

Doctrine Works: A Greeting with a Goal

Titus 1:1-4

I want to read you the first line of several novels this morning and I want you to see if you can identify which novel they are from. Ready?

Call me Ishmael – *Moby Dick* Herman Melville

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife. —Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*(1813)

Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way. — Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*

Mr. and Mrs. Dursley, of number four, Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much. They were the last people you'd expect to be involved in anything strange or mysterious, because they just didn't hold with such nonsense. – *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* by J.K. Rowling

Now, these are well known first lines and the way something begins can often set the tone for the rest of the book, movie, letter, or whatever piece of work you have in front of you. While novels begin in a variety of ways, the Apostle Paul structures his letters in very similar ways beginning with a greeting. Today we are going to begin studying one of Paul's letters and we can't just skip over the greeting. The book of Titus has one of the longest and most elaborate Pauline greetings for one of his letters and he introduces some of the major themes of the letter to us in the first few sentences.

Look with me at Titus 1:1. Paul begins all of his letters by introducing himself and identifying exactly who he is. But notice he doesn't say, a man trained at the feet of Gamaliel, or a church planter extraordinaire or, visionary leader. He calls himself a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ. Of course, many of you know that this word translated servant here could also be translated slave. The idea is that Paul viewed his life and ministry as not his own. He was the property of God. Practically speaking this meant that Paul did not spend his life in his own pursuits but in God's. He worked for the furtherance of God's cause.

In Romans 6:17-18 Paul makes the point that no matter what you are always a slave in this life. You were born a slave to sin and by God's grace Paul was

transferred from slavery to sin to slavery to God and righteousness. This understanding of his life as owned by God has a massive impact on Paul's ministry and that is why he introduces himself as a slave or servant of Gods.

But he also calls himself an apostle of Christ Jesus. This is a significant designation. The Apostles were key individuals, commissioned by God because they had seen the risen Christ. While Paul was a slave of God, he was also an apostle and he carried the authority of Christ with him as he wrote and preached the gospel. In other words, this letter carries the authority of God because Paul wrote as an Apostle commissioned by God.

So, Paul identifies himself as an apostle in the service of God. Now, each one of us in here have a variety of roles that indicate we have certain responsibilities. I am a husband, father, and pastor. I've also been a soccer coach, a student, a dump truck driver, and a shoe salesman. Each of those roles meant I had certain goals. So, when we read about Paul as a slave of God and apostle of Christ, what goals do those roles have him striving toward? What does he hope to accomplish in those he is serving and teaching through this letter? He tells us

Today we want to examine **3 ministry goals from Paul that we want to build into one another in ministry.** These are Paul's aspirations in writing this letter and serving as an Apostle, but we want to have these same aspirations in our interactions with one another at Woodhaven Bible Church. What do we want to build into one another?

1. Faith (Based on God's Electing Love)

Look back at verse 1. Paul's service and authority as an apostle is meant to encourage and edify the faith of God's elect. Faith is one of those words and concepts that is vital to the Christian life and one of Paul's primary goals in ministry is to encourage the faith of those God has chosen.

Obviously, the Christian life begins by faith. We are justified, or declared righteous when faith in Christ is born in our hearts. But, it's always important to remember that the Christian life that begins by faith continues by faith. Paul makes this clear in passages like Galatians 2:20.

Faith is one of those interesting concepts because it's somewhat like humility. When you begin to focus on whether you have humility or not you almost

immediately lose it. Humility is a lack of self-awareness and faith also turns its gaze outside self to an external object. Often our faith is like a person watching an event through a camera on a cell phone. We are so concerned about capturing the event that we focus on the recording of the moment rather than the event itself.

That's why I think it's so helpful here that Paul subtly reminds us that faith is a gift, given from outside us and not based on anything worthy in us. He says that his apostleship is for the sake of the faith of God's elect. Election can often be a controversial topic among Christians, but it should be something that is encouraging and edifying. The only reason you and I have exercised faith at all is because God chose to give us spiritual life. Ephesians 2:8-9 puts the whole process of salvation, including our faith, within the realm of God's gift.

Paul's ministry is about growing the faith of God's chosen one's by reminding them of the overwhelming goodness of God's gracious gift. This is precisely how faith grows and this ought to be one of the goals of our ministry to one another. In our conversations with one another let's have as our mission to help one another adjust our line of vision from self to God's electing love so that we grow in faith. And this brings us to our second ministry goal.

2. Knowledge (That Results in Godliness)

Look at the rest of verse 1. Paul wants us to grow in faith *and* knowledge. We talked about this last week, but faith cannot grow without knowledge. The two are intimately tied together. Paul's service to God had as its express goal to increase the knowledge of those in his care.

You will notice that raw information is not what Paul is going for here. Look at this whole phrase. Proper knowledge of the truth will result in godliness. What does he mean by godliness? This term is used most often in the NT in the letters to Timothy and Titus. The idea is fully formed Christian character that is properly related to God. It's a person who knows who God is as Creator and Savior and responds appropriately in attitude, disposition, desires, and actions.

The intersection between knowledge and godliness is a major theme in Titus and that's why Paul mentions this here. Look at the qualifications of elders in 1:6 & 9. The elder must be one who has godly character (vs. 6) and who also has sound

doctrine (vs. 9). This is the exact problem with the false teachers in 1:16. Titus must teach the right things that lead to the right lifestyle. Look at 2:1 and then he follows this with specific instructions to different groups within the church in light of sound doctrine. Look at the impact of God's grace on us in salvation in 2:11-14.

Let's talk about the relationship between knowledge and action here since this a major theme in this letter. You and I have more knowledge at our disposal than any group of humans in history. My kids ask me questions regularly and when I respond, "I don't know", they say, "Google it." We encounter all sorts of knowledge every day that doesn't change the way we live at all. But that cannot be what happens when we grow in biblical knowledge. Paul is quite clear throughout this book that sound doctrine changes lives.

Augustine put this connection between Scriptural knowledge and obedience quite plainly. He said:

"Whoever, then, thinks that he understands the Holy Scriptures, or any part of them, but puts such an interpretation upon them as does not tend to build up this twofold love of God and our neighbor, does not yet understand them as he ought." – Augustine

In other words, if you think you understand your Bible and you aren't loving God and neighbor more, you are gravely mistaken concerning your knowledge of Scripture. Paul's goal in exercising his apostolic ministry was to build faith and knowledge based on truth that changes who we are and how we live.

This is important for our ministry to one another. We can't be content to simply impart facts to one another. We must help one another live out the knowledge we have received. This is why our mission statement says that followers of Christ connect with one another. We need each other to properly apply the Bible.

So, we've seen that Paul's goals for his ministry were faith and knowledge and now we come to the third ministry goal in verses 2-3.

3. Hope (Which Longs for Eternal Life and Clings to it Now)

Look at the first part of verse 2. Hope is a word that is central to Christian identity, but one we probably don't think about as much as we should. Paul sees one of his

main apostolic goals as cultivating hope in believers. What does he mean by hope?

Hope is the “confident anticipation of what is to come” according to one commentator. Paul puts hope in rarified company when he says in 1 Corinthians 13 that “faith, hope, and love abide.” Hope is forward looking and in this instance Paul wants believers to direct their anticipation toward eternal life. So, we need to think carefully about what Paul means by eternal life.

We often think of eternal life in terms of the duration of life. In other words, it’s life that will go on forever. That’s true, but in Scripture eternal life also indicates the quality of life. It’s life that is in fellowship with that which is eternal, namely God. John 17:3 says this is eternal life, knowing God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. It means participating in the fellowship and love between Father and Son. John 17:20-23. It means joining the family and knowing by experience what it means to be a part of this family. It's called eternal life because God defines life and now you and I get to experience the very definition of life.

"The good news of salvation is ultimately that God opens his Trinitarian life to us. Every other blessing is either a preparation for that or a result of it, but the thing itself is God's graciously taking us into the fellowship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." - Fred Sanders

Now Paul explains how this hope of eternal life comes to us. Look back at verses 2-3. I’m going to read these verses to you and then show you what Paul is communicating. So, the object of hope is eternal life, the realization of fellowship with the Father and Son through the Spirit that will go on forever.

Paul now is pulling us up to 35K feet to see our hope of eternal life worked out over the ages and how you and I receive it and ground our hope in it. God committed himself to saving action before time even began and promised eternal life. He manifested that promise in time and space through his word the preaching of Paul regarding Jesus Christ and he entrusted that ongoing preaching ministry to Paul and those who would come after him. Promised. Manifested. Entrusted. This is the progression.

We see God's promises being consistently fulfilled and so we trust His Word. Then He manifests his promise through His word and then conveys that word to us through servants who preach and teach it, like Paul.

Paul uses the word entrusted here to describe his reception of the message of this promise. This is the same root of the word faithful and the idea is that when you have been given a trust, you must remain faithful to protect and pass on what you have received. Paul had received the promise from God of eternal life and he hoped in it and passed that promise along to others and we are now the recipients of it. Paul did not come up with this message on his own and he doesn't preach it on his own authority or for his own personal gain.

When you think about this hope in eternal life, it's the type of thing we anticipate for the future when it will be fully realized. But we also begin to experience eternal life now. You can walk with God this week in a genuine foretaste of what will happen one day in heaven. And hope will change the way you live. Listen to 1 Timothy 4:10.

So, faith, knowledge, and hope are key to Paul's ministry. He longs to cultivate these qualities in those whom he writes to. But I want you to notice one more thing about Paul's greeting. These qualities are not abstract. Look at verse 4. Paul was a real person, living in a time and place, who was responsible to proclaim the gospel and train others to proclaim the gospel. He writes this letter to help Titus, one of his associates to a job that will advance the gospel. This incredibly powerful theological statement of faith, knowledge, and hope is meant to be passed from Paul to Titus.

And this ought to be true for us. You know, sometimes when you get involved in a complex endeavor it's easy to forget the core values and basics of what you are doing. The Super Bowl was last Sunday and football is a very complex game. There are schemes and plays and formations and the players must know their role in each different play and to get to the point where you are playing in the Super Bowl requires an incredible amount of precision among 11 players moving as one unit. But coaches will often talk about how they spend time in practice reminding their players of the basics of blocking and tackling, running and catching. No matter how good your formation is, if you can't catch and tackle, you won't win.

Sometimes the Christian life and our lives in community with one another in the church can seem complex. We have responsibilities, programs, positions, and budgets. But the bottom line is that we are all trying to build one another up in faith, knowledge, and hope. That's it. So, no matter what ministry you are involved in here, keep these goals in mind and understand that God's grace and peace will be with you along the way. Let's pray.