

From One Slave to Another

Slave Traits: Part One

Titus 1:1a & 4

Introduction

During the reign of the Roman Emperor, Marcus Aurelius, Christianity had become illegal. Persecution of Christians was in season. The penalty for following Jesus Christ was imprisonment, torture and even death.

A young man by the name of Sanctus stood before the Roman governor, on trial for the crime of Christianity – his life literally hanging in the balance.

He was repeatedly told to renounce the faith he possessed, but his mind was resolved no matter what to remain true to Christ.

Every time he was asked a question – no matter what it was – he only answered by saying, “I am a Christian.” No matter what the questions were, he always gave the same unchanging answer – I am a Christian.

According to Eusebius, the ancient church historian who recorded the events of this trial, Sanctus, the young man would not even tell his name, or the nation or city to which he belonged, or whether he was bond or free, but answered in the same manner, “I am a Christian.”

When it became finally obvious that he would not renounce Christ, he was condemned to a public death in the amphitheater. On the day of his execution, he was attacked by wild animals; fastened to a chair of burning hot iron. Eusebius recorded that throughout all of this ordeal, his accusers tried to break his resolve, they heard nothing but what they had heard throughout his trial, “I am a Christian.”

For Sanctus, his entire identity – including his name, citizenship and social status – was bound up in Jesus Christ. What defined him above and beyond everything else was that designation – I am a Christian.

The term Christian wasn't just a title though – it was a new way of thinking; it was a new way of living.ⁱ

More than ever before the church is in need of going back to the biblical drawing board and answering the question – what exactly does it mean to be a Christian; to live and act like a Christian?

In our world today, the term Christian has become so broad and elastic, that one size now fits all.

Today you can claim the title, Christian, even if you don't even care about Christ.

Today you can be considered a Christian and deny the deity of Christ, the virgin birth of Christ, the coming judgment of the world by Christ, a future kingdom whose King is Christ, a heaven for those who believe in Christ and a future hell for those who don't.

You can even be a Christian leader today and deny the need for Christ's atoning death on the cross.

In fact, a growing number of people who call themselves Christians believe that salvation doesn't even have to involve the cross of Christ.

You can be a Christian today and basically have the attitude that the gospel is way too restrictive and the Bible is far too intolerant.

A Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life found that 65% of the people polled said they believed the basic message of the Bible while at the same time saying they believe in the legitimacy of other religious tenants which included everything from reincarnation to astrology.

Every so often, I'll read from what are normally considered Christian – even evangelical – journals and magazines, and I am more and more amazed at how quickly the undertow of secular thought is

sweeping the church out to a sea of moral uncertainty and doctrinal confusion.

Many churches and denominations today are convinced that our commission as Christians is as much about saving the planet as it about saving people.

In fact, more than ever before, you are likely to be considered un-Christian if you don't buy into the politically correct perspective of the environmentalists and the abortionists and the gay activists.

I was in the audience of a debate a few months ago where a mainline denominational leader was debating an evangelical leader on the biblical basis for homosexuality and same sex marriage.

What amazed me was how she was able to literally claim for her point of view, that she and those like her were the ones who were actually following the core values of Christianity and the loving nature of Christ.

In other words, to call anything sinful is unloving and that would mean that you are not a good Christian.

So the church needs to change her message if she ever hopes to be viewed by the world as "Christian".

Sometime ago a man in our congregation sent me an article from the News and Observer. The article interviewed a pastor from a mainline denominational church in our city.

The pastor was asked, "What would you say to someone who's thinking about giving your church a try?" The pastor responded, "They would be welcome regardless of who they are and regardless of their belief system." The pastor went on to add, "We don't try to convert anybody."

So the reporter asked him, "Well, what exactly is your church known for?" "For believing in nothing!" – Okay, that was my answer. This pastor said, "We are known for having a positive spiritual message, so that we can feel better when we leave than when we came in."

In other words, no matter what you believe in or how you might behave, church is all about feeling good about yourself when you leave.

The guy in our church who sent me this article wrote in the margin, tongue in cheek the words, "Hey, sometimes I don't feel better after your sermons – could you work on that?"

I am. I'm trying to offend everybody so you won't feel so alone.

The truth is, you can believe just about anything you wanna believe and feel pretty good about your position and opinion, until you open up the Bible.

The Bible has a way of messing all that up; because the true gospel of Christianity isn't interested in relating *to* the world – the gospel is interested in saving people *from* the world – and at the same time renewing the mind of the believer that is constantly being influenced *by* the world..

I get these advertisement cards from churches in my mail box and they all say the same thing – come to our church because we're relevant – you can be comfortable with us – the coffee's great; the music is cool and the sermons are dynamic – we're all about being relevant – which is to be interpreted – we're not gonna provoke anybody.

Can I tell you something about myself? I need to be provoked. I hope my wife doesn't hear this.

- Truly, I need to be provoked to live for somebody rather than myself (Hebrews 10);
- I need my mind renewed and transformed so that it doesn't so easily justify sin (Romans 12);
- I need the Bible to act as a sword to cut through the façade of motives because I can fool myself (Hebrews 4);
- I desperately need the fellowship and accountability of other believers who follow hard after Jesus Christ (Hebrews 10); I have a friend in the ministry and I love to hear him pray because when I do it so deeply convicts me that I do not know how to pray like I ought.
- We need to be exposed to the word of God, which is profitable, telling us where we're wrong and where we're right and how to believe and behave correctly (2 Timothy 3).
- We need to have our lives redefined.

I want you to take your New Testament and turn to a letter where, in 25 sentences or less, the Apostle Paul is going to stick his nose into just about every arena of life and redefine it all.

It's a very short letter to a church leader named Titus. And in this letter, Paul is going to redefine everything:

- He's gonna redefine spiritual maturity
- Paul is gonna redefine true leadership
- He's gonna redefine what it means to be a godly man and a godly woman
- He's gonna redefine the home

- He's gonna redefine pure relationships
- He's gonna redefine sexual purity
- He's gonna redefine the Christian's testimony
- He's gonna redefine the gospel

And do we ever need all of the above redefined . . . re-clarified . . . re-stated.

Paul wrote three letters to men who were serving as teaching elders or pastor-teachers. So we refer to these three letters as the Pastoral Epistles – or simply, Letters to Pastors.

We know them as First and Second Timothy and Titus.

They were not exclusively for the benefit of the pastor teacher – but for the congregations they led. These were inspired by the Holy Spirit – they would become Books of the New Testament Canon.

As early as the 3rd century, the letter to Titus was included in a list of apostolic letters, considered necessary for the life of the church.ⁱⁱ

Most believe that Paul wrote this in between his other two pastoral letters – in between First and Second Timothy.

Paul would refer to both Timothy and Titus as his sons in the faith.

You'll notice in *verse 1* that the letter begins a little differently than the way we wrote letters or emails today.

It begins with the name of the writer – **Paul**.

Now we typically end our letters with our signature – but not in these days. Whenever you opened a letter in these days, you would know immediately who the author was.

The name, Paul, is from the Latin, *Paulus* – which means, *small, or little*. He had been born a Roman citizen and this was his Gentile or Roman name.ⁱⁱⁱ

His middle name, so to speak, was the Hebrew name *Saul* – his Jewish parents had proudly named him after the first King of Israel.

But throughout his ministry, he would choose to be known, not by the name of a former king, but by the common name of a Gentile – a name without any particular Jewish tradition.

And since Paul referred to himself as the ***Apostle to the Gentiles*** – (***Romans 11:13***) – he would choose this common, Gentile name throughout his ministry.

By the time he wrote to Titus, Paul was a veteran missionary, church planter, pastor teacher and theologian.

In His wonderful new publication entitled *Insights*, Chuck Swindoll, the Chancellor of Dallas seminary writes that when Paul sent this letter to Titus, Paul had seen just about everything. He had survived years of misunderstanding, controversy, slander, betrayal; disciples thrilled him and then failed him. Friends had come and gone. Thriving churches he'd planted flirted with apostasy. Congregations continually looked to him for guidance and then thanked him by rejecting his authority or questioning his integrity. In success, he was accused of boasting; in prison, he was dismissed as a failure. No one knew better than Paul how rewarding, yet how frustrating ministry could be. He had suffered repeated disappointments with people . . . the scars he had received over the years would be his gift to Titus, who needed these reminders as he struggled to stabilize churches on the unruly island of Crete.^{iv}

There was no one better to prepare Titus for the challenges of ministry on the island of Crete than Paul.

Crete was located in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea. It was the midway port to the continents beyond and a melting pot for anyone and anything.

During the days of Titus, the island of Crete held up to a million residents occupying a hundred famous cities along the coast.

The citizens of Crete had a reputation for deception and vice. In fact, if you said that someone was Cretising that meant he was lying. The expression, “playing a Cretan with a Cretan” meant that you tricked a trickster – you got the better of a deceiver by out-deceiving him.^v

The very name of the island had come to represent corruption and deception and dishonesty and every form of vice.

Talk about a mission field . . . and talk about pressure for this young pastor!

Titus is going to need inspired instruction . . . words of wisdom from a wise and seasoned Christian.

Like the words of Hudson Taylor, who, as a veteran missionary pioneer to China in the last century, spoke to his staff and audience of believers on one occasion and said, “It doesn't matter how great the pressure is, what really matters is where the

pressure lies – whether it comes *between* you and God, or if it *presses* you nearer to the heart of God.^{vi}

What great mentoring . . . from a veteran missionary.

In this letter, Paul will come to Titus and to everyone who truly means it when they say, “I am a Christian” . . . and mentor us along . . . here’s how you stand for Christ – here’s how you handle the pressure.

Let me redefine life for you.

And the first thing Paul will convict us with and challenge us with his how he refers to himself.

Paul’s Obligation: A Slave

Notice further in *verse 1, Paul – a bond-servant of God*.

In addition to the name Christian, the Bible calls believers by a number of different names – children of God, citizens of heaven, ambassadors, branches, infants, joint-heirs – and more. And all of these titles help us understand a little better what it means to be a Christian.^{vii}

However, the Bible uses one term more frequently than any other – one word used nearly 40 times in the New Testament to refer to the believer – from the original Greek word, *doulos*, which should be translated, slave.

The overriding description of the Christian’s relationship to Jesus Christ is the relationship between a master and his slave.

The problem is, you’ll never read it that way – because the English translation, going all the way back to the King James version and the Geneva Bible that predated it, the word *doulos* is softened in its translation with the word bond-servant, or servant.

In an effort to avoid the negative imagery and cruelty bound up in the slave trade throughout Europe and into the Americas, translators over the centuries chose to translate *doulos* a little more sensitively – by translating it, servant.

It’s interesting to know that the Greek language has several words that can refer to servants – but *doulos* isn’t one of them.^{viii}

Although the duties of servants and slaves often overlapped, there is a key distinction between the two; servants are hired; slaves were owned.

Servants had a measure of personal rights and freedom in choosing who they worked for and what they did. Slaves had no freedom, no rights – they

were considered in the days of Titus and our own English speaking world for centuries – without personal rights. They were possessions rather than persons.

What’s lost on us is that when we read today this phrase by Paul in Titus chapter 1 – you don’t suck in your breath and shudder at the gravity of this term.

It doesn’t offend our sensitivities . . . it doesn’t confront our misconceptions of personal autonomy as Christians.

We would prefer to think that we have an option to obey Christ, to serve Him, to belong entirely to Him.

We don’t quite get it when the Apostle Peter referred to every Christian as a slave of God.

We would rather believe we can negotiate with Him over the terms of His will; that we can protest with what He does to our bodies; that we can fuss at Him about the inconveniences of His service; that we can halfheartedly fulfill His clear commands; that we can actually complain at the lateness of His blessings or the ill-timing of His burdens.

You see, we think we’ve been hired by God.

No wonder we complain about overtime . . . long hours of inconvenient service – the hourly wage . . . we’ve been trained to take our complaints to the top if our manager doesn’t make our job as comfortable as possible.

Who’s in charge of the benefit package around here?

Have you forgotten, Paul asked the Corinthians, ***“you don’t belong to yourself anymore . . . you’ve been bought with a price . . . your body and everything about you now belongs to the one who bought you – God (1 Corinthians 6:20).***

Charles Spurgeon, the British pastor of the 19th century saw this problem and said, “Where our Authorized Version softly puts it “servant” it really is “slave”. The early saints delighted to count themselves as Christ’s absolute property, bought by him, owned by him, and wholly at his disposal. Paul even went so far as to rejoice that he had the marks of his Master’s brand on him and he cries, “Let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.” That was the end of all debate; he was the Lord’s and the marks of the whips, the rods and the stones were viewed as the branding of Paul’s body as the property of Jesus the Lord. now if the saints of old time gloried in obeying Christ, I pray that you and I will [do the same]^{ix}

Paul is redefining our freedom. He's turning it all upside down.

It is only as a person becomes the slave of the Creator that he can begin to experience true freedom . . . the way of freedom is through slavery to God.^x

Another author from the 1800's wrote it this way, "Slavery [to God] is the only [liberty in life]. Liberty does not mean doing as you like, it means liking what you ought – and doing that. Such slavery to Christ is the only nobility."^{xi}

Find the Christian who is arguing with God over the terms of his will and you'll find a Christian bound in frustration and hobbled with despair.

But find a man or woman or a young person who stands and says with Paul – ***I am a slave of God*** – and you will find someone liberated to serve and live with contagious joy.

Like the young lady at a Bible conference held on her campus; she stood up and before her peers held up a sheet of paper and explained, "This page represents my life, dedicated to Christ – this piece of paper is blank – it's been left for Him to fill in as He pleases – but I have already signed my name at the bottom of the page.

I am a Christian! What does that mean? It means, "I am owned by Christ, He is my Master and my Lord."

Paul's Occupation: An Apostle

Paul goes on to say in *verse 1*, ***not only that he is a slave of God, but an apostle of Jesus Christ.***

Slavery referred to his obligation; apostleship referred to his occupation.

The word apostle (apostolos) comes from 2 words, when combined mean *to be sent forth*.

The word was used more widely to refer to someone who was authorized to deliver a message from a King.

In that way, the apostle was an ambassador, or even a missionary sent on behalf of Christ and the church, with a message to another people.^{xii}

Paul even used the word *apostle* to refer to Timothy and Titus as messengers of the church and his own fellow workers (***2 Corinthians 8:23***).

But Paul is using it here in Titus 1 in the official narrow sense –referring to a select few men who were personally commissioned by the resurrected Lord.

And the reason for that is this: Titus is going to need to speak with apostolic authority as he appoints elders and instructs the church on how to conduct themselves.

Titus is going to be challenged. He's going into churches to bring order and structure and make appointments.

Can you imagine someone coming to Colonial today from the outside and after 6 weeks saying, "Alright – here are my appointments for elders and deacons."

That's exactly what Titus is going to do.

And people are going to say, "Who asked you? How do you think you can waltz onto our island and into our churches and decide the officers and leaders of our church?"

Who are you again?

My name is Titus.

Titus? That's a Latin name – are you a Jew?

No.

You're a Gentile?

Yes.

But you were circumcised as a believing Jew, right?

No . . . never was.

Were you trained in Jerusalem?

Nope.

Did you ever meet Christ personally?

No.

So you're not technically an Apostle?

That's right.

Listen son, the pillars of this church were saved years ago at Pentecost when they traveled to Jerusalem and heard Peter preach.

Who sent you here anyway?

Well, let me show you – I have a letter from Paul the Apostle – "Yea, we know him, but does he know you?"

Oh yeah, just look down at *verse 4*. ***To Titus, my true child in the common faith.***

In other words, Titus was led to faith by Paul himself. Titus was discipled by Paul, personally. And Paul says that the faith of Titus is the same faith as his own – they share a common bond – a common Lord – a common faith.

Which would have been remarkable for these pillars of the church to read here – Paul, a former Pharisee – a devoted Jew, a faithful Rabbi, a Hebrew among Hebrews, a man impeccable in his Jewish heritage – is calling an uncircumcised Gentile convert – my son.^{xiii}

In other words, "Titus and I are related, in the family of God together . . . and we got in the same way – this common faith – in Jesus Christ.

Titus probably paused there to let that all sink in . . . and then he might have said, “Oh, and while we’re reading here, you might notice the next verse – **verse 5 – for this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I direct you.**

Case closed.

By the way, Titus was perfect for the job.

Earlier Paul had sent him to Corinth to help straighten out the mess – what a church – what problems – what division and compromise.

Titus succeeded in bringing about unity and he even strengthened the reputation of Paul in the eyes of the Corinthian church (**2 Corinthians 7:6-7; 13-16**).

Titus became Paul’s personal troubleshooter.^{xiv} Titus was sent on the toughest assignments.

In fact, Paul sent Titus from Corinth to a province known as Illyricum where a church was struggling to survive in a difficult culture.

According to the Roman historian Polybius, “the Illyrians were common enemies of everyone”; they didn’t get along with anybody. Strabo, a contemporary of Titus wrote that the people of Illyricum were wild and given to their primary occupation as pirates.^{xv}

Can you imagine?

All that was wonderful preparation for the Island of Crete.

Titus would confront disorderly churches with several years of history . . . anybody knows you don’t just waltz in and change the color of carpet, or the stationary, or the way it’s always been done and you surely don’t show up in Crete and tell the church who the elders are going to be?

When I read the job that Titus is supposed to perform – choosing elders and leaders – I can’t imagine the confrontation – the hurt feelings – the bruised egos of men passed over in the reordering of the church – the change!

You just don’t do that!

I can still remember exactly how I felt the first time I ever decided to bring a change to a ministry. As a college senior, I accepted an assistant role at a church on one of the mountains in Tennessee about an hour away from the Bible College I attended. The pastor was a seminary student who was a few years older than me and married – he’d served the church for less than 6 months.

He preached most Sunday mornings to about thirty people and it was my role to preach on Wednesday nights to about ten. I would drive up there in a borrowed car and preach to about ten people who faithfully attended.

Oh, the name of the mountain was Jump Off Mountain and the name of the church was Jump Off Baptist Church. Welcome to Jump Off . . . that should have been my first warning.

The church looked and smelled old. It seated about 75 people, with a little one step platform and a small choir loft that was never used.

There was a man in the church who had been there for 25 years. He taught the one adult class on Sunday morning and basically ran everything. His wife played the piano.

On the wall behind the pulpit, just above the choir loft was a banner about 6 feet wide with an inspirational statement of some sort on it and I think a Bible reference. But the banner had faded . . . the edges of the paper had curled and turned brittle and turned brown. In fact, there were several places where this paper had actually cracked open.

And whenever anyone sat in the little chapel and looked at the preacher – that banner was unavoidable.

I talked with the seminary student about an idea I had to create a new logo for the church and a brand new banner. It was time to give this church some fresh momentum. So, I contacted an artist at school and we began working on it.

The next Sunday morning, filled with excitement, I went into the choir loft and took down that old banner. I remember leaning on one of the pews in the choir loft, nailing up the new banner when this pillar of the church walked in. He got a few steps inside the auditorium and then yelled, “What are you doing?” I said, “I’m putting up the new banner.” His face was as red as a beat – he was livid . . . he pointed his finger at me and said, “Young man, that banner has been up there for 20 years.” I wanted to say, “I would have guessed 100.” Actually I was too shocked to say anything. He stormed out of that church and slammed the door behind him and the pastor had to go after him and talk him into calming down. Meanwhile, I took down the new banner and actually nailed the old one back up on the wall.

When I read that Paul is asking Titus to go into established churches and decide which men will be elders – I can’t imagine going to Jump Off Baptist

church and saying to that man – I’m appointing 2 deacons and 1 elders and you aren’t any of them.

Paul . . . you got any encouragement for me?

Paul writes at the end of *verse 4, Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.*

Grace to strengthen you . . . grace to pray . . .
grace to forgive . . . grace to serve . . . grace to
endure . . . grace to persevere.^{xvi}

Peace for reassurance . . . peace in the midst of
struggle . . . peace when everything around you is
chaotic.

The source of this grace and peace is God Himself.

The letter of Titus is a letter from one slave to another.

An old, battle scarred slave who writes to a younger slave – and to all of us – and he tells him with the wisdom of both truth and experience; Titus, when you take your stand and say, “I am a Christian – when you effectively say, I am a slave of God – one of Christ’s messengers” don’t forget to draw from the divine reservoir of grace and peace.

There is just enough for one day at a time, backed up by the limitless supply of God the Father and our Savior, Jesus Christ.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 1/8/2012 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Adapted from John MacArthur, *Slave* (Thomas Nelson, 2010), p. 7

ⁱⁱ George W. Knight III, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Pastoral Epistles* (William B. Eerdmans, 1992), p. 3

ⁱⁱⁱ D. Edmond Hiebert, *Titus and Philemon* (Moody Press, 1957), p. 16

^{iv} Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll’s New Testament Insights: 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus* (Zondervan, 2010), p. 257

^v Robert Black and Ronald McClung, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon* (Wesleyan Publishing House, 2004), p. 2011

^{vi} Swindoll’s Insights, p. 268

^{vii} John MacArthur, *Slave*, p. 12

^{viii} *Ibid.*, p. 16

^{ix} MacArthur, *Slave*, p. 20

^x Gene A. Getz, *The Measure of a Christian: Studies in Titus* (Regal Books, 1983), p. 17

^{xi} MacArthur, p. 222

^{xii} Jon C. Laansma, *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: Volume 17* (Tyndale House, 2009), p. 125

^{xiii} R. Kent Hughes & Bryan Chapell, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, (Crossway Books, 2000), p. 278

XIV Life Application Bible Commentary: 1 & 2 Timothy/Titus General Editor, Grant Osborne (Tyndale House, 1993), p. 234

XV Swindoll's Insights, p. 258

XVI David Campbell, Opening up Titus (Day One Publications, 2007), p. 22