

Footprints of a Useful Christian

A study of the life of Titus

Perhaps the two best known disciples of the apostle Paul are Titus and Timothy. Each is addressed by the apostle as “my true son in the faith” (Titus 1:4, 1 Timothy 1:2). Both were young men with Greek backgrounds (Gal. 2:3, Acts 16:3) and each was considered by Paul as “my fellow worker” (2 Cor. 8:23, Romans 16:21). Many times I have wondered what it would be like to be in their shoes, to travel with that great, mission minded apostle; to see him explain and debate with hostile crowds, to discuss some of the many church problems; to hear him pray; to hear him discuss his evangelistic plans and explain his edification strategy. Don't you also feel a bit envious of these two young men? We know more about Timothy, being mentioned twice as many times as Titus in Scripture. Yet putting together the dozen times Titus is mentioned, we find a stimulating example of a Godly and practical young man. These references cluster around five distinct situations or events over a period of some 13 years.

1. Titus in Jerusalem - Faithful to His Convictions

The first time we read of Titus, he is travelling to Jerusalem in the good company of Barnabas and Paul (Gal. 2:1-5). It was probably not a very happy trip, since a serious problem was on their mind. These men were being accused of promoting a very “free” Christianity, without circumcision, without due respect to the Law and Jewish traditions. Some scholars associate this trip with the Council in Jerusalem in Acts 15, dating the event around 49-50 AD.

Most young men would prefer to go skiing or to play a game of football rather than sitting in intense doctrinal meetings. The temptation is to leave serious Bible studies and conferences to the retired, the intellectual or the eccentric saints. Perhaps Titus wondered if the issues at hand were worth such a long trip and such expenditure of energy. Why not simply show a submissive spirit and conform to the legalist pressure? Why not give up part of the “freedom we have in Christ” for the sake of peace and unity? The Godly and experienced apostle to the gentiles was aware of the long term danger of such a compromise. We can nearly hear his stern voice as he says “we did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you” (2:5). Young Titus takes his stand with Paul and Barnabas.

Five and six centuries ago, Christians in Europe would allow themselves to be burnt alive rather than deny their God given convictions. Do we still have some Biblical convictions worth suffering for? In this modern world of comfort and religious tolerance, it is easier to go on skiing and playing football.

2. Titus in Corinth - Faithful in Showing Love to Fellow Christians

Some five years later, we find Titus associated with the Christian assembly in Corinth. In his second letter to the church at Corinth, Paul narrates a meeting with Titus: "We were especially delighted to see how happy Titus was, because his spirit has been refreshed by all of you" (7:13). Titus was not mechanically doing his Christian duty in Corinth, he felt great "affection" (7:15) for these brethren. Let us not forget that the assembly in Corinth was far from perfect. There were tensions between the more legalist brethren ("I follow Peter"), the progressive activists ("I follow Paul"), the intellectuals ("I follow Apollos") and those who felt above it all ("I follow Christ"). There was immorality among some and sad indifference in most; carnality and competition between the gifted. Yet Titus loved them. They were his brethren.

What do you bring to assembly life? Do you contribute to that heavy and critical atmosphere? Are you a hard to please saint? No Christian gathering will ever be perfect here on earth. Assemblies must constantly seek to change for the better. I am sure Titus was instrumental in the positive changes in Corinth, but in a happy way. As we travel through life, do we leave behind a pleasant or a nasty smell? Do we love our brethren enough to radiate warmth and acceptance? - even towards those we disagree with? Real, warm fellowship among God's people requires a close walk with God. Titus became a source of "comfort" to a tired and "harassed" apostle (7:5,6). If we really love our brethren, the Lord may also use us to encourage and comfort them.

3. Titus on the Move - Faithful Administrator of Resources

In the next chapter (2 Cor. 8), we find Titus involved in money matters. The project was to collect gifts from different assemblies and take them to the needy saints in Judea. We must sadly admit that the human heart is inclined towards deceit: either misappropriating funds, wasting them or using them to control others. The experienced apostle had probably seen much of this, therefore he was "taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men" (8:21). The apostle needed some faithful saints on this project. Administratively honest and faithful men and women are still very much needed today. There is a worrying lack of them on most mission fields. Are you trustworthy? Does your past behaviour inspire confidence?

No Christian team functions well with the presence of unreliable saints. Titus and the others chosen for this delicate job were disciplined and transparent men. Their honesty and reliability had been proved by consistent behaviour over time (8:22). If you lived in those days, would those who know you propose your name for such a delicate job? Can others depend on us? Do we finish what we start? Has our life shown commitment to the cause of Christ? To each of us the Lord has entrusted time, energies and some material possessions. To some He has also entrusted

children, a job, a ministry... are we proving faithful? The words of our Lord Jesus still hold true today: "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much" (Luke 16:10).

4. Titus in Crete - Faithful Leading a Difficult Task

Titus was working with Paul on the island of Crete. Believers were now assembling in a number of towns on the island. We can imagine much life and enthusiasm but there were also many deficiencies. Around year 62 AD, at this critical point in the work, the apostle leaves the island but Titus remains. Soon after, the apostle writes "The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town" (Titus 1:5). This was no easy task. The general moral ambient on the island was decadent: "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons" (1:12). Some opposed the message (1:9). Among the many new believers, there were probably some more experienced believers. We find Cretans present on that special day of Pentecost (Acts 2:11). By this time, these saints could boast nearly 30 years of tradition and could resist Titus with "we have always done it this way". Among the saints in Crete we find "mere talkers", "deceivers" and legalists from the "circumcision group" (1:10). There were those who loved "controversy" and "quarrels" (3:9), even "divisive" saints (3:10). I am sure that the loving and faithful service of Titus in Corinth was used by God to prepare this young man for this next challenge.

Maybe you are living a difficult situation right now. Difficult situations do not last forever. Tension and pain are used by the Lord to develop and deepen His servants. How else do we learn perseverance? In His hands, frustrations and tears can be used to reduce the gap between what we profess and what we live (1:16). Titus had received delegated apostolic authority for this task. Today our base is Scriptural authority. But the consistent and faithful life of Titus was an inspiration to others in Crete. Moral authority is not delegated and it cannot be forced or demanded. It is earned. "In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech" (2:7,8). Our lifestyle should "make the teaching about God our Saviour attractive" (2:10). How do we measure up? Does the joy of our Christian lifestyle inspire others? This is the best kind of leadership.

5. Titus in Dalmatia - Faithful When Alone

The last reference to Titus we find in 2 Timothy 4:10. This is the apostle Paul's last letter. As is not infrequent among ageing servants, we find sad expressions of loneliness: "everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me" (1:15). "At my first defence, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me" (4:16). As age and infirmity limit the joy of active service, the Godly saint learns more and more to sense and enjoy the Lord Himself. "But the Lord stood by my side and gave me strength" (4:17).

The apostle reflected over his years of sacrificial ministry. He concluded: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (4:7). He now looked forward to that "crown of righteousness" (4:8). Yet he also had some final

advice for his younger co-workers: “keep your head in all situations, endure hardship... discharge all the duties of your ministry” (4:5). Be a faithful finisher. Finish well. The apostle's mind then turns to some specific co-workers: “Demas, because he has loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica” (4:10). What attracted Demas to Thessalonica? A life of alcohol and drugs? An immoral life style? Or was he simply absorbed in a good secular job with a challenge and financial stability? We are not told. What about Titus? The verse continues “Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia” (4:10). Titus was now entering a new stage in life. If Titus had started his travels with Paul in his early 20’s, he was now in his late 30’s. A decade and a half of working in the shadow of the great apostle was coming to an end. Thank the Lord for Christian parents, but the day will come when you are to live your faith without them. Thank the Lord for Godly men and women, who counsel us and encourage us and say “well done”. But they shall also pass. Are we ready to stand alone? Are we prepared to press on without their support and supervision? From what we know, Titus proved faithful to the end.

Conclusion

Brief encounters with enthusiastic useful believers like Titus challenge our lifestyle and priorities. Titus shared the apostolic preoccupation: “Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good... and not live unproductive lives” (Titus 3:13). Titus left some good footprints for others to follow. May we also.

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December 2003

Source: www.philipnunn.com