

## All or Nothing

Slave Traits: Part Three

*Titus 1:1c - 3*

In his booklet entitled, *Absolute Truth*, the author recounted a true story about the customary introduction of a philosophy class at the University of Illinois, taught by Roger Wengert. He often begins his ethics course by asking how many of the students believe that truth is relative. In other words, how many believe that there is no absolute standard for right and wrong. A show of hands usually reveals that most of the class has bought into moral and ethical relativism. Without pausing, Wengert has his students turn to their class notes and discusses testing dates, paper assignments and other course requirements. He then informs the class that they will actually be graded according to their physical height. Every semester at this point some tall kid usually says, “Yeah.” But then Wengert says, “Short students get the best grades.”

Inevitably students’ raise their hands in protest and say, “You can’t do that . . . your grading system isn’t fair.” He responds matter of factly, “I’m the professor and I can grade however I wish.” The students insist, “But what you ought to be doing is grading us according to how well we learned the material. You should look at our papers and exams to see how well we understood the material – you should grade us on that basis.”

Professor Wengert then replies, “By telling me I *should* do something and that I *can’t* do something and that I *ought* to do something, you contradict your belief that truth is relative. If you were true relativists, you would realize there is no external standard to which my grading should conform. If *my* truth and *my* ethical standard lead me to an alternative grading system that you consider inappropriate, well then, that’s life!”

And he would be right . . . but these students really aren’t original.

In fact, just go back to the first century and you’ll discover this cultural norm on the island of Crete – a population of 1 million people – who had made relativism their way of living.

And in the opening words of the Apostle Paul, you find him hammering away at unchangeable, objective truths.

As Paul begins his letter to Titus, a young pastor on this island, you discover several passions about Paul, the slave of God.

We could call them slave traits – characteristics of someone who is all or nothing for the glory of Christ.

In the opening lines of his letter to Titus, Paul says without any reservation, “God is my master and I am His messenger boy.”

For Paul, Christianity was wide open . . . it was indeed all, or nothing.

So far we have identified 2 passions that captivated the heart and life of the Apostle Paul.

1. Paul was passionate about **God’s elect** – that is, he was passionate about the genuine nature of the faith of God’s people. He literally gave his life away for the establishment and the protection and the development of the church.
2. Secondly, Paul was passionate about **God’s truth** – that is, he lived to develop the substance of the believer’s understanding of the truth – the objective truth of God’s word.
3. **And now thirdly, I want you to notice that Paul is passionate about God’s glory.**

Notice what he says again in *Titus chapter 1 and verse 1. Paul a slave of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth – now notice – which is according to godliness.*

One of the things Paul does in clarifying his statement about truth is to send a clear warning to Titus and the churches.

They're going to hear a lot of messages and a lot of descriptions to be spiritual truth – but if it doesn't promote godly living, it isn't a valid message.<sup>ii</sup>

- If it promotes materialism and self-centeredness it isn't the truth;
- If it endorses sinful behavior it isn't the truth;
- If it encourages greed and self-satisfaction it isn't the truth.

Paul is saying that the gospel leads you toward godlikeness; and he's also clarifying the greater incentive for pursuing godliness.

It's easy for us to want to grow more godly and miss the primary motive.

We're not passionate about growing in the knowledge of the truth just so we can become smarter Christians. Won't people be amazed by how much Bible knowledge we have?!

This noun translated "godliness" refers to both living out the truth in front of others, [but with the added nuance of] reverencing God.<sup>iii</sup>

In other words, we want to be godly because we want to reverence God. We want to be godly because we want to build up the reputation and status of God.

We're not trying to grow up in our knowledge so we can win blue ribbons and get our name in the church bulletin.

We are passionately attempting to live out our faith so that *God's name* receives greater credibility and honor and glory.

One author wrote, isn't it amazing what God chooses to do through the lives of people when they don't want to take the credit.

Hudson Taylor, the great missionary pioneer to China was once riding in a carriage with a friend, later in life and the friend said to him, "You must often be conscious of the wonderful way God has prospered you and the China Inland Mission? I doubt if any man living has had a greater honor." To which Hudson Taylor turned to his friend and said, "You need to know that this is how I think – I believe God was looking for someone small enough

and weak enough for Him to use, that all the glory might [rightfully] be His – and He found me."<sup>iv</sup>

That's the passion of a true slave of Christ. It's not about us – it's about *His* glory and *His* greatness and *His* reputation and *His* honor.

Paul would write, "***God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of Jesus Christ.***" (*Galatians 6:14*)

In other words, "God forbid that anyone should ever take personal glory away from the person of Jesus Christ."

This was the passion of Paul – living out the gospel in such a way that God was glorified.

And would you notice again the connection in Titus between truth and godliness.

***1b. . . the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness.***

In other words, spiritual truth that doesn't produce goodness isn't the truth.

Outward behavior validates the nature of inward belief. In fact, what you believe inwardly will eventually show up in how you behave outwardly.

And how you behave tells us a lot about what you really believe.

In our last session I mentioned the law of gravity. What you believe about the law of gravity determines how you behave when you're standing on the edge of the Grand Canyon.

You're going to behave a certain way because you believe objective, genuine truth – about gravity.

Knowing determines living.

And by the way, 'Knowing' the truth will not eliminate the battle of 'living' the truth.

Knowing one more verse isn't going to get you released from the next spiritual battle with the devil, the world or your own flesh.

That's why 'godliness' is something we realistically call a "pursuit".

And what is the '**godliness**' Paul is talking about here in this text? Is he talking about a list of do's and don'ts – a standard of living – good table manners.

I would recommend that you use a fork instead of your fingers this afternoon, but when it comes to defining godliness – you can travel around the world and get different definitions from a lot of people.

In fact, if I were preaching in certain Eastern European countries today I would have taken off my wedding ring – because to them, it would imply

materialism and an unnecessary expenditure. So I'd take my ring off.

Listen, I haven't taken my ring off in years. You know why? Because I can't. No, that's not true – if somebody in here has a stick of butter – I can do it.

Actually I want to keep it on because in our culture it doesn't signify materialism as much as it signifies marriage. It signifies that I belong to someone else – I have a bride out there.

I'll be preaching next month in Santiago, Chile and I have already asked the question about what I should wear in the pulpit in that culture. A matching suit – pants and coat – might be considered flamboyant – a long sleeve shirt and a silk necktie might be a symbol to them of ostentatious wealth.

The problem with defining godliness externally is that it changes from country to country, even from church to church.

So let me simplify this word for you and let you know it will stand up in any culture.

Godliness is simply God-likeness.

One author defined the word in this text simply enough by writing that godliness is everyday expressions that demonstrate the character of God.<sup>v</sup>

- In other words, if God is love, godliness consists of loving in word and deed.
- If God is mercy, godliness consists of being merciful.
- If God is patient and kind, godliness is expressed through patience and kindness.<sup>vi</sup>
- If God hates pride and laziness and gluttony, then growing in godliness means I'm growing to dislike any allowance of pride, laziness and gluttony; which means we I stop excusing it and start confessing it;
- If God desires sexual purity – both physically and mentally – then godliness is pursuing purity in every aspect of life.

And on and on . . .

Godliness is godlikeness.

That's why we prefer our own little list; it's a lot easier to keep up with my list of the dirty dozen or the sanctified seven than attempt to *demonstrate the nature of God*.

Godliness isn't a list, it's a life . . . it is the life of Christ *in* you which demonstrates *through* you the character of God for the glory of God.

That's the genuine item.

I read recently about an episode on a History Channel show about a man who brought in a violin and asked for an appraisal. He had recently purchased a piece of property that included a house and a barn. Shortly after his purchase, while inspecting the barn, he opened an old chest and discovered this violin safely tucked inside. As he dusted off the near-perfect instrument, he found the name "Stradivarius" clearly inscribed on the violin. His discovery might actually be worth millions of dollars. The experts didn't agree, however. After the violin was examined, they told the man that the violin wasn't a genuine Stradivarius – the name had been forged. The violin was an imitation produced in the early 1900's, worth around 500 dollars. The appraiser concluded by telling the crestfallen violin owner, "Remember, just because something has a label doesn't mean it's real."<sup>vii</sup>

Which is exactly what Paul is warning here – something labeled spiritual truth or religious truth or biblical truth doesn't necessarily mean it's the genuine item.

Just because God's name is attached to something doesn't mean it has anything to do with God's nature.

Listen, God's signature has been forged throughout history – and it's being forged today.

Be careful, Paul warns . . . make sure that what you're pursuing is the genuine item.

Titus, you're going to have to help the Flock to grow in the knowledge of the truth – the genuine item – and the way you know it's the genuine item is that you will be led along a path that ultimately brings glory to the character and name of God.

That's living with passion for God's glory.

There's another passion in Paul's opening statement to Titus.

4. **Paul is passionate about God's elect; he is passionate about God's truth; He is passionate about God's glory and now, notice, he is passionate about God's presence.**

*He writes in verse 2. ...in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago.*

You'll notice the progression in Paul's opening statement between learning and living and all the while looking for the appearing of Christ.

This is *the hope of eternal* life, he'll describe more fully in *Titus chapter 2*.

Now when we use the word *hope* we're usually referring to something we're hoping will or won't happen in the future:

We say things like:

- I hope it doesn't rain the day of our outdoor wedding;
- I hope I get that promotion next week;
- I hope our house or condominium sells this month;
- I hope our dog doesn't have any more puppies;
- I hope the New York Giants win today;
- I hope the New England patriots lose today (that's not in the text but I think it's biblical)

When Paul uses the word *hope*, it has an entirely different quality about it; it is a future [reality] based on the promise of God.<sup>viii</sup>

The word here for *hope* is always used in the New Testament for a confident expectation . . . in this case, of eternal life.<sup>ix</sup>

Keep in mind that the believer already possesses eternal life.

***These things I have written unto you that you may know that you have eternal life – present tense – 1 John 5:13.*** As a believer, you already possess eternal life in Christ.

But Paul is referring to something future.

He's referring here in Titus to the final consummation of eternal life when Christ gathers us to Himself. This is the glorious moment every believer eagerly awaits.<sup>x</sup>

***We are groaning for this day of redemption (Romans 8:23)***

And how can we be so certain that our hope is not going to be dashed to pieces – how is it that our hope is actually grounded in certainty?

How can Paul be so sure?!

Paul answers further in *verse 2*, ***“in the hope of eternal life, which God – who cannot lie – promised . . .***

God promised!

***And God*** – Paul reminds us – ***is the God who cannot lie*** – literally, the cannot-lie God.<sup>xi</sup>

Which was a startling claim in his generation; the gods of the Greeks and the Romans and the Cretans were just as good at lying and deceiving as human beings.

But not this God!

***The Glory of Israel will not lie (1 Samuel 15:29)***

***It is impossible for God to lie (Hebrews 6:18)***

God promised! This isn't the promise from Paul – or the Apostles – or the church. Human beings and human institutions can be guilty of making promises and not keeping them.

It's in our nature to break a promise – it is not in the nature of God to break a promise.

Benjamin Franklin wrote, “Our new Constitution is now established, and has an appearance that promises permanency; but in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and (what?) taxes. ~Benjamin Franklin

One author made this humorous analogy; he wrote that promises are like babies: they are easier to make than to deliver.

But what God promises, God delivers.

Now I want you to notice that Paul adds an interesting phrase here – ***eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago.***

The tense is used to refer back to an event in the past.

This promise was made “long ages ago”. Paul only used this phrase twice in all of his letters. It means, “before times eternal” or “before the world was” or “before time began.”

Do you know what Paul means?

He means that your eternal life and mine is one of the oldest promises that has ever been recorded.<sup>xii</sup>

Before time began, eternal life was a promise made by God.

And Paul is actually telling us that the promise of eternal life isn't only an old promise, it's a promise that wasn't even first made to you and me. It was, but not first and foremost – it was made between the members of the Trinity. They promised each other. The Father said to the Son and the Son to the Spirit and the Spirit back to the Son and the Son to the Father – let's make a promise to each other that eternal life will be part of the plan of our coming creation.

We think that God promised heaven to us as believers and that's true – but listen – God the Father promised it to God the Son. God the Holy Spirit promised it to God the Father.

This is their promise to each other! And they have been working in perfect unity to keep the promises they've made to each other – promises made before time began.

You know what that also means? It means that the plan of redemption for sinners did not come into

existence after the fall of man, but *before* man was ever created.<sup>xiii</sup>

That's why the crucifixion of Christ was not some emergency plan, concocted by God who's trying really hard to keep one step ahead of mankind.

Peter preached in Acts chapter 2 that the crucifixion of Christ was part of the plan of God *before time began. (Acts 2:23)*

You say, man you're frying my circuit board. Mine too!

To discover that the promise of eternal life was made *before* time between the members of the Godhead makes God all the more mysterious and amazing and infinite and glorious – and we know it's the truth because it leads our hearts into wanting to live *more* for Him and *less* for ourselves – it puts our feet on the path of godliness.

And it causes us, doesn't it, to long for the fulfillment of the ages and the consummation of the plan of God which brings us into His presence forever . . .

When our flawed and failing flesh is forever put away and we are clothed in immortality and the perfection of holiness (*1 Corinthians 15*).

Paul the Apostle was given a personal tour of heaven and a glimpse of the coming glory. (*2 Corinthians 12*)

No wonder he serves as a model slave of God for us all . . . passionate about God's people; passionate about God's truth; passionate about God's glory; passionate for God's presence – he's seen the Father's house – he's tasted the same sights as John and witnessed the emotions of final redemption and the glory of God's throne and he can't wait to get there permanently.

5. Finally, Paul is **passionate about God's assignment**

*Verse 2 again, "in the anticipation of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began – now notice, verse 3, but at the proper time manifested even His word, in the proclamation with which I was entrusted according to the commandment of God our Savior.*

What Paul is saying is that God has revealed His word – His *logos* – the word Paul uses here. Paul often used *logos* to refer to the gospel itself.<sup>xiv</sup>

God has revealed the gospel – the mystery of the ages manifested through Christ and His church. (*Ephesians 5:32*)

In other words, the only source of this monumental truth, the one true message about God, the only effective way of finding Him; the only way of pleasing Him, and the only hope of being forever with Him are manifested in His *logos* – His word.<sup>xv</sup>

And Paul emphasizes the proclamation of the *logos*.

In fact, the word for proclamation (*kerugma*) here in *verse 3* is used of the message of the herald who arrives on behalf of some ruler or town council, under whom he serves.<sup>xvi</sup>

The herald is merely delivering the message of his superior.

And Paul is passionate about this assignment and he relates this same urgency to his sons in the faith.

He solemnly charges Timothy, *in the presence of God to preach the word (2 Timothy 4:1)*.

Preach the word!

I can remember with fondness the inspiration I felt as a seminary student whenever I saw that large stone pedestal on campus and the words carved into one side of it that simply read, "Preach the word."

In our world today, the title *preacher* is virtually disappearing. It's obvious why. It sounds way too dogmatic. It's too black and white. It suggests moral authority in a world of moral uncertainty.

"Don't preach to me", is the attitude of our relativistic culture.

I have watched and listened over the past 10 years especially as evangelical preachers and pastors are now preferring to be known as speakers and their sermons known as talks or lectures or even conversations.

I read an interview about one popular pastor who has nearly 20,000 people listening to him every Sunday; he explained in the interview that 42 Sundays out of the year he basically addresses human relationships and human issues and other relevant topics and uses a verse or two to buttress his talks. Ten weeks out of the year they study a passage of scripture. He even said that he prefers to refer to himself as a communicator.

Paul wrote to Timothy, in a way that is sounding more and more antiquated and old fashioned, in *1 Timothy 2:7, where he said, I was appointed a preacher* – a keruxon (κηρυξον).

That word used here is chosen because Titus is going to battle false teachers.

He's going to have to stand up to creative speakers who are teaching error and myth and speculation.

They are communicators and they outnumber Titus. So Paul effectively tells Titus, Listen, you are an expositor; a herald of God's truth.

You see, a teacher can teach his own stuff. He can come up with his own perspective – he can choose his own words. A speaker can originate his own message; a communicator can deliver his own opinion and create his own content.

But not a herald – not an expositor – not a preacher.

And expositor is simply repeating and explaining what has been previously delivered to him.

The pastor or Bible teacher who only uses the Bible topically or randomly to proof-text his own opinions to support whatever he wants to say about whatever issues he wants to address – he never expounds a passage or a narrative or a Book of the Bible – he merely presents his views on life and the news of the day and culture and human relationships and then uses a verse or two to back him up – listen, if all he does is use the Bible to reinforce what *he* wants to say about what he thinks is important, then the church without realizing it is actually being conformed to the mind of the pastor rather than the mind of God.

That's how you can have in recent months a church of thousands of people blindly follow their apostate pastor into accepting universalism – that everybody's going to heaven after all – and there's no need to fear hell anymore. The gospel is rewritten and the cross of Christ is redefined.

Listen, Titus . . . Timothy . . . Stephen – and every other Bible teacher in my audience – we are not original . . . we don't create the message.

God has delivered His logos. We simply read it, translate it, outline it, explain it, illustrate it, apply it and impose it.

A.W. Tozer said in the early 1900's, words that need delivering again as challenged the pastorate of his generation when he said; "We are not diplomats – we are prophets [delivering "thus sayeth the

Lord"] and our message is not a compromise – it is an ultimatum."

In 1930 the most popular pastor in America was on the cover of Time Magazine. He refused to mention sin, hell, absolutes and dogma. His name was Harry Emerson Fosdick and he preached to a packed church, built specifically for him by John D. Rockefeller after Fosdick was forced to resign from a Presbyterian church on charges of heresy.

His primary message was that the church needed to be relevant. The message of the church needed to be positive and the needs of people were to be the focus in his sermons.

In an interview with Time Magazine, Fosdick said, "Who seriously supposes that one in a hundred of the congregation cares what Moses or Paul meant in those verses. The preacher should not end, but begin with thinking about the audience's vital needs, and then let the whole sermon be organized around a constructive endeavor to meet those needs." He would also say in that interview, "Preachers who pick out texts from the Bible and then proceed to give their historic settings, their logical meaning in the context, their place in the theology of the writer are grossly misusing the Bible. Nobody who speaks to the public assumes that the people are interested in the meaning of words spoken 2,000 years ago."<sup>xvii</sup>

Ladies and Gentlemen, the mainline denominational disasters of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and now into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, along with so many others was the result of this thinking – the Bible doesn't really matter, so why teach it carefully.

The loss of health and credibility in the church today is to be laid directly at the feet of pastors who will not be preachers – they refuse to be heralds, delivering and expounding the words of God.

Is there really an option for any messenger? Is there really any other message?

Notice what Paul writes at the end of *verse 3. In the proclamation with which I was entrusted according to the suggestion of God . . . that's not what it says, is it?*

*Paul actually wrote, "in the proclamation with which I was entrusted according to the commandment of God."*

There's not another message . . . it isn't up for a vote . . . there are no alternatives to deliver to our world.

We as slaves of God are obeying his commandment to expound on the word.

And the word reveals that that ***God is our Savior*** – did you notice that? God through ***Jesus Christ*** – ***the end of verse 4 – He is our Savior.***

When Titus was preaching on the Island of Crete and Paul throughout the Roman empire, that word for Savior – soter – was used to praise the god Zeus and Apollo – they were mankind’s savior. The word was also given to Caesar who was known as the savior of the world.<sup>xviii</sup>

Paul says, “Listen, I’m going to tell you the truth – and we might as well offend the Emperor and all the religious people in the empire while we’re at it” – Caesar isn’t the savior and neither are Zeus and Apollo . . . the only true Savior of mankind and the world is Jesus Christ, who is the true and living God.

Preach the word Titus . . . just as I am preaching the truth of God.

Don’t hold back . . . it’s all or nothing.

Martin Luther the reformer was given the credit for bringing about the great reformation and on one occasion he corrected someone complimenting his efforts. He said these wonderful words, “I simply preached and taught the word of God; and the word of God did everything else.”

Are we slaves of God?

May we then be, like Paul, passionate for the faith of God’s elect; passionate for God’s truth; passionate for God’s glory; passionate longing for God’s presence and passionate about God’s assignment – whatever for you and me that assignment may involve.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 1/22/2012 by Stephen Davey.

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