

## The Power of a Gospel Ordered Church & Life

Titus 1:1-4

“...I left you in Crete, so that you might put **what remained in order...**”

**Introduction:** If there was a word to describe our time and place in history, one could make a strong case for the word **chaos**. We hear it, observe it, and feel it every day. We observe **disorder** on our college and university campuses where dialogue and exchanges of ideas have given way to professional protestors and destruction of property. We feel its tension in the issue of **immigration**, desiring to be gracious and compassionate to so many who are fleeing harsh circumstances with the possibility of a better life (just like most of our relatives did at some point in the past), but it being complicated with illegal means of getting it done, along with so many abusing the system to further insidious plans. We are shouted at that our **democracy** is at risk, though there is no clarity in how that will happen. Our justice system which is supposed to be blind, impartial, and separate from political trappings has been dragged into to fray of the ugly side of the political spectrum. We've already talked about the fact that there is **disorder in the family unit**, with fathers refusing to take responsibility, divorce rampant, and the institution of marriage itself seen as something old and out of date.

All of this chaos has not led to settled, happy, or content lives but has had effects on adults and children alike. In trying to give words or diagnosis to how people are feeling and how the disarray marks people, we have a proliferation of disorders: *anxiety, bipolar, depression or mood disorder, PTSD, ADHD, body dysmorphic, eating, personality, dissociative, and schizophrenia*. These are all *responses* to the brokenness around and within us. According to **NAMI** (National Alliance of Mental Illness), **1 in 5** American adults experiences mental illness each year, with **50%** of all lifetime mental illness diagnosis beginning by the age of 14, and **75%** by the age of 24. In fact, **suicide is the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of death** among children aged 10-14. Chaos is reigning in our midst and it is touching everyone.

### **BUT NONE OF THIS SHOULD BE SHOCKING OR SURPRISING AS CHRISTIANS!**

God created this world in perfect order, splendor, and majesty to be enjoyed by His creation as they multiplied and filled the earth to His glory. This would have been *satisfying, peaceful, and led to perfect contentment*. But **sin destroyed this possibility**, entering in through the rebellion of man and devastating the creation, out of which came disorder. The creation itself is now under the bondage of corruption, subjected to futility and awaiting redemption (Rom. 8:20-23). Our bodies are under the curse of sin, so we face the degradation of our physical makeup, the culmination being death itself. But we also face disease, pain, suffering, and responses in our mind, body, and soul to all of these factors. The argument to be made is NOT whether we are broken, it is always what is the solution.

As mankind has faced life and reality in this broken world, there have been consequences in our makeup. **Romans 1** tells us that when we reject the obvious and built-in knowledge of God, it leads to foolishness, ungodliness and an unrighteousness that suppresses the truth. The consequence is that God gives man over to the **unnatural** (1:26-27), consumed with passion for each other and committing **shameless acts** with each other. What should be shameful is now accepted and approved. This leads to people being given up to a **debased mind**, filled with *evil, covetousness, malice, murder, strife, inventing evil, disobedience to parents, heartless, faithless, and ruthless, all while giving approval to those who practice the same*. **In other words, the consequence of mankind's rebellion IN a chaotic world is MORE CHAOS in themselves.**

In **2 Timothy 3** we see the chaos created in us having its full effect. It says “in the last days” (which is now), people will be “*lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, and loving of pleasure rather than lovers of God*” (**3:2-4**), and **these will even be those PROFESSING to know Christ and appearing to be Godly.**

Putting these lists together, we see a progression, or more clearly, a *digression* of disorder in this world. Rebellion against the Lord and the truth leads to foolish and disobedient behavior. This foolishness leads to an embracing of self-driven passion and seeking of pleasure, which cannot satisfy but drives for MORE, and in the angst left leaves people with envy, hatred, and malice toward others, looking to blame others for their plight. Once this part of their heart is full-grown, it leads to pure **insanity**, where *logic is thrown out of the window, rationality gives way, and a willingness to cancel or rid oneself of someone who speaks the truth is a must*. Seeking approval from others who tell you you’re okay is a must, and anyone who fails to give approval must be eliminated.

Paul wrote the letter of **Titus** in the midst of a culture of disorder: “*Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, and lazy gluttons*” (Titus 1:12). Not only was the city of Crete (an island south of Greece 160 miles long and 7-35 miles wide) in disorder, but the fledgling church already had false teachers and those who were upsetting whole families. This church was most likely started by people who were at Pentecost in **Acts 2:11**, who heard the gospel and were saved, moving back to their home and making disciples, in which churches developed. It was because of this DISORDER that Paul tasked Titus to “**put what remained in order**” (Titus 1:5). This would have been in terms of elders leading well, by example and pure doctrine, and silencing those who were teaching falsely (1:11). It would be **mobilizing** the church in discipleship, the **older teaching the younger to live out the realities of the gospel** (2:1-10), so that lives would be *ordered properly, moving toward godliness*. Out of this there would be a proper view toward those outside the church, knowing that salvation was for all people (2:11).

One of the key passages in Titus is found in **3:3-7**, where the solution for disorderly lives in the midst of chaos is found. We all start out in disorder in our heart:

*For **we ourselves** were once **foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.** (v. 3)*

Paul admitted that he, Titus, and the rest of the church started out in DISORDER, on the pathway to insanity through depravity. This list is consistent with every culture for all time, and we have NOT progressed beyond this list in our own. So what was the solution to this problem:

*4 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, **5 he saved us**, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the **washing of regeneration and renewal** of the Holy Spirit, **6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.***

The gospel of Jesus Christ brings **order out of chaos**, hope out of misery, trust out of insanity. The gospel is not a nice add-on to other strategies, it IS the transformative solution to every disorder we experience. It washes, renews, justifies, adopts, and brings hope. **It re-orders our lives, reorienting us to know the truth, brings clear purpose, and trains us for godliness.** The new order is salvation – holiness/godliness – training – reaching.

### Order of a New Mission (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**,*

Life in a chaotic world is difficult, and living out that life in God's church is always difficult as well. Mind you, it is glorious, beautiful, and effective, but difficult nonetheless. Just like living together in a home with a family that strives to love each other, the church is made up of all kinds of different people, from different backgrounds, ethnic backgrounds, experiences, habits, and personalities that create variety but also potential tension. Every church faces:

- A group of **sinful people** – We are redeemed, called out of the world to be holy, but our sinful flesh stubbornly sticks with us, which means it will seep out into relationships
- **Attacks from the outside world** – Will the world ultimately take kindly to our offensive message that is exclusive and says people have offended a holy God and deserve punishment?
- **Disunity from within** – Disunity comes from people with different agendas, false teaching, and our enemy who would love to see things crumble from the inside out.
- **Daunting mission** – a disorderly and miserable world means great opportunities for the gospel and disciple making, but it also is a daunting task, one that requires us remembering that all authority has been given to Jesus who will be with us (Matt. 28:18-20).
- **One generation away** – the church at Crete was relatively new, but just like every church, we are always one generation away from losing the initiative of our mission. That means each generation must be compelled to fight FOR what has been entrusted in order to perpetuate.

The **purpose of this letter** was for Paul to encourage and strengthen a **young pastor** whom he disciplined. The goal was to be unified and prepared as a church to be an effective witness to the unbelievers on Crete, and to see the gospel be adorned by all believers there.

Paul, writing with apostolic authority as one who was sent by Jesus Christ (Acts 9:15-16) had been in Crete for a time with Titus after being acquitted of charges and set free from Rome, but now he was going to sail to *Nicopolis* (Titus 3:12). Just as Paul left Timothy in Ephesus, he left Titus here to move the church into its next steps of development. We do not have an overwhelming amount of information about Titus, but we do know he made two trips to Corinth with Paul to collect contributions for the church in Jerusalem. Titus is mentioned 8 times in 2 Corinthians (2:13, 7:6, 13, 14, 8:6, 16, 23; 12:18). Titus was also with Paul and Barnabas in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:1) and was an illustration of the power of the gospel, as Titus was not required to get circumcised since he was a Greek, even though some believed he should to fulfill the Law (Gal. 2:1-5). So Titus was a trusted servant and friend to Paul, so he was given this large assignment before he'd finish his ministry in Dalmatia (2 Tim. 4:10).

Paul had functioned **for the sake of two main things** while in Crete and called Titus to continue the same:

#### **For the sake of the elect**

What drove Paul in his mission, and what assured him of success? It was the fact that he was working "for the sake of the faith of God's elect". In fact, one of the key verses in all of Titus is 3:5, which says

**"He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy."** We are saved as a product of God's mercy, His choice, His love. This truth is as beautiful as it is misunderstood, since we rail against the idea that we are NOT IN CONTROL of our life or destiny. But when fully understood, this reality is like fresh oxygen given to someone trapped in a cave of suffocating smoke.

**What God's elect does NOT mean:** God's elect does not mean that people do not need to respond to the message of the gospel nor does it demotivate those who bring the message (if it is up to God's election, what role do we play?). We respond by faith to the gospel message, since it is by grace through faith that we are saved (Eph. 2:8). But we often have a stunted view of our own sinfulness. Ephesians 2:1-3 says we were dead in our trespasses and sins, meaning we COULD not respond on our own to God, since dead men tell no tales. We were dead, and because of our sin we deserved death eternally, and without something supernaturally happening we would have stayed that way.

**What God's elect does mean, and why it's life giving:** Paul worked on behalf of God's elect, even though it was not his choice nor did he know who else that would be. He knew those who were believers in the church were elect, since the singular proof of election is saving faith, just as the proof of salvation is sanctification, and the proof of sanctification will be glorification. He also knew that evangelization would be effective because the message, though foolish and a stumbling block, would cut through the darkness to those God had chosen. In fact, the term *elect* or variations (chosen or predestined) are seen all through the New Testament (Romans 8:33, 16:13; Col. 3:12; 2 Tim. 2:10; Eph. 1:4-5; John 15:16; 1 Pet. 1:1-2), and the OT (Deut. 7:6-11). Why is this actually life giving?

**Freeing** - Paul does not focus on what someone "*must do*" to qualify as God's elect but rather the faith that characterizes those who are God's. We remember we are products of God's sovereign grace, not our own goodness or ability. We are products of God's love and mercy, meaning God loves us without qualifying that with something we have to do. This frees us to live, obey, and proclaim not in a mindset that is trying to earn something from God, but simply because we are infinitely loved.

**Assuring** - The order here matters. Godly conduct is a PRODUCT of faith given by God, NOT the basis of our salvation. That means that our goodness and obedience does not lead to a relationship with God, rather the relationship with God that gospel faith establishes **leads to righteous actions**. *God is not waiting to love us until we have gotten our lives straightened out. He loves us and demonstrates that love by grace and mercy, unaltered by anything we can do.*

**Securing** - If salvation was up to me, there would be no hope. If keeping my salvation was up to me, I'd fail every time. If I had to maintain righteousness on my own and God required perfect obedience to let me into heaven were up to me, I'd leap headlong into judgment every time. But the fact that we are saved as God's elect means that we are also secure in Him. **John 10:28-30 says**, "*I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one will snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.*" This means that our salvation is secured in the strength of the Father and work of the Son, and no one can remove us from the safety of His hand, even our own sinfulness. What does that mean for those who claim belief and then act in faithlessness? Those who are saved WILL respond in faith which will endure, grow, and obey. A profession of faith without change is a false one, not driven by God's grace but a misunderstanding of it.

### For the sake of truth-driven godliness

*"Grace is not opposed to effort, it is opposed to earning. Earning is an attitude. Effort is an action. Grace, you know, does not have to do with forgiveness of sins alone. (Dallas Willard)*

God's elect by faith will come to grips with the truth, the reality of God and His glory. True repentance leads to a knowledge of the truth (2 Tim. 2:25), where there are some who are always learning but do not come to a knowledge of the truth (2 Tim. 3:7). Salvation brings a new appetite for truth, which inevitably leads to godliness, since we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, are given the Word, and have the mind of Christ (John 17:17; 1 Cor. 2:1).

**This moves us beyond intentions.** There are many who have good intentions, are nice, and seem like good people who know there is a God out there. Salvation is by grace alone, and that grace that produces salvation enlightens us to the truth, which leads us to godliness. If there is no truth, there will be no godliness. If there is no godliness, there is no truth.

This gives us a baseline of **self-evaluation** as well as **ministry evaluation**. Here's what I mean. If you believe today, you are a product of God's grace, love, and choice, which means we have all we need to bow ourselves in worship. This never gets old, is never boring, and drives the rest of our lives. But we are NOT motivated by past grace as much as future grace, that we wait expectantly for more grace, knowing that we can do nothing apart from God. Are you living out a life of worship and grace? Are you dependent on grace or are you doing life on your own? Have you grown stale in worship? ***One of the main reasons our kids think church and worship is boring is because their parents demonstrate that it is!*** Are you growing in the knowledge of God and because you know Him, you are growing in your hatred of sin and have a growing appetite for godliness?

In ministry, are we working hard to communicate the message of the gospel, being totally dependent on the grace of God for effectiveness? Do we trust God for the means of salvation or do we feel we have to add something to the mix to make it more palatable?

### Order of a New Message (1:2-3)

*in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began 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*

### Hope in God's eternal & sovereign grace

What is the end goal of the preaching of the grace of God in the gospel? **Eternal life.** This life actually starts now (John 17:3), which is characterized by **knowing the only and true God and Jesus Christ whom He sent.** The goal of God's sovereign grace in salvation is that we would know God in Christ and do so forever. We are not just saved from punishment, we are saved TO knowing God, having a restored relationship with Him. This means that the God of the universe not only wanted that kind of relationship, He died to get it.

Paul's language here is like standing on a road and looking back to the **left** and looking **forward** to the right. To the left is eternity past, where we see God deciding, choosing, and electing by His sovereign grace and mercy those that He loves. He made promises to Himself that He would fulfill in Christ in order to offer us life in Him. As we look to the right, we see eternity, the space of time that will go on

and we will be His forever, serving, loving, and knowing Him every day without ever burning up a future day. *What does this promise do for us?*

- **God's sovereign grace is seen in eternity past and future, so we can trust it in the present** - How did Paul endure the suffering that came from his being a slave of Christ? He knew that God was working according to His grace and mercy. The new lens we have is that we can see all things through the lens of grace, knowing that God is not making mistakes. How do we deal with loss, cancer, or unexpected heart attacks? We trust that God is operating out of His sovereign grace, drawing in those He loves and refining them so that we will know, enjoy, and treasure Him above all things. This lens moves us from questioning God's goodness in hard times to resting ON HIM in those times, finding as the outcome His grace and peace.
- **We can experience the hope of eternal life now, not just the future** - Life in the here and now is going to be hard and stink. We should long for heaven NOT because it is easier, but because we get to see Jesus and worship the Father without the hindrance of our flesh and sin nature. But we experience life eternal NOW when we embrace the reality that we are called to know the truth, move toward godliness and embrace knowing Christ as our greatest value. This lens sees life not about us, but about Him, not about our comfort but about magnifying Him, not about our own excellence but about His glory.

### **Entrusted with the preaching of the Word**

Paul understood that since he was a product of grace, he now knew that it was NOT up to him to save people, but simply to play his role as a preacher of the message of the gospel. This is what he was entrusted with, a message that brought life but did not originate from him. Again, **this was his assurance and joy**, what kept him going through the suffering, pain, and persecution that he faced in his life of ministry.

### **Order for a New Messenger**

*<sup>4</sup>To Titus, my true child in a common faith:*

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

So he left Titus, his true child (a convert under his ministry) in a common faith and entrusted him to the **grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior**. This is the model of perpetuation, a design and order that says we give ministry away in the way it was entrusted to us. Titus was only going to stay for a time, and then hand it off to elders who would hand it off to faithful men (2 Tim. 2:2) who would be able to teach others also. We only have so much time to be faithful, and in that swath of time, we want to order our lives, homes, and church to be effective in God's harvest.

So that is the book of Titus in a nutshell, a life and church that is set in order so that we can reach a world that lives in the whirlwind of chaos, and has no answers. But we possess the greatest news that anyone could ever receive, that **God saves us, re-ordering our life and moving us from rebellion to peace, from sinner to child, from wrath to redeemed**. May we live out this ordered life to the glory of God.