

# Division & Devotion

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[ 0 : 00 ] All right, well this morning we come to our last sermon in the New Testament book of Titus, the letter that Paul wrote to Titus. We're going to hear this morning how the Apostle Paul wraps this letter up and what his final instructions are for Titus there on the island of Crete.

And if you've been here for some of these Sundays where we've been working our way through this, you'll know that Paul has already given a whole bunch of instructions to Titus about how he should teach the Christians there on the island to live.

And his emphasis has very much been on living good lives and on doing good works and on living with self-control because this is the kind of living that adorns the gospel.

It reflects the character of the God who has saved us. And so we as followers of Jesus are to live that way. And it's a way that we bring testimony to our God and to our Lord, Jesus.

Well, after proclaiming some wonderful truth about the gospel, about how God has saved us and the work that he has done in us by his spirit, Paul now finishes his letter in this way.

[ 1 : 16 ] We're in Titus chapter 3 verse 8. He says, This is a trustworthy saying, and I want you 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. So Titus, this truth of our salvation, this gospel, teach it, proclaim it, declare it, emphasize it, emphasize it in the churches.

And not just so that more will hear and be saved, but so that those who have already been saved may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good.

The gospel leads us to live differently, to devote ourselves to doing what is good, or good works, literally. And if we do this, he says it's going to be beneficial, it's going to be excellent for everyone.

Verse 9, But avoid foolish controversies, and genealogies, and arguments, and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless.

[ 2 : 34 ] There's a contrastive link here. I highlighted those words in the verses there. The flow of Paul's thought seems to turn on this word profitable, which in this case doesn't mean financial.

It means just beneficial. So what's profitable? If everyone devotes themselves to doing good works, that's profitable.

That's beneficial. What's unprofitable? Getting caught up in these foolish controversies, and arguments, and quarrels about the law, and genealogies.

This is unprofitable. It brings zero benefit. And so let's consider these four things that we as Christians are to avoid. The instruction given by Jesus through Paul.

First, he says, Avoid foolish controversies. There are some things that are worth fighting over.

[ 3 : 39 ] There are some hills that are worth dying on. The apostles made this clear through their lives. The gospel message, the truth about Jesus and his kingdom, is something worth dying for.

It's something worth fighting over to defend. Paul himself fought to defend the gospel in his letter which he wrote to the Galatians.

He was willing to go to battle over this. That it's not by works that we're saved, but by faith alone. And so there are some things that are worth fighting over.

There are some controversies which demand our participation as Christians, but there are many that we are to avoid all together. Avoid foolish controversies, says Paul.

And Paul gives us two other things here in the context which kind of serve as examples of what kind of things is he talking about. What's a foolish controversy? There are two listed in this little list here.

[ 4 : 47 ] One of them is genealogies. This on its own is a thing to avoid, but it's also an example of a kind of foolish controversy. Fighting or arguing over ancestry is foolish.

And we don't know how much the Gentile Christians in Crete did this, but we do know that some of the Jewish people of this time were more susceptible to this kind of controversy.

They would argue about who was descended from who, who was of which tribe. Paul himself even goes so far as to give an example of this, this mentality in his letter to the Philippians where he boasts about his ancestry to the Philippians.

There in Philippians 3, verse 4, he says, if someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more. I was circumcised on the eighth day.

I'm of the people of Israel. I'm of the tribe of Benjamin. I'm a Hebrew of Hebrews in regard to the law of Pharisee. And he goes on, and then he ends it this way.

[ 5 : 59 ] He says, but whatever were gains to me, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What's more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord for whose sake I have lost all things.

I consider them garbage that I may gain Christ. Ancestry or heritage is not entirely unimportant. Of course, we hear a little bit about this in Paul's letter to the church at Rome. But now, the gospel message is that salvation is for all people.

regardless of heritage, regardless of ancestry, as Paul says in his letter to the Galatians, there's neither Jew nor Gentile in Christ Jesus. And as we just heard, Paul said that his particular ancestry, he now counted as rubbish compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Jesus, his Lord. Ancestry, whether you're Jew or Gentile, who you're related to, that doesn't limit your access to Jesus and it doesn't give you special privilege or access to Jesus.

[ 7 : 15 ] And so going back and tracing out genealogies to bolster your status, it's foolish. It's pointless. We all have the same standing before Christ and in Christ.

So this is just one of the foolish controversies that he names that's going on on the island of Crete. A second example, he says, avoid quarrels about the law.

Avoid quarrels about the law. And this is almost certainly a reference to the Mosaic law, like the Old Testament law. And again, another distinctly Jewish point of controversy.

Scribes would get into battles with each other over what the Old Testament law meant, how it was to be read, how it should be interpreted and applied.

And there were different sects that emerged within Judaism and then that would all filter down to the people and there'd be these factions that were at odds with each other. So this, on its own, quarreling about the law is a thing to avoid, but it's also a specific example of another kind of foolish controversy that people were getting tangled up in back then.

[ 8 : 29 ] And here again, Paul had some pretty clear words about our relationship to the Old Testament law as Christians today. He said, we've died to the law through Jesus.

He said, we're no longer under law, but grace. The author of Hebrews describes how the Old Covenant has been made obsolete by this new covenant which Jesus has inaugurated with his death.

And so the Old Testament law, it doesn't apply to us today in the same way that it applied to the people of Israel before Christ came. And so it's foolish to get caught up in disputes about Old Testament law observance like some of the Jewish false teachers were promoting.

So these are just two examples of foolish controversies given by Paul himself to avoid. But we also see that this is broader than just those two examples.

In between those two examples, he says, avoid arguments. It's pretty general. There seems to be a larger principle here. It's not just about ancient Jewish controversies.

[ 9 : 43 ] It's about all kinds of foolish, stupid, senseless, irrelevant controversies or arguments that we could get tangled up in even today.

Now, I thought about just giving a whole list of some different ones but then I thought, you know, this is a tricky thing because these are things that we easily take offense over.

These are things that we tend to invest ourselves into a lot. We feel very strongly about some of these kinds of things. We put our emotions into these things. We come to see these things as really important.

And sometimes in these kinds of issues we tend to see everything as truth versus error or right versus wrong when in many of these issues in our world today they're not as easy to sort out or to get to the bottom of.

And we can do the same thing when it comes to matters of our faith. Unfortunately, we can be all too quick to judge a brother or a sister in the church as sinning or as straying from the word of God. [10:57] We could judge them as being unsubmitive to the word of God just because they might come to a different opinion or understanding of a secondary matter in the Bible.

We can be so concerned about that speck in our brother or sister's eye that we fail to see the log in our own eye. So how do we know whether something falls into the category of argument worth having or foolish controversy to be avoided?

Well, Paul gives us at least one very obvious reason or statement, a way to see a little bit what we're dealing with.

He says, avoid foolish controversies and arguments because these are unprofitable and useless. Here we've got a pair of words, basically synonyms.

They mean the same thing. These foolish controversies and arguments, they're of no benefit. They're fruitless, literally.

[12:07] Nothing good is coming from them. And so that's really, I think, maybe the first way to discern whether an argument is worth having is to, at the outset, before we get into it, before we venture into this discussion or debate or whatever, ask ourselves this question, what good is there to come of this?

What benefit is there to arguing over this, to going to battle over this? What's really at stake in this argument?

If we think about genealogies, it's pretty obvious that arguing about who's descended from who is pointless. There's nothing at stake. If we think about the precise significance of every little detail of the Old Testament feasts and how they were commemorated, it's pretty obvious, I hope, that arguing over those details is fruitless.

We're not even required to keep those festivals and feasts today because of our position in Christ. And so, how is arguing over the details going to help us? It isn't.

But let's pick a more contemporary issue and let's pick one that's not a biblical issue just as an example. One of the hot-button issues in our world today is climate change.

[13:30] And it's not a simple issue. There are many different related issues to it. You could talk about emissions. You could talk about global temperatures.

You could talk about natural disasters and how they affect or are affected by the climate. We could talk about related technologies and their effectiveness or ineffectiveness at curbing emissions. We could talk about carbon taxation or power generation and power demand. Is climate change an important issue?

Yes. The policies being made around this issue do affect us. But when it's all said and done, does what a person believes about climate change and each related sub-issue really matter for the kingdom of God?

I hope your answer is no. I doubt it. What benefit, what good fruit can come from really arguing with people over this?

[14:46] We might think that we're bringing the benefit of enlightening the person that we're talking to, helping them see the truth of the issue, but do we fully understand the truth of the issue?

and all the related sub-issues? Do we know which scientific studies are good and which are bad? Do we know all the motivations and agendas that are being carried by all the players around this issue?

We might think that we do, but you know, that's kind of a common factor in every useless argument. We think we see things clearly.

We think that we have it all figured out. We think that everyone would be best served by forsaking their opinion and adopting mine. But as it often goes, do people tend to change their views on these issues?

Or do they tend to just get more entrenched? We could probably take a lot just from the word foolish. Foolish controversies.

[15:47] What are fools known for? Well, in the Bible, one of the things that they're known for is doing the same thing over and over and over again without learning from the consequences of their actions.

There's a senselessness to it. A lot of efforts put into an endeavor or behavior that yields, at the end of things, no benefit. That's why it's foolish.

It's like just wasted effort, wasted words, wasted time. The overall aim of the actions taken or the words spoken is of little value. What do we really hope to accomplish if after an hour of going at it back and forth about climate change we still haven't changed the other person's mind and they still haven't changed ours?

Should we go another hour just for the fun of it? Or maybe there's something that we could talk about that really will build each other up, something that will really encourage the other person or meet a need or open the discussion up to spiritual things?

So this is a question the Lord wants us to consider when it comes to a matter. Is this really of benefit or value? Is this worth fighting over?

[ 17 : 09 ] Is there something lasting and worthwhile at stake here? Does this have to do with kingdom things? The things above? Or is this just pointless quibbling over stuff that doesn't really matter for no real benefit?

Now let's be clear here. Is it okay to have an opinion on these kinds of things? Yes. He doesn't say avoid thinking about controversial things.

Is it fine to have a discussion with a friend about a controversial topic? I think so. What's the thing that we're really to avoid here?

It seems by the way that it's worded that it's really the fighting part, the arguing, the quarreling part, the senselessly going at it with each other.

That's the thing that we're to avoid. I mean if you want to yak with a friend about Elon Musk's latest speech on interplanetary space travel, go for it.

[ 18 : 15 ] God is not against the use of imagination or reason or evaluation but it's when we fight over these kinds of issues and in so doing allow these issues to cause rifts and hurt and division among us that it becomes a problem.

It's when it becomes your mission to win the argument or to spread the good news of your opinion to everybody else and convert them all over that damage is done and factions are formed.

Avoid that kind of behavior says Jesus. It's unprofitable. It's useless. There's no benefit to it. And here's what to do when a person becomes divisive like this as a sort of pattern or as a sort of habit. He says in verse 10 warn a divisive person once and then warn them a second time. After that have nothing to do with them.

So this is serious. Paul gives instructions to Titus about how to deal with divisive people in the church. He's first to warn them.

[ 19 : 34 ] And the word that's used here for warning it has a very nuanced specific meaning. It specifically means to counsel them about avoiding or stopping an improper behavior with a goal that they actually would.

So it's not just kind of like lambasting them or intimidating them. Just stop it. It's more than that. The goal of this kind of warning is to help the person see how what they're doing is improper.

The goal is to counsel them, to warn them, to admonish them so as to change, to see them change from doing that to behaving as they should.

And so this kind of warning should really address the heart and the mind as well as the behavior. So first warn them like this, says Jesus, and then if they continue to be divisive, warn them a second time.

and then if they still continue to be divisive, he says have nothing to do with them, a more accurate translation, reject, reject them.

[ 20 : 52 ] Some commentators see this as more of a passive thing, like just shun that person, don't talk to them, treat them like an unbeliever. Others see this as more actively dismissing them from the church, or excommunicating would maybe be a word.

I mean, we don't use that word often because it kind of brings up connotations, especially in the Catholic church. But I think I tend to agree more with this idea of kind of sending them out.

Why? Look at the next verse. For you know that such a person has gone astray and is sinning. He is self-condemned.

So they're persistently deviating from what is good and right. They're stirring up trouble and conflict. They're promoting foolish and fruitless arguments and controversies over things that are bringing no benefit to anybody.

And the present tense here is notable. Such a person is sinning. Is sinning. Like right now, in doing this, they are sinning.

[ 22 : 04 ] They are self-condemned. So if they're unresponsive to this kind of restorative warning that Titus gives to them twice, then they're kind of proving their own actions, that they're just unwilling to be obedient to the Lord Jesus and to the correction that he's bringing into their life through the leaders in the church.

Now we might want to think for a moment about the effect on that individual. It might seem harsh, but the truth is that the Lord Jesus is concerned about his people.

He doesn't want to see us all divided and in factions. He wants to see us united, together, like a family. And these kinds of behaviors, when done persistently, fight against that and they destroy that.

But there is also a purpose for the person who is being sent out. If they don't yield to the warnings that are given, it's not all judgment or condemnation and God may use that to help them really come to grips with where they're at spiritually.

And the hope or the goal would be that they would repent, that they would confess the wrong that they're doing and be restored to fellowship in the church. We could look at some other passages about that, but we won't go into that this Sunday.

[ 23 : 32 ] It's probably worth mentioning that it fell to Titus to do this in the churches, to do the warning and also the rejecting part.

But then when Titus leaves, naturally this would then fall to the elders that he appointed, the leaders in the church. We think back to the metaphor of shepherds, elders are to be shepherds, and at times that's going to require them to ward off the wolves, those who would try to creep in and do damage or hurt.

So this is the first part of our passage this morning, and it's really focused on a thing that we're to avoid, because this doesn't do anything good for us.

Avoid arguments and foolish controversies. But then as we shift into the last little bit of the letter here, we're going to see an emphasis the other way on what we're to do, what we're to focus on.

And let me just read it for us here in verse 12 to 15. Paul says, As soon as I send Artemis or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, because I've decided to winter there.

[ 24 : 48 ] 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 in order to provide for urgent needs and not live unproductive lives.

Everyone with me sends you greetings. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all.

So Paul goes on to give some very specific instructions here about how Titus is to come to Nicopolis once his replacement arrives, and he's also to ensure that Zenos, the lawyer, and this guy named Apollos are sent on their way with everything that they need.

Paul then passes along greetings of those who are with him, and he tells Titus to greet those who love him in the faith. What should we make of these instructions?

What should we make of these greetings? Things? Well, sometimes when we read through our Bibles, these might be the parts that we just kind of skip over. Is it even relevant to our lives today?

But you know, as I was thinking through some of these words, there's actually a lot here for us.

There's something that we can take from them. We get the sense from these words that there is so much more going on than just the happenings of one local church, or the happenings of one little island.

[ 26 : 26 ] We see Paul kind of quarterbacking efforts to see the gospel go forward here and there, and he's trying to get people to go this way and see that people can go that way.

And even these people on Crete and their churches, even though they're isolated from others because of living on this island, they too have a role to play in the greater cause of the gospel.

And so, help Zenos, the lawyer, and Apollos on their way. Be diligent. Make sure that they have everything that they need as they're coming and as they're going. Whatever assignment the Lord Jesus has for them, Paul probably knew where they were going or what they were doing.

Each local church, even on the island in the middle of the Mediterranean, has something to contribute to the cause of the gospel, to the mission of Jesus Christ in our world, to our brothers and sisters who are beyond our community.

And in some ways, as I was thinking about Crete, here this island in the middle of the Mediterranean, it kind of wasn't, you know, it's not really a destination. It's not a place people wanted to get to.

[ 27 : 40 ] It was a place that was on the way, usually traveling by ship, a place that people would stop over. And so, here in this stopover place, they had this unique opportunity to assist these brothers in Christ on their way.

And I got thinking about this, you know, Davidson is also a place that's on the way. A place between the big cities. The coffee pot says it well.

people often stop to grab a Timmy's, to take a rest break, to get gas. It's just a long way to go between Regina and Saskatoon for most.

We're also a meeting place where those are who are looking to meet halfway for sports or business or other things can meet. I wonder what opportunities the Lord might bring to us in the future to meet the needs of our brothers and sisters in this province as that place on the way.

Finally, there's the greetings here. I love this part. You get the sense that wherever Paul is at this moment, the believers with him, they're there.

[ 29 : 01 ] They're thinking about their spiritual family members. They're on the island of Crete. I don't know if you guys do this same thing that we do in my family when it comes to FaceTime.

Sometimes you get on FaceTime with family or friends who are far away. You ever have that moment where either at the beginning when it's hello or at the end when it's goodbye, everybody comes and gathers around the screen and at least gives a little wave and says, hi, goodbye.

Well, back then they didn't have FaceTime. They didn't even have telephone. So the picture we get here is of them all crowding around the letter that Paul is penning. Oh, you're writing to the churches on Crete, to our brothers and sisters on Crete.

Well, tell them I say hi to. And eventually there was just too many names probably. So he just says, everyone with me sends you greetings. We are a spiritual family as a church, knit together by Christ.

But we are just one local expression of of the larger family. We have brothers and sisters all over the world and in the neighboring communities and cities in our province.

[ 30 : 14 ] This is why I'm really excited for us as we explore this opportunity to join the Baptist General Conference to which we've applied because it's another opportunity for us to open ourselves up to just some of our brothers and sisters in Christ who are in other churches in our province.

There's an opportunity here for us to participate in the cause of the gospel beyond just Davidson and Craig and the surrounding areas. There's an opportunity here for us to take an interest in the blood bought brothers and sisters in Saskatoon and Regina and Wadena and Mydale and Birch Hills and Turtleford.

Right now many of those brothers and sisters are probably doing the same thing we're doing right now. Maybe they have some needs in their community or in their church that we can help meet. Even if it's just to pray for them. Maybe we have some needs that God has uniquely equipped them to meet. And they could be praying for us about some things.

Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good in order to provide for urgent needs and not live unproductive lives. The temptation is for us to just focus our attention on ourselves.

[ 31 : 46 ] Only on our comforts. Only on living a life of ease and entertainment and recreation for me. But no. Paul shows us a better way here.

He says the cause of the gospel is greater. It's greater than the local community. It's greater than the local church. There are urgent needs in the cause of the gospel all over the place.

And our people need to be actively participating in meeting those needs. Devoting themselves to doing good works that meet real needs. Urgent needs.

And to live otherwise he says is to live an unproductive life. There it is again that word. Unprofitable. Unproductive. A fruitless life.

A wasted life. As we bring this to a close we could kind of sum this whole passage up. We're given something to avoid.

[ 32 : 44 ] And we're given something to devote ourselves to. We're to avoid being divisive. And we're instead to learn to be devoted to doing what is good.

To meeting needs. In the first half of this passage we heard about the thing that is unprofitable. The thing that is fruitless and unproductive. And it's getting into foolish controversies and arguments and fights.

And in the second half of this passage we hear about the thing that is profitable. The thing that is beneficial and fruitful. It's us being devoting to doing what is good.

To the meeting of needs. This is the profitable. This is the fruitful life that Christ longs for his people to embrace. Don't be a divisive disturber of the peace.

Be a devoted doer of good works. A meter of needs. Paul is saying. And so I want to just leave you with this question. Are you attuned to the needs of others?

[ 33 : 52 ] Are you looking for them? Are you responding to them as you can? Paul ends with a simple blessing. He says grace be with you all.

May God's generous kindness. His favor. Be with all of you there on the island of Crete. Let's pray. Father in heaven we thank you for the words of this letter.

And we ask that you would do in us what you long to see happen in them all those years ago. In those churches. In any way where we are the same.

Where we need the same word of correction. Speak that to our hearts. Lead us away from the things that are unprofitable. The things that are that have no value.

And lead us to the things that will bless others and benefit others. And ultimately will bring glory to you. Our Savior.

[ 34 : 56 ] And our King. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.