

The beginning and end of New Testament letters bookend the messages: the ending offering reminders of truths taught, restating important instructions and reassuring of God's love. Paul writes to Titus on Crete. **They are Christian friends.** It is likely Paul led Titus to faith: **'my true son** in our common faith' (1:4) - as he did Timothy (1 Tim 1:2). **They are Christian workers.** Paul left Titus on Crete (an island of legends and lies) to lead the new church (1:5). Friendship in faith and partnership in the gospel are keys to Paul's ministry. He mentions four co-workers (*Artemas, Tychicus, Zenas, Apollos* 3:11 -12).

This letter is all about our sharing the good faith, living a good life and having good friends.

Christians who worship the true God Jesus are to live lives of exemplary goodness.

2:7 'set an example *doing what is good.*' 2:14 'Jesu gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness...purify for himself a people...eager to do what is good.' **3:8 / 3:14**

Christian goodness is not boring, monotone morality. 'It stabilizes society without sterilizing it!' (Glover) 1. What is goodness? Who define goodness? Why be good at all? 2. *Is goodness possible? If it is, to what degree, for how long, and with what effect?*

The former lawyer to President Trump testified before Congress this week saying,

'I lied, but I'm not a liar. I have done bad things but I'm not a bad man.' (M. Cohen)

Can we separate what a person does (actions) from who they are (nature / quality)?

The Bible states. **'The LORD is good.'** (Nahum 1:7) **'How great is your goodness'** (Ps 31:19)

Goodness is defined by God who is Good and created a very good world (Genesis 1:31).

The goodness of creation means that evil cannot be inherent in any part of it at all.

Our ability to be 'good' was short circuited by sin. Jesus highlights our real condition.

'If you...though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!' (Luke 11:13)

We still bear the image of our good Creator but wear in our heart sinful imperfection.

Why be good? God created us so. How to be good? We need the goodness of grace.

'Faith in God is not just a philosophical belief in a supreme being; it is a life-changing experience of the one who has made us what we are.' (Gerald Bray: Biblical Theology 19).

People on Crete had encountered the living God through hearing the truth of Jesus.

'the faith of God's elect...their knowledge of the truth leads to godliness...brought to light by preaching: Grace and peace from God the Father and Jesus our Savior.' (1:1-4)

That is why Paul ends his letter with these words: ***'Grace be with you all.'*** (Titus 3:15)

Goodness is restored through the grace of God declaring us to be righteous in Christ Jesus and giving us the Holy Spirit - 'rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.' (Titus 3:5-6)

We are given a new position before God (justified) and a new power (to be like God).

So we can understand why Paul was concerned to remind the believers on Crete to

'avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the

law...these are unprofitable and useless. Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them. You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are self-condemned.’ (3:9-11) Jewish teachers invented **meaningless** (empty) fables around Old Testament genealogies (1:14; 3:9). Worse, they **deceptively** (1:14) argued ‘*about the law*’ - teaching that faith in Jesus is not enough to be accepted by God, and grace is not effective to be changed by God. **Faith in Jesus is our ‘common faith’** (1:3). We are **united** in Christ and in God’s family. **False teaching divides the flock. Legalism denies the gospel and separates people.** Legalism will always result in an insular, intolerant, graceless, loveless community. Alert to this real danger, Paul tells Titus to warn the false teachers, and if they will not listen to church leaders nor stop teaching error, they should not be listened to. Having good faith means hearing good preaching (1:3): sound doctrine...speech’ (2:1; 7) Sharing a good (common) faith and living a good life requires us having good friends.

*As soon as I send **Artemas** or **Tychicus** to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, because I have decided to winter there. Do everything you can to help **Zenas** the lawyer and **Apollos** on their way. See that they have everything they need. Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order to provide for urgent needs and not live unproductive lives. Everyone with me sends you greetings. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all.*

Paul needed friends, and so do we! Paul’s many friends encouraged and supported him – and he them. About Titus Paul says: ‘*when we came into Macedonia our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn - fighting without and fear within. But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus.*’ (2 Corinth 7:5–6) *Despite today’s digital connectivity was there ever a time when people were lonelier?* We all need Christian friends in the faith. Who were Paul’s friends? Tradition says **Artemus** was bishop of Lystra. **Tychicus**, a ‘faithful minister’ (Eph 6:21-22), accompanied Paul from Macedonia to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4) and stayed with him in Rome (2 Tim 4:12), after which he served the Lord in Ephesus. **Zenas** was a lawyer and **Apollos**, a fervent Egyptian preacher led to faith in Ephesus by Priscilla and Aquila, served the church in Greece. Apollos ‘*greatly helped those who through grace had believed.*’ (Acts 18:27) Many friendships are superficial. Paul’s friends served Jesus. *They were grace friends.* What do friends do? ‘**Do your best to come to me.**’ ‘**Do everything you can to help.**’ By grace we do everything to support the gospel by *supporting God’s gospel workers.* By grace we give everything to provide for urgent needs, and not live unproductively. Jesus ‘*went about doing good*’ (Acts 10:38). Japanese Christian Toyahiko Kagawa wrote: ‘***I read in a book that a man called Christ went about doing good. It distresses me that I am so easily satisfied with just going about.***’ Don’t live aimless, empty lives! The early Church lived good lives because they loved God ‘who gave himself for us to redeem us’ (2:14), and they loved each other ‘**in the faith.**’ (2:14) What is the good life?

True (saving) faith resulting in living a good (godly) life and serving with good (gospel) friends.