

God Blueprint for a Healthy Church
Saved to Serve the Mission
Titus 1:1-4
June 25, 2017

We are starting our summer series today in Titus called “God’s Blueprint for a Healthy Church,” with today’s message, “Saved to Serve the Mission,” seeing Paul’s ministry as central to the mission of the church in 1:1-4.” Titus is a letter written by the apostle Paul to one of his disciples and coworkers. Titus was one of Paul’s traveling companions, an apostolic delegate¹ who represented Paul by helping struggling churches. Paul left Titus in Crete to help the churches address leadership issues (chapter one), discipleship issues among different demographic groups (chapter two); and living the mission in a non-Christian culture (chapter three).

MIAS – We are saved to serve to the mission of the church, be disciples who make disciples.

The letter starts out with Paul identifying himself² as a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ (1). Servant is often translated slave in the New Testament. People were slaves in the Ancient Near East for a number of reasons, some because they were prisoners of war, others were born into it, some people sold themselves into slavery to pay off a debt, or because they could not afford to live. As a servant/slave, you served the master’s household. But from Paul’s perspective this is not negative as God is a benevolent master who loved him and rescued him from his sin. This is how I think Paul understood being a servant of God. Under Old Testament law, slaves were freed after six years but could stay on with the household permanently because they loved their master, loved being part of the household, and were better off with the family (Deut 15:12-17). This is what Paul has in mind here. Servant is also used of God’s Old Testament leaders³ who served to advance God’s mission by leading God’s people as God’s spokesmen. Paul is identifying himself in the long line of the servants of God who led God’s people as God’s spokesmen. He is also an apostle of Jesus Christ. Apostle refers primarily to the twelve disciples of Jesus who became the initial leaders of the early church. Paul was added to that number when he encountered the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-31). As a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, Paul serves God’s mission by leading God’s people and speaking for God and his Son Jesus Christ. This gave him credibility and authority to speak into the life of the church and to send Titus to deal with their problems.⁴

Then Paul describes God’s purpose for him as a servant and an apostle. “Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ *for the sake of* the faith of God’s elect and (*for the sake of*) their knowledge of the truth (1).⁵ God called Paul to be an apostle for the purpose of serving God’s mission of making disciples. He was saved to serve the mission. First, Paul is a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the sake of “the faith of God’s elect (see also 1 Thes 1:2-5).” Faith means more than intellectual ascent, it means to rely on, to count on, to put your hope in Jesus Christ (Gal 3:2-5; Rom 1:5). God’s elect points to God’s sovereign love in choosing people for himself. Humanity is born in rebellion against God and therefore under his judgement. God’s answer to their rebellion and his judgement is the cross, the place where God’s love and justice meet. No one deserves to receive God’s mercy but in love God sets his affection on us and draws us to himself until we say, yes.

Second, Paul is a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ *for the sake of* their “knowledge of the truth.” Faith and knowledge are linked in the bible (Jn 4:42; 1 Tim 2:4). There is truth and there is falsehood. Paul and Titus teach the knowledge of the truth in contrast to the false teachers who are teaching falsehood. Genuine faith is based upon the knowledge of truth. Christianity is not one of many religions that lead to God. Jesus claimed exclusivity when he said, “I am the way, the truth,

¹ Someone who represented Paul to the churches in the New Testament.

² In letters in the New Testament the author identified themselves at the beginning rather than the end like we do.

³ For example Moses (Num 12:7), David (Ps 89:3), and Daniel (Dan 6:3).

⁴ This is also why he says he has been entrusted with preaching the gospel by the command of God our Savior (1:3).

⁵ Italics added.

and the life (Jn 14:6).” So, you have to come to grips with who Jesus is, what he said, and what he did. I believe in Jesus Christ because there is ample evidence about the truthfulness of his life, death, and resurrection. A growing disciple is *growing* in the knowledge of the truth. Do you have a growing knowledge of the truth? If your knowledge of the truth is deficient then your faith in Jesus Christ will be deficient. You will not trust him, see him as trustworthy and reliable. This knowledge accords with godliness (1), that is, it leads to being God like or Christ like (Titus 2:11-13). The mission of the church is not to make converts but disciples (Mat 28:18-20). The mission Jesus gave us is to make disciples, teaching them to obey everything Jesus commanded (Mat 28:20), that is, individuals who put their faith in Jesus Christ and are in the process of becoming like Christ (Mark 1:17; Mat 4:19). I just saw a short video blog by David Powlison that was helpful on this topic. He describes sanctification⁶ as the human process of growing up and becoming human. He said that Scripture describes human flourishing as learning to walk with our Savior in childlike faith and becoming increasingly like our Savior, that is, being helpful to others. But knowledge of the truth does not automatically lead to godliness, becoming like Christ. Godliness comes as our thinking changes, which in turn changes our desires, and these new/changed desires determine our choices. The will always follows our greatest desire in the moment of decision. But this process is not easy or automatic, right? The bible also describes accountable relationships as a necessary ingredient toward godliness or change (Hebrews 10:24-25). Accountable relationships in the form of fellow strugglers who hold you accountable for the way you are thinking, the desires you have, and the choices you make. We have ideas and opinions, desires, and behaviors that are sinful. I know that because I have them too – sinful ways of thinking, sinful desires, and sinful behaviors. The reason we need accountable relationships is that others see our sin more clearly than we do and can lovingly hold us accountable to change. *Discipleship cannot happen outside of accountable relationships.*

Faith and knowledge are directed toward the hope of eternal life which God promised and was revealed in the preaching of the gospel. Paul describes our hope of eternal life as secure because the God who cannot lie promised it in eternity past and now revealed it in God’s time through the gospel (3). Eternal life was promised in eternity and at the right time, God pulled the curtain back so eternal life was revealed through the gospel (3:4-7). Eternal life is secure because God has promised it to all who put their faith in Jesus Christ (Jn 3:16-18). Disciples live in the present with the hope of eternal life, an eternal future with God.

Paul was saved to serve the mission of making disciples. God gave that mission to the church, to each of us – be disciples who make disciples. This is what Paul means when he says he is a servant and an apostle for the sake of their faith and their knowledge of the truth which leads to godliness in the hope of eternal life which God promised and revealed through the preaching of the gospel. Paul lived for the mission. He is writing to Titus who became his spiritual child, his disciple, when he led him to faith in Christ (4). Then he disciplined him and developed him into a leader who became part of his team. Then as needed, Paul sent him out on assignment to struggling churches. Titus is in now in Crete, with Paul’s blueprint for a healthy church, teaching and discipling and raising up leaders in the twenty churches throughout Crete. Paul was an apostle who used his gifts to make disciples who could help make healthy churches. Growing disciples make healthy churches.

Sanctification is the same as discipleship, the process of becoming like Christ, godly, or spiritual maturity.

