

## **Covenant History—Titus: *A Faith that Works***

### **Introduction**

#### *Author and Recipient*

This letter was written by the apostle Paul to Titus, and is one of three letters (as we have seen before) that are called the “Pastoral Epistles,” the other two being First and Second Timothy.

Chronologically Titus comes *before* Second Timothy. As the books have come down to us—that is, as they are arranged in our Bibles—the order is First and Second Timothy and *then* Titus. But in terms of the order in which they were written, its First Timothy and Titus at about the same time, and then a couple of years later, Second Timothy.

First Timothy and Titus belong to that brief period between Paul’s first and second Roman imprisonment (ca. A.D. 62-64). After his release from his first imprisonment, mentioned in Acts 28, Paul traveled and preached on what we might call his “fourth missionary journey.” We don’t have a historical record of it in Acts that gives us a play by play like we do with his first three missionary journeys. But we have a few scattered notices here and there from both NT and extra-biblical Christian literature that lets us know that he was released from prison and continued to carry on his ministry of preaching the gospel. One of those notices we find here in Titus. Paul mentions that he left Titus in Crete in order that he might put what remained in order (1:5). But nowhere in Acts, which follows Paul’s ministry very closely, do we ever

read of him going to Crete. So we conclude that this must have happened subsequent to the period covered in Acts.

Crete is a large island in the eastern half of the Mediterranean and had a long association with Greek history stretching all the way back to the Minoan culture which thrived on the island at about the time of the Exodus (ca. 1500 B.C.).



### *Titus*

Now who is this fellow named “Titus”? Interestingly, although he’s mentioned a few times by Paul in a couple of his letters, he’s not mentioned at all in the book of Acts, even in places where we might expect to find him.

Paul mentions Titus in five other passages of the New Testament (2 Cor. 2:13; 7:5-8:24; 12:18; Gal. 2:1-5; 2 Tim. 4:10). He says of him in 2 Corinthians 8:23, “As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker for your benefit.” And in this letter he addresses him as “my true child in a common faith” (1:4).

There’s not a lot that we know about Titus’ background: who his parents were, where he was from, how he met Paul, etc. About the only things we know about him for sure, is that he was Gentile (**Gal. 2:1-5**). Now this stands in contrast to the position he took with Timothy (**Acts 16:1-3**). What’s the difference? Why did he have Timothy circumcised, but adamantly refused to have Titus circumcised? Because Timothy was Jewish, or at least partly Jewish.

His mother was a Jew. And Paul didn't want Timothy's non-circumcision to become an issue when he was ministering to the Jews. They'd be sure to say, "Why should we listen to you? You're unfaithful to the laws and customs of Moses. Your right hand man, here, Timothy, a descendant of Abraham, isn't even circumcised according to the law."

Timothy was Jewish, it would have been expected that he should be circumcised *because* he was Jewish; and his non-circumcision would have been an obstacle, a stumbling-block thrown in their way of believing the gospel.

Titus, on the other hand, was a Gentile. For Paul to have consented to the demand that he be circumcised in order for him to be saved and be incorporated into the people of God—or in other words, to insist that Titus *had to become a Jew by circumcision* before he could become a Christian—would have been to deny the universality of the gospel and to say that faith in Jesus Christ was not sufficient for justification.

Do you see the wisdom of Paul in this? Some have accused Paul of double dealing, of being hypocritical in how he handled these two cases. But these two cases are not entirely alike. Paul properly distinguished between things that differed and rendered a decision that was appropriate in each case.

### *Theme*

There are several things we could point to as themes in Titus, but I think that without doubt, the overarching theme, or we could say Paul's major purpose in writing the letter is to urge Titus to advocate for *a faith that works*—to insist upon a form of religion which is not just speculative and theoretical, or notional, but a religion that

produces godliness, an uprightness of life and character, as measured by good works. This needs to be stressed as much now as it did then, because there are many people today who, it seems to me, fundamentally misunderstand the nature of the gospel. They seem to think that being a Christian consists in believing certain doctrines, quite apart from living a godly life and bearing the fruit of righteousness.

Anyone who thinks this will be quickly disabused of the notion by reading Titus. Look at the very first verse:

(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...

The knowledge of the truth accords with godliness. It doesn't matter *what* one knows or *how much* one knows, if his knowledge doesn't lead to godliness, *he don't know nuthin!* He mentions it here in the first verse, and he will come back to it again and again. Why? Two reasons. First, because there have always been those who have looked upon grace as a means to become morally careless. They have looked upon grace as a license to sin.

We see this in Romans. In Romans Paul extols the grace of God in the forgiveness of sin, and he shows how the demonstration of divine grace brings glory to God. And then he says, "Why then do we not do evil that good may come?" In other words, the more I sin, the more opportunity there is for God to show his goodness and grace by forgiving me. Consequently, the more opportunity he has to receive glory by the demonstration of his mercy. So why not continue to sin. Why not do evil that good may come? He says "this is what some people slanderously charge us with teaching." But he adds, "Their

condemnation is just.” In other words, God is going to set them straight. The wrath of God will fall upon the heads of the disobedient.

The second reason he stresses “the knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness” is because people often think that being a Christian consists in theoretical knowledge or simply in believing certain doctrines.

### **Exposition of Selected Passages**