

The blessings of goodness

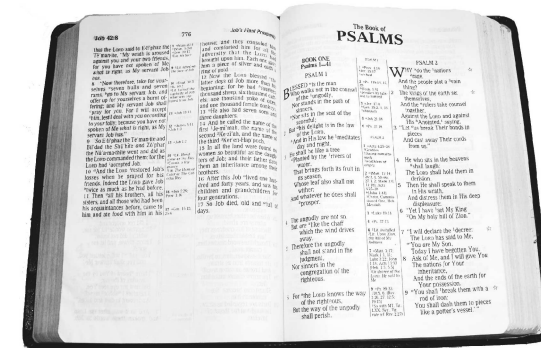
Most Bible commentators understand this psalm as speaking of Christ the King and his victories. Matthew Henry writes, 'In this there is an eye to the Messiah, the Prince, and the glory of his kingdom; for to him divers passages in this psalm are more applicable than to David himself.' There are also precious lessons to be drawn which relate to the believer's experience of God. The first seven verses of this psalm acknowledge God's goodness to the king (David). The Lord had given him strength to defeat all his enemies (8–12). The psalm ends by exalting God (13).

This psalm gives us much encouragement. Who more than the Christian should rejoice in God's strength and salvation (1)? We may not have battles against earthly armies like David, but the Lord has given us victory that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4), victory over sin and over Satan (Romans 6:14; 16:20). We are also encouraged that God hears and answers prayer (2).

God meets us (AV '*preventest*' which in the Hebrew means that God goes before us; theologians call it 'prevent grace'). He goes ahead of us preparing the way with '*the blessings of goodness*' (3). How wonderful! What great '*blessings of goodness*' God has given us. We may not be earthly kings, but the Lord Jesus wore a crown of thorns so that we could be kings to God (Revelation 1:5–6). He has given us eternal life and has placed *honour and majesty* upon us. We are *most blessed* and God makes us *exceedingly glad* with his presence. He is with us wherever we go and in whatever circumstances we find ourselves (3–6). David affirmed his trust in the Lord and his confidence that through divine mercy he would not be shaken ('*moved*'; 7). **Think about these and other '*blessings of goodness*' with which God meets us and rejoice in him.**

PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



March 2013

Bible readings from 2 Timothy, Titus,
Psalms 17 to 21

2 TIMOTHY

30 MARCH

Psalm 20

We will remember the name of the LORD our God

Psalms 20 and 21 form a pair. The first is a prayer for the king before battle and the second a psalm of thanksgiving for victory after battle (the answer to the prayer of Psalm 20:4 is recorded in Psalm 21:2). These psalms serve as a timely reminder that we must pray for the leaders of our nation (cp. 1 Timothy 2:1–3).

Verses 1 to 5 describe the prayer of the people for the king. Look at each of the requests beginning with the word ‘*May*’. David would have been greatly encouraged by such prayers. In verse 6 the person speaking is possibly the king or the high priest, expressing his confidence in God (the ‘*we*’ of verse 5 changes to ‘*I*’ in verse 6). The psalm finishes with the people affirming their trust in the Lord (‘*we*’ – verse 7) and their prayer for deliverance.

The name of God (1) reveals his character. What is God like? He is all-powerful (omnipotent) and absolutely sovereign in the universe. He is full of wisdom, goodness and mercy. We can therefore be confident in him when we come to him in prayer. *Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the LORD our God* (7). We must never trust in worldly methods to win our gospel victories, but in our spiritual warfare *remember the name of the LORD our God* (7; cp. 2 Corinthians 10:3–4).

We need to pray frequently together as a church. Corporate prayer encourages us in every adverse situation (cp. Acts 4:23–31) and without it the church is weak. Are you faithful in attending the prayer meeting? Do you pray for your fellow-church members and for the Lord’s people elsewhere? **Let us remember the name of the LORD our God and be encouraged to approach him in prayer.** He is faithful and he will meet our need in *the day of trouble* (1).

Rome was devastated by fire in AD 64 (said to have been started by the wicked emperor Nero for his own entertainment). Nero blamed the Christians for this and unleashed terrible persecution on the church. Thousands of Christians were tortured and killed. It was probably during this persecution that Paul was again imprisoned and put to death.

Paul’s second letter to Timothy is the last of all his letters in the New Testament. It was possibly written within a few months of his death and Paul was most anxious for Timothy to come to Rome to see him before he died (cp. 4:6,9). The apostle faced death with a calm dignity and with an expectation of the Lord’s reward for faithful service (4:6–8). As a man who knew that he was nearing death, he urged Timothy to persevere *as a good soldier of Jesus Christ* (2:3) and to shun false teaching (2:16–18; 3:1–9). The great antidote to false teaching is sound doctrine and Hendriksen points out that the apostle urges Timothy to: hold on to it (1:13–14); teach it (2:2,24); abide in it (3:14) and preach it (4:2).

Outline of 2 Timothy

- | | | |
|---|---|-------------|
| 1. Opening greetings | – | 1:1–2 |
| 2. Thanksgiving for Timothy’s faith | – | 1:3–5 |
| 3. Exhortation to be bold and faithful | – | 1:6–14 |
| 4. The loyalty of Onesiphorus commended | – | 1:15–18 |
| 5. Exhortation to persevere | – | 2:1–13 |
| 6. The man God uses | – | 2:14–26 |
| 7. Warning against the coming apostasy | – | 3:1–9 |
| 8. Equipment for perilous times (the word of God) | | 3:10 to 4:5 |
| 9. Paul’s own circumstances | – | 4:6–18 |
| 10. Closing greetings | – | 4:19–22 |

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The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul

Psalm 19 is divided into two parts which deal with two different ways in which God reveals himself to men. Two great truths about revelation are set before us:

- Natural Revelation: In nature – in the works of God (1–6). The universe and the earth with their beauty and wonders reveal to man that there is a God. There is no excuse for atheism which is folly (Psalm 14:1), nor for agnosticism which believes that we cannot know whether or not there is a God. *The heavens declare the glory of God* (1; cp. Romans 1:20). God's handiwork is there for all to see; it is a universal language which even the most primitive man can understand (3–4).
- Special Revelation: In the Bible which is the word of God (7–14). The world around us tells us that there is a Creator, that there is a God, but it cannot tell us how to get right with God or how we can know God. The Lord has not left us to grope in ignorance, however. He has given us the Bible. Look at the descriptions of the word of God: *the law of the LORD ... the testimony of the LORD, etc.* (7–9). It is through God's word that the soul is converted, is made wise, is enlightened (7–8). God's word is *perfect ... sure ... right ... pure ... clean ... true and righteous*. God's word is more precious than pure gold (10). How much do you desire to know it and to obey it?

God's word reveals to us the sin in our lives, sending rays of light into the darkest recesses of our hearts. It will lead us to pray, *Cleanse me from secret faults. Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins* (12–13). As we begin the day, let us meditate upon this lovely psalm and rejoice in its truths.

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my strength
and my Redeemer* (14).

The genuine faith that is in you

Paul was in prison awaiting execution (4:6) but he was not afraid to die because in Christ Jesus the gospel brings *the promise of life* (1; cp. 1 Timothy 4:8). He could look back on his life knowing that he had served God *with a pure conscience*. There isn't any trace of self-pity in the apostle because of his adverse circumstances. He rather opens his letter with thanksgiving to God (3). His last recorded letter is to Timothy whom he describes as his *beloved son* (2). He had described Timothy as his *true son in the faith* at the beginning of his first letter (1 Timothy 1:2).

Paul's love and concern for Timothy drove him to pray for him day and night. He longed to see Timothy again, remembering his tears (4; cp. 4:21). This may refer to the last time that they were together and the tearful parting that followed. True friendship and concern will show itself in constant prayer for those who are the objects of our love. How often do you pray for Christian friends and for ministers and missionary friends?

Paul was thankful to God for the sincere faith ('*genuine faith*') of Timothy and recalled that this kind of faith had been seen in his mother and grandmother (5). Timothy's Jewish mother had become a Christian but his Gentile father had probably remained outside of Christ (Acts 16:1). **Eunice is a great example to any whose husband (or wife) is not a Christian.** This godly woman and her mother had taught Timothy the Scriptures (3:15) from his earliest years and he became an outstanding Christian and a beloved fellow-worker of the apostle Paul. Lois is a great example to grandparents who can play an important role in the spiritual nurture of their grandchildren.

Parents, you have a great privilege in having children given to you by the Lord. You also have the great responsibility to teach them God's holy word, to pray with them, and to set a godly example before them in and out of the home. Are you doing these things?

The notes for 1 and 2 March are included with the notes for F

Do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord

The apostle urged Timothy to stir up the flame of the gift of God which he had received through the laying on of hands (6; cp. 1 Timothy 4:14). The Lord gives all Christians various gifts but they must be stirred up and used for his service (cp. Romans 12:6–8). The devil wants us to neglect our God-given gifts and he will encourage us to hide them because of the fear of men. Timothy had a timid disposition and the apostle sought to encourage him (cp. 1 Corinthians 16:10). Are you beset by fear? Is this fear hindering your service for God? Remember, *God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind* (7). How wonderful and encouraging!

When persecution rages against believers, it is all too easy to lie low and hide our Christian testimony. *God has not given us a spirit of fear ... Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner* (7–8). Notice that though the apostle was imprisoned by the Romans, he recognised the sovereignty of God in his suffering; he was Christ's prisoner. Timothy had to be prepared to share with Paul in suffering for the gospel (8). If you faithfully follow Christ, do not be surprised if you suffer for the sake of Christ.

Many Christians are *ashamed of the testimony of our Lord*. They are fearful of the scorn of men and women. They do not speak about the Lord, not of his greatness and love. They are 'secret believers'. **Why should we be ashamed?** The superstitious person is not ashamed of his folly; the godless man is rarely ashamed of his wicked lifestyle. **Why should we be ashamed of Christ or of stating our conviction that the Bible is God's holy word?** *God has not given us a spirit of fear so why should we be ashamed?* When we openly speak of the Lord and lead a life which honours him, we know much joy and blessing. Pray that the Lord will help you open your mouth to speak of him, and to strengthen you so that you have a good witness. Pray that your life will glorify him. *Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord.*

The LORD lives!

David rejoiced in the victories that God had given him over his enemies (37–45). These verses also point to the victories of David's greater Son, the Messiah, who will triumph over all his enemies and will come again as King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 19:11–16). David undoubtedly possessed great skills as a leader in battle, but he acknowledged that it was God who had armed him with strength to fight (35–39). His opponents were fighting God and when they finally prayed, it was too late (41). If you are not a Christian, I plead with you, 'Do not refuse to listen to God's voice' (see Hebrews 3:7–12). It is a solemn thing to know that a time may come when God will refuse to hear our prayers if we refuse to listen to his voice.

We must not lead our lives as if God were dead. Never forget, *The LORD lives!* (46). We are privileged to have fellowship with the living, personal God.

- He lives to avenge us when we are wronged (47 – we must never take personal revenge on those who mistreat us; cp. Romans 12:19–21).
- God lives to deliver us and to give us victory over Satan. If we resist the devil, he will flee from us (James 4:7).
- The Lord lives to prosper his work, to build his church, and to keep us in all our ways.
- He is the eternal God who lives to help us through the dark valley experiences. Nothing, not even death, can separate us from his love (Romans 8:38–39).

The psalm closes with God's '*anointed*' (or 'Messiah') rejoicing in his everlasting kingdom (49–50; cp. Romans 15:9). **Let us give thanks to the Lord and sing praises to his name** (49).

*The LORD lives! Blessed be my Rock!
Let the God of my salvation be exalted* (46).

As for God, his way is perfect

Wonder of wonders! God makes sinners righteous by his grace and then rewards them for being righteous (20–24)! If we love the Lord, we will do all that we are able to keep ourselves from falling into sin (23). As we behave towards others, God will deal with us (25–26). How can we expect to find mercy from God, if we are not merciful? (cp. Matthew 6:12; 18:21–35).

There are times when we are baffled by the ways of God with us. Let us be encouraged by verse 30: *As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is proven.* God's way is perfect because he is infinitely wise, powerful and good. **God's word is a proven word because he cannot lie and he will never fail us. All his promises are true.** David proved it, countless thousands have proved it since David and so have we. Hallelujah!

God also strengthens us and makes our way perfect (32). He weaves blessings out of trials and works all things together for good. He supports us with his right hand and his gentleness makes us great (35; the Hebrew word for 'gentleness' is elsewhere translated 'humility'). God in grace stoops down to lift us up to make us great (and what can be greater than being a child of God?). He keeps us from falling (36). Let us worship him and praise him, for he is *worthy to be praised* (3).

*God shall alone the refuge be
And comfort of my mind;
Too wise to be mistaken, he,
Too good to be unkind.*

*When I the tempter's rage endure,
'Tis God supports my mind;
Too wise to be mistaken, sure!
Too good to be unkind.*

(Samuel Medley).

Nevertheless I am not ashamed

When we see the greatness of the gospel and the exceeding perfection and goodness of Christ, we also see that he is worthy of our devotion. There is a great statement about our salvation in verses 9 and 10. Election (God's choice of individuals to salvation) is not based on our works but is by grace according to the purpose of God. We were chosen in Christ *before time began*, not because God foresaw any good works in us *but according to his own purpose and grace* ('grace' is the undeserved favour of God). Theologians describe this wonderful truth as 'unconditional election'.

We have been saved and called with '*a holy calling*'. Christ through his death has abolished death (deprived it of its power) and *brought life and immortality to light through the gospel*. Our souls will go to heaven when we die and our bodies will be raised when Jesus comes again (cp. 1 Corinthians 15:5–55). What a glorious hope we have in Christ!

God had appointed Paul to be *a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles* (11). As a servant of God he suffered, but he also testified, *Nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him until that day* (12). It is important that we not only know what we believe, but that we also know whom we have believed (God). Paul stresses here his relationship with God. He was persuaded that God would keep all the precious things that he had committed to his care – his soul, his future, his friends, his work. Paul had such a great trust in his God and Saviour that he could face death with peace and assurance.

Is your experience like that of the apostle? Do you know whom you have believed? Are you persuaded that he is able to keep what you have committed to him until that day (of Christ's return)? **Commit your life, your ways, your problems, your anxieties and your cares to him. He will never fail you, he cannot fail you, for he is God.**

He often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain

Many people say that it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are sincere. That is just not true! The Bible has many warnings against false religions, false teachers and error. False teaching is the enemy of truth and of the gospel. Like Timothy we too must *hold fast the pattern of sound words* which are found in the teaching of the apostles. God had entrusted Timothy with the gospel (1 Timothy 6:20) and he was to keep this good thing which had been committed to him. He could not do this in his own strength but by *the Holy Spirit who dwells in us* (14). We must never forget our need to depend upon the Holy Spirit.

When Paul was again imprisoned, it appears that he appealed to leading Christians in the province of Asia (of which Ephesus was the capital) to come to Rome and support him. They had deserted him however, and he singles out Phygellus and Hermogenes. This would have been a bitter disappointment to the apostle.

There was a man at Ephesus who was different and he was a great character (15–18). We are briefly introduced to Onesiphorus who had always been a loyal friend to Paul and had ministered to him at Ephesus. He went to Rome where Christians were being slaughtered for their faith during Nero's persecution of the church. Braving all kinds of danger, he diligently searched for Paul until he found him (17).

Paul had urged Timothy, *Do not be ashamed*. He also stated that he *was not ashamed* and now he writes of this dear brother who was not *ashamed* of him. *He often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain* (16). Onesiphorus was not ashamed to be identified with a man condemned to death despite the great danger to himself in a climate of persecution against Christians. He was a merciful man and Paul prayed that God would have mercy on him and his household (from whom he was absent; cp. Matthew 5:7). Men and women of such calibre are indeed rare. How often do you 'refresh' other Christians in their need? **Are you willing at all times to be loyal and true to God and his servants, whatever the cost to yourself?**

He delivered me because he delighted in me

David sang this psalm after God had delivered him from Saul and other enemies (see the title of this psalm which is also found in 2 Samuel, chapter 22). Verses 2 and 49 are quoted in the New Testament with reference to the Lord Jesus (Hebrews 2:13; Romans 15:9). The whole of the psalm breathes out praise to God for his deliverance. *I will love you, O LORD, my strength* (1). The Hebrew word translated 'love' denotes a deep, heartfelt love. Do you love God with all your heart?

Look at the description of God's greatness and strength in verse 2: *My rock ... my fortress ... my deliverer ... my strength ... my shield ... the horn of my salvation* (the 'horn' is a symbol of strength)... *my stronghold*. We have a strong God who is deserving of our trust and worthy of our praise (2–3). The Lord does hear us and he does deliver us (6, 16–19). Are you going through a time of trial? Do you feel weary in the Christian warfare? Meditate on today's reading and take heart; the Lord will never fail you.

This psalm not only tells of God's strength but also of his grace. *He delivered me because he delighted in me* (19). God delights in his children and those who would fight us fight the Almighty (cp. Acts 5:39; 9:1,4–5). How encouraging! *If God is for us, who can be against us?* (Romans 8:31). Christian, if you are feeling depressed or lonely, remember that the Lord delights in you; he will never forsake you.

True religion means enjoying a relationship with the God who delights in his people. Notice the repetition of '*he ... me*' in verses 16 to 19. **Do you know God by personal experience? Can you honestly testify to his gracious dealings with you? Do not be content with a mediocre, dull 'Christianity'.** Seek the Lord and call upon him in prayer. He will make himself known to you so that you too will praise him from a heart overflowing with love. *I will love you, O LORD, my strength*.

I shall be satisfied when I awake in your likeness

Spurgeon writes in his commentary on the Psalms (THE TREASURY OF DAVID), ‘The smell of the furnace is upon this present psalm, but there is evidence in the last verse that he who wrote it came unharmed out of the flame. We have in the present plaintive song, an appeal to heaven from the persecutions of earth.’

David may have written this psalm when Saul was seeking his life (cp. 1 Samuel 23:26). He knew that he had not done anything wrong to merit such dreadful treatment at the hands of Saul (cp. 1 Samuel 24:11) and he cried out to God to vindicate him (1–5). We often come before the Lord with little passion or urgency in our prayers. Notice how David calls upon the Lord – ‘*Hear ... attend to my cry; give ear*’ (1). He prayed that the Lord would protect him (6–12). He then ended his prayer confident that God would deliver him and one day would bring him to heaven (13–15).

There is a lovely description of God’s dealing with us in verse 7 – *your marvellous lovingkindness*. His ways with us are truly marvellous and he is worthy of our trust when we are passing through the valley of trial and trouble. David had proved God in many ways and had experienced wonderful deliverances from danger and death.

The ‘*men of the world*’ (14) live for this world and its passing pleasures (cp. Philippians 3:19; 1 John 2:15–17). When they die, their pleasures are no more and they have to leave their wealth behind them. **After death there is judgment (Hebrews 9:27), but the child of God has a glorious eternity. We will be made perfect in righteousness and will see the face of our Saviour.** The Christian is able to say, ‘*I shall be satisfied when I awake in your likeness*’ (15). Let us close with some words from the New Testament: *Beloved, now we are the children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when he is revealed, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure* (1 John 3:2–3).

A good soldier of Jesus Christ

Having written of the examples of Lois, Eunice, Onesiphorus and himself (chapter 1), Paul encouraged Timothy to *be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus* (1). He was to commit the teaching he had received from Paul to faithful men who would in turn become teachers of God’s word (2). What does it mean to be faithful? In this context it means to be devoted to Christ and to the truth of the gospel. It means to be trustworthy and dependable. Paul went on to liken the Christian life and service to that of a soldier (3–4), an athlete (5) and a farmer (6). Geoffrey B. Wilson comments, ‘The ministry of the gospel demands:

1. The whole-hearted devotion of the soldier;
2. The self-discipline of the athlete;
3. The wearisome toil of the farmer.’

(THE PASTORAL EPISTLES published by Banner of Truth).

We are involved in the good warfare (1 Timothy 1:18) against the world (4), the flesh (22) and the devil (26). *A good soldier of Jesus Christ* must endure hardship (3). The Greek word translated ‘*endure hardship*’ is the same as that rendered ‘*share ... in the sufferings*’ (1:8). We must not expect to have an easy time.

A good soldier of Jesus will not get entangled *with the affairs of this life* (4). We may have to deny ourselves pleasures and enjoyments which are not in themselves sinful, but which may distract us from our warfare. *All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful* (1 Corinthians 6:12).

Our supreme aim must be to please him who has *enlisted* us as his soldiers (4). Dare we be half-hearted when the Lord Jesus gave his life to save us? Surely, if we love him, we will be prepared to deny ourselves for him and to suffer for him. **Let us consider the words of Paul in these Scriptures and remember that success and fruitfulness in spiritual work do not come without hard toil and sacrifice.**

The word of God is not chained

Persecution against the church was raging when the apostle wrote this letter to Timothy. He had told his younger friend that he must endure hardship in his service for Christ (3). He now encourages Timothy not to fear. He reminded him that because Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, God's elect may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory (8,10). Our Saviour conquered death which is a terrible enemy but our great salvation leads to eternal glory.

Paul was in chains for the gospel but he knew that *the word of God is not chained* (9). This encouraged the apostle to endure *all things for the sake of the elect* (10). He knew that the gospel was advancing through his suffering (cp. Philippians 1:12–14). Wicked men may imprison or kill God's servants, but they cannot imprison God's word or prevent it from working in the lives of men, women, boys and girls. **Oh, that we had such a confidence in the word of God, and love for the elect that we could honestly say that we would endure anything for them! Our churches, our evangelism and our missionary work would be transformed.**

There is another '*faithful saying*' in verses 11 to 13:

- *For if we died with him* (Christ), *we shall also live with him*. This refers not so much to dying to sin (eg. Romans 6:7–8) but to dying to earthly comfort and ambition as a good soldier of Jesus Christ, being ready to suffer reproach, imprisonment or even death for him. *We shall also live with him*. 'To live with Christ means to be with him, to have fellowship with him, to delight in him, to be like him, to love him, and to glorify him' (Hendriksen, COMMENTARY, page 259).
- *If we endure* ('bear up courageously under suffering' – VINE'S EXPOSITORY DICTIONARY OF NEW TESTAMENT WORDS), *we shall also reign with him*.
- *If we deny* Christ (by apostasy), *he also will deny us* on the day of judgment.
- *If we are faithless, he remains faithful*. Let us praise him and encourage ourselves in him.

Be careful to maintain good works

The *faithful saying* (8) refers to the words in verses 4 to 7. We are not saved *by works of righteousness* (5) but we are saved to do good works. Paul urged Titus to *affirm constantly* these things (8) **We must always remember that free grace is not the enemy of good works. We must be kind to others because God is kind to us.** We are to be *ready for every good work* (1). Those who have believed in God *should be careful to maintain good works* (8).

Good works flow out of a life which loves the Lord, which is grateful for his grace. They come from a heart of compassion for those around us. This does not mean that we are to tolerate false teachers or those who threaten the unity of the fellowship. Such people are '*warped*'; they may not be condemned by their own distorted conscience, but they are *self-condemned* by what they teach and do (9–11).

The apostle promised to send Artemas or Tychicus to Crete so that Titus could be released to go to him at Nicapolis where he was planning to spend the winter (12). Zenas and Apollos were probably the bearers of Paul's letter to Titus (13). Paul returned to the theme of good works in his closing greetings. *And let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful* (14). Is there an urgent need that you could meet by some good work? Is there someone you could help with a word of encouragement? **Seek to be fruitful in your Christian life; it is far healthier than seeking to receive blessings.**

*Give me a faithful heart,
Likeness to thee,
That each departing day
Henceforth may see
Some work of love begun,
Some deed of kindness done,
Some wanderer sought and won,
Something for thee.*

(Sylvanus O. Phelps).

The kindness and love of God our Saviour toward men

We are repeating yesterday's Bible reading and we will think particularly of verses 4 to 7. Verse 4 contains one of the great 'buts' of Scripture (cp. Ephesians 2:4). *But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour towards men appeared* (cp. 2:11 – *the grace of God ... has appeared*). Man without God lives in malice, envy, and hatred (3) and we see this continually in the world around us, but God is kind.

The Bible teaches us that good works are important and that they are an evidence of our faith (1, 8; cp. 2:14; James 2:17). However, we cannot possibly save ourselves by our good works. *Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us* (5). This salvation includes:

- The washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit (5).
- The abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ our Saviour (6).
- Justification by his grace (7). Our bad record is cleared and we are no longer condemned (cp. Romans 5:1; 8:1).
- Being made heirs according to the hope of eternal life (7).

All this is so wonderful! Does it not cause your heart to overflow with adoration and praise to our kind and loving God? Does it not encourage you to please God and to live for him?

If you are downhearted or discouraged, remember that God is kind. Pour out your heart to him in prayer and bring your needs to him. He did not spare his Son in order to save you and he will not turn you away (Romans 8:32). If you are not a Christian, our kind God will freely forgive you and save you from your sins if you will turn from them and trust in him.

*Indulgent God, how kind
Are all thy ways to me
Whose dark benighted mind
Was enmity with thee;
Yet now, subdued by sovereign grace,
My spirit longs for thy embrace!*

(John Kent)

Approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed

Timothy was to remind the *'faithful men'* whom he taught (2) of the things mentioned in verses 8 to 13. He must solemnly charge them (*'before the Lord'*; 14, cp. 4:1) not to engage in useless battles about words which do not profit the hearers but lead to ruin (14). The apostle had warned Timothy in his first letter against the false teacher who is *proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words* (6:4).

Paul now urges Timothy, *Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth* (15). William Hendriksen comments, 'Timothy then, must be a workman, not a quibbler. His work, moreover, must be such that it does not reflect shame on him and that he does not need to fear that shame will cover him when he hears the divine verdict with respect to it' (COMMENTARY ON 1 & 2 TIMOTHY, published by Banner of Truth). **Christian, are you being diligent in your service, a worker who does not need to be ashamed?**

The Christian worker must rightly divide *the word of truth* (15). The verb translated *'dividing'* means 'cutting straight' and the Greek word is also used of a plough cutting a straight furrow in the soil. The teacher of God's word must guide it along a straight path and refuse to be turned aside by useless debates or heresy. The ideas of heretics who deny the resurrection of Christ from the dead and the resurrection of the dead when Christ returns are not new; they were propagated in New Testament times. Hymenaeus and Philetus were teaching that the resurrection had already happened, denying the future resurrection of the body (17–18). They probably taught that the resurrection was only spiritual (eg. the new life experienced at conversion). **Do you see the craftiness in such an error? It affirms one truth in order to deny another.** A gospel that denies the bodily resurrection of Christ is a false gospel (18).

A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all

We are deeply troubled when Christian leaders go astray, either through embracing false ideas or through immoral behaviour. We rightly wonder if they were ever truly saved, and the faith of many is shaken because of such people. We have also to recognise that there are temporary believers who have never known real faith or love for the Lord (cp. the Parable of the Sower, Matthew 13:1–23). We may not know whether certain individuals have ever been true believers, but *the Lord knows those who are his* (19). On the day of judgment, the Lord Jesus will say to those who have not really known him as their Saviour, *‘I never knew you; depart from me, you who practise lawlessness’* (Matthew 7:23).

There are two essentials for any pastor or Christian worker – purity of life and purity of doctrine.

- Purity of life. Holiness is essential for all who profess to follow Christ. Everyone who belongs to the Lord and names the name of Christ must *depart from iniquity* (19). The worker *approved to God* (15) will *flee youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace*. By doing these things he will be in the good company of *those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart* (22). A godly character is far more important than the possession of spiritual gifts.
- Purity of doctrine. We were thinking about this yesterday. The servant of the Lord must rightly divide the word of truth (14) but he must *avoid foolish and ignorant disputes* (23). He must *not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient* (24). He must humbly seek to correct and recover false teachers from the error of their ways. Those people have been enslaved by the devil and are blind to truth. **A godly life will convince them as much as force of argument from Scripture. How is it with you? How is your doctrine and life?** Are you being diligent to *present yourself approved to God ... sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work* (15, 21)?

To be peaceable, gentle, showing humility to all men

Paul commanded Titus to remind the Christians in Crete that as God’s special people they were to be model citizens; these instructions apply to all Christians.

- We are to *be subject to rulers and authorities* (1); this command can be very difficult to follow, especially when politicians are corrupt and there are unjust laws. We must remember, however, that God is sovereign over rulers and that he appoints them (Proverbs 21:1; Romans 13:1–7). We are to pray for rulers and for those in authority over us even when they enforce laws which are unjust (1 Timothy 2:1–3).
- We are to *be ready for every good work* (1); good works of compassion and kindness honour God and are an evidence of the reality of our faith (Matthew 5:16; James 2:14–18; 1 John 3:16–19).
- We are to keep ourselves from slander and gossip – *speak evil of no one* (2); this sin is common among many believers and causes great damage in churches.
- We are to be *peaceable, gentle, showing humility to all men* (2). Many a Christian has been deeply hurt by individuals who have been harsh, rough and arrogant towards them.

Are the virtues listed in verses 1 and 2 seen in your life?

Let us think about our state before God graciously saved us (3). We were *once foolish* (ignorant of spiritual things), *disobedient* (rebels against God), *deceived* (believing the lies of Satan), *servicing various lusts and pleasures* (slaves of our own sinful passions), and *living in malice and envy* (because of hatred in our hearts). It is only when we are saved that we realise the exceeding sinfulness of the human heart. Let us thank God for delivering us from the power of sin and seek with all our heart to please him by leading godly lives.

The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men

The gospel is good news for all men and must be preached to all whatever their nationality. *The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men* (11). The grace of God is described here as a teacher (12). What does it teach us?

- To renounce *ungodliness and worldly lusts* (this includes immoral sexual desires, living for pleasure and being self-centred).
- To live *soberly, righteously, and godly* (12).
- To look for *the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ* (13). This verse is one of so many which teach that the Lord Jesus is God (eg. Romans 9:5; Philippians 2:6; Colossians 1:15–20; 2:9). Do you think much about the return of the Lord Jesus? This glorious hope is a great incentive to being holy (12,14; cp. 1 John 3:3).

The Lord Jesus gave himself for us to redeem us from sin and *to purify for himself his own special people who are zealous for good works* (14). Christian, never forget that you are one of *his own special people* (cp. 1 Peter 2:9). You are special to God. He chose you for himself before he created the world. He gave his only begotten Son to die for you, to save you from your sins. The Lord Jesus will never leave you nor forsake you and he will come again for you. Be encouraged that you are so special to him. **If the grace of God has been teaching you anything, it should be that you are to show by your life that you belong to the Lord.**

Titus was to teach these things, to encourage and rebuke. He was not to allow anyone in the church to despise him in the exercise of his pastoral work (15). This was not an encouragement to be arrogant nor to lord it over the flock (cp. 1 Peter 5:1–3). Oh, do not rebel against your pastor when he seeks to apply the Scriptures to encourage you to lead a godly life. He is concerned for you and for your spiritual wellbeing.

Having a form of godliness but denying its power

The last days (1) are not limited to the time which immediately precedes the second coming of Christ. They refer to the gospel age (cp. Acts 2:17), to the time in which Paul lived and to the twenty-first century. There have been and there will continue to be perilous seasons which will have their climax in the revealing of the Antichrist, the man of sin (2 Thessalonians 2:1–12).

Verses 2 to 4 contain a list of dreadful sins which in many ways reflect the godless society around us. The first sin in the list is the love of self and the other sins that grow out of selfishness – *lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, etc.* The Lord Jesus calls on all who would follow him to deny themselves (Mark 8:34). Let us examine our own hearts to be sure that none of these sins are to be found lurking within.

These sins are not only found among the godless. They are to be seen in the lives of religious people who are described as *having a form of godliness but denying its power* (5). The Pharisees of New Testament times had many religious trappings in their lives but they were strangers to the power of living religion. Their religion was all outward show; it was a sham. Some have a form of godliness but they resist the truth as did Pharaoh's magicians, Jannes and Jambres. Others gain entrance into the homes of gullible women who are *always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth* (6–8). In some respects this describes the activities of some false cults. They are always learning error from their leaders and from their magazines and books, but are unable to recognise the truths so plainly taught in the Bible. A time is coming when the folly of such people will be revealed (9).

Be sure that your Christianity is real. If your life has only a form of godliness, but denies its power, you are in a perilous state.

All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution

There was a great contrast between Timothy and the false teachers. Paul was able to write of him, *But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, etc* (10). If our teaching does not make us godly, if our life does not match our profession, we must question whether or not we know the Lord. Let us think about Paul's 'purpose'. He lived for Christ and aimed always to please him (2 Corinthians 5:9; Philippians 1:21). He lived to make known the gospel of Christ and to serve the Lord's people (2 Corinthians 4:5). How do those who know you observe your life? Can they see that you love the Lord and that you desire to be godly?

Paul was a godly man who suffered much persecution for the sake of the gospel but he could testify to the Lord's deliverance (11). Hendriksen comments on this verse, 'The Lord ever rescues his people, frequently from death, sometimes by means of death. Either way, nothing ever separates them from his love (Romans 8:38, 39)'.

We may not be imprisoned or called upon to die for our faith, but we must expect trouble in a hostile world. *All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution* (12; cp. John 15:18–25; 16:33; 1 John 3:13). Most of us do not face violent hostility to our Christian testimony and message, but we must not be surprised when persecution comes our way (cp. 1 Peter 4:12–14). A godly life attracts the relentless opposition of Satan. The world will leave us alone if we are prepared to compromise our Christian faith or witness. A Christian may be passed over for promotion because he refuses to be dishonest for his employer. He may lose his job for refusing to work on the Lord's Day in his factory or shop. **Are you prepared to suffer for the Lord Jesus and to follow him whatever the cost? Do you desire to lead a godly life in Christ Jesus?**

That they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things

Paul has stern words concerning false teachers (1:10–16) but he now shows what is expected of the servant of God. Titus was to teach and to be an example of one who embraced *sound* (healthy) *doctrine* (1,7–8). He was to reach all sections of the church in his pastoral work encouraging young and old alike to lead godly lives (2–10). The older Christian man is to show in his life the kind of spiritual maturity that matches his age. He is to be *sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience* (2). Older men often lack patience, but they must look to the Lord to correct this deficiency (2). Every Christian, young or old, must be 'sober' (serious-minded, 2,6,12) and beware of the type of Christianity which lives for religious excitement. This of course does not exclude joy and laughter in our lives, for walking with God brings great happiness.

Older women may have a very useful ministry in teaching good things to the younger women in the church (3–5). This is a vital ministry in our churches but is only possible when the older women are loved and respected for their godliness. The young women should be willing to receive the help and teaching of such people.

Godly living in the home and at work is essential if our witness is to be taken seriously by those outside the church. An inconsistent life will cause the word of God to be '*blasphemed*' (5; cp. 1 Timothy 6:1). We have already considered slavery in New Testament times (see notes on 1 Timothy 6:1–5, 27 December 2012). Slaves were often very surly and untrustworthy but a Christian slave was able to have a very convincing testimony by being different (9–10). The same principle applies to all of us. Our lives must *adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things*. Is this true of you? **Do your life and witness make the Christian faith appear beautiful and attractive?**

Sound in the faith

Wherever God is at work, you can be sure that Satan is not far away. The infant churches of Crete were already being troubled by false teachers. Titus needed to appoint suitable men as elders over these churches to guard them against these deceivers. *Those of the circumcision* (10) were Jews who had attached themselves to the churches, but were insisting that Gentile Christians submitted to Jewish rites (eg. circumcision) and dietary laws. Many of their petty rules and regulations were derived from *Jewish fables* (14–15) rather than the Old Testament. Such teaching was a denial of the grace of God (cp. Galatians 2:16,21).

False teachers are liars and Paul quoted the Cretan poet, Epimenides, who had said, *Cretans are always liars* (12). What a contrast to *God, who cannot lie* (2)! Epimenides was revered by the Cretans as a prophet but he had harsh words to say about his own people. It was a recognised fact in the ancient world that the Cretans had such a reputation for lying that they had a verb ‘to cretize’, which meant ‘to lie and cheat’. The Cretan poet had described his people as ‘*evil beasts, lazy gluttons*’. The wonderful thing is that many had been transformed by the grace of God and were now following the Lord Jesus. The Jewish false teachers were like the unconverted Cretans in their quest for *dishonest gain* (10–14).

We must not tolerate false teachers. Their *mouths must be stopped* (11) and they must be sharply rebuked (13). Elders must not be afraid of being accused of lack of love when they deal firmly with false teachers. It is cowardice and lack of love for the Lord and his people to allow error to flourish in a church. What is the antidote to error? It is the teaching of *sound doctrine* (9; 2:1) so that those who sit under such a ministry become *sound in the faith* (13; cp. 2:2). The Greek word translated ‘*sound*’ means ‘healthy’. Healthy doctrine leads to a healthy faith. **When did you last have a spiritual check-up? Were your doctrine and faith found to be healthy?**

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God

The apostle again warns Timothy about the enemies of the gospel who are described in verses 2 to 9. They are *evil men and impostors* who *will grow worse and worse* in their activity of deception and who are themselves deluded (13). What was Paul’s advice to Timothy in the face of persecution and of increasing confusion caused by false teachers? He must continue in the things he had learned from the apostle, from Lois and Eunice (14–15; cp. 1:5). **We cannot emphasise enough the necessity of a thorough grounding in the Scriptures.** Such a foundation is essential if we are to be godly people and if we are to be equipped to combat false teaching. Parents must follow the example of Timothy’s mother and teach their children the word of God.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God (i.e. ‘God-breathed’). The Bible is the word of God. *Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit* (2 Peter 1:21). The word of God has been under attack from early history. In Eden Satan questioned and contradicted the things that God had said (Genesis 3:1, 4–5). There are no errors in the Bible (this is known as the ‘inerrancy of Scripture’). The Bible alone is the authority for our teaching. We must beware of those who add to it (eg. superstitious fables and teaching found nowhere in its pages) and those who subtract from it (eg. Modernism which denies that the Bible is God’s word and rejects the creation account found in Genesis chapters 1 to 3).

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness (16). The Bible is the holy word of God and is our complete guide for our teaching and for instruction in leading a godly life. *All Scripture ... is profitable* (and that includes the Old Testament Scriptures) ... *that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work* (16–17). **How thoroughly equipped for every good work are you?**

Be watchful in all things

Paul knows that he will soon be put to death and he makes a very solemn charge to Timothy *before God and the Lord Jesus Christ* (1; cp. 1 Timothy 5:21). He reminds his close friend and fellow-worker that the Lord Jesus *will judge the living and the dead* when he comes again. The apostle charges Timothy to:

- *Preach the word!* The Greek verb translated ‘preach’ means ‘proclaim’ or ‘herald’. True preaching proclaims the message of God. The proclamation of the word is essential for a healthy church. If a professing Christian despises the preaching of God’s word, serious questions must be asked about his religion.
- *Be ready* at all times to proclaim the truth.
- *Convince* the sinner of his sin and of his need to repent.
- *Rebuke* those who continue in sin. The godly preacher will never tone down the serious nature of sin and its consequences.
- *Exhort* – encourage sinners to repent and follow Christ (2).

The Christian preacher and teacher must fulfil his ministry with long-suffering (2; cp. 3:10). This means being slow to anger and being gentle and patient with those he teaches.

Many who profess to love the Lord will not endure sound doctrine. Their ears itch for sensational stories. Others *heap up for themselves teachers* who make outlandish claims. They are taken in by fables, but they have little interest in the truth (3–4). Paul urges Timothy, *Be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist* (pastors must be able to preach the gospel plainly and powerfully), *fulfil your ministry* (5).

We live in difficult and dangerous days. Many churches are very weak and error and false religions continue to make great progress. **Let us be watchful in all things.**

Elders

It would appear that Paul had completed a very successful period of missionary work in Crete after his release from his first imprisonment. Many had responded to the gospel and were gathered in local fellowships throughout the island. He had left Titus behind to do two things:

- He was to *set in order the things that are lacking* (5). The Greek translated ‘set in order’ means ‘to straighten out’ and Titus was to deal with the things that remained to be done. Believers were to be gathered together to form churches under godly leadership.
- He was to *appoint elders in every city* (5). The ‘elder’ (5) is also described as a ‘bishop’ (‘overseer’, 7). An elder (or pastor) shepherds the flock of God (1 Peter 5:2). The practice of a single bishop who oversees several churches does not conform to the biblical pattern. The New Testament shows that each church had a plurality of elders (eg. Philippians 1:1). Churches need elders, but they must only appoint men who have the spiritual qualifications for such a ministry. Compare the qualifications required in elders (5–9) with those in 1 Timothy 3:1–7. It is better to have just one pastor than a plurality of unsuitable elders.

An elder must be *blameless* because he is a *steward* over the household of God (the local church). He must be *blameless* in his family life. He must be a man who is faithful to his wife, a good husband and father. A man whose children are unruly must not be appointed (6; cp. 1 Timothy 3:4–5). If he is unable to control his own children, he is hardly fit to control unruly elements in the church. There are five things which are not acceptable in those who would be elders (7) and seven things which must be in evidence in their lives (8–9). Elders must be sound in their doctrine, *holding fast the faithful word* that they have been taught, so that they are able to deal with false teachers (9).

Let us pray that God will be pleased to raise up godly men to serve as elders in our churches and also pray for our own elders that they will always be faithful to their awesome responsibilities.

The faith of God's elect

Paul addresses Titus as *my true son in our common faith* (4). His opening greetings (1–4) would have given added weight to Titus' authority for his mission in the island of Crete. He describes himself as *an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect* (1). We have already seen in our reading in 2 Timothy 1:8–12 (5 March) that the elect are those whom God was pleased to choose to salvation before time began. *Our common faith*, the faith that we share, is *the faith of God's elect*. Let us think about this faith:

- This faith produces a love for truth and godliness. – *The truth which is according to godliness* (1; cp. 1 Timothy 6:3). God has chosen us to be holy (Ephesians 1:4). Truth and godliness must always go together. Truth embraces the great doctrines of the gospel and all that is taught in God's word.
- *The faith of God's elect* rests on the unchanging faithfulness of God, who cannot lie (2). We have the *hope of eternal life* which he *promised before time began* (2; cp. 2 Timothy 1:9). All the promises and warnings in the Bible are true because God cannot lie! Satan tried to undermine this fact when he tempted Eve. He asked, 'Has God said?' and then stated, 'You will not surely die' (Genesis 3:1,4). If you are struggling in trial or perplexity, if you are beset by doubts, encourage yourself in the Lord by remembering that God cannot lie. He cannot deny his holy character (2 Timothy 2:13). He will bring you through.
- *The faith of God's elect* is committed to the faithful preaching (proclamation) of God's word (3). This faith will not bow to pressures which despise preaching and seek to replace it with entertainment in the church.

The faith of God's elect is a precious faith. Do you have it?

I have fought the good fight

The apostle approaches the end of his letter with a most moving and glorious statement of faith. He writes, *I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand* (6). In Old Testament times a drink offering was poured out as *a sweet aroma to the LORD* (Numbers 15:7). During his first imprisonment Paul had thought about the possibility of execution (*if I am being poured out as a drink offering* – Philippians 2:17), but now he knew that he was soon to die (*I am already being poured out*). His life of sacrificial service and willingness to lay down his life for his Saviour was *a sweet aroma to the LORD*. He had continually offered his life as *a living sacrifice* (cp. Romans 12:1). For Paul death was not the dread end, but a departure for heaven; it was to be with Christ which *is gain ... which is far better* (Philippians 1:21,23). When Christians die, they go to be *at home with the Lord* (2 Corinthians 5:8 ESV).

Paul had wrestled throughout his Christian service with Satan and the powers of darkness. He had been in a continual battle with Jewish and pagan opposition to the gospel, with false teachers and with his own remaining sin. He writes, *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race* (cp. 2:3–5) and like the successful athlete he awaited the victor's crown. The servant of the Lord had *kept the faith* and he was looking forward to receiving his heavenly reward (7–8). Everyone who loves the appearing (the second coming) of Christ (cp. verse 1) will receive *the crown of righteousness* from the Lord.

Many professing Christians do not finish the race; they are drawn away by the love of the world (cp. verse 10) or they grow lukewarm and forget that the Lord will require an account of their lives. If we really love the Lord, we will always seek to please him and we will long for his return. **Let us be faithful to God** in the work that he has given us so that we will be able to say, when our earthly pilgrimage comes to its end, *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith*.

The Lord stood with me

Paul closes by giving Timothy some news of their fellow-workers and their present spheres of service, as well as sending greetings to some of his fellow-workers (19–22). Only Luke had remained with him and he urged Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, and to bring with him Mark (9–11,21). Luke *the beloved physician* (Colossians 4:14) had been a loyal and precious friend to Paul. He had accompanied him on many of his travels and was with him in Rome during his first imprisonment. The apostle was deeply disappointed with Demas who had forsaken him, *having loved this present world* (10). The love of the world had taken away his love for the appearing of Christ (8). My dear reader, do not grieve the Holy Spirit or disappoint your pastor and Christian friends by growing cold in heart and in love to the Lord.

Paul wanted Timothy to come urgently (9), not only because of his impending death, but if he were spared the winter, he would need warmth in his cold, damp prison cell. The cloak that he had left at Troas could be brought to him as well as his books and especially the parchments (13,21). Paul was a reader to the end and he wanted to encourage himself in the Scriptures (*the parchments*). He warned Timothy against Alexander the coppersmith who had been a bitter enemy and he prayed that the Lord would deal with him according to his works (14–15; cp. Romans 12:19).

No influential person had come to support Paul at his first court appearance. Were there such Christians in the Roman church, who held back for fear of their lives? Paul prayed that the Lord would forgive them (16). **He was not alone however.** *The Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached* (17). How wonderful to know that the Lord stands with those who are faithful to him (cp. Hebrews 13:5–6)! Paul had a burning passion to preach the gospel to the very end (17). He had fought the good fight and he knew that the Lord would preserve him for his heavenly kingdom (18). Let us praise our great God who cares for us and preserves us, who will never forsake us. *To him be the glory for ever and ever. Amen!*

TITUS

Paul describes Titus as his *true son in our common faith* (1:4; cp. 1 Timothy 1:2) and wrote to him at the same time as he wrote his first letter to Timothy (approximately AD. 63). Titus, a Gentile (Galatians 2:3), was a faithful and trusted fellow-worker (cp. 2 Corinthians 2:13; 7:6–15; 12:18; 2 Timothy 4:10). Paul had left him in Crete to *set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city* (1:5). This letter sets out the things necessary for a healthy church – godly elders, sound doctrine and godly living. Paul also wrote to urge Titus to come to him at Nicopolis as soon as Artemas or Tychicus arrived in Crete to take over from him (3:12).

Outline of Titus

1. Opening greetings – 1:1–4
2. Titus' task: *to set in order the things that are lacking* – 1:5 to 3:11
 - a. To appoint elders (1:5–9).
 - b. To combat error (1:10–16).
 - c. To teach sound doctrine and to encourage godly living (2:1 to 3:11)
3. Personal messages and closing greetings – 3:12–15

