

Profitable and Unprofitable Conversation

Call to Worship: Psalm 84

1st Scripture: 1 Timothy 1:1-11

2nd Scripture: Titus 3:1-11

Hymn #681- *I Will Sing of My Redeemer*

Hymn Insert- *Before the Throne of God Above*

Hymn Insert- *O Church Arise*

Introduction

While exhorting the brethren at Crete to be subject to their governing authorities, Paul moved on to further address the general disposition that they ought to have toward all people, “speaking evil of no one, being peaceable, gentle and showing all humility to all men.” And he followed this imperative command with the indicative motivation of reminding the brethren that they too were once as lost as the rest of the world, until God by His own grace and kindness, regenerated, redeemed and saved them unto the future hope to which they now look.

This morning then, we will find Paul exhorting Titus to continually affirm these glorious, indicative truths to the Cretans, in contrast to the unprofitable and useless disputes that were making their rounds throughout the church. And it is here then, that we will find, yet again, that encouragement to foster edifying, godly conversation in the church, which is profitable unto our Christian growth, while putting away useless and vain chatter, which does nothing, whatsoever, to aid in our growth in grace.

I. Cultivating Profitable Conversation (vs. 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.”

Now, when Paul states here, “This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly,” he is referencing the statement that he has just made, prior to this (as the ‘faithful saying’), and while the things that he wants Titus to affirm constantly can potentially look back to all that has been said in the letter so far, they are especially to be identified with the command that he has just given and the indicative that motivates the keeping of the command.

Now, the word “that” which follows this statement is what’s called a “hina” clause, which in the Greek points us to a purpose or a result. And so, the beginning of verse 8, could then best be understood this way: “This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, (in order or so) that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. This is important, so that we can pinpoint the “faithful saying” that Paul is referencing, as that which precedes this statement, and not that which follows the word “that.” In other words, “that those who believe in God should be careful to maintain good works” is not the faithful saying itself, but rather, it is the end result or the desired outcome of Titus constantly reiterating the faithful saying, given prior to verse 8. And that’s why he finished verse 8 by saying, “These things are good and profitable to men,” showing that what Paul has stated prior to this, is useful to the Holy Spirit, in producing good works by the people of God. And, we will see in a moment how this contrasts the foolish disputes over genealogies and strivings about the law, which do nothing, whatsoever, to profit the people of God, and in fact, cause unnecessary divisions.

That said, let us then break down the whole verse. “This is a faithful saying...” What then is the faithful saying that Paul wants Titus to continually come back to and highlight and expound? It is the summation of verses 4-7: “But when the kindness and the 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, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” And so, the “faithful saying” involves reminding us of where we once were (lost and dead in sin, like the rest of the world), of how we have been transferred to where we now are (the goodness and kindness of our Triune God, which rescued us out of our lost, dead state, and brought us alive into His grace), and the hope of eternal life to which we now look, and anticipate, given us by means of the free justification that we have been graciously given in Christ. The reality of all that God has freely done for us, in Christ, is the “faithful saying,” about which, Paul here speaks.

“This is a faithful saying, *and these things I want you to affirm constantly...*” What then are the “theses things,” which Paul wants Timothy to affirm constantly? Well, again, while all of

the content of this letter could be included in this statement, he is especially speaking about the “faithful saying” itself, as well as, the imperative command that the saying should motivate us to keep. In other words, Paul exhorts Titus to remind the Cretans of where they once were, and how they have come to where they now are, all by the free course of God’s kindness and grace, and to continually command them to strive, “to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men.”

This is to be a constant theme; an ongoing emphasis of Titus’s instruction to the Cretans; both the imperative command, and the indicative motivation. Why? Because such an obedient and humble disposition is becoming and revealing of the type of Christianity that Christ calls for. And that’s why Paul adds the “hina” clause. He states, as it were, “Titus, reiterate these things constantly, *so that*, “those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works.” [Note again, the connection to verse 1-2: “...to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, *to be ready for every good work*, to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men.”]

Now brethren, let me add something important here, about the statement Paul makes in the second part of verse 8. First, note that when Paul adds, “that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works,” the word “in” is not there in the Greek. The verse literally states, “that those who have *believed God* should be careful to maintain good works.” And the idea being conveyed here, is that, as we are reminded about all that God has freely done for us in Christ, if we truly believe what God has said, concerning all that He has done in our salvation (and that, the whole package of it, is no thanks to us or any works of righteousness that we have done), then truly believing what God has said, will most definitely provide us with all that we need to obey the imperative here given, driving us to not simply *do*, but to *maintain* (as a pattern) good works. And so, if we still find it impossible to obey these commands, in any consistent fashion, then Paul is saying that we are showing that we don’t really believe God. In other words, in some way, we deem ourselves self-righteous, and as having merited some portion of our salvation. It is not wholly a work of God. We don’t believe Him. Do you see that? And that is extremely important to understand, brethren. If we cannot adopt and maintain a general

demeanor of compassion toward all (toward even the worst of sinners), then we exhibit the fact that we don't believe what God has said about all that He has done, in saving us. Now, this strikes right at the heart of attempting to blame the sins of others for our unwillingness to show them grace and compassion, exposing rather that we simply don't believe God, concerning the total work of grace that He has done in us. That is a gross sin of unbelief, which needs to be repented of, immediately, if we are true children of God. [Ex: If we don't forgive others, God will not forgive us; the parable of the man who was forgiven much, but would not forgive little]

And so, recognizing the power of God's truth, which alone, can change our hearts, Paul then states, "These things are good and profitable to men." "Titus, reiterate these things constantly; remind them of these things, so that they never forget, because these truths are good and profitable. They can produce the change that is needed in their hearts. With the accompaniment of the Holy Spirit's work, they will bring conviction and change. The truth of what God has done for us, freely in Christ, will produce obedience in His true sheep."

Contrary to this, and in keeping with the false teachers who have been infiltrating the church, Paul also charges Titus, all the more, to reject and deal appropriately with the useless doctrines that are unprofitable for God's people, and which ultimately cause division.

II. Avoiding Unprofitable Conversation (vs. 9-11)

"But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they 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" (vs. 9-11).

In our studies of 1 and 2 Timothy, we had seen that these kinds of foolish disputes over genealogies and misuses of the law were a significant problem which was disrupting and threatening the unity of the church. Debates over issues related to genealogical connections and man-made laws were distracting the brethren with unprofitable, non-sanctifying laws, which were not only useless in themselves, but also served to take their minds off of pursuing those doctrines which would truly benefit their souls unto godliness and Christlikeness (such as the things that we went over in verses 1-7). [Example: 1 Timothy 4:1-5: forbidding marriage and from eating certain foods...etc.].

We saw this abuse in our first Scripture reading in 1 Timothy, but let me just mention two other texts from 2 Timothy and Titus.

2 Timothy 2:22-26- “Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.”

Titus 1:13b-15- “Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth. To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled.”

And so, Paul commands Titus here, to avoid foolish disputes, dealing with genealogies, contentions and striving about man-made laws, all of which, do absolutely nothing to profit the wellbeing of the soul, and in fact, hinder us from seeking to benefit from those doctrines that are indeed of God, and therefore, profitable.

And finally, Paul gives Titus further instructions, addressing what to do with those who cause divisions in the church, especially by (but not limited to) initiating controversies over such useless disputes. In verse 10, he adds, “Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.”

One who is divisive; one who disturbs the unity and peace of the church, which is called for in Christ, being a hindrance to the gospel and the church’s progress, is to be given two admonitions (two warnings and rebukes); they are to be instructed, in love, about the danger of what they are doing, and if they still persist in their sinful ways, they are to be rejected. They are to be put out, knowing that such a person, hardened and unwilling to be corrected is warped, sinning and self-condemned. By their anti-Christian, unity disrupting actions, they actually show themselves to be self-condemned (pretty sobering and frightening words!).

And so, ultimately, God uses the proclamation of His true doctrine to change, mold and shape His people unto Christ likeness. But, those who contradict or distract with useless,

contentious disputes, after being admonished/warned twice, are to be rejected and put out. Such will preserve the unity of the Spirit, while enabling God's profitable, gospel-centered truths to be cultivated freely throughout the church body.

III. Closing Thoughts and Applications

1) Recognize that there is, indeed, profitable and unprofitable conversation, which can promote unity and growth or division and corruption. What we say, and what we speak matters, because God has chosen to use *words* to be a primary means of influencing others, positively or negatively.

Recall, that in Ephesians 4:29, we are told, "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers." You see, what we speak matters. Our words can corrupt or they can edify and be a useful means of grace in the lives of others. And interestingly enough, Paul follows this up in verse 30, with these words: "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." Thoughtless, contentious, corruptive speech, which causes division, grieves the Holy Spirit of God.

Now brethren, this is important, because it compels us to recognize that we must guard our words, and that, we must think before we speak. And that is not a common practice in our culture and society. People are encouraged, and think that it is perfectly fine, to simply "speak what is in their hearts," but that is a recipe for pouring sewage into the ocean of communication. We can't trust our own hearts. And, even as Christians, we have to bring our thoughts to the Word of God, so as to examine whether what we might say is God glorifying, edifying and profitable. We have to give attention to our words. [Note: James- "Be slow to speak..."]

And so, brethren, let us be a people who stand out in the world, by being a people who strive to speak what is edifying and profitable to others; words that will truly benefit others...beginning in the fellowship of the church. Let us cultivate Christ exalting speech; gospel conversation, which is the answer to all that is needed, at the corporate level, and the individual level. Let us make much of Christ and Christ crucified, and how that relates to needy sinners, using Paul's indicative model, here given in the text. Let us avoid trifling with and debating over

trivial issues, while investing most of our words in this general direction, “But when the kindness and the 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, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” And when dealing with the unbeliever, let us present the gospel, herein presumed, as their greatest and most desperate need, which God will freely meet, in Christ, if they but come to Him in faith and repentance!

The gospel!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25