

Focus on the Gospel, Reject Those Who Don't

By Joel Wood

Bible Text: Titus 3:3-11

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As we look today to Titus, Titus chapter 3 (and I am going to dip back into verses 3 through 8) and so we will read verses 3 through 11 today. And I will read and preach on these verses from the Modern English Version. Hear God's word for God's people. "*[Titus 3:3-11] We also were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various desires and pleasures, living in evil and envy, filled with hatred and hating each other. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward mankind appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of rebirth and the renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, being justified by His grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you constantly to affirm, so that those who have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to everyone. But avoid foolish debates, genealogies, contentions, and arguments about the law, for they are unprofitable and useless. Reject a divisive man after a first and second admonition, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.*" The grass withers and the flower fades but the word of our God stands forever.

I noted at the beginning of last week's sermon what a blessing and how refreshing it was, and I imagine in my own mind that- that it was so for Titus, that as he, in his personal reading and then in the reading of this letter to First RP church of Crete, that when he got to that moment where the glories of the gospel were expounded and highlighted and told "think about these things, focus on these things," it had to be refreshing for him. But then in 9 through 11 we learn that neither Titus nor we catch a break, that wherever the truth of God is there is light and that highlights the darkness of human hearts and confrontation ensues. So my main point that I want to encourage you in today is to focus on the gospel. Focus on the gospel and reject THAT and THOSE who don't. Focus on the gospel and reject THAT (those things that don't) and those people who don't. In verses 3 through 8 we see this gospel highlighted and expounded. And that's our first point today: to focus constantly on the gospel and its fruits. We see in those verses effectual calling. We see the sin and misery in which we live, FROM which we are called. We even recall the descent of Adam and Eve into that estate as we saw the progression of it, going from near heavenly bliss, heaven on earth as it were, to the accusation and the condemnation and trying to cover their sin with their own means. And in that effectual call, remembering the regeneration of our hearts and our souls as the Spirit works in us the gospel. And the consequent justification, that right standing that we are given before God, being declared righteous and pardoned from all of our sins and being accepted as righteous in His sight. That other legal act of adoption whereby we are received into the number and given all of the rights and privileges of the sons of God. And then that ongoing work of God's free grace whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God and are enabled more and more to die unto sin and live unto righteousness, that

sanctification that is happening now in our lives as we are being prepared for eternity with Him. And that ultimate glorification that begins for us at death as our souls passed immediately into His presence and our bodies wait, our bodies wait for that final judgment day when we will stand before God complete. Brothers and sisters, these are glorious truths. These are the points that stand in contrast to and ultimately overcome the world, that Jesus Christ saves sinners and to do that He came as the scriptures tell us, He died as the scriptures tell us, He was buried as the scriptures tell us, He was raised again as the scriptures tell us, He ascended on high as the scriptures tell us, and He is seated in glory and majesty at the right hand of the Father. And while we do not yet see all things perfectly in subjection to Him, it is coming. And this is not just a cosmic truth, it is a personal truth. The gospel is something that God is working out in the universe and so, consequently, it is working out in hearts of men and women and boys and girls, as well. And brothers and sisters, this is what we are to constantly focus on, is this good news AND its fruits in us. As the gospel is worked out change will come. We WILL be made more like our Savior Jesus Christ. We will learn and be enabled more and more to die to sin. The Christian life, as glorious as it is, part of that glory is it is a life of death, constantly dying to ourselves and our sinful desires and those things that would lead us astray and lead us away from the truth and glory of Jesus Christ. We must focus constantly on the gospel and its fruits. And as we move into verses 9 through 11 then, a contrast is set up. If we're to focus constantly on the gospel and its fruits, what does it mean for those things that are not focusing us on the gospel and on its fruits in our lives?

Well, secondly, if firstly we're to focus constantly on the gospel and its fruits, number two, but avoid those things which bear no fruit or bitter fruit. Because the reality is, just like you've perhaps heard it said that in any relationship you're either growing closer together or farther apart, there's no just kind of coasting on each rail of the train track where you're neither working at it or working against it but you just kind of stay in this kind of magnetic field of equal distance from one another. That's not how it is, you're either growing closer together or your growing farther apart, and brothers and sisters, we are plants. We are either wheat or we are tares and we ARE bearing fruit. We should be concerned when we self-examine and think, "Boy, I haven't been bearing much rice-- righteous fruit lately," because what that means is, not that you haven't been bearing any fruit, you've been bearing the wrong kind of fruit. So we're to avoid those things which bear no fruit or bitter fruit. I'm-- avoid them because they're unprofitable and useless. This IS an imperative. In the Greek this is in the imperative sense. We MUST obey this. We MUST do this.

And three things are laid out for us that we are to avoid, all of them being labeled foolishness. Genealogies. What happens is that we don't learn the glories of the doctrine and practice from those who have gone before us. In other words, we- we should see how the blood of Christ is lined through them rather than worrying about the bloodlines. I have a dear friend who is a Presbyterian minister and he can trace his line back to William Wallace. And that's fun, but he knows at the end of the day it does him no good, he's no more free than anybody else just because his ancestor (at least according to the portrayal) yelled, "freedom" as he was disemboweled that day. We see this from the genealogy of Jesus Himself. Those who were privileged to be of the physical seed line were not always or necessarily of the spiritual seed line. We see this in the fact that Jesus is the lion of the tribe of Judah. But Judah was busy abusing Tamar while it was Joseph who is denying Potiphar's wife. Go back and review those two chapters, as they come in sequence. There is a stark contrast between the one who was the physical seed line of Christ and the one who was the Christ type, who is the spiritual seed line in that story.

What else are we to avoid? We're to avoid contentions. Now there's no specificity here, I mean genealogies are genealogies, we know what- what that is. We brag about the bloodline, we brag about who we're related to, etc. etc. But contentions, there's no real specificity in this. But I would propose to

you today, a general question that should apply to your conversation within the body of Christ. And this- this takes wisdom to answer and to apply and to interact with, and that is this: does talking about THIS at THIS time in THIS way with THIS person help me to grow in my appreciation for the gospel things outlined in verses 3 through 8. This subject at this time in this way with this person, does it help me in joy and delight in and focus on the gospel of Jesus Christ. If it doesn't, I have some words of advice for you. You might want to make sure you have your pen and paper ready and write this down in case you want to go back and reflect on it later. Stop it! Stop it! If talking about that subject at that time in that way with that person is not engendering in you a glory and delight and the love for the gospel of Jesus Christ, then stop it. Don't press on any further. Now I'm not saying that there aren't things that we shouldn't talk about, but it's not just the subject matter. It's the timing of the subject matter, it's the way that the subject matter is discussed, and sometimes it's just the person that you're discussing it with that need to be altered so that the discussion of that subject can give you a greater appreciation for the gospel and even how that subject fits in the gospel. So this isn't just a- a rule now where, "Well, Pastor Joel said I don't have to talk about this." No, I want you to be-- to guard how you talk about it when you talk about it who you talk about it with because we don't want just needless contentions. Whenever there's a contest somebody has to win. That's the point of contests. And when we make doctrine a contest we cease being disciplers and disciples and we start being gladiators and that's not the life that we're called to.

Arguments about the law. Obviously we don't mean just talking about the law or figuring out the uses of the law and how they apply in our contemporary context, but here Paul is laying out the matter of using the law as a pretext for conflict, for catching someone else, which ultimately leads to control and manipulation. We hear echoed in Paul's disdain for these moments, we- we almost see the life of Christ before us as He was on this earth. Christ was engaged in this ongoing game of whack-a-mole in His ministry. A Pharisee would pop up here and He'd bop 'em on the head and they'd go down and a Sadducee would pop up over here and He'd whack him on the head and a scribe would pop up here and it was constantly they were-- and we see why, in the gospel of Mark, they decided early on that He had to die and they were going to stop at nothing and it was a constant game. "Oh, oh here's this law." And as these men sat in the synagogue week after week, they were no longer listening to the reading of the Torah for the purpose of sanctification and blessing in their walk with God. They were now listening to it to find that hook to catch Jesus because He had to go. These are the same temptations that we can be tempted with. But we're not to argue about the law in a foolish way. We're not to use the text as a pretext to abuse others with. In Second Timothy 2, Paul adds another little *umph* to it. He says, but avoid foolish and unlearned debates. That should cause you to delete your Facebook account right now. We might just pause so everybody can pull out their smartphone and get on Facebook and kill it. Avoid foolish and unlearned debates. Why? Knowing that they create strife. See, you're never gonna reach the end of the argument where everybody says, "well, I'm glad that's over," because it just creates more strife. Strife upon strife upon strife. But Paul, as he was counseling this young minister, he knew that these strifes don't create themselves. In fact, he knew that it does no good to confront behavior as if it's an abstract thing that operates on its own, and so he takes it to its conclusion.

Thirdly, avoid divisive people. See, all of this doesn't just happen on its own. You don't walk into a room where there is- is unlearned and foolish debate and discussion going on and there's nobody there. And so, as we consider these things and as we consider stopping these things we must consider stopping people, whether it be ourselves or others. I'm- I'm trying to be nice. Number three, I said, was avoid divisive people. Paul says, "reject a divisive man." Why? He wraps together three issues here. First of all, he's perverted. He's perverted. I know this may be hard to imagine but some people actually find it to be a good time to simply frustrate the faith of those around them with peculiar doctrines, practices, or just stirring the pot. Why? "Because I can." Some people just take great joy in bringing

strife and conflict with them where ever they go. It's like they have a backpack of the stuff and they're just more than happy to pull some out and lob it in your direction. They're perverted. They are distorted in what they take joy and delight in. Secondly, Paul says, this one is sinning. It's sin. It's not just how someone is wired or how they process, it's not fun or cute, it's sin to do these things. And thirdly, this person is self-condemned. Yes, they're condemned in their own conscience, as they know by the conviction of the Holy Spirit that what they are doing is not right, but there is also another experiential out working of this type of person who does these kinds of things that has been painful to watch over the years. There are those who are constantly questioning (I believe it was Calvin who called them the questionnaires) who are NEVER satisfied with any spiritual conclusion or activity. Their battle cry seems to be, "yeah, but...!" and they charge headlong into the fray. Nothing is ever good enough. Nothing is ever acceptable. This isn't the Berean spirit that searches the scriptures to verify that what is said is true. These folks aren't looking for truth. They're not looking for good. They're not looking for the right. They're looking for reasons to complain, to gossip, to slander, to slight, and ultimately to impose their spiritual superiority over others. They are indeed heretics. They don't just hold to alternative views, they shipwreck the faith of others, sadly, as their own cutter glides right into the rocks. Because here's the sadness of it; here's the issue. With extra biblical standards and personal spiritual superiority over others is that you can't keep up, even and especially, you yourself can't keep up with the standards that you impose on other people. Eventually, even those touting them crack under the very pressure that they seek to create for others. And as humility has NOT been part of their arsenal they, rather than make a forgiveness and repentance transaction, they either shut up or they stop showing up. They break. They implode inside, burned up by guilt and failure. And I would offer a, what you hopefully see as a loving word of warning about those who refuse to participate in forgiveness. Those who will confront you on something and if you say, "I am sorry about that," they might say, "I don't want an apology, I just want to make you aware of what you did and what went on." Be very wary of those who refuse to hear an apology, a confession, and refuse to grant forgiveness.

First Timothy 1. Paul tells another young minister, "[\[1 Timothy 1:18-20\]](#) *This command I commit to you, my son Timothy, according to the prophecies that were previously given to you, that by them you might fight a good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.*" Brothers and sisters, these men rejected not only the faith but also a good conscience. You might remember the comments I made while reading through Corinthians, that it's okay to stop asking questions sometimes. It's okay say, "the Lord has brought me thus far and let me work this out before I press on and on and on in a way that destroys my family or destroys my friendships or even destroys me." So what should our response be to these? What should our response be? Paul seems to say give them a fair shake and if they don't turn it around, shake them on out of the tree. "*Reject a divisive man after a first and second admonition.*" That word "admonition" there is the noun form of the verb that's become well known in biblical counseling $\nu\omicron\theta\epsilon\tau\acute{\epsilon}\omega$ from which we get the anglicized word "nouthetic." We're talking here of confronting, of admonishing, of rebuking, giving the truth to them so that they might change. This isn't just, "Hey, by the way, this is what you're doing," it's, "Hey, by the way, this is what you're doing and you need to stop it or I am done with you." That's what Paul is calling us to. Change is the goal and if they don't change or won't change, let them go. Let them go. Reject them. Because I will tell you that no good comes from keeping them around. It may be blatant heresy or it may be less obvious but don't let them control you, don't let them focus you on the unprofitable and useless things. Focus on the gospel and its fruits in your lives.

That is our fourth point. Don't enable the ongoing spiritual hurt of yourself or others. Know this, if someone is doing it to you, they are doing it to someone else, too. Paul says, the Holy Spirit says, reject

them. Give them a fair hearing. Confront them once, twice, if you're super nice, three times a maybe. But reject them if they will not change. If they constantly want to focus on things in a way that brings no fruit, or bitter fruit that brings shipwreck, that brings manipulation and control of others by their personal spiritual standards, whatever the case might be, if they will not change, if they do not change, reject them. But the good news is in this text, Paul hasn't just given us a negative to accomplish. He calls on us to focus on the gospel and its fruits, to focus on all those good things that effectual calling out of that sin and misery in which we had no hope, in which we deserved the worst day and the worst death and hell forever after that and he calls us to glory and bask in our regeneration, our justification, our sanctification, our adoption, and someday our glorification. Brothers and sisters, we want to be clear as well, even as we read in Colossians, that this rejection does not mean NO activity toward that person. We're to pray for them. We are to ultimately love them even if it is from afar. We are to have the greatest hope that the gospel that they claim to believe will ultimately save them and sanctified and move them into joyful gospel-focused living and fruitfulness. Focus on the gospel and its fruits and reject that and those who don't.

Stand with me as we pray.