

Gal. 2: 1-5; Acts 15:22-29 Titus the Companion of Paul I. A True Child II. The Uncircumcised III. The Example of Freedom

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, what does it mean to be free in Christ? The fact is, freedom can be taken away by either sudden bondage or a gradual erosion. Freedom can also be an excuse for sin. Some of the worst bondage comes in the name of supposed freedom. For example, those who champion sexual freedom today find themselves in bondage to the flesh. Even within the church, there is always a temptation to fritter away our freedom in exchange for rules and regulations. This fact does not mean that we are not free- rather we must learn to see our freedom within the larger context of obedience. As we will see, the purity of the gospel is at stake! In our reading from Gal. 2, we are going to follow Titus as a proof in concept of the freedom that we have in Jesus Christ. We consider this theme: Jesus Christ sets us free from bondage to sin and the rituals of men.

## **I. A True Child**

In our first point, we are going to reintroduce ourselves to Titus. Now we learned about Titus a few months ago, so we do not need to spend too much time in this first point. Titus is introduced to us in 2:1- I took Titus along with me. And again in v. 3- Titus who was a Greek. This word for Greek is “Helon” which could mean anyone born in Greece or the related island. But in Scriptures, the word Greek could be applied to anyone who was not a Jew. In some passages, Gentile and Greek are used interchangeably. Greek was also the language spoke in the civilized world of the day- and was the language used to record the New Testament. So Titus is called the Greek one- and he was a young man who had been converted during the first or second missionary journey of Paul. He was a companion of Paul- working with Paul and traveling with him. It would be this same Titus who would be left on the island of Crete as recorded in the book of Titus. So Titus would become a preacher and teacher in his own right- although never becoming an apostle, he was a trusted leader of the NT church used to establish elders in each church. In fact, there is such a close connection between Titus and Paul that Paul calls Titus his true child in Titus 1:4. So even though there was no biological link between Paul and Titus- Titus is seen as a true child in the common faith. A spiritual descendant of Paul if you will- as they share the same spiritual,

heavenly father. Now this union in the faith in contrast to the biological connection becomes a major point in these verses. Did the fact that Titus was not a Hebrew- that he had none of Abraham's blood in him- disqualify him from service in the church?

## II. The Uncircumcised

In our second point, we see that Paul focuses on the uncircumcised nature of Titus in v. 3. Remember, Titus was a born and raised Greek- from the unbelieving nations to whom the apostles had now been sent. But even though Titus has become a follower of Christ, he was not compelled to be circumcised. Here Paul is going to be making a distinction between a follower of Christ and those who are circumcised. The question we have to answer is this- when a Gentile becomes a Christian, do the OT ceremonial laws need to be applied to their lives? Could Titus be a Christian without receiving the OT sign of the covenant? As a reminder, Titus would have been baptised. So the question is not about the covenant per-se; but rather the obligations of the OT signs and ceremonies. Titus has already been welcomed as a brother and faithful preacher- just as he is! As Paul will make clear in Gal. 3- in Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile. What matters is not the external circumcision nor the biological lineage, but rather the internal circumcision of the heart. The flesh counts not- but what Titus's heart circumcised? Has he been joined to Christ by faith? By the Spirit has his old nature and sin been cut away? If so, how was he to relate to the OT ceremonies and signs. What made this such a pressing matter is that there were false brothers- as v. 4 puts it- who had slipped into the church. These false brothers came from a Jewish background and they were demanding that Christian Gentiles receive the sign of circumcision. In other words, to be a good Christian you have to become a Jewish Christian. But Paul will resist this as he refuses to get Titus circumcised. That was the whole point of the Jerusalem Council which we read of in Acts 15. Gentiles are now welcomed into the faith- having been saved by the grace of God and washed by the blood of Jesus. No other requirement would be placed upon them- no OT ceremony, ritual, rite or sign would be applied to them. To demand that Titus be circumcised was to place a yoke upon him. In fact, to try and revive the OT structure is to go backwards and not forwards. As Paul will say again in 5:2- if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no

advantage to you. Now that Christ has come, circumcision as a shadow has passed away. So Titus remains uncircumcised as he is- in this way he is a living testament to God's acceptance of the Gentiles as his own people. But before we move into our last point, the question will be raised- what about Timothy? Titus was not circumcised, but Timothy was! Why the different response? Put briefly, remember that Timothy was raised by his Jewish mother and he would minister to the Jewish people primarily. So the context in which they serve makes a difference. No one was forcing or demanding Timothy to get circumcised, but it was a good idea to avoid unnecessary offense. The point Paul is making is that if someone is forcing and demanding you to be circumcised, then resist. Refuse to bow to the legalistic laws of these false brothers and Pharisees. But if being circumcised is going to open doors for preaching, Paul will seek to be all things to all people. The actual mark of being circumcised or uncircumcised does not matter in the New Covenant. But if circumcision is being presented as a law that must be kept, then he would resist!

### **III. The Example of Freedom**

So Paul is making it very clear in our text, the gospel is at stake. For those who trusted in the flesh and demanded that the ceremonial law and sign and circumcision be kept, Paul will not yield. As he says in v. 5, we did not yield in submission for a moment so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved. Stated another way, the uncircumcised Titus had come to illustrate a gospel principle. As Paul said in v. 4- these false brothers snuck in and they wanted to take away our freedom. They spied out our liberty- they wanted to put the yoke of slavery on us. Their desire was to resurrect the Mosaic Laws and force them on these new, Gentile believers. Paul will have none of this! As soon as Jesus came, died, rose and ascended, the OT ceremonies and signs were fulfilled. The types and shadows that had been preparing Israel for the coming Messiah were now complete and abrogated. But these false brothers did not understand or accept this fact. They wanted to keep these OT rituals like circumcision and apply them to both Jew and Gentile. Once again, this was a "works mentality" that was being taught. The false gospel proclaimed by these Judaizers is that you are saved by grace plus an aspect of works. You still need to submit to these marks! But as Paul will clearly say in 5:1, for freedom Christ has set

you free! Do not submit to this teaching which is from man and based on a wrong understanding of Christ's work. The gospel does not come with strings attached! Do not submit to man's rules and regulations. To expand this point, Christians are free to eat meat, free to drink wine, free to remain uncircumcised. We are free from sacrifices and ceremonial washings and the feast days. For freedom Christ has set us free! So do not give up your freedom by submitting to yoke of man's ideas. But how does this apply today? No one is going around to the churches trying to convince us of the need for circumcision today. That is true, but there are always human rules and regulations that are elevated in the churches. For example, don't drink, don't smoke, don't dance, don't watch moving, don't do this or don't do that. As if these lists are what make you a Christian. Now to be clear, it may not be wise to engage in these things, but our refusal to partake of them is not what makes us a Christian! I need to be clear here- what we do or what we do not do is not what makes us a Christian! Our actions or lack of action does not save! Listen to what Paul said in I Cor. 10:23, all things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful, but not all things build up. When the Bible is silent on an issue, we need to be very careful! Where the Bible clearly speaks, we need to obey. But when we start adding our own lists to Word of God, legalism is not far behind. So Paul will be slave to no man! He is bondservant of Christ- and Christ has set him free! So if someone tells you that a Christian must do this- or must not do that- ask yourself if this is the Bible speaking or this a personal preference. Titus was free- he was not under compulsion to be circumcised. For freedom we have been set free! Christian liberty is a great gift! We are set free! Free not to live for ourselves- but free to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice of praise- doing all to God's glory as we obey His word and not the rules of men.

As we close, the liberty that Christ has given us is not an excuse to sin. We are not free to do whatever we want. However, we are set free from ceremonies and bloody rituals because Christ has fulfilled them. As BC art. 25 puts it, the use of the ceremonies and symbols of the law have been abolished among Christians- yet their truth and substance remain for us in Christ. Jesus Christ sets us free from bondage to sin and the rituals of men. May we all rejoice in the freedom that we have in Christ as we obey His Word and not the words of men.