

Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus Christ. Bring us to the place where we know our faith and have confidence in all You have done for us. May we never avoid the tough demands which our faith makes on us, either practically, spiritually or mentally, and bring us at last to Your home in glory, where we can know that our faith is complete in You: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Broken Families

Pray for all who are trying to mend broken relationships within their families. Pray that Gods people might be those who seek reconciliation and be an example of the power of love.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks for the Sabbath and the importance of rest
- Pray for scientists whose work is to monitor the health of our planet
- Pray for the housebound and chronically sick who live near you

Meditation

We have been created for love

So let us be seen to love one another

We have been created to be passionate

So let us live our lives to the full

We have been created for fellowship

So let us value each other's company

We have been created to be fruitful

So let us use all the gifts we have been given

We have been created for fulfilment

So let us live our lives with purpose

We have been created to be productive

So let us be dynamic and fully employed

We have been created to be spiritual

So let us be given over to the eternal purposes of God.

Bible Study - Titus 1:1-4

¹ Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that corresponds to godliness, ² in the hope of an eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began - ³ for He has revealed His Word at His own chosen time by preaching, which has been entrusted to me by the command of God our Saviour - ⁴ to Titus, my loyal son in the faith we share in common: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Saviour.

Review

Paul begins his letter to Titus, one of his close companions, with a brief but distinctive summary of the salvation history of the world. Within this framework, Paul identified the ongoing task of preaching as lying at the heart of God's active work in the world as well as the faith and the call he shared with Titus (1:4). This is clearly a very personal letter, and as we study it in the coming weeks we will find that just like the two letters to Timothy, it offers specific guidance to Titus in the particular circumstances in which he found himself. The advice is similar to that found in 1 Timothy, but the letter as a whole is more succinct and it is possible that Paul wrote to address certain issues raised by Titus about the leadership of the church. Leadership is an important theme for us today, but we must remember that when Paul mentions 'elders' and 'bishops', he did so at a time when these terms were descriptions of work that needed to be done by people rather than titles of jobs with status. The focus of the letter is on maintaining right teaching, and guarding against anything that undermine this crucial and precious spiritual commodity.

Titus and Paul Titus is a relatively well known figure in the life of the early church, and a companion to Paul in many of his missionary activities. He was a Gentile who must have been converted in the earliest days of the church before Paul began his Christian work, as it was Titus who accompanied Paul to see the disciples when he sought approval for his preaching ministry (Gal 2:1-4). The fact that Titus was an uncircumcised Gentile led to some hot arguments amongst early Christians about its relevance (see Acts 15:1f.) and it is possible that in supporting Titus against those who wanted all Christians to be circumcised, Paul, by the grace of God, set the pattern of his future ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 16:1f.).

In later years, when relationships seem to have broken down between Paul and one of the most important churches he founded, the one at Corinth, it was Titus who went there twice to represent Paul and re-establish his place as their founder and honorary leader (2 Cor 7:6-7, 13-14, 8:6, 16-17). At the time of the writing of this letter, Paul had left Titus in Crete (see 1:5) to conclude the founding of the church there, and some suggest that they had both been there on the journey to Greece (Acts 20:3f.) during some part of Paul's third series of missionary journeys, but there is no real proof of this. Paul's advice to Titus is now regarded as particularly relevant to the setting up of new churches; but we will discuss the relevance of this as the letter unfolds.

The faith of God's elect (the church) Reading the first four verses of Titus is a little breathtaking! Phrases flow from one to the other with such rapidity that it can be hard to catch the direction of Paul's thoughts. The best way to take hold of it all is to regard verse 3 as a secondary, though highly important thought, which is triggered in Paul's mind by what he is saying, but does not connect with it grammatically. For this reason I have placed a hyphen before and at the end of this verse.

From the first verse, Paul introduces himself typically as 'a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ'; making the same exclusive claim to apostleship he makes in most of his letter introductions. Titus, however, was one who was more familiar with this aspect of Paul's experience and commission than most! The next sentence describes the Christian faith by means of three phrases; 'the faith of God's elect,' 'the knowledge of the truth,' and 'godliness'. When put together, these phrases give us a sense of the truth and godliness of the faith of God's people as a whole. So although Paul was one of the first evangelists to appeal to individuals to accept salvation by faith in Jesus, we are reminded that it is the body of Christ, the Church, which represents God's truth in a far deeper way than is possible for an individual.

God's plan of salvation Following this great vision of the truth of the Gospel held by the church, Paul spoke of the eternal plan of God to bring this salvation in the second verse; something He 'promised before the ages began' (1:2). God does not lie, and Paul's appeal to this ever grander vision of God's saving intention and purpose for the world was an

appeal not to trust personal thoughts and feelings about the faith, but the eternal authority of God and also His chosen means of maintaining it through the Church.

This inspired Paul to add an addendum (1:3) in which Paul speaks of the great honour of being one chosen by God because he lived at the right time and place to be used by the Lord for the spreading of the Word and the preaching of the Gospel; it was an immense privilege he shared with Titus.

Greetings All of this forms the introduction to Paul's formal greeting to Titus, found in verse 4. Here, Paul writes with affection, speaking about the faith he shared with Titus, but such a greeting was no formality. The two had shared probably more deeply than we can ever know during years of ministry in unique historical circumstances. We all know what it is like to share precious memories with close friends, so that when we say words that in other settings may be mere formalities, such as 'hello', or 'goodbye', the way we do this is personal, and our voices convey the love and affection mere words cannot. As Paul said 'grace and peace' to Titus, it was with such warmth.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. What does verse 1 tell us about the church of God? If you were describing the church, what would you feel it necessary to add?
2. What does verse 2 tell us about the eternal purposes of God? What events in history illustrate what Paul says here?
3. What reasons could lie behind God's choice of the first century AD to send His Son into the world and bring salvation to humanity?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

The opening of this letter to Titus has a different feel to some of the other letters, indeed, whilst there are common elements, each one is markedly different and tells us that Paul was no theological robot or autocratic church leader. He responded to real people and real events in history by applying the Gospel and some human common sense to the circumstances in which he found himself. We do not know why Paul left Titus behind in Crete (as we will see tomorrow), but the introduction certainly indicates a close bond between the two, in my opinion, perhaps more so than with Timothy.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Do you trust the Church to be the vehicle God uses to convey the truth of the Gospel? That may be hard for you to answer, for it is something many people struggle with today. Pray about this, and ask the Lord to help you understand His will for the safeguarding of the Gospel as well as its proclamation.*
- *Pray for those with whom you have a very close relationship as a Christian. If possible try to make an arrangement to pray with them so that you can support each other in Christ. This can be done over the phone!*

Final Prayer

Jesus, Saviour of the world, You were lifted up on a Cross to draw people of all races and nations to Yourself. Bless the witness of Your church in every place, and help Your people finish the work You have given them to do. We ask this in Your victorious name: AMEN