

Titus 1:1-9 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, ²in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began³ 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 Saviour.** ⁵This 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— ⁶if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. ⁷For 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, ⁸but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. ⁹He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

The letter of Titus is not just an ancient letter written by a long dead Paul. It is a letter given by Jesus Christ to his apostle Paul for the church in every age and that includes us. From this letter, we are hearing what Jesus wants us to know about living godly lives in a godless culture. If we are going to take our commitment to Jesus seriously, we need to understand what it means to be the church and live as Jesus wants us to live in 21st Century Britain.

We need to take this seriously because

we will be held to account by Jesus for how we live out the message he gives us.

To help us do this, we will look at how Paul addresses his letter (**v4**). As a representative of the church, it was Titus' task to read the letter to the church, to teach them what it meant and ensure they obeyed it. As the church today, we too need to hear this message and obey it. **V4** shows us in four ways that

We, the church, are a people united under Christ our Saviour

with a mission to turn the world upside down in the strength that God supplies.

1. We have a unique identity – Paul describes Titus as his true child in a common faith

Titus was a trusted and valuable member of Paul's mission team. Paul described Titus as his 'fellow worker for the benefit of the churches' (**2 Cor 8:23**).

- Titus respected Paul as an apostle, and submitted to him as obedient children submit to their fathers.
- Paul trusted Titus with some difficult pastoral tasks because he was willing to submit to Paul's authority, and could be trusted to do what he had been tasked with.

The close bond between them was astonishing because of the significant difference between them, a difference that would normally cause division, hatred and hostility back in those times and still causes the same issues today.

Paul was a Jew, but Titus was a gentile (a non-Jew). There was normally hatred between these two races.

- Because Jews were God's chosen race, they considered themselves to be superior to gentiles.
- The gentiles reacted to Jewish pride with hostility

Yet here are a Jew and a gentile working closely together.

They have found something in common that unites them beyond their ethnicity.

Paul describes what unites them as a **common faith** – it is not just any faith but **faith in Jesus**.

When Paul came to put his trust in Jesus, he was united to Jesus, and the same was true for Titus.

- Because they were both united to Jesus, they were united to each other and able to serve together.

We live in a culture that urges upon us unity and tolerance, but which has deep divisions because it looks for unity around things that are deeply divisive. People unite around their sexuality or gender or race or concern over climate

and expect everyone to show them tolerance, but those things divide society and often result in hostility rather than unity. In contrast, faith in Jesus Christ unites people to Jesus. What unites us at BBC is not race, gender, age, class or wealth. It is not even religion.

**What unites us together is Jesus Christ and the gospel, so that, despite our differences,
we are able to worship together, serve together and, together,
hold out the gospel to a world that needs to be united to Jesus and in Jesus**

2. We have an awesome Saviour – Paul describes Jesus as our Saviour

In **v3**, Paul has described God as our Saviour. Now he uses the same word to describe Jesus, reminding us that there is one God who exists in three persons, Father, Son and Spirit – the Trinity. The Trinity is a profound mystery which is taught in scripture and which leads us to a deep sense of wonder, worship and gratitude. The doctrine of the Trinity is essential to our salvation:

- God the Father elects a people to salvation according to his free and sovereign grace
- God the Son secures that salvation through his life, death and resurrection
- God the Spirit effects that salvation by causing us to be born again, bringing us to repentance and faith

Some people will say this doesn't make sense so it can't be true and they walk away from it or they write their own religion or gospel, denying Jesus as Saviour so they never experience salvation from sin.

Yet when we come to a place where it makes sense with our spiritual understanding, even though humanly we cannot grasp it, we will find ourselves in love with this God of mystery. We will want to tell other people about him and help them see what we see.

**We will want to worship this God who is Father, Son and Spirit
and experience more of him at work in our lives to change us.**

3. We have a subversive mission – v4 contains a subversive message for that culture, and for ours

Titus lived in the time of the Roman Empire. As far as Rome was concerned, the Emperor was god and saviour of the Empire, and people were confronted with that message every day of their lives in what they saw around them. Paul spoke into that culture, undermining its very foundations with the truth about God and what he has done, saying:

Jesus Christ is your God and Saviour

That is the mission of the church today, and we are part of that mission. Every day, just as in Titus' day, our culture is bombarded with messages that lead people away from Christ as Saviour. Here are two examples for old and young:

- a)** Our western culture tells us that a long and happy retirement is god, promising health, financial security, leisure activities and great social life for all who aspire to it.

Even as Christians we can get caught up in this and think it is the life we deserve.

- While we are being deceived by this message, the reality is that we grow older and our health fails, our pensions don't keep up with the cost of living, we can't keep up with the leisure activities and the social life isn't what we thought it would be. In any case it all ends in death!

This world that makes retirement its god is heading for massive disappointment and eternal ruin.

- b)** We are being told that we need to worship the god of planet earth. The media tell us that the evil retirement generation have ruined the climate and this planet is heading for destruction unless we humans can save it.
- Planet earth has become god and human beings become its saviour.

- It is true that we have been placed on planet earth to be good stewards of the world God created.
- We haven't done a good job of it because we are sinful but this earth is not god and we are not its saviour.

Those examples may make you feel uncomfortable. That is because we have been conditioned by the messages from our culture telling us that these and other things are god and saviour. We need to be reminded of the truth that

Jesus Christ is God and Saviour

We need to see where our culture has deviated from what the Bible has to say and then speak into our culture the truth that God has given us in his word so that those around us are confronted with the truth that

Jesus Christ is God and Saviour.

We do that because we have a message of hope that:

- goes beyond retirement and instead promises eternal life
- the planet will be saved from climate change, not by us, but by Christ when he returns to this earth and restores our planet. Then it will be a place where redeemed and resurrected people can enjoy him forever.

To undermine the thinking of our culture, we need a worldview shaped by the Bible. This requires a shift in our thinking and priorities so that we spend less time focussing on what our culture puts before us, and more time critiquing it in prayer before God and examining it under the spotlight of the Bible. We will find ourselves being misunderstood, hated and even killed as we go against the culture we live in. We can draw on the fact that...

4. We have a supernatural strength – Paul signs his off his letter with the words *grace and peace*

Paul wants Titus to know the grace and peace that come from God. This is a kind of prayer-blessing.

- Grace is God's unmerited and unasked for favour. God gives us the Saviour we need for salvation, and works in our hearts to bring us to a saving knowledge of that Saviour. The result is peace with God, giving us assurance that we are now put right with him through Jesus and accepted as his own children.

In this, we also have the assurance that we have everything we need to do the mission God has called us to. Paul's prayer for Titus calls on God to give him everything he needs for the tough task he faces in Crete – wisdom, courage, and strength so that he can do what Christ commands. Paul asks for God's peace for Titus so that he will not be overwhelmed by the task, or feel threatened by his opponents.

What does this mean for us? When Jesus commands us to confront the gods of our culture with the truth that he is our God and Saviour, he doesn't expect us to do it on our own. Jesus promises: **I will never leave you nor forsake you (Hebrews 13:5)**. As we believe that promise we experience not just his help but also his peace.

When we are united to Jesus, we know Christ will be with us to enable us to do everything he commands us to do.

We will be sustained in our harsh British culture by God's grace and peace. We have the promise of Jesus so that

- We don't need to be afraid that we won't know what to say ... **Matthew 10:19-20** (see p4)
- We don't need to be afraid when they hate us **Matthew 10:22** (see p4)
- We don't need to be afraid that they may kill us **Revelation 2:10** (see p4)

In Christ we are a people united together, who are called to join him in the mission to undermine the voices of our culture so that the truth of the gospel is heard. He has given us the assurance that he will be with us to give us his grace and peace.

**As we get on board with God's mission, so we will experience
the presence of Christ, the strength of Christ and the peace of Christ.**

Matthew 10:19-20 When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. ²⁰ For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

Matthew 10:22 and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

Revelation 2:10 Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.