

Titus 1:1–2

A Ministry in the Word

Scripture Reading

Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began.

The Character of the Epistle

The three epistles to Timothy and Titus form a group with a common concern: godly order among the saints, and what is necessary for its maintenance. In 1 Timothy, the assembly of God is seen in the main as being in order. In 2 Timothy, it is seen in disorder, with special reference to the last times. In Titus, the concern is the maintenance and restoration of order — things that were wanting are to be set right. Without 1 Timothy, we would not know how things are supposed to be, and could not judge what genuine godly order looks like. Without 2 Timothy, we would not know what to do in a day of disorder. And Titus is an encouragement to be in order, to put things in order where they have lapsed.

The character of the epistle is given in its very first verse: the maintenance of godly order among the saints, pressed by obedience to the truth as it is lived according to godliness. Godliness forms the practical outworking of the truth in the life. Where the truth is fully known and genuinely received, the result is piety. Where piety is absent, the truth is not being fully expressed in practice, whatever may be professed.

Bondman and Apostle — Both Together

Paul introduces himself as both a bondman of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ. Darby notes that the word *and* joining the two is not mere conjunction — it marks a particular additional circumstance, giving occasion to consequences. The consequences flow from both descriptions together. As a bondman of God, Paul is one who does the will of another — this keeps him humble, and it is in keeping with the godliness and obedience to the word that the epistle will press throughout. As an apostle of Jesus Christ, he has authority — the authority to appoint his delegate, and through his delegate to establish elders in the cities of Crete. These two belong together: the humility of the bondman and the authority of the apostle, neither cancelling the other.

According to the Faith of God's Elect

His bondmanship and apostleship are said to be *according to* the faith of God's elect. This is an order of things that God has brought about for His glory in Christ. It is an entirely new order — the second man established, the first set aside — and Paul's person and ministry are in full accord with it. Everything he is and does is consistent with this new thing God has brought in.

The faith of God's elect is not a collective faith of an elect church — it is the faith that characterises each individual who is God's elect. Each Christian may put himself into this expression. God's sovereignty in election is not diminished by the importance of faith — rather, faith itself is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast. To import into these words the notion that God elected those whom He foresaw would believe is to move the goodness out of God and into man, and to take away from the sovereignty and grace that these words are meant to press.

The Knowledge of the Truth Which Is After Godliness

Joined to the faith of God's elect is the full knowledge of the truth — Darby's marginal note on the word rendered *acknowledging* is: *real, full knowledge*. This is characteristic of Christianity. There is nothing beyond what has been revealed for God's glory in Christ — no higher knowledge awaiting some further unveiling. We are connected with what is the highest aspect of what God is doing for His glory.

The character of this truth is that it is *according to godliness*. Full knowledge and piety go together inseparably. Truth that is genuinely known and received will produce piety; piety that is genuine is attested by truth. Where one complains that doctrine is too abstract and demands something more practical, the answer is that there is nothing more practical than sound doctrine — it forms the walk, it shapes the life, it produces the piety that the whole epistle is concerned with. The two cannot be divorced without losing both.

The mystery of piety in 1 Timothy 3:16 illuminates this — *great is the mystery of godliness*. This was not foreseen; it was a mystery. Grace producing piety is something new. The law did not produce piety — God's elect in Israel were pious by the secret sovereign operation of God in their souls, not by the law. Now, in Christianity, grace comes in and produces piety as its natural fruit, in those who have the full knowledge of the truth and walk in it. That is the mystery.

In Hope of Eternal Life — Promised Before the World Began

Verse 2 speaks of something God cannot do. There is one thing He cannot do: He cannot lie. *God, who cannot lie*. He is light, and in Him is no darkness — a lie is darkness, and therefore it is impossible for the God who is light to utter one. And it is this God who has promised.

Eternal life was not a subject unfolded in the Old Testament. There are occasional references to life in a millennial sense, but eternal life in the Son — the life that flows from the risen Christ into those who are His, as described in

John 12 with the image of the grain of wheat — was not revealed there. Nor was life in Christ — the sphere or position in which the Christian possesses that life, as Paul unfolds it. John gives us the nature of the life, calling it eternal life in the Son; Paul gives us the place where we have it, calling it life in Christ. Both speak of the same life, presented along the particular line each was appointed to bring out.

This eternal life was promised before the ages of time — before the world began. Scripture connects the heavenly blessings of Christianity with the phrase *before the foundation of the world*, while the blessings connected with Israel and the earth are linked with *from the foundation of the world*. The hope of eternal life belongs to what is heavenly in character, and its origin precedes time altogether, going back into the counsels of the Godhead before creation began.

2 Timothy 1:9 connects with this precisely: *who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began*. These things form a system: the faith of God's elect, the full knowledge of the truth, the hope of eternal life — all rooted in the eternal purposes of God, and all pressing the godliness that is their practical expression.

— Study ends —