

A Closing Word On Relationships

Titus 3:9-15

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Beginning in Titus 3:9, Paul writing to Titus, this young pastor who was on the island of Crete, he says, “But avoid foolish questions,” or controversies, “and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain,” or worthless. “A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; 11 Knowing that he that is such is subverted,” or he is warped, as some translations have, or twisted or seeks to undermine, “and sinneth, being condemned of himself. 12 When I shall send Artemas unto thee, or Tychicus, be diligent to come unto me to Nicopolis: for I have determined there to winter. 13 Bring Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their journey diligently, that nothing be wanting unto them. 14 And let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful,” or they be productive in their Christian lives. “All that are with me,” Paul says, “salute thee. Greet them that love us in the faith. Grace be with you all. Amen.”

There is an old forest folklore, so called, about two porcupines in the forest on a cold night. It was so cold that these two porcupines wanted to warm themselves, so they snuggled in close together. As they snuggled in (you probably know the story), they poked one another, needled one another, and so had to separate. They got cold again and knew they needed one another to warm each other, so they nestled in close to one another yet their needles pricked each other so went back away from each other. As they got cold, they went back together and their needles poked one another, and they realized that old statement that they needed each other but kept needling each other. Many times that’s what it is in the church. We need each other, and we keep needling each other.

In the church of Jesus Christ, wherever you have people, you have problems. Some of you are problems right now. You’re looking at me like, “Oh, no. I’m busted.” Wherever you have people, you have problems; and the church isn’t perfect. There are problems. We need each other, but we often try to draw together and needle each other. The church is made up of people, and wherever you have people, as I said, there will be problems. The book of Titus is to call us to sound belief and behavior.

In Titus 2:10, just as a reminder, it says that we are to “...adorn the doctrine of God.” I love that imagery—just like putting on a piece of clothing or a garment that we want to kind of adorn—we’re to adorn the doctrine of God, so we’re to wear it by the way we live. People are to watch us and see the doctrines of God adorned in their beauty. To do that, we must have a strong church built on sound doctrine—or God’s Word which is truth—but also unsanctified relationships based on God’s love which is the fruit of the Spirit.

Paul, in closing this letter, tells Titus to mention three important categories of personal relationships within the church. It deals mainly with....remember that Titus is written to a pastor. The books of 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus are the three letters that are known as pastoral epistles, which means Paul was writing to pastors. He was talking to them about how to set up

the church of God, the problems in the church, and the issues that were in the church. It is interesting that pastors do many times fall out of ministry because of issues, problems, and contentions with people. Someone said, “A pastor has to have a heart of a child and the hide of a rhinoceros.” That’s such a great description. He has to have a heart of a child—a tender heart—and tough skin, a tough hide to be able to deal with criticism, attacks, and as we’re going to see tonight, to be able to deal with false teachers, factious people who want to bring division and strife, but also to work together with others in the ministry in doing the work of the Lord.

There are three relationships in this passage (verses 9-15) that I want to point out. The first relationship is Titus’ relationship and the spiritual leadership of the church to false teachers. Notice it in verse 9. He said, “But,” contrast, “avoid foolish questions,” maybe a better translation would be controversies, which involve, “genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain,” or empty. Titus is here told to avoid foolish or pointless controversies. It starts with “But,” so it’s a word of contrast. It’s what you’d call a disjunctive conjunction. It’s tied together, but it brings it into a different focus. Titus was (verse 8), if you back up there, to affirm sound doctrine which is good and profitable. He was to preach sound doctrine, preach the truth of God’s Word, which is good and profitable, but there are those who try to creep into the church and bring in false doctrine. Someone said, “Wherever the light shines the brightest, it attracts bugs.” Have you ever noticed that? If you’ve got a church where the Word of God is being taught and preached, you can bet some bugs are going to come and bug the ministry of that work.

Notice, Titus is to avoid now unsound doctrine (verse 9) or “unprofitable,” which is unprofitable, “and vain.” The things Titus was to avoid, let’s break it down. First of all, he’s to avoid foolish or profitless controversies. Granted, we cannot go back in time and know every facet of every detail of what the problem or the issue was, we’re left to guess. One of the challenges of Bible interpretation is what’s called bridging the time gap. The Bible was written a long time ago. We weren’t there, so we have to kind of go back and try to understand the culture, the time, and the history of what was going on. You always want to ask yourself, “What kind of literature are we in? Who’s writing to whom? Why are they writing? What’s the theme? You want to get the big context. You want to see the forest before you look at the individual trees so that you keep everything in its proper context. Paul is talking to Titus about false teachers—those who would bring in false doctrine—that he is to avoid them. They are foolish, profitless, and void or empty.

This is not a prohibition of all theological controversy. This is not to say that we never confront or deal with someone in the body about doctrinal error or doctrinal issues or even brothers and sisters in Christ. I always love to sit down with believers and have a good lively theological discussion, but what you want to do though is generate light not heat, okay? You don’t want it to turn into a fistcuffs. You don’t want to go to blows over, you know, “My doctrine is right and yours is wrong,” but you want to be able to speak the truth in love. Jesus is kind of an interesting example again of this. He Himself was controversial, so it’s not eliminating all controversy or dealing with controversial issues. In His constant debate with the religious leaders of His day, He would actually call them, “You’re whitewashed tombs. You appear beautiful on the outside, but inside you’re full of dead man’s bones.” He would say, “You

hypocrites.” He would rebuke, confront, and deal with them.

Look with me back, real quick, don’t go too long, but turn back to Titus 1:9-11. We saw this several weeks ago. “Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.” When he says to avoid foolish talk and foolish questions, he’s not saying that we don’t ever get in there and deal with issues. Notice verse 10, he says, “For there are many unruly and vain talkers,” he said in chapter 3:9 that those kind of foolish questions are unprofitable and vain, but these are “vain talkers,” they’re deceivers, especially “they of the circumcision.” I want you to notice that because when we go back to chapter 3, the false teachers are most likely Jewish in their nationality, and they’re dealing with Jewish issues—quibbling, debating about, and discussing them. Then he says, “Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert,” or overthrow, “whole houses, teaching things which they ought not,” and they do it, sadly (verse 11), “for filthy lucre’s sake.” In other words, they’re in it for the money. All they want to do is get rich and cause all this controversy.

Now, go back with me to Titus 3:9. Not all controversy, as I said, is bad, only foolish controversy, so notice that. In Jude it says we, “...should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints,” but don’t waste time on profitless controversies or literally speculations. What are these speculations and controversies? Well, look at the text (verse 9). It starts with genealogies. Again, we don’t know what they were doing with these genealogies, but most likely they were spiritualizing, allegorizing, and mystifying them, and finding hidden meanings that God never intended to be in the passage. I say that with a little emphasis because I’m a little bit in that sanctified ticked mode right now, if it’s okay to say that, because it seems like people never ever, ever, ever, ever, ever get over abusing God’s Word by spiritualizing texts that are historical and narrative and not intended to be spiritualizing and pulling out meanings of their own ideas and fanciful concepts that God never intended it to mean.

Do you know that all verses of Scripture have one meaning? Not the same meaning, but each text has its own meaning. Let me tell you what the meaning is. It’s the meaning the original authors intended it to have. That’s what the meaning of the text is, so you must get to the meaning of the text if you’re going to understand the meaning. When you read the Bible, you then interpret the Bible, then you apply the Bible. When you interpret the Bible, which is the important part of Bible study, you must interpret a text in its historical, grammatical, and theological context. What kind of material am I in? Am I in Old Testament or New Testament? History? Poetry? Prophecy? What kind of material am I in? When we start the book of Ecclesiastes on Sunday morning, we’re going to be in the area of the Old Testament known as Hebrew poetry. A lot of cults come up with crazy ideas from the book of Ecclesiastes. This will really blow your mind. There are things said in Ecclesiastes that really aren’t even true, that are wrong, even though they are in the Bible. You say, “Wait a minute, Pastor, how could that be?” Because they’re said by Solomon in a backslidden state when he’s looking at life without God, when he’s looking at life with kind of an apathetic, complacent idea, and then the Bible brings in the truth, so what the Bible does is truthfully record what is actually being said but not always

what's being said is true.

Do you know that the devil speaks in the Bible and it records what he actually said, but what he actually said is not right, so you have to take into consideration who said it, what was the context, what's going on? "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God," but we need to take into context what we're reading and what's going on. Now, that was just a little diversion for just a moment about how you interpret Scripture. Let's get back to genealogies, and I just remembered how I got diverted. This is how I got diverted. I won't tell you what I was watching on Christian television the other night, (why I do this I do not know) but I was hearing all these crazy, fanciful, wild, bizarre interpretations of Scripture not anywhere close to what the verses were all about, and people thought, Isn't that marvelous? Isn't that wonderful that we find things no one else has ever found. Let me give you another little tip. I never thought I was going to go here tonight, but let me tell you a little tip: If your interpretation is different from two thousand years of church history—no one has ever seen what you've seen—it's wrong. I don't know who you think you are that you got some insight that nobody else has ever seen. If it's new, it's not true; if it's true, it's not new, alright? You need to understand that. When somebody writes a new book and got some new insight and some new understanding just given to them by the Spirit, I'm very, very, very suspect.

What these Jews were most likely doing was finding hidden codes and meanings. I heard some guys preaching on prophecy, and they were making a big deal out of Israel's 70 year in the holy land, 70 Sanhedrin in the Bible, and 70 this. It's like, "Where did you get that?" A few years ago a popular book was, Hidden Codes of Scripture. There aren't any hidden codes in the Bible. God said what He meant, meant what He said, and it's plain and there for us to read and to understand. Write down 1 Timothy 1:3-4 where Paul said, "As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine, 4 Neither," listen carefully, "give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do." When the plain sense of a Bible verse makes good sense, seek no other sense. If you've gotta kind of really run around the bushes to figure it out, it's probably not the meaning of that text. Another possibility is that these Jews were teaching from genealogies to boast about their heritage, to boast in their flesh, and Paul says that it's vain and empty.

Here's another thing that we're to avoid (verse 9), contentions and arguments. "But avoid foolish questions, and," avoid debates about, "genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law," so there's contentions and arguments. Fourthly, "strivings about the law," they get all wrapped up in all of these issues about the law. Again, remember it's probably Jewish in flavor—don't touch that, don't taste that, don't eat that, don't drink that, you must worship on the Sabbath day, you must be circumcised, you must keep the law of Moses. They were probably legalists putting these Gentile believers on the island of Crete under a very legalistic kind of bondage, and Paul says, "Don't get involved in that. Don't get into these foolish questions." The word "foolish," by the way, from that Greek word we get our word moronic or moron. They're just foolish to get into.

Sometimes Christians, rather than focusing on the clear doctrines of the Scriptures, want to debate nonessential controversial things and argue about them. I've often noticed, too, that a lot of times when people want to argue about silly things in the Bible, it's usually to cover a moral issue in their life. I've seen it a thousand times. People will come up to me, they want to debate this verse and that verse, this controversial issue, and the problem is they don't want to obey the Scriptures that they understand. They want to get to the Scriptures they don't understand because it leaves them in kind of an ambiguous situation rather than the very clear Scriptures that rebuke an attitude or action in their life—they want to avoid that—so it's kind of a smokescreen for them. They get into all kinds of silly issues like mode of baptism. They want to debate it, "Do you baptize face forward or do you baptize backwards? Do you sprinkle or do you immerse?" It doesn't really matter, okay? I've often thought we should just throw people off the end of the pier, "In the name of the Father, Son, and Hoooooly Ghost." If you make it back, you're born again, I guess. I'm kidding! But, let's not quibble over baptism. Baptism doesn't save us. It is a rite, an ordinance given to the church, but let's not quibble over that.

People want to talk about what day you worship on. We've had them come to our church and say that by our worshipping on Sunday that we're taking the mark of the beast and we should worship on Saturday, and they want to get into a debate. People want to argue about church music or style of church music or proper clothing for church. How should we dress in the house of God? Some churches have dress codes and dress standards, and there are other issues of Christian liberty. Can a Christian dance? People have asked me, "Can Christians dance?" I say, "Some can and some can't." "Can Christians go to the movie show?" I was raised in a very legalistic church where you couldn't dance (not that I wanted to), you couldn't go to the movie shows, you couldn't play cards—cards were the devil, and if you touched some cards, demons would fly out of them and take over you. They want to debate these issues and get sidetracked in them and other Christian areas of Christian liberty.

I have even heard people debate on methods of spiritual realities such as people have debated on what kind of juice we should have for communion. Really? Now, some churches have actual wine, and it's happened to me only a couple of times. I've been to guest speak at a church, just visiting, and they take communion. I grab the communion cup and go, "Whoa! Whoa. Whoa. Can't take too much communion. I won't be able to drive home after service." I mean it's an alcoholic beverage. They feel like it's gotta be real wine. Others say, "It's gotta be Welch's grape juice. That's the sanctified stuff," you know, "created by God for communion service." Whether the bread is leaven or unleavened or crackers or what kind of bread. They want to get into a big debate, and they break company and divide over that. Other theological nitpicking goes on as people argue about that.

We need to remember these three things. In essentials we want to have unity—in absolute essentials, unity. I really want to try to preach a series sometime on what are the essentials of Christian unity, definitely the Bible is the Word of God, Jesus is the Son of God—God in flesh—and salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, saved by grace; but in nonessentials, practice liberty—in essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty. Don't argue, debate, and quibble about them. The third thing we do is in all things practice love, so we want unity, liberty, and

love. Watch out for these people that come with their foolish questions or controversies and their crazy ideas of how to interpret the Bible. It's contentious, it's striving about the law. Don't get into legalistic issues with them, "For they are unprofitable and vain." You can be siderailed if you do that.

Here's the second relationship in the church, that is, factious people or people who are divisive who try to split the church and draw people after them (verses 10-11). He says, "A man that is an heretick," and we'll go back to explain what that word means, "after the first and second admonition," you are to do something that by today's standards is pretty radical. You are to reject them. "Knowing that he," or she, "that is such is subverted," or is warped or twisted, "and sinneth," the word sinneth is in the present tense. They are continually, ongoingly, and habitually practicing sin, "being condemned of himself," or literally self-condemned. They're condemning themselves by their behavior. Titus is here told to discipline contentious people.

Did you know the Bible actually talks about what is called church discipline? It's in the Scriptures, but you don't hear a lot about it today because it's not popular and it's not en vogue. The idea that you would actually discipline members of the congregation is something that is so hard for your modern person to understand. Sad to say, the church has always had stubborn and contentious people, and Paul calls them here (verse 10) "heretics." What is a heretic? The word literally means a sect or a party that comes to mean one who is factious, causing factions, who is contentious or divisive or quarrelsome. It's a person who demands that others follow them and go their way and causes division. He forms his own faction or own party and divides the church of Jesus Christ. This is happening all the time. People will come into the church, the family of God, and create a divisive issue and expect people to come on my side, "We're against them. Are you for me or are you with them? Are you with the pastor, or are you in our group?"

Many good and godly pastors have been actually run out of the pulpit of their churches by factious people. One of the greatest heartbreaks that I can think of is a good and godly man called by God and then some divisive person in the church gets maybe sometimes even the green eye of jealousy or envy and starts attacking the pastor, coming against the pastor, and gets others to group with him and starts spreading these kind of divisive things and causes division. That kind of person needs to be confronted and dealt with—in love—seeking to restore them, but they need to be dealt with. Someone put it in these words:

Believe as I believe—no more, no 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.

People get like this. "You don't have the right Bible. You don't wear the right clothes. You don't say the right things," and they create factions.

Paul mentions Diotrephes in the Scriptures in 3 John 9, "...who loveth to have preeminence among them," loved to be first. God help us that we'd be willing to be whatever God wants us to be and not want to have preeminence among us. It's their way or the highway. One of the greatest Greek scholars America has ever produced is a man by the name of A.T. Robertson. He was a member of the Southern Baptists. He wrote an article on Diotrephes for Church Magazine portraying him as one who wants to control a church according to his own whims. Subsequently, 20 deacons from various parts of the country wrote the editor to cancel their subscriptions because of this "personal attack" made upon them. You know, it's kind of like, if the shoe fits, wear it. Right?

Sometimes I'll teach a message from the Word and someone will come up and think that I was preaching right at them the whole time. "Were you thinking of me? Did you put this sermon together because you know what was going on in my house?" Yeah, you know those bulletins you pick up on Sunday? We put little bugging devices in them. They've got little hidden cameras. I listen to your conversation, and based on that, I know what to preach on and which way to look on Sunday when I'm making my points. I've never done that and would never do that, but if God's Spirit takes God's Word and convicts you, that's the Word of God. That's the Spirit of God.

How do you handle a person that causes factions? Three steps (verse 10), warn them. You don't immediately kick them out of the church, you warn them. This is one of the problems that a lot of spiritual leaders have in the church. They don't do this. They just say, "We're a loving church. We don't confront people. We don't deal with these issues. We just let it slide." They must be warned. Any pastor worth his salt will confront those who are factious. The second thing you do is warn them, again. Notice "second admonition," so you give them two opportunities to repent, to abandon their divisive ways, and the third thing you do is reject them. We can't be absolutely sure about all that Paul has in mind when he says to reject them, but it probably has two concepts. It probably has excommunication from the fellowship, "You're no longer welcome to come to church." The problem in today's culture is they just bounce to another church, and when they do, they cause the same problems.

Have you ever had people say, "Well, I'm looking for the perfect church." I always say, "If you find it, don't join it because if you do, it won't be perfect anymore." There have been people that have been told, "You're not welcome to come to this church anymore because you've been warned and you're divisive. You're causing factions," and so they go to another church and cause the same problems. They go from church to church. So, you warn them the first time, you warn them the second time, and if they don't straighten out, then you reject them. Spiritual leaders need to have enough courage and braveness to be confrontational. They have to have love for the people, but they have to also act in love and deal with that. Many times you have to

discipline them by removing them from the fellowship.

Thirdly, there is social ostracism. Many groups call it shunning. My wife and I were in Pennsylvania a few weeks ago and we took one day to drive through Amish country. They will shun a person that gets into doctrinal heresy or error or needs to be excommunicated. The purpose in doing this is always restoration. It should be done in love. It's for restoration, for the purity and unity of the church. This is one of the hard and difficult things that a pastor and spiritual leaders are called to do in a church congregation, to have to confront people, do it in love, but to be firm and deal with the issue that there be no division. Paul says (verse 11) such a man is warped or twisted and is sinning, present tense, as I pointed out, and self-condemned.

There are three reasons for disciplining in the church (write them down). The first is teaching heresy. In 1 Timothy 1:20, Paul mentions Hymenaeus and Alexander, "whom I have delivered unto satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme," so, "I've kicked them out of the church. I've removed them from the church so that they would learn that they need to get right with God and not blaspheme."

The second reason is scandal or sin. This is the one that's really controversial and that a lot of pastors don't like to deal with. If you are a member of a church (and at Revival we don't have formal membership because we don't have a church roll with your name on it, but if you fellowship here, you attend here, you say this is your church, you're involved, you're serving), but you are practicing intentionally, purposely, habitually, openly, sinful unbiblical behavior and it comes to the attention of the leadership, we will confront you. We will talk to you. Now, this isn't sin sniffing, flesh finding. We don't bug the bulletins and spy on you, but many times people who are a part of our church think that they can live contrary to God's Word while professing to be a believer. Now, if an unbeliever comes into this church (they don't claim to be a Christian or say they're a Christian) and they're living in sin, that's fine. I hope they get saved. They need to get born again. But, if you profess to be a brother or sister in Christ, and you're deliberately, willingly, habitually practicing sinful behavior, then you can be confronted by the leadership of this church; and we do that in love, we do that with compassion. Read Galatians where it says, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness," many times in tears, "considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." Good spiritual leadership in a church will confront scandal or sin.

Read 2 Corinthians 5. There was a man in the church at Corinth that was living in an incestuous relationship, the Bible says, with his mother, it's probably his stepmother, but it was a sinful, sexual relationship. The Corinthian Christians were saying, "That's alright. That's wonderful. We want to love him and accept him and that's okay." Paul is saying, "No, it's not okay, 'A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.'" A little piece of fermented dough put into a piece of bread is what causes it to rise. It permeates. Leaven is symbolic of sin in the Bible, and you allow a little sin like that, it starts to spread and permeate; so he says to purge out that leaven. A little later on it indicates that this man repented and came back to the Lord, and Paul says, "Now you need to forgive and accept them back, lovingly and openly, into the congregation."

Here's the third reason for church discipline, it's our text, Titus 3:10, that is, schisms. As I said, this is one of the very difficult and sad things that pastors have to deal with. It almost saddens me to even mention or talk about it because over the years there have been some situations that were so sad where people got divisive, critical, trying to cause divisions in the church. They were talked to, they were prayed with, they were confronted, they wouldn't repent, and they were asked to no longer come to the church. They were removed. Now, many times they'd repent and come back later, but they had to be dealt with or the church would be divided, so in protection of the purity and the unity of the church.

What about when you're the offended and when you offend one another? Write down these verses and we'll just move on, Matthew 5:21-26. If you come to church and you know that you've offended someone, you should go to them and ask them to forgive you. If somebody has offended you (Matthew 18:15-17), then you should go to them and confront them. If they repent, then you've saved your relationship and a brother.

The third and last category (go back to our text, verses 12-15, and we won't tarry long on it), are just some closing remarks of Paul to Titus, but they have some real important lessons to learn in the way of getting along with fellow servants. The first category is false teachers (verse 9). The second category is factious people (verses 10-11), and then the third category is fellow servants (verses 12-15) learning to get along with one another in the fellowship of God. Titus, first of all, is to join Paul in Nicopolis. Look at verse 12. He says, "When I shall send Artemas unto thee, or Tychicus, be diligent to come unto me," Paul is writing to Titus. He's going to send these two individuals. We know almost nothing about Artemas in the Bible. He has a Gentile name, but we do know Tychicus. He was a traveling companion of Paul. We found him in the book of Acts. He's mentioned in Ephesians. He traveled with Paul. One of these guys was going to relieve Titus from his pastoral duties on the island of Crete so that Titus could join Paul in Nicopolis. Notice it, verse 12. He says, "...be diligent to come unto me to Nicopolis: for I have determined there to winter." There were a lot of different cities that used that name, so we're not sure exactly where in Greece this spot is. Paul is going to spend the winter there and wanted Titus to join him so he could mentor and encourage him further.

Here's the practical lesson (verse 12). We do need each other—we needle each other but we need each other. The cool thing about Paul is he had this great theological mind. He's this great man of God, a great missionary who preached the gospel, traveled around establishing churches, but he realized that he needed others to work with him. He realized that he couldn't do it alone. He realized that he had to be a part of others in their lives, that they had to have a fellowship of servants, so "be diligent to come unto me to Nicopolis: for I have determined there to winter." We need to realize that we need one another in this fellowship and service.

Notice verse 13, Titus is to send Zenas and Apollos on their way. Read it with me. "Bring Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their journey diligently, that nothing be wanting unto them." Again, Paul closes his epistles often by greeting people and giving some practical tips and things he wanted to do. Zenas is just called the lawyer. Bible scholars kind of debate whether it was a Jewish lawyer dealing with Jewish law or whether he was a Greek or a Gentile and was

probably a civil lawyer. We laugh a little bit about that, but it could be that Paul needed a lawyer. He's always in a tight spot. He's always getting arrested, so he says, "Hey, can you send Zenas? I've got some legal issues that I need to talk to him about." "Bring Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their journey diligently, that nothing be wanting unto them," see that they lack nothing.

In verse 12, we need to work together. We need others to serve the Lord together in the body of Christ. In verse 13, we need to help others serve the Lord. The NIV renders that, "and see that they have everything they need." I like that. If you know somebody—listen carefully—that's serving the Lord, pray for them. Encourage them. Help them. Support them. Come alongside them. See that they have what they need. Over the years of ministry for me, there have been people who've prayed for me, encouraged me, supported me, assisted and helped me, and I thank God for that—that we work together and we encourage one another. I have to do the same thing—find somebody serving the Lord, pray for them, serve them, help them, and encourage them. He says, "Help them along." Most likely, too, it would involve showing them hospitality and helping them as they go on their way to serve.

In verse 14, Titus is to teach God's people to live productive lives. I love it. "And let ours also learn," that is, let the people of God and the church of God, let them learn to do this, and this is the theme of Titus, "maintain good works." That's the main theme of Titus. What you believe determines how you behave. "...maintain good works," now we don't work for salvation, but we work as the fruit or evidence of our salvation. Then he says at the end of verse 14, "...for necessary uses," or the reason, "that they be not unfruitful." In other words, help them, assist them, so that they can do good works (bear fruit) and be fruitful, or one translation has productive. I want a productive life, don't you? You want your life to bear fruit, so we live to be a blessing to others. We need others, we encourage others, and we want to be a blessing to others.

In closing (verse 15), we learn to love the brethren. "All that are with me salute," or greet, "thee," send their greetings. "Greet them that love us in the faith," and notice how Paul ends this letter to Titus, "Grace be with you all. Amen." All is plural. In Texas it would be ya'll. It's talking about all the believers, all the brothers and sisters in Christ, "Grace be with you all. Amen." Grace is the theme that dominates Paul's life and writings. How does Paul often end his epistles? With the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. He opens with grace and peace, to the pastors he threw in mercy, and then he ends to Titus by talking about the grace of God. What a blessing that is.

We need to learn to love one another, not to bite, devour, and attack one another. I heard the story of a guy that was bit by a rabid dog and contracted rabies. The doctor actually told him, "I'm sorry to tell you, but you're going to die. You've got rabies, and you're going to die." The patient asked the doctor, "Can I have a piece of paper and pencil?" He said, "Sure." He started writing real frantically, and the doctor thought he was writing his will or something. He said, "Boy, that certainly is a long will, writing out your last will and testament." He said, "Doctor, this is not my will. These are the people I want to bite before I die." You know, so many times Christians want to bite, devour, and consume one another. God help us. Amen? Let's love one

another. Let's encourage one another. Let's work together and serve the Lord together. Let's encourage one another and rely upon the grace of God. Amen?