

How Should the Church Respond to the Truth?

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We have spent the past several weeks looking at a passage from Titus chapter 3 and we are going to go back to Titus 3 this morning but we're going to move on in the text. We spent the past month basically looking at Titus chapter 3 verses 4 through 7 and I want to remind you of that glorious, glorious text of the Lord's work in salvation as the prelude to verses 8 through 11 which we're going to consider this morning. You remember from verse 3 that we were foolish, the Bible says, "disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another." As we've been singing about all morning, the Lord broke into the situation, the Lord Jesus Christ appeared. Verse 4, "But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

If you've been with us as we've unpacked those verses over the past three weeks or so, you know that contained in those four verses, verses 4 through 7, is just an astonishing kaleidoscope of mercy, goodness and love that's been displayed to us in our salvation. The Lord Jesus Christ came to redeem us from our sins. The kindness of God our Savior appeared in our lives personally when the Holy Spirit came on us with power and opened our hearts and minds to understand the Gospel and so worked in our hearts that we put our faith in Christ for salvation. At that very moment, in an instantaneous act, God declared us righteous. He forgave all of our sins and assigned to our account the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ so that all of our sins are forgiven, that we are completely righteous in the sight of God even though we are walking through this world being conformed to his image and that we are now heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The hope of heaven belongs to us. There is a spot in heaven reserved for you and for me that know our Lord Jesus Christ. This is what's coming. We have been wondrously and gloriously saved. There has been such mercy showered upon us. There has been such goodness bestowed on our souls that is going to echo throughout all of eternity, that we have been utterly transformed and we have been utterly delivered from that realm of darkness in which we once lived, the darkness that once dominated our hearts. We have been transferred into a completely different kingdom, a completely different realm and God has shown mercy to us already and he's only just begun. We are so greatly blessed

by the goodness and mercy and the love and the kindness of God, those of us that are Christians, to try to put our minds around the fullness of it is impossible to our finite sinful minds. Eternity won't be long enough for us to rejoice and enjoy the fullness of salvation that God has given to us. This is something that utterly transcends the world, that goes beyond our present existence and we look to the future when we will be with Christ and honor him and glorify him and love him forever. That is the Gospel. That is what we own. That's what we possess. That's what God has given to us and we simply can't calculate the magnitude of how great it is and when we sing those songs about the incarnation of Christ, how true it is. "It's the Lord, oh, wondrous story. 'Tis the Lord the King of glory," for all of the salvation, the full aspects of it that he's bestowed on us. The only thing we can do is, "At his feet we humbly fall and crown him, crown him Lord of all."

Now the question as we move into verse 8 and what follows is, is this: what do we do with that truth corporately speaking as a church? What is the church of Jesus Christ who has been so set apart, that has been so blessed by all of that goodness, what are we to do with that truth? What are we to do with the Gospel? What are we to do with the truths of Scriptures that are contained in the 66 and no more books of the Bible? What do we do with that? How do we respond to that? Well, that's what we're going to see in verses 8 through 11 as we come to our text for this morning. You see, we're approaching this passage, verses 8 through 11, with such a spiritual momentum of gratitude and wonder at the glories of salvation, now Paul tells us inspired by the Holy Spirit he says, "Here's what you do as a body of believers with that." He speaks to Titus in the first person singular and says, "Titus, here is what I want you to do," and as he gives this instruction to Titus, we see what the local church is supposed to do with this glorious truth that's been entrusted to us. There's a privilege, there's a prerogative, there is a responsibility that goes with it. This truth is precious. This truth is glorious. This truth is sacred. And so what do we do with that as it were deposited within us? Those of us that are no more than earthen vessels, what do we do with such glory and truth? Here's what Paul says, look at verse 8, Titus 3:8, how should the church respond to the truth?

8 This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men. 9 But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. 10 Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, 11 knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.

What do we do with the truth? Understand that this passage, these four verses, are coming right on the heels of one of the most glorious explanations of salvation in all of the Bible and Paul isn't changing directions here. He's not introducing really a new theme, he's not changing the subject, this is all built on the glory of what we just saw in verses 4 through 7. And what Paul says in verse 8 is, "This is a trustworthy statement." He's looking back at verses 4 through 7, that one long sentence and says, "What I have just said in verses 4 through 7 is trustworthy. You can take it to the bank. This is absolute

certainty revealed from the God of heaven. This is something to be believed and embraced." The question is now: what does God want us to do in response to the glory of this truth and the glory of our salvation? We find three things that are laid out for us in this text that really set a philosophy of ministry in some ways for the local church, and also gives us a sense of how we are to view the Gospel.

Look, this needs to be said up front, especially in light of the content that is about to come in God's word here: I don't need to tell you that the prevailing, dominant mindset in the evangelical church in at least America if not all of Western culture is, how can we make this satisfactory to people who don't want to hear? How do we please the people who are outside that want to come in and maybe they'll listen and maybe they won't and the whole of ministry is geared toward a lowest common denominator of people who aren't even saved? That is tragic. That is the absolute wrong way to approach ministry. You don't start from the standpoint of who the audience is. You don't think about how we're going to handle and package the Gospel from the standpoint of we think it's going to be received by those who hear. That is not what we do. That is not our starting point. Our starting point, this is so important, this is so important for you to understand: our starting point is not unsaved people. Our starting point is this Gospel which was just explained in verses 4 through 7 is precious and it is our duty and responsibility to protect it and to preserve it and to defend its purity with everything that we have. We don't want it to become corrupted. We don't want to change and soften the edges of the message so that more people will listen to us than otherwise would. That is not what you do with the Gospel. Your starting point as you understand the Gospel is, "This is so precious that whatever else I do my preeminent priority is to protect it," and then let God do what he wants as we honor with faithfulness what he tells us to do in response to the truth.

Now, I said there were three things. What do we do in response to the truth, first of all? First point, if you're taking notes this morning: we proclaim the truth powerfully. We proclaim the truth powerfully. I was reading this past week a writer who was presuming to speak to all of the church from his comparative youth and said, "We've got to change the way that we speak to the younger generation. You see the younger generation wants a conversation. They don't want authoritative preaching. They want a conversation that they can engage." Well look, when it comes to what the local church does when it gathers together, Scripture understand plainly, Scripture tells us something completely different and we don't measure what we do by polling the youngest generation to see if they'll like it or not. We look to God's word and say, "God, with all that you've given us here in the Gospel, what do you want?" We're preaching for an audience of one and trusting him to do with the Gospel whatever he pleases. Well, here in the inspired word of God, it tells us what we're supposed to do.

Look at verse 8, Paul says, "This is a trustworthy statement and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently." The word "speak confidently," that phrase, many people like to translate it "insist." Insist on these things. Don't compromise them. Don't back down. Scripture tells us that the word of God is to be spoken and preached with authority. Let your eyes go over to Titus chapter 2 verse 15. You can see this right in the context. Paul frames his discussion at the beginning and the end of the Gospel and how it applies

in our lives. He frames it. He bookends it with these statements about the way in which it is to be delivered. He says in chapter 2 verse 15, he says, "These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you." Then he goes into that beautiful statement of salvation that we've been considering for weeks and he comes back, he comes back to the theme of authority and he's speaking first-person singular to Titus and he's giving direct instruction to the man that he appointed to lead the development of the church on the island of Crete. He says, "Here's what I want you to do now that I've said these things, Titus. Here's what you're to do, I want you to speak confidently." Nothing's changed. Nothing's changed. If a man is hesitating, if he is uncertain, if he has doubts about whether the Scriptures are the inerrant word of God, if he has doubts or hesitations about whether the Gospel is the exclusive message of salvation and that there is salvation in no one else other than in Jesus Christ, if he has doubts or he quivers at that, if he's too afraid of the audience in order to speak it, whatever else he does, he shouldn't be in a pulpit. Because these things are precious. These things are true by the very authority of the word of God and God says, "That they are to be proclaimed with confidence. They are to be proclaimed with authority." It's not our job to entertain the masses. Let Hollywood entertain the masses. Let Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus entertain the masses. That's not what we are supposed to do. We are supposed to speak about the Gospel with confidence. That's what we do when we gather together and then when Christians go out from the Sunday gathering, then they engage these things in their sphere of relationships, their circle of relationships, strengthened by what God's word has said and able to in one-on-one conversations, be able to speak with confidence themselves what the Gospel is and the fact that people must repent and believe in Christ or they are destined to perish eternally. There's just too much at stake. The Gospel is precious. Souls are precious and we don't help anyone when we make it look like this is a joke, this is only for your entertainment, this is only to help you get by a little bit better day-by-day. That doesn't do anybody any good. It's a sin against Christ to approach ministry that way and it's a sin against lost people to handle the Gospel in such a haphazard, slippery way that really conceals and hides the glory of what we should be putting front and center to be displayed to all men. Paul says, "You speak these things with confidence, Titus."

Turn back to the book of Acts. I want you to see a little illustration of this and what you need to understand is that the power of the Gospel is not resident in us, it's not resident in the methods that we choose to use, it's not resident in education or being well bred. The power of the Gospel is in the Gospel itself. We're just human vessels of it. Acts chapter 4 verse 12 is where I'd like you to turn. There is salvation in no one else. This is the end of a sermon which Peter is speaking. You look up at verse 8, "Rulers and elders of the people." He goes on and he concludes in verse 12 he says, "There is salvation in no one else. For there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved." Utter confidence with what he proclaimed. Look at the effect, look at the effect on the audience as Peter spoke. Verse 13, "Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John," okay, so the very demeanor with which those men preached the Gospel had an impact on the audience. Preaching is not to be wishy-washy. God intends it to be done with confidence, a confidence that is worthy of the absolute truth that it is. Now watch, they're putting two and two together. "They observed the

confidence of Peter and John and they understood that they were uneducated and untrained men." How can uneducated and untrained men speak that way? The very weakness, watch this, the very weakness of the human vessel speaking with confidence about truth was that which helped to penetrate the darkness of their minds and was a manifestation of the truth of the Gospel. The very confidence with which they spoke manifested the truth of the Gospel. They were uneducated and untrained men and "they were amazed," because these two things did not go together. No training. These guys were hicks from French Lick, so to speak, and yet there's this confidence. There is this compelling authority with which they speak.

They began to recognize them, look at the end of verse 13. They "began to recognize them as having been with Jesus." Ah, they made the connection. Their confidence is a reflection of the presence of Christ upon them. You see, that's what we're after. That's what we're after. We don't care if people who really aren't interested in Scripture walk out of our service and say, "I didn't like that. I didn't care about that. That didn't appeal to me." Well, okay, fair enough, appreciate the transparency there. Just understand that it wasn't about you in the first place. It was about the truth and the glory of the Gospel and what God has commanded us to do. We must as a church, we must as the body of Christ, understand where our allegiance lies and our allegiance is vertical, not horizontal. That's our primary allegiance. It's not that we don't love lost people, that's not the point, it's that they don't define our philosophy of ministry, the way that we handle the truth. That prerogative is reserved to the one who revealed the truth. We're just trying to be obedient in response and so we proclaim the truth powerfully.

There's one other place that I want you to see. Turn over to 1 Corinthians chapter 1. Maybe someday I'll preach on this passage but not today. Today is just a passing reference to it. We proclaim the truth powerfully even while we understand that people are going to think that it's foolish. There's no way around it. The whole point of the Gospel is that this does not appeal to the sensibilities of fallen man and so the more that we try to appeal and want to appeal to the sensibilities of unsaved people with our ministry, the more we are separating ourselves from the very source of power in our message. Look at verse 18, 1 Corinthians chapter 1, verse 18, he says, "For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." Verse 21, I should go through the whole passage but I'm not going to do that. "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom," but that's not what we give them. We know what they want, we're not doing it. They want miraculous signs, the Jews do. Greeks want us to be really fine rhetoric. No, verse 23, "but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." Look, what we do, what we preach, what we proclaim, is foolishness to unsaved people. We can't get around that and it's not our job to do that. Our job is to deliver what God wants, not what they want. And trust that God will use our faithfulness to the message to save those who believe.

Look over at chapter 2 verse 1, we're proclaim the truth powerfully. This is what we do in response to the Gospel. 1 Corinthians chapter 2 verse 1, Paul is speaking about his history with the church at Corinth and he said, "And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God." You see, what you preach from the beginning, the way that you approach people, what attracts them to the Gospel, is what their expectations are going to be. It's what you're setting the standard by which their Christian life if they're saved is going to be determined. We have to make it obvious right from the get-go, right from the very beginning that we're relying solely on the revealed word of God, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That's what we proclaim. We proclaim it with confidence because we know it to be true and we trust the Spirit of God to use that in their lives just like he did in ours. We don't need media gurus to tell us what to do. We're not reliant on the latest new thing in preaching to help us know how we're to speak. God's already told us. Don't you think that if the Gospel is crucial, if the glory of Christ is revealed in the proclamation of the true Gospel, don't you think that God would tell us in his word how he wanted it done? Well, that's what he's done in the Scriptures. And if you read these preaching, so-called consultants, you'll find this element is almost always missing because they're starting from the absolute wrong starting point: what does the youngest generation want and how can we make it likable to them? No, no, no, that's entirely the wrong question. The question is: what does God want? And where would he tell us? Well, he's told us in the word and so that's what we do. That's what we do. We speak it with confidence, not just from the pulpit but in our private, personal witness as well. We don't hesitate about its accuracy. We don't hesitate about its power because that's already been settled for all time in the word of God and so we proclaim the truth powerfully.

Secondly, what else do we do as the people of God in response to this glorious truth found in verses 4 through 7? Point number 2: we receive the truth reverently. We receive the truth reverently. Look at verse 8 with me again. Paul said, "This is a trustworthy statement. Concerning these things, I want you to speak confidently so that," under this purpose, "see Titus, here is what you do, here's the impact that it's supposed to have on the people of God, "so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men." God requires us to respond to the truth with two different aspects that are like two sides of a coin. First of all, we respond, we receive the truth number 1: by believing it. We believe it. Look at what it says there in verse 8, he says, "Those who have believed God," those who have been redeemed by Christ, those who have believed God, this is how they respond. And just focusing on that word "believe" for just a moment, we're under command of Christ to believe these things. Whether we believe it or accept it is not a matter of personal choice. Christ commands us to believe it, to receive it. Jesus said, "Repent and believe in the Gospel." And when we say that we are to believe this truth, what we mean by that is that we affirm it. We confidently from conviction say, "Yes, that is true. The word of God is true." Period. We don't qualify that in our minds. We affirm it and let it shape our

convictions. We not only affirm it in our minds, we embrace it with our hearts. We say, "It's not just that it's true. I love this truth. This truth is my life. The Lord Jesus Christ is the object of my affections. I not only hear it with my ears and receive it in my mind, I believe it and receive it with my heart. I submit to it. I acknowledge it's authority and I bring myself under it. I put myself in rank under the truth of the word of the God."

We affirm it, we submit to it and we entrust ourselves to it. You and I have no other hope but this truth. There's nothing else that we can hope in. There's nothing else that can save our souls. There's nothing else that can give us power to live this life. There's nothing else that gives us anything to say to anyone other than the Gospel and so we entrust ourselves to it. "Lord, you said it. I believe it. I receive it and now I just entrust myself," I cast myself upon Christ and the authority of this message about him. So when we say we believe it, it's not just a little mental checkbox and then we move on to something else. We believe it in the sense that we utterly, completely, unreservedly receive it, own it and rejoice in it and we're reverent. It's an attitude of reverence and see look, look think with me: that's the only way it could be. If this Gospel in verses 4 through 7 is true and all of the glories that we've been looking at for the past three or four weeks, if that's true then this is not a matter of casual reaction to it, this is the great word of God. This is the great Lord Jesus Christ. These are things of great eternal significance that we are hearing and responding to and so we don't treat that flippantly. We receive it with reverence and do you see, beloved, do you see how that builds upon the way the word is preached to begin with? If the word is preached casually, flippantly and accompanied by circus acts on the platform before and after it's preached, people aren't going to take it seriously. You've completely undermined the seriousness of it by the shenanigans that surround it. Shame on them and God keep us, God keep Truth Community Church from ever being like that. Because when it's evident that the people of God who gather together in a local body believe it, receive it, submit to it, then that sets a context for the way that people receive it and we testify by our lives, the way in which this truth is to be received and so we receive it reverently.

So one aspect of that, one side of the coin is that we believe it, as we've been describing just now. So we believe, secondly: we behave. Look at verse 8 with me again, "so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds," that they'll watch what they are doing and use their life constructively in advance of the Gospel. We receive the truth, we believe it and then, beloved, we pay attention to how we live. If this is true, if the Gospel is true and it is, then it affects the way that we live. It changes everything. True salvation changes us. It changes us, first of all, because there has been a transforming work of the Spirit of God on our hearts that has imparted new spiritual life to us. Scripture says the Holy Spirit comes and indwells everyone who believes in Christ. That in itself, that complete radical change of nature, guarantees that a new life must flow from true salvation. In addition to that, as we think about these things, as we think about the glory of the Gospel, it transforms our motivations. It narrows greatly the sphere of things that we care about in this life and says, "I just want to devote my life to the truth of the Gospel. I want whatever I do in my secular employment, whatever I do in school, whatever I do in the realm of life, I just want that to somehow to contribute to the glory of this great glorious Gospel that Paul been talking about in verses 4 through 7." The

glory of the Gospel defines your motivation in life if you're a Christian. How that works out differs from one to the other. How you apply it is what I'm saying, it differs from person to person but the truth of the matter is that for you as a Christian, it's no different from me as a Christian in that if you're a true Christian the Gospel defines your motivation in life and everything else flows from how you view the Gospel. If you received it reverently, then obviously that would be the case. That lets us say this without apology or qualification: this very point, the impact that the Gospel has on a person's life, this is the dividing line, this is the defining difference between true Christian and those who only claim to be Christians. True Christians and false Christians, this defines the difference. If someone's life is unchanged they've never been converted to begin with. It couldn't be any other way. The Gospel is too powerful. The Holy Spirit is so omnipotent. He is so powerful and he so works to change people into the image of Christ. You go from darkness to light and nothing changes? Please, that's ridiculous and that exposes how foolish it is to say, "Oh, but I raised my hand at a meeting. I walked an aisle." That doesn't mean anything if there wasn't something different on the other side of that that lasted. You see, it's conversion. There's real change. And when we understand that as regenerate born again believers, we say, "Ah yeah, I'll pursue that. I aim my mind, I aim my will, my volition at this," we say. This is the defining mark of life.

Turn over to James chapter 2 to just reinforce that point briefly. We receive the truth reverently. We believe it and we behave in response to it. It changes the way we live. That's what true salvation does. James just after book of Hebrews, James chapter 2:14, "What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself." You see, it's not that those works contribute to our merit before God and somehow help us earn salvation, that's not the point. The point in James is that someone who's truly converted, true faith changes the way that they live and what James is saying in reverse is that if there hasn't been a change, there hasn't been conversion to begin with. And so we behave. It changes the way we live. When someone's need crosses our path, we stop and find a way to meet it if we have the ability to do that. That honors the Gospel. It makes our lives profitable to men. It displays the earnestness with which we have received what we say we believe and that's the motivation. Not to earn merit but in response to grace already received, we behave. We live in accordance with what Scripture teaches us to do.

And so what does the church do in response to the truth? First of all, we proclaim the truth powerfully. Secondly, we receive the truth reverently. And thirdly, we defend the truth diligently. We defend the truth diligently. Look back to Titus 3. I want to remind you that we're talking more than just what we do as individuals in response to the Gospel although that's included in it. Paul here under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is defining what a local body of believers is to do corporately with the truth. We just don't gather together willy-nilly and just talk about different things and then scatter out. You see, there is defining purpose to the existence of a local church. There is a defining purpose for which we exist as a body and part of that purpose in our existence is to

defend this precious truth from verses 4 through 7. What Paul does here in the verses that remain, 9 through 11, is he shows us the different threats that come in the life of a local church and how it is that leadership in a church is to respond to those threats. We defend the truth diligently. Look, most of you have all been in churches for a period of years. You know by experience that diversions arise in the life of a church. Things come that get people off track, whatever those things may be. You start out well but then things just kind of drift away from what originally brought believers together. How do we protect ourselves against that? How do we protect ourselves when we know that the Gospel is so precious? What do we do? What are we to be on guard for?

That's what Paul is going to go on to explain and the first thing that he says, the first aspect of defending the truth diligently is this: reject, follow this, this is really definingly important, we reject doctrinal distractions. We reject doctrinal distractions. Remember the Gospel, this is all about the Gospel. Verses 4 through 7, the clear, unadulterated, powerful, saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Gospel that saved you and me. What do we do with that? The focus on the redemptive work of Christ, the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, the justification that belongs to us, our future hope, what do we do with that? Well, part of it is that you don't get off base. You keep your eye on the ball, so to speak. We reject doctrinal distractions. Paul says, "Christians, listen to me, do not get caught up in foolish controversies over minor points that don't matter." This is so important. "Don't get caught up in doctrinal distractions, in little disputes that have nothing to do with the centrality of the Gospel of Christ. Keep the first things first."

Look at verse 9. This helps you understand why he says what he says right here. He just said in verse 8, "This is a trustworthy statement. Speak confidently about these things." Now by contrast he says, verse 9, "But I've told you what to do, now I'm going to tell you what not to do." You see, he covers it positive and negative, pro and con. He gives us both sides of the understanding so that we can find our path through the distractions that would undermine clarity and the purity of the Gospel. That's what he's doing here. This is all about the Gospel. And so he says there in verse 9, he says, "Avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the law for they are unprofitable and worthless." Apparently, some of those with Jewish influence...remember I want to remind you that a big element of the problem in the island of Crete was a Jewish emphasis that people were trying to bring to the teaching. Look over at chapter 1 verse 14. You can see the background. He doesn't go into too much detail but Paul gives the background. He says in verse 13, "This testimony is true. For this reason reprove them severely so that they may be sound in the faith not paying attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth." Now we come to our verse this morning, Titus 3:9, he says, "Avoid foolish controversies, genealogies," apparently there were teachers that wove fantastic stories about Old Testament genealogies and the people that were listed there that had no basis in Scriptures. He said, "Strife, avoid these disputes over words and avoid disputes over the law. Avoid disputes over the Mosaic law." He said, "Avoid that don't get caught up in that." He says to avoid it, that means to turn away from it. Don't give it ground to take root. Don't even engage the discussion. Some people find an issue that they think is important and they want to press it and so they want to argue about this. "Well, what do you think about this?" "Well, okay." "No,

no, no, what do you think? This is important. I define this as important for the life of the church." "Wait, what does this have to do with the Gospel?" "Not much. I don't even want to hear it." You just close your ears to it. You turn away from it.

You see, it's not unkind and here is what we need to understand as a body of believers in Christ: when those things come up, it is not, it is not, it is not unkind for us to refuse the dispute. It is not unkind for us not to spend our time and spend hours tracing down answers and clarifications to these side points that have nothing to do the Gospel. That is not unkind, that is being obedient because that's what Scripture tells us to do. Don't get off track on these side discussions that don't matter. You see and why is that so important? Why is it that you wouldn't engage pulpit discussion over Old Testament genealogies or minor points about the Old Testament law? Why would you do that? Beloved, remember what we've been saying all along this morning: it's all about the Gospel. It's all about the purity and the clarity of the Gospel. If you start to engage these side disputes that have nothing to do with the redemption of Christ, the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, the doctrine of regeneration, future judgment, the heirs of eternal life, when you start to focus on things that aren't really clearly tied in to those issues, to those doctrines, people lose sight of what's important. You see, Christ came and fulfilled the Old Testament law so we could move on to the Gospel. We're ministers of the New Covenant, Paul says.

And so, let's put it this way, it's so important that I look for different ways to say it to make it clear: even if someone is well intentioned, even if someone is well intentioned, we don't have to impute ill motives. Even if they're well intentioned, we don't let someone hijack the teaching of the church into issues that don't matter. You stop it. You don't let that happen. Why? Not because we don't care about these people but because they don't get it and when they don't get it they have no business setting the teaching agenda of the church through continued controversies and objections and contentions because the prevailing motivation in that, beloved, is that we don't want the Gospel to get lost in the clutter because the Gospel is too precious to let that happen. It's the Gospel that saved us, not minor points from the Old Testament. It's the Gospel that will save sinners. It's the Gospel that is the only hope for your children. It's the Gospel that's the only hope for lost people in your workplace and in your neighborhood. It's the Gospel. It's the Gospel. It's the Gospel. Focus on that is what this passage is telling us. And it's not that we're missing something when we do that. Look at the end of verse 9. Paul says, "Those disputes are unprofitable and worthless." So before a church gets engaged in a big discussion about some point of Bible knowledge, we've got to step back and ask ourselves: what does this have to do about proclaiming the Gospel? And that defining commitment to defend and proclaim the Gospel with power, will keep things better on track. That's why we avoid it. That's why we turn away.

We have to reject doctrinal distractions in order to defend the truth diligently. Now secondly, this is a sub point. We defend the truth diligently by rejecting doctrinal distractions. We defend the truth diligently by the second sub point: we reject divisive people. We reject divisive people and we especially need this instruction in our postmodern culture that thinks that the worse thing that you can do is offend someone or

to be too precise and too particular about truth that you're contending for. We have to realize that we're fish swimming in an environment that is utterly contrary to what Scripture is describing here. It's not the worst thing that you can do to stand for something. Hurting someone's feelings by being obedient to the Scripture is not unloving or unkind. We can't import that mindset into the truth. We have a job to do, beloved. We have a truth to defend. We have a precious pearl of great price that is in front of us and we give our life and we give our energy and if necessary we give our blood to protect that and not only to protect the Gospel but to protect those that are under the sphere of our ministry that come to our church for leadership because we understand that these doctrinal distractions and divisive people have a destructive impact on the people of God.

Go back to Titus chapter 1 verse 10. We're not here to please all men at all costs. We're here to be faithful to the Gospel and faithful to the people of God. Verse 10, "There are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers especially those of the circumcision," you see, there's another flare out against the Jewish influence there, "who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain." You see, church isn't a town hall; the church isn't a town hall where every opinion has equal value and everybody gets to say whatever they want. That's not the case. That's not the purpose of the church. If someone wants that, they can get into politics. If they want that, they can go to a different place that does different things. In the church of Jesus Christ, we need to be, we must be focused on what the truth is and so with that background in mind, look at verse 10. You say that we reject divisive people, here it is plainly in the text. It's talking about inside the body of Christ not outside dealing with unbelievers. This is inside the body of Christ. Paul says, "Reject a factious man after a first and second warning knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self condemned." Who's a factious man? He's a man who's chosen to be divisive. He wants to focus on the issues forbidden in chapter 3 verse 9. He gathers a group of people, he picks off individuals to come after and follow him, that way he can be the authority and sets himself in opposition to church leadership either personally or against the doctrine of a church. Here he is, siphoning away people from the leadership that is proclaiming the Gospel and siphoning them away to his own little brand of whatever it is that he teaches. What do you do with that? Listen, this is one of the hard elements of church leadership and church responsibility and it is primarily on church leadership to implement this but you can't allow that to continue because it is a threat to the Gospel. "A house divided against itself must fall," Jesus said. You can't allow that kind of division to take place. You can't have people rising up and opposing what is taught or opposing leadership in open defiant ways because it's not about the leadership, it's about the Gospel. It is about the Gospel. It is about protecting the purity of the Gospel. It is about protecting the clarity of the Gospel because it is so precious that you can do nothing else but defend it.

Now, God tells us here how to deal with this. We don't deal with it abruptly. We don't even deal with it unkindly but we do deal with it clearly. What do you do? First warning, you approach the man. You inform him. Maybe there's a misunderstanding that you can clear up with an initial discussion. You say you realize that what you're doing and teaching, what you're saying is contrary to the doctrine of our church. "Oh really, oh I'm

sorry I don't want to do that." Well, then there's no need for anything further. You see, you work with a guy like that who responds. You help clarify. You define that here's an issue. "We can't go down that road. Do you understand that?" Somebody responds and great, you've restored a brother to fellowship. Praise be to God. That's all we're after. We're after unity not driving people away. If there's a misunderstanding, that approach can deal with it but I've had long histories of this at the other church that I was at in years gone by, if the man persists in his position, he says in essence, "I don't care what you say. I want to do what I want to do. This dispute is important to me." Then you warn him again and this time there's a little bit more of clarity and warning involved in it. You say, "Look, no, no, no, it doesn't work that way here. You can't continue on in that and retain the privilege of being part of this fellowship. You're about to forfeit your privilege. I'm warning you. We don't want this but if you're going to continue like that you've got to understand that there are consequences to it." This is the responsibility of spiritual leadership and this is what a shepherd does to protect the sheep. If threats, talking about literal shepherds and literal sheep now, if a threat comes to the sheep, the shepherd has to drive that threat away. His primary goal is to protect the sheep. Well look, part of pastoral leadership, part of elder leadership in a church is that you build fences around the flock to protect them from those who would come in and try to harm them. Maybe the guy doesn't understand the consequences of what he's saying but the fact that he's been warned twice now and wants to persist, shows that there's culpability in it. We do this to protect the Gospel.

Now you've gone to him once, "Hey there's an issue here. Are you aware of that?" "I'm going to continue doing what I want to do." "Now wait a second, there are consequences to this. You can't do that here. Do you understand? This is contrary. You're being divisive here. This isn't healthy. We can't allow it to go on. Do you understand." "I'm going to keep doing what I'm doing." This is exactly the way these conversations play out, by the way. It's exactly how it plays out. It's when that second refusal has been expressed and clarified that you say, "Okay look, it's time for you to move on." You reject that man. You send him away from the church, not to be unkind but because we're about protecting the Gospel and protecting the flock and you can't underestimate the threat of what a man like that is like because Paul goes on in verse 11, and sometimes as you are dealing with this in leadership you say, "Am I being too harsh?" You wrestle with it more than the divisive guy does in trying to make sure that you're being fair and gracious, that you're not overreacting and so Paul injects this word of instruction. Verse 11, Paul says, "When you get to that point in the life of the body of Christ in dealing with the man, take heart, take comfort even in the midst of the conflict of it all. Let this settle into your mind," Paul says in verse 11, "knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned." You see, his refusal to receive the admonishment, to receive the warning, after two warnings and he's still refusing, it displays what he really is. You don't have to say anything about it because he's self-condemned. His response to that loving instruction from leadership condemns himself and so Paul says, "Reject him. Send him away from the fellowship and go on in peace and then get back to the purity and the clarity and the greatness of the Gospel." Because the Gospel is so precious that that's what we focus on.

Look over at Romans 16. You see, Scripture speaks to these things over and over again and here Paul speaks to it in a collective way. You know, when we have a body of believers that understand this, that embrace it, that are concerned about the purity of the Gospel, it's not just leadership that's protecting this, we all get involved in it. We all understand how precious this is and we recognize threats when they come and we say, "Not on our turf. Not here. Not there. You'll have to take that someplace else because we're united on the Gospel. We're not going to allow someone else to inject dissension and division to undermine the sweetness of the fellowship and the purity of the Gospel that we have here. No, you'll have to take your wares and sell them someplace else." That's often what it is. Romans 16, verse 17, "I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ," no matter what they say to the contrary, "but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting." Ah, it's not that they come in waving a gun around to create their division, it's smooth. "Hey, come listen."

Well, we've got to be on guard against that. We realize, we understand how they operate and we protect each other from that. That's what we do. That's what a church does in response to the Gospel. We proclaim it with power. We receive it with reverence. We defend it with diligence. God help Truth Community to be a place where we love this truth individually and corporately. We love this truth and we go further, we conform our lives to it and then we go even further than that, this is so glorious that we say, "I'm going to stand guard. I'm going to be part of the protecting influence on this body that we've come to love and even more so on this Gospel that saved my soul." That's what we do. That's what a church does in response to the truth. It proclaims it. It responds to it. It defends it, not for our sake but for his.

Please bow with me in prayer.

Father, it is your word. It was Christ's death. We are his people that he purchased with the price of his own blood. Lord, you've told us what you want from us, it's very clear here in your word and we just want to say to you that our response is one in which we want to obey. Obedience would be our grateful privilege, Lord, and we acknowledge before you this morning that it's not just our privilege, it's also our moral responsibility, one that we embrace, one that we love, one that we want to be faithful to. Lord, your truth, your Gospel is worth living, it's worth defending and this life of being a Christian is the only life on earth that is worth living. Yes Father, what we've said in the past we say again to you, we thank you and we recognize that you have bestowed upon us the most noble thing in the world. You have bestowed upon us the privilege of being a Christian and we ask you to be true and powerful to help us to be faithful in response. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

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