

Titus 3:8-15

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[0:00] Good morning, everyone. I'm really excited to be with you today as we close out our series in the book of Titus. And it's, well, as the whole book has been, this is such a good one. And I'm really excited to walk into this text with you. So I'm going to read Titus chapter three. If you have a Bible, I'd invite you to turn there. If you have it on your phone, please turn there with me.

And I'm going to start in Titus chapter three, verse eight, where Paul says, this saying is trustworthy. And I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works.

These things are excellent and profitable for people, but avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless.

As for a person who stirs up division after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with it, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful. He is self condemned.

When I send Artemis or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. Do your best to speed Zenos, the lawyer, and Apollos on their way. See that they lack nothing. And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need and not be unfruitful.

[1:28] All who are with me send greetings to you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all. Now this morning as we begin in Titus chapter 3 verse 8, you might be thinking, hey, you messed up the passage boundaries here.

Today's first verse, verse 8, the saying is trustworthy, I want you to insist on these things. That's about last week. It goes with verses 1 through 7. Pastor Jordan should have handled that. And today we should start with verse 9.

Well, you're right. But I wanted to begin today with verse 8 so that we could see the connection between these two sections.

Without that connection, verse 9 could look like just one other disconnected item on a list thrown in at the end of the book. But Paul has one big idea here in chapter 3, and verses 8 and 9 are the bridge.

And so when Paul says in verse 8, this saying is trustworthy, I want you to insist on these things. And then in verse 9 he says, but avoid these other things.

[2:37] Insist on one, avoid the other. There's this bridge between them. And so Paul is drawing the book to a close, reminding Titus, be about this thing.

And everything else is secondary. Make sure that you avoid being distracted towards them. You know, the English Standard Version, the translation that Shoreline preaches out of, says, I want you to insist on these things.

Another translation says, I want you to affirm them constantly. Another says, I want you to stress these things, but avoid foolish controversy. And so verses 8 and 9 set up this contrast. It's an either or.

Either a church will be faithful or it will be unfruitful. Either a church will be focused or it will flounder. And the health, the life, the mission of the local church depends on this.

Where are our eyes as a congregation? Where are they fixed? And Paul tells Titus, insist upon these things. Avoid and shun and turn away from what stands in the way.

[3:42] And so a month ago, we entered the book of Titus because in this moment of lockdown, we are physically separated from the church. And so this is a wonderful moment to direct our gaze at what the Bible has to say about the church.

And Paul concludes this short letter by giving us the defining feature of a true and healthy church. And it is our stand on the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And today, as we'll see, this isn't just a test, you know, did you get the right answer, right? It's not like you just fill out a form. Oh, you have the right focus.

No, this is the very power of God at work among his people. And we're going to see how that is. So let's pray together and let's jump in. Oh, Lord, our Father.

Thank you that as we saw last week. You sent your son to redeem and to rescue us. And Lord, that you, by your spirit, have joined us to him in his death and resurrection.

[4:45] So that all of the gospel promises from Genesis to Revelation can be true for us. Father, I pray that that would be the focus of our congregation's life and focus.

And also my life and focus. And every member of our congregation and everyone who hears. I don't know who's on this live stream today.

But Lord, I pray that the gospel would be central. That your grace and love would be our all in all as we look to you, our great God.

I pray this all in Christ's name. Amen. So we've been saying that Paul here is talking about centering on the gospel and avoiding distractions away from it.

And so what is he saying, verse 8, to insist on? That's what Pastor Jordan was walking through last week. I'm going to read that again because it's just so, so beautiful.

[5:48] Our salvation in Christ. I'm going to start back in verse 4. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us.

Not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing and regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.

So that being justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

And that's when he says this saying is true or trustworthy.

And I want you to insist on these things. Friends, that is the heart of the Christian message. God the Father saved us. Not because we are so good, but because he is so merciful.

He sent his Holy Spirit to believers to join us to Christ in his substitutionary death on the cross and in his victorious resurrection so that we enter into eternal life with our Lord.

[6:54] And friends, if you, I don't know who's on this stream right now. I don't know where you are. But if you've not embraced that message, embraced that Savior, will you do that today?

Will you recognize that you cannot be set right with the living God apart from his mercy? It's not, as Paul says, because of works done by us in righteousness.

The debt of our sin has piled up and the guilt of our sin before a holy God whose glory is so magnificent. We cannot, by our own righteousness, set the scales right.

It is only by his mercy that we might be forgiven and redeemed to him. And so if you will turn from self and sin, that's what we call repentance, and turn to Christ and entrust your soul to him and call him Savior and Lord, that's what we call faith.

If you will repent and believe, he offers as a free gift his righteousness, his life, his resurrection for you, and you might become one of the people of God.

[8:09] That's what Paul is saying here in verses 8 and following to insist on, to constantly affirm, to stress these things. And again, it's not some doctrinal test that Paul says because he's saying in verse 8, insist on these things so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works.

These things are excellent and profitable for people is what he says. And so a church that rightly focuses on, insists upon, centers around the gospel will become a church that devotes itself to good works.

So in verses 9 and following, Paul instructs us to shed every entanglement that keeps us away from that central focus on the gospel, which produces in us good works.

And so here's how we're going to proceed. First, we're going to look at avoiding foolish and divisive things. And then secondly, we're going to look at that connection that Paul makes about, you know, verse 8, how centering on the gospel, insisting on these things, empowers us, produces a congregation devoted to goodness, how the gospel actually generates good works in us.

So that's kind of the outline for how the rest of this is going to proceed. And so first, let's talk about avoiding the foolish, the divisive, the distraction.

[9:35] And so he says, verse 9, avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless.

As for a person who stirs up division, we might ask for ourselves, well, who is the person who stirs up division in Paul's mind? Well, I think that person who stirs up division in verse 9, or verse 10, excuse me, it is the person who's doing verse 9.

They're the same thing here. They're connected. It's the person who insists on drawing the church away from her central message, whether that's by false teaching or by distraction.

This person is divisive because pulling, dividing the church, drawing her away from the center. And Paul says that that person is warped, self-condemned.

And I think what that means is, well, I mean, think of, you know, a U.S. senator who says, I don't really care for the Bill of Rights very much. You don't belong there.

[10:39] If you're in a Star Wars movie and say, I'm not, I don't really care much for the force. Well, you're not a Jedi. If you belong to the Church of Christ and say, I think we should center our attention on something other than the gospel, you condemn yourself by saying, by showing that you don't really belong here or know how to belong here.

Right? You know, the Sesame Street line, right? One of these things just doesn't belong. One of these things just isn't the same. And so focusing on something other than Christ, crucified, buried, raised in the Church of Christ is racing NASCAR at a rodeo.

It's selling an iPad at an antique show. It's voting for King George III at the U.S. general election, right? Do you even know where you are? You're self-condemned, Paul says.

Now, to that person who would distract the Church, who would, and by the way, we're going to come to that in a moment, that this isn't just some person out there, that this could be me.

This could be you. And so we need to be careful and on guard. And that's why Paul is saying, insist on these things. Bring them back to the center all the time. What is the reaction to that person?

[11:56] At first, we might think, oh, well, it's pretty aggressive here, right? Verse 10, Paul says, as for a person who stirs up that division, after warning him once and twice, have nothing more to do with him.

That can sound pretty aggressive, right? So is this instruction here to attack, to condemn, to abandon them? Well, not quite. First, it's bring them back to the beautiful gospel of our Lord.

Now, certainly it's serious. So we don't do it flippantly or lightly, right? The mission of the Church is at stake. The witness of the Church is at stake. Salvation is at stake.

So it's serious, but not angry, right? Because all along the gospel, from the very beginning, Titus chapter 1, verse 1, right?

The gospel prompts us to good works and to love and to kindness, not angry arguments. And in fact, Paul specifically wants to avoid dissension, right, and wrathful arguments.

[12:59] So the affect, the mood, the tone of corrective ministry is not angry. It's loving. And it must be patient as well because that is also a fruit of the Spirit.

And so, and Paul actually calls that out. If you look in verse 10, right? He says, after warning him once and then twice, there's this process.

It's only after repeated refusals to come back to the center that Paul says have nothing to do with him. And Titus may have understood this probably in one of two ways.

It might be talking about Church discipline, which Titus knows is not something he can unilaterally do. But Matthew chapter 18, as we've seen, right, is an act of the whole congregation that he would be leading the church towards.

Or he's talking about Titus not throwing pearls to swine or elevating that person to a position of influence within the congregation. As Titus has been, in chapter 1, encouraged to appoint elders. [13:59] And chapter 2, to have mature and wise Christians minister to younger Christians as well. So it could be either one of those, depending, I guess, on the circumstance. Now, let's think.

Let's bring that back to us, right? Let's think a bit about our context and our submission to this text, right? The person stirring up division focuses, if you look at verse 9, there are a whole bunch of different things that could distract the church from the gospel at center.

It could be falsehoods. It could be fanciful speculation. It could be misleading teaching. It could just be distractions. So it could mean everything from heresy to just simply turning us away from Christ at the center.

And so that's why we need to continually insist on these things. That is, verse 8, the testimony of the gospel. So that we might come into an obedience to the gospel.

And so sinful practices or false doctrine, those are definitely crossed purposes to the gospel, right? But I'm happy to report that Shoreline seems to be pretty spectacular at this point.

[15:12] At no point have any of you asked the elders to incorporate Hindu doctrines or prosperity theology into our teaching. We have a remarkably low level of heretics, I think.

But that doesn't mean that we can sleep on that. Because distractions to true and good but lesser things are also a problem.

True but off-center teaching, admirable but lesser goals, and neutral but not Christian ideas can still tear a church body away from its prime directive just as easily.

It may be even easier. It's really easy to spot pagan philosophy in a sermon or something like that. But subtle, slight distractions away from Christ's center might be even more difficult to spot.

And look at the list that Paul says here. Some of these are, you know, real problems. Essentials, quarrels. But genealogy? Is there anything inherently wrong with genealogies?

[16:24] No. But is heritage genealogy? Is that the goal of the church? No. Many of you are in the military or in the business world where you've heard mission drift, that term, right?

It's when a company or an organization gets away slowly from their main objectives and gets drawn into something else.

And actually, for some organizations, switching their focus works, right? A Kodak is producing far less film these days than in days past. Now they're focused on patent licensing.

They're focused on commercial printing. And that mission change probably saved their business. But what happens when the only organization, the church, in the world that brings the ministry of reconciliation, that offers forgiveness for sins, that shows the way to the narrow gate, the only organization that offers life to have it abundantly, John chapter 10.

What happens when that organization allows something else to stand at the center? Disaster for the church and for the world, right?

[17:43] If there's only one organization that provided water, that could provide water for the whole world, that organization suddenly started selling something like solar panels.

Well, solar panels are good, but what the world really needs from you is to go back to providing water, right? A solar panel is no good to me if I die of thirst.

And the church, friends, is the only organization in the world that offers the water of life, the living water that Christ offers. And so the church needs to remain focused on the gospel and not distracted towards other things.

And that might be where we as a congregation could be drawn astray and need to be re-centered each and every time we need, right? And so I think there are some things that are prominent in the American church that we need also to remain vigilant about, right?

The church is not an institution to win the culture. Now, does the church speak against injustice? Does it extol public and private virtue?

[18:54] Does it change the culture? Yes, absolutely. But how? Is it by focusing on the culture? Is it by centering ourselves on the culture wars or by investing ourselves in special interest groups and super tax?

No, no. It's by proclaiming the gospel so that sinners repent, so that spiritually dead people are raised to new life in Christ and are transformed.

And we transformed the members of a society into Christ-like servants who live godly and virtuous lives. That's how culture changes, right?

So it begins with the gospel and it results in a culture change, right? The church is not, as might be another focus that we might drift towards, the church is not a social service agency.

Now, does the church engage in mercy ministry? Absolutely. We don't make a spectacle of this, but ask our deacons about the church's mercy ministry that goes on year by year faithfully.

[20:00] Ask the shoreline community group that provided generously for family in need just this month without even asking the deacons to get involved.

Ask the foster and adoptive families in our congregation. Does the church engage in mercy ministry out of love for neighbor? Yes. And why? It's, as we saw in chapter two, to adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.

Yeah. But the church isn't at heart, at root, a social service agency. That's not our mission. But all of these things are a byproduct of our central focus.

And I think there are a myriad of other ways that the church can get off track. A church can become all about one of its programs. Or it can become all about its building.

And that's something for Shoreline to be mindful of, right? As we continue to look for our next location. A church can get off track by becoming all about members' preferences or about the style of the church, whether that's from the furniture to the musical style to just the affect of the people.

[21:11] A church can get misdirected from that central focus on the gospel by becoming all about its network or its denomination or its affiliation. It can become, you know, this is an election year, right?

Entangled overly in politics, right? I'm fond of saying this. You won't hear Shoreline endorse a candidate. You will hear us proclaim a king, right?

And so we need to be brought back to the central ideas of the gospel. Week in and week out. And we need to keep secondary things in a secondary place.

If we shift and put those things at center, we are headed for disaster. Now, when Paul says, you know, avoid these things. Turn away from them.

That doesn't mean don't ask a question, right? I've heard stories of churches that discourage people's questions. Some other inquiry. You know, oh, just have faith.

[22:10] You know, if you're having questions or doubts or something like that, you know, you must not be good and even shame people for having questions. Well, first of all, that's not what biblical faith is.

Our culture tends to treat faith as, you know, blind faith. But the faith commended in the Bible is not believe against all evidence, you know, believe against all logic.

The faith of the Bible is entrust yourself to Christ because he has proven himself, right? It is a reasoned faith. And so we must ask questions.

We must seek answers. And so voicing doubts and uncertainty is part of the journey of growing in faith. Ask lots of questions of the scriptures, of your brothers and sisters in Christ, of your pastors. And if the Lord moves you from southeastern community so that you have to find a new church, you know, don't join a congregation whose leadership and culture discourages honest questions.

[23:08] And so this passage definitely doesn't mean don't ask questions or don't voice doubts. This passage means don't spend your time with those who are unimpressed with the resurrected Christ who would rather spend their time on something else.

It also doesn't mean don't have serious discussions about differences in doctrine. Paul's letters, like think about the letter to the Galatians. It's all about fine points of doctrine at the center point, right? This book he has been talking about, sound instruction. He's talking about discerning, verse 9, the foolish controversies in Genie. So he's not saying avoid all conflict or about doctrine.

What he's just saying is don't send her there. We must not send her there. Now, that's that whole balance between insisting on the gospel and keeping ourselves from the distraction, keeping the gospel at center.

How then? Right? Because this passage is built on, verse 8, he says, insist on the gospel so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works.

[24:17] And so what he's saying here is that in centering on the gospel, something happens within the people of God so that we have a new and obedient and godly life pouring out of us into the world.

And so what does centering on the gospel look like and how does that produce good works? What does it look like for a church to hold the gospel at center in this way?

Does it mean that at the end of every sermon we tuck repent and believe in Jesus so you can be saved at the end of every service? Is that what Paul is talking about?

No, I don't think so. I think the gospel needs to be more tightly integrated into the life of the church. Consider what we've seen in the last three weeks just in the book of Titus.

And I want you to see how the gospel is so infused into what Paul has been saying about how we think and then live.

[25:22] That the gospel is at the center of our obedience. Three weeks ago, Pastor Mike showed us in chapter 2, excuse me, how our love for the gospel leads us to what?

Desire to adorn the gospel with good works. That we are, when we are saved and brought into a living relationship with Christ, that when we see how much mercy we have been shown, we are so enamored with Christ and his gospel, the mercy of his grace, that we, that our hearts are lifted to it and we want to adorn the gospel with good works.

The gospel is central to that idea, right? Two weeks ago, I got to preach from the second half of Titus chapter 2. What did we see there? We saw how Paul says, basically, put on the new, put off the old, as we hope for Christ and his coming.

What the gospel promises for our future robs present temptation of its power. We can look at temptation because temptation's power is in its offer, right?

Temptation says, do this, you'll get that. And we'll look at that and we'll say, you call, you call that pleasure? You call that gain?

[26:52] Let me, let me tell you about gain. Let me tell you about pleasure. I have an inheritance waiting for me that is so much greater and grander than this. And so the gospel and its promises shame our temptation and change the way we live right now.

And last week, as Pastor Jordan showed us in the beginning of chapter 3, verses 1 through 7, of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the rebirth he brings to believers, all the gospel, right, lead to a radical life transformation.

In each case, our daily living and the preaching of the word related to it is built on a response to the gospel of God's grace.

And consider how even now, right, we, I'm not with you. I'm preaching to a little green dot on my laptop.

I'm not making eye contact with you. And I so long to be ministering the word to you in person. But in the midst of this strange time, in the midst of this physical distancing, our, consider how the promise of the gospel message, that message of our final redemption, our adoption consummated, our future home, how that the promises of the gospel transform our experience of quarantine, right?

[28:20] Our hope is bigger than the end of a lockdown. Our hope is better than the end of a pandemic. Our hope is in a city whose streets are paved with gold, where the sun does not set, where we will belong to and see.

See the king. So do not lose heart. Do not let your hearts be troubled in a few short years, maybe even sooner, but also in 10,000 years, you will know glory and blessing that passes understanding.

The message of Christ and redemption and grace, our new life in him, the gospel is the core of Christian teaching. It's not, but it's not just the entry point, right?

It is endlessly deep, endlessly beautiful, endlessly useful in the Christian life, because it transforms us into a people who, chapter 2, chapter 3, here are, because of the gospel, it is power in us to transform us into a people who are zealous to good works.

And so the gospel is not just a sales pitch. It is reconciliation to the living God. And so it is the fountain of the Christian life. And that's why Paul calls the gospel.

[29:47] In Romans, chapter 1, he says, it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek, right?

I'm reminded of a couple quotes here. The great Puritan Richard Sibbes said, the law cannot do anything other than remind us of our duty.

Only the gospel can move us to grateful obedience. That's the relationship that we're trying to tie here from the gospel to our obedience. Friends, we don't believe the gospel and then go on to something else.

We dive into its depths. That's why Paul says to center on, to stress, to insist on the gospel, because it is the power of God for his people.

And Tim Keller once said, because the gospel is endless through rich, it can handle the burden of being the one main thing of a church. And that's what we need for myself, for our whole congregation.

[30:54] We need, we ought, we have to be centering on the gospel day in and day out. Otherwise, we won't be profitable. We won't be zealous after good works.

We'll be zealous after a program. And that will peter out quickly. Paul concludes this passage with some greetings and instructions.

He says, When I send Artemis or Tychicus to you, Do your best to come to me in Ecopolis, For I've decided to spend the winter there. Do your best to speed Zenos, the lawyer, and Apollos on their way.

See that they lack nothing. And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, So as to help cases of urgent need and not be unfruitful. All who are with me sign greetings to you.

Greet those who love us in the faith. Christ be with you all. At the end of chapter 2, I didn't get to focus on this two weeks ago, But Paul said that the Lord, Actually, let me just pull it up real quick.

[31:58] In chapter 2, verse 14, He said that Jesus Christ gave himself for us, To redeem us from all lawlessness, And to purify for himself a people, For his own possession, Who are zealous for good works.

He is not just interested in redeeming me. He's interested in redeeming a whole church for himself. A people zealous for good works.

And so the Christian life is not about rock stars. Yes, there are leaders, chapter 1, But they lead the whole church, chapter 2, To build each other up in ministry.

And that's what we're seeing here in verses 12 through 15. It's really interesting. There are two pairs here, Tychicus and Artemis and Zenos and Apollos.

For both of those pairs, We know one of them, And we don't know the other. One of them is famous Within the pages of the New Testament. Tychicus we know from the book of Acts.

[33:07] Artemis we don't. This is the only time he appears. But Paul treats them the same. They have the same mission, right? Apollos we know. He's a prominent figure in Acts and in Paul's letters.

The Zenos we don't. Paul instructs them, Titus, To treat them the same. Paul greets the church Along with all who are with them.

And sends his greeting to all who love in the faith. All who belong to Christ. And he sends his blessing to all, Not just the prominent members. What better blessing can he give than this?

A reminder that God's grace remains on them. The people of God. There are no rock stars before the throne of God. Only recipients of his grace.

And so every member of the family of God receives the same grace. He has the same Lord as their inheritance. He is charged with the same high calling.

[34:07] Has the same Holy Spirit. Is called to seek all that Paul has called us to in this book of Titus. Will you walk in that?

Because you have the same gospel. The same power at work in you. The same call. And the same Lord. As Paul and Titus.

And every other Christian. In the history of the church. Will you keep the gospel at center? Let's pray. Lord, thank you for this wonderful message.

The book of Titus. I pray that you would conform our church family. So that we continue to hold the gospel at center. In our own lives.

To transform our own thinking. So that we are enamored with it. And want to adorn the gospel with good works. So that we look at what temptation offers.

[35:09] And say that's feeble. So that we dive into the redemption. And renewal. And the power. The empowering presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

To live good and godly lives. And Lord, we long for the day. When you make all things. When there will be a congregation that will never break up.

A Sabbath that will never end. A song of praise from your people to your throne. That will never cease. An assembly. That will never be dispersed. Lord, will you keep us centered on these things. So that we might be fruitful and profitable servants. And Lord, so that our joy may be full. In the midst of every circumstance.

We pray all these things in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.