

Titus 3:12-15; Acts 18:24-28; The Closing Words of Titus I. The Reminder II. The Sending III. The Blessing

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, the art of writing a good letter has fallen on hard times. We live in an age when messages are closed by writing “thanks or okay”. Since we are able to email or text repeated, our electronic conversations are more of a running chat of one or two words. As a result, very few of us open and close our letters as once was common. But today, as we come to the closing words of this letter written to Titus, we find a beautifully crafted conclusion which includes a summary as well as stated blessing. What would Paul choose to include in these last verses. It is interesting to note, as stated in Gal. 6, Paul often wrote the conclusion of his letters with his own hand. Normally he used a scribe to write down what he dictated, but the mark of authenticity in his letters is seen in the hand written conclusion. So it is likely that this conclusion was written by the very hand of Paul as well. How would He close this letter to this church plant? As we have seen in recent weeks, the book of Titus focuses on right doctrine that leads to right practice. Orthodoxy leads to Orthopraxy. Our God has saved us by grace- by the goodness and mercy of our God appearing to us in Jesus- we have been justified and are now heirs to eternal life. So this evening as we bring our study of Titus to a conclusion, we consider this theme: Jesus Christ reminds the church in Crete of her calling as He assures her of His care.

I. The Reminder

In our first point, we find that Paul is going to use this opportunity to remind the saints on Crete of this need for good works. God’s grace is the foundation for our calling to do good works! As we saw earlier in August, the theme of good works runs through this book- in 1:16- it is the wicked, defiled unbeliever that is unfit for any good work while the saints will be zealous to do good as 2:14, 3:1 and 3:8 affirm. So to say that Paul is stressing the need for good works would be fair. Now good works are not the grounds of our salvation but the fruit. We are not saved because of our works- but we are not saved without our actions either! In other words, the grace of God that saves and justifies is the same grace that changes and sanctifies! The Spirit is fruitful in His work within. So in 3:14, God’s people are reminded again- that they must learn to do good! To learn implies a

process that required attention- one in which there is growth and development. Keep on remembering- keep doing- be dedicated and devoted to this life of holy obedience. Note also, this is a calling placed upon the church. Let our people learn! Not the people out there- not the leaders of the church alone- but the members of this congregation! Our people- the men, woman and children who make up the flock of Christ. It would be wrong to assume that the leaders of the church have this responsibility alone! Yes, the elders are to set an example of hospitality and service, but the entire congregation- all our people here- are to learn to devote themselves. Everyone has gifts and talents- abilities that are to be used to be a blessing to the church as a whole and the community in general. This “doing good” will then help in cases of urgent need. If, for example, there is a famine or flood, the church will help with their time and treasures. During this specific time, there was a severe famine in the land of Judea. The church in Jerusalem was suffering- and the saints of Crete would surely send aid in this time of urgent need. So no one who claims the name of Christ will be unfruitful. An unfruitful Christian is an impossibility! There is no retirement and no stagnation in the army of Christ! If you are not sure how you can help- or in what ways you can serve- then just ask an elder or myself. We would be glad to give you some ideas and point out areas that need your willing hands! Remember that the resident of Crete were called lazy gluttons- but the church is made up of those who are self-controlled and hard working! Being diligent as they worked with their hands in order to share with those who are in need! So good works- a fruitful life that blesses others- is the key teaching of this book that Paul wants to remind them of! As is often taught- during a speech you start by telling them what you are going to tell them. And in the conclusion, remind them what you just told them. So Paul reminds the church of her need for good works.

II. The Sending

But Paul also uses the conclusion of the letter to give specific instructions concerning the movement and sending of church leaders. Remember that this church on Crete is a church plant and apostle Paul has been instrumental in its establishment. Paul, as an apostle, has an authority that church leaders do not have today. Added to this fact, this church on Crete was still being established. As elders were not yet ordained and

installed- so Paul has to send teachers and pastors to serve this church until it is established and self-governing. So we get a front row seat as various teaches come and go. We read of 2 names in v. 12- men who would be sent by Paul to this church. Currently, Paul was spending the winter in Nicapolis- this would serve as his base of operations for the time being. But Paul would send either Artemas or Tychicus to the church on Crete. Now we do not know very much about Artemas- but Tychicus had accompanied Paul on his 3rd missionary journey as recorded in Acts 20. Remember that there was no reliable way to send letters- so Paul would have used one of these men to serve as a letter carrier to deliver this letter to Titus and the church on Crete. So we have another church leader being sent to this church- and Titus was being encouraged to come and visit Paul in v. 12 as well. Now remember that Titus is the pastor of this church for the time being- and his first task was to ordain elders in this church for the her continued oversight, leading and teaching. But Titus would not be around forever- and he was invited to visit and accompany Paul during these winter months in Nicapolis. Next, we read of 2 men who were to be sent from the church on their way. Zenas the lawyer and Apollos are to be sent on their way. Evidently, these two men were traveling to other churches and their time on Crete had come to a close. We do know that Apollos was a gift teacher as we read in Acts 18- so he was an evangelist and apologist of some kind. Now what is the point of these names- why should we care about the sending and staying of various pastors, teachers and apologist? Well, the movement of these men serving within the church for a time is a good reminder that the building of the church is a work of Christ performed by the hands of his human shepherds. As Paul said in I Cor. 3, I plant and Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. The movement of these men- teachers and leaders of the church who come and go- proves that Jesus uses many different means and various men to build His church! There are many laborers in the field- each worker is called to be faithful, but only God can give the increase! So each pastor, elder and deacon within the church is important- they must be faithful in their work- but no man can build Christ's church! This is not my church- it is Christ's church! Shepherds serve under the chief shepherd! It is His flock- and He uses many different people to bring His people into His flock. We can also learn something from the names of these men. Two are known, two are

not! At the end of the day, it does not matter if you are well known or if you spend your days in obscurity. Even if you never write a book or never get on the front page of the paper, Jesus can use you to bless His people and build His church! It matters not if the world knows your name- but is your name written in the Lamb's book of life? We each have a part in the story- a position to play! So it is okay to be an unknown servant of the Lord- faithfully serving behind the scenes! Your Father sees what is done in secret and He will reward you! Being unknown by others does not mean that you are less important to Jesus! Rather He uses the weak and the unknown people of the world to shame the proud and the popular! So don't worry if no one knows your name- the Good Shepherd knows and calls all of His sheep by name!

III. The Blessing

There remains just one more thing for Paul to do- and that is to say his farewells. Now instead of just signing off by saying- sincerely Paul- or something like that. Paul uses this opportunity to send his personal and shared greetings. In v. 15- the church at Nicapolis sends greeting to the pastor of the church at Crete. Those with me send greetings to you. Also, greet those who love us in the faith. In a few weeks we will be having classis at church here- and there is specific time for what is called "fraternal greetings." This is when one church brings a message of encouragement, challenge, rebuke, or simply greetings to other churches that have gathered. For example, there will likely be a fraternal greeting from the OPC and the RCUS and perhaps the Canadian Reformed Church at our classis meeting. That is basically what we have here. The church planting Paul sends his Christian love to those on Crete- his true family in the faith. There is a brotherly love that is shared by those who have a common Savior- and that love is rooted in their united faith. And although Paul has faced his share of opposition- having been beaten, stoned, whipped and imprisoned- there are still those who love him in the faith!

And with the final words, Paul concludes this letter. Grace be with you all. Now this is one of the shortest closing benedictions that Paul uses- but it is almost word for word the same as his conclusion in II Tim. Having

spend so much time reminding the church of their need for obedience and good works, Paul leaves them with a reminder that they and we all stand by grace alone! We all need grace- we are saved by grace- and it is by God's grace that we alone live! And even though this letter was written particularly to Titus, Paul knows that it will be read to the entire church. Grace be with you all! The grace of God be upon you- fellow saints of the church of Crete. And even though Paul is no longer physically present, He still pronounces the benediction- God's grace be upon you. This is not a prayer- but a statement- a declaration! Knowing that this church has been saved and washed by the blood of the Lamb- God's grace is pronounced upon them! Remember what our theme is? Jesus Christ reminds the church on Crete of her calling as He assures her of His care. This is not just the letter of Paul to Titus- it is the word of God to His people- the message of the Savior to His sheep! In this letter, it is Jesus who is calling the saints to do good works! It is Jesus who has appointed Paul as an apostle- and by way of this letter Jesus is comforting His people! Assuring them of His care- of God's grace! Reminding them that grace has been secured by the Son- poured out upon them by the Spirit- so that this Grace is and will be with them all! And that is why we close every service with these words of benediction. It is not a prayer- not a hope or desire that I have. It is a pronounce- the Grace of God be upon you- having heard and believed the Word- having received the means of Grace- having been saved by the Son and filled with the Spirit- God's grace is yours! It is your possession- God's grace and mercies not only has appeared- but has been received into your heart! That is the parting encouragement that Paul can give- the Jesus wants His church to know! You have God's grace- you are the special recipients of His love! So this letter opens with grace and peace from God the Father and Jesus our Savior- and it ends with the grace of God that is with you!

To conclude, this short letter to Titus is rich in grace but also strong in doctrine and application. Jesus Christ is reminding His people of what they have- and how they are called to live! Receiving grace, called to good works. Whatever position you have- whatever roll you fill. Being well know or behind the scenes- pastor or elder, older man or young lady- servant and child- all are to be diligent and dedicated to good works which spring from a thankful heart! Having received the grace of God- we offer our lives as a living sacrifice of praise!