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**COMMENTARY**

**DARBY'S SYNOPSIS OF THE  
BOOKS OF THE BIBLE  
PART 2: NEW TESTAMENT**

*by John Nelson Darby*

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## John Nelson Darby, 1800-1882

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## TITUS

The epistle to Titus is occupied with the maintenance of order in the churches of God.

The especial object of those written to Timothy was the maintenance of sound doctrine, although speaking of other things with regard to which the apostle gives directions for the conduct of Timothy. This the apostle himself tells us. In the first epistle to Timothy we see that Paul had left his beloved son in the faith at Ephesus, in order to watch that no other doctrine was preached there; the assembly is the pillar and support of the truth. In the second epistle we find the means by which Christians are to be strengthened in the truth, when the mass have departed from it.

Here, in Titus, the apostle says expressly that he had left him in Crete to set in order things that were yet wanting, and to establish elders in every city. Although more or less the same dangers presented themselves to the mind of Paul as when writing to Timothy, yet we find that the apostle enters at once upon his subject, with a calmness which shows that his mind was not pre-occupied in the same way with those dangers, and that the Spirit could engage him more entirely with the ordinary walk of the assembly; so that this epistle is much more simple in its character. The walk that becomes Christians, with regard to the maintenance of order in their relationships to each other, and the great principles on which this walk is founded, form the subject of the book. The state of the assembly comes but little before us. Truths that flow more entirely from the christian revelation, and that characterise it, have more place in this epistle than in those addressed to Timothy. On the other hand, prophecies concerning the future condition of Christianity, and the development of the decline that had already commenced, are not repeated here. While stating in a remarkable way certain truths with respect to Christianity, the tone of the epistle is more calm, more ordinary.

The promise of life is particularly spoken of here as well as in Timothy. Moreover this promise distinguishes Christianity, and the revelation of God (as the Father) in Christ, from Judaism.

But in this epistle the great boundaries of Christianity are set forth at the outset. The faith of the elect, the truth which is according to godliness, the promise before the world began of eternal life, and the manifestation of the word of God through preaching, are the subjects of the introduction. The title of “Savior” is here, as in Timothy, added to the name of God as well as to that of Christ.

This introduction is not without importance. That which it contains is presented to Titus by the apostle as characterising his apostleship, and as the special subject of his ministry. It was not a development of Judaism, but the revelation of a life and of a promise of life which subsisted (that is, in Christ, the object of the divine counsels) before the world was. Accordingly faith was found, not in the confession of the Jews, but in the elect brought by grace to the knowledge of the truth. It was the faith of the elect: this is an important truth, and that which characterises faith in the world. Others may indeed adopt it as a system; but faith is in itself the faith of the elect.

Among the Jews this was not the case. The public confession of their doctrine, and confidence in the promises of God, belonged to every one who was born an Israelite. Others may pretend to the christian faith; but it is the faith of the elect. Its character is such that human nature neither embraces it nor conceives it, but finds it to be a stumbling-stone. It discloses a relationship with God, which to nature is inconceivable and at the same time presumptuous and insupportable. To the elect it is the joy of their soul, the light of their understanding, and the sustainment of their heart. It places them in a relationship with God which is all that their heart can desire, but which depends entirely on that which God is; and this the believer desires. It is a personal relationship with God Himself; therefore it is the faith of God’s elect. Hence also it is for all the Gentiles as well as the Jews.

This faith of God’s elect has an intimate character in relation to God Himself. It rests on Him, it knows the secret of His eternal counsels — that love which made the elect the object of His counsels. But there is another character connected with it, namely, confession before men. There is the revealed truth by which God makes Himself known, and claims the

submission of man's mind and the homage of his heart. This truth places the soul in a true relationship with God. It is truth according to godliness.

The confession of the truth therefore is an important character of Christianity, and of the Christian. There is in the heart the faith of the elect, personal faith in God and in the secret of His love; and there is confession of the truth.

Now that which formed the hope of this faith was not earthly prosperity, a numerous posterity, the earthly blessing of a people whom God acknowledged as His own. It was life eternal, promised of God in Christ before the world was, outside the world and the divine government of the world and the development of the character of Jehovah in that government.

It was eternal life. It is in connection with the nature and with the character of God Himself; and, having its source in Him, proceeding from Him, it was the thought of His grace, and declared to be such in Christ, before a world existed into which the first man was introduced in responsibility (his failure in which is his history up to Christ the second Man, and the cross in which He bore its consequences for us, and obtained that eternal life for us in its full glory with Himself), and which was the sphere of the development of God's government over that which was subject to Him — a very different thing from the communion of a life by which one participates in His nature, and which is its reflection. This is the hope of the gospel (for we are not speaking of the assembly here), the secret treasure of the faith of the elect, of which the revealed word assures us.

“Promised before the world began” is a remarkable and important expression. One is admitted into the thoughts of God before the existence of this changing and mingled scene, which bears witness of the frailty and sin of the creature — of the patience of God, and His ways in grace and in government. Eternal life is connected with the unchangeable nature of God; with counsels which are as abiding as His nature, with His promises, in which He cannot deceive us, and to which He cannot be unfaithful. Our portion in life existed before the foundation of the world, not only in the counsels of God, not only in the Person of the Son, but in the promises made to the Son as our portion in Him. It was the subject of those communications from the Father to the Son, of which we were the objects, the Son being their depository.\* Marvellous knowledge which has been

given us of the heavenly communication of which the Son was the object, in order that we might understand the interest which we have in the thoughts of God, of which we were the objects in Christ before all the ages!

[\* Compare Proverbs 8:30, 31, and Luke 2:14, and Psalm 40:6-8, “hast thou opened” being really, “thou hast dug ears for me” — that is, prepared a body, the place of obedience, or a servant (Philippians 2); so translated by LXX, and accepted in Hebrews as just.]

That which the word is becomes also more clear to us through this passage. The word is the communication, in time, of the eternal thoughts of God Himself in Christ. It finds man under the power of sin, and reveals peace and deliverance, and it shows how he can have part in the result of God’s thoughts. But these thoughts themselves are nothing else than the plan, the eternal purpose, of His grace in Christ, to bestow on us everlasting life in Christ — a life which existed in God before the world was. The word is preached, manifested (that is, the revelation of the thoughts of God in Christ). Now those thoughts gave us eternal life in Christ; and this was promised before the ages. The elect, believing, know it, and possess the life itself. They have the witness in themselves; but the word is the public revelation on which faith is founded, and which has universal authority over the consciences of men, whether they receive it or not. Just as in 2 Timothy 1:9, 10, it is presented as salvation, but then made manifest.

It will be observed that faith here, is faith in a personally held, known, truth; a faith which only the elect can have, who possess the truth as God teaches it. “The faith” is used also for Christianity as a system in contrast with Judaism. Here it is the secret of God in contrast with a law promulgated to an outward people. This promise, which dated from before the revealed ages, and which was sovereign in its application, was especially committed to the apostle Paul that he might announce it by preaching. To Peter the gospel was committed more as the fulfillment of the promises made to the fathers, which Paul also recognises, with the evangelical events that confirmed and developed them by the power of God manifested in the resurrection of Jesus, the witness of the power of this life.

John presents life more in the Person of Christ and then imparted to us, the characteristic fruits of which he sets forth.

We shall find that the apostle has not the same intimacy of confidence in Titus as in Timothy. He does not open his heart to him in the same way. Titus is a beloved and faithful servant of God and also the apostle's son in the faith; but Paul does not open his heart to him in the same manner — does not communicate to him his anxieties, his complainings — does not pour out his soul to him — as he did to Timothy. To tell of all one sees that is heart-breaking and disquieting in the work one is engaged in — that is the proof of confidence. One has confidence with regard to the work, and one speaks of it with regard to oneself, with regard to all, and there is no restraint, no measuring how far one ought to speak of oneself, of what one feels, of all things. This the apostle does with Timothy, and the Holy Ghost has been pleased to portray it for us. In writing to Timothy doctrine above all occupied the apostle's mind: by its means the enemy wrought and endeavored to ruin the assembly. Bishops only come into mind as an accessory thing. Here they have a primary place. Paul had left Titus in Crete to set in order the things that were yet wanting, and to ordain elders in every city, as he had already commanded him. It is not here a question of the desire any one might have to become a bishop, nor (in that view) of describing the character suitable to this charge, but of appointing them; and for this task Titus was furnished with authority on the apostle's part. The necessary qualifications are made known to him, in order that he might be able to decide according to apostolic wisdom. So that on the one hand he was invested by the apostle with authority to appoint them, and on the other hand instructed by him with respect to the requisite qualifications. Apostolic authority and wisdom concurred to render him competent to perform this grave and important work.

We see also that this apostolic delegate was authorised to set in order that which was necessary to the welfare of the assemblies in Crete. Already founded, they yet needed directions with regard to many details of their walk; and apostolic care was requisite to give them these, as well as for the establishment of functionaries in the assemblies. This task the apostle had committed to the approved fidelity of Titus, furnished with his own authority by word of mouth and here in writing; so that to reject Titus was to reject the apostle and consequently the Lord who had sent him.

Authority in the assembly of God is a serious thing — a thing that proceeds from God Himself. It can be exercised through influence by the gift of God; by functionaries, when God establishes them by instruments whom He has chosen and sent for this purpose.

It is not necessary here to enter upon the detail of qualifications that were needed to fill the office of bishop suitably. They are, in the main, the same as those mentioned in the epistle to Timothy. They are qualities, not gifts; qualities — outward, moral, and circumstantial — that proved the fitness of the individual for the charge of watching over others. It may perhaps occasion surprise that the absence of gross misconduct should have a place here; but the assemblies were more simple than people think, and the persons of whom they were composed had but recently come out from the most deplorable habits; and therefore a previous conduct that commanded the respect of others was necessary to give weight to the exercise of the office of superintendence. It was also needful that he who was invested with this charge should be able to convince gainsayers. For they would have to do with such, especially among the Jews, who were always and everywhere active in opposition to the truth, and subtle in perverting the mind.

The character of the Cretans occasioned other difficulties, and required the exercise of peremptory authority; Judaism mingled itself with the effect of this national character. It was needful to be firm and to act with authority, that they might continue sound in the faith.

Moreover, he had still to speak concerning ordinances and traditions, those evil plagues in the church of God which provoke Him to jealousy, and which, by exalting man, are opposed to His grace. One thing was not pure, another was forbidden by an ordinance. God claims the heart. To the pure all things are pure; for him whose heart is defiled it needs not to go out of himself to find that which is impure; but convenient, in order to be able to forget what is within. The mind and conscience are already corrupt. They talk of knowing God, but in their works they deny Him, being unprofitable and reprobate as regards every work really good.

Titus, who was not only to appoint others for the purpose, but, being there clothed with authority, was himself to watch over the order and moral walk of the Christians, was charged (as is the case throughout these



three epistles) to see that every one, according to his position, walked in agreement with moral and relative propriety — an important thing, and which shelters from the attacks of Satan, and from confusion in the assembly. True liberty reigns in the assembly; moral order secures this; and the enemy finds no better occasion to dishonor the Lord and ruin the testimony and throw all into disorder, thus giving the world occasion to blaspheme, than the forgetfulness of grace and holy order among Christians. Let us not deceive ourselves: if these proprieties are not maintained (and they are beautiful and precious), then the liberty (and it is beautiful and precious, and unknown to the world, who are ignorant of what grace is), the excellent liberty of the christian life, gives room for disorder which dishonors the Lord and throws moral confusion into everything.

Often, in perceiving that the weakness of man has given occasion to disorder where christian liberty reigns, instead of seeking the true remedy, men have destroyed the liberty; they banish the power and operation of the Spirit — for where the Spirit is, there is liberty in every sense — the joy of the new relationships in which all are one. But, while severing every bond for the Lord's sake when necessary, the Spirit recognises every relationship which God has formed; even when we break them — as death does — through the exigency of the call of Christ, which is superior to them all. But while we are in them (the call of Christ apart), we are to act suitably to the relationship. Age and youth, husband and wife, child and parent, slave and master, all have their own proprieties to maintain towards each other, a behavior in accordance with the position in which we stand.

“Sound doctrine” takes account of all this, and, in its warnings and exhortations, maintains all these proprieties. This is the instruction which the apostle here gives to Titus, with regard to aged men, aged women, young women (relatively to their husbands, their children, and their whole life, which should be domestic and modest); young men, to whom Titus was to be always a pattern; slaves, with their masters; and then the duties of all towards magistrates, and indeed towards all men. But, before taking up this last point, he establishes the great principles which are the foundation of the conduct of the saints amongst themselves in this world. Their conduct towards magistrates and the world has a different motive.

The conduct of Christians, as such, in the assembly has for its basis and motive the special doctrines of Christianity. We find these doctrines and motives in chapter 2:11-15, which speaks of that conduct.

The particular motive for the character of their walk, with regard to the world, we find in the third and following verses of chapter 3.

**CHAPTER 2:11-15** contains a remarkable summary of Christianity, not exactly of its dogmas, but as a practical reality for men. Grace has appeared. It has appeared, not limited to a particular people, but to all men; not charged with temporal promises and blessings but bringing salvation. It comes from God to men with salvation. It does not expect righteousness from men, it brings salvation to those that need it. Precious and simple truth, which makes us know God, which puts us in our place, but according to the grace which has overleaped every barrier in order to address itself, in the sovereign goodness of God, to every man on the earth!

Having brought this salvation, it instructs us perfectly with regard to our walk in this world; and that in relation to ourselves, and to other men, and to God. Renouncing all ungodliness, and all lusts that find their gratification in this world, we are to bridle the will of the flesh in every respect and to live soberly; we are to acknowledge the claims of others and to live righteously; we are to own the rights of God over our hearts and to exercise godliness.

But our future also is enlightened by grace. It teaches us to wait for the blessed hope, and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

Grace has appeared. It teaches us how to walk here below, and to expect the appearing of the glory in the Person of Jesus Christ Himself. And our hope is well founded. Christ is justly precious to us. We can have full confidence of heart in thinking of His appearing in glory, as well as the most powerful motive for a life devoted to His glory. He gave Himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify for Himself a people who should belong to Him in His own right, and be zealous — according to His will and His nature — of good works.

This is what Christianity is. It has provided for all, the past, the present, and the future, according to God. It delivers us from this world, making of us a people set apart for Christ Himself, according to the love in which He gave Himself for us. It is purification, but a purification which consecrates us to Christ. We belong to Him as His peculiar portion, His possession in the world; animated with the love that is in Him, in order to do good to others and bear testimony to His grace. This is a precious testimony to that which Christianity is, in its practical reality, as the work of the grace of God.

With respect to the conduct of Christians towards the world, grace has banished violence, and the spirit of rebellion and resistance which agitates the heart of those who believe not, and which has its source in the self-will that strives to maintain its own rights relatively to others.

The Christian has his portion, his inheritance, elsewhere; he is tranquil and submissive here and ready to do good. Even when others are violent and unjust towards him, he bears it in remembrance that once it was no otherwise with himself: a difficult lesson, for violence and injustice stir up the heart; but the thought that it is sin, and that we also were formerly its slaves, produces patience and piety. Grace alone has made the difference, and according to that grace are we to act towards others.

The apostle gives a grievous summary of the characteristics of man after the flesh — that which we once were. Sin was foolishness — was disobedience; the sinner was deceived — was the slave of lusts, filled with malice and envy, hateful, and hating others. Such is man characterised by sin. But the kindness of God, of a Savior-God, His goodwill and charity towards men (sweet and precious character of God!)\* has appeared. The character that He has assumed is that of Savior, a name especially given Him in these three epistles, in order that we should bear its stamp in our walk, that it should pervade our spirit. Our walk in the world and our conduct towards others depend on the principles of our relationships with God. That which has made us different from others is not some merit in ourselves, some personal superiority: we were sometime even as they. It is the tender love and grace of the God of mercy. He has been kind and merciful to us: we have known what it is, and are so to others. It is true that in cleansing and renewing us this mercy has wrought by a principle,

and in a sphere of a life, that are entirely new, so that we cannot walk with the world as we did before; but we act towards others who are still in the mire of this world, as God has acted towards us to bring us out of it, that we might enjoy those things which, according to the same principle of grace, we desire that others also should enjoy. The sense of what we once were, and of the way in which God has acted towards us, combine to govern our conduct towards others.

[\* In Greek it is the word philanthropy, which is here used in speaking of God; and which moreover has much greater force than the English word, because phil is an especial affection for anything, a friendship.]

Now when the kindness of a Savior-God appeared, it was not something vague and uncertain; He has saved us, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy by washing and renewing us. This is the double character of the work in us, the same two points which we find in John 3 in the Lord's discourse with Nicodemus; except that here is added that which has now its place because of the work of Christ, namely, that the Holy Ghost is also shed on us abundantly to be the strength of that new life of which He is the source. The man is washed, cleansed. He is washed from his former habits, thoughts, desires, in the practical sense. We wash a thing that exists. The man was morally bad and defiled in his inward and outward life. God has saved us by purifying us; He could not do it otherwise. To be in relationship with Himself there must be practical purity.

But this purification was thorough. It was not the outside of the vessel. It was purification by means of regeneration; identified with the communication of a new life no doubt, which is the source of new thoughts, in connection with God's new creation, and capable of enjoying His presence and in the light of His countenance, but which in itself is a passage from the state we were in into a wholly new one, from flesh by death into the status of a risen Christ.

But there was a power which acted in this new life and accompanies it in the Christian. It is not merely a subjective change, as they say. There is an active divine Agent who imparts something new, of which He is Himself the source — the Holy Ghost Himself. It is God acting in the creature (for it is by the Spirit that God always acts immediately on the creature); and it is in the character of the Holy Ghost that He acts in this work of renewal.

It is a new source of thoughts in relationship with God; not only a vital capacity, but an energy which produces that which is new in us.

It has been a question, When does this renewal by the Holy Ghost take place? Is it at the commencement, or is it after the regeneration\* of which the apostle speaks? I think that the apostle speaks of it according to the character of the work; and adds “shed on us” (that which characterises the grace of this present period) to show that there is an additional truth, namely, that the Holy Ghost, as “shed on us,” continues in order to maintain by His power the enjoyment of the relationship into which He has brought us. The man is cleansed in connection with the new order of things; but the Holy Ghost is a source of an entirely new life, entirely new thoughts; not only of a new moral being, but of the communication of all that in which this new being develops itself. We cannot separate the nature from the objects with regard to which the nature develops itself, and which form the sphere of its existence and characterise it.

[\* The Greek word here used is not being born again. It is used, besides this passage, only in the end of Matthew 19 for the millennium. The renewing of the Holy Ghost is a distinct thing from the regeneration. This last is a change of one state of things to another.]

It is the Holy Ghost who gives the thoughts, who creates and forms the whole moral being of the new man. The thought and that which thinks cannot be separated, morally, when the heart is occupied with it. The Holy Ghost is the source of all in the saved man: he is ultimately saved, because this is the case with him.

The Holy Ghost does not only give a new nature; He gives it us in connection with an entirely new order of things (“a new creation”), and fills us as to our thoughts with the things that are in this new creation. This is the reason, that, although we are placed in it once for all, this work — as to the operation of the Holy Ghost — continues; because He ever communicates to us more and more of the things of this new world into which He has brought us. He takes of the things of Christ and shows them to us; and all that the Father has is Christ’s. I think that the “renewing of the Holy Ghost” embraces all this; because He says, “which he has shed on us abundantly.” So that it is not only that we are born of Him, but that He works in us, communicating to us all that is ours in Christ.

The Holy Ghost is shed on us abundantly by means of Jesus Christ our Savior, in order that, having been justified by the grace of this Savior, we should be heirs according to the hope of eternal life. I think that the antecedent of “that,” v. 7, is “the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost”; and that the sentence, “which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior,” is an accessory parenthesis introduced to show us that we have the fullness of the enjoyment of these things by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Thus He has saved us by this renewing that we may be heirs according to the hope of eternal life. It is nothing outward, earthly, or corporeal. Grace has given us eternal life. In order to this, we have been justified by the grace of Christ. Thus there is energy, power, hope, through the rich gift of the Holy Ghost. In order to our participating in it we have been justified by His grace, and our inheritance is in the incorruptible joy of eternal life.

God has saved us, not by works — nor by means of\* anything that we are, but by His mercy. But then He has acted towards us according to the riches of His own grace, according to the thoughts of His own heart.

[\* Here, as everywhere, the responsibility of man and God’s saving grace, by which purpose also is accomplished, are clearly distinguished.]

With these things the apostle desires that Titus should be occupied — with that which brings us with thanksgiving into practical connection with God Himself and makes us feel what our portion is, our eternal portion, before Him. This acts upon the conscience, fills us with love and good works, makes us respect all the relationships of which God Himself is the center. We are in relationship with God according to His rights; we are before God, who causes everything that He has Himself established to be respected by the conscience.

Idle questions and disputes on the law Titus was to avoid, together with everything that would destroy the simplicity of our relationship with God according to the immediate revelation of Himself and of His will in Jesus Christ. It is still the Gnostic Judaism setting itself up against the simplicity of the gospel; it is the law and human righteousness, and that which, by means of intermediate beings, destroys the simplicity and the immediate character of our relationship with the God of grace.

When a man tried to set up his own opinions, and by that means to form parties in the assembly, after having admonished him once and a second time, he was to be rejected; his faith was subverted. He sins, he is judged of himself. He is not satisfied with the assembly of God, with the truth of God: he wants to make a truth of his own. Why is he a Christian, if Christianity, as God has given it, does not suffice him? By making a party for his own opinions he condemns himself.

We have, at the end of the epistle, a little glimpse of the christian activity which the love of God produces, the pains taken that the flock should enjoy all the help with which God supplies the assembly. Paul wished that Titus should come to him: but the Cretans needed his services; and the apostle makes the arrival of Artemas or Tychicus (the latter well known by the services he had rendered to Paul) the condition of the departure of Titus from the field in which he was laboring. We find too that Zenas, a lawyer, and Apollos, who had also displayed his active zeal at Ephesus and Corinth, were disposed to occupy themselves in Crete with the work of the Lord.

Observe also that we have the two kinds of laborers: those who were in personal connection with the apostle as fellow-laborers, who accompanied him, and whom he sent elsewhere to continue the work he had begun, when he could no longer carry it on himself; and those who labored freely and independently of him. But there was no jealousy of this double activity. He did not neglect the flock that were dear to him. He was glad that any who were sound in the faith should water the plants which he himself had planted. He encourages Titus to show them all affection, and to provide whatever they needed in their journey. This thought suggests to him the counsel that follows; namely, that it would be well for Christians to learn how to do useful work in order to supply the wants of others as well as their own.

The apostle ends his epistle with the salutations that christian love always produces; but, as we saw at the beginning, there is not here the same expansion of heart that we find in Paul's communications to Timothy. Grace is the same everywhere; but there are special affections and relationships in the assembly of God.