

Closing out the Letter to Titus Titus 3:9-15

Hebrews 11:1-22
Hebrews 11:23-12:2
Psalm 84

This morning we are going to be finishing up this little letter, looking at the last few verses here in Titus. So before we close it out, I want to spend a little bit of time this morning just kinda of going over a broad view of each chapter to encapsulate everything that Paul is saying here in this little letter. We know that Titus was a young gentile believer, who traveled with Paul on some of his missionary journeys and was a close companion and good friend. Titus meant a lot to Paul, who saw him as his own “son in the faith” which we see in the greeting in chapter 1. Titus also traveled with Paul to Jerusalem in the debate against the necessity of circumcision among the Gentile converts. Proving the faith has come to the Gentiles outside of the rituals and traditions. Titus was left in Crete to establish good order within the church, the appoint elders, root out false teaching, and instruct the people in proper living for Christ.

This little letter can be broken up in a few pieces by the issues that Paul is addressing in this letter. First after the greeting, is the order of setting good leadership, laying down a foundation of traits to be looking for in any who would be a leader in the congregation. One whose life was a reflection of Christ as we have been talking about over the past few weeks, as Paul writes in verse 6 of chapter 1 “If a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation, which is debauchery or excessive indulgence or rebellion. And likewise the teacher, the bishop, or pastor should be blameless as a steward of God, not self willed, not quick tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, and self controlled.”

This is the standard that is set forth for any who would be a part of the leadership within a church, for it is their lives that reflect the church itself, they are representatives, the face of that body. This was one of the issues at Crete, was that unqualified men have become leaders, have moved themselves into areas of authority and were leading the people astray, leading them back to the law, though it was determined already by the Council in Jerusalem with Paul and Titus that such things were no longer necessary having seeing their fulfillment in Christ. Next in chapter 2 Paul directs his focus upon the people of the church, upon the congregation. Imploring the older generations to live as examples to the younger. Wisdom is widely accepted as to come with age, but there are many foolish people of all ages and generations. So, there is a reminder here, live as those who are worthy of this calling of which you have been called, so you can be a reflection of the goodness, and mercy of our Lord. And as we see in subsequent verses the same challenge goes out to the younger generation, to conduct themselves honorably, with a focus upon Christ, and the ministry of the gospel, knowing how lives and our conduct is a part of that ministry, for who would believe a hypocrite? Who would believe someone who does not live by the very things that they claim?

Therefore Christian conduct, and how we live our lives is an important subject, reminding us who we are in Christ, what he has done for us, and how we should then live. For at its core is the gospel, to live as those reflecting the reality of Christ in our own lives and conduct, so that others may see him, with the hope and prayer that others may come to know him through our ministry.

As Paul wrote in chapter 2, verse 11 “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for himself his own special people zealous for good works.” In short, we as Christians strive after good works not to gain, but because we have already received, as we are looking forward to his return and we are united with him in eternity. And this concept is repeated again in chapter 3, verse 4 “But when the kindness and love of God our savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the holy spirit, whom he poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our savior.”

We are to remind and exhort one another in this truth, because in his flesh we forget, we get distracted, and fail and fall short. But thankfully this gift, this salvation is not predicated upon our own ability, but on Gods, our creator, our savior, the author and finisher of our faith. Which brings us to our passage this morning, the last half of chapter 3. So lets go ahead and read continuing on in verse 8 “This is a faithful saying and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men. But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law, for the y are unprofitable and useless. Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning being self condemned. When I send Artemis to you, or Tychicus, be diligent to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. Send Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their journey with haste, that they may lack nothing. And let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful. All who are with me greet you, greet those who love us in the faith, Grace be with you all. Amen.”

Paul has argued that sound doctrine, is necessary, it is profitable, and here in verse 9 he is pointing out things that are unprofitable, no necessary, therefore not worth disputing or arguing over. We still have some of this today, the Catholic church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, and even the Anglicans believe in this idea of Apostolic Succession. This doctrine states, that the bishops are direct, authorized successors of the original apostles through an unbroken line of ordination. The Roman Catholic Church believe it is the pope who is a direct successor to Peter, giving them a sort of apostolic authority over the church. The Eastern Orthodox, believe it is their bishops who have this unbroken line of succession, This is can also be found in Lutheran churches as well, with the emphasis that this lineage ensues the preservation of the original apostolic tradition, rather than an actual blood line.

The Jews trace back their lineage to Abraham, so disputes and arguments over such things were common place. It was this lineage that they believed justified them, as they were the descendants of promise, as long as they can trace their genealogy back to Abraham, they are linked to the promise. All of this type of discussion is unprofitable, for physical, or traditional lineage accounts for nothing before God, that is what the book of Hebrews. The author drives home, that justification before God is not the law, it is not your lineage, and it is not your traditions, but it is faith and faith alone, a gift that is given by God himself so that we know know him. hat is why we read Hebrews 11 this morning, all who are of this faith are in Christ, those looking forward to the promise, and those of us who look back to the one who redeemed his people on the cross, the fulfillment, the author, and finisher of our faith. We do not need an apostolic lineage to confirm our faith, we don’t not need to debate, or prove genealogies, or hold to traditions for Christ has been revealed to us, and it is in him and him alone that we find salvation.

We are free in Christ, no longer under the bondage of sin, no longer under the bondage of the law, but in Christ we have been freed from those things, for he has conquered death, the penalty of sin, and he has fulfilled the law, and traditions, for all those things were given to point to him. A new covenant was established in his blood, not like the old from the blood of lambs and bulls, but by the blood of Jesus, the Son of God and it is his righteousness that is laid to our account, it is by him that we are saved, it is by him that we are justified. Therefore there is no longer disputes over the law, we no longer need to concern ourselves of which part of the law is ceremonial, and which part is moral. We no longer need to debate on whether or not the law applies to us today, for it has all been fulfilled, wiped away, made obsolete through Christ. As Paul wrote to the Romans, chapter 7:4, but starting in verse 1 here for context,

“Or do you not know brethren (for I speak to those who know the law) that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives she marries another man she will be called an adulteress, but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, that she is no adulteress though she has married another.” And here is the point, using marriage as the example here, “Therefore my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ that you may be married to another-to him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. For when we were in the flesh, that is unbelief, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.” “So again Titus 3:9 “ avoid foolish dispute, genealogies, contentions and striving about the law for they are unprofitable and useless.”

In verse 10 Paul shifts a bit here, but it is still under the idea of not spending time or energy debating over unprofitable things. “Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition.” Titus was to root out false teachers and those who were leading the church astray, away from the doctrines of scripture, away from the teachings of the apostles, and away from the grace of God. Paul has summarized the church experience by pointing to the importance of sound teachers, and the exhortation to the congregation to live out their lives like Christ. Here is the final aspect of the management and protection of the church body...dealing with divisive people and trouble makers within the church. Paul said to avoid disputes over foolish and unprofitable things, and to reject a divisive man. These two things go hand in hand for it is the divisive, disruptive who are seeking the disputes. Such a person causes tensions, causes strife, and disunity within a church body. Often causing factions among the people where there should be unity, they love to take sides, and pit sides against one another.

This is harmful to the church body therefore it is something that needs to be addressed and dealt with. Jesus gave guidelines for dealing with such issues in Matthew 18. He said, “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.” Sadly, there are times where church discipline maybe necessary, but it should be done always with the goal of restoration. Even the “treat him as a heathen and tax collector” is at its heart to bring them to repentance. Sometimes these things are necessary to protect the church and her ministry. The church can not have someone who is seeking to undermine her every step of the way.

As Paul wrote to Timothy about this very issue, he said, (2nd Timothy 2:25) In humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth." Divisions within the church results in hostility and contentions among the believers, it effects the ministry as the focus becomes about who is right and wrong instead of edifying one another. Again as Paul wrote in Romans, (16:17) Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you have learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their won belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple." We are to be on guard, and guard ourselves of such people, focusing upon the ministry of the gospel, the building up of one another in the unity found in Christ, and not be caught up in debates over unprofitable things. In meditating upon this a bit this past week, I had a thought about this, there are worthy debates is there not? I think a worthy debate would be about the method and mode of salvation, about the redemptive work of Christ on the the cross, about the work of the spirit vs the curse of the law for these effect how we live out this Christian life, these things effect what we know and believe about God himself, and how we address our own sinfulness and failures.

The examples Paul gives here, are the issues of his day, genealogies, contentions and strivings about the law. As mentioned earlier we still have some of that today, as some try to argue their genealogy, or get into debate over what aspects of the law still may apply to us today. But I think a big one that is a modern version of unprofitable contentions, is the discussion and debates over end time views. There are believers out there, who will disassociate themselves with those who do not believe exactly what they do about the end times. They use the debate around such things, as divisive, some even as far as a test of faith on whether you agree or not with one particular view. The reality is, there are things we can know, and things we can't know...we know and believe in Christ imminent return, we know and believe that he will return and when he does he will be gathering all his people to himself. We know that there will be a resurrection, for the dead are not separated from God, we know that we will pass from this life into the next. But to claim to know or understand a time, or a method that these realities will unfold is unclear in scripture and in today's christian community can be quite the debate.

Some churches require an agreement to their explicit view. While I think such discussions are interesting, can be beneficial, they should never be contentions, nor should they cause separation and division among Gods people. We have our own modern version of "disputes over unprofitable things" We need to understand that while we are in this flesh, we see, and only know shadows, we have the full revelation of what God has given us so that we may know him, we have what we need which points to Christ for redemption and salvation, but it does not answer every question for there are mysteries that are not ours to know at this time, and it is a foolish waste of time to devote to much energy in those things which cause unnecessary division when we should be building one another up in admonition and exhortation to align our lives with Christ.

Though my point here is that we should not find ourselves in contentions with one another over the mysteries of the bible that have not been fully revealed to us, what Paul is addressing here in verse 9-11 is the false teachers that have arisen. This is more then just a debate, or discussion, or disagreement on tertiary issues, but is a deception in the church leading people away from the gospel, and Christ. We know this because of the response in verse 11 "knowing that such a person is warped and sinning being self condemned." I wouldn't say that someone who holds a different end time view then myself is warped and sinning, but someone who is adamant that we need to look to anything other then Christ for our justification, is teaching a false gospel, warping the truth, and leading people astray.

But the principle still stands, that we should not be divisive, we should not be trouble makers within the church body, there are right and wrong ways to discuss and debate nuance of scripture, or those not fully revealed mysteries. Likewise we also need to deal with those who are contentious and cause division, so that that church body is built up instead of torn down by constant debate and disruption. The goal is unity in Christ, being a community of believers who love and are loved by Christ, there we we likewise are love, and are loved by one another. Seeking the best for one another, not selfish gain, using Christ as our example as we strive to be like him. That is what we are doing here every week, gathering together to praise him, to worship him, and to exhort and encourage one another in this Christian walk. We are stronger united together, and it is Satan who wants to seek division among us making us weak.

Paul closes this letter with a few requests, but in verse 14 we see his final admonition to Titus in teaching the people, he says “Let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful.” Again we are a community that is to look out for one another, we are all brothers and sisters in Christ and our lives need to reflect that reality through our good works, and love toward one another. Paul has laid out in this short little letter the instructions that every church should look to and order themselves around, with Christ being at the center of it all. There was a lot to unpack here in these 3 short chapters, but all of it good instruction and reminders of the importance of our conduct, and a Christ centered life as we are to minister this gospel not only to the lost, but to one another as we meditate, rejoice and worship God for what he has done.