

Passion

Slave Traits: Part Two

Titus 1:1b

In 1798, a board game made it over to the United States called The New Game of Human Life. The game was made up of moves based on virtues and vices. The virtues sped you through game and vices slowed you down. Parents were encouraged to play the game with their children. And the game's creators spelled out the primary purpose of the game – and I quote – “Life is a voyage that begins at birth and ends at death. God is at the helm . . . and your reward lies beyond the grave.”

A man by the name of Milton Bradley took up the legacy of that game and in 1860 created a board game and called, “The Checkered Game of Life.” The good path included honesty and bravery. The slower path included idleness and disgrace. Industry and Perseverance led the game players to win wealth and success. Bradley described it as, quote, “a highly moral game that encourages children to lead exemplary lives and entertains both old and young with the spirit of friendly competition.”

He evidently didn't play games at my house.

100 years later in 1960 the Milton Bradley Company released an anniversary edition, called simply, The Game of Life and it went on to sell 35 million copies. The game had been revised to have the players earning money to buy furniture and grow a family. Vices and virtues were non-existent. The winner of the game was the one who at the “Day of Reckoning” had the most money.

That's not all.

The game was revised again in the 1990's as the Milton Bradley designers tried to make the game less about money. This time, the family is even out in favor of game players saving endangered species or solving pollution problems. They were the ones rewarded with cash prizes which ultimately created the winner.

And then in 2011, the game was revised again. This time players have the ability to do whatever they want and get rewarded for it. They can attend school, travel, start a family, or whatever they like. Values were up-for-grabs. You get as many points donating a kidney to some needy person as you do for choosing to go scuba diving. There is no end or last square to the game – you stop any time you want – because – subtle hint here, we're not gonna mention the end of life. In fact, the game's description says, and I quote, “Do whatever it takes to *retire* in style . . . at the end of the game.”¹

What a change in perspective – reflected even in the games we play.

The revisions of this game serve as a description of our own cultural digression over the past 200 years.

In the original game, the successful winner was the person who acquired the most virtues and avoided the most vices and who, by the way, determined virtues and vices? God did – and He was at the helm of our journey through the game of life.

But then God was dismissed and virtues and vices became moral expressions of courage and industry over idleness and disgrace because whatever you did – you wanted to be the winner with the most money at the end of the game.

And then the day of reckoning is not a problem so long as you have plenty of money.

And finally, we're all encouraged to choose to do whatever we want – we'll even be rewarded for doing something sacrificial for someone else as equally as choosing to go diving.

And whatever you do, remember that you're living for retirement . . . that's the end-all of everything – all of your planning and decisions and

investments are for the goal of retirement. Just make sure you arrive at that stage with as much stuff as you can get.

What a difference between that and the original game which said your reward would be given to you *after* the grave – after this life – so live with eternity in view and God before whom there will be a day of reckoning.

And money – gold – on that day, gold will be nothing more than pavement.

The loss of moral values and the courage to list moral vices has deeply impacted our culture, has it not?

In the wake of the London riots, just a few months ago, one religious leader in Great Britain had the courage to say that the rioting was merely a symptom of moral disintegration throughout the western world.

The Wall Street Journal carried his statement; This leader said, and I quote, “There has been a tsunami of wishful thinking that has washed across the West – wishful thinking that you can have sexual relations without the responsibility of marriage; children without the responsibility of parenthood; social order without the responsibility of citizenship, liberty without the responsibility of morality and self-esteem without the responsibility of work.”

He went on to add – There are large parts of Britain, Europe and even the United States where religion is a thing of the past, and there is no counter-voice to the culture of buy it, spend it, wear it, flaunt it, because you’re worth it. The message is that morality is passé, conscience is for wimps, and the single overriding command in life to follow is – Thou shalt not be found out.”

He went on to quote from Harvard historian Niall Ferguson, has a fascinating passage in his recent book "Civilization," in which he asks whether the West can maintain its primacy on the world stage or if it is a civilization in decline.

He quotes a member of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, tasked with finding out what gave the West its dominance. He said: At first we thought it was your weapons; then we thought it was your democracy; then we said it must be your capitalism. But for the last few decades we have known that what gave the west its dominance – it was your religion.ⁱⁱ

His observations are insightful, but his answer is shortsighted.

The solution isn’t religion – in fact, I would argue that the world is more religious than ever. Religion is big business.

When Paul arrived at Athens, he commented on how religious the city was – there were statues of gods and goddesses everywhere. In fact, they were so afraid that they might have missed a god, they built an altar to the god they didn’t know about.

And Paul introduced to them the God of the ages – the Creator God whose Son came to earth to redeem mankind, not only from rioting and riotous living, but empty religion.

When one of the young protégés of the Apostle Paul began his ministry on the island of Crete – he was surrounded by religion and religious mythologies; he was submerged into a relativistic culture where lying and deceiving was part of the game.

There were no virtues to win and vices didn’t slow anybody down; it was every man for him.

And the answer certainly wasn’t another religion.

The answer was a spiritual reformation, bound up in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

That’s why as Paul introduces himself to the churches in Crete –through his letter to Titus – which is where I invite your attention to return – he informs both Titus and the churches that he is a very passionate man.

In fact, he will describe himself with the kind of passions that will change a person’s life – and his relationships – and his work ethic – and his perspective – and his life, in general.

If the Christian ever hopes to impact his world – these passions must become our passions.

1. Passionate about God’s elect

If you were with us in our last session, you may remember from verse 1 that Paul introduced himself as the slave of God.

The word *doulos* appears in that first self-disclosing title – translated “bond-servant”.

I hope you never forget from our former study that the English language has through the centuries attempted to soften the translation by using the term “servant” instead of “slave.”

But the fact remains. There are plenty of Greek terms for servant, and *doulos* isn’t one of them.

Doulos means slave.

And the difference between a slave and a servant in the first century to this very century; a servant is hired – a slave is owned.

A slave had no rights or will of his own – his will was to fulfill the will of his master. Study the life of Paul and you will discover he really meant it when he said, “I am God’s slave.”

But that isn’t just for Paul, the Apostle. God hasn’t hired us either. We have no right to complain about overtime, or negotiate for better wages or better living conditions, or better health reports or nicer treatment by those around us.

We haven’t been hired – we have been purchased, Paul wrote, so that we are no longer our own, **for we have been bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20).**

Paul then described himself as **an apostle** – a messenger boy for Jesus Christ.

And he was passionate about both the message and his calling as a messenger.

Paul frankly lived in a hurry.

I was behind a van the other day, a bunch of ladders on the roof of the van, on racks; splattered paint on the back doors and on the bumper – obviously a painting company van. The driver was going 40 miles an hour in a 45 mile an hour speed zone.

That’s an unpardonable sin.

I was stuck behind him for several miles; he just wouldn’t speed up – or have the decency to pull over it was a Sunday drive for him. I finally got a chance to pass him, legally – in case you’re wondering – and I saw he was a young guy – the window rolled down . . . he’s just enjoying the workday.

I couldn’t help but laugh to myself as I drove past him – his boss is probably wondering where in the world he is – but this guy is getting paid by the hour – he doesn’t really own anything about the job . . . everything’s just fine in slow motion.

The Apostle Paul was not only owned by God, he owned his calling from God.

I am all of the above – why? – middle part of verse 1: **for the faith of those chosen of God.**

The construction of this Greek phrase – kata – translated “for” – “for the faith” – with the accusative points toward the end or the Goal [which Paul has in mind].ⁱⁱⁱ

In other words, Paul is saying, “I am a slave of God and an apostle of Christ for this goal – this is my passion – the faith of those who’ve been chosen by God.

This theme is picked up down in **verse 13** where he tells Titus to correct those in the church who are following after fables so that they will be **sound in the faith.**

Over in **chapter 2 and verse 2** he exhorts the **older men to be sound in faith.**

To be anchored to the genuine article of faith.

How passionate are we in relaying to the next generation of believers – to Christians at large – the soundness of our faith.

I shared with my GreenHouse class last Sunday night the story of D.L. Moody, the famous evangelist of 1800’s who was used by the Lord to establish what we now know as Moody Bible Institute, and Moody Press; he preached in crusades throughout England and America. The church he began is now named Moody Church, pastored by Erwin Lutzer.

When D.L. Moody applied as a young man for church membership in his home church, in that day – the mid-1800’s – an interview was required with the deacons to discern the candidates understanding of the gospel. After his interview with the deacons, Moody was declined for membership based on insufficient knowledge of the gospel.

But they didn’t just leave him there – they put him on a one-year course of study in the word and then interviewed him again. At the end of that interview, they received him into membership, the records showed, get this – with reservation.

How many churches would even care today with what people truly understand and believe? The average church says, “Just believe . . . just join us . . . promise to give a tithe . . . and be a nice person.”

Imagine the church today requiring a certain level of understanding of the doctrines of the faith before being allowed to join the church!

Someone mentioned to me a book – and I ordered it and skimmed it before throwing it away.

It certainly lived up to its title. It was written by a pastor in a liberal mainline denominational church with the title, “What’s the least I can believe and still be a Christian?”

What’s the least I can believe and still be a Christian? It was no surprise that the author would write that Biblical inerrancy was actually detrimental to authentic faith.^{iv}

He also went on to basically affirm homosexuality; argue for evolution; deny the literal,

eternal state of hell; suggest that unbeliever's just might make it into heaven, and on and on.

I found it ironic the book was published by John Knox Press – John Knox, the Scottish Reformer would roll over in his grave.

The question isn't, "what's the least I can believe and still be a Christian?"

That's like a groom asking his bride at the altar, what's the least number of vows I can promise and still be your husband?

What's the least I can do as a father and still be a Dad?

What's the least I can do at work and still keep my job?

What's the least I can believe and still be a Christian?

The Apostle Paul was passionate to establish the soundness of the faith of those who were true believers.

The real question is, "What's the most I should believe because I am a Christian?"

Paul is telling us at the outset of this letter that he is passionate developing and strengthening the content and substance of the faith of God's elect.

He lived for the sake of the gospel. His passion was the body of Christ. He was shipwrecked, nearly stoned to death, beaten, imprisoned and ultimately executed as a martyr because of passion to advance the gospel of Christ and build up the faith of those who belonged to Christ.

Paul is passionate about the soundness of the faith – notice, *of those chosen by God*.

Now that phrase has caused a lot of heartburn over the centuries, hasn't it? Those chosen by God – from the word, *eklektos*, from which we get our word, elect.

Perhaps it will be helpful to understand the two sides of the coin of salvation.

One side expresses God's perspective (and that will always remain a mystery!) The other side presents man's perspective – and we've easily mastered that angle.

Since salvation is described in terms of marriage between Christ and His bride, think about salvation in these terms:

1. First, there is the sovereign proposal of God
2. Secondly, there is the willing acceptance of the sinner

Let me poll the audience? How many of you guys proposed marriage to your wife? This is not a trick question.

How many of you guys said the words to your girlfriend that went something like this – Will you marry me? Will you be my wife, even though I am forever unworthy of you!

And all the ladies said – "Amen, you got that right!"

Here's how it usually works – not always – but most of the time.

Eventually some guy comes to the realization that this woman – this creature of enrapturing delight and infuriating complexity (I'm just preaching the whole counsel of God) – he says to himself, she is not someone I just want to live with – she is someone I cannot live without.

And all the men said, "Amen."

You really haven't fallen in love with her – you are actually choosing to love her and you had made up your mind that she's the one!

And so you proposed.

She also came to the same conclusion – you were her choice too.

But listen, your choices did not make a marriage.

Somebody had to propose – and you finally got around to it.

And she accepted your proposal.

Now on the wedding day if I asked the bride– did you choose him? She could say, "Of course I did."

And if I asked the groom, did you choose her? Of course I did.

But in the order of events, he proposed to you and you accepted his proposal – which led to a marriage.

Election is the God initiated proposal of marriage to the Bride whom He's chosen for His Son. It's actually an arranged marriage.

However, no member of the bridal party is going to heaven who hasn't responded to the divine proposal. You have accept His proposal . . . you have to say "yes" to Jesus!

Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. (Romans 10:13)

Now you can stay up all night if you want trying to figure out the mystery of God's initial proposal. I would rather join Paul, the great theologian and, by the way, the greatest evangelist on the planet, in delivering the terms of the wedding contract so that those who believe give me the privilege of having been the one to tell them about Christ.

Paul even said in Romans, that the unbeliever cannot believe in someone they've never heard about – so they need a messenger – faith comes by

hearing and hearing by the word of God (Romans 10:17)

Unbelievers cannot accept the proposal of marriage until they've heard the news of the Bridegroom – Jesus Christ.

And let me add this – how do you know if you're one of the elect? It's really simple. Have you accepted His proposal? Have you said "yes" to Jesus? Have you accepted the proposal of marriage, bound up in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

If you have, the doctrine of election is referring to you.

The doctrine of election is a positive doctrine intended to dazzle the bride – He chose me.

No woman gets to the wedding altar and then says to her future husband – I just can't get out of my mind all those other girls you didn't choose. I'm just so disturbed about why you didn't choose them?

No the point of this doctrine is simply for the amazement and wonder of the bride – He chose me.

I really don't understand it, but isn't it amazing?

Listen, I don't understand how Jesus Christ could pay 2,000 years ago for a sin I'll commit tomorrow.

I don't understand it, but isn't it amazing?

I don't understand how He's gonna take the dust of my body in the grave and reconstruct it and glorify it and immortalize it and in an instant reunite it with my spirit which has been with Him since the moment of my death – I don't understand it, but isn't it wonderful?

Paul effectively says, "I happen to be passionate about delivering the truth of the gospel to those who believe."

Frankly, there's nothing more thrilling than seeing someone hear the gospel and believe – to watch someone's eyes open with understanding by means of the initiating work of God's grace."

How passionate are we to deliver the saving gospel of Christ to our world?

Howard Hendricks – who retired from Dallas seminary after teaching for 50 years – who remains for most of his students like me, eternally grateful for his passion for teaching the word well. He wrote biographically in his book, *Teaching to Change Lives*, "I'm sure I would have died and gone to hell and nobody would have particularly cared. I was born into a broken home, my parents having separated before I was born. The only time I ever saw them together was eighteen years later when I was called to testify in a divorce court.

As a boy I lived in a neighborhood in north Philadelphia in which they said an evangelical church could never be planted. But God has a fantastic sense of humor whenever anyone decides what can't be done. The Lord led a small group of Christians to band together, buy a little house and start a church. One man in the church was named Walt. He had only a sixth-grade education. One day Walt told the Sunday school superintendent he wanted to start a Sunday school class for boys. "That's great, Walt, but we don't have an opening." Walt insisted however, so the superintendent said, "Good. Go out and get a class. Anybody you find is yours to teach. Walt came into my neighborhood. The first time we met I was playing marbles out on the concrete sidewalk. "Son," he said, "how would you like to go to Sunday school?" I wasn't interested. Anything with the word 'school' in it had to be bad news. So he said, "Well, how about a game of marbles?" That was different. So we shot marbles and had a great time, though he whipped me in every single game. After that I would have followed him anywhere. Walt ended up picking up a total of 13 boys in that neighborhood for his Sunday school class – all but four of us were from broken homes. Today, eleven of the thirteen boys are serving in full-time Christian work.

Hendricks concludes, so you see, my interest in teaching is much more than professional – it's intensely personal – a passion – because the only reason I have a ministry today is that God brought along my path a committed [passionate] teacher.^v

Paul was that kind of a committed teacher – passionate for the establishment and the development of the faith of those who would come to believe in Jesus Christ..

2. Passionate about God's truth

Paul is also passionate about God's truth – he goes on in *verse 1* to add to this phrase the words, *for the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth.*

That's one of the most disliked words, by the way, to the vocabulary of our generation – *truth.*

That word conjures up the idea of imposing virtues on someone – or maybe even – perish the thought – suggesting that something is a vice.

"Truth" sounds like the potential for right and wrong. It suggests dogma, doesn't it?

No wonder the world doesn't want to traffic in truth. They'd rather take someone's truth and turn it into an opinion. What's true for you might not be true for me, so keep your opinion to yourself, right?

Paul, what do you mean that we can come to *the knowledge of the truth*?

The word for *knowledge*, Paul uses here, is a compound Greek word that is a favorite of his – it refers to a full, precise and complete knowledge. Paul often links the word *knowledge* to the word *truth*.^{vi}

Which means that truth can be knowable - we can be certain.

We depend on the existence of truth every day, whether we want to deny the existence of absolutes. It isn't a matter of opinion that a spoonful of arsenic will kill you. It's simply true.

Truth can have definitive content and distinction from what is not true.

The Bible is the truth. It is self-authenticating – Israel exists; the church exists. Prophecies have come true by the bucket-load. Jesus Christ came, was crucified and rose from the dead – the course of history itself has been changed by His coming. Paul and others were actually accountable in the record of history.

The truth will not cease to be the truth if you don't buy it. It will not become false if you ignore it. God lives whether you like it or not.^{vii} Imagine traveling down a mountain road and you see a sign that says sharp curve ahead and gives a speed limit of 35 – you're gonna slow down – whether you're paid by the hour or not.

You can actually do three things regarding the truth of that sign –

- you can *obey* it and slow down;
- you can *ignore* and keep going at the same speed;

- you can *defy* it and speed up.

No matter what you decide to do in response to the message of that sign, it remains the truth – and you will either suffer or be safe depending on how you respond.

Truth matters.

Paul says, I want the church to get a grip on these truths – to grow in a precise understanding of these matters.

You know, one of the problems with keeping children safe is they don't understand so many truths.

In fact, children don't understand the law of gravity and they get into all sorts of trouble because of it.

The law of gravity is precise – and unforgiving.

I remember when I was supposed to be watching our youngest daughter, Charity, who at the time was still in diapers. I was sitting in a living room chair reading – what can she do . . . she doesn't know how to light matches yet . . . she'll be fine. And before I knew it, she had crawled halfway up the stairs. I got up, panicked and did the wrong thing – I said, "Charity" – she looked back at me, and of course, lost her balance and as I went up toward her, she bounced down to me.

I caught her on the third bounce.

Titus, you're going to need to teach these churches and their communities the precision regarding the truth – the truth about eternal life; the truth about sin; the truth about relationships; the truth about virtues and vices . . . the truth that life isn't about getting all the stuff you can before you retire.

No – go back to the old version of game of life – teach them "Life as we know it is a voyage that begins at birth and ends at death. God is at the helm . . . and your reward lies beyond the grave."

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 1/15/2012 by Stephen Davey.

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i Jill Lepore, "*The Meaning of Life*," *The New Yorker* (5-21-07); posted on Christianity Today International/PreachingToday.com, 10/24/2011

ii Jonathan Sacks, "Reversing the Decay of London Undone," *The Wall Street Journal* (8-20-2011)

iii John Kitchen, *The Pastoral Epistles for Pastors* (Kress Christian Publications, 2009), p. 478

iv Martin Thielen, *What's the Least I can Believe and still be a Christian* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), p. 49

v Howard Hendricks, *Teaching to Change Lives* (Multnomah, 1987), p. 13

vi Kitchen, p. 478

vii John Benton, *Straightening out the Self-Centered Church*, (Evangelical Press, 1997), p. 30