to keep going in the face of threats? It was the knowledge that God had many people in the city. The same is true today. God has many people in your city. His elect are all around you. If you preach the gospel, then God will give them the faith to respond.

I have come to realise that the main thing that stops me witnessing about Christ is the feeling that it will be a waste of time. If I invite my neighbour to an evangelistic event, they will almost certainly say no. If I share the gospel with someone at a party, then they will probably edge away from me. And so I do not bother.

But this is not how Paul saw his life. His life was lived for the faith of God’s elect. God has done the choosing, so God will do the persuading. All Paul had to do was find the elect—and he did that by preaching the gospel to everyone without discrimination.

In my shed I have a tray of seeds. This year I noticed that a number of packets were past their use-by date (I didn’t even know seeds had a use-by date!). So I stood there in my shed with these seeds in the palm of my hand. They all looked dead. But perhaps some of them still had the potential for life and growth. There was only one way to find out. I planted them and watered them. Some grew, some didn’t. And that is the point, and what made it worthwhile: *some grew*.

It is the same with the people of your city. They look spiritually dead, because they are spiritually dead. But some are God’s elect. If you water them by preaching the gospel, then God will use that to bring those people to new life. You cannot tell which are God’s elect, but you can preach the gospel.

The main thing that stops me witnessing is the feeling it will be a waste of time.

Think about the people in your city. Think about your neighbours, colleagues and friends. Some may be God's elect. God may grant them life through the Spirit if they hear the gospel. Who are God's elect and who are not? There is only one way to find out.

The Godliness of God's Elect

Paul does not stop working for the faith of God's elect once people are **converted**. The second goal of Paul's ministry is godliness. "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" (Titus **1:1**).

Paul was not content with people simply coming to faith.

Paul was a great evangelist—but he was not content with people simply

coming to faith; he laboured to ensure they would grow in their faith, too. As he puts it in Philippians, his aim is to: "continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith" (Philippians 1:25).

The goal of God's servants is the faith of God's elect:

- the beginning of faith—as people become Christians
- the continuation of faith—as people remain Christians
- the progress of faith—as people grow as Christians
- the multiplication of faith—as people themselves become servants for the faith of God's elect

After all, Paul reminds us, truth does not only bring us to God; it leads us into godliness (Titus **1:1**). The link between truth and godliness is ambiguous in the original Greek text. Paul could be talking about the truth that "accords with" godliness (as the ESV suggests). This truth that accords with godliness would be in contrast to other teachings that self-identify as "truths", but do not produce godly lives (this is going to be an issue later in the letter). False teachers are teaching

false doctrine that leads to corrupts behaviour (v 10-11), whereas there is a conduct that is “appropriate to sound doctrine” (2:1). In this sense godliness **authenticates** the truth; godliness shows that the truth is true. Or, better still, it shows that the truth is living because of the fruit it produces.

Nevertheless, the more natural reading of 1:1 is (as the NIV suggests) that the truth “leads to” godliness. Perhaps it does not matter too much. Is godliness the sign of truth? Or is truth the cause of godliness? The answer, of course, is that both go together. Godliness is the sign of truth because truth leads to godliness.

This pursuit of godliness in people is not separate from Paul’s pursuit of faith in people. This is faith bearing fruit. As our faith grows in knowledge, so we will grow in godliness. The more we understand what God has done for us in Christ, the more we will love him and live for him.

Paul will expand on this dynamic in 2:11-12: “For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.” In 1:1, he says the truth leads to “godliness”. In 2:12, the truth leads away from “ungodliness” and towards “godly lives”. These three all come from the same Greek root, *eusebeia*.

Paul does not simply want Christians who believe the right things. He did not travel round the Roman world totalling the number of decisions for Christ he had seen in his ministry. His goal was not simply people coming to the front of a meeting to give their lives to Christ. His goal was people whose faith bore fruit in godly living. His goal was not converts, but disciples. For any ministry we are involved in or praying for, that should be our goal, too.

Questions for reflection

1. How does knowing that God does the choosing, and God does the persuading, encourage you to share the gospel? With whom?
2. What difference has knowing the truth of the gospel made to your life this week?
3. Who in your church could you begin to pray for, that they would grow in godliness?