

THE COMPASS

Titus 3:9-15

We are in the final portion of the text in the book of Titus. We have been studying this book along with our theme that reminds us of going on a journey – “A Church That’s Going Places”. It is written by the apostle Paul to Titus, a younger pastor and disciple of Paul, instructing him how to go about organizing and instructing these undeveloped churches on the island of Crete. There were several gatherings of believers on the island but they needed some apostolic instruction to learn how to line themselves up with God’s active and be **useful** to Him. God is actively carrying out His will and wants them in on it – Him working through them.

If they were going to get with **God’s plan**, they had to take **the first step** and appoint elders. These elders would then have to deal with **some roadblocks**, the false teachers infiltrating churches with false gospels. Then we read about how as we’re on this great journey we’ve got bumper stickers on our backs that read “How’s My Driving?” – we want to honor and adorn the gospel by living it out. **Next**, we looked at **the roadmap**. We zoomed out from our journey and Paul gave a glimpse of this journey from beginning to end and how God is redeeming and purifying a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. And our motivation for those good deeds is His love for us and the power is from His Holy Spirit whom He richly poured out on us. Then we studied **the intersections** and what it should look like for people who are saved by grace to intersect with society – we treat others with grace. Lastly, we want to look at **the compass**. The book doesn’t end with a finish line. I think more than anything it ends with a compass because we’re still in progress. We’re still on this journey. Paul has been teaching us sound doctrine and sound living throughout this book and as he comes to a close, he reminds us not to get distracted from that – **to stay the course**. There were some things going on that he didn’t want them to get off course with and as we’ll see, want us to help those who are off course, to get on course. So let’s go ahead and read our passage.

So again, when we read this last bit through the lens of going on a journey, it’s like he’s saying, “Keep your eyes on the compass and stay on track.” There’s a lot of things when you’re traveling that you can get sidetracked by. But one the first things we see that Paul warns us not to get off track on is with the teachings of the false teachers.

I. **AVOID GETTING SIDETRACKED WITH USELESS TEACHINGS (V. 9)**

Paul just got done in this letter explaining sound doctrine and sound living. He just finished talking about how we were not saved by our own work. Through a really long statement, he explained that we were saved by God’s kindness, love, mercy and grace through Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. He said this is a **trustworthy statement** and to **speak confidently** about it. It is a statement that is **good** and **profitable** for men. It’s **useful** for us. It’s truth we need to know. It’s a statement that comforts. It’s edifies us and helps us understand God’s work. It keeps us from being proud. It enhances our praise. It creates in us a love and desire to serve Him. There’s so much that is contained in that trustworthy statement that we looked at last week that is profitable for us.

And now he contrasts that summary statement of his teaching with what the false teachers were teaching that were **not useful** or helpful. They didn’t help, they actually harm. He says, “But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law, for they are **unprofitable** and **worthless**.” One of the things we know about the religious climate in Crete is that there were false Jewish teachers trying to corrupt the churches with their get-rich-quick false

teaching. It sounds like the island was just overrun with religious men claiming to be from God or “having a word from God” and some were only in it for the money. They had no idea what they were talking about, were not handling the Word of God carefully and with integrity so that the people could understand it and be set free from sin. Jesus came to set captives free but they were enslaving people further. This is one of the reasons why Paul said to appoint elders who would “**hold fast to the faithful word** which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able to both exhort in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict. For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and **deceivers**, especially **those of the circumcision** who are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain” (1:9-11).

There were many people being upset by these teachers with their legalistic teachings that were keeping people from freedom. He mentioned the “**those of the circumcision**” – a group we are familiar with from Galatians called Judaizers – a group Paul seemed to highlight often and deal with on a regular basis. **Legalism** is a broad term we should all be familiar with which basically defines any religion other than true Christianity – teaching that the way to get right with God was **by man’s performance** of religious works, good works and rituals, instead of grace. Instead of saying that Christ did all the work and we simply trust in Him, they point men back to themselves and to trust their own performance. Legalists often put a lot of pressure on people to get right with God through self-effort and man-made teachings or Scriptures taken out of context – especially out of the Law.

They might say, “This is the way to God and to godliness!” but because they deny grace, they only alienate man further from God and enslave him, rather than freeing him. These are the guys mentioned in 2 Timothy 3:5 who had a form of godliness but were denying its power. And as we’ve been studying in Titus, **the power is in the gospel of God’s grace**. They denied grace and therefore, grace’s power to transform lives. It is His affection for us (His giving of Himself) that give us new and loving affections for Him. I’m glad I don’t have to stand up here and try to convince you to do something that you don’t want to do like good deeds. That’s the gospel changes us. It creates in you a love for Him and a desire to serve Him. You’ll begin seeking His will and how He can do His will through you.

But Paul here summarizes the content of their teachings in verse 9 that we are to **avoid**, or **shun**.

A. Foolish controversies:

Apparently these guys, instead of making the Word of God clear for people to understand, just liked to talk about controversial things and to argue about them. 2 Timothy 2(16, 23) describes their typical talk as foolish and ignorant speculations. It sounds like they just liked to debate and wrangle over controversial ideas and philosophies. And that kind of talk isn’t healthy. It’s not what God wants a church to focus on. Many younger believers like to argue about controversial things. They find some sort of entertainment in it or ego boosting sensation. It’s not healthy or attractive. I heard one pastor say he had a lot of young guys in church who were serious about the Lord and loved the Lord but he wouldn’t ask them to lead much because they liked to argue over controversial things. God wants us discussing the solid biblical truths of God’s Word.

B. Genealogies:

They majored in the genealogies. A genealogy is just a pedigree or family lineage like what is listed in Matthew 1: there we can trace Christ all the way back to Abraham. And that’s critical for prophecy being fulfilled and knowing Jesus is the seed promised to Abraham.

But these false teachers were obsessed with finding weird and fanciful, allegorical interpretations in them. Jewish literature was filled with myths and fables and mystical numerology – they would assign certain numbers to letters and make strange interpretations out of it. On top of that, they likely taught that if you were connected to Abraham or someone in it you were more spiritual. It had nothing to do with sound doctrine or sound living, so Paul says avoid it. It's useless. In 1 Timothy 1:3 Paul said to Timothy, "Instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith."

C. **Strife and Disputes about the Law**

It's clear that a lot of these guys wanted to be teachers of **the Law of Moses**. The Law of Moses, referring to the first five books of the Bible called the **Pentateuch** or maybe more precisely the collection of commands and instructions for the nation of Israel that God gave Moses on Mt. Sinai with the ceremonies and sacrificial system. But these guys didn't understand the purpose of the Law, which was to show us our sin and point us to Christ. Instead of using the Law to point folks to Christ, they were using it to take away from Christ. So they were really missing the big picture of Christ and struggled to let go of the Law and embrace Christ completely. In 1 Timothy 1:7, Paul said these guys are "wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions." So even though God's program had dramatically shifted and we're not under Law, but under grace – these guys are still picking the Law apart trying to find certain rituals and ceremonies and commands for people to keep to be saved like circumcision. Again, it's worthless. We're under grace.

Verse 9 says don't get distracted. Focus on God's grace in Christ. "Keep the main thing (the gospel), the main thing." Preach and teach the gospel every day because that's what people need. That's how we stay on track.

The second main point is that he tells us to avoid getting sidetracked with divisive people.

II. **AVOID GETTING SIDETRACKED WITH DIVISIVE PEOPLE (VV. 10-11)**

"Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned." After studying the content of these false teachers' teaching, it's clear that these guys were **factious**, meaning they were divisive. And Paul's disciplinary instruction is very similar to what Jesus taught in Matthew 18:15-18 – Basically, if someone comes along, stirring up division between the body of Christ like this, and especially with false teaching or over things that don't matter, warn them. And after a first and second warning, and if they still continue on with it, the elders would then be responsible to **reject** or excommunicate the individual and have nothing to do with him. We are actually to cease to associate with them. Not listen to their teaching.

And that sounds harsh, especially after what we looked at last week – how we are to treat all men with love and grace and mercy and kindness. But **one thing to keep in mind** is when you read this stuff on church discipline is you need to **think restoration**.

❖ **In church discipline, think restoration.**

Don't think of an old west movie where one cowboy throws another outside through swinging doors. That's not what it looks like. The confrontation is done by elders who are gentle and peaceable people, genuinely seeking the individual's spiritual restoration. In Galatians 6:1, in the

context of legalistic teaching, Paul said, “You who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness.” In 2 Timothy 2:24, same context, Paul said to Timothy, “The Lord’s bondservant must not be quarrelsome, but kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if **perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth**, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive to do his will.” That’s what we’re talking about here. Through the confrontation and excommunication, the hope is that the individual will repent and be restored.

But a second thing to keep in mind is the damaging effect of legalism on the church.

A. It destroys lives.

To get sucked into the performance-based mindset of legalism is to be a slave to the flesh and not the Spirit. It keeps people religious, but keeps them from being truly spiritual. It’s ruins peoples’ relationship with God and with each other because it puts on ladders and we start comparing ourselves with each other. You remember how Paul described the effect in Galatians? It caused them to devour one another, to become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another. It causes things like divisions, strife, disputes and dissensions, factions. That sort of thing really messes people up and they take that home with them and it begins to destroy families. It makes people angry, critical, proud, and hypocritical. At a recent counseling conference I heard the perfect description of a heart wrapped up in legalism: Anger, criticism, high expectations, controlling, rejecting others, pride and hypocrisy. This is what he called “The Turbocharger”. Now, **there’s a lot of unresolved issues that can help make up a turbocharger heart, but legalism is definitely one**. And a parent with a turbocharger heart can wreck an entire family. If you have a turbocharger heart, you need to get rid of it. Repent of it and seek some help to find out what’s causing it.

B. It destroys the unity of the church.

God is serious about the unity within the church. The church is to be a place where the typically divisive social barriers like race and gender and financial status have been leveled at the foot of the cross. Where we’re all one in Christ and all have the goal of knowing Him more through His Word and experiencing Him. God loves that. That’s part of His redeeming plan. So imagine how He sees it when someone is destroying that unity. 1 Corinthians 3 describes the local church as the temple of God (the individual is described that way too – 6:19) and if anyone destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy and that is what we are. Those are frightening words. We should be serious about unity but obviously, not at the expense of sound doctrine. In Ephesians Paul said be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of faith – and sometimes, being diligent means rejecting one person who won’t cease trying to destroy the unity.

C. It destroys the witness of the church.

We’ve been talking about how important it is for us to live out the gospel before a watching world but if a church lets a factious person come in and destroy the unity of the church over things that don’t matter or over things that are clearly not sound, how’s that going to look? People don’t want to be a part of that and it sort of dims the beacon of light that the Church is supposed to be shining. In John 17 Jesus prayed to the Father that we would be perfect in unity **so that the world would know** Jesus Christ is One that was sent. The unity of a church is a witness to the world that He is the Savior they need.

So you can see why after being warned a couple times not to create factions, the factious man would be considered **perverted(warped/corrupt)** and **sinning** and even **self-condemned**. After the warning, he knows what he is doing is wrong but keeps doing it.

III. **STAY ON TRACK WITH THAT WHICH IS USEFUL. (VV. 12-15)**

As Paul finishes the letter, he has some ministry concerns that provide opportunities for people to do **good** and **useful deeds**. “When I send Artemas or Tychichus to you, make every effort to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to winter there.” Paul was sending Artemas and Tychichus to replace Titus it seems, and then the hope was that Titus, having laid a good foundation in Crete for his successors, would meet up with Paul again in Nicopolis. **Tychicus** is mentioned a few times in the NT and he is considered a faithful and beloved servant of the Lord. He helped Paul and traveled with him. We don’t know much about **Artemas** but he was clearly qualified to lead according to Paul and according to his name he was probably Greek – Artemas could be the masculine form of Artemis, the pagan fertility goddess. That may tell us a little about his parents anyway.

There were a few cities with the name **Nicopolis**, so we can’t know for sure which one he meant but most think it was this one on the west coast of Greece. It would have been a strategic city to reach and to send letters and also to be able to catch a quick ship to Rome. Paul always had dreams to keep reaching the westward frontier where no one had heard the good news yet.

Verse 13: “Diligently help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way so that nothing is lacking for them.” So Zenas and Apollos may have been the ones who delivered this letter to Titus and Paul wanted to make sure that they were amply supplied for their needs to keep ministering. What we know about **Apollos** is that he was a gifted speaker and evangelist and was mighty in the Scriptures. **Zenas** we don’t know much about. His name was Greek, meaning Zeus-given. Titus was to see that they lacked nothing. This was a way Titus could engage in good deeds and provide opportunities for others to get involved in supporting them as well. What we’re seeing in the closing of this letter is Paul emphasizing the good deeds by encouraging mutual support and care for each other. We do the same thing basically when we support missionaries.

❖ **Mutual support and care for fellow servants of the Lord.**

Now we finally get to our theme verse in **Verse 14:** “Our people must also learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs so that they will not be unfruitful.” I like how he says, “**Our people**” because we’re a family – God’s people who should stand out. The apostle says we **must learn** to engage in good deeds – not *should* learn but *must* learn. The world has trained us to be self-centered, self-focused people and we have to retrain ourselves to God’s interests, God’s will and God’s purposes – and when He reveals that to us, to **engage** in that. Engage is an active word. We are to be *actively* helping and giving aid to **pressing needs**. As we look around, there are many pressing needs and the Church is commissioned to glorify God through meeting those needs as He leads us to. And the only way we’ll get to know those needs and deeds He wants us involved in is when have a living and surrendered relationship with Him. He’ll speak to us through His Word, through the church, through prayer, through the Spirit of God and through circumstances. And I’m excited to see what good deeds the Lord has for us. Be aware and be thinking of how God wants to work through us in Chadron and elsewhere. How He wants to work through you in this church body – where He may be molding you and shaping you to serve in a certain area. Where you will be **fruitful** – **productive** and **useful**. That’s who we want to be.

One of the images I think of when I think of the difference between a church that is on track and fruitful and one that is sidetracked and unfruitful is the difference between the **Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee**. The Dead Sea is lower in elevation, taking in and taking in, but it never gives water back out so it is stagnant. And I'm not saying we're one of them, because we have a lot of folks serving in this church and growing and I love this church because of that. I can't thank enough people for all they do. But there's a lot of sidetracked churches who are like the Dead Sea. There is no life in the Dead Sea. But the Sea of Galilee gives out water. It takes in fresh water and gives out and because of that it is teeming with life. One things I don't want you to get from this is that you have to be some big church or be significant in the world's eyes. The Sea of Galilee is much smaller than the Dead Sea. A church doesn't have to be big to be significant and productive. I just think it's a good reminder to take in God's Word and being balanced, also reaching out and serving.

He finishes the letter saying, "All who are with me greet you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all." It's by God's grace that we will apply this incredible little letter of Titus. One of things that has been really interesting is just seeing the different ways Paul used the words **good deeds**. And how the Lord has been leading us as a church board. So for the next couple weeks or few weeks, I want to go over the ways Paul has used this term and try to help us learn more about being fruitful in good deeds. It'll be kind of side series of Titus into spiritual gifts before we open up a new book.