

### 03. Titus 1:1-5





## Titus 1:1

Paul, a slave of God and an apostle of Jesus the Messiah, for the sake of the faith of God's elect

Paul calls himself a 'slave (δοῦλος) of God'. In his letter to the community in Rome he calls himself a 'slave of the Messiah' (Romans 1:1) and speaks of the Roman Christians as having been 'freed from sin and enslaved to God' (Romans 6:22). Likewise, the Thessalonians have been converted 'to serve as slaves (δουλεύω) a living and true God' (1 Thessalonians 1:9). In speaking in these ways he has before his eyes Jesus, who in humility and obedience 'emptied himself, taking the form of a slave' (Philippians 2:17). Paul identifies with Jesus, the suffering servant ('slave') of the Lord. He is also highlighting the fact that he is writing in obedience to his Lord. His words, therefore, are to be taken as the word of the Lord. This is further underlined by his use of the title 'apostle of Jesus the Messiah.'



As is his custom, Paul uses the address to focus the attention of his readers on what are to be the main themes of his letter. In speaking of ‘**God’s elect**’ (see Romans 8:33; Colossians 3:12), he is accenting the truth that God is the one who initiates communion, not us. He therefore speaks first of ‘**faith**’, which is the welcome which we give to grace. For Paul, faith is always ‘**in the Messiah**’, for it is his communion with God that is offered to us, and it is his Spirit who draws us to welcome the communion we are offered and to live out of this communion. It is his faith that we share



In Crete faith is endangered by false teaching. Paul's focus, therefore, is on what it is that people believe, and so on the importance of discernment and of teaching that is consistent with the gospel. We must know who it is in whom we believe as well as how faith is to be expressed in our Christian life. We find this idea in Paul's earlier letters. He instructs the Corinthians: 'Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith' (2 Corinthians 13:5). He stresses with the Colossians the importance of being 'established in the faith, just as you were taught' (Colossians 2:7). Living 'in the faith' is the same as living 'in the Messiah'. We recall his words to the Philippians: 'Live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of the Messiah, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel' (Philippians 1:27).



## Titus 1:1

an apostle for the sake of the knowledge of the truth that is in accordance with godliness

We know the ‘truth’ (ἀλήθεια) when reality is not obscured by falsehood and allowed to fall into oblivion (λήθη). When Paul speaks of ‘truth’ he is speaking within the context of the ultimate truth of who God really is as revealed in Jesus. Hence the close link here between ‘faith’ and ‘**knowledge of the truth**’. For Paul ‘truth’ is also a matter of the way we live. Hence the close link with ‘**godliness**’. In his letter to the Romans, Paul speaks of the ‘ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth’ (Romans 1:18). We find the same link between truth, faith and Christian living in his letter to the Colossians in which he speaks of the ‘gospel’ as ‘the word of truth’, and speaks of it ‘bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God’ (Colossians 1:5-6).



We recall his prayer for the Colossians: ‘We have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God’ (Colossians 1:9-10).

Paul speaks of human behaviour in terms of ‘**godliness**’ (εὐσέβεια). Though he speaks of ‘ungodliness’ (ἀσέβεια) in his Letter to the Romans (see 1:18), he does not speak of ‘godliness’ in his earlier correspondence, perhaps because of its connection with pagan religious cult and its political overtones demonstrated by the use of Σεβαστός to translate the Latin ‘Augustus’ (see Acts 25:21,25; 27:1). However εὐσέβεια (Latin: pietas) was considered of the utmost importance in the Roman world, as it consists in an attitude of reverence for the gods shown in religious worship and in respect for the order that is sanctioned by the gods. It is close to our concept of ‘religion’.



Though the Hebrew ‘fear of the Lord’ is normally translated literally in the Septuagint, in three texts it is translated by εὐσέβεια (Proverbs 1:7; Isaiah 11:2; 33:6). The spirit given to the Davidic king includes ‘the spirit of knowledge and εὐσέβεια (fear of the Lord - Isaiah 11:2). King Josiah is praised because he ‘kept his heart fixed on the Lord; in lawless times he made godliness (εὐσέβεια) prevail’ (Sirach 49:3). The Jewish authors were attempting to build a bridge between the Jewish faith and the surrounding culture. We might surmise that Paul is doing the same and that it became part of Paul’s missionary vocabulary during his time in Rome. Always the missionary, he saw the importance of ‘baptising’ the Roman ‘pietas’, by directing it to the true, living God as revealed in Jesus. Luke makes the same connection in his account of the healing of the cripple at the temple gate (see Acts 3:12), as well as in his account of the conversion of the Roman centurion (see Acts 10:2,7).



## Titus 1:2

in the hope of eternal life that God, who never lies, promised before the eternal ages.

An essential aspect of 'the truth' revealed by Jesus is that we are invited to share with him in the life of God. In the final analysis it is this sharing in the life of the living God which alone deserves the name 'life'. Any other so-called life is passing. This divine life is 'eternal', since whatever pertains to the divine is beyond the power of death. We read concerning the mother of the seven boys martyred at the time of the Maccabean revolt: 'She loved religion (εὐσέβεια) more, the religion that saves them for eternal life according to God's promise' (4 Maccabees 15:3). We are invited to live this life of love communion now. As Paul says: 'it is no longer I who live; it is the Messiah who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, loving me and giving himself for me' (Galatians 2:20).



Paul, therefore, speaks of God's 'promise' and of 'hope' (ἐλπίς). God's promise is not bound to the fluctuations which we experience in the ages of human history. God's will is 'before' the events of history, not, of course, in a temporal sense, but in the sense that what God decides is ontologically prior to the vagaries of our human obedience or disobedience. To underline this, Paul qualifies the word 'ages' with the same adjective (αἰώνιος) that he has just used to qualify life. It is the 'eternal' God who creates the ages. As we look at history, Paul wants us to look at the presence of the eternal in time.



God's promise stands, indestructible. Nothing anyone can do or fail to do can change it. Hence the security of our hope. We can be confident that God will carry out his plan and keep his promises, for God 'never lies'. God kept his promise in Christ, in whom 'every one of God's promises is a Yes' (2 Corinthians 1:20). Part of God's carrying out his promise is precisely through the apostolic commission given to Paul, including this letter. However, as Paul has already noted, it matters that we welcome in 'faith' what God has promised. It matters how we live. It matters, therefore, that we live in 'godliness'. 'Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and of spirit, making holiness perfect in the fear of God' (2 Corinthians 7:1).



## Titus 1:3

In due time God revealed his word through the proclamation with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Saviour

Paul has just been speaking of history, of the generations that pass in the flux of time (χρόνος), and of the importance of living our lives in the light of God's promises. He now contemplates history as the arena within which God's grace is constantly active. This 'due time' (καιρός) is entirely beyond our control or calculation. We can only remain open to the surprise of grace and respond to God's love with the welcome of faith. In God's time, Paul was approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the gospel.



‘To God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus the Messiah, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed ... to the only wise God, through Jesus the Messiah, to whom be the glory forever! Amen’ (Romans 16:25-27).

It is Jesus’ total openness to God in complete communion that created the perfect time (compare Galatians 4:4; Romans 5:6; Ephesians 1:10) for God to enlighten the world with his word. That time is now, and it is through the gospel which Paul has been commissioned to proclaim, and which is the subject of this letter.



## Titus 1:4

**To Titus, my loyal child in the faith we share**

In his correspondence with the Corinthian church, Paul speaks of Titus as his ‘brother’ (2 Corinthians 2:13), and as his ‘partner and co-worker’ (2 Corinthians 8:23). He speaks of Timothy as his ‘beloved and faithful child in the Lord’ (1 Corinthians 4:17). We find him speaking in the same way in his letter to the Philippians, where he says of Timothy that ‘like a son with a father he has served with me in the work of the gospel’ (Philippians 2:22). This is a recognition of the fact that, in the providence of God, the life of faith came to Timothy and Titus through Paul. It was a customary way of a master speaking to and about his disciples. In addressing Titus in this way, Paul is assuring the Christians in Crete that the gospel that Titus proclaims can be reliably taken as the gospel proclaimed by Paul who is giving his own personal guarantee that he and Titus share a common faith.



## Titus 1:4

**Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Saviour.**

The customary Greek greeting was χαίρειν (see Acts 15:23; 23:26). Paul uses a similar sounding word, χάρις (**grace**) – a greeting that reminds the Christian assembly of God’s action in their lives in drawing them to share the life of the risen Jesus – a life of communion in love with his Father through the shared bond of the Holy Spirit. Paul’s prayer for the community is that they will continue to experience the graciousness of God pouring out his love upon them.

The customary Jewish greeting was shalom (**peace**, εἰρήνη). Paul repeats this greeting here, for his prayer is that they will experience the peace that is the fruit of grace: the fullness of life that happens when each member of a community contributes his or her gifts to the others in harmonious communion.



Paul speaks of Jesus as the ‘**Saviour**’ of his body the church in his letter to the Ephesians 5:23, and speaks to the Philippians of ‘expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus the Messiah’ (Philippians 3:20). He regularly speaks of how he and the others have been saved by Jesus’ life-giving love. The only thing that needs explaining is why he would change his customary greeting and use this title in the address. I suspect that it is for the same reason that he has just spoken of ‘our God and Saviour’. It will soon emerge that salvation is a key theme of the letter, and Paul wishes to insist from the beginning that it comes from God through Jesus.



## Titus 1:5

I left you behind in Crete for this reason, so that you should put in order what remained to be done, and should appoint elders (πρεσβύτερος) in every town, as I directed you

In his address Paul has already signalled the main focus of this letter. He is concerned about ‘the faith of God’s elect’ which is intimately related to ‘knowledge of the truth’ and which demands ‘godliness’, both for the internal life of the Christian community and for its mission. He is writing as part of his apostolic commission and in obedience to God who has entrusted him to proclaim ‘his word’. If these central values are to be encouraged, protected and maintained, the various Christian communities in each town will need leaders whose responsibility it will be to organise, support and encourage whatever is needed in this regard. Expecting from Titus the same obedience to which he himself is committed, Paul immediately focuses on the responsibility which Titus has of appointing such leaders.



Luke tells us that on their first missionary outreach from Antioch (48AD), Barnabas and Paul 'appointed elders (πρεσβύτερος) in each church' (Acts 14:23). The young Christian communities in southern Galatia had close relationships with the synagogue, in their origin and probably in their on-going life. It is understandable that they would pattern their leadership on that of the synagogue. The communities in Crete are in much the same situation and so we find the leaders here, too, called 'elders' (presbyters/priests).



When Paul began proclaiming the gospel in Thessalonica in 49AD and began to gather converts, leadership would have naturally fallen to him. At the same time, some form of organisation, however minimal, would have been needed for the coherence of the community. He speaks of their leaders in his letter to them, written the following year from Corinth: 'We appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who labour among you, and have charge of you (προϊστήμι - 'those standing in front') in the Lord and admonish you; esteem them very highly in love because of their work' (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13).



Different people would have been 'in charge of' different aspects of church life. Leadership can be exercised in many ways, including teaching, but presumably Paul also had in mind those whose function it was to supervise the organisation of the community. The communities founded by Paul continued to look to him for leadership. When the church in Corinth was having trouble it was to Paul that the community wrote, and when he responded in writing he did not address himself to a single authority in Corinth, but to the whole community.



One of the main problems in Corinth was that the church was dividing into factions, each, no doubt, with its own leaders. In his first letter to the Corinthians (53AD), Paul likens the church to a body in which each part needs the other to function properly. He speaks of the three foundational ministries given to the body by God: the ministries through which the gospel is preached, through which the Spirit reveals God's will and through which the revelation of God is explained to the community: 'God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers' (1 Corinthians 12:28). He goes on to mention other ministries exercised in the community including 'forms of leadership' (κυβέροντες, 'governing'). Those exercising this ministry had a gift for organisation, and were responsible for directing the community according to God's will.



Similarly, in his letter to the Romans (57AD), Paul speaks, as he did to the Thessalonians of those who have the ministry of being a 'leader' (προΐστημι, 'the one standing in front'). He exhorts them to carry out their ministry 'efficiently and conscientiously' (ἐν σπουδῇ, Romans 12:8).

Luke tells us that on his way to Jerusalem in 57AD, Paul summoned to Miletus the leaders of the church in Ephesus, called 'elders' (πρεσβύτερος, Acts 20:17). In his speech he exhorts them: 'Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (ἐπίσκοπος), to shepherd (ποιμαίνω) the church of God (Acts 20:28).

This text includes many of the titles by which organisational leaders in the church have been known ever since. We have πρεσβύτερος ('elder', 'presbyter', 'priest'), ἐπίσκοπος ('overseer', 'bishop') and ποιμήν ('pastor').



In his letter to the Gentile churches of the east (Ephesians, 59AD), Paul is particularly concerned for the unity of the church . He highlights those ministries which the Risen Jesus gives to the church to form it as his body, listing ‘apostles, prophets and evangelists’. He goes on to add those ministries which the Risen Jesus gives to the church for its maintenance, listing ‘pastors and teachers’ (4:11). Each of these ministries makes its special contribution to ‘equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of the Messiah’ (4:12).

He addresses his letter to the Philippians (62AD) to ‘all the saints in the Messiah Jesus who are in Philippi with the bishops (ἐπίσκοπος) and deacons (διάκονος)’ (Philippians 1:1). There were a number of them in what must have been a rather small community. It would seem that different people supervised different aspects of the community life, or else the overall leadership was exercised by a group.



The title and functions of those responsible for organisational leadership in the communities founded by Paul would presumably have varied according to the composition, size and situation of each community. The larger the church became in a particular area, and the longer Paul was absent, the more need there would have been for each local community to devise appropriate forms of leadership, and the more need there would have been for organising ways of ensuring some cooperation and coordination between local communities, and also for representing the community in the society at large. It is important to recall that in the Greek, Roman and Jewish cultures at the time positions of leadership in public life were open only to men.



Paul, a slave of God and an apostle of Jesus the Messiah, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that is in accordance with godliness in the hope of eternal life that God, who never lies, promised before the eternal ages.

In due time God revealed his word through the proclamation with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Saviour

To Titus, my loyal child in the faith we share

Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Saviour.

I left you behind in Crete for this reason, so that you should put in order what remained to be done, and should appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.