

Bible-Reading Coach Podcast Transcript

Week 50: Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, *To a Pastor, a Master, and Jewish Believers*

Welcome to Week 50 of the Bible reading coach podcast. My name is Karl Vaters and I'm here to help you read through the entire Bible in 52 weeks.

This week, we will finish off the writings of Paul with two very short letters. One of them, Titus, is to a pastor. And the other one, Philemon, is actually to a slave owner, who is now a Christian. Philemon is a short book, but it's really complicated because it's about how a slave owner and a slave, now both Christians, should treat each other as brothers in Christ. It's really short, but it's got that complexity at the center of it. So we'll talk through some of that.

But we'll spend most of the week reading the book of Hebrews. This is a book whose authorship is a bit of a mystery. In fact, a complete mystery, but whose message could not be clearer it's written to Jewish Christians, to help them understand what it means to live as followers of Jesus, while still honoring but not being tied to the Jewish cultures, their traditions and their scriptures and their families. So let's take a look at it. Let's begin.

First of all, the first book we'll read is the book of Titus this week. Titus is the last of what we talked about last week, or were the three pastoral epistles along with First and Second Timothy, these three books were written from Paul to two different pastors about how to pastor the church well, so Titus was a pastor on the island of Crete, in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea. Paul had started the church there with Titus. And then Paul had left Titus behind, to pastor the church and to keep the work going, while Paul went on to start other churches and other places. Titus had been led to Jesus by the apostle Paul, and he had been trained by the Apostle Paul.

And now Paul was following up with him on how to better pastor this church that he was pastoring on the island of Crete. Paul is writing specifically this book, because he had heard that Titus is dealing with opposition and dealing with false teachers who are trying to sow wrong messages and wrong teachings into the true teachings that Paul had left him with. It is three very short chapters, it lasts only about a page in most print Bibles. So it is one of but not the shortest book in the entire Bible. We'll get to the shortest one next week.

All right, so let's take a look at chapter one of Titus. First of all, explains why basically talks about why are you in Crete. Remember why I left you in Crete is basically what Paul tells Titus in Titus one, he reminds him that Paul had entrusted him to lead the church in Crete. And then he quickly talks about the importance of continuing to raise other leaders, just like Paul had raised Titus to be a leader, Titus was now given the job of raising other leaders. And he talks about the importance of leadership, and the character traits that leaders in the church ought to have. This is a primary place from which we draw these ideas for even who should be leading churches today, whether it's a pastor or an elder, or a deacon, or a department head, or whatever. These are the character traits for church leadership.

We then go to Titus chapter two, where he actually goes to have an interesting passage of helping Titus understand how to teach different people in different ways. Not everyone learns in the same way, we know that now. But Paul here with Titus helps him to understand how to

treat and teach young women and older women, younger men and older men and even slaves slightly differently, because they're all going to learn in a different way.

Now, today, it's hard for us to hear that men and women learn in different ways or that even younger people learn in different ways than older people. But that is true, but it is even more true in their society. Because in their society, unlike today, in our society today, in American culture, and European culture today, men and women are treated far, far, far more equally than they have been in the past, and that they are in many other cultures still today. But back then, younger men and older men were treated very, very differently. Women and men were treated very, very differently. Free People and slaves were treated very, very differently. And because of the different way they were treated, because of how they were perceived, because of the kind of education they did or did not receive, having the ability to read or not being able to read at all, for instance, because of those backgrounds, and because of those very huge differences in training. You couldn't treat a young free man the same way you would an older enslaved woman. They were just they might as well be on different planets in their understanding of the world and of life and how they receive information.

So the Apostle Paul outlines them and gives them just some real basic and simple but wise ways of how to relate to each of them differently as Pastor. So that's really what's behind that. As you read it today in our culture, you may read it and think it's a little bit old school, it's not old school, it, first of all, does outline how we should be treating older and younger differently, how men and women are different. In fact, it should be treated differently. But also remember the society that they were living in was much more stratified than our society is today. And the bottom line is this: no matter what background you're from, no matter what kind of education you have, or don't have, no matter what status you might see yourselves in, or others might see you in, in society. The Gospel works everywhere. And the gospel is simply the most widely adaptable teaching of all time. And the reason for that is because truth works everywhere. So no matter the teaching style, the Gospel always works.

And then we'll end Titus in chapter three, where he talks about the lines of authority that even though we're equal at the foot of the cross, what does the current lines of authority and our understanding of authority in the world today, how does that balance out with the equality that we find in Christ? And then he closes it with some greetings.

We'll then go to the book of Philemon. It is a one chapter book. It is, I think, the second shortest book in the Bible, only 25 verses. Third John being the shortest of them all. Philemon was probably written at the same time as the book of Colossians. And it was probably sent with the book of Colossians by the same people. Philemon lived in Colossae. He had owned a slave named Onesimus, and Onesimus had run away from Philemon. Interestingly enough, Onesimus, the runaway slave meets the Apostle Paul, gets saved, becomes a Christian. And Paul now sends this slave who had run away from his master back to his master who was also a Christian. So Paul knew Philemon, the slave owner, in Colossae, he meets Onesimus the runaway slave in another town, and now he sends Onesimus back.

Now, this is one of those cultural differences that's really, really hard of all the books in the Bible, especially in the New Testament. Philemon is one of the hardest for us to wrap our minds around today. First of all, because we understand that owning human beings is evil, always has been. Freeing slaves from slavery is one of the core foundational stories of the entire Bible, right? Becoming freed people and not enslaved to sin anymore as one of the

primary teaching principles of the entire New Testament. And then all of a sudden, we read well he sends a slave back to be a slave.

Well, what's going on here? Well, there's a handful of things that are going on here that don't fully satisfy our queasiness with it, for lack of a better term, but will help us understand that there's more nuance going on here than it may appear at first. First of all, slavery was different than it is today in some, some in some bad ways. And it's, and in some better ways. The better way was this in many cases, the word slavery was a generic catch all term. And it was often used for people that we would call servants today or even employees today. They didn't have different terms like servants and employees, they just had slave you. This is your boss, boss/employee, they use master and slave, same term. So sometimes a slave was someone who was in fact, you know, had been kidnapped someone who was being abused, someone who had no choice, sometimes the term slave was used for someone who was under someone's employ. Okay, so we don't know for sure which one it is but it very well could have been. This is someone who ran away from their employer, even though they had an obligation to stay on. So that might have been it.

Second thing, a slave on a run in their day had nowhere to go to be safe. In American history, for instance, back in the horrible days of American slavery, there at least was an underground railroad that got you to the free states, where you could not be enslaved again, there was a place to escape to. In their era, there was nowhere to escape to you, you couldn't there's no way anybody would have the ability to escape to a place outside of the thumb of the Roman Empire and anywhere in the Roman Empire, if it was discovered, you're a runaway slave, it was punishable by torture by death or at minimum by sending you back to your owner. So there were few other options in that day.

Thirdly, sometimes slaves were indentured servants, and indentured servants was basically something like this. Here's typically how it would work. If you were a poor person, the only way out of poverty was to learn a trade by which you could earn some money. And what you would do is you would go and offer yourself to a trades person to a carpenter, for instance, Okay, you go to a carpenter and you'd say I need to be trained in carpentry, but the carpenters like, I got no time to train somebody. So here's what they would do, I will work for you for seven years. As a servant, I will do whatever you say, for seven years. And in that seven years working for you, I will learn how to become a carpenter. So if you invest seven years into me to teach me, I will then work for you for seven years after I've been trained.

So basically, for the first seven years, the master, the carpenter, who knows his business, is teaching the person who comes to work for him. At the end of seven years, that person now knows enough that he could contribute back to the carpentry trade enough to pay the carpenter back for the seven years he trained. So basically, you make a 14 year commitment. It didn't always have to be 14 years. But that was a typical kind of thing. So what might have happened here is that Onesimus, as often happened, might have been running away in your eight year nine year 10. At a point where, hey, wait a minute, you need to stay and fulfill your obligation and pay this guy back for the amount of training that he gave him. We don't know that that's what happened. But I think that did happen and could have been contributing to what was going on here.

And then fourthly, there are now brothers in Christ, their relationship will change. And so he kind of walks what Paul does is walk him through, here's how to treat a person, now primarily

as a brother in Christ and not primarily as your employee or as your slave. Bottom line is this, we don't know for sure what the relationship was. But we do know that we can't read Phil Leimann through the lens of our modern understandings of slavery, they were different back then we don't know for sure what the situation was. But Paul obviously would not have sent a man back to be owned by another human being and subjected to the kind of slavery we think about that is not what happened. And in fact, the advice that is given in this book is to be treated completely differently than that. So as you read it, note Paul's appeals to their common humanity, to their brotherhood in Christ, to Paul's love for both of them, and to Jesus' love for all of them. That will help us get over some of our queasiness with the book of Philemon and the queasiness with it is understandable. All right.

But those are all quick, we're going to spend the bulk of our time in the book of Hebrews. So let's talk about that for a couple of minutes. As I said earlier, the book of Hebrews is a mystery about who wrote it, we don't know who wrote it. But it's also very clear, because what the author meant is very clear to the book. So first of all, who wrote it? Basically, there are two camps of belief about who wrote Hebrews, Camp number one is people who say that Paul wrote it. Camp number two is people who say somebody other than Paul wrote it. Basically, it's the Paul and the not Paul camps. We know for sure that it was into Jewish Christians, uses a lot of Jewish and Old Testament references, because the author is helping Jewish Christians understand what it looks like to be a Christian now, while not having to betray their Judaism in any way whatsoever. And it's really about how everything that we know about God in the Old Testament was fulfilled by Jesus when he lived, and as we read about in the gospels, so let's take a look through Hebrews. It starts in Hebrews one by basically telling us, it's all about Jesus.

Here's how the book of Hebrews starts. Hebrews one verses one through two, "In the past, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets, at many times, and in various ways. But in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe." So this is a really important opening verse, basically, what he's telling Hebrew Christians was, hey, as Jews, we know that in the past, God spoke to our ancestors, as we read about in the Old Testament, to a whole bunch of different prophets and a whole bunch of different times and in a whole bunch of different ways. That's not the case anymore. It's not going to be to different prophets at different times, and in different ways. From this point on, everything we hear from God will come to Jesus. That's why, from the Gospels on everything from the Gospels on in the Bible is about Jesus. It's all through one lens. So anybody comes to you, and it gives you something that's outside of Jesus, we reject it as Christians, because this is real clear teaching in the Bible, not just here, but elsewhere, in the New Testament, that everything is through Jesus right now. It's not different prophets at different times.

This is for instance, why we reject Islam, why we reject the Book of Mormon, because these are additional teachings that come outside of the realm of simply through Jesus. Everything we know from this point on is through Jesus. All right, so how do we know how the original Hebrews know that Jesus is the fulfillment of all of these things? Well, let the Old Testament quotes begin. The book of Hebrews constantly quotes the Old Testament to show to first century Jewish Christians that Jesus was the fulfillment of these Old Testament prophecies. Okay? It's helpful if you're reading through the book of Hebrews. It's really helpful this week to read the book of Hebrews using a translation that has a lot of side notes in it. The ones that

specifically tell you when they give you a quote where that quote is from in the Old Testament, because there's a lot of them. And thankfully, many of the Bible reading apps will have that. We often read through and don't notice it. But now as you're reading through Hebrews, take a look at the asterisks. Take a look at the little, you know, footnote numbers and so on, and actually use them and look at the footnotes to see what they mean. It'll give you an understanding of how broadly the book of Hebrews draws from the Old Testament.

So he starts at Hebrews one by reminding us that Jesus is greater even than the angels. Now why does that matter? Well, because the angels are God's messengers, in the Old Testament, and in the new right with Joseph and Mary, even when you hear from an angel that's directly from God, and you obey whatever an angel tells you. And then the writer of Hebrews comes along and says, if the message that came through angels is something you're going to obey no matter what, how much more important is it to listen to what Jesus says, no matter what, because Jesus is greater than the angels, being God Himself, okay? He's a higher messenger with a better message. Just as you should pay attention to angels, you better pay attention to Jesus.

We then move along to Hebrews two, where he says, basically, if listening to angels is important, how much more important is it to listen to Jesus, because it's a more important message from a more important messenger. And then, maybe even more important in this for many Jews, Hebrews three tells us not only is Jesus greater than the angels, Jesus is greater than Moses. Now, that would be blasphemy to a first century Jew, unless a first century Jew understood that Jesus was, in fact, Messiah, and in fact, was God and flesh, which most of them refuse to believe. The idea that anyone could be a greater prophet than Moses was simply unheard of for them. But if Jesus is greater than Moses, which he says he is, then Jesus' message is greater than Moses' message, right? And what was Moses' message? The first five books of the Bible? Yeah, so Jesus' message supersedes even Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. That's what Hebrews three tells us.

We then move to Hebrews chapters four and five, which tell us this, since one of the set of laws given to Moses, namely the 10 commandments, since one of the 10 commandments is Sabbath. And today we don't think of Sabbath as one of the most important of the top 10. But they did, Sabbath was huge for Jewish people, okay, they revered the Sabbath very, very highly. And basically what Hebrews four and five talks about using the Sabbath, as a touch point for how important this new law under Jesus is. Basically, what he's saying is, on the Sabbath, this idea of rest was just hinted at. This idea of rest, that the Sabbath hints at, is now fulfilled in Jesus. Now, what does rest mean? Does it mean just sit around all day and do nothing? No, rest here means that we don't work to earn our salvation. We rest in Jesus for our salvation. He completely turns upside down what Sabbath means, but in fact, fulfills what Sabbath means. Just as Sabbath is fulfilled in Jesus. Then also Hebrews four and five tell us, so is the need for a High Priest.

Now, when he starts talking about high priests, what's he talking about here? And once a year, there was a priest that was designated from among all of the priests to go into the Holy of Holies, where the Ark of the Covenant stood, and to offer a sacrifice for the entire nation for all of their sins for an entire year. And if that priest's sacrifice was accepted by God, then the entire gnash, the sins of the nation were forgiven for the entire year. If God did not forgive their sins for the entire year, you know how they knew it? The priest died. Okay, so this idea of the high priest

is a big deal, but it's also a really scary deal. And what he tells us in what the writer of Hebrews tells us here is, we don't need a high priest, to go into the scary place into the temple anymore, to the Ark of the Covenant, and hope and pray that our sins will be forgiven. Jesus is our high priest. He does that for us. He has done that for us and our forgiveness is assured.

Which then moves us to the end of chapter five, and chapter six, where the author actually gets a little angry, which gives us a hint that he knew the specific original recipients of this book were people that the author actually knew. And he basically says, you know, I want to teach you more than this. I want to go deeper than this, but I can't, because you people just aren't growing up enough in your faith and you got I gotta keep feeding you milk because you're not ready for solid food. Now, that sounds familiar. It should sound familiar because we saw in first Corinthians already the same complaint from Paul to the Corinthian church. It's one of the big reasons why the people who believe Paul wrote Hebrews why they leave that because a lot of themes from Paul's other writings are repeated in Hebrews almost word for word, this being one of those key ones here.

We'll then move along to Hebrews seven, where we have this interesting teaching about a man named Melchizedek. Now, back in week one, if you've been following along all the way, back in week one, in Genesis, we read in Genesis 14, about Abraham giving tithe to a man named Melchizedek, who comes out of nowhere. He's the king of Salem, which we know today is Jerusalem. And he gives him a tithe. And I told you back then to remember this guy's name, because in week 50, which is where we are today, he'll come back again. Well, here's that promise fulfilled. Here in Hebrews seven Melchizedek shows up again. And basically one of the things that the apostle Paul, (not the Apostle Paul, whoever wrote Hebrews) one of the things that the writer of Hebrews tells the readers of the book of Hebrews is that Jesus is a king like Melchizedek. That, basically, the mystery of Melchizedek is now fulfilled in Jesus.

There are some people because of this passage, especially who believe that Melchizedek may have been what theologians call a pre incarnational epiphany. That's a complicated theological term and I'm gonna tell you what it means. Incarnation means the arrival of Christ, okay, Christmas is the incarnation, the arrival of Christ. Pre-incarnation means before Christmas before that before Bethlehem, okay. An epiphany means an appearance of Christ's incarnation, means Christ in bodily form on Christmas. Epiphany means the appearance of Christ before the birth of Christ. Okay, pre incarnational epiphany means an appearance of Christ before the birth of Christ. So how can Jesus appear before he's born? Well, because Jesus has pre existed, he was there at creation. We already read that earlier in Hebrews, right? He was there at creation. So that means if he wants to, he can dip in at any time. There are a handful of times in the Old Testament, the fourth man in the fire, and Daniel, for instance, the appearance of Melchizedek, being another one and a couple others that appear that they might have been Jesus actually appearing to people before he was born in Bethlehem, that he, as God came down in what's called a pre incarnational, epiphany, and Melchizedek might have been one of those in Genesis 14, well, we don't know for sure. So let's move on from that.

We now move to Hebrews eight, nine and 10, where we hear about the high priest, the new covenant, and the new temple, the author, and this these chapters comes back to a description of Jesus as the high priest, offering forgiveness for all the people for all time, he reminds them that the Old Testament said that this would happen. And we'll read quotes about that in those chapters. He then reminds them that Jesus, he isn't just the high priest who offers

the sacrifice. He is the sacrifice in the Old Testament, and during the time that this was written in the temple, and during the holiest of holies was a fearful thing. If you're not forgiven, the priest is killed. But then Hebrews eight, nine and 10 says, Now because of Jesus, because he's the high priest, and because he's the sacrifice, our forgiveness is assured. So we can enter God's presence boldly, because we know we're going to be forgiven because of what Jesus did.

What a huge change from walking into the presence of God terrified that your sacrifice not be might not be accepted and your sins might not be forgiven. to Now we can enter with confidence, knowing that our sins are forgiven through Jesus moment, one of the greatest truths, if not the greatest truth in all of Scripture, the confidence that we have knowing our sins are forgiven because of Jesus, we then go to Hebrews 11. And he was 11 is one of the mountain peaks of Scripture is his book called The Hall of Fame of fate. It lists the great heroes of the faith through the Old Testament, the ones that we read about in the Old Testament reading this year. And then the author of Hebrews tells them, that these great saints who we appropriately revere for what they did in the Old Testament, they wish they knew what we knew today. They anticipated Jesus but had no idea the fulfillment of Jesus. And now we get to play a part in the continuation of their story, we get to fulfill their story, because we now live after Jesus, and we know the fullness of this. And we now have the presence of the Holy Spirit living in us. Hebrews 11 is just one of those absolutely epic moments in the entire Bible.

And then we get to finish up Hebrews with chapters 12 and 13, where it feels a lot like Paul again. And of course, this may be Paul, concluding with encouragement, reminding his readers, to to not take this bold approach to God lightly just because you can enter the throne of grace boldly doesn't mean you do so arrogantly do so with humility anyway, God is still Holy, and we must approach him with humility and in holiness, ourselves. And then after some final instructions he tells them that Timothy has just been released from prison, and he will visit them soon. So we don't know the exact location of these original recipients. But we know that it was sent to a specific town where Timothy was known. This is another reason for those who believe it was Paul, because it's all the same people as well. It's the same style. It's the same people, it's a lot of the same phrasing. But there's enough of it that's different, that doesn't feel like Paul either, though. Paul usually signs his name, Paul usually says it's him. So is it Paul? Isn't it Paul? We don't know for sure. But the message is awesome.

So as we close, remember again, that the book of Hebrews especially which we'll conclude the week with was written to first century Jewish converts. So the more we know about that, the less confused we'll be. This is why as Christians, we don't just read the New Testament, we read the old as well, because you can't understand what's happening in the New Testament without some grasp of what went on in the Old Testament. And note also, there's no anti Jewishness here. Even though it's about fulfillment in Christ. That does not mean that Judaism is negated, it means that Judaism is fulfilled, that Jesus is the Messiah who came to redeem everyone. We also need to remember that the writers were Jews, the receivers of this original book were Jews, that Jesus himself was Jewish. So even as we're reading about how Jesus changed, or changed their approach, at least, to Judaism, and to the Old Testament, it does not put down Judaism. It does not negate Judaism. It fulfills Judaism. And it tells us that now the gates are wide open for everyone. Again, an amazing week of reading. I hope you get a lot out of it. And I hope to see you next week. Thanks.

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