

Christian author... Eugene Peterson... in *Run with the Horses*... tells how he saw a family of birds teaching their young to fly.

Three young swallows were perched on a dead branch that stretched out over a lake. "One adult swallow got alongside the chicks and started shoving them out toward the end of the branch--pushing, pushing, pushing. The end one fell off. Somewhere between the branch and the water four feet below, the wings started working, and the fledgling was off on his own. Then the second one.

"The third was not to be bullied. At the last possible moment his grip on the branch loosened just enough so that he swung downward, then tightened again, bulldog tenacious. The parent was without sentiment. He pecked at the desperately clinging talons until it was more painful for the poor chick to hang on than risk the insecurities of flying. The grip was released, and the inexperienced wings began pumping. The mature swallow knew what the chick did not--that it would fly--that there was no danger in making it do what it was perfectly designed to do.

"Birds have feet and can walk. Birds have talons and can grasp a branch securely. They can walk; they can cling. But flying is their characteristic action, and not until they fly are they living at their best, gracefully and beautifully.

Eugene Peterson's illustration (here)... helps to explain why I have selected the next sermon series that we begin this morning. ... You and I have been given a purpose for our lives... by God. (It is the air into which we have all been born. ... It is the action that was designed into us before our birth.) ... But we try desperately to hold on to our safe branches... living for ourself. ... We look so bedraggled and pathetic doing it... hanging on to the dead branch of minimal risk... for dear life... afraid to endanger ourselves on the untried wings of serving the Lord... in the way we know... that He wants us to. ... (This is true... isn't it?)

But the sooner we start... the better... for we are going to have to give up our lives finally... and the longer we wait... the less time we have for the soaring and swooping life - of grace.

How many of us really know who we are and why we are here? ... Of course... we all have names and our own personal histories. ... We have goals... dreams... and characteristics... which we feel give us a special identity... and these things are certainly to be valued. ... But when we think about reason for being... personal identity and meaning in life... do we intentionally allow it to impact our day-to-day living?

Today I am going to be issuing a personal challenge to you... from the way that Paul opens his letter to Titus. The way that he opens this letter is one of his longest openings of all his letters. As I studied it this week... two initial thoughts struck me. **#1**. This content is usually what we pass over very quickly... in our haste to get to the “good stuff” of the letter. (I mean) Paul has his standard way of opening all his letters. (Most of you are a bit like me.) ... We’ve already seen it. We are familiar with his opening formula.

But this opening is longer than the opening formula that we normally see. Why? Why did he add things that he did not put in his letter to Timothy (which was written about the same time)...? ... OK... so this made me slow down in getting to (what I saw as)... the “*substantial part of the letter.*”

Here is what I discovered. Titus (the whole letter) is a bargain-basement letter. We get more than our money’s worth... because Paul packed so

much truth and teaching in this short letter. Even his standard opening bulges with life-impacting truth. You will see this in just a moment.

But here is thought **#2**. that I initially had: Paul's opening shows us: his strong sense of identity. (Then it occurred to me)... **ONLY** because he had such a solid conviction that these things were true about him... was he able to accomplish the things that he did.

(Please don't raise your hand)... but how many of you have felt like your life has not been all that God has intended...? (You have never really flown – the way God has designed you. You're still clutching to a dead branch.) ... I am willing to guess that the same number of people (who would have raised their hand)... have never developed such a clear identity statement about themselves... as Paul's. ... Just imagine how you might be flying right now... if you had a precise statement (like Paul's) about who you are... and what God has called you to do. And imagine if you were to look at it every **morning**... praying for God to enable you... and praying every **evening**... asking God to forgive you – where you failed to measure up during *that day*.

(You see)... In studying Paul's opening to Titus... I realized that I've been missing out on this. ... Have you...? ... At the end of this message I will tell you what I wrote (this week) about mine... and hopefully this will encourage you to write out a self-identity statement of your own. Paul had such a conviction of who he was – and he **lived** it. Every believer needs to have a solid sense of their own unique identity... which will steady them... motivate them... and guide them every day.

OK... so those were my two initial thoughts. ... But since we are opening a new book of the Bible today... for our study... (as always)... it is essential to get some of our bearings... like: who is Titus?... and why did Paul feel the need to write this letter to him?

So here is the background to the letter that we are about to study...

Paul wrote three Pastoral Letters during the years 63-67 A.D. to two of his spiritual sons... Timothy and Titus. These two men... whom Paul led to Christ... represented Paul and the apostles in different churches. ... Paul sent them to collect offerings for the starving in Judea during the famine... He also sent them out to the churches for peacemaking... and they carried letters... and they gave instructions to the churches from the apostles.

Paul instructed Timothy to appoint elders in Ephesus... and **Titus** to appoint elders in Crete.

Crete is an island about 75 miles south of Greece. Cretans are descended from the ancient tribes of the Philistines. ... You remember them. These are the people who bothered King Saul... King David... Samson... and so often Israel's army so much. Apparently... their descendants became great sailors and pirates... So... as a people group... they kept to their evil and menacing ways... that we see in the Old Testament. Next week we will cover verse 12 in Titus chapter one... that says...

Titus 1:12 (ESV)

One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons."

Crete was known as the mythical birthplace of Zeus... it was also famous for the fabled creature... known as the Minotaur... a half-bull and half-human monster... Furthermore... Crete was deeply immersed in worship of the Roman emperor as universal savior. ... These fledgling congregations on the Island of Crete needed serious attention... and they needed it quickly.

Prior to his assignment to Crete... Titus had a special mission to the troubled church at Corinth... His work there... and here (on the difficult island of Crete)... revealed Paul's confidence in him. ... We can say Titus was Paul's "*hit man*"... his "*Green Beret*"... his "*spiritual Navy Seal*"... who could go into the hard places and set things in order... get things fixed... make things right.

Titus is **less prominent** than Timothy in Paul's letters. (In Acts... Titus is never mentioned at all). ... But Paul regarded him and treated him with the same fatherly affection... as Timothy. The father-son relationship was a spiritual one... because Paul probably led both of these men to Christ.

Now we are ready to see how Paul defined his own life ... (As we do... please start to think about your own identity.)

Titus 1:1-4

I suspect one of the greatest joys of the Christian life is when we thoroughly understand who we are in the sight of God... Think about your relationship to Him... what special circumstances has God placed you in... what exceptional experiences has He given you... unique talents and abilities... spiritual gifts... special opportunities and privileges... and how does it all

enable you to proclaim God's message to the world. Figure all this out. Write it all down... Then you have a start for a solid self-image that will help you fly in your service to God.

Paul is laying out his credentials. He calls himself "a servant of God" in verse 1. ... He is saying, in effect, *"I am a slave of the God Who created the universe. I'm held captive by Him."*

The word Paul used for "servant" here actually means "bond slave." Paul says that he is a bond slave of God. ... We know from the Old Testament that a bond slave was one who chose to remain a slave of his master for life.

I had a friend in seminary who would say to others... *"I don't mind being called a servant of God; I just don't like being treated like one!"*

(I think he reflected how most of us feel.)... Because the **last thing** that a person wants to be... is a slave to anybody. ... Yet this is exactly what Paul claimed. ... (As a matter of fact) it needs to be part of every believer's self-image. Include it in yours... and evaluate yourself everyday by how good of a slave you were that day.

Were any of your irritations – because you had jumped out of your role of being a slave...? Did you demand any rights, slave? ... How would a conviction that you are a slave effect your pride? ... Did you behave (today) as though you are superior? ... How does it affect your prayers? ... Did you treat God as if HE were YOUR slave? Did you ask Him for things (from any sense at all) that it would enhance **your** glory... rather than HIS...? ... How often do you plead with God for something – as if you had

to persuade Him to change His mind? “*Look God... it’s just not right how You’ve been handling this...?*” (Is that the right way to talk to your Master, slave?) ... [P A U S E] ...

Paul... by calling himself a slave... was (actually) boasting. Listen to some of the names of people who are honored by Scripture... and are referred to as "the servants of God." ... These are some of the most exalted men in history. **Moses** was called the slave of God (in Deut. 34:5 and other places)... **Joshua** was called the slave of God (in Joshua 5:14)... **King David** was the slave of God (2 Samuel 3:18)... **James** was the slave of God (James 1:1)... **Jude** was the slave of God (Jude 1)... (And) The **prophets** are all called the slaves of God (Amos 3:7; Jeremiah 7:25).

The great need today is for men and women to see themselves as *slaves* of the Lord Jesus Christ... and to *behave* accordingly. ... We must become His slaves and do what He says. ... Then and only then can we fly in the way God has intended.

About 120 years ago... British author and pastor F. B. Meyer (with a heart aflame for God) came to the United States. And he was preaching in a college in the United States... and in that college were some ministerial students. F. B. Meyer was talking about making a full surrender to God (giving God everything.) Then... he said this poignant thing:

“There are some of you who are ready to quit. There are some of you who are not willing to give everything to Jesus Christ, and you don’t seem to have the strength to live for Him.”

But he said,

“If you cannot tell God that you’re willing to give Him everything, would you tell God this: ‘O God, I am not willing, but I am willing to be made willing.’ God, start with me where I am. I am weak, yes, Lord; but start with me. O God, I want to be willing. I give You my will. Work in me, O God.”

Sitting in the audience was a young man. His name was Wilbur Chapman. Wilbur Chapman said, “O God, that’s me. I’ve been ready to quit. But God, I am willing to be made willing. Work in my heart.” And God began to work in the heart of Wilbur Chapman... and Wilbur Chapman was touched by God... and anointed... became a mighty evangelist used of God across America... and throughout the world.

Make your identity a conviction - that you are a slave of the Lord. If you are not willing... (by all means) ask God to make your heart willing.

... [P A U S E] ...

Paul also saw himself as the Apostle that God called him to be. Paul’s two-fold reference to himself (“bond-slave” and “apostle”) combines humble obedience with confident authority. But he is not being braggadocios here. The reason that he asserts his apostleship is that he is going to give instructions to the organized church. (We will see that it had false teachers in it – like Timothy’s did.) These instructions come from an apostle... the appointed writer of the Lord.

Many want to be an apostle but not a servant. They want honor and position... but not work and submission. (It doesn’t work that way in God’s Kingdom.)

Having shared who he is... Paul shares his purpose... (also here in verse 1.)

Titus 1:1

Those who believe... are "*God's elect*"... meaning their eternal status is determined by the love of God... and not simply the result of a human decision. ... To be chosen of God should create in our hearts a sense of security... gratitude... and well-being. It should create in our hearts a sense of humility... and a sense of responsibility.

Paul's responsibility was "*for the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness.*" Paul wanted people to come the full knowledge of who God is... to not only get the facts but to fully experience the very life of Christ Who was living in them.

Observe in verse one that it is... faith (**then**) knowledge (**then**) godliness. The order is absolutely essential to note. The gospel... (fed by knowledge of the truth)... should always lead to godliness. In other words... what I believe... will affect how I live... and how I live... will demonstrate what I believe! Our relationship with God (that the gospel faith establishes) leads to righteous actions.

Vance Havner... commenting on the church's failure... to move from faith to knowledge to godliness... said:

"We are challenged these days, but not changed; convicted, but not converted. We hear, but do not; and thereby we deceive ourselves."

Wouldn't you say that this is an unfortunate... but truthful...
characterization of evangelical Christianity today...? ... We are that
family of birds... challenged by truth... yet we are desperately holding on to
the dead branch.

Here is the theme of this letter to Titus... that we not only see (here) in
Paul's opening... but we will continue to see as we study through this book:
Life must conform to doctrine. Grace should produce godliness.

"Godliness" is an important concept in this letter... even though the actual
word is used only once. Godliness keeps being brought-up with the
repetition of the phrase "good works." (Godliness is having "good works.")

Titus 1:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.

Titus 2:7 (ESV)

⁷ Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity,

Titus 2:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

Titus 3:1 (ESV)

¹ Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work,

Titus 3:8 (ESV)

⁸ The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.

Titus 3:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ *And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful.*

The truth of the Gospel changes a life from ungodliness to holy living. Sad to say... there were people in the churches on Crete... like some church members today... who professed to be saved... but whose lives denied their profession.

True saving faith in Jesus Christ does two things #1) it secures a future in Heaven someday for us... but #2) RIGHT NOW it makes our lives godly. Godliness (good works) is part of the same package that comes with a faith that saves. ... The grace that true faith receives stimulates a desire for godliness in believers... (Grace compels godliness.)

(Let me be as blunt as I could possibly be on this...) My friend... if the truth that you have... does not lead to a godly life... there is something radically wrong with your faith. (You better check to see if it is a saving faith.)

Godliness is the sure proof that God's truth has been sincerely received into the heart.

Our doctrinal beliefs should produce godliness... (AND) in verse 2... Paul mentions something else that should produce godliness – "*hope of eternal life.*"

Titus 1:2a

This word hope means different things to different people. Often the way we use it ("I hope tomorrow will be a nice day," "I hope I get the job") implies uncertainty. But Christian hope has an entirely different quality

about it... because it is grounded on the promises of God. **Hope** is a confident certainty and expectation of something that is not yet ours but will be.

Titus 1:2b-3

Paul gives two reasons for the certainty of our hope. First... before time... God made the promise of eternal life. That is... it was part of His eternal will that His people would enjoy eternal life. Second... God's promises are not like human promises... because God cannot lie.

Apparently lying was commonplace in Crete (which Paul indicated in verse 12... that verse I showed you earlier)... God does not lie. ... The foundation of our faith is trust in God's character.

God made this promise before sundials... watches... or Google calendars were made. ... He thoroughly planned it before we came into time and space ("long ages ago.") ... In His love and mercy God chose us "before the foundation of the world." The hope of eternal life rests on the truthful character of God and his eternal promise.

Here is what J Vernon McGee wrote:

Sometimes we believers almost make God out a liar by the lives we live. We say we believe something, but we don't really believe, and we act as if we don't believe. Paul says God cannot lie.

I have often wanted to preach a sermon on things that God cannot do. This is one: God cannot lie. Do you also know that you see something every day that God has never seen? You have seen your equal; God has never seen His equal. Why cannot God lie when we can? Well, you can do something God cannot do. You see, God must be true to Himself. He is holy and He is righteous -- that is His nature,

and there are certain things He cannot do because of His nature. It is not because it is impossible for Him to do it; but because God is true to His nature, He cannot do it. He is righteous, He is just, and He never deceives. He is One you can depend upon.

Titus 1: 4

The very first thing that he says to Titus is “Grace” . There’s so much in this book about grace. You see grace there (in chapter 1, verse 4) then again (in chapter 2, verse 11)... yet again 3:7... and then 3:15. ... This is a book that is **full** of grace.

Paul was so grateful for his son in the faith (Titus.) ... As a matter of fact... Titus was to Paul a trophy of grace. ... When there was a conference in Jerusalem... and the conference subject was this: “*Can the Gentiles be saved without keeping the Jewish law?*” ... Paul took his young convert (Titus) to Jerusalem... and put him on display as a trophy of grace. ... (You can read about it in Galatians chapter 2.) ... And here’s this young man who comes all the way to Jerusalem... (a Greek)... and Paul says: “*Look at him. There is a trophy of the grace of God.*”

Now this brings me to a very natural question: What kind of a trophy of grace are you? I mean, if I wanted to show the people of La Pine or Bend, Oregon what the grace of God is like, and what the message I preach is like, could I bring you before the chamber of commerce, and say, “*Hey, this is what we’re all about at Living Water?*” Would you be a trophy of grace?

Could I just bring you before the town dignitaries and say: “*This is what we are talking about; this is a trophy of grace?*” ... (You see)... not only should we be witnesses... we ought to be the **evidence** ! — This young man was

saved (and lived) by the grace of God... and Paul could take him all the way to Jerusalem and say: “*Just look at Titus...*”

But in Titus 2:11... we are going to find that we are not just saved by grace. Once we are saved... we are to live by the rule of grace. ... When we live by the rule of grace... all of our striving for status and affection fades away. Assessments of who is more deserving of affection... or praise from others... dissolves. Competition for recognition and regard evaporates in the realization that all the rewards of grace are unearned. We become equal members of the fellowship with all those whose condition is equally desperate apart from Christ. The need for comparison and competition dies in the recognition that Christ provides our only measure of glory before God. That all happens when we live by the rule of grace. Are we good examples of this? Are we trophies of God’s grace?

... ..

These opening verses of Titus demonstrate that Paul knew the importance of understanding... and projecting... our sense of who we are before God. It ought to be foundational for every believer. Why? Why should you take the time to think carefully about this?

Because each of us is somewhere along the journey of our life that God has given to us. You might be facing... or will soon face... a perilous part of your journey... it might include tremendous pain and suffering. Or maybe you are soon to face decisions and you know the RIGHT position to take will make you unpopular... Others will doubt... misunderstand... and

(even) *malign* your character. ... If you are established in your identity... purpose... and calling ... you are well-equipped to emerge victorious.

If you haven't taken the time to prepare this crucial foundation... may I suggest you start now? Begin with prayer... asking God to show you how **He** sees you. Ask Him to remind you of things that are true and are *definitive* about you. (Start with acknowledging your servanthood to Christ. That is true for all of us.) Then take an inventory of your unique set of abilities and experiences.

THEN - evaluate your primary purpose. Ask yourself deep probing questions. Be specific. Use questions like these:

- To what am I committed?
- What do I most want to see fulfilled... as a result of my being here on earth?
- What spiritual activities do I particularly delight in? ... How does God use me?

NEXT –Summarize and combine what you discover... using words that will *recall to your mind* all the particulars that you had written down. Write it so that it can motivate... guide... and convict you – every day.

Here is what I have so far... with regard to mine:

Jim... a servant of God... whose security and significance comes *NOT* from man but from Christ... a recipient of God's grace... called to now live by "the rule of grace"... to endure suffering... and to participate in God's plan that His Name be hallowed on earth just as it is in Heaven... by teaching truth... loving well... and influencing others to discover and move onto God's agenda for their lives.

I welcome your prayers!