

A Closing Word On Relationships

Titus 3:9-15

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Our text is Titus 3:9-15, but I want to start in verse 8, because it introduces us to our text. Paul says to Titus, “This is a faithful saying...” which takes us back to verses 4-7 “...and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God...” this is sound doctrine “... should be careful to maintain good works.” This is sound living or behavior. That’s the two-pronged theme of Titus: sound in doctrine or belief and sound in behavior. “These things are good and profitable to men.”

Now we come to the contrast in verse 9. “But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless.” Note the contrast at the end of verse 8: sound doctrine is “profitable to men,” but “foolish disputes” are “unprofitable and useless.”

Paul says, “Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped...” or “perverted” or “twisted” “...and sinning, being self-condemned,” because he knows he’s sinning.

Verse 12, “When I send Artemas to you, or Tychicus, be diligent to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. Send Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their journey with haste, that they may lack nothing. And let our people...” these are the believers that are part of the church “...also learn to maintain good works...” there’s the theme of Titus “...to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful.” The idea is that they then would not be unproductive but productive in showing the fruit of salvation.

Verse 15, “All who are with me greet you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all. Amen.”

The book of Titus is a call to be sound in belief and behavior. I like the book of Titus, because it is so clearly expresses this two-fold theme. Sound in what we believe should result in soundness in how we behave. The word “sound” is a medical term; it means “healthy” or “life-giving.” If we have sound doctrine or teaching, which is the truth of God’s Word, it should result in sound living or living godly lives for the glory of God.

To do that, we must have strong churches that are sound in teaching and preaching the Word of God. I believe the number one job of a pastor is to preach the Word. He is to “be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when [men] will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth...” which is the Bible “...and be turned aside to fables” (2 Timothy 4:2-4).

That's what Paul is warning Titus about in our text. Don't tolerate people who are teaching false doctrine and who are factious or causing division. Confront them and deal with them. Excommunicate them from the church if need be.

This is a difficult thing for pastors to do. You sometimes see the pastor preaching on Sunday and think, What a great job! He works one hour a week and then sits around the pool and plays golf the rest of the week! No. You don't realize the people problems they sometimes have to deal with. Wherever there are people, there are problems. Someone said, "Wherever the light shines the brightest, it draws more bugs." Do you know if you have bugs in your backyard? Go out tonight after dark and turn on the patio light. They will come.

When the church is teaching the Word that is light, then bugs will come. You're not bugs, but some of you bug me sometimes. We needle each other but we need each other.

So there are problems in the church, and the pastor needs to have the hide of a rhinoceros and the heart of a child. That's a challenge: to be able to deal with problem people and difficult people but to always do it in love in a desire to win them to the truth and to glorify God.

In closing his letter to Titus, Paul mentions three, important categories of personal relationships within the church. The first is false teachers.

This is a text that a lot of pastors will skip over. If I had a choice, I probably would also skip over it. But we want to study the whole Word of God. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Timothy 3:16). Who wants to talk about false teachers and heretics? So this first category is false teachers.

Our text starts with "but." That is an intended contrast. I pointed it out in reading verse 8. Pastors were to teach the "faithful saying," believe in God and "be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men."

Then Paul instructs Titus, in verse 9, "But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law..." why? "...for they are unprofitable and useless."

So this is a very clear contrast between the end of verse 8 and the beginning of verse 9. Teach sound doctrine, which is "good and profitable," but avoid false teachers who teach unsound doctrine that is "unprofitable and useless."

And what things are Titus to avoid? Let's break it down in the text. "Foolish disputes." From the word "foolish" we get our word "moronic." There are a lot of people who talk about foolish, moronic things in the church, and many times it causes strife and division.

But this is not a prohibition from all, theological controversy. Jesus Himself was controversial with the Scribes and Pharisees. He called them "whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness" (Matthew 23:27). He said that they "Cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of

extortion and self-indulgence” (Matthew 23:25). So it is okay to stand on clear, Biblical truth and essentials and “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).

Don’t waste time on profitless controversy or literally “speculations.” Look at what Paul says to Titus in chapter 1, verses 9-11. “...holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine...” there’s that theme “...both to exhort and convict those who contradict.” So there is a time with sound doctrine to “exhort and convict” people who oppose the truth. “For there are many...” not just a few; there was a big problem on the island of Crete “...insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision...” These false teachers were primarily Jewish. We see it also in the word “genealogies” and “strivings about the law.” They could have been Judaizers. “...whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain.”

See why a pastor’s job is not easy? He must deal with false teachers. He must deal with false doctrine that comes into the church to destroy the work of God. So watch out for these “foolish,” moronic, profitless “disputes.”

More specifically, what he meant was “genealogies,” verse 9. He doesn’t give us much detail. You ask, “Wait; what’s wrong with ‘genealogies’?” Nothing. It’s only wrong when you read into a genealogy allegorical meaning that God never intended to be there. No one can find secret, lost codes in a genealogy. That’s foolish. God doesn’t hide things in the Bible. God said what He meant and meant what He said. So watch out for these foolish interpretations of genealogy.

In 1 Timothy 1:3-4, Paul said to Timothy, “As I urged you when I went into Macedonia—remain in Ephesus that you may charge...” there’s that confrontation “...some that they teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith.”

What these Jews did many times—and it was very popular with Jews who came from Alexandria, Egypt—was to allegorize and spiritualize genealogies. They found hidden meanings. Be very, very careful of those who teach the Bible, read a historical narrative and jump right into allegorizing or spiritualizing the text. They don’t set it in its historical context and don’t approach interpreting the Bible literally.

This past week I taught on how to interpret the Bible. One of those ways to interpret it is literally. Yes, the Bible uses allegory, metaphors and figures of speech, but we approach the Bible as being literally true. We don’t try to find hidden meanings or hidden codes in it. A very popular book years ago was *Hidden Codes in the Bible*. Don’t waste your time. God hasn’t hidden codes in the Bible. They’re making it up. Be careful and don’t get all wrapped up in the idea that the genealogies mean this or mean that. So the Jews would allegorize or spiritualize the text.

Verse 9 also says that we should avoid “contentions” or arguments. Don’t argue and debate in the area of nonessentials. It also says we shouldn’t get into “strivings...” or “quarrels” “...about the law.” Some people just want to argue or debate. They want to throw out these “red herrings” to get you involved in arguments, to get you angry and involved in their nonsense or moronic debates.

Notice that these things are “unprofitable and useless.” What that means is that those things will not lead you to godly living. In the context, proper belief results in proper behavior. But debating foolish questions does not promote godly living; it’s not going to make you more spiritual.

I’ve found that nine times out of ten when someone wants to argue Scripture with me, it’s because they have some sin in their life they are trying to hide. They just want to throw out a smoke screen or a detour to take the focus away from the problems they have in their sinful life and focus on theological controversies and debates. They want to create a party that opposes the pastor and causes a division in the church. There have been many, godly, good pastors in churches destroyed by false teaching and divisive, heretical people. It breaks my heart.

Be careful. Deal with these people. A pastor needs to deal with them. And I believe that as parishioners, you also need to confront them. So watch out for these genealogies, quarrels about the law, which are “unprofitable and useless.”

People want to argue about baptisms. What does it matter how you baptize—whether by sprinkling or dunking? Some churches split over such issues. You may have your convictions about that, but let’s not quibble over nonessentials, such as on what day to worship, what is proper music in the church, how we dress or Christians liberties. People ask me, “Can Christians dance?” Some can; some can’t. The ones I’ve seen dance should not dance!

We don’t want to divide over these issues. Theological issues have to be confronted but not on the nonessentials.

The standard we should have is that, number one, in nonessentials, unity. That means you must know what they are. You must know what is essential Christianity and inspiration of Scripture. I would never encourage anyone to belong to a local church that denied inerrancy or infallibility of the Bible. You must be part of a church that has a high view of Scripture.

Everything flows from how we view the Bible. These are so very important: the doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of the deity and humanity of Christ, the doctrine of atonement, the doctrine of Christ, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, the doctrine of salvation. What do you believe on how you’re saved? It’s by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. These are the essential doctrines that should divide; that we should confront and should stand on. We should “content earnestly” for these. But in nonessentials, we should practice liberty.

So in essentials, unity, and you should know the essentials. In nonessentials, liberty; don’t become legalistic. And in all things, charity. Always charity or Christian love.

The second group of people flows out of verse 9. We go from false teachers to factious people, in verses 10-11. The King James Bible calls them “heretics.” Paul says, “Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person...” “a heretic” “...is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.” Paul gives Titus very specific instructions on how to deal with heretics in the church. “The first and second admonition” means you have tried to correct them, admonish them, instruct them verbally. But if they reject you twice, you reject them.

This “warped” person is perverted. We usually think of it in a sexual way, but it is not always connoted that way. It literally means “to be turned inward” and “twisted.” You could paraphrase that word by saying they’re “tweeked.” And they’re divisive. “Being self-condemned” means that person knows he is doing wrong.

What is a heretic? It literally means a sect or a party that came to mean “one who is factious, divisive, quarrelsome.” It’s a person who is determined to go his own way, rejecting God’s revealed truth, so he forms a party or faction in his own, sinful lifestyle. So he basically divides the church over a real party spirit. And many times it’s based on false teaching, verse 9.

Someone put it like this:

“Believe as I believe—no more, nor less;

That I am right (and no one else) confess.

Feel as I feel, think only as I think;

Eat what I eat, and drink but what I drink.

Look as I look, do always as I do;

And then—and only then—I’ll fellowship with you.”

That’s factious. Let us not become legalistic or factious.

People in the church often turn into “Diotrephes, who [loves] to have the preeminence among them” (3 John 9). That means that it’s “my way or the highway,” and he tries to divide the church.

Years ago, A.T. Robertson, the great Greek scholar, did an exposition in a Christian magazine on Diotrephes. It was interesting that there were 20 deacons from various churches around the country who wrote letters to the editor of the magazine canceling their subscriptions, because they said this was a personal attack on them.

You’ve heard the saying, “If the shoe fits, wear it”; right? Sometimes people think I’m singling them out. “Pastor Miller, why did you preach to me on Sunday?”

“Well, I have a bugging device and I know what your sins are, so I know just what to preach

on.” No. How silly is that?! “If the shoe fits, wear it.” These deacons read his exposition on Diotrephes, and the problem was they had become a Diotrephes. They loved to have preeminence in the church.

Years ago in my former church in San Bernardino, there was a Christian man who had a Christian wife and family, and he had committed adultery. So I confronted him. Elders need to repent. But he used it to turn the tables on my doctrine and my teaching. He tried to justify his sinful behavior. We had to excommunicate him from the church. I had to say, “You’re no longer welcome here.” He started to get a party spirit and rally people to his cause. He was unrepentant. He just became tweaked. There was a demonic influence in his life, and it was divisive in the church, so we had to tell him that he was no longer welcome in the church.

This whole passage supports what I believe is taught in the Bible: church discipline. You don’t hear preachers talking about that. But it is Biblical and is taught in the Scriptures.

Let me give you three reasons for disciplining a church member. Number one, for teaching heresy. In 1 Timothy 1:20 Paul says, “Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan...” that’s pretty radical “...that they may learn not to blaspheme.” Paul had to deliver them to Satan.

The second cause for church discipline is scandal or sinful behavior. In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul said to the believers in Corinth that it was commonly reported there was “sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father’s wife!” (1 Corinthians 5:1). It probably was an adulterous relationship with a stepmother, or it could have been incestuous. And Paul said that the Corinthians, instead of being grieved and dealing with this man, had applauded him and welcomed him, all in the name of Christian love and tolerance!

This is so contemporary today. The church cannot be unified if the church is not holy. Purity always comes before unity. You can’t sacrifice unity for impurity. We must be holy if we’re going to have unity.

Paul said to deal with the situation. And 1 Corinthians 5 describes why we must deal with it in Galatians 5:9: “A little leaven leavens the whole lump.” So it must be dealt with in the church.

Number three why we have church discipline is because of schism and heretics, Titus 3. It’s about making a party spirit, which many times divides the church.

Now what should be done about just offending someone in the church? What if you’ve offended someone? Matthew 5:21-26 says that if you know you’ve offended someone in the church, you should go to them and apologize and ask for their forgiveness. Work it out and restore the relationship before you come to worship. And if you are the one who has been offended, Matthew 18 says that you should go to the other person, and if they refuse to repent, take someone with you and go to them again. If they still won’t repent, take someone in spiritual leadership with you and go to them. If they still won’t repent, then church discipline should take place.

Now we move on to the third category in our text, which is fellow servants. These are the people who bless the pastor's heart. To see you loving one another, to see you serving one another brings joy to my heart and to the heart of God. It's so very important.

Verse 12, "When I send Artemas to you, or Tychicus, be diligent to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there." These are just several instructions. "Send Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their journey with haste, that they may lack nothing." Paul wanted them to have all the support and help they needed to do their ministries. "And let our people..." that's the people in the churches on Crete "...also learn to maintain good works...." There's the theme that ties to verse 8. "...to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful," but rather be productive.

Verse 15, "All who are with me greet you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all. Amen."

Let me go back over this. In verse 12, we learn that Paul wants Titus to join him in Nicopolis. So he mentions that he is sending a man named Artemas. We know nothing about him, other than his mention here. Then there is Tychicus. He is mentioned five times in the New Testament and always in a good light. He was a servant to Paul. He carried letters to other churches for Paul. He was a fellow servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So Paul wants to winter in Nicopolis, and he wants one or both of the two men to relieve Titus so that Titus can join Paul in Nicopolis. And most likely, Nicopolis is on the west coast of Greece overlooking the Adriatic Sea. This was where Paul was going to winter and would be doing his ministry there. Nicopolis was in the area of Dalmatia. Nicopolis means "victory town." What a great name for a town!

Then in verse 13, Paul says, "Send Zenas the lawyer." We don't know if Zenas was a Gentile and a lawyer of civil law, Roman law or whether he was a Jewish lawyer in the sense of being a scribe. If he was a civil lawyer, it would make sense, because Paul was often thrown in jail. So Paul traveled with a lawyer and with Dr. Luke; he had all the bases covered. And Zenas is only mentioned here.

Apollos is a well-known, New Testament individual. We know a lot about him from Corinthians, where Paul talked about the groups that said, "I am of Paul" and "I am of Apollos" (1 Corinthians 3:4). Apollos became a very powerful and eloquent orator and preacher. He was taught and instructed by Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus. And he also was a traveling companion of Paul. Paul wanted Titus to send Zenas and Apollos "on their journey with haste" and to help them, "that they may lack nothing."

Also the people were to "learn to maintain good works..." which again ties in to verse 8, "...to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful."

Then Paul took the pen from the transcriber, in verse 15, and with his own handwriting said, "All who are with me greet you." Paul names Artemas, Zenas and Apollo here, but how would you

feel if you were one of the others here “who are with me” but unnamed? We don’t know who those people are, but they all say hello. Paul then says, “Greet those who love us in the faith.” There’s that theme for us as believers: loving one another. “Grace be with you all. Amen.”

Let me say a few things about these verses. In verse 12, we learn that we need each other. Over and over Paul would close his letters, even to the churches he didn’t go to, by greeting people by name.

No one can do the work of the Lord alone. No pastor can do the work of the Lord alone. I cannot do what I do without a team of people. And I believe every member of this church is a servant, a minister. Every member of a church should be a minister. It’s not just “a one-man show.” So we need to understand our need for one another.

In verse 13, I like that Paul wanted them to help Zenas and Apollos on their way. It means that they should provide financial support, material support, lodging, food, clothing and assistance—whatever they can do to further the work of the Lord.

What a beautiful thing when members of a congregation get engaged and involved in helping the work of the Lord progress; serving the Lord in the local church and serving those who go out of the local church, helping by assisting and supporting them. The NIV translates verse 13 as, “seeing they have everything they need.” So we should be supporting our missionaries, our pastors and the servants in our church by seeing that “they have everything they need.”

Verse 15 shows us that we are to love the brethren. I like the fact that Paul says, “Greet those who love us in the faith.” One of the marks of a true Christian is love, and we need to love our fellow workers and encourage them in the Lord. And notice the verse says, “in the faith,” which is the body of belief that we hold in common.

Then he says, “grace.” The grace of God is everything; it is the grace that came in Jesus Christ, grace that came to save us, grace that sustains us, grace that brings us to glory. We are saved by grace, we are sanctified by grace and one day we will be glorified by grace.

But we need to learn to love the brethren. Don’t bite, don’t devour, don’t attack each other. I heard of a man who was violently sick and went to the doctor and was told he had rabies. Rabies is gnarly stuff! The doctor told him that he was going to die. So he asked for a pencil and paper. He frantically wrote stuff down on the paper.

The doctor said, “Wow! That’s a long will. Why are you writing out your will right now?”

He said, “Doctor, I’m not writing out a will. I’m writing out the names of people I want to bite before I die.”

Let’s not do that as Christians. Let’s not be false teachers. Let’s not be factious. Let’s be fellow workers. And verse 8 says that we “have believed in God” and that we “maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.”