

Introduction:

Today we are starting a new series on the book of Titus, titled “The Church Established.” The book of Titus is a letter written by the apostle Paul to a Greek convert of his, named Titus. Paul refers to Titus throughout the New Testament as a brother, fellow worker, and partner. We know from Galatians 2, that Titus went with Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem as an example that the gospel was reaching the Gentiles, and establish the truth that a Greek did not need to be circumcised. 2 Corinthians show us that Titus was sent by Paul to Corinth in order to check on their response to his first letter and also to gather the collection for the Jerusalem saints. Titus was a trusted disciple, and verse 5 of this letter, shows us that Paul left Titus on the Island of Crete, entrusting him to finish establishing the churches there. Titus 1:5, which we will examine more closely next week, stands as an important verse for understanding the purpose of this letter. Paul writes, 5 This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order. This letter serves to instruct Titus on how to “put what remained into order,” establishing these churches. Now, GracePoint church is an almost 75-year-old church, we have a wonderful campus, long history, are supporting several missionaries, and have a vast number of ministries happening. One might say we are “an established church,” so, why we would study a letter focusing on how to establish the church? Well, one reason is that the word of God is living and active, always sharpening us as we study it, and we should continually study every part of it. Also, reviewing letters like these help to reground our hearts and minds in what we should truly desire for this expression of God’s church. What should GracePoint look like? What should we be concerned about? How are we doing at being the church, as God intended for it to be? Where should we, as a church, get our vision and goals from? To be clear this one letter won’t give us everything we need to know, but it can unite us together, and strengthen this church, for God’s glory and our joy. Today, we are going to examine the first 4 verses of Titus, chapter one, which form a greeting by Paul to Titus, one long sentence, packed full of foundational truths for us to know and cling to. We will discover that these foundations set the readers hearts on our great God, propelling Titus, and now us, forward toward the right aim of our lives and church. Let’s start in verse 1, where we see the first foundation to cling to. The truth that,

GOD IS CARES ABOUT HIS PEOPLE HAVING TRUE FAITH

Look closely at the beginning of verse 1, 1 Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, Pause there. Paul opens by identifying himself in two ways. “A servant, or bondservant of God,” shows us his view of himself as a slave, completely surrendered to the authority of God over his life. “Apostle of Jesus Christ,” reveals the choice of Christ to commission and send Paul as His representative. Apostles were eyewitnesses of the resurrected Jesus, given authority by Christ to build His church. Paul’s apostleship was bound up in his interaction with the resurrected Christ found in Acts 9. In Acts 9, we read of Jesus Christ personally halting Paul, as he was vehemently persecuting Christians. Jesus blinds him and sends him to a man named Ananias to relay Paul’s commission as an apostle to the Gentiles. As Paul identifies himself in these ways, he is pointing to one reality for Titus, and now us to understand, that Paul was purposefully called by God to his position of servant hearted surrender and authority. This, then, highlights the significance of the phrase that follows. Look again at verse 1, 1 Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God’s elect. The word translated “for” points to purpose. Paul is saying, the purpose of his servant hearted apostleship, is “for the sake of the faith of God’s elect.” The elect is a common term used throughout the bible that we cannot escape. It means chosen, or picked out for oneself.

We can agree there is some mystery in the nuances of this term, but we cannot deny its meaning and use. The idea of God's election, His choosing some to be His people, began with God choosing Israel in the Old Testament. When Jesus speaks of his followers, especially those who are steadfast in trials, he calls them "the elect" in Matthew 24:31. He also says God hears his elect as they cry out to him in Luke 18:7. Peter calls all believers a chosen race, a holy, or set apart nation and a people for God's possession in 1 Pet. 2. Paul consistently grounds this election in the eternal purpose of God. We see this in Romans 8, 2 Timothy 1, Ephesians 1, and Col. 3. Being God's elect is a beautiful truth for us to fully embrace, even with the mystery in some of its nuances. If you are in Christ, God has chosen you to be part of His people. How astonishing is that? Now, recognize that God called and commissioned Paul because He cares about you having true Faith. I want you to see how important this foundation is for Paul. Do you remember how I mentioned these 4 verses are one long sentence? In his commentary, Robert Yarbrough, helpfully points out a symmetry that exists between verse 1 and verse 4 in the original language. Look at this with me (he uses the NIV translation).

v. 1: to further the faith of God's elect = kata pistin eklektōn theou

v. 4: in our common faith = kata koinēn pistin

I believe this symmetry points to this being a priority for Paul, because your faith, my faith, the faith of God's people is the reason God called and commissioned Paul. And Paul helps us to understand what truth faith is throughout this opening, by pointing to what I suggest are 4 vital aspects of True Faith. Examine these together with me. First, we see that,

1) TRUE FAITH INVOLVES KNOWING THE TRUTH

Paul doesn't just share God's concern for faith but uses a term of connection to join that concern with the next phrase in verse 1. Look there with me, 1 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. The word for "and" is a fascinating conjunction in the Greek. Often it carries the idea of incremental increase. And the flow of this verse points to reading this as an increasing explanation. One commentator suggests thinking of the "and" more as "that is." I believe he is right. "Their knowledge of the truth" is not a new topic, but a deeper understanding of what kind of faith God wants for us. Knowledge of the truth is an essential part of the faith of God's elect. True faith doesn't exist without it. God's concern is for you to have True Faith that involves knowing the truth, not a blind faith that clings aimlessly to nothing of substance. Think about what should take place before scuba diving. You don't just grab some diving equipment and say, "I'm ready, let's go." I looked up diving safety. Before you dive, you use a buddy system and typically go through several pre-dive checks. You check the air, confirming things like a functional air supply, on both your primary and alternative air supplies. You test the inflator button and all the deflate valves. You make sure both divers have the right kinds of weights, and those weights are secure. You ensure your diving buddy knows how to open the releases in case of an emergency and makes sure nothing is positioned where you can't get out of the equipment. You even confirm if your air tastes ok. The goal is to know that everything is working and in order before diving. Similar to how you are careful to know the truth about your equipment before you dive, God cares about your faith involving knowing the truth. so that your faith is true and strong. That is why He sent His son. That is why He commissioned the apostles. That is why He gave us His word in written form. And therefore, we want to study it faithfully. The second aspect of True Faith Paul points to is how,

2) TRUE FAITH ALWAYS LEADS TO GODLINESS

Keep following the flow of verse 1, 1 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, Paul is saying that when

faith is true, genuinely involving the knowledge of the truth, it always leads to godliness. This term godliness, however, is more than what we often think. It doesn't only carry the idea of righteous living, but it includes the idea of right worship and reverence for God. The early church father Eusebius defined it as "reverence towards the one and only God, and the kind of life that He would wish us to lead." We will see throughout this letter that proper reverence and worship is the key to righteous and godly living. And, true godliness is always an outworking of true righteousness, which is found only through trusting in the blood of Jesus Christ. As we trust in His sacrifice on the cross, we receive His righteousness, declaring us justified and giving us the power to walk forward in new life. Consider what Paul says in 1 Timothy 3:16, with what may have been one of the first confessions of the church, 16 Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory. The mystery of godliness is the person of Jesus Christ. His work on our behalf, which secured the power of the Spirit working in us. This is why knowledge of the truth accords with, or leads to godliness, because the gospel of Jesus Christ, rightly understood, is the change agent for our sinful hearts. It is through knowing Christ, that God's power is granted to us. And His power always produces godliness. This is how the apostle Peter puts the same truth in 2 Peter 1:3, 3 His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, True faith, involving knowledge of the truth, which God is cares about us having, always leads to godliness. The third aspect of True Faith Paul shows is that,

3) TRUTH FAITH IS ANCHORED TO GOD'S PROMISED HOPE

Notice how the flow of thought moves towards this faith being anchored to something very specific, follow along in verses 1-2, 1 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, 2 in hope of eternal life The faith of God's elect is anchored in the hope of eternal life. This hope is such a vital part of the Christian Faith. You can see how vital with the rest of verse 2, as Paul continues, 2 in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began This is God's promised hope, secured in the character of God, as one who never lies. A hope that God promised before the ages began. Think about that for a minute, from eternity past, God promised this hope to His people. But what is the hope of eternal life? Is it simply to live forever? Look at what Jesus says about eternal life in John 17:3, 3 And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. Do you see what Jesus is saying? Eternal life is knowing God and knowing Christ. Eternal life is not primarily living forever. Eternal life is the joy of knowing God and dwelling with His all-satisfying glory forever. Consider how Paul makes this clear one of his other pastoral epistles, to Timothy. 1 Timothy 1:1, calling, 1 . . . Christ Jesus our hope. We will see this more clearly when we get to chapter 2 of this letter, where Paul calls the glory of Christ "our blessed hope." Oh church, I want you to see this. The hope of eternal life is the glory of Christ. Glory that we cannot even fathom. Glory that will delight our hearts more than we even know. But this hope is not just something that comes in the future. The beautiful truth is we can know Him now. We can see glimpses of His glory now, though in a mirror dimly as Paul says in 1 Cor. 13. This is the main reason we gather each week, to see glimpses of the glory of Christ. We want to sing of His glory, read of His glory, and pray for spiritual eyes to see His glory. We see His Glory through His gathered people worshipping and using their spiritual gifts to build up the church (Or at least we should). As we do this, each week, it is like we are casting an anchor deep into a deep ocean. Then, when storms of life come, week in and week out, causing waves to crash against our weak hearts, our anchor to God's promised hope keeps our eyes focused and our faith firm. If you do not know this hope, I pray you will see it as we keep studying. True faith, involving knowledge of the truth, leading to godliness, which God is concerned with us having, is anchored to God's Promised Hope. The final aspect of True Faith we should see is that,

4) TRUE FAITH IS A COMMON FAITH

We will look at verse 3 in a moment, but for now, consider what Paul says in verse 4 again, 4 To Titus, my true child in a common faith: True Faith is one consistent and common faith. There aren't varying kinds of faith. We will see more clearly as we look at this letter. We need to know that Jesus Christ commissioned His apostles to lay a foundation of the faith, the truth, for all who believe. The faith they laid is consistent and clear. In Jude 3 it is called, 3 . . . our common salvation, and the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. In 2 Peter 1:1, Peter says it is, 1 . . . a faith of equal standing with his. Our faith is a common faith, a common truth for all who believe. Theologian A T Robertson draws out an importance for Titus, and now us, of True faith being A Common Faith, commenting that this faith is "common to a Gentile (a Greek) like Titus as well as to a Jew like Paul and so common to all races and classes". Church, there is one faith delivered for all the saints, throughout all generations, in all the world; and there is certain truth connected to that faith. There may be ways we are continuing to grow in our understanding of it, but it is one faith. True faith, involving knowledge of the truth, leading to godliness, anchored in God's Promised Hope, which God is cares about us having, is a common faith for all. The foundation that God cares about your having true faith is important for us to cling to as we study this letter, and I see 2 more foundations laid that we should consider this morning. The second foundation is understanding how God has ensured the care for His people's faith was met.

GOD MADE THIS HOPE CLEAR THROUGH APOSTOLIC PROCLAMATION

Follow the flow of verses 1-3, 1 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, 2 in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began 3 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; Verse 3 helps us to understand that Paul's proclamation of the gospel was the means God used to make our hope clear. Paul focuses our attention on this in a few ways. He points to God's intentional timing at the beginning of verse 3, saying, 3 at the proper time. The idea is that the time was determined as the most appropriate point. He chooses wording to help us to understand that God has made His word, His truth, His gospel clear, saying that God, 3 manifested in his word The word for manifested means to make visible or known, pointing to something being hidden that is now clearly visible. We have probably all been to restaurants where you sit down and there is this unmistakable glow catching your eye. When you turn to look, it is one of those abrasive florescent signs, advertising something. You know, the ones with so many different lights and colors that you can't help but see clearly what it is. In fact, you can even hear the electricity running through them with that small buzz from the power they generate. These signs have been made in such a way that it is clear what they are pointing out. Similarly, God has made His gospel clearer than that. More still, Paul says it was the command of God that he would proclaim His word. 3 through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God Just take a moment to soak in the intentional work of God to ensure that His word, the gospel of truth, the hope of eternal life, was made clear for the sake of your faith. Do you marvel at care and work of God? If you don't, this greeting is meant to cause our hearts to do so. To push us to see the work of God in establishing His church. And there is one more foundation to move our hearts even more to do that. To move our hearts to marvel even more at this, Paul lays the foundation that,

GOD IS A GRACE GIVING SAVIOR

We need to observe a repetition in verses 3 and 4 and think through what Paul intends with the closing of this greeting. Look at verses 3-4 again. Do you see the repetition? He ends verse 3 saying, 3 . . . God our Savior; and verse 4 . . . Christ Jesus our Savior. Twice Paul focuses on God as savior. The first appears to be God the Father, the second God the Son (Jesus Christ).

Paul does 2 more times in this letter, in chapter 2, verses 10 & 13, and chapter 3, verses 4 & 6, referring to God as savior 6 times throughout this letter. One of the most foundational truths we can understand is God's amazing act of providing salvation for all who believe in Jesus Christ. And as we continue to study this letter, one of my main prayers is that we grow deeper in our understanding of this truth. Yet, it is more than just God as Savior, it is God as a Grace Giving Savior. As Paul concludes this greeting, He shows Titus, and all who read it, that we need God's grace. Look again at verse 4, he says. 4 . . . Grace and peace Paul is heading into his charges for Titus, and before he does, he grounds Titus in understanding his need of the grace and peace that comes from God alone. We will see the grace of God resounding throughout this letter. How it brings salvation, justifies sinners, and trains us to live rightly. We will discover the true peace of God that has reconciled us to himself, even while we were wretched people. Church, we are constantly in desperate need of our Grace Giving Savior. We even need His grace to extend all the way to helping us understand and embrace the truths in this letter. This is why Paul often begins his letters asking for grace to his recipients and ends his letters asking God for that same grace.

Conclusion:

There are so many ways we could respond to these 4 verses:

- We could respond by simply marveling at the work of God for us.
- We could have our hearts challenged to grow in our knowledge of the truth.
- We could respond by asking God to give us the grace we need to help us grow in godliness.
- If you haven't placed your trust in Jesus, you could see the amazing work of God our Savior and trust in Him fully today, asking for Him to forgive you of the sin that stains your heart, and give you the life and hope He promises in Jesus Christ.

Today, we have a unique experience of responding to this word, as we are going to move into a time of taking communion together. Communion is, in one way, an act of marveling at the work of God our Savior. When we take communion, we remember that God sent His own Son to receive the payment we deserved for our sin. We think on how He stood in our place, as the wrath of God was poured out onto Him for us. Communion exists for those who have placed their trust in Jesus as their Lord, Savior, and Treasure. Those who have heard of how He died on the cross to pay for the sin of His people, and said my hope is in nothing but the blood of Jesus. Communion is never something to approach lightly, but a thoughtful remembrance of the truth that all you have is Christ. All who truly know their sins are forgiven in Christ and are trusting in Him are invited to partake. If that is not you, we ask you to refrain from participating and encourage you to consider the cross of Christ and what you see and hear during this time. We are going to do something a little different for communion today and have an extended time of reflection before we take together. Pastor David is going to lead a song of reflection. My encouragement is to think deeply on the gospel of Christ during this song. As you hold the bread and cup in your hands, think of how His body was broken for you. Reflect on how His blood, shed on the cross, secured the new covenant for you. Sing along if you are led to sing. Think on your sin and thank God for His forgiveness for all your sin. Pray for God to meet you as we remember. Then at the end of the song, I will come back up and lead us to take the elements together. Let's meditate on the cross of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.