

PAUL'S LETTER TO TITUS

1. INTRODUCTION

In studying this letter we need to know four things,

- (i) why Paul wrote the letter,
- (ii) the nature and person of his young friend Titus,
- (iii) the nature and value of the contents of the letter and,
- (iv) the particular position of the church of the day.

This will also require some understanding of the geographical, historical, and cultural situation of the Island of Crete.

2. THE PERSON CALLED TITUS

We can discover quite a lot about Titus. He is first mentioned in Galatians 2:1 as a Gentile who went with Paul to Jerusalem 14 years after Paul's first visit to Jerusalem, i.e. following his conversion at Damascus. Titus, with Paul and Barnabas, met the apostles. If this is the visit referred to in Acts 15 then the theme of discussion on that occasion was the conversion of the Gentiles. Titus was not compelled to be circumcised. From that point onwards Titus may have accompanied Paul on his journeys. This is what we learn concerning him:

- (a) He was Paul's representative at Corinth for some time prior to Paul's writing his second letter to Corinth. (Note: Paul is said to have written four letters to Corinth. The original second letter was 'the severe letter' mentioned below. See II Cor. 8:6).
- (b) Titus with another person was to complete the collection for the needy saints at Jerusalem.
- (c) Titus had carried a special letter from Paul to Corinth. (See II Cor. 2:1-13; 7:13-16). Paul was evidently under some strain after he sent the letter, wondering whether the Corinthians would receive it. They had, in fact, received it well.
- (d) Titus appears to have been competent in his ministry and visit and well received (cf. I Cor. 16:10, where Timothy seems to be a weaker sort of person than Titus).
- (e) Titus had gone to Paul in Macedonia, there telling Paul that the Corinthians had received his 'severe letter' well. (II Cor. 2:12-13; 7:13). Titus had then gone back to Corinth for ministry, being recognized as a strong person with a firm character.
- (f) The character of Titus is seen from clear statements in II Corinthians 7:13-15, 8:16-18, 23, 12:18. These show him to be a sympathetic person, concerned for others, not seeking his own advantage, someone both competent and authoritative.
- (g) He had been commissioned by Paul, as his 'true child in the faith' to be an apostolic delegate to the church in Crete. He was to appoint elders 'in every town'. (See Titus 1:4-5). What more we need to know concerning Titus, we can pick up as we read the text of the letter. Especially interesting to us is the commission to him to counteract Judaizing tendencies, which were being introduced by certain visiting teachers (Titus 1:5-14).

- (h) In II Timothy 4:10 we have the brief statement that Titus has gone to Dalmatia (i.e. present Yugoslavia), and it would appear this journey would have been a mission. In Titus 3:12 Paul wishes Titus to come to him at Nicopolis. These are all indications of the value and capabilities of Titus as a person and a minister.

3. THE ISLAND OF CRETE

Crete is an island, mainly mountainous, about 250 km long, with its breadth varying from 11 to 56 km. It is situated in the Mediterranean Sea, south-east of Greece. It has a long history of high civilization, and of a Jewish population during the time of the Jewish Dispersion, i.e. the dispersion which took place through the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. Jews from Crete are mentioned as being present at the feast of Pentecost in Acts 2:11. Paul sailed along the coast of Crete in his voyage to Rome (Acts 27:7–21).

4. THE PEOPLE OF CRETE

For certain reasons Paul quotes a Cretan poet who describes the Cretans as ‘always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons’ (RSV), ‘liars, evil beasts, slow bellies’ (AV). This indicates the basic temperament and cultural nature of the Islanders. In the church there would be those, too, of other nations, but it seems the very nature of a people, i.e. their temperament and characteristics, determines to a great degree the problems that develop in churches.

Heresy threatened the church at Crete so that disciplined leadership as well as good teaching was needed. Titus 3:14 (cf. 2:11–14) indicates that there was a special need of teaching and training of the Cretans.

5. AUTHORSHIP OF THE EPISTLE

Titus should undoubtedly be read with I and II Timothy. The letters are pastoral in emphasis although opinion is divided as to whether Paul wrote these three letters. Most agree that they are ‘Pauline’ in flavour if not wholly in character.

For our purposes we will assume they are written by Paul. It is suggested that Paul’s great doctrinal themes are not to the fore, and that many words used in the letters are not found in his other writings. These things do not however make it certain that Paul did not write the letters, since style and vocabulary can change from time to time, and for various reasons, in any writer.

6. AN OUTLINE OF THE LETTER

- (a) Paul’s initial greeting. 1:1–4.
- (b) Titus must appoint elders of a certain kind. 1:5–9.
- (c) Certain opponents must be withstood. 1:10–16.
- (d) Certain behaviour is set out. 2:1–10. This concerns (i) old men, (ii) old and young women, (iii) the young men (Titus to be the model), (iv) slaves.
- (e) The basis of true action is grace and its discipline. 2:11–14.

- (f) The duty of the church members to the authorities, as also to one another. 3:1–2.
- (g) God's grace contrasted with man's degradation with a description of the inner and dynamic effects of grace. 3:3–8.
- (h) Teaching good works, false teachers, along with Paul's final injunctions. 3:8–15.

7. THE NEED FOR THE 'PASTORALS'

By 'Pastorals' we mean the three pastoral letters of I and II Timothy, and Titus.

We need to read I and II Timothy in order to see the problems which confronted the churches at the time of Paul's later ministry. In Titus 1:5, 10, 11, Paul speaks of amending 'things which are defective', and indicates problems coming from the 'circumcision party', and both these matters show us that there were significant problems in the Cretan church, namely problems connected with faith and practice.

I and II Timothy show Paul urging and encouraging Timothy to stand firm in the face of similar issues and problems. In the three Pastorals the more explosive elements we meet in Acts, where the apostolic proclamation comes with dynamic, pneumatic (i.e. actions of the Holy Spirit) and charismatic (i.e. gift-manifestations of the Holy Spirit) ministries, have settled, and a fairly steady church community life has developed.

We mean that that ferment which caused and followed proclamation has now issued in a stable form of church life. Doubtless the dynamic of the proclamation was still present but would be more often seen in the bringing to birth of new churches, especially where new ground was broken in missionary outreach.

This way of life of the developing churches called for stability, leadership, teaching and discipline. That is why the Pastorals are often offensive to some of our modern spirits. Where we wish mainly to see 'action', the (so-called) 'creative' elements seem to be missing from the churches to which Paul addressed his pastoral letters. We really do not have strong evidence that life in these churches was at all institutionalized, but certainly there seems to have been less of a ferment than in the decades prior to Paul's writing.

Even so we ought to recognize the vast task facing church leadership, the task of bringing the church to a living, workable life and community. Even with the dynamic 'washing of regeneration and renewal of the Spirit', believers seemed to bring many personal residual problems into their churches, and these required pastoral discernment, treatment, and care. The community needed direction.

Little of that seems to have changed for us today. By 'residual problems' we mean those problems that are linked with our temperaments, dispositions, past experiences, and future aspirations. We do not come to the churches as ideal and wholly normal persons, if indeed there are such anywhere! For these reasons we need to read and reread the Pastorals, since their relevance for today cannot be in doubt. Human beings have changed little—if at all—over the past two milleniums.

8. THE TEXT OF THE LETTER

In this section we will seek to cover the three chapters of the Epistle. This means we must take the text as it stands and try to see what it is saying. In order to do this we must use certain principles of interpretation, known as ‘hermeneutics’.

There are no infallible principles of interpretation, but commentators often vary somewhat in the hermeneutic they use, so that every commentary on the text will differ to some degree or other. Even so, it is not difficult to obtain the general sense and meaning of a verse, passage or chapter. Scripture—for the most part—has a way of unveiling its own meaning. Certainly this letter must have been reasonably clear to those who read it at Crete, especially to Titus to whom it was addressed.

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