

F.B. Hole

**Comments on
the Epistle to Titus**

Extracted from “Stempublishing”

Reformatted by www.bible.beauport.eu

bible@beauport.eu

Rue du Château d’Or n°16/6

1180 Uccle (Brussels)

Belgium

Comments on the Epistle to Titus

By F.B. Hole

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2
Chapter 1.....	3
Chapter 2.....	11
Chapter 3.....	17

Introduction

THERE IS A very strong general resemblance between 1 Timothy and the Epistle to Titus; so much so that at first sight we might be misled into thinking that the latter is mainly a repetition of the former. As we examine the Epistle to Titus in more detail we shall soon become conscious that it has features all its own, and that it fills a niche in the scheme of Christian truth which without it would remain empty.

As we remarked when surveying the four personal epistles of Paul, Titus is the epistle of sobriety and soundness. It is also marked by the strong assertion of authority, the authority vested in Paul as an Apostle of the Lord, and in Titus acting as his delegate. The conditions prevailing in Crete, owing to the racial characteristics of the Cretians to which Paul alludes in his first chapter, rendered this strong assertion necessary; but as there is all too much of the Cretian difficulties — if not of the Cretian character — about us and amongst us all today, we shall find the exhortations of this epistle peculiarly healthful to our souls.

Chapter 1

PAUL ADDRESSES TITUS in verse 4 but before doing so he points out the characteristic features of his apostleship and service in a series of short and pithy statements. It was "according to the faith of God's elect." Speaking in a general way we may say that the preposition "according to" indicates character. What characterized his apostleship was the faith, and also the truth which is "after" or "according to" godliness. There are all too many nowadays claiming to be ministers of Christ who wish nevertheless to minister "according to" the latest conclusions of science, falsely so called, or the latest reasonings of unbelief. Notice that "the faith" spoken of is not the faith of the world nor even the faith of Christendom, but of "God's elect." That unconverted ministers and preachers should deny and even ridicule the faith is very sad but not at all surprising. The faith was never theirs though they may have once given an intellectual adherence to it.

Observe too that the truth is said to be characterized by godliness. Here is a very good test which may be applied in either direction. Certain things are urged upon us as being the very truth of God. We may be hardly equal to the task of analyzing

them, comparing them with Scripture and demonstrating their falsity, yet we have no difficulty in observing that the practical effect produced by accepting them as truth is the casting off of godliness. That is sufficient. These things are not the truth of God. Or, it may be, a certain course of action is urged upon us which would be quite profitable and seem sensible enough. But it is not according to the truth. Then we may be quite sure it is not godliness and is to be avoided.

Further, as verse 2 tells us, Paul's apostleship was in view of an immense blessing which in its fulness lay in the future. In reading the New Testament we meet pretty frequently with the expression, "eternal life," and if we carefully considered all the passages we should discover that its meaning is not easily exhausted: it carries within it profound depths of blessing.

Nothing is more certain in Scripture than that the believer in Christ has eternal life, and has it now. This side of things is specially stressed in the writings of the apostle John. We believers already have this life in Christ, and already we are introduced into the relationships, and made participators of the understanding and communion and joys and activities which are proper to that life. Still the fulness of eternal life is not yet ar-

rived, as our verse indicates, and this view of it is in keeping with the first allusion that Scripture makes to it in Psalm 133:3. The only other allusion in the Old Testament is in Daniel 12:2, and in both these passages it refers to the blessing of the bright age which is coming, when the curse will be lifted from off creation and death be the exception rather than the rule as at present. When the earth is flooded with the light of the knowledge of the Lord the blessing of ever-lasting life will be enjoyed.

The Old Testament does not lift our thoughts from the earth as the New Testament does. The verse we are considering shows us that eternal life was in God's thoughts before the world began, and in keeping with that it will abide in all its fulness when this world has ceased to be. We live in hope of it, and our hope is sure because based upon the Word of God, who cannot lie.

If any find difficulty in reconciling John's assurance of the present possession of eternal life with Paul's hope of it in the future, they will do well to remember that we commonly use the word "life" in more senses than one. For instance a man refers to a person critically ill and says, "While there is life

there is hope." By "life" he means the vital spark, the vital energy BY which we live. Another man who has been squandering a lot of money in the pursuit of pleasure remarks that he has been "seeing life." He is mistaken of course as to what really constitutes life, but he clearly uses the word as meaning those relationships and enjoyments that go to make up life practically — the life IN which we live.

We have eternal life now as truly and as much as we shall have it, if we are speaking of the former use of the word. But if we think of the latter use we can rejoice that we are going to know it in far fuller measure than we do today. Walking through a greenhouse we espied amongst other tropical plants a cactus which looked like a fairly straight cucumber covered with small spines and stuck upright in a pot. We recognized in it a dwarf specimen of the cactus we had seen by the score in Jamaica standing 20 feet high or perhaps more. The little dwarf was as much alive as the giant cactus. Its life was of precisely the same order. All the difference lay in the environment.

This may illustrate our point, for though we have eternal life the world is an icy place, and the enjoyments proper to that life are found, by the Holy Spirit given to us, in God's Word and

amongst God's people and in God's service, which provide us with a kind of greenhouse in the midst of the cold world. We are in hope however of transplantation into the warm tropical regions to which eternal life belongs. In hope of that the Apostle lived and served, and so do we.

We must notice the word "promised" in verse 2. Eternal life was not merely purposed before the world existed but promised. To whom? — seeing that man as yet did not exist. At any rate we may safely say that when the Lord Jesus became Man to glorify God's name and redeem men it was under the promise that He should become the Fountain Head of eternal life to those given to Him, as is stated in John 17:2.

If verse 2 of our chapter looks on into a coming eternity when the promise made in a past eternity shall be fulfilled, verse 3 speaks of the present in which God's word is being manifested through preaching; and the commandment authorizing that preaching has come forth from God our Saviour, consequently the result of that preaching when believed is salvation. This preaching or proclamation was entrusted in the first place to Paul. It would indeed be well if every one who today has a part in this great work were deeply impressed with its dignity and

importance. Woe betide us if we make the preaching a platform for the manifestation of our own cleverness or importance! It is for the manifestation of the Word of God.

With verse 5 the main theme of the epistle begins. Paul had been to Crete and left before he had had time to give the infant churches instructions as to many things. He therefore left Titus behind that he might do it, and also appoint elders with his authority. Verses 6 to 9 follow, giving the characteristics that must be found in such.

These verses are not a mere repetition of what we have in 1 Timothy 3. Conditions in Crete differed from those at Ephesus. There were similar dangers from "unruly and vain talkers and deceivers" in both places, but the natural characteristics of the Cretian race were peculiarly bad, so much so that some prophet of their own, some heathen seer, had been moved to denounce them in strong terms as "always liars, evil wild beasts, lazy gluttons." Such was the old nature of the converted Cretians, and such it remained in them when converted; and alas! it was manifesting itself and hence Titus in verse 13 is instructed to administer to them a sharp rebuke.

A liar is evidently no lover of the truth. An evil wild beast (for that is what the word used really means) does not love restraint, especially the restraint of good, since insubjection is its very nature. A lazy glutton thinks of little save that which ministers to self, and self in its lowest desires. See, then, how completely the apostolic instructions meet this sad condition.

Those elder men whom Titus was to appoint as bishops were to be such as held fast the faithful word. They were to be lovers of the truth. Moreover they were to hold it fast as they had been taught; that is, they were to recognize the authority with which it had been originally given and to carefully respect that authority and be subject to it. Hence in addition to being themselves sober men they were to be able to minister sound doctrine with effect. The men branded by the Apostle as deceivers were ready to teach anything if only there were money in it, and this of course would be quite in keeping with the Cretian spirit, for to be able to acquire money easily is a prime necessity for the lazy glutton. On the other hand the bishop is to be a man neither given to wine nor to "filthy lucre," or "base gain." Marked himself then by godly features, the very opposite of

those which were natural to the Cretians, he would be well qualified to exercise rule amongst them.

Before proceeding, notice that this scripture assumes that matters in the assembly are to be regulated by God. Had it been just a matter of human preference or choice Paul would have told Titus to stir up the Cretians to develop a church order and to establish church customs as they thought most suited to their island and its ways. He did nothing of the kind, but rather told him to "set in order the things that are wanting" since the divine order has been made known. The fact is that the divine order is extremely simple demanding nothing but lowliness and grace and spirituality — but that really is where the trouble lies, for men naturally love that which is ornate and showy and imposing.

Notice also that the men who were to be ordained as elders, in verse 5, are spoken of as bishops in verse 7. The word in the former verse is presbuteros from which we get the words presbyter, Presbyterian. The word in the latter verse is episcopos from which we get episcopal, Episcopalian. A presbyter is an elder and an episcopos or bishop is an overseer - for that is the

simple meaning of the word — and originally they were but different terms for the same man!

Now the bishops were to be men of soberness and sound in the faith, as we have seen, but all believers are to be sound in the faith as verse 13 shows. That is the thing of first importance. If we are right ourselves — pure ourselves — then all things are pure to us for the inward holiness preserves from infection. On the contrary, the defiled and unbelieving defile all they touch.

Chapter 2

HENCE IN THE opening verses of chapter 2 the Apostle turns the thoughts of Titus away from the bishops to those whom we may call the rank and file of the church. There were more bishops than one in each of these early assemblies yet not all elder men were bishops. Consequently there were found aged men who could be addressed as a class by themselves, as also aged women, young women and young men. Instructions suitable to their varying conditions are given as to each class. It is striking how the words "sound" and "sober" occur in these verses. Each is found three times, though the words in the original may not be in each case precisely the same. It is worthy of note how-

ever that the word, occurring again and again, translated "sound" is one from which we get the word "hygienic" which is so often upon people's lips today. It means healthful. Sound doctrine is in very deed doctrine which makes for spiritual health.

In verse 9 he turns to servants. Any kind of service would be like a galling yoke on the neck of one who was an evil wild beast by nature. Yet here were some of these converted. In their old wild beast days they had served under the lash, as a wild beast serves: they answered again and contradicted as much as they dared, they robbed their masters whenever an opportunity offered. Now they are to be obedient to their masters, acting in an acceptable way in all things, showing all good fidelity, the effect of which would be the adorning of the doctrine of God our Saviour in everything. The doctrine is beautiful in itself, so beautiful, it might be thought, that it is impossible to adorn it further. Yet it may be. When the doctrine of God is exemplified and carried into effect in the beautiful life of a poor slave, who before his conversion was a perfect terror of a man, it is adorned indeed, and made beautiful in the eyes even of careless onlookers.

Now, what can produce such an effect in our lives? What produced it in the lives of some of the degraded Cretians? Nothing but the grace of God. Of that grace and its appearing verse 11 speaks. The law was given by Moses and was made known in the small circle of Israel's race. The grace of God has risen like the sun in the heavens to shine upon all men. Into its shining we have come, for which we shall bless God for ever and ever.

The marginal reading of verse 11, "The grace of God that brings salvation to all men, has appeared," is to be preferred to the text. The point is that now there is salvation for all, and that the grace of God which has brought that world-wide salvation teaches us how to live, while we await the appearing of the glory. The passage is not as clear as it might be in our Authorized Version inasmuch as in verse 13 the words "of the glory" are turned into an adjective, "glorious." There is this striking connection and contrast between the grace which has appeared and the glory which is yet to appear.

The grace of God has shone forth in all its splendour in Christ and His redeeming work. In its scope and bearing it is not confined to Israel, as was the law, but it embraces all; though in its application it is of course limited to all that believe. Hence

verse 12 begins, "Teaching us." Not teaching all but us, who believe. Those who receive this salvation that grace has brought are thereby introduced into the school that grace has instituted.

How often is this great fact overlooked to much harm and loss. Why, there are those who refuse and denounce the fact of the eternal security of the true believer because they think it opens the door to all kinds of loose living! They imagine that if once we were assured of an eternal salvation restraint would be gone; as though the only effective restraint is fear of the whip — the whip of eternal damnation. Grace is far more powerful in its effects than fear, even that fear that was engendered by the law of Moses.

The law, we read, was "weak through the flesh" (Rom. 8:3) and it failed altogether to restrain its workings. Every true believer is however a subject of the new birth and possesses therefore a new nature. The flesh, the old nature, still remains within him, yet it is a judged and condemned thing and upon it grace lays a restraining hand whilst fostering all that is of the new nature. "Ungodliness and worldly lusts" are the natural expression of the old nature, and grace teaches us to deny all these. The new

nature expresses itself in sobriety, righteousness and godliness, and the teaching of grace is that these things should characterize us.

There was of course teaching of a sort under the law, for the Jew had "the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law" (Rom. 2:20). It consisted in the clear laying down of what was right and what was wrong. The law was like a schoolmaster who impartially hands round a code of rules, very peremptory, very clear and well printed, yet without offering to his scholars the least assistance in putting those rules into effect. Grace teaches in a far more effectual way. There is of course the same clearness about all that it enjoins and the standard set is even higher than that which the law demanded, but there is this in addition, it works IN us. When Paul preached the grace of God to the Thessalonians and they received his message in its true character as the Word of God he was able to say that it "effectually works also in you that believe" (1 Thess. 2:13).

That is the way of grace. It works in us, it subdues us. It not only sets a lesson-book before our eyes but bit by bit produces within us the very things that the lesson-book indicates. This is the case of course where the grace of God is really received.

Where it is not really received men may do all kinds of things under cover of it, "turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness" as Jude puts it in his fourth verse. But this is because they are ungodly men and not true Christians.

Grace teaches us to live soberly, that is, "with self-restraint and consideration." It thus puts us each right in regard to ourselves. It teaches us to live righteously, that is, in a way that is right in regard to our fellows. It teaches us to live godly, that is, to give God His right place in our lives. It puts us right in regard to God and man and self, and it sets us in expectation of the appearing of the glory.

Here is a converted Cretian. This wild beast of a man is thoroughly tamed and now plods on serving his master in a sober, righteous and godly way. But suppose he had no prospect! Life to him might then wear a very drab aspect. But grace teaches him to lift up his eyes and look for the approaching glory; the glory being that of "our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ." The glory will be the fruition of all the hopes that grace has awakened. It may well be that by, "the blessed hope" the Apostle indicated the coming of the Lord for His saints, of which he writes to the Thessalonians in his first epistle (1

Thess. 4:15-17), and if so we have both His coming for and His coming with His saints set before us as our hope in verse 13.

The One who is soon to appear is the One who gave Himself for us upon the cross, and verse 14 very strikingly states one of the great objects He had before Him in giving Himself. It was in order to redeem us from the "iniquity" or "lawlessness" under which we had fallen, so that being thoroughly cleansed we might be a people for His own special possession and filled with zeal for good works. It is not enough that we should be delivered from the practice of evil; we are to be keen in the pursuit of what is good, and that not only in a theoretical but also a practical way. We are not only to do good works but also to do them with zeal. How strikingly will all this "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour." Once a liar, an evil wild beast, a lazy glutton: now, redeemed from lawlessness, purified before God, a zealot for good works. What a transformation!

Chapter 3

THE FIRST AND second verses of chapter 3 follow up the same theme, giving further details of the godly behaviour that the Gospel inculcates. Obedience and subjection to authorities,

and gentleness and meekness to all men are features very much the opposite of all that the Cretians were by nature. They are also very much the opposite of what we all are, and this the Apostle puts on record in verse 3. "We ourselves" he says in contrast with the "them" of verse 1. What a picture he gives us in this verse of himself and Titus and all the rest of us, if viewed in our natural characteristics: a fearful indictment but true! That, being such, we should hate one another is hardly surprising, but then we were hateful ourselves. Coming after this how wonderful is verse 4!

Hateful were we, every one of us. Though we were each blind to the hateful features in ourselves we were quite alive to what was hateful in other people, hence the world is full of hatred. Now God looks down upon this scene and there breaks upon the world of hatred the light of His kindness and love. That God should love the unlovable is wonderful: that He should love the positively hateful is more wonderful still! Yet such is the case. The words, "love ... toward man" are the translation of the one Greek word, philanthropia. The kindness and philanthropy of our Saviour God have appeared. The word indicates not merely that God loves man as He loves all His creatures but

that He has a special affection for man — a specially warm corner in His heart for man, if we may so speak.

His philanthropy expressed itself in kindness and mercy, and by His mercy we have been saved.

In Scripture salvation is generally connected with a work accomplished for us. This is true whether we consider Old Testament types or New Testament doctrine. We have to stand still and see the salvation of the Lord which is achieved outside of us. The passage before us is however an exception to this general rule, inasmuch as we are said to be saved by a work wrought upon us and in us. The work in us is quite as necessary as the work for us. This is very plain if we consider the type of Israel's deliverance from Egypt. By the mighty work of God wrought for them they were saved out of the land of bondage, yet in spite of all the wonders accomplished on their behalf the vast majority of them fell in the wilderness and never reached the land of promise. Why? The answer of Scripture is, "So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief" (Heb. 3:19); that is, they had no faith, no work of God took place within them.

Salvation then, according to verse 5, is not according to our works of righteousness but according to God's mercy, and the means of it are "the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost." In John 3 where the new birth is in question we have the Spirit of God as the Agent or Operator and the "water" as the instrument producing it. Here too we have the Spirit and the water, only the latter is alluded to under the term "washing." But we must note that the word, "regeneration" in our verse is not exactly the equivalent of the new birth. The only other place in the New Testament where the word is used is in Matthew 19:28, and it indicates the new order of things which is to be established in the day of Christ's glory. We have not got that new order of things yet but we have come under the washing, the cleansing, the moral and spiritual renovation which is in keeping with that day.

This washing is by the Word. It is so stated in Ephesians 5:26, only there it is the repeated and continuous action of the Word which is in question, here it is the once-for-all, never-to-be-repeated action of the Word in our new birth. The Word however is not operative upon us apart from the action of the Holy Spirit who works in renewing power.

This Scripture speaks not only of the Spirit's initial work in us in new birth, and of the renewing which is consequent upon that, but also of the gift of the Spirit. He has been "poured out" on us abundantly. Thus bestowed He energizes the new life that we now have and works a day-by-day renewing within us, which works out a continuous and increasing salvation from the old life in which once we lived. The Spirit has been poured on us through Jesus Christ our Saviour, and as the fruit of His work. He has been poured on us abundantly, and hence it is that we may enjoy that which really is life in abundant measure. We not only have life but have it abundantly, as the Lord himself tells us in John 10:10.

The work in us, then, is quite as necessary as the work for us. It is equally true that the work for us is quite as necessary as the work in us, and this is indicated in verse 7. We could not become heirs of God merely by the work of the Spirit in us, for we needed to be justified before God and this is accomplished by the grace that wrought for us in Christ. Washed, renewed and justified it was possible for grace to go further and make us heirs, but all these three things were equally necessary.

We are made heirs, you will notice, according to the hope of eternal life; that is, we share equally with Paul in this wonderful hope, as may be seen by comparing this verse with the second verse of chapter 1; though we are none of us apostles as he was.

God saves us in order to make us His heirs and it is striking how He is presented as Saviour in this epistle. It is even more striking how the term Saviour is applied to both God and the Lord Jesus in such a way as to assure us that Jesus is God. In Titus 1, it is "God our Saviour" in verse 3, and "Christ our Saviour" in verse 4. In Titus 3, it is "God our Saviour" in verse 4, and "Christ our Saviour" in verse 6. In Titus 2, it is "our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ" in verse 13.

When at the beginning of verse 8 the Apostle says, "This is a faithful saying" it is not easy to determine whether he refers to what he has just written or whether to what immediately follows, but it would appear to be the former. It seems that Titus was to constantly bring before these converted Cretians the way in which they had been washed and renewed and justified and made heirs, in order that they might be stirred up to the maintenance of those good works which were in keeping with

such grace, and not only in keeping with grace but also good and profitable to men. How clearly this illustrates what is often said, namely that all suitable conduct flows from an understanding of the place in which we are set. Here again we meet with the fact that the knowledge of grace promotes practical holiness and does not lead to carelessness.

By constantly maintaining and affirming the truth Titus would be enabled to avoid all those foolish questions and contentions about the law which were so common in those days. There is nothing like diligence in what is good to shut out evil. There might of course be a man who carried these questions and strivings to such a point that he became a leader of a faction in the church, a maker of a sect — for this is what the word, "heretic" means. Such an one was to be admonished once and twice, but if then he still remained obdurate he was to be rejected. To make oneself into a leader of a party is a serious sin.

The epistle closes with a few words as to other labourers in the service of the Lord. They were to be supplied with all necessary things, and this leads the Apostle to lay it as an obligation upon all saints to apply themselves to labour of a good kind that they might not only have themselves the necessities of life

but have the wherewithal to give and thus be fruitful. The once lazy Cretian is now to be a diligent worker and a helper of others.