

April 25, 2010

Titus 3:9-11

Alright good morning. Welcome back, take out your Bibles and let's continue in our study of the book of Titus. If you are a guest today, you need to know that we are looking at Titus chapter 3 verses 9 to 11 today because we have been working our way through this letter from chapter 1 verse 1 and that's where we are today. This letter as a whole is God's blueprint for His church – that's the theme not just of the graphics you see on the screen but of the letter itself. Chapter 3 is uniquely about God's plan for the church's relationship with the world around us. And having just given us a number of verses laying out the incredible doctrines of salvation by the grace of God and explaining how our understanding of those truths are what motivate us to spend our lives doing what God in His Word defines as good so that we have a platform of integrity to share with the world around us those truths of salvation, now in writing to Titus, Paul turns to a touchier subject. In fact there will be some of you here today who at first glance do not like what you hear until we see how crucial it is for our survival and success as the church of God. We'll look at verses 9-11 together, but let's start with **verse 9**.

But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless.

Now the verb there in **verse 9 – avoid – is a word that means SHUN**. It is an imperative or a command – avoid, shun – the sense here is to do so as a continual practice. It **has the idea of treating with INDIFFERENCE, to literally turn yourself around and go the other way for the purpose of avoiding someone or something**. And what we are to avoid includes 4 things:

First is foolish controversies. The word “foolish” there – just to give you a flavor of what he's talking about - in Greek gives us our word “moron” in English – moronic debates, moronic arguments. Avoid these and those who produce them – controversial teaching and novel insights used to attack the solidly based truth of the church. This was so common in Paul's day, by the way, that if you read 1 and 2 Timothy you will hear an echo of what you see here in Titus.

He says avoid genealogies. Does that mean we shouldn't read certain parts of Genesis? Or the opening of the gospel of Matthew where we see the genealogy of Jesus? No of course it doesn't. This has to do with something that was common in that day – wild, allegorical interpretations of Old Testament lists of names instead of just taking them at face value: so and so had a son named so and so – and on and on giving us a historical line to draw certain conclusions about God's unfolding redemptive purpose. Instead people then would read into it all kinds of bizarre and mystical interpretations. Avoid those things – avoid those people.

Then he mentions arguments. Strife is another word used here. Again this is similar to what Paul wrote Timothy in 1 Timothy 6:3: *“If anyone...does not agree to the sound instruction...he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between men of corrupt mind.”* – just constant friction trying to stir up battles that destroy the confidence and security we can have in the Scriptures. Avoid that stuff – avoid those people.

Finally – quarrels about the law. Again very common in that day and time coming from the history with the Pharisees and Sadducees. Fruitless discussion and pointless argument from people being dogmatic on things distorted from the law which they didn't really understand in the first place but were designed to elevate themselves. Avoid that stuff – those people.

Now none of this stuff really seems to amount to direct denials of cardinal Christian doctrines. It was just speculative conclusions being drawn from very little but it was unnecessary speculation that ended up genuinely problematic because it produced arguments and distracted from the central teachings of the gospel and in many ways fostered these weird practices. So Paul just says **when you come across these things that attack God's Word through these foolish controversies, allegorical genealogy stuff, USELESS DISPUTES about the things of God – just avoid it – turn your back and walk away**.

And Paul says we should avoid it because – verse 9 says – *“these are unprofitable and useless.”* That’s a throwback to verse 8 where Paul told Titus to stress and emphasize the truths of the gospel from verses 3-7 because those truths are profitable and excellent for everyone – he says stress those things *“so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good.”* So the yardstick here on whether a matter is worth getting into a public debate about is if it relates to genuine conversion – salvation – godliness and good works. If it is just a matter of idle speculation that doesn’t affect these core issues, then don’t waste your time on it. Can I put that into a summary for us that connects verses 3,4,5,6,7,8,&9? **If our theology and doctrine does not PROMOTE the supremacy and lordship of Jesus Christ and the need to submit every aspect of our lives to Him, it is WORTHLESS speculation – not always sin, but not worth the time.**

And then we go to **verse 10** that escalates from not good, just stupid situations to actually dangerous individuals. And the escalation is important to recognize because those stupid things in verse 9 can lead to verse 10. Look back at verse 10 with me:

“Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him.”

Now the word “divisive” there if you were to look in the King James Bible would be the word “heretic.” But just about all the other translations do not use that word because, even though we get our English word “heretic” from this Greek word, at the point when Paul was writing Titus, the word had not yet taken on the meaning that we associate with it – that a heretic is someone who is an apostate – someone who rejects the truth and holds to false teaching, usually in a doctrinal sense. But at this point in history, the word didn’t have that connotation – it meant more along the lines of to choose, to take for oneself.

So though it could be in a doctrinal sense, it was anybody who tends to divide, to fracture the fellowship, “to tear the seamless robe of the garment of the unity of the church” as MacArthur explains. So to get us on the same and right page here, where it says a **“divisive person” it is used here to mean someone who had CHOSEN an idea, a teaching, a doctrine, a viewpoint, a perspective, a course of behavior that was not ACCEPTABLE to the church – it was not acceptable to the Word of God or to the mind of the Spirit as revealed through the leadership.** Literally it was one who chooses for himself that he will not become part of the consensus – will not submit to the Word – not become a part of that which is the mind of the Spirit revealed through the elders. Which again assumes elders in the church on the basis of all we saw in chapter 1.

So **though it may be caused by any number of things** – course of action, personal whim, personal preference of behavior, separate doctrine or perspective – but **the issue is DIVISIVENESS: not only is he or she holding to whatever the cause is but is also factiously seeking to persuade or recruit others.** He or she wants others to condone what he or she is doing or saying – they want acceptance by a faction and thereby are being divisive in one way or another.

So what do we do? The end of verse 10 says **“have nothing to do with him.”** The word there literally is to **reject** him. It is a lot like **Matthew 18:17** *“treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”* **Cut him off from the FELLOWSHIP.** **2 Thessalonians 3:14** applies: *“If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.”*

The assumption is that unless the divisiveness is over salvation that he is a brother – he is in sin – don’t treat him like an enemy but do not associate with him. Don’t have fellowship – don’t make it easy for him to feel comfortable so that he may be shamed by being put away from the accepted fellowship.

This is basically church discipline. In fact verse 10 says you don’t even do this until you’ve given him a first and second warning. You’re following the process of Matthew 18 – you go to him, he doesn’t repent – you go with two or three others, he doesn’t repent – you tell the church and treat him

as an outcast. Why? Look back at **verse 11**. *“You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.”*

“*You may be sure*” there literally is the word “knowing.” In other words it is at this point clear to everybody – it should be obvious to all of us that someone who has made his choice to stand pat and is divisive about some teaching or matter of behavior or choice is warped and sinful. We ought to put him away – to keep him at arm’s length – we ought to reject such an individual because it should be evident to everybody that his character is revealed by his stubborn hard heart.

The word there for “warped” is really “perverted.” A very strong usage of a very strong word. It means turned inside out – distorted, twisted. In medical use it means dislocated. So understand the situation. He has the truth. He has been told the truth. He has been warned multiple times. This isn’t some pagan who has never heard. **This isn’t some individual who doesn’t know the truth or what is expected and what God says. He is a warped individual and is sinning – willful sin in the present tense – continuing in a course of belief and action and attitude that is contrary to the Word and will of God.** And you put him out. Reject him.

Paul says he is self-condemned – in other words **he is** condemning himself by his error – **passing judgment ON HIMSELF by the way he is acting.**

There are people today who teach error, who live in ungodliness, who carry unholy attitudes who are self-willed, divisive both in local churches and, in a wider sense, in their areas of influence. And rather than being rejected, they’re allowed to maintain their profile in the local church or in the greater assembly of the body of Christ, they’re tolerated, they’re often even respected and given a platform for their aberrations. God says no. **The blueprint for the church – and you may want to write this down because it isn’t in your message map but it should be – the blueprint toward anyone and anything that doesn’t lead to being devoted to what is good is avoid and toward anyone who is determinedly divisive is reject.** Why?

I want us to get a grip on two reasons today. First – in keeping with the purpose of chapter 3, remember Titus is a blueprint from God for establishing God’s church. Chapter 3 in that is all about God’s plan for the church’s relationship with the world around it – how do we interact – how do we respond – how do we view – how do we impact and reach a pagan society? And **God gives us such strong responses because truth in UNITY is the stock and trade of the church’s EVANGELISM.** Sound doctrine and love expressed is our message. What makes our sound doctrine believable is the integrity of our unity – as Jesus made clear when in **John 13:35**, *“By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

The church has not only always struggled against error, it has struggled against division. The first 3 and a half chapters of 1 Corinthians are about Paul trying to bring that church to the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. The first two chapters of Philippians are very much about the same thing. Ephesians 4 we see there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one Spirit we all receive – there is a spiritual unity but there must be a real and visible one as well. So does unity avoid and reject like we’ve come to understand today? Absolutely. Yes **unity does exactly what God says in Titus because unity demands that we are united around the TRUTH of the Word of God and the mind of the Spirit.**

That’s why we saw in chapter 1 – the blueprint for the leadership of the church – that God’s church needs strong spiritual leadership. In fact **chapter 1 verse 9** we see God’s blueprint is that the leadership of God’s church be men who *“hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that they can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.”*

They must be faithful to the Word, the revealed content of divine truth, and they’re able to wield that truth both for exhortation and sound doctrine and refutation against those who contradict. Godly pastors, godly elders, godly leaders are needed as defenders and protectors of the purity of the doctrine of the church. **If the church is going to have any WITNESS in the world, it must maintain pure doctrine because like we saw last week in verse 8, pure doctrine – God’s truth – is the foundation for PURE living – for being devoted to a life of doing what is good - and so it is**

crucial that these false teachers and divisive elements be confronted and dealt with so God's church is insulated from them.

If you think that I or anyone as church leaders are being judgmental and UNLOVING if ever we need to deal with someone in the manner God has shown us today, you are probably being more influenced by our "tolerant culture" than by the truth of God's Word. I want you to hear that again because you probably didn't like it. If you think church leaders are being judgmental and unloving if ever they must deal with someone as God lays out in these verses, it is probably because you are more influenced by the attitude of our culture than the Word of God.

Because sin destroys people and churches, to confront sin and remove from the church those who continue in sin is an act of love and obedience. I add this because invariably when church leaders discipline a factious person by putting him out of the church, some will accuse the leaders of being unloving or unkind. But to preserve the doctrinal purity of the church, to keep sin from spreading, to maintain our witness to the world around us, and to uphold the honor of the God of truth, we must remove unrepentant sinners from the church. Our aim should always be to restore them until it becomes clear that they refuse to repent. But when their determination to continue in sin is evident, the Bible is clear that they must be put out of the church. If we – if I – as a leader do not do so, we are being disobedient to God's Word.

The other reason for the necessity of the principles we see in Titus 3:9-11 is that TRUTH MATTERS. Our culture believes in the exclusivity of truth in the physical realm, but it denies it in the spiritual realm. In the physical realm, it makes all the difference in the world whether you take a cyanide pill or an aspirin to deal with your headache! It doesn't matter how sincere you are in your belief that the cyanide pill will help or in your belief that we must be open to different theories of dealing with headaches. Sincerity isn't the issue; truth is. Even if you think that it's judgmental to criticize the cyanide pill, it will kill you if you swallow it. An aspirin at least is made to relieve your headache.

Unless Jesus was a liar or a deceived man, believing the truth about Him makes all the difference between spending eternity in heaven or in hell. Peter says in **Acts 4:12**, "*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.*" Paul states in **1 Timothy 2:5**, "*For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.*" John draws the line in **1 John 5:11-12**, "*And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.*"

Jesus not only claimed to be the truth, the only way to the Father, but also He talked about the Spirit of truth, whom the Father would send to guide the apostles into all the truth (John 14:17, 26). He said in **John 17:3**, "*This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.*" He prayed in **John 17:17** – one of the first dozen verses our Sparks in Awana learn - "*Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.*"

Jesus was affirming that spiritual truth is narrow, it is knowable, and it is contained in verbal and/or written propositions in the Word of God. In speaking to Pilate in **John 18:37** Jesus summed it up when He gave the very reason for His coming, "*For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.*"

Truth matters! **These things are IMPORTANT to affirm, not only because unbelievers in our godless culture are attacking them, but also because professing believers in the church are attacking them.** The growing "emerging church" movement – if you've heard of that all over the place – in books and speakers and whole churches embracing this new way of looking at things - denies that spiritual truth can be expressed or known in written, propositional form. They disparage preaching and deny that anyone can get up and speak authoritatively in the name of the Lord.

But no church can be committed to a vague gospel and be Christian in any biblical sense. And that's what Paul is preventing for this reason: no lives will be transformed in such churches, no hearts drawn to Christ, no sins forgiven, no lives cheerfully surrendered to the authority of Almighty God.

In countless churches all over this land, where once the gospel was preached with faith and power, it is now denied. There you will find and, in many cases, for generations you have found people who "have a form of godliness but deny its power." You will find a life that is not the Christian life, whatever claims may be made to the contrary.

Because these verses and verse 8 from last week have not been upheld.

But this matter of holding fast to the truth will have more to do with your salvation and your eternal life and that of your children than any other spiritual encouragement I might give you today.

To stand for the truth, to defend it against corruption and denial, to expose error and refute it, was the calling and the glory of the prophets and the apostles and continues to be our calling today. And to stand for the faith once and for all delivered to the saints is one of the greatest, the most valuable things we can do for the world and for other human beings.

And yet it should not surprise us that there will be those adamantly unwilling to give up their speculations and return to divine revelation. But if it is the truth that sets us free, then it is the truth that we must have and others with us. We cannot love our own souls or those of our children; we cannot love the world in hopes of its salvation; and listen - **we cannot LOVE God who revealed his truth to us if we are unwilling to stand up and be counted for the truth he has disclosed to us** through Jesus Christ his Son.

And **unless we are willing to carefully yet confidently avoid and reject anything and anyone that:**

DISTORTS the gospel of grace in Jesus Christ or

DISTRACTS from the godliness of life submitted to His Lordship or

DIVIDES the unity of the church in the truth of the Spirit – we cannot love God because it is by these things **which the world around us sees the glory of a living Savior.**

Church – such men are who you want in leadership – as pastors, as elders, as teachers – for as long as God desires this church to exist. And even more importantly - such should every man and woman here who claims the name of Jesus and a connection to His body at Fairway strive to be together. And my prayer today is that God would bless and protect our understanding and obedience to these truths from His Word. Let's pray.