

Pure Church: Pure Fellowship

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Date: 02 June 2013

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[0 : 0 0] Let's read God's Word. Reminds the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility towards all people.

At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.

But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs, having the hope of eternal life.

This is a trustworthy saying. And I want to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good.

These things are excellent and profitable for everyone. But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless.

[1 : 3 9] Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful.

He is self-condemned. As soon as I send Artemis and Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, because I have decided to winter there.

Do everything you can to help Zenas, the lawyer, and Apollos on their way, and see that they have everything they need. Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for the daily necessities and not live unproductive lives.

Everyone with me sends you greetings. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all. Peter, to come up and I'll pray for you.

Thanks, Johnny. And I'll pray for us. Just so everybody knows that Peter and Maeve have been back from the US for a couple of weeks and returning tomorrow week.

[2 : 5 9] Tomorrow week. Yeah. Yeah. So, yeah, so we've enjoyed Peter preaching last weekend. We're going to pray for him again as he speaks today. So let's just pray for them.

Father, we thank you for your gifts to us and we thank you for the way in which your gifts come to us through people. And we thank you for Peter and for Maeve.

And we ask that you would continue to give them strength physically and mentally for all that they are doing in their studies and preparation for Maeve and with her research.

Give to her all that she needs day by day. We pray as well that you would give to them both the rest that they need and that they would be refreshed so that when they return back to the US they would be ready for a new term.

Father, we pray for them and we pray that they would also have good times with family while they are here enjoyable times an opportunity to catch with catch up with all of their friends.

[4:10] We pray for Peter now that he may know the power of your spirit working in him and through him that we also may know your spirit helping us to not only understand your word intellectually but also that it would make its way deep into our hearts to change us and transform us into the people that you call us to be so that we make the teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour attractive to all around us.

So bless Peter now and encourage us through what we listen to and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thanks, Pastor Sammy.

Well, I'd like to just reiterate how blessed we have been through your hospitality and through your prayers and through your support at this time and so when we go back to the States we'll have we'll have very fond memories of these few weeks that we've had back home so thanks so much for being that for us.

So we have been looking at Titus for the last few weeks it's only a short letter when you look at it in the red covered Bibles it's very clear it's only less than two pages long so I'd encourage us to be reading that maybe especially before Wednesday night if you're going to come to our Gospel communities so we're going to review it on Wednesday night the whole letter today we're going to look in particular verses 9 to 15 of chapter 3 for the sake of time I guess we can't look at the whole thing and it's good that we've read the whole of chapter 3 because it's important for us not to forget what we were saying last week it's important for us not to forget what God has saved us from and what God has saved us to and that being at the very core of our faith at the very core even of what we're going to be looking at today as well as has been mentioned and as has been drawn out very nicely in our singing we're looking at pure fellowship that's the theme for this morning one of the things that myself may have been aware of in the states is just the importance of a good diet and just being able to eat well

I don't know whether I've achieved that but I've certainly been aware of it in the states they're facing what is an epidemic anywhere between 100,000 and 400,000 people a year die from obesity related illnesses which is actually horrendous when you think of it that people are struggling to eat healthily and to live healthy lives that's physically speaking spiritually speaking for us we want to live healthy lives we want to have pure fellowship healthy fellowship with each other and from this passage this morning we're going to tease out just three things three key ingredients or three key things that we can feed pure fellowship with so that our fellowship can be healthy and pure the first thing we want to look at is that pure fellowship is fed by pure divisions which is quite an alarming thing to say but we'll consider that a little bit more carefully the second thing is that pure fellowship is fed by pure decisions and the third thing pure fellowship is fed by pure devotions

[7 : 52] I hope that alliteration is not distracting I think that's very clear from the passage as we work through it so firstly pure fellowship is fed by pure divisions so Paul in verses 9 and 10 he's calling us not only to avoid foolish controversies in other words discussions or arguments about various things but he's also calling us to avoid foolish people in verse 9 he says avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law now these things might be a little bit tricky for us to relate to I can't remember the last time I had an argument about a genealogy or a quarrel about the law but it's important for us to try and understand clearly what Paul is saying here he's writing to Titus in particular in Titus' role as a leader in the church and what he has in mind are controversies about the Old Testament so Jewish controversies that were going on at the time if we look back at chapter 1 in verse 10 just for a moment where Paul writes there are many rebellious people mere talkers and deceivers especially those of the circumcision group they must be silenced because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach those two verses give us some idea of the types of things that were going on at that time that Paul wants Titus to avoid even if we understand that though it still takes a little bit of work for us to understand what relevance has this for us today 2000 years later so we may know that it's

Jewish Old Testament controversies about circumcision or genealogies but what relevance is that for us today if we remember last week in verse 3 we saw that we too were foolish and that is something that God has saved us from and so when we consider here that Paul is saying avoid foolish controversies there's a very clear connection between what we were that we were foolish and again how we should live and that we should avoid foolish controversies and so as we mentioned at the start all that God has done is motivating what Paul is saying here and should motivate us accordingly so Paul's principle basically is that rather than being involved in foolish controversies that we want to avoid foolish controversies he chooses his words carefully though because when you think about Paul's life he was no stranger to controversy himself when you think about Jesus

I would say the most controversial figure in all of history he divides history he divides people either you accept Jesus as Lord and Savior and live accordingly or you refuse to accept that and so Jesus is very controversial so it's not controversy in general that Paul is wanting Titus to avoid but it's foolish controversies it's the kind of controversies as he says in verse the end of verse nine controversies that are unprofitable controversies that are useless arguments that create more heat than light arguments that when we look back on them when we reflect on them and we realise that was really not worthwhile that was really unfruitful I really should have avoided that so those are the kind of things that Paul wants Titus and us to avoid and as we consider what that would look like practically if we were to avoid foolish controversies we realise that most of our controversies are with other people so although you may be like me where you have these controversies going on in your own mind or arguments going on in your own mind the reality is most of our controversies are with other people and Paul picks up on that so if you look at verse 10 warn a divisive person

Paul says once and then warn him a second time as we read verse 10 and verse 11 it's important to remember that Paul is speaking particularly to Titus so there will be a temptation for us to immediately jump into Titus' role and say oh well if Paul tells Titus to do this then maybe I should go around warning people warning divisive people once or twice but our position in relation to this letter that we are hearing is more as the congregation more similar to the congregation that Titus cares for and so Paul is saying that Titus has a God-given authority Paul has left him there to appoint elders as we saw back at the start of the letter he has left him there to put in order what Paul has left to be done and so Titus is an authority he has to exercise discipline and the minute I say that word

I know some of us are thinking that sounds very harsh I mean discipline is that that's a fierce thing to be doing all together in this day and age but I think that's unfair it's unfair to think that discipline equates with harshness it's unfair to think that discipline equates with some kind of necessary evil if you look at the way this discipline is to be exercised look at the patience that's involved in this discipline warn a divisive person once so something has been going on this person has been causing division so there's one warning a clear warning in order for the person to turn away from their divisive ways the person continues and Paul says warn them a second time so this has been going on for some time now and the person is unwilling to turn away from their divisive ways and it's only then it's only after these things Paul says at the end of verse 10 that you're to have nothing more to do with them we've seen this kind of attitude already we saw it back in chapter 1 where the reason Paul tells Titus to rebuke people is so that they will be sound in the faith that is

[14 : 31] Paul's concern it's Titus' concern and it should be our concern as we consider what church discipline and what authority should look like in the church so there's great patience involved in this but there's also a realisation that this is serious stuff as we read in chapter 1 the people of the circumcision group are upsetting households these divisive people by their very nature divide people so it's not just some abstract thing that's going on over here it's actually causing upset in the church in the body of Christ and so when we are tempted to think that discipline is somehow bad or somehow very mean or nasty of Titus to be doing we must realise that this is serious stuff and if it goes unchecked the division will only spread now there's no doubt for Titus it would be an unpleasant thing to do to go to these people and to warn them but Paul reassures him with these words in verse 11 you may be sure Titus he said that such a man is warped and sinful that such a man is self condemned which is serious serious language from Paul but that's how he affirms

Titus in his role there's a sense in which as Titus exercises this authority there's something greater going on here because the person who continues in their divisive ways is identifying themselves they're identifying themselves as a verse 3 and verse 4 person someone who is still disobedient someone who is still foolish and so when we think about this discipline that's being exercised we realise there's great patience here and there's serious stuff going on in the church for this to be happening and we realise that it's out of care it's out of love it's out of a desire for the church not to be more divided and in some sense it's the person who is dividing things bringing it on themselves as they continue in this way maybe a way to illustrate this would be to consider these nice room dividers beside us here which serve a very helpful purpose for us in this hall as we meet on a

Sunday morning they create an area for which we can meet so it doesn't feel too big or too un-intimate or whatever the proper word is there so these room dividers are good I want to say that clearly what Paul is saying is that division in the church is bad and so if we consider these room dividers if they will fold away as they do then we can remove the division by folding them to put in the parallel from this passage that we are looking at if this person if this divider of the church will be warned if they will heed a warning then we can get rid of the division but if for some reason these room dividers rust up if they just simply will not fold if they simply will not be warned the only way to get rid of the division is to get rid of the divider and so that is what Paul instructs

Titus to do if this person continues if they will not fold if they will not be warned then have nothing more to do with them in other words if you want to get rid of the division if you want pure fellowship you have to get rid of the divider now here's the thing if you listen very closely I'm going to let you in on a secret we all love a good argument isn't that true you're down in Barry Collins you're browsing through the potatoes the next thing you hear are voices raised down at the other end of the potato section and you suddenly start taking a great interest in what you're looking at and you linger around this particular area for some reason and as the argument goes on you're thinking this is getting really juicy and you're really enjoying it it happens on Facebook as well I think the reality is even if we might not love being in an argument we certainly love hearing good arguments and not only that but we live in an age when there's plenty of opportunities to argue

I'm sure you've seen yourselves if you're on Facebook or any of those internet thingies I'm sure you've seen yourself that the most innocent comment can lead to a most heated debate a most vehement argument where people are getting worked up for apparently no reason and so we like a good argument wrongly I think of us and we live in a time when there's plenty of arguments to be had which is a potent combination and so as we consider Paul's instructions to Titus it's quite relevant for us to be listening to what he is saying because of the times we live in and then the flip side as we've noticed is that divisive arguments are not very far removed from divisive people now as we've alluded to the question for us here is not so much who can I go around warning about their divisive ways the question for us is am I willing to be warned about my divisive ways and that's an important thing to realize because often when we read passages like this we put ourselves in the position where we are the authority where we are the law where we create the norm by which other people should live but no Titus is the one who has been given this authority and the vast majority of us are the ones who should be submitting to this authority who should have humble hearts who should be willing to heed a warning so rather than taking the law into our own hands we should be willing to heed to hear older Christians wiser Christians as they come alongside us as they seek out our good patiently and lovingly and caringly so that's the first thing and we've spent a little bit longer on that the pure fellowship is fed by pure division now I hope you remember the content of that because the idea that pure division in the church is a good thing is maybe hard to get our heads around but let's remember that we need sometimes to avoid controversial arguments and controversial people the second thing we want to see is that pure fellowship is nourished or fed by pure decisions and we see this in verses 12 and 13 where he says as soon as

[21 : 45] I send Artemis or Tychicus to you do your best to come to me at Nicopolis because I have decided to winter there do everything you can to help Zenos the lawyer and Apollos on their way and see that they have everything they need our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good Paul says in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives so what we see worked out by Paul is an example of how to make good pure decisions and how these decisions affect our fellowship in verses 12 and 13 he's showing us an example of good planning and how planning affects our decision making process and we see that so much of his plans are people based so we have Paul himself he has made his decision we have Artemis we have Tychicus we have Zenos the lawyer we have Apollos all of this planning that

Paul is doing is based around people and where they're going to be what they're going to be doing and that's only the people he has named there's plenty of people in the congregations that are going to be affected by this planning as well and so good planning is part of the pure decision making process that in turn leads to pure fellowship so we're on about three levels here but good planning is essential planning that works around other people works around the people in the body of Christ here in Carigoline another thing another element of our pure decision making is to do our best to make our very best efforts so if you're like me you may be the kind of person who is very good at planning things but as long as the plans stay in your desk if you don't fulfill them if you don't follow through in them they're pretty worthless there's no use to them and so Paul says to Titus do your best in verse 12 do everything you can to help

Zenos and Apollos on their way and that these people must learn to do what is good in other words to put in effort to put in their best efforts in order for good decisions pure decisions to be made so Paul recognizes good planning best efforts these are two things that are part of the decision making process but there's also a third thing which is vitally important and that is a recognition by Paul that there are human limitations so we can't be everywhere at once we don't know all things we can't do all things and so even though Paul has good plans even though Paul expects best efforts from people he also recognizes that people are limited individually and corporately and so when he says I will send Artemis or Tychicus it's one or the other there's a reason that he's not sending both perhaps Tychicus might have to stay wherever he is for another reason and so when

Paul tells Titus to come to him in Nicopolis he realizes that if Titus comes to him in Nicopolis that leaves a gap a space where Titus would have been and so he wants to send Artemis to fill that gap and so he recognizes that people are limited we are limited in who we are and what we're able to do and what we're able to understand and so it's this kind of decision making that has good planning that puts in a good effort and realizes limitations that feeds pure fellowship maybe the most obvious illustration of this is where we are right now on a Sunday morning at 11 o'clock or shortly thereafter when you consider a Sunday morning it needs to be planned there needs to be decisions made people need to know what's going to happen on a Sunday morning and if that doesn't happen some people might arrive at 10 some people might arrive at 12 the plans need to be made well not only that but we need to put in the effort so I'm sure most of us set our alarm clocks last night we put in that intentional effort to be up on time to get here but there's also a recognition on a Sunday morning that we're limited that we can only do so much and so as we consider the various things that are going on the various ministries that are happening in our church there's a realisation that there's so much we could be doing and yet there's only so much we can do if we recognise that it will help us to not be small in our plans or small in our efforts but it'll help us to guard against the frustration where we see all that could be happening in Cargilline for example and we feel inadequate or we feel unable to achieve it but if we recognise that these human limitations are part and parcel of who we are then it will guard us against frustration and it will feed pure fellowship so for us the question is whether other Christians factor into our planning there are plenty of motives involved in good planning but this passage in particular is highlighting the need to recognise other people in our planning it's also asking us whether we're putting in our best efforts in order to create pure fellowship in order to make good decisions and follow through in them and it's also asking us to recognise our limitations and the limitations of other people so that we do not put undue pressure or stress on people in a way that they are unable to fulfil and so that's the second thing we want to see pure fellowship is fed by pure decisions and the last thing from this passage this morning is that pure fellowship is fed by pure devotion which is a much more exciting word than decision so when we consider the language that Paul uses here in verse 14 for example he says our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good you may remember that phrase from such verses as last week in verse 8 that those who have trusted in

God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good within the space of six verses Paul repeats it and he wants us to remember it and he wants it to be scorched into our memories that we are to be devoted to doing what is good and this in turn will lead and feed pure fellowship I guess depending on the background you're from you may respond to this phrase devoted to doing what is good differently so perhaps you may think well I have to be devoted to doing what is good because if I do enough what is good then I will get into heaven hooray or you may be of the opinion that well no I don't need to be devoted to doing what is good because Christ has done it all for me and it's certainly true that Christ has done everything for us we saw that back in the start of chapter 3 where it's not by our own righteousness that we are saved but the tendency the temptation can be to say if Christ has done it all

[29 : 34] I don't need to be quite so devoted to doing what is good but no Paul says God says to us this morning that we should be motivated we should be devoted to doing what is good because of all that we have seen in chapter 3 so far because of all that God has done so far that's certainly the primary motivation but we should also be motivated by secondary things there are urgent needs there are daily necessities as we see in verse 14 we should be motivated because there are things that people need there are things that we might have they might be gifts they might be financial resources they might be time to pray and there are things that we have that can provide for daily necessities of others a second motivation to not live unproductive lives which is a tempting thing to do to be unproductive in our lives it's tempting to say well

I've been working hard I just want to chill out and do nothing but Paul calls us here to be motivated by the desire to live a productive life to make the most of what God has given us he says in verse 13 do everything you can to help Zenos and Apollos on their way that they have everything that they need and so Paul's attention to detail attention to need in the lives of those around him is a good example for us I think in order to illustrate this idea that we are to be devoted to doing what is good maybe an experience that I've never had which is being at the start of a race Shane will have it tomorrow in the marathon and others as well is the sprinter at the start of a race they adopt a certain position they lean towards where they're going to be going they're ready to go when the gun goes off and so when the gun does go off there is an urgency they jump out of the blocks nearly because they've been leaning in that direction for us

Paul says we are to be leaning our hearts are to be leaning towards doing what is good all the time we saw that again in verse 1 of chapter 3 be ready to do whatever is good so there's a readiness there's a preparedness to do what is good rather than leaning away from these things rather than adopting a heart position where we lean away naturally from doing good Paul's concern it's not so much the nitty gritty he's not going around saying Ralph I want you to do this or Chris I want you to do this his concern at this stage is for our hearts to be leaning towards doing what is good to be devoted to it and he recognizes that this is something we need to learn that's exactly the word he uses in verse 14 it's not something that necessarily comes naturally to us and so you may ask how will I learn such a thing it feels quite unnatural for me well it's learned the same way many other things are learned which is through practice if you don't feel like you're leaning towards doing good if you don't feel like doing good

Paul says to practice it to follow the examples of others to see the way in which others are fulfilling need around us and to follow their example to see the example of people in the Bible what we don't want to do at this point is to get into the nitty gritty of how to do this but simply to recognize the heart devotion that is there that we are to be devoted to doing what is good it's interesting that Paul himself again sets a good example in this he recognizes the need that will be there when Titus leaves and in order to fill that need he's going to send somebody to that congregation not only that he recognizes that Zenos and Apollos have been on this long journey which I always think of as something like out of Lord of the Rings for some reason but they're on this long journey they may have no drinking water left they may have no food left and again

Paul recognizes the need his heart is leaning towards doing what is good in this case he's distant from them so he can't himself fulfill that need but what he does is he writes to Titus says this is going to need to be fulfilled this need is going to be satisfying and he asks Titus to do it so there's helpful examples of that in the scriptures and in the people around us so that we can learn to devote ourselves to doing what is good so that's our last point pure fellowship fed by pure devotion we've looked at a lot we've looked at how pure fellowship is fed by pure divisions and that we are avoiding controversies we're avoiding arguments that are fruitless and unproductive we've looked at how pure fellowship is fed by pure decisions in other words that our decision making is made around other people and take those people into account while recognising their limitations and we've seen just now that pure fellowship is fed by pure devotion a desire a leaning towards doing what is good

[35 : 11] I think it's really sad and yet it's really understandable that people in America and people everywhere in the world nearly in the western world are struggling so much to eat healthy food and to live healthy lives it is a real challenge it's a real epidemic and maybe the same could be said of fellowship if we want our fellowship with each other to be pure to be healthy rather than malnourished and sick we need to feed it this good diet of pure division pure decision and pure devotion let's pray heavenly father help us not to be like the person who looks in the mirror and after turning away forgets what he looks like forgets what he has seen help us to take your word to heart today and in the coming days lord we're conscious of the high calling that your word puts in our lives and we're thankful that you yourself by the power of your spirit enable us enable us to be living lives that are pleasing to you help us father to rest in what you have done in our lives that you have saved us from what we were but help us to recognize lord that you have saved us into this fellowship into this body of believers brothers and sisters beyond beyond count innumerable brothers and sisters in christ help us to have a commitment to pure fellowship lord and help us to encourage each other in the faith this day in the days ahead lord and father we're so thankful for what you have prepared for us where one day we will all sing your praises together in heaven father we love you and we rejoice in your goodness to us thank you lord in jesus name amen thanks very much peter well we're going to sing our final song together