

Telling the Difference

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[0 : 0 0] what does it mean that he also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above the heavens, that he might fill all things, and gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers to equip the saints for works of ministry for the building up of the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to the mature manhood, to the measure and the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind and doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

In Titus chapter 1, I'm going to read verses 5 through to the end of 9. So this is Paul writing to Titus, and as we read in verse 5, this is why Titus is where he is.

This is why I left you, verse 5, in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you. If anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife and his children are believers, and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.

For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine, and also to the rebuke of those who contradict it.

[2 : 3 2] If you ever read Titus, one of the things you have to get used to is there's generalizations being made in the same way Jesus makes them in the Gospels. And of course, this is also written in the context of maturity, hence why we read out Ephesians 4, that no one's perfect, but it's all about the direction you're moving in. Is it one that leads to maturity or one that leads to immaturity? And so if you were to read on in Titus, which is a great little New Testament book, you come across some of these generalizations, and it's really important that you understand that in Scripture, they are allowed to generalize. So for instance, when it says, one of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, and lazy guttuns, this testimony is true. And you want to go, well, I'm sure there was a good one somewhere. And there probably was, you know. When Jesus says to the Pharisees, you brood of vipers, okay, I'm sure there was probably a good Pharisee somewhere.

But again, generalizations are true, because they're generally true, okay? And that's important, important. We're going to come back to that in God's grace, after we've sung again to him in praise.

Let's do that now. Your Bible's open, if possible, at both passages. Both passages are fairly easy to remember. Perhaps the Ephesians 4 won more than the Titus, in the sense that, you know, we've been reading from Ephesians 4 over the last few weeks. And so hopefully it's set in our minds, in hearts.

Titus is one that perhaps a little less familiar. It's one of those books that many Christians read when it turns up in their Bible reading plan. But other than that, it doesn't get a look in, you know. And it's going to be important that you read all the scripture, because you don't want to get to, you don't want to get to heaven, and Obadiah come up to you and says, so did you enjoy my book?

You know, you wrote a book? Okay, you don't want that to happen to you. You want to be able to have read all the scripture. But more importantly, don't read scripture simply to get through it.

[5 : 00] Simply to say, I've read the entire Bible. That is one way to read scripture, to simply get through and say, yeah, but I've read it all. It's important that when we read, we read for understanding.

We read for meaning. And so if it takes you a long time to make your way through a book, then take a long time. Okay, it's better to understand perhaps one book in its entirety than to read the whole Bible and not understand much of it. You know, that's better. And so I would encourage you to read all the scripture, but read for understanding. As we come then this evening, and having read what we have, this is the final message in this series. And therefore, we are at the position now where we ought to be able to tell the difference between the issues that I have raised and have been raised throughout scripture. But being able to tell the difference is that particular skill that requires fine tuning as we mature in Christ. The issue before us is unified disunity, which is a title which I have given to the conundrum of what you do when you have a united disunity in the church. When the moment you do something, you create disunity.

But the moment you do nothing, or there is no moment, you just do nothing, you're left with the disunity you already have. So you're caught between a rock and a hard place, it would seem, it would seem, of having disunity if you do something and being left with disunity if you do nothing. But the issue that I've been sowing the seed, at least over these last few weeks, is not the issue of what do we do next. If you're sat there wondering, okay, but what does he want us to do? That would be to miss the point. The point here is to recognize rather what would happen if what currently happens stops.

That's how we ought to be looking at this. It'll become apparent if these things are never addressed, more so than if they continue to be addressed. And this is a matter of key importance for the health and unity of the church moving forward, or even for a marriage moving forward, or a family, or whatever it may be. So when a person knows the difference between knowing what needs to be done and doing it, he knows that just knowing what needs to be done doesn't mean that it's going to happen.

The person knows the difference between deciding to go for a jog and actually going for a jog. I've made the decision to jog quite a lot, but I've never actually done it. Can you tell? Shame on you.

[8 : 20] So I used the story of, you know, three little birds sat on a telegraph wire deciding to fly south for the summer. How many went? And the answer is none, because deciding to fly south isn't the same as flying south. And that simple distinction is important. In the same way, you're always able to tell who picks up around the house when they stop doing it. You're always able to tell, okay, who picks up around here when they no longer pick up around here. It becomes immediately apparent when you notice it because it is no longer there. So the issue that I'm laying out this evening is not what needs to happen. That needs to be talked about. That needs to be discussed. But rather, what would happen if those things that are currently happening stops that none of you notice?

That's what I'm addressing here. So the village by the sea, right by next to you, with all the pretty houses and the nice little gardens, experiences the peace and safety that it does because of the sea wall that doesn't experience any peace or safety. Okay? The village that dwells in peace has its peace at the cost of the wall taking the battering. And it's possible to live in a little town like that and know somewhere in the background that that's true, but never for it to dawn on you day after day that the reason we don't have flooded streets, the reason we don't have disruption, is because something else is taking the weight and the battering for us. But as we've seen in real life circumstances in my home country of Cornwall, that when those walls disappear, okay, the villages take the full force. So the issue here is not what needs to happen, but what would happen if those things disappeared? This, I feel, is the most important situation that we have to face. It is easy for

Christians to misunderstand the peace and the direction that they experience. They're not too sure where it comes from, but they know that that's what they've got. And yet it needs to be pointed out that it comes at the cost of other people fighting for you. The reason you get to enjoy some of the peace and the direction and the unity and the security of your children growing up in a church where we know how to look after them is because of those who fight those battles for you. So it's possible to sit here and enjoy all the benefits and not realize the harbour wall and not realize the person who goes around picking everything up and not realizing that the reason why the town is safe is because you've got an army out there fighting for you. So while some people are here enjoying the peace and the unity and the direction, it's not always possible for those people to understand how it is that they have that. They may miss it entirely. So those people who know that not all conflict is bad know that some battles need fighting. And they need fighting because it all depends on what you're protecting.

Okay, battles have to be fought depending on what you're protecting. And I mentioned a few weeks ago, didn't I, about Adam and Eve and just for a moment, for an absolute moment when Satan had tempted Eve, there was a moment, a split moment, where you had a fallen woman and an unfallen man.

You had a fallen wife in sin and an unfallen husband. And we all know what he should have done because it's what Jesus did for his bride years later. My life for yours. He should have stood before God and laid down his life on behalf of his wife. And in fact, even before it got to that, he should have fought the battle with Satan for the protection of not only him, but his wife and the future generations. But he didn't fight. And so at a cost of not fighting, you have the consequences that we now live with. And so in this final message, the issue that we have is one where we have to be able to tell the difference between conflict, which is necessary, and disunity, which is not necessary.

[13 : 20] We have to be able to tell the difference between what it is to love according to the way Christ loves and what it is to love according to the flesh. And those who love according to the flesh who are Christians are not scared of claiming that that's how Jesus would do it. But it's not how Jesus would do it. And that's a conflict worth having. That's a fight worth having. Because what's at stake is the value and the definition of what God's love actually is. So I want to begin with some familiar ground and by re-emphasizing a point that I made last week that I thought was clear, but it seems with a few conversations, perhaps it wasn't so clear to make really clear, hopefully, this week. And that's the difference between experience, wisdom, and qualifications. Okay? Experience, wisdom, and qualifications. When we live together as a church, we ought to seek the maturity of one another. This will require us to love one another like Jesus loves us. Okay? Sometimes it is a hard love. Sometimes it is an encouraging love. Sometimes it is a softly, softly love. But at the end of the day, his love is to take us from where we are to where he wants us to be. It is always to move us on to become fuller, to become more like him. Maturity matters to God. And as we saw last week, those who are spiritual are the only ones who can restore those who have transgressed. And even those who are spiritual have to be careful, as we read in Galatians 6.1, that they don't end up falling by the wayside, okay, in trying to save the other person. And the way to save a drowning person is not to get in there with them. Okay? There are other ways of doing it. And those who are spiritual know how to save the person who is transgressed by not getting themselves into the same situation that the one who's transgressed has got themselves into. And so the elders, titers, have to be experienced men, but we have to understand what that experience needs to be. It is most definitely not the experience of vices.

Now, I know that we sometimes can think that the experience of vice is good, but the qualifications are quite clear. The man is to have one wife. The man is not to be a lover of drink. The man is not to be a lover of money. He is not to be a lover of the world, you know, in the sense that he loves what the world has, like Demas, who turned his back on the Lord Jesus Christ for his love for the world.

It's great out there. I can get to do whatever I want. But the elder is able to recognize the sacrifices that need to be made, which is, I don't get any of that because I'm following Christ.

Okay? And understand the difference between what it is to be faithful. He's to have faithful, believing children, and all of these qualifications matter. And the experiences are not experiences of vice. And the reason they are to have that is so that they're able to teach transgressors, those who sin, often, not that they're in a condemning way, of how to avoid those sins in the future.

You need an eldership, okay, who know how to teach others how to avoid sins by they themselves avoiding them. That's how your confidence in submitting to a leader works. Okay? It is much easier to submit to a leader who knows how to avoid transgressions, or at least as many as possible.

[17 : 27] No one's perfect, but know how to avoid them rather than being able to share in the same experiences that everyone else has. It all depends on what you mean by experience. By experience here, we mean applied wisdom, not the experience of vices. For instance, if a minister, let's say a minister I know, had lost his wife several years ago, and he lost his wife and he's got children, and he just so happens to be the same age as me. And then in a month's time, the same thing happened to me as what happened to him a couple of years ago. Even though I'm an entirely different person, and will react differently to the situation than what he does, he is able, in part, to share an experience, because he's been through it. That kind of experience is a good experience, and it's shareable.

But I want you to notice the fact that it's after the fact. It's already happened. The reason he's able to share in the experience is because it's already happened to him. But when we talk about applied wisdom, we're talking about things that we don't want to happen.

Okay? We need people who know how to avoid things happening so that they can teach others how to avoid those things happening. So there is an experience like the one I've just mentioned, which is always after the fact. Because it happened to him, he can share in my experience, in part, because it's now happened to me. So imagine a man or a woman who has lots and lots of experiences in the vices. Okay? The sex, the money, the drugs, the drink, whatever else you want to add to that list. And someone comes along and says, but they're able to relate to people in the world.

They're the perfect person to be able to relate to the people in the world. They're able to come alongside them. They're able to be on the same page as what they are. They're able to share experiences. I'm not arguing that. What I'm arguing is, is that the way forward? And the answer is clearly no. And why is it no? Because if they were the qualifications needed to minister to such people, then why didn't Jesus mention them in his word? If they were the qualifications that help people, then why didn't God say that elders need to be drunkards, liars? Okay? Have trouble with sex and money. Why aren't they the qualifications? Well, because the qualifications is how to avoid those experiences, not how to share them. And that's the difference here. The maturity that a church ought to experience ought to be from mature people. It is the one who is spiritual who should be doing the restoring to the one who has transgressed. Now, that doesn't mean that none of us will ever make mistakes, but it does mean and it does explain why some people make more mistakes than others.

Because it comes down to the level of spiritual commitment that you make to God himself. So no one's perfect. Okay. No one's perfect. But the question is, is what direction are you moving in?

[20 : 59] This isn't about sharing experiences as though I was where you were five years ago. Great. But how do I get out of it? Well, I don't know because I'm still there. Okay? I agree that sharing experiences is good. Like the minister who lost a wife to a minister who's just lost his wife. Okay. But the other types of ones don't add any kind of spiritual benefit to the equation. They don't do anything. Because if they did, they would be included in the qualifications for people to mature others. Take, for instance, it's a young person. A baby. Okay. You look at a young baby who's just come out and here they are in the world. And they've got very little. They can't even walk. In fact, they can't even roll. They just are just there. And you've got this little bundle of joy. Okay. Which God calls that they were conceived in iniquity. So as you look down on this little innocent baby who you think couldn't do anything,

God looks down and see the potential that sin can do to this life as it grows up. This child has a whole life ahead of it. And therefore, this child lives with the potential of sin. Sin has massive potential in his life. Who should bring the child up? Well, is it the person who's got plenty of experience in the vices? Or is it the person who's got the maturity who knows how to avoid those vices? If you were to hand that child over, who would you give the child to?

And so the issue here is not that sin isn't an issue for every one of us. It is an issue for every one of us. The issue before us is that when you look at people maturing in the church, and it's more noticeable with children than it is with older people, what you're dealing with is sin's potential and how to fight it. That's the fight worth having. And therefore, we need to be well-educated enough to know what sacrifices need to be made, the dangers of not making those sacrifices, and more importantly, how we're going to mature these people correctly and even ourselves. We need to do it in the grace of God. We need to do it in the power of the Holy Spirit. But we need to do it because their personal holiness before God is what's at stake. That's what matters.

As they repent and believe in Christ, their new life matters to God, and their life matters to God anyway because he sent his son to die for them. Now, when you sin as a child, the consequences aren't that great. Okay? You knit your sister's pen, you knit your brother's pencil.

Okay? Stealing on that level means that you get disciplined by your parents, but you take that 20 years down the line, and you do it out in the world, and suddenly you're finding yourself before a judge and in a prison cell. The crime gets greater. Okay? We understand the potential here. The question is, is how do we address it before that potential takes full hold? Sin destroys everything.

[24 : 21] And children, even young Christians, may have to be told, you're not allowed to go ahead and play this evening. Okay? And that's a miniature discipline. But it carries with it its necessary component, which is, as I said last week, there's a big, big difference between training a person to be a person and training a person with a skill. There are plenty of husbands who are exceptional at their job, and yet very poor fathers and poor husbands. There's a massive difference between being able to train a person to become a person and training a person to do a particular skill. And that's the issue that we're addressing here. So as we move on, it ought to become apparent what the next stage is.

Once you have a bunch of Christians together, what's your job? What is the main thing that, as a church, we have to do? Well, we have to keep the salt salty. And we have to be able to demonstrate how to keep the salt salty. So if we want people to mature properly, we need to be able to teach how it is you keep the salt salty. Jesus said that if salt loses its saltiness, it'll just be trampled underfoot. That's all that will happen. So the elders need to be well educated, as with the congregation, enough to understand the sacrifices that need to be made and the battles that need to be fought.

And we need to know the dangers of not making those sacrifices and not fighting those battles. Because if the battles aren't fought, then you have a whole generation of people that quite possibly are in danger of losing their saltiness.

The difficulty before us is a real difficulty. Those who come to Christ and live their life in Christ begin to learn how difficult it is to sacrifice. It's not easy to sacrifice. It is incredibly difficult to sacrifice. If sacrifice was easy, then maturity would be easy. And maturity is not easy. If submission to your rulers, those who rule over you, Hebrews 13, was easy, then you wouldn't even have to be told to do it. The reason it's not easy. It's because you don't want to do it. It's because of the necessary difficulties with not wanting to do it. It's made even more difficult when the leaders that you are called to submit to in Scripture don't actually submit themselves to God's Word. And that's a big problem also. So what we have then is that in the Christian life, it's clear that both sacrifice and submission is a key part of growing up. But it's not easy. And therefore, those who are mature have the right before God, or rather the responsibility before God, to restore those who have transgressed. And those who have transgressed need to be well-educated enough to know that I need to submit to this person for my own well-being. Okay? I'm not in a good place, and that person is not where I am. Though he cannot relate to any experience that I've gone through, but nevertheless, he just so happens to be the very person that God has determined needs to get me out of this mess. Now, as I said last week, love, loving, needs a direct object. You cannot tell whether or not love is good or bad unless you fill in the direct object. To love God is a good thing, because God is the direct object. To love the world like

Demas did in forsaking Christ and following the world is a bad thing, even though in both cases the word love is employed. So it is possible for Christians to talk about being loving, but their love could be completely in a very unbiblical way. Now, what's involved here is the distinction between loving someone according to the flesh and loving someone according to the Spirit. That is, loving someone according to the way Christ would actually love them. So let me give you a few examples. The paralyzed man in Mark chapter 2, who's brought to Jesus by his four friends, clearly demonstrating faith that Jesus is able to heal him. And this man is brought before Jesus. Jesus looks at him and says, get up and walk. No, he doesn't. He says, your sins are forgiven. Now, if Jesus was loving this man according to the flesh, you might expect him to say, first and foremost, get up and walk. But he doesn't, because this man's greatest need is his personal holiness before God, not his ability to be able to walk.

[29 : 38] Now, Jesus does heal him to prove that he saved him and forgave him his sins. But there's a distinction here between loving a person according to the flesh and loving a person according to the Spirit.

What about the woman at the well? Does Jesus love her according to the flesh? Or does he love her according to how he ought to love her? She's had five husbands, and the man that she's with now is not her husband. Okay? What do you do with a lady like that? Well, one of the things that you don't do is love her according to the flesh. And don't take up issue with the fact that she just so happens to be living with a man who's not her husband. That's no big deal. No, it is a big deal, because what matters is our personal holiness before God. And so Jesus immediately turns the subject onto worship as a matter of loving her according to God's way rather than according to the flesh. And so those who love according to the flesh will always want to claim is how God would do it, but that's because you're paying no attention to the way God is doing it. To love someone according to the flesh is to not have any concern for their standing before God. And the way that you show that you have no concern for their standing before God is because you allow them to continue in their way without discussing those issues. And they are big issues. And what about the woman caught in adultery?

And I love this woman for a number of reasons, because I think her honesty, though she doesn't say anything, but the fact that she's caught between Jesus and just about to be stoned.

Jesus looks at her, you know, he looks at the crowd first and says, let him who was without sin go and cast the first stone. Okay, and more striking than that is that you, when you read it carefully, it says that the oldest left first. And that's a significant point.

I think moral guilt sharpens with age. I think the older you get, the more you realize that actually, yeah, we're wrong, but we're not going to admit it. Because you're more grown up. But the more grown up you are, the more difficult it is to open up and say, yeah, I've got it wrong.

[31 : 58] Like, no, so what do you do? You walk away. You walk away from Jesus. And Jesus looks at her and says, I'm not going to condemn you, but go and sin no more. Well, why not?

Why not carry on the way that I am? Because what matters is your personal holiness before God. And not only that, because if you do go and sin, something worse is going to happen to you than being stoned to death. Hence, the judgment of God to come. What matters is our personal holiness before God. So Jesus doesn't love anybody according to the flesh ever. He loves all people according to their greatest need before God, which is their personal holiness. When a person loves another person according to the flesh in the church, they are unable to keep the other person's salt salty.

And the reason we have some of the issues that we have in the church, not just here, but throughout the nation, is because of men, elders in particular, who aren't fighting those battles.

We don't want the conflict. And yet, we need the conflict. Because what's at stake is little boys and girls who grow to become men and women, and their personal holiness before God, which matters.

Because who's loving them the most? So when you look at someone who seems to be starting fights, look at what he's protecting. When you look at someone who doesn't walk away from conflict, look at what he's protecting.

[33 : 39] Don't think there's a man who's always causing trouble. But look at why he's engaged in the conflict that he is. And who's really loving who the way Jesus would do it. Jesus doesn't want to leave anyone in sin. Hence why everything is on the table. The battles are worth fighting because people matter. And they matter to God. And they matter because God wants them to be holy.

So as we wrap it up, we start with this, by telling the difference. Learning to tell the difference between receiving God's wisdom and sharing in experiences is an important one. We ought to be able to see so far ahead that we're able to see the pitfalls before people make their way into them. We want to train our young children and even some of the adults to be able to go out into the magician's world out there where there's lots of deception and know how every trick is done so that they don't fall for it.

Okay? Now it's okay if you go into a magic show where tricks are done. Okay, we kind of like that surprise and that experience of how did you do that? And that's fine if you're going to see a show and it's cards. But it's altogether a different thing when it's a person's life in the world and the deception and the consequences are far greater. We need to teach people of how the tricks are done.

We need to teach people in how to become mature in the way scripture teaches them how to become mature. And so what we're left with here is that we are not left with a room to love people according to the flesh. We have to love them according to the way God wants them loved. That their personal holiness before God matters. So here's the exhortation. As we sit here in church and we deal with the issue of unified disunity and we deal with all of these issues which are on the table, one of the things that we need to realize is to look back around of all the believers that you know that are now trampled underfoot. If they are believers. Just look around of all these children that have grown up who have lost their saltiness and are no good but to and they're trampled underfoot just like Jesus said they would be. And what about the adults who are trampled underfoot? And we must take full responsibility and say it's because I've not fought the battles that need to be fought. Now there may be other reasons but that is one of them. That is one of them. That we've not fought the things that need to be fought. So those who sit here thinking what's the way forward? We need to understand that those who don't know the way forward don't know it for a couple of reasons. And those who do know what is the way forward understand that if you get disunity by doing something and you're left with disunity if you do nothing, disunity is going to be part and parcel of moving forward. Whichever way you look at it.

But what are you protecting? What are you protecting? Now a congregation like yourself might wonder what you have to do after a series of messages like this. Now this is going to be incredibly difficult for you if you can't imagine the church any different than what it currently is.

[37 : 08] Or if you can't imagine your life any different than what it currently is. Okay? If you can't see a way forward then of course you don't know what the next step needs to be.

So here's the final thought. I've made many points over these weeks and I could make many more. But for purposes that I have, that I've mentioned, we're stopping right here. So I'd like to make just one example as we conclude all of this. That whichever way we go, okay, we're going to be going somewhere.

There's no neutrality. So whatever step you take, it's going to be going somewhere. So who decides which direction we should be going in? Who decides how all of this is going to be done?

Well Jesus does. Jesus decides. I've not said anything that the scripture hasn't said. I've teased out the meaning of it, but I've not really told you anything that surprises you. You know all of this. But here's the issue that we're faced with as we close. If we're going to begin somewhere, then the place where we really have to begin is what are we committed to?

What are we actually committed to? Amen.