

June 6, 2010

Titus: God's Church, God's Blueprint

Good morning and welcome. Please take out your Bibles with me and one more time – at least in this study – turn back to the book of Titus. We started Titus a year ago – took a break for a few months in the middle – and then resumed several months ago, but the theme that has guided our study is the idea of “God’s church – God’s blueprint” – that **Titus is about God’s plan for establishing HIS church**. And this morning I want us to wrap that study up by bringing that theme to a head.

If I was the leader responsible for the many church congregations on the island of Crete as Paul was, if I was responsible to lead and guide and direct and equip a young man to oversee those young and fragile churches, if I was responsible to strengthen a church in the midst of a very violently pagan culture, if I had the responsibility to arm them against false teachers and ungodliness and confusion and evil authority, if I had the task of trying to lead them to purity and holiness and virtue and maturity, if it was my responsibility to make sure that they were insulated from the evil of the world around them while at the same time reaching that evil world with the gospel of Jesus Christ, if all of that was my task...I think I would have written a longer letter. I might have written a book. I might have written many books. And it amazes me that with all of that as responsibility, the Apostle Paul has wrapped this whole thing up in three chapters, brief chapters at best.

He was so brief and yet he was so direct. And he focused on the crucial matters –which again demonstrates the mind of the Spirit of God who with an economy of words can say everything that needs to be said. But like we saw two weeks ago, if we were to sum up this whole letter in just one statement we would probably have to choose **chapter 2 and verse 10** where the Apostle Paul says we are to live the life described in Titus – to be the church described in Titus – so that *“in every way we make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.”* While aimed at those who were slaves, it certainly captures in one statement the essence of responsibility for every believer within the church: to adorn the teaching of Scripture about God's saving power by demonstrating what saved lives look like. **We are to live so that the truth about a God who saves sinners from their sin is made visibly verifiable by OUR LIVES as His church.**

So really this is an evangelistic letter, it is telling the church how to win the world. If the church is to effect the lost world but be unaffected by it, it must be established – exist – according to God’s plan. Though clearly, it doesn’t require God’s power to draw a crowd in our culture today. David Platt points out how just a few key elements we can manufacture will suffice. First we need a good performance. In such an entertainment-driven culture we need someone who can captivate the crowds. No charismatic communicator and we’re doomed from the get-go. And it’s even better if he has an accomplished worship leader with a strong band at his side.

Next we need a place to hold the crowds that will come. Gotta gather the resources and build a multi-million dollar facility to house the performance – everything excellent and attractive because that is what our culture expects.

Finally, once the crowds get here, we need something to keep them coming back so we start programs – first-class, top-of-the-line programs for kids, for youth, for families, every stage and age and in order to have these programs we need professionals to run them.

Obviously that is an oversimplified and exaggerated analysis, but are these not the elements we think of when we consider growing dynamic successful churches in our day? But too, too often what is strangely lacking in the picture of performances, personalities, programs, and professionals is the power of God. How frightening should it be when churches – when we – can carry on most of their activities smoothly, efficiently, even successfully, never realizing that the Holy Spirit of God is virtually absent from the picture. We can so easily deceive ourselves by mistaking the presence of physical bodies in a crowd as the existence of spiritual life in a community.

And that’s what Titus is about – the blueprint for God’s church – a church established in, sustained by, and displaying the glory of God alone. And so we’ve seen in Titus that chapter 1 really

focuses on the church's leadership, chapter 2 on the relationships within the congregation, and chapter 3 on the church's relationship with the world around it. All of that has been covered with the genius of the Holy Spirit in these three brief chapters. And in all of that today, I want us to go back to the idea of God's blueprint – His blueprint for building His church so that we can see – can evaluate – can choose to follow that blueprint together. Because again – **this may be God's truth – but it is only going to be effective when it is REALIZED in us** – when it affects us enough to affect others through us. So where must that start? Any blueprint begins with the foundation.

And **the foundation of God's church is GOD'S WORD – the truth, the doctrine of God's Word – specifically the incredible truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ.** It makes sense then, in a letter effectively giving us God's church's blueprint, that Paul would lay out those truths in every step. The very opening of the letter starts with allusions to the truth, the Word, the gospel as Paul establishes his authority as God's servant. Look in **chapter 1 (1-3).** TEXT

But even more clearly in chapter 2 and 3 these incredible truths are unleashed for God's church. Listen again – and listen for all the different aspects and powerful truths we find here. **Chapter 2:11-14. Chapter 3:3-8.** TEXT

When you hear that does your heart sing? Does your blood pump? When you read it does your head nod in assent and humility? This is what God's church is built on. But it is not necessarily what all church's are built on. See the modern-day gospel has for a long time said "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. Therefore, follow these steps and you can be saved."

But the biblical gospel says "You are an enemy of God, dead in your sin, and in your present state of rebellion you are not even able to see that you need life, much less, cause yourself to come to life. Therefore, you are radically dependent on God to do something in your life that you could never do." See the former may sell books and draw crowds, but the latter saves souls.

When we read the truth in those verses in chapter 3, God reveals the depth of our need for Him. We can't manufacture salvation – we can't program it – we can't produce it. We can't even initiate it. God has to open our eyes, set us free, overcome our evil, and appease His own wrath. He has to come to us and as Paul described, He did and He does.

This biblical proclamation of the gospel beckons us to a much different response than mere intellectual assent or even a so-called one-time decision and it leads us down a much different road. Here the gospel demands and enable us to turn from our sin, to take up our cross, to die to ourselves, and to follow Jesus. These are the phrases we see in the Bible. And salvation *now* consists of a deep wrestling in our souls with the sinfulness of our hearts, the depth of our depravity, and the desperation of our need for His grace. Jesus is no longer One to be accepted or invited in but One Who is infinitely worthy of our immediate and total surrender.

You might think this sounds as though we have to earn our way to Jesus through radical obedience, but that is not the case at all. That is clear in the passage in chapter 3 – that is not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. **We are saved from our sins by a free gift of GRACE – something only God can do in us.**

But – as we see at the end of the passage in chapter 3 and all through the passage in chapter 2 – **that gift of grace involves the gift of a new HEART.** New desires. New longings. For the first time we want God – we see our need for Him and we love Him. We realize that we are not saved just to be forgiven of our sins or to be assured of our eternity in heaven, but to know God – to serve God. **So we naturally ABANDON everything else to experience Him. This is the only proper response to the revelation of God in the gospel.**

This is why we must avoid cheap caricatures of Christianity that fail to exalt the revelation of God in His Word and why you and I cannot settle for anything less than a God-centered, Christ-exalting, self-denying gospel. That is the foundation of God's church and that is what we believe here.

There has not been a book we have studied through together since I have been here that has not forced me to urge you to make your calling and election sure (as 2 Peter 2:10 says), to test and see that you are in the faith (as 2 Corinthians 5:13 says). Because as a pastor – I like Paul, like

Titus – shudder at the possibility that scores of people sit before me on Sundays who think they are saved when they are not. People who have positioned themselves on a religious road that makes grand promises at minimal cost.

We have all been told or heard before that all that is required is a one-time decision – maybe even just intellectual assent to Jesus, but after that we need not worry about His commands, His standards, or His glory. We have a ticket to heaven; we can live how we want on earth. Our sin will be tolerated along the way. Many people are flocking to that road today but it is a road built on sinking sand and it is not the foundation of the church in God's blueprint.

But when what God has shown us today and in Titus is – when there is a right view of the gospel and a subsequent right view of God – then the next portion of God's blueprint makes sense. It actually would be the third part of the blueprint, but it is the second part we will look at today – from the foundation to the furnishings – the internal – the congregation – the people themselves – ourselves.

The right foundation isn't enough to qualify a church as fitting God's blueprint for His church. The furnishings – the people matter. **The PEOPLE in a church based on the gospel that exalts God and our need for Him must also fit God's blueprint for His church.** And that's not as easy as walking an aisle and signing a card or even going to a 101 class and signing a covenant. It never has been - even when Jesus Himself was the one laying out the foundation. In fact in some ways, He was more known for turning people away than bringing them in.

Jesus never made the gospel easy – never made it a small thing to follow Him. Whenever the crowds got big around Him, he'd say something like what He did in John 6: *"I tell you the truth, unless you eat [my] flesh ...and drink [my] blood, you have no life in you."*

Not exactly the best church-growth tactic. You can almost picture the looks on the disciples faces: "No – not the drink my blood speech! We're never going to get big and famous if you keep asking them to eat you!"

And by the end of that speech, all the crowds had left and only 12 guys remained. His invitation to potential followers were clearly most costly than the crowds were ready to accept, and He seemed okay with that. He focused instead on the few who believed Him when he said radical things. And through their obedience to Him, He turned the course of history.

And we see the same thing in God's blueprint in Titus. At the end of the gospel in chapter 3 – in verse 8 - it says *"so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good."* All through the gospel in chapter 2 it says things like how the same grace that saves us is the grace that (verse 12) *"teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age."* And that those who belong to Jesus are a people who are *"eager to do what is good."*

And all of that flies in the face of those who were trying to be in the church but had no business claiming to be a part of it – those in chapter 1 who were described in verse 16 as claiming "to know God" but denying Him by their actions. And that's why **God's blueprint for the people in His church includes that which in chapter 2 verse 1 says "is in ACCORD WITH sound doctrine."** The life that goes along with the gospel. Verse 2 – teach the older men to be. Verse 3 – teach the older women to be. Verse 4 – train the younger women. Verse 6 – encourage the young men. Verse 9 – teach the slaves to be. Why? So that we make the truth about the gospel attractive in every way.

Folks that means **God's blueprint for the church that is His includes two clear realities** expressed in Titus. **First, from the outset you need to commit to BELIEVE whatever Jesus says.** As a Christian it would be a grave mistake to come to Jesus and say, "Let me hear what you have to say and then I'll decide whether or not I like it." If you approach Jesus this way, you will never truly hear what He has to say. You have to say yes to the words of Jesus before you even hear them.

Second – you must commit to OBEY what you have heard. The gospel does not prompt you to mere reflection; the truth of God requires a response. In the process of hearing Jesus, you are

compelled to take an honest look at your life, your family, and your church and not just ask, “What is He saying?” but also ask, “What shall I do?”

I know that isn't new to you. Back in our study of James, we hit that truth really hard. And yet the continuing reality is that a church composed of people whose starting point is to hear and evaluate rather than to listen and obey when they come to hear the Word of God will never fit in God's blueprint for His church.

But the flipside of that is that when we do. When we don't come together to analyze or grade or evaluate what God says and decide on the parts we don't mind doing. When we come because we know we have been saved by a gospel that exalts God and our need for Him – when we come because the result of that gospel is a dependence in us on Him who saved us – then we create a church God is proud to call His own. That's why a church can have all the man-made resources that one can imagine, but apart from the power of the Holy Spirit in control of the people, such a church will do nothing of significance for the glory of God.

On the other hand, this piece of God's blueprint means a church could have the least gifted people, the least talented people, the fewest leaders, and least money and that church under the power of the Holy Spirit in the obedience of God's people could still shake the nations for God's glory.

That's the story of George Muller. You may not have ever heard of Mr. Muller. He died in 1898. He pastured a church in Bristol, England for more than 60 years – but he was best known for the orphan ministry he began. During his life he cared for more than 10,000 orphans. Remarkably and intentionally he never asked for money or other resources to provide for those orphans. He simply prayed and trusted God to provide.

But what is amazing about George here is by his own words, his primary purpose in starting the orphanage was not to care for orphans. He wrote in his journal:

“If I, a poor man, simply by prayer and faith, obtained without asking any individual, the means for establishing and carrying on an Orphan-House, there would be something which, with the Lord's blessing, might be instrumental in strengthening the faith of the children of God, besides being a testimony to the consciences of the unconverted, of the reality of the things of God. This, then, was the primary reason for establishing the Orphan-House...the first and primary object of the work was (and still is) that God might be magnified by the fact that the orphans under my care are provided with all they need, only by prayer and faith without anyone being asked by me or my fellow-laborers whereby it may be seen, that God is faithful still and hears prayers still.”

Here's a guy who decided he wanted to live in such a way to make the truth about God our Savior attractive – to Christian and non-Christian alike. He risked his comfort – some would say his life - believing and obeying the greatness of God and in the end his life made much of the glory of God.

Such is God's blueprint for you and me. **Whether it involves fame or hardship or both or neither is not up to US. But if God's gospel is critical as the foundation of God's church, then God's people as they commit in response to that gospel to believe and obey whatever Jesus says are just as CRUCIAL to the blueprint.**

We are just as crucial to God's blueprint as the gospel itself!

Well if any of you are architects – builders – construction workers, etc. Or really – if you've ever played with legos, erector sets, or lincoln logs – you can probably guess what's missing – what's next – in the blueprint. You've got what goes underneath. You've got what goes inside. What's missing is what the inside goes into and what stands on what's underneath: the structure, the medium – that which gives shape to the blueprint.

You may have heard the phrase before that “the medium is the message.” A Canadian media scholar named Marshall McLuhan first coined the phrase in 1964. It means simply that the medium in which a message is communicated affects the content of the message itself.

Mark Dever in a forward to a book by Jonathon Leaman brings that reality home to the church. McLuhan's phrase is just another way of describing how any organization's purpose or message will affect its structure and its structure will in turn shape its message or purpose.

And what comes out of the blueprint God gives us in Titus is that **the structure of the church's corporate life together is tightly tied to the content of the gospel – its foundation – and the COMMUNICATION of the gospel is tightly tied to the structure of the corporate church's life together.** So what is striking, therefore, is how most evangelicals – churches like us – have pushed the question of church structure into the category of nonessentials and therefore non-importance.

The gospel is important, even essential.

Our lives and relationships are important, even essential.

But church structure is neither.

But what if that is wrong? What if just adapting the current business models out there into something workable for the church really isn't ok? What if God – in His wisdom – actually revealed both content and form – both message and medium – both gospel and polity – that are perfectly suited to one another? Could wrong structure eventually misdirect the relationships and perspectives – even undermine the gospel itself?

That seems to be the case in our study of Titus. In fact, such was the first reality that Paul addressed once he got into the meat, so to speak, of the letter. In fact it was one of Titus' major charges. Look at verse **5 again in chapter 1.** TEXT

Did you see the structure God gives us there?

Elders – plural – WITHIN the churches – verse 9 says, **encouraging and refuting with sound doctrine.** We spent several weeks on these verses in chapter 1 as we studied through them last summer. Many of you asked me and others – what does that mean for us? Why doesn't our structure look like what seems to be clearly laid out in Scripture? How does that work? What might it look like here?

And here is where we get back to both part of what we mentioned today and a foundational truth we've dealt with the past three times we've been in Titus together. To be the people of God – to fit His blueprint for His church, we must be committed to believe what God says and committed to obey God's Word. And for truth to be effective, it must be realized in us – realized doesn't mean understood, it means lived out – for truth to affect us enough to affect others through us.

Church, if this what we want to be - A church founded on the truth of God – the Word of God – the gospel of Jesus Christ in all of its glory. A church family committed to doing life in Christ one step at a time together in response to and obedience to God who saves us by His grace. And now – are we willing to also work together as God's Spirit through His Word leads us to be a church structured as clearly as can be according to God's blueprint, as well?

So for some time this summer in the weeks ahead, we will dig deeper into the Word together to see what God created and intended for His church along these lines and how we out of a belief in His Word and a longing for Him need to continue, adapt, change, evaluate not only our norms and traditions, but each of our personal perspectives and possibilities in order to be the church that God wants us to be in every area together. I want to encourage you to be studying and praying and present here with me each week as we do.

But this morning – I don't want the newness or novelty or unknown of elders, of structure, to cause us to lose sight of the other two aspects of the blueprint.

Structure won't matter if the foundation is WRONG or even weak.

I asked you when we studied chapter 3 that even though most of you in here would claim to be Christians – which is great – and most of you probably have a good handle on what you think that means, but if I were to come ask you randomly to share with us what you would say to share that gospel with someone else – or what you would say to explain what being saved means – what would say?

I wonder now that we've spend weeks and weeks on the truth of the gospel in multiple chapters, has your response changed? Would you be more confident now than then? Or not? Because the same concern is there - How can we believe in something we can't express – not explain – but express? But even more – how can we build a church on a foundation if we don't know what it is?

Is the gospel you believe the gospel of the WORD?

Are you growing in the depths of its truth to the point that you can tell when what you hear is not TRUTH – to the point that you will stand for what the CHURCH should be because of what the gospel is?

Structure also won't matter is the furnishings don't MATCH.

After weeks and repeats and summaries of themes about the results of salvation in God's people now – the expectation of good works as God defines them – the necessity of interdependence, relationships, confrontation, and living for the glory of God in every area of a Christian's life – has anything in you been confirmed – been challenged – been changed – been started?

Do you come together week to week to hear what the Word says and EVALUATE whether you'll do it or are you beginning to come already submitted to what God says and listening for how to OBEY it in your life?

We can't afford to wait on those two aspects of God's blueprint while we address the other one – so regardless of where you are in all this, the prayer today is that each of us leaves our corporate worship this morning determined to do whatever it takes on our part for Fairway to be the church God wants us to be. Because **Fairway will always be not what we WANT it to be – but what we ARE being. So let's be a people that make the truth about God our Savior attractive in the gospel we BELIEVE, the lives we LIVE, and the church we ARE together.** Let's pray.