

Basic Training Bible Ministries

“Living in the Light of the Cross”

A Study in the Book of Titus



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The Book of Titus

Living in the Light of the Cross

Introduction

The life of faith is a spiritual journey beginning at the moment of new birth (regeneration) through personal faith in Jesus Christ as Savior, and continuing onward and upward from spiritual infancy—through the stages of spiritual growth— into maturity and beyond. I refer to it as the journey “from the cross to the crown.”

Three biblical references help to establish this idea. First, Paul says in Gal 2:20, *“I have been crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.”* This union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection is true for every believer due to the salvation works of the Holy Spirit, which we will note in our study. However, the key to learning to live “by faith” is persistent spiritual growth. Thus the Apostle Peter says, *“Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”* (2Pe 3:18). The challenge to grow up in our faith is the burden behind every one of the epistles. For those believers who submit to this challenge, there exists the hope of attaining spiritual stature similar to our “heroes of the faith” such as Abraham, *“Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness, and he was called the friend of God”* (Jam 2:23).

The little book of Titus, one of Paul’s “pastoral epistles,” provides a short-course on the life of faith. As we explore the great and timeless truth contained in this epistle, we will refer again and again to the “life of faith” and the journey “from the cross to the crown,” and to the many promises and provisions supplied by God in His matchless grace for those who choose to live in the light of the cross.

Background

The book of Titus, along with 1 and 2 Timothy, is a “pastoral epistle.” Paul is dealing with the leadership and guidance of the early Church—a small island of faith surrounded by a sea of paganism. At the forefront of Paul’s concern is the selection of worthy leaders for these small bands of believers. These epistles are a precious guide to all who aspire to positions of leadership in the local church, but not to them alone. The commands, instructions, and warnings contained in these small books are vital to every child of God regarding spiritual conduct in the household of God (1Ti 3:15).

Titus was written after Paul was released from his first Roman imprisonment and before his second and final prison sentence, which was terminated by his martyrdom. Titus appears as an early companion of Paul (Gal 2:1). He was a Gentile (Gal 2:3), and some suggest that he was the brother of Luke (2Co 8:16–18; 12:18), *“whose praise is in the Gospel throughout all the churches.”* He appears to have been older than Timothy, and of more stern and stable

character, able to take on daunting and difficult tasks assigned by Paul. His epistle is unique in presenting Jesus Christ and God equally as Savior (Tit 1:3–4; 2:10, 13; 3:4, 6), in stressing the value of sound doctrine and living (Tit 1:9, 13; 2:1–2, 8, 11–13), and in exhorting believers to engage in “good works” (Tit 1:16; 2:7, 14; 3:1, 8, 14). These topics all deserve special attention and definition, and we will look at them in detail as they occur in our study.

Book Outline

Key verse: 1:1 *“the truth that accords with godliness”*

Theme: Living in the Light of the Cross

Outline:

- I. Godliness: The aim of salvation and Bible study, Chapter 1
- II. Godliness: The goal and proof of spiritual growth, Chapter 2
- III. Godliness: The power of fruitful living, Chapter 3

No outline is perfect, and I offer this one as a work in progress as I am constantly refining. It should be noted in the outline that the book follows a clear and simple progression, which we will see goes from the incarnation of Jesus Christ to the glorification of His people. While one weekend does not provide enough time to study this little book—with all its great content—in much detail, it is my prayer that an expositional approach will introduce each fellow-student with new insights and stimulate a diligent pursuit of a life of conformity to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our approach to this study, for our greatest gain, must be in the humility of genuine faith, as vessels cleansed of all sin (2Ti 2:20–21; Jam 1:21; 1Jo 1:9), and with the diligence resulting from genuine spiritual hunger (Mat 5:6; 6:33). If we allow the Spirit of God to bring this letter to life in us, we will be brought further along in our experience of “living in the light of the cross,” which is another way of saying “abiding in Christ” (Joh 15:4, 5, 7, 8; 1Jo 2:6).

I. Godliness: The aim of salvation and study, Chapter 1

Today most people think of truth in relative terms. In fact, many choose to live as agnostics in regard to truth, as if it cannot be defined with certainty. For them, Pilate’s scornful question, “*What is truth?*” (Joh 18:38) explains their world-view. Paul, however, begins this epistle with the bold declaration that truth is defined absolutely in the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Joh 14:6).

A. In relation to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Tit 1:1–4

The Gospel is the “good news” of what God in His mercy has done for sinful men. It is this that sets the Christian faith apart from all the religions of the world. This faith is the “*acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness.*” Godliness is defined in 1Ti 3:16 as “the mystery of the incarnation of Christ and His saving work among men.” Those who trust in Christ are God’s “elect,” God in

effect having chosen them when He chose Christ to die for them before the world began (compare Isa 42:1 with Eph 1:4 and Tit 1:2).

This revelation (mystery) of godliness, though promised in eternity past, was manifested *“in due time”* (Gal 4:4), the promise of *“the hope of eternal life”* being passed from God the Father to the Son, then from apostles like Paul down to believers like Timothy, and through the written Word to us. Thus, both the heavenly Father who planned our deliverance, and Jesus Christ who accomplished redemption on the cross, are given the title *“Savior,”* as they—along with the Holy Spirit—share equally in the divine undertaking for sinful men.

Titus is addressed as a *“genuine son”* of Paul, having been raised up in the truth by him. The *“common faith”* of verse 4 is *“the faith of God’s elect”* (v. 1) shared by all who possess *“the hope [assurance] of eternal life”* (v. 2) due to the *“grace, mercy, and peace”* offered by God. As we will see later in Tit 2:11–14, God’s grace is offered to all, Christ having died for all (1Ti 2:3–6), but mercy is the personal application to the believer, resulting in peace (Rom 5:1).

In summary, anything contrary to the biblical record of *“Immanuel”* (*“God with us—Mat 1:23*) in the Bible, and our salvation by faith alone in Christ alone, does not meet the criteria for truth. Our personal faith in Christ begins the journey of the spiritual life for us *“from the cross to the crown.”* It is likened to a *“race set before us”* (Heb 12:2), and can only be run and finished to the glory of Christ by diligent advance *“from faith to faith”* (Rom 1:17; 2Ti 4:7–8).

B. In regard to leadership of the Church, Tit 1:5–9

The first necessity for a newborn infant is milk. For the new believer, it is the study of the Word of God. Beginning with *“milk,”* then growing into the *“meat”* of God’s Word (Heb 5:12–14) is essential to spiritual maturity—the life of abiding in Christ (Joh 8:31–32; 15:1–8). Thus, Paul addresses the necessity of qualified spiritual leadership for the Church.

The task of Titus on the island of Crete was to *“set things in order”* (cf. 1Co 11:34). Two things that were lacking were spiritual leaders in the churches and a congregation that was submissive and faithful to the Word of God. It is wonderful to see people come to faith, but that is only the beginning of the work. Three words are used for these leaders, *“elders”* (v. 5), *“bishop[s]”* (or overseers) (v. 7), and *“shepherd[s]”* (see Act 20:17, 28 with 1Pe 5:1–2, where all three occur). These titles are used synonymously of those who *“shepherd the flock of God”* (1Pe 5:2).

The list of qualities here parallels that in 1Ti 3:1–7, consisting of spiritual positives as the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23), contrasted with carnal negatives, which are the fruit of the sin nature—to be avoided.

It is crucial to see that only by these solid spiritual achievements in the lives of leaders are they enabled to combat error. The only way to hold “*fast the faithful Word*” (v. 9) is to hold it in both faith and action. As a young pastor, I often heard the saying, “It is the message, not the man.” It took me many years, and much failure and heartache, to learn that “the man is the message.” To teach the truth while living a lie is to contradict your message, and a teacher of God’s Word is judged not just by what he says, but also by what he does (cf. Ezr 7:10 with Act 1:1). Sooner or later, the hidden man of the heart is revealed by the open man of the street. If anyone hopes to be successful in exhorting and convicting those who contradict the truth (v. 9), it will require the clear message of Christ-centered truth combined with a Spirit-transformed life.

Ultimately, the saying is true, “If you sow a thought, you reap an act. Sow an act, and you reap a habit. Sow a habit, and you reap a character. Sow a character, and you reap your destiny.” Thank God that His grace has the power to “redeem our life from ruin” (Psa 103:4) and to restore us to purity and usefulness (Psa 51:2, 7, 10, 12–13; 2Ti 2:20–21; 1Jo 1:9). When Paul speaks of “*sound doctrine*” (v. 9), he uses the word *hugiaino*, or that which is “healthy, health-giving, wholesome.” As we will see, healthy doctrine produces “healthy faith” (Tit 1:13; 2:1–2), which results in a life of spiritually healthy conduct (Tit 2:11–14). Thus, the secret of life begins in one’s attitude to the truth. A humble attitude leads to spiritual priorities, which produce wise decisions, bringing about right actions, which result in God’s blessings. On the other hand, an arrogant attitude produces worldly priorities, which lead to foolish decisions, then wrong actions, and finally ends in self-induced cursing. Whether we experience a life of blessing or cursing begins in our attitude toward truth. This is why Moses and the prophets said of their message, “*Behold I set before you today a blessing and a curse ... the way of life and the way of death*” (Deu 11:26; Jer 21:8). God allows every soul to choose which path, and what life, they will have. Truly, God “*will render to each one according to his deeds*” (Psa 62:12; Pro 24:12; Mat 16:27; Rom 2:6).

C. In resisting false teaching and living, Tit 1:10–16

In every land and culture there are religious hucksters. Such men serve the god of their own belly (Phi 3:19), deceiving souls “*for the sake of dishonest gain.*” These perverted souls “*suppose that godliness is a means of gain*” (1Ti 6:5). These self-assumed “prophets” follow a long line of degenerate deceivers (2Pe 2:1–22), who will give an account to the Savior they dishonor.

The work of the Spirit-gifted and filled leader is to “shut their mouths” (v. 11) by exposing their true motives (vv. 12–13, here a quote from Epimenides, Sixth Century B.C.), and bring to light their spiritual corruption (vv. 14, 16). In Colossians 2, we have a catalogue of distortions and perversions that fit today’s false prophets and teachings as much as they did in the early Church. Their teachings are not founded in the saving work of Christ, but rather various forms of philosophy, mysticism, legalism and other “empty deceptions.”

In Tit 1:15, Paul states the axiom that “*to the pure all things are pure,*” since all things are put in their proper place, as God intended (1Ti 6:17–19). Thus Paul echoes Jesus in declaring that evil lies not in things, but rather in the motives of men’s hearts (Mar 7:1–15). The reason the Pharisees were so judgmental is that they projected their own inner evil cravings on everyone around them. So it is with many legalistic “Pharisees” of today.

Every child of God daily faces the potential of three separate paths. First and best is the path of spiritual growth, leading to blessing in time and reward in eternity (2Pe 1:5–11). If this path is rejected, the believer will automatically revert to the path of spiritual stagnation and decline, in which he lives like the unbeliever (Eph 4:17–19). The life of David illustrates that this path leads to great divine discipline, designed to bring us to repentance (cf. Heb 12:3–11). When a believer has strayed on this path, there is always the path of repentance and spiritual recovery (Jam 4:4–10). It is far wiser and better to stay on the “narrow path” of God’s revealed will, enjoying His fellowship and blessing.

II. Godliness: the goal and proof of spiritual growth, Chapter 2

Paul now turns from the leaders to the rank and file of the body of Christ. If the teaching and lives of the leaders are Christ-centered, those of the church members should also be a reflection of the “*truth which accords with godliness*” (Tit 1:1). Every believer must choose to be devoted to the study of God’s Word (2Ti 2:15). Beyond study, however, is the decision to apply the teaching to life. This is where true spiritual growth takes place. Far too many believers have deceived themselves into thinking that study and knowledge alone equates to growth. However, growth never takes place until God’s Word is incorporated into one’s life.

A. The life that adorns sound doctrine, Tit 2:1–10

Three times in this section, Paul uses the word “*sound,*” again meaning “healthy, health-giving.” Note the progression from “*sound doctrine*” (v. 1) to “*sound in faith*” (v. 2) and finally “*sound speech*” (v. 8), all of which follow “*a pattern of good works*” set by Paul (v. 7). It is inevitable that where accurate Bible teaching is met with genuine faith, lives will be transformed in the most beneficial ways.

In these verses, Titus is given instructions in “healthy spirituality” for all classes of people. These evidences of spiritual health are both simple and practical. They

remind me of the definition of John the Baptist to what constitutes “*fruits worthy of repentance*” (see Luk 3:8–14). Anyone who participates in the life of a local church can immediately see the usefulness of these commands. They demonstrate to us that true spiritual living is not a far-off achievement, but rather relates to things near at hand, things common to daily life and relationships.

In light of his call for spiritual living among all classes, Paul declares that such actions “*adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things*” (v. 10). The word “*adorn*” comes from the Greek *kosmeo*, from which we get “cosmetic.” Obedient lives among God’s people serve to “beautify” true theology. In fact, the Apostle John says this is an eternal accomplishment, for in eternity, the Church—the bride of Christ—is adorned by the righteous acts of the saints (Rev 19:7–8; 21:2).

Maintaining Spiritual Health

Every day we do six simple things to maintain physical and mental health. We wash, eat, walk, talk, work, and rest. These activities are part of our daily routine and are essential to our overall well-being. These same activities should be incorporated into spiritually healthy living:

1. **Wash:** We ought to daily cleanse our souls by self-examination, confession, and correction (Psa 139:23–24; Joh 13:6–10; 2Ti 2:20–21; 1Jo 1:9).
2. **Eat:** The soul needs daily nourishment even more than the body, and we should feed on the Word of God each day (Mat 4:4, 5:6; Joh 6:35, 53, 56).
3. **Walk:** The most basic and healthful exercise is walking, and in Scripture the life of faith is portrayed as a “*walk of faith*” more than any other example (Joh 12:8; 2Co 5:7; Eph 2:10, 4:1, 5:2, 8, 15; 1Jo 1:7, 2:6).
4. **Talk:** Dialogue and discussion are fundamental to relationships. In reality, the whole of spiritual life is an ongoing dialogue between God and the believer. God communicates through His Word, and we respond in prayer. This is illustrated by the disciples on the way to Emmaus (Luk 24:13–30). We should be aware that Christ is always near and should be included in our conversations (Mat 7:7–12; Phi 4:6–7; 1Th 5:16–18; Heb 4:14–16).
5. **Work:** Each day has its work to be done. In the same way, every believer has work to do as a believer-priest (1Pe 2:5–9) and ambassador of Christ (2Co 5:18–21), and a gifted member of Christ’s body (1Co 12:4–7; Mar 13:34; Eph 2:10, 4:12).
6. **Rest:** The Bible is filled with the promise of rest for our soul and the invitation to claim it. In our time of incessant hustle and bustle, we need to enter fully into the faith-rest life (Psa 37:7; Mat 11:28–29; Heb 4:3, 9–11).

B. The life that conforms to Jesus Christ, Tit 2:11–15

These verses lay the theological foundation for the life described above. It is not self-effort that sustains our spiritual life, but the finished work of Christ and the power of His Word working through faith. The whole of the spiritual life follows

the format “*By grace ... through faith ... unto good works*” (Eph 2:8–10). The progress of the believer is seen in five dynamic stages. It is worth noting that the following points chart the flow of the epistle from beginning to end:

Faith: First, God’s grace, provided for all men through the work of Christ on the cross, must be received personally by faith (v. 11). At the moment of salvation, God’s unlimited provision for all becomes a personal application of God’s mercy to the believing soul.

Learning: Next, the believer enters the life of discipleship, as a student of the Word of God (v. 12a). The power of God’s Word, implemented in the inner life by His Spirit, begins the work of transformation from the inside outward.

Living: Then comes the application, again in the power of the Holy Spirit, of the truth learned in one’s life (v. 12b). To live “*soberly, righteously, and godly*” is to be gradually conformed to the image of Jesus Christ (Rom 12:2; 2Co 3:17–18). The life of discipleship is a never-ending pursuit of the outward expression of the Christ-life within.

Looking: We are sustained in our steady progress by the promise of Christ’s glorious return, called our “*blessed hope*” (v. 13). The word “*hope*” speaks of absolute assurance, by which our daily lives are “*blessed*.” Those who live in light of eternity are promised a crown of righteousness (2Ti 4:7–8).

Working: The final stage of development is now defined as “*good works*” (v. 14), the outward effect of our inner purification. It is essential to view these works properly, as the end product of a divine work in and through the believer, as a cleansed vessel in the hand of God (2Ti 2:20–21). The word “*good*” is *agathos*, speaking of good as a quality belonging to God alone (Mat 19:16–17).

Thus “*good works*,” as defined by Paul here, refer to those things God is able to do through believers who live by faith in His Word and act under the power of His Spirit. Much of what is passed off as “*good works*” will actually be burned up at the Bema Seat of Jesus Christ (1Co 3:11–15).

Of these stages of spiritual development, Paul exhorts Titus to “*speak ... exhort ... rebuke with all authority*.” Again, if Titus is a living example of what he teaches (vv. 7–8), no one will have grounds for despising either his life or his teaching (v. 15). Every believer must choose to grow up in the faith (Eph 4:11–16; Heb 5:11–14). This growth follows a pattern: from infancy (1Co 3:1) to youth (1Jo 2:13b, 14b), to maturity (Eph 4:13–16; Heb 5:14), to spiritual warrior (2Ti 2:1–3; Eph 6:12–18), to friend of God (Joh 14:21, 23, 15:14; Jam 2:23).

III. Godliness: the power of fruitful living, Chapter 3

In this final chapter, Paul ascends to the pinnacle of spiritual development by introducing the concept of heirship and inheritance (v. 7). He reemphasizes the necessity of engaging in “good works” three times (vv. 1, 8, 14), because to do so is “good and profitable to men” (v. 8) not only in this life, but in the life to come (cf. 1Ti 3:8, 6:6).

A. Building on the cross, looking to eternity, Tit 3:1–8

We have already seen the connection between living in the present while looking to eternity (Tit 2:13). In these verses, Paul exhorts us to right civil and social conduct (vv. 1–2) by presenting a panoramic view of our spiritual journey, beginning with our life as unbelievers (v. 3). Then comes the dramatic intervention of God in our new birth (vv. 4–6) followed by the prospect of eternal inheritance in the kingdom of God (v. 7). From this, Paul concludes that the idea that believers should engage in good works should be “constantly affirmed” (v. 8). But why should the promise of inheritance be used as an impetus for Christian service? Certainly gratitude to God for His grace is one reason. But Paul is thinking here of even greater implications. The answer is that our eternal status as heirs—our rank and reward eternally—is dependent on how faithfully we serve in the present life.

Note that our salvation was not effected by any “works of righteousness which we have done” (v. 5), but rather came by “the kindness and love [omni-benevolence] of God our Savior” (v. 4). Out of an act of pure mercy, “He saved us, through the washing of regeneration” (v. 5) (cf. Col 1:14, “forgiveness of [all] sins”) and “renewing of the Holy Spirit” (v. 5) (cf. 2Co 5:17, “new creation”). Both “God our Savior” (v. 4) and “Christ our Savior” (v. 6), working through the Holy Spirit (v. 5) bring us to a point of being “justified [declared righteous] by His grace” (v. 7).

All of the mighty saving power of God brings us into right relationship with Him, but that is not the only end in view. The work of God accomplished “apart from our works” (Eph 2:8–9) now—as a new creation in Christ—calls on us to “engage in good works” (v. 8) for the grand finale, our status and service in the eternal kingdom. Paul, more than any other author in the New Testament, constantly sets before the believer the promise of eternal reward (cf. 2Ti 2:11–13). Neither time nor space allow a full study on the subject, but we can gain some idea of his meaning by looking at the five crowns available to the believer:

1. Imperishable Crown—1Co 9:24–27. This crown is the reward of those who, like the athlete training for the games, exercise spiritual self-control in all areas of life.
2. Crown of Joy—Phi 4:1; 1Th 2:19. Here the reward is for faithful witness, leading others to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

3. Crown of Life—Jam 1:12; Rev 2:10. For those who endure their sufferings faithfully, there is offered the eternal equivalent of “*abundant life*” (cf. Joh 10:10b).
4. Crown of Righteousness—2Ti 4:7–8. Paul anticipated this crown and assures us that it is for all who live in light of Christ’s coming.
5. Crown of Glory—1Pe 5:4. Though often called “the pastors’ crown,” since every believer is gifted for some ministry (1Co 12:4–7; 2Co 5:18–21), I believe that this crown is available to all who are faithful in their respective ministry.

In light of these, and so many other promised rewards, it is good for us to heed the warning, “*Hold fast what you have* [God-given assets and potential], *that no one may take your crown*” (Rev 3:11). The believer who patiently advances through the stages of spiritual growth—from spiritual infant to young man, from young man to mature, from mature to warrior—will ultimately come to the point of living for (in light of) eternity. This will bring them to the final stage of spiritual growth, that of “*friend of God*” (Jam 2:23).

B. Avoiding the evil while maintaining the good, Tit 3:9–15

The life of faith is not only pictured as a walk, but also as spiritual warfare. The life of the disciple is not only that of a servant, but also as a soldier of God (Eph 6:12–18; 2Ti 2:1–3). The believer must navigate the battlefield of life, making constant choices between the good and the evil (Jer 15:19; Tit 2:12; Heb 5:14). All of life comes down to choices (Jos 24:15), and our decisions are the evidence of the spiritual condition of our soul.

In 1Ti 6:11–12, Paul challenges Timothy to choose the good while avoiding the evil, in order to “*fight the good fight of faith.*” By doing this, Paul says he will “*lay hold on eternal life,*” a phrase that speaks of laying up treasure and reward in heaven (cf. Mat 6:20; 1Ti 6:12, 19).

As the believer begins, from the vantage point of spiritual maturity, to engage in doing the will of God, he will face increasing opposition from the realm of darkness (Eph 6:11–13). In his persistence to accomplish the works, which God designed for him to do before the world began, the Christian worker soon becomes the Christian warrior, consistently defeating every “*high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God ...*” (2Co 10:5).

Even so, Titus is urged to avoid both false teachings and false teachers (vv. 9–11). Those who persist in rejecting the truth are spiritually warped, willful in sin, and stand self-condemned. It is far better to spend our time on those who are spiritually hungry and seeking the truth.

Giving final instructions regarding his plans to winter in Nicopolis (v. 12) and urging Titus to meet him there, sending along his lawyer Zenas and Apollos the teacher (Act 18:24–28), Paul closes the epistle with a final exhortation to “*learn to maintain good works,*” (v. 14) in order to meet “*urgent needs*” of others and to avoid being unfruitful in our spiritual lives (2Pe 1:8).

Summary of the Book

The book of Titus builds each chapter around a summary of some facet of the Gospel (Tit 1:1–3; 2:11–13; 3:4–6). Building on God’s foundational work in Christ (1Co 3:11), Paul develops the Christian life from beginning to end. The epistle is a brief roadmap of the journey of faith, beginning at the cross, and ending (with much diligence and endurance) at the coveted crown of faithful service.

We can summarize the book along the lines of the divine design for the Christian life: Beginning with salvation (Tit 1:1–4), moving through diligent study of God’s Word (Tit 1:5–16), leading to personal application (Tit 2:1–10) and transformation (Tit 2:11–15), into the fruitful service of a mature believer (Tit 3:1–8), now wise in discernment (Tit 3:9–11), becoming a useful and effective warrior in the service of the King of kings (Tit 3:12–14).

There is enough in this little book for a lifetime of study. It is my prayer that this study has generated a greater understanding of the spiritual life, and created a greater desire to “*run with endurance the race set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith ...*” (Heb 12:1–3). If this is accomplished, in even a few lives, my labor and my prayers will not be in vain!