

MASTERING LIFE'S DIFFICULTIES

"To Titus, mine own son after the common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour. For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee." Titus 1:4-5.

Authors have not paid much attention to or devoted much space to Titus, and yet he played an important part in early Christian history. Even though he was one of the outstanding servants of Christ in the first century, Titus was not mentioned by name in the Book of Acts. Every time that his name appears in the New Testament he is in the midst of a difficult situation.

We do not know where Titus was born and reared, but both of his parents were Gentiles. When Paul met Titus for the first time we have not been informed. We do know that it was Paul who introduced Titus to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is entirely possible that Titus was a native of Antioch, and that he listened to the preaching of Paul during his first mission tour of that city. It is certain that Paul led him into the family of God because he referred to Titus as His "own son after the common faith." Paul had many spiritual sons, but he had a special affection for Titus. Titus understood the point of view of the Gentile world on life and morals. That view was one of idolatry, low standards of morality, set amid a rich culture of literature and language and social life. Into this atmosphere the gospel of Christ had to be carried.

Titus was thrust into the squabble in the church at Antioch over whether or not one had to keep the Jewish Law in order to be a Christian. Paul and his co-workers denied that it was necessary to be circumcised in order to be saved. They contended that people are saved by grace through faith in Christ, and not by keeping a lot of rules. Others said all of the rules had to be observed. Being a self-governing body, the church at Antioch sent a committee to Jerusalem to confer with the apostles and other religious leaders about this matter. Among those who went were Paul and Barnabas. They took Titus with them as the prize example of a non-Jewish Christian who trusted in Christ as his Saviour and was saved, even though he did not abide by all the little rules of Judaism. The Judaizers demanded that Titus submit to the rite of circumcision or else not be permitted to attend the conference. Evangelical Christianity and spiritual religion were at stake in this controversy. Titus was the innocent victim and, therefore, was placed under tremendous pressure. Many others probably would have thrown up their hands and walked out, but Titus did not do anything of that nature. He could stand up under controversy. When the news of the decision of the conference, to the effect that a Gentile did not have to be circumcised in order to be saved, was carried back to Antioch by the committee, Titus returned with them wearing the badge of Gentile liberty.

Titus appeared on the scene the next time in Corinth. The church in Corinth was a problem church. Previously Paul had sent Timothy to Corinth to take care of some grave difficulties in the church there. Many abuses had taken place and the church was in danger of disruption. There were two opposing factions. They were bickering with each other so constantly that nearly all the members had taken sides and the church was just about split. There was also a public scandal in the church because one of the leaders was living in immorality. This immorality was not only widely known, but was condoned by all. Some of the church members were getting intoxicated when they observed the Lord's Supper. Things had sunk to a low ebb. There was also the delicate subject of church finances. The Corinthians had tried to make a big impression by talking about their generosity. At that time there was a campaign among all the churches to help the Christians in distress in Palestine. When it became a matter of coming through with cash, the members of this church had failed. They furnished the talk, but withheld the cash.

With conditions like these existing in the church, it is not surprising that Timothy failed in his mission. He did not fail because of any lack of ability, but because of lack of experience in such a situation. He was too young. The church members despised his youth, and were hostile toward Paul because he had sent Timothy to them instead of coming himself. Some churches get into such a condition that no pastor is able to cope with the situation, and one after another resigns and leaves in disgust, just as Timothy left Corinth.

What an assignment Titus had! He was sent to Corinth to reorganize the church, bring together and reconcile the two factions, stop the immorality of the leader, put an end to drunkenness at the observance of the Lord's Supper, and raise funds for the poor saints in Jerusalem. Talk about pressures and tensions and difficult situations, Titus certainly inherited one, but with God's wisdom and strength he succeeded in pulling the group together and in getting them to conduct themselves as becometh Christians. Naturally, Paul rejoiced greatly when Titus carried the good report to him.

The next difficult situation in which we find Titus is in Crete. At some unrecorded time Paul had visited this island in the interest of Christianity. When he took his departure therefrom, Paul left Titus there to carry on the work. This island was not a desirable place for a Christian to be left.

Treachery and deceit were so prevalent that even one of the Cretians wrote of his fellow countrymen as being "always liars, evil beasts, idle gluttons." All knew how hot-tempered and quickly aroused to a brawl these people were. The Roman world looked down on them as cheats and no-goods. They were thought of as the poor white trash of the Mediterranean area.

Titus was sorely disappointed with his assignment. One can only imagine the terrific job he had of trying to propagate Christianity on that isolated island. The job was as lonely as that of a salesman today being given Central Africa for his territory. The task must have been terribly disheartening for results were extremely slow and there was so little to show for his effort. Naturally Titus was inclined to give way to the mood of despair.

When Titus wrote Paul, he complained about the difficult situation in which he had been left. The difficulties of which he complained seemed to him to be sufficient reason for his leaving the place. Why should he waste his life among such people when there were other places where his labors would count for so much more? Who of us has not had such situations, problems and experiences? We, too, have been sadly disappointed at the enormity of the difficulties, the unresponsiveness of the people and the small visible results, and have entertained the thought of running away and leaving it all. Anybody can do that sort of thing, but that never accomplishes anything worthwhile.

Titus mastered his difficulties in a remarkable way and stayed on the job for the Lord. His greatest difficulty was within himself. That is the trouble with most of us. Too many of us give more time analyzing our problems than we do to solving them. Titus mastered his difficulty by gaining more faith and courage in his own heart, and so must we. He also did it by cultivating the proper attitude. He came to realize that the very things in Crete that were so distasteful to him were the reasons why he was there. He came to see that a place in which there was so much evil was an opportunity for him to exercise his creative power.

When you get to the place where you want to tell people what you think of them and then leave them, or when you are attracted by the newness or strangeness of places, or when you fancy that if you were just there you could do great things, just remember that

you cannot run away from difficulties. You cannot master anything by running away from it.

Titus stood his ground in crete and won the day for Christ. That took courage and steadfast devotion. After standing up under tremendous pressures and overcoming such adverse circumstances, Titus won a wonderful victory. In recent years explorations and excavations have been made on Crete. The archaeologists have found the foundations and superstructures of chapels and churches dating back to early Christian times, as if many had turned to God and He had changed their lives. These bore the inscription, "Dedicated to our beloved St. Titus." This would never have happened if Titus had not mastered his difficulties with the strength and ability which the Lord imparted to him. We do not know what happened to Titus. It is possible that he remained in Crete and eventually died there.

If Titus could stand as he did through the incredible pressures and tensions, the adverse and trying circumstances, he must have something to teach us. One lesson which he teaches us is the folly of trying to run away from pressure. Some would tell us just to forget about the pressure. But just telling ourselves to ignore the tensions is not enough.

The Christian answer to life's difficulties and problems is not running away from them through trying to tell ourselves that they are not real, through the use of liquor, tranquilizers or what--have you. Happiness pills do not remove the causes of anxiety, even though they are frequently gulped by those who want the peace of mind of the good life, but who do not want to live the life that is good. A Christian can stand in the midst of pressure, tension, strain, anxiety and difficulties because he knows the security of a loving and helping God. With God's help one can stand up to life. The same God of comfort and care Who stood with Titus will stand with us, and for Him we can receive the comfort and the care which we need for all of life's difficulties.