

# Faithful, Fruitful Ministry in a Fractured World

**Text: Titus 3:9-15**

**Introduction:** Today we are finishing our study of Paul's letter to Titus. And as I wrote in our July newsletter, July 3 marked my nine-year anniversary as your pastor. By my count, Titus is the 16<sup>th</sup> full book of the Bible that I have preached through since coming to Goshen in 2016. Some of you have been here for all 16 of those sermon series. Bless your hearts. We only have 50 more to go.

If you're new to Goshen, it is my normal practice to preach expositionally through books of the Bible. That means we cover it all. We don't skip the hard parts. We believe that all Scripture is breathed out by God. The Bible is God's Word. It is, as Paul says, "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

I believe that God has been at work in my life and your lives over the last nine years as we have opened God's Word together. You probably don't remember all of the sermons you've heard me preach. Even I don't remember all of them. Some of them I'd probably like to forget. Maybe you don't even remember any of them.

But opening God's Word week after week and hearing from God is a lot like eating. You probably don't have clear memories of most of the meals you've eaten over the course of your life. But those meals have grown you and sustained you. The same is true of us as we come to God's Word week after week. God uses His Word to grow us and sustain us even when we don't fully realize that is what is happening.

You may wonder where we're headed next. Thank you to those of you who participated in the survey I sent out at the beginning of June. While there were some who preferred turning to the first 12 chapters of John's Gospel to complete our journey through that book of the Bible, the vast majority of responses preferred 2 Samuel. So, I am planning to begin a sermon series through 2 Samuel on August 10.

I'll be away preaching for homecoming and revival at Calvary Baptist in Orange next Sunday. Matt Gregory from SBC of Virginia will be preaching here. I have two sermons from 1 Corinthians 6 planned for the next two Sundays. And then Nate Sisson, one of the church planting residents from Impact Church, will be preaching here on August 3.

I'll be preaching at 2pm that afternoon for the homecoming service at Piney Branch Baptist. You know that they had a wonderful turnout here when Pastor Michael preached. I realize 2pm on Sunday is probably your nap time. It's usually my nap time. But it's important for us to have a strong showing from Goshen that day to demonstrate our love for our sister church at Piney Branch. So, I hope you will make plans to join me on August 3 at 2pm at Piney Branch Baptist Church.

With all of that said, we are in Titus 3 this morning. Go ahead and turn there in your Bible if you haven't already. It starts on page 938 in the black pew Bible in front of you. If you don't own a Bible, we encourage you to take the pew Bible with you when you leave.

Our sermon is focused on the second half of chapter 3, but we're reading the whole letter as a part of our service this morning. Chapters 1 and 2 were read during our Scripture reading. And I'm going to read all of chapter 3 now.

(Read Titus 3:9-15...Pray)

How many know that we live in a fractured world? Sadly, that fracturing sometimes makes its way into the church as well. It's interesting that not much has changed in 2,000 years. The Cretan Christians faced many of the same challenges that we face today as evidenced by Paul's instructions to Titus here at the end of his letter.

Paul concludes the letter by telling Titus that **faithful, fruitful ministry requires a steadfast commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ.**

In fact, Paul gives Titus four lessons for faithful, fruitful ministry in a fractured world.

## **I. Focus on the gospel (Titus 3:8).**

### **A. Look back at verse 8 for a minute. (Read vs. 8)**

- 1. Paul says, “I want you to insist on THESE THINGS.” What are the THESE THINGS that Paul is referring to? He’s talking about the message of the gospel that he has just finished unpacking in verses 3-7.**
  - a. The truth that we were far from God because of our sin. Foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.**
  - b. BUT. God intervened. Because of His goodness and lovingkindness. He sent Jesus. His Son. Our Savior.**
  - c. He saved us! Not because of anything that we did. But according to His own mercy.**
  - d. We’ve been made new creations in Christ. Our sinful hearts that were bent toward sin have been made new. We’ve received the Holy Spirit. We’ve been justified by His grace. And we are now co-heirs with Christ. We’ve been given the promise of eternal life.**
- 2. Titus was to insist on this gospel. If the Cretan church was going to be faithful and fruitful, Titus had to keep the main thing the main thing. He had to insist on the gospel.**
- 3. Goshen, the message of the gospel is the only foundation on which to build God’s church. My first sermon as your pastor was from 1 Corinthians 3:5-11 where Paul writes, “For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:11). The main idea of that sermon was that the only foundation of the church is the Lord Jesus Christ.**
- 4. And by God’s grace, that’s what we’ve done. We’ve built on that foundation. We’ve insisted on the gospel. When we’ve faced challenges and difficulties as a church, we’ve insisted on the gospel. When we’ve suffered loss in our midst, we’ve insisted on the gospel.**

**When we faced a worldwide pandemic, we insisted on the gospel. When we experienced social unrest in our nation, we insisted on the gospel. When the rest of the nation was divided by vaccines and facemasks and politics and race, we insisted on the gospel.**

### **B. Note that Paul says that focusing on the gospel is what produces good works.**

- 1. Look at verse 8 again. (Read vs. 8)**
- 2. Sometimes people think that focusing on the gospel means that we don’t care about good works. And it is true that some people try to weaponize the gospel as an excuse for not doing good works themselves or even to prevent others from carrying out good works.**
- 3. But Paul says that insisting on the gospel is actually what produces good works. Our good works flow from the gospel.**
- 4. Because how can we who have experienced the goodness and loving kindness of God to us in Christ turn around and withhold His goodness and loving kindness from others? We can’t! We extend His goodness and loving kindness to others.**
- 5. When you realize how lost you were before God intervened and saved you, you won’t look at someone else and consider them too far gone for God to do the same thing in their life.**
- 6. If the Lord Jesus left His throne in heaven, took on flesh, experienced life in this broken world, and then went to the cross to die to pay for your sin all to save you, then surely you can experience a little pain or inconvenience or uncomfortableness to carry out good works in His name.**
- 7. Paul says that “these things are excellent and profitable for people.” When God’s people who have been saved and transformed by His gospel do good works in His name, it is excellent and profitable for people. We make a difference in people’s lives. Certainly in the here and now. But also for all of eternity as people are drawn to faith in Christ because they see the way God has saved and transformed us.**

How do we carry out faithful, fruitful ministry in a fractured world?  
First, we focus on the gospel. #2...

## **II. Avoid division (Titus 3:9).**

Look at verse 9. (Read vs. 9)

### **A. Notice that word “BUT” again at the beginning of verse 9.**

1. “Insist on these things (the gospel)...BUT avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law.”
2. We insist on the gospel, BUT we avoid division.
3. Insisting on the gospel and avoiding division go hand-in-hand. You can’t focus on the gospel AND give yourself over to division at the same time. If you’re going to give yourself over to division, you will by necessity have to take your focus off of the gospel.

### **B. Now, what are the specific things that Paul says to avoid? Paul lists four things. They all seem to be interrelated, so it’s difficult to make a sharp distinction between them, but perhaps each one adds something to our understanding of what Paul wanted Titus and the Cretan Christians to avoid.**

1. First is “foolish controversies.”
  - a. Perhaps this is a broad category that includes everything Paul has in mind here to avoid. The controversies that had the potential to divide the Cretan church were foolish or stupid. Some translations say “foolish debates.”
  - b. Paul is likely thinking of doctrinal disagreements that extend beyond the clear teaching of Scripture.
  - c. It’s not wrong to have a spirited discussion about the finer points of Christian theology. Doctrine matters. But when we allow tertiary matters to divide us, we’re not focusing ourselves on what really matters most, namely the gospel of Jesus Christ.

d. This is why we have a statement of faith. This is why I make sure in our new member class that everyone who joins Goshen Baptist Church is aware of our statement of faith and committed to it forming the doctrinal boundaries for our life together at Goshen.

e. Maybe you have or haven’t heard of a concept called theological triage. Theological triage says that there are three levels of theological issues, and each level requires a different approach.

- 1) *First order issues are things like the doctrine of God, the gospel, the Bible, eternity. These are areas of Christian doctrine where there really isn’t any room for disagreement among Christians. If your beliefs go too far afield in these areas, you quickly depart what can rightly be called Christianity.*
- 2) *Second order issues are things like the doctrine of the church and the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. People can disagree about these things and still be Christians, but it becomes challenging for people to hold strong differing convictions about these things and remain together in the same church. We believe that baptism is by immersion. We believe it’s only for those who have turned from their sin and placed their trust in Jesus. If you want to baptize your baby by sprinkling water on his head, you can still be a Christian, but it would be really difficult for you to be a member of Goshen Baptist Church because we’re just not going to do that because it’s not what we believe the Bible teaches.*
- 3) *Third order issues are those doctrinal issues that are important, but Christians can have disagreements about these issues and still remain in fellowship together in the same church. We have members of our church who emphasize the sovereignty of God in salvation through the doctrine of election and members of our church*

*who do not. We don't divide over that issue. We link arms and share the gospel together. We have members of our church who are pre-millennialists, members who are amillennialists, and members who are post-millennialists. We don't divide over that issue. We all agree that Jesus is going to return and establish His kingdom forever.*

- f. Because we've agreed to disagree over third tier issues, if someone comes in and wants to start causing division over those types of issues, we're going to have a problem. Just like we would have a problem if someone came in and started teaching contrary to our statement of faith on 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> order issues.
  - g. We're not going to engage in "foolish controversies."
- 2. The second thing Paul says to avoid is "genealogies." We see this term also in 1 Timothy 1:4. This likely refers to fanciful interpretations of Scripture that had something to do with the family trees of biblical heroes. The idea that certain Christians are better or more important than others because of who their ancestors are is contrary to the gospel.
  - 3. The third thing Paul says to avoid is "dissensions."
    - a. We talked about causing division in the church by overemphasizing third order theological issues. You also can create dissension by elevating matters of preference or conscience to the level of biblical mandate.
    - b. One example that sometimes shows up in churches is that of school choice. We have members of our church who homeschool, members who send their kids to private school, and members who send their kids to public school. Each family has to decide what is best for their family given their individual needs and resources. It's wrong for anyone to

present a single schooling option as the only biblical or godly choice as if those choosing a different option are acting contrary to Scripture.

- c. These kinds of things can create dissension in the church, but they ought not because Paul says to avoid dissensions.
- 4. The final thing Paul says to avoid is "quarrels about the law." Given what we know about the rest of the New Testament and the struggle between Jews and Gentiles regarding what areas of the OT law were necessary for Christians to follow, that's likely the kind of thing that Paul had in mind here.
- C. Notice what Paul says about these kinds of arguments and divisions within the church. He says that "they are unprofitable and worthless."
- 1. Contrast that with what he said about insisting on the gospel in verse 8. The gospel, which leads to good works, is "excellent and profitable for people." But foolish controversies that lead to division in God's church are "unprofitable and worthless."
  - 2. We have to be careful that we give our attention to what is "excellent and profitable for people" and avoid what is unprofitable and worthless."
  - 3. Every minute we spend focused on foolish controversies is a minute that we are not focused on the gospel.
  - 4. This again is why our statement of faith is so important. It outlines our beliefs. It keeps us operating within the boundaries of our agreed upon confession. It makes clear what we must believe and teach so that we don't have to spend time arguing over false doctrine that contradicts our statement of faith. And where it leaves room for disagreement and differing understandings of Scripture, we recognize that we won't always agree on every specific matter of Christian doctrine, but we commit to moving forward together for the sake of the gospel.

Focus on the gospel. Avoid division.

### **III. Discipline the divisive (Titus 3:10-11).**

Look at vs. 10-11. (Read vs. 10-11)

#### **A. Paul doesn't mince words when telling Titus what to do about people who stir up division.**

- 1. Warn them once. Warn them again. Then have nothing more to do with them.**
- 2. This instruction reflects the teaching of Jesus and Paul in other places in the New Testament regarding church discipline.**
  - a. In Matthew 18, Jesus gave a process for dealing with sin among believers. If your brother sins against you, you go to him directly. Then you take one or two others along. Then you tell it to the church. And if he still will not repent, you treat him like an unbeliever.**
  - b. We see the same thing in 1 Corinthians 5. Paul tells the Corinthians how to deal with gross immorality in the church. Treat him like an unbeliever. We don't judge those outside the church. It's those inside the church whom we are to judge.**
- 3. It's interesting that here in Titus 3, Paul puts divisiveness within the church on the same level as significant sin among brothers and sexual immorality. Just as significant sin among brothers and sexual immorality require discipline, so does sowing division in God's church.**
- 4. I say it's interesting because sometimes in churches divisive people are allowed to go on unchecked. Church bullies continue on bullying people because no one will ever stand up to them. Paul says to "have nothing more to do with [them]."**
- 5. Perhaps this sounds unloving to you. But the same principles that Paul teaches the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 5 apply here. Church discipline is for everyone's good.**

- a. Church discipline is for the good of the church. Divisive people have the potential to wreak havoc in a church. They make life miserable for everyone. Not only that, but divisiveness can spread in a church like gangrene if it's not dealt with appropriately. God's people cannot allow divisiveness to continue unchecked. Church discipline is for the good of the church.**
  - b. Church discipline is also for the good of the person being disciplined. The hope is always restoration. But the only way for there to be true restoration is for the person causing division to be confronted and then to repent. When everyone is afraid of confronting a divisive person, the divisive person is never called to repent and never is given the opportunity to see the seriousness of their sin before God and repent of it.**
  - c. Church discipline is also for the good of the watching world. Don't think that people outside the church don't know what's going on inside the church. And when they look inside the church and see a fractured church, why would they want anything to do with it? The church looks just like the world.**
- 6. That's why Paul says to warn them once, then twice, and then "have nothing more to do with" "a person who stirs up division."**

#### **B. Paul makes clear in verse 11 that stirring up division within the church is a serious matter that reveals something terribly wrong in the heart of the person who engages in such divisiveness. (Read vs. 11)**

- 1. Danny Akin writes, "Sin is destructive. It damages and destroys. What it can do to a community of believers is serious. What it does to the sinner enslaved by its addiction is tragic" (Akin, 301).**

2. When we mark and avoid divisive people, we are not condemning them. Paul says they are “self-condemned.” We’re merely recognizing what is already true.

How do we engage in faithful, fruitful ministry in a fractured world? We focus on the gospel, avoid division, discipline the divisive, and finally, we...

#### IV. Value relationships (Titus 3:12-15).

A. Paul’s closing of his letter to Titus is very similar to the way he concludes his other letters. He writes with a very personal, pastoral heart.

1. Look beginning in verse 12. (Read vs. 12-15)
2. There are four different people mentioned in these four verses.
  - a. Interestingly enough, Artemas and Zenas are not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. We know nothing else about them. All we know is what we can infer from what Paul says here at the end of Titus. They were apparently very important to Paul. They were co-laborers in the gospel. They were people that Paul could trust to help with and continue the work there in Crete.
  - b. Tychicus is mentioned in Acts 20, Ephesians 6, Colossians 4, and 2 Timothy 4. He was a traveling companion of Paul’s. In Ephesians 6, Paul referred to him as a “beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord.” Paul trusted Tychicus to faithfully carry out the work of ministry wherever he sent him.
  - c. Apollos is definitely the most prominent and well-known of the four people mentioned here at the end of Titus. He’s particularly known for his ministry to the church at Corinth. In fact, he was so well-loved in Corinth that some were saying things like, “I follow Apollos,” which Paul corrected in his first

letter to the church at Corinth. There’s no indication that Apollos was encouraging that kind of attention. In fact, he too seems to have been a faithful, fruitful minister of the gospel whom Paul trusted to carry out the work of ministry.

3. I think that sometimes the Bible can seem far off to us. It’s not far off. These were real people mentioned in a real letter written by the real Apostle Paul to his real son in the faith Titus.
  4. It seems that Artemas and Tychicus were being sent by Paul to continue the work in Crete where Zenas and Apollos had been serving alongside Titus to some extent and would be moving along.
  5. The thing that stands out in Paul’s mention of all four of these individuals is his love for each one and his trust in them to faithfully serve Christ and His church. They were not divisive men. They were men who avoided division and focused on the gospel.
  6. They were faithful, fruitful ministers. The kind of faithful, fruitful ministers that we should all aspire to be. In fact, Zenas was a lawyer, the text says. Whatever your vocation, as a follower of Jesus, God has called you to be a faithful, fruitful minister for Jesus and His church.
- B. Notice Paul’s continued emphasis on good works in verse 14. (Read vs. 14)
1. God’s people are not unfruitful. God’s people devote themselves to good works. They help in cases of urgent need.
  2. As those who have experienced the goodness and loving kindness of God to us in Christ, we extend His goodness and loving kindness to others both inside and outside the church.
- C. Paul then closes the letter with a final greeting (vs. 15). (Read vs. 15)

- 1. I want to draw your attention to two words: love and grace. God's church should be a place that is marked by both love and grace.**
- 2. How are we going to be faithful and fruitful in ministry together? We need to have a genuine love for one another. And we need to be ready to show grace to one another.**

**Conclusion:** "No one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11).

By God's grace, for nine years we've built on that foundation together. But Goshen family, we are not done. The work of gospel ministry continues. And the need for a faithful gospel witness in a fractured world is as great as it has ever been.

If we're going to be faithful. If we're going to be fruitful. We must stay focused on the gospel, avoid division, discipline the divisive, and value our relationships with one another.

Goshen, may we maintain a steadfast commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ so that we can be faithful and fruitful in all that God has called us to.