

Titus 3:12–15

A Ministry in the Word

Scripture Reading

When I shall send Artemas unto thee, or Tychicus, be diligent to come unto me to Nicopolis: for I have determined there to winter. Bring Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their journey diligently, that nothing be wanting unto them. And let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful. All that are with me salute thee. Greet them that love us in the faith. Grace be with you all. Amen.

An Orderly Transition — Come to Me

The closing verses of Titus show the apostle's care for an orderly transition of ministry. He will send one of two men — Artemas or Tychicus — to take up the work at Crete, and then calls Titus to join him at Nicopolis. This is not abandonment of the saints at Crete; it is provision before departure. The elders had been established in every city. There were now others fitted to continue the ministry. The apostle's delegate is recalled with care, not yanked away.

The last two words of the apostle's instruction — *come to me* — show something of the whole difference between the apostolic order and the system that grew up after it. Some later hands appended to copies of this epistle a note describing Titus as the first bishop of the church of the Cretians. That one sentence packs an extraordinary quantity of error. There was no assembly of the Cretians — there were assemblies in the several cities of Crete. Bishops and elders are the same person, not a hierarchy of offices. And a delegate of the apostle is not an apostle, and could not perpetuate apostolic authority by passing it to others. Meanwhile, the apostle's own words say: come to me. Not, stay there, you are now the

bishop. Come to me.

The Rise of the Hierarchy — and What Prevented It

The story of how this hierarchical system grew is not mysterious. Authority flows downward from Christ: to the apostle, to the apostolic delegate, to the elder. No one could appoint an apostle but Christ Himself. No one could appoint an apostolic delegate but an apostle. When the apostles and their delegates passed from the scene, that authority came to an end — not because God had failed to provide, but because the church in its responsible testimony had come under the governmental hand of God.

What this epistle would have prevented, if received into the heart, is the whole development that followed. A presiding elder in a local assembly, then a presiding elder over a group of assemblies, then the idea of a metropolitan with authority over a large region — all of it a human development, step by step, built on the refusal to acknowledge that what God had provided was what He had provided, and that when it was withdrawn it was withdrawn. The orderly response to the ruin of the church's visible testimony is to acknowledge it — to own the hand of God in it — and to seek what is available in that owned condition. William Kelly remarked that the last verse of 1 Corinthians 14 — *let all things be done decently and in order* — gets used for every kind of order except the order of that chapter. The same principle applies here. The epistle to Titus is a book of order, and the order it gives is what the church needs.

Zenas and Apollos — Two Walking Together

Verse 13 asks Titus to set forward diligently on their journey Zenas the lawyer and Apollos, that nothing be lacking to them. Zenas's background was in the Jewish law. Apollos was mighty in the Scriptures, and had been helped by Priscilla and Aquila to understand the way of the Lord more perfectly. One may

have brought strength from the Old Testament; the other from the New. And they were on one journey together — which means they walked together.

How can two walk together except they be agreed? (Amos 3:3). And Psalm 133 describes what it is when they do: *Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, that went down to the skirts of his garments.* Two men, one with roots in the Old and one schooled more fully in the New, walking on the same journey. This is what Christian unity looks like in practice — not the togetherness of compromise, but the togetherness of those who walk in the same truth and toward the same Lord. The testimony of two or three together has its own weight in Scripture; Matthew 18:20 is echoed here in a very simple and practical way.

Let Ours Also Learn — Good Works for Necessary Uses

Verse 14 turns to the saints in the assemblies: *let ours also learn to apply themselves to good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful.* This is not book-learning but practical learning — on-the-job training. Good works that meet necessary wants, like caring for those who travel in the work of the Lord, express the life that is in the believer. 3 John speaks of it directly: they went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing of the Gentiles; therefore we ought to receive such that we might be fellow helpers to the truth.

The phrase *that they be not unfruitful* rather than *that they be fruitful* is deliberately chosen. Good works are life works — they flow from the life of Christ in us and manifest that it is there. To be without good works is to be unfruitful, which raises the question of whether the life is truly operative. The call to good works runs through this whole epistle, from beginning to end, because the whole epistle is about order — and a living, fruitful Christian life is the most fundamental expression of the order God desires.

All with Me Salute Thee — Grace Be with You All

The closing is brief and warm. Those who were with the apostle sent their greetings — a unity expressing itself in a common word of affection. They were all in order, as those together with Paul must be, and their greeting flows from that order. *Greet those who love us in the faith* — not a love of mere sentiment or social convenience, but love in the faith, rooted in the one life and the one truth that all the Lord's people share.

And then: *Grace be with you all*. Though the letter was addressed to Titus, the apostle knew that others would read it — in the assemblies of Crete, the letter would be seen. And so he sends grace to all. Authority was Titus's: the charge, the appointment of elders, the rebuking of the disorderly. But grace — grace was for all. That is how the apostle's heart closes this epistle: authority given where authority was needed, and grace poured out freely on all who would receive it. It is a fitting end to a letter whose great theme is the grace of God that brings salvation, teaches us, puts us in order, and keeps us until He comes.

— *Study ends* —