

Titus 3:9–11

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[0 : 0 0] and it's crept into the church, and it's not only pervading the church in Crete, but Paul has written similar words to Timothy, his other protege in Ephesus.

Paul writes to Timothy in 1 Timothy chapter 1, Hey, charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith.

Judaism seemed to have taken genealogies and constructed narratives regarding insignificant individuals, and they had become an obsession.

Dissensions. Beware of dissensions, interpersonal strife that would pit one person against another. Avoid quarrels about the law. That it seemed evident that as Jews became Christians in the early church, there remained a lingering attachment to the Old Testament law.

And it makes sense, right? Because if you were a devout Jew and you adhered to the law, and that's how you were raised and brought up, you would bring it with you. And there are things that you would have to unlearn and relearn.

[1 : 1 8] And yet there would emerge great quarrels about the law. Disputes would arise and divisions would ensue. And Titus was charged to avoid these things because they are unprofitable and worthless.

There was no value add to any of these things. While good works were excellent and profitable for people, foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, quarrels about the law were useless and unprofitable.

Unprofitable. What Paul is saying to Titus is, Titus, don't be distracted. Don't be distracted.

Do not let minor matters detract you from the major things. Beware of the side scuffles and the side conversations because they will derail you from the main event.

Don't take your eye off the ball. If your attention is on the periphery, you'll lose focus on the main thing. Don't get bogged down. Don't get sidetracked. Don't be distracted.

[2 : 2 3] The temptation is certainly there. Early on in my pastorate, it's been now nearly 20 years. I think of this particular conversation.

It's been 20 years, but 20 years ago, I know some of you were not around 20 years ago, but 20 years ago, there was a movement that had emerged or arisen in the Western church known as the Emerging Church or the Emergent Church.

It took the church by storm. Its aim was to help the church transition from modernity to post-modernity through kind of the undoing of the institutional church, reforming worship, recrafting dogmatism, all that.

And its aim was really to help the church be more relevant. As a 25-year-old, I got caught up in it. I read articles and books anticipating that this would be the next wave of Christianity.

At the time, my senior pastor was nearing his 30th year of ministry, and I approached him and I said, We need to be mindful of this movement.

[3 : 34] We got to watch, be on guard. What are we going to do? It will undermine churches like ours. Aren't you concerned? Without any hesitation, he looked at me in his Scottish accent.

I can't say it in his Scottish accent, but he just said, Being the main things are the plain things, and the plain things are the main things. And that was it. End of conversation.

I left confused. I said, Well, what are the main things? And what are the plain things? And, but now having pastored for quite some time, I'm catching on to what he meant.

What he's saying, what he said, what he meant by what he said, is don't be deterred by movements that sprout up, disrupt things for a short while, and just pass.

That aren't concerned about the main things. Don't be distracted. Because many things will start and stop. What he was saying, and he says it to me often, Bing, keep your head and stay steady.

[4 : 50] Keep your head and stay steady. Don't be distracted. A good church knows what to avoid. And this was Paul's charge warning to Titus.

Don't get caught up in these side matters. Focus in on the main matter, the instruction of sound doctrine. How are we to do this?

If you've been here for a season, one of the commitments that we have at Christ Church Chicago is our systematic exposition of the Bible. To me, entering into a world like that was strange.

I grew up at a church where the pastor chose a topic, and then every week it just seemed like a different topic, and over time you had this topical catalog of the Bible. But here, we literally go verse by verse, line by line, chapter by chapter, book by book, through the Bible.

There are a handful of reasons why we believe this is beneficial. But one of them has to be it safeguards us. It safeguards us from finding minor things to major in.

[6 : 01] It safeguards us from distractions. What it does is it binds us to the text. And as I prepared for this, you know, and I think about it all the time, I'm like, how did I get stuck with this text?

There's so many things I'd rather preach. So many hobbies I'd rather more enthusiastically endorse. So many other verses that I would find more encouraging or more urgent.

And yet the way we've done things here, our commitment to this systematic exposition doesn't give me the liberty to choose to talk about whatever I want to talk about, whenever I want to talk about, however I want to talk about it.

It binds us to the text. It makes us focus on the main and the plain things. The church has a priority to not be swayed by fads, cultural hot issues, hobby horses, news events, pastoral proclivities, or preferences.

We cannot be a church that's just driven by the wind. We go this way when culture goes this way. We go that way when culture goes that way. We can't be tossed to and fro.

[7 : 24] We are given a priority, and it's right there in verse 8. Insist on these things, the main things. There is content that we must address and insist upon.

There is content that we must avoid and ignore. Verse 9. See, a church is worth leaving. A church worth leaving is one who gets distracted, forgetting the primary task that it has been given.

The primary task, I would argue, came last week. The goodness and kindness of God appears. And he saved us, not because of works done in righteousness, but according to his great mercy by the washing and regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out richly through Christ, so that we're justified by grace, that we might become heirs according to the eternal hope of eternal life.

That's the main thing. Those are the saving words. No one will enter the kingdom hearing discussion on foolish controversies.

The way into the presence of God does not come from quarrels about the law. The way to meet Jesus is not through arguments over genealogies or trivial matters.

[9 : 05] No. None of these matters convey salvation. None of these matters have eternal significance. None of these matters matter.

Irrelevant matters are ineffective in bringing about new birth in the unbeliever. Some may tickle our minds, but don't ever think they actually transform the heart.

How tragic would it be if the church got caught up in trivial pursuits while her neighbors perish because we failed to declare the main thing as the main thing.

How sad if a church is caught up in fancy mythology while neglecting saving theology. So beware when a church's leader or leadership become distracted by foolish pursuits.

If that be the case, it becomes a church worth leaving. Secondly, leave when people, when the people are divisive.

[10 : 18] Verse 10 gives us the second warning. A church is worth leaving when her people are divisive. As for a person who stirs up division after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him.

There are people who have made it their intention to disrupt the church by causing division. How was it caused? Perhaps these were the individuals that were pushing foolish controversy, that were bringing up these genealogies, that were obsessed over creating quarrels over the law.

And Paul wants Titus to beware of such people whose aim is to sow division. They are divisive by disposition, agitating by nature, frequently causing factions.

The word division, hereticos, would eventually become the word where we derive heretic from.

These are disruptive people to the church. in the church. Earlier in the letter, they are insubordinate according to verse 10. Empty talkers, deceivers, upsetting families, those who turn others away from the truth.

[11 : 32] They are false teachers. And there's a little note there that we should note. There are many, many. The presence of false teachers is known, is a known reality in the early church.

Paul's letters address them. Peter's letters address them. John's letters address them. The early church was replete with individuals who would infiltrate and mislead.

Jesus had foretold that wolves would come disguised as sheep, predatorial by their errant teachings, and they were active in Crete. So Paul gives Titus the template on how to handle these individuals, these divisive people.

They are to be warned once, warned twice, and then disregarded. The warning that is to be given, the warning is certainly to be given with instruction or correction so that the individuals would stop and end their divisiveness.

The tone of the correction is probably more accurately laid out in 1 Timothy. The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

[12 : 42] The hope of their correction is so that they may be sound in faith according to chapter 1 verse 13. I imagine that some new believers were divisive unknowingly.

I had mentioned maybe they were formerly very religious, law-abiding, zealous, coming out of Judaism. They may not have known better. And Titus' obligation is to admonish them or instruct them.

This word that has been translated warn in our passage is used by Paul elsewhere when he teaches about family life or the home. The exact word is used in Ephesians 6.4 and it's translated as instruction.

It's interesting there, the relationship between children and parents and instructions are given to the fathers. Do not provoke your children to anger but bring them up in the discipline and the instruction or in our text the warning of the Lord.

It reads warn in Titus and Ephesians is translated instruction and Titus has a duty to instruct the divisive person in the same way a father is to instruct a child.

[14 : 01] The word admonish carries this sentiment. Warn and instruct firmly. Titus be patient with them. Admonish warn and correct them once.

Admonish warn and correct them again. And if they heed your admonishment if they fail to heed your admonishment have nothing to do with them.

As a parent warns and instructs the child to refrain from touching the hot stove top we do it once we do it twice and if they fail to heed they learn a valuable lesson and if a person persists in their divisiveness Paul tells us they are warped and persisting in sin they are settled in their ways stubborn refuse correction and change.

The person actually participates in their own condemnation. Their persistence is a sign of their self condemnation end of verse 11.

For the person who promotes division and refuses repentance have nothing to do with them. It is not worth I think Paul is saying to Titus your pastoral energies and efforts they are self condemning guilty by their own actions because he or she rejects admonishment they are to be rejected.

[15 : 38] You see admonishment is a safeguard for the church. It is practice for a congregation's well being. It takes place in order to preserve and to protect a congregation's unity unity.

Because what divisiveness in a congregation does is it incapacitates a church from living out her mission. If her mission is to prioritize the main thing which is proclaim the gospel demonstrate good works a sure deterrent to fulfilling this mission is to create confusion and infighting.

You see this often well I don't know if you see it often. You see it enough in professional sports teams. A team may be stacked which is just another way of putting they are well resourced with incredible players.

Is that right? That makes sense. They're a stacked athletic team. They have incredible talent filled with capacity limitless potential but for some reason they're found unable to perform on the field or the court.

When journalists probe they eventually find that there are internal disputes infighting that has disabled them from winning. Great talent.

[17 : 06] Great gifts. What a great tragedy. And I think sometimes that's the same for churches. Great talent.

great resources. Great gifts. But divisiveness within creates great ineffectiveness.

A great tragedy. You might be saying well Bing we don't experience this divisiveness today do we? Probably not in the same way as the early church.

Today we have a plethora of churches to choose from. If I don't like the music in this one I could go to that one. Or if I don't like the pastor in this one I could go to that one.

Some will differ from us in conviction practice and philosophy of ministry. I attend here because I like this.

[18 : 14] I like their engagement with this. So I go here and the list goes on and on and in some ways ironically the church is more divided than it's ever been based on preferences, practices, and convictions. But since you're here allow me to ask you this.

Do you see division in this church? Division not necessarily based on errant teaching. but maybe division based on personal preference.

Oh man, I would never say it. You don't have to say it. Maybe you have a divisive spirit. Divisive spirit that needs to be repented of and examined.

You may think I don't cause any division. division. But perhaps you speak in a divisive manner. Maybe it's divisive speech.

Maybe it's a divisive spirit. Because the opposite of division is cultivating unity. Right? So maybe you don't cause division.

[19 : 28] Maybe you don't think about division. But let me challenge us with this. How do you promote unity? If we don't want to be divisive, then we better promote unity. Because I think by nature, by human nature, we naturally divide.

By supernatural nature, we are brought together in unity. How do you cultivate unity? How can you promote the church's unity?

Have you considered, considered? Well, I'm going to get maybe too personal now. But who sits around your dining table? Well, bang, my family.

That's what my kids would say. But who do you invite to be around your dining table? Who do you choose to greet Sunday mornings? Who do you choose to serve?

When you walk down the row, have you considered, how do I promote unity just in this row? How can I pray for you and with you and help you and support you?

[20 : 43] How do I build unity? We have, and I am excited for, the chili cook-off. But the chili cook-off is not just this social event. Because in human eyes, it's just a social gathering of friends.

But under the spirit of God, it is the cultivation of unity within a congregation. And how does it do that? It puts you in a room with people you may never eat with.

And you look across the table or across the room and say, that is my brother for whom Christ died. That is my sister for whom Christ bled. God. And what can I do to strengthen this church family?

We traverse socioeconomic boundaries. We must. We must cross ethnic and cultural and racial lines. That is the task of the church.

And so we've committed ourselves to it. what takes place for lunch and hopefully, maybe I scared you for lunch. You should still go to the chili cook-off.

[22 : 00] But it's not a mere recreational activity. By the spirit, it nurtures friendship, camaraderie, fellowship, and unity.

And so you go. But we've been warned against division. division weakens our witness.

See, this is at the core of Jesus' longest prayer recorded in John 17. Do you remember that? When he's praying for his disciples, he's praying for his future disciples, and he petitions his father that the church would be one, united, not divided.

Why? He gives the reason so that the world may believe. our unity is tied to the effectiveness of our witness.

And if we are divisive, we will find it will cripple us, cripple our effectiveness as a church. Therefore, we must warn, we must correct, we must admonish when necessary.

[23 : 10] And Jesus was well aware of the fate of divided entities. You remember this when the religious leaders come to him and accuse him of being the devil. And Jesus says, if a kingdom divided against itself, it will be laid waste.

A household, a home divided will fall. And similarly, it applies to the local congregation. If division persists, it will come crashing down, and it will be a church worth leaving.

The church has a mandate to avoid foolish disputes and to admonish the divisive. And if they fail to avoid and admonish, it becomes a church worth leaving.

Well, let me pray for us as we close. Father, we thank you for your word and its warnings. We thank you for the challenge that it holds out to us.

That, yeah, we might not get consumed with genealogies and bizarre quarrels over the law, but we talk about so many trivial matters as if they mattered.

[24 : 31] And all the while, the gospel message, what matters the most, is neglected. and yeah, Lord, we may not have raging, divisive actions, which we give thanks for, yet within us, within myself, there is often a divisive spirit.

Somehow, in my pride, I see myself as better than others, or I judge others because I feel they're bizarre.

and yet all that spirit is not the spirit you cultivate in your people. And so, Father, forgive us for being those who divide with our lips, divide with our thoughts, and would you compel us to be those who pursue radical unity, that we would tether our lives to those in this room, and that we would experience the truth that we are better off together than we would ever be alone, that as the world watches a church united, that they would see a Christ exalted.

And so, help us to that end, we pray, as we respond in song. May you stir up our affections to worship you well. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.