

“The Real Life of a Pastor”
by Rom A. Pegram (7/10/16)

I don't know if you've ever noticed this or not ... but the world we live can be very *un-Christian* at times... How in the world can we live this life that Christ has called us to live ... when we live in a world that is so dead-set against Christ and his ways? How in the world can we live Christian lives ... in such an un-Christian context? I'm sure that Titus was asking himself the same questions, as Paul left him on the island of Crete, to lay down a Christian foundation for living ... in a world that was anything but... Listen to this intro, as we begin today (Titus 1:1-4, NLT):

This letter is from Paul, a slave of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ. I have been sent to proclaim faith to those God has chosen and to teach them to know the truth that shows them how to live godly lives.

² This truth gives them confidence that they have eternal life, which God—who does not lie—promised them before the world began.

³ And now at just the right time he has revealed this message, which we announce to everyone. It is by the command of God our Savior that I have been entrusted with this work for him.

⁴ I am writing to Titus, my true son in the faith that we share. May God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior give you grace and peace.” – Titus 1:1-4 (NLT)

Today, introducing this series, we're simply covering Paul's greeting—verses 1-4 of Titus. To set this up a bit, Paul writes without any reference to his personal circumstances. There's no place in Luke's narrative (Acts) about such a trip to Crete. So, we must assume that his work in Crete took place after Paul was released from his first imprisonment in Rome (recorded at the end of Acts), and before his second lock-up in Rome that ended in his execution. So, this letter was probably written between the letters of 1st and 2nd Timothy...

In these first four verses, Paul presents his credentials, making a *profound doctrinal statement about TRUTH*. Here's a quick run-down of what he let Titus know:

1. First, TRUTH is always consistent with and/or grounded in *the teachings of Christ*—nothing more, nothing less...
2. Second, TRUTH always shows people how to live godly lives! Unfortunately, this part of TRUTH is all too often neglected! Let me say it this way: **Doctrine becomes deadly when it's divorced from godly living!** There are those who call themselves Christians ('little Christs') but fail to live lives consistent with that claim ... and because they've aligned themselves with culture ... that's O.K.! For Paul though, *TRUTH must always produce goodness in our lives ... or it's not really TRUTH!* (*BELIEF in Christ = adjustment in our BEHAVIOR!*)
3. Third, TRUTH always points to *the hope of eternal life*—promised before the world began, spoken of clearly through Paul's preaching, and this TRUTH was preached ... because it was commanded by God that Paul do so!

It's upon these doctrinal foundations that Paul lays his claim to truth and authority. He can call the church in Crete to particular standards of behavior and relationships ... because TRUTH itself is nailed down in the person and life of Jesus Christ, whom he had preached about previously! Here's where *his authority* and *the TRUTH he preaches* comes from. Now, let's get back to what this young pastor's life looked like... Titus, living on the newly evangelized island of Crete, is given the responsibility for laying the foundations of a Christian community in the midst of a culture that doesn't really know much about community—God's way. The emphasis in this letter to Titus ... is on *building community* and on *leadership in that community*—two ideas that *must* be kept together as we move through these texts. ***What a job Titus has before him!***

Paul was the one who evangelized this island—*planting the seeds of faith*, letting the people there know of the good news of Jesus Christ for the first time. *Titus*, on the other hand, had the job of *cultivation*. In a very real sense, seeding is the easiest part—the hard work of cultivation and harvest is what pastors (and other church members) are called to do. And that's where consistent leadership comes in; without it, God's work of cultivation and harvest would never really happen...

So, Titus was to lay a Christian foundation (for a new faith community on Crete) in a world that was anything but Christian! And, folks, like Titus and those early Christians on the island of Crete, we have a choice if we're about this business that Christ has called us to in our world. The first option is this:

WE CAN BE A SLAVE OF CULTURE... As the Church, the living Body of Christ on this earth ... any time we align ourselves with culture instead of God's word, we're in trouble! There's no other way to say it, folks; when we turn our backs on God's word and align ourselves with the loudest voices of our day, we are usually in trouble ... with God! Here's how it works out:

- Aligning ourselves with God's word ... *points us to Christ!*
- Aligning ourselves, instead, with the culture around us ... *leads us away from Christ* (who was always counter-cultural)!

Let me give you an example... The mainline churches today (i.e. United Methodist, ELCA Lutheran, Presbyterian Church USA, etc.) have consistently moved toward an alignment with culture over the past several decades. Is it any coincidence that over the past several decades the mainline churches have continued to decline? One of the hottest topics today—including in *our* Annual Conference (i.e. past 40 years)—is the topic of human sexuality. What many have believed is this: If we align ourselves with culture (i.e. taking the loudest voices point of view), we will then begin to grow again. Surely this is why the mainline denominations have continued to decline! Our culture is not happy with God's design for humanity...

Statistics have shown, however, that *this is not the case*. Where mainline churches have chosen to intentionally align their thinking to the culture around them (i.e. seeking their truth in culture), they've experienced more rapid decline than ever before...

However, those denominations that've chosen to intentionally align themselves with the traditional—more orthodox—interpretations of scripture (i.e. Southern Baptist Association, etc.) have experienced continual growth ... even in these difficult times!

Folks, we can choose to be a slave [servant] of culture ... if we want to. But if we do, we need to realize that we're usually choosing to go against God ... and that's never good! So, *we can choose to be a slave or servant of culture...*

OR, WE CAN BE A SLAVE [SERVANT] OF CHRIST! Let me ask you this: Do you want your life to count for something—eternally—or are you O.K. with 'when it's over, it's over' and that's it? I truly believe that most people would rather their lives stand for something—*mean something* ... in a significant way! We'd all love to leave *an eternal legacy*, wouldn't we? But, the fact is, the only thing that will last forever ... is *what is of God*—not *what is of culture*! So, what decision have you made? What direction have you chosen for your life ... and for the life of your church?

I met a man—one of those God-incidences—the other day in Madison that I'd like to tell you about. About 6 AM Friday, I took my son Josh up to Madison to pick up a rental vehicle for the mission trip that he was leaving on. While we were there, Josh recognized the name of the business next door to Enterprise—the same name of a Richland Center business that he knew (as he'd played basketball with the owner). It was '**The Homesteader's Store Inc.**' We went over (we had time to wait) and I met Josh's friend who he'd played basketball with—the owner of the business whose name was *Rick...*

Josh asked Rick what he was doing in Madison. Rick's comments went something like:

- This is a real step of faith ... opening up a new store in Madison...
- I felt led to do this, so I had no choice but to give this new location a try...
- After all, it's not about what Rick can get out of it—how Rick can expand his wealth, etc. It's really all about the Kingdom of God for me. *How can God's Kingdom be expanded by this step of faith* ... opening up a new store in Madison?

Folks, we're all called—as followers of Christ—to be *in* the world, but not *of* the world (John 17)! That's exactly the perspective that Rick had on life—on his business. It wasn't about him. It was all about Christ ... and his Kingdom. Then, I must add, before we left the store ... Rick had a pray for both Josh and I—praying God's blessings on the mission trip this week, that it would be all about God's Kingdom, too!

So, folks, we have a choice to make...

- Will we be slaves of culture ... in this world we live in (i.e. seeking truth in the culture around us)...
- Or will we be slaves or servants of Christ, always seeking to further his Kingdom in *all* that we do?

These are the very things that Titus was up against in his day. And, these are the very things that we're still up against as followers of Christ today! We're asked—as pastors and as leaders in the Church—to lay a Christian foundation wherever we go—to be a positive influence for the eternal Kingdom of God. And ... we're being asked to do this in a world that will fight God's ways ... every step of the way!

This is *the real life of a pastor*—Titus, to be exact. This is also my life ... and Jane's life. And this will be *our life together*, as we commit to follow Christ—building up his eternal Kingdom—in *every way*!

Today, folks, we've talked about the reality of the un-Christian world we live in. For the next three weeks, we're going to talk about what we're going to do about it—***how to lay a Christian foundation ... in an un-Christian world!***