

# Titus: Unfinished Business

## *Righteous Rebuke or Divisive Diva*

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: Titus 3

Speaker: Sam Schertz

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Good morning. Over the past two weeks, we've been studying in the Book of Titus. This is going to be our third and final message in this series today, and we'll be looking at Titus chapter 3. So if you would begin turning in your Bibles or on your mobile devices to Titus chapter 3, we will also have the scripture on the screen behind me. Or if you have the Fairview Missionary Church mobile app, you can go into that and just click sermon notes.

It'll take you right to the Bible app with today's scripture and notes for you. Now, as Pastor Joel has already discussed in the previous two weeks, this was actually originally a letter written by the apostle Paul to a man named Titus. Titus was a Greek follower of Jesus who had traveled with Paul, had been this companion and coworker with Paul on missionary journeys. And on one such journey, they had traveled to an island in the Mediterranean Sea known as Crete.

And they had planted churches all across this island. And then Paul continued onward in the missionary journey and left Titus in Crete. And so this letter then is Paul's instruction to Titus. Paul wants Titus to bring things in order in these churches because honestly, the Cretan people were just a little nuts. Can I get an amen? I mean, they were known for being vile, selfish, dishonest, and undisciplined.

And Paul is telling Titus, "I want you to bring about this order in the churches, and I want to instruct you to, number one, help them grow in their understanding of the truth and their obedience to the truth." And then number two, Titus, I want you to install elders in every church across this island so that when you are gone, these elders will see this forward.

They will be the ones then to oversee the churches and make sure that right truth and right doctrine and right actions are taking place in the family of God. But for now, this is Titus' job to get the ball rolling. In the opening lines of his letter to Titus, Paul has given us a big-picture purpose for this. Why do we need order in the church? Why do we need these elders?

Well, all of this can be summed up in Titus 1:1, where Paul says, "Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness." Paul is saying, "I want you to help these believers grow in their faith." Faith is trust and confidence in God. I want you to help them to grow in their knowledge of the truth. Help them to know who God is and what he desires.

And then finally, help these believers grow in godly living. That's our obedience to the truth of God. This is actually an example of the journey that each and every one of us is on if you have said yes to Jesus as Lord and Savior. We're learning to grow in our faith. Yes, this began the moment you said yes to Jesus. You put your faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins.

But now the rest of your life is learning to put greater trust and confidence in who Jesus is. All of us are on a journey of growing in truth. We're learning to understand more of who God is and more of what he's designed us to live and look like. What things matter to God, what things grieve the heart of God. And then it's this truth as an act of faith that is then lived out as we grow in our obedience to God.

Because if we really believe that Jesus is our Savior and Lord, and if we understand exactly what He's asking of us, then when we walk in obedience, that is an act of faith that's showing our trust and confidence in Christ. And when we don't, it's actually a sign of a lack of faith. So now in chapter three, Paul is going to finish up his instructions to Titus.

And God's desire for you and for me today is the same as Paul expressed to the Cretan believers 2,000 years ago. God desires that we would grow in our faith, our trust and our confidence in God. His desire is that we would grow in our understanding of truth, our knowledge of who God is, and that we would grow in godly living our obedience to that truth. So would you pray with me toward that end this morning?

Lord, we come to Your Word this morning and we don't take it lightly. God, the gift of this written text as an avenue through which Your Holy Spirit wants to teach us and train us and equip us to look more like Jesus. What a gift. God, there's nothing that I could say today that would change a heart. But God, there are things that your Spirit wants to say today that can do that very thing.

And so help me to be out of the way and for you to move in power. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's begin in verse 1 of Titus chapter 3. We read this. Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good. Notice the first word that Paul says, "Remind." Now, this is not a one-time action for Titus to do.

This is not, "Hey, remind them one time so that they will do this." This is a present, active, imperative verb, which all that means is, "Remind and keep on reminding them." As humans, we have this need to keep being steered back toward what is right in a way from what is selfish and sinful within us. Any parent in the room can attest to this. When you tell a young child the truth or what is not okay, you have to keep on reminding them of that.

And if we're honest, even as we grow, we all struggle with this. There are ways in which we need reminded of what is right. This is why spiritual disciplines like reading your Bible, prayer, attending church, singing songs of worship together, taking a space to rest in the Lord. These are spaces where the Holy Spirit reminds us of what is good and what is true.

This is also why God has put elders and pastors and ministry leaders in the church. These are positions where someone is called to remind the family of God of what is true and what is good. And all of this is an act of faith that the church might grow in Christ. Paul then says that believers are to be subject to rulers and authorities.

Pastor Joel mentioned last week that we are not citizens of the kingdom of this world. We're citizens of the kingdom of heaven, and you and I are ambassadors for Christ as we live. And though that is true, this does not give us the right to disrespect the rulers and authorities of this world. Christians are to live out that heavenly kingdom and goodness by honoring our employers, our local and national government.

Scripture is very clear that God has placed people in authority in these positions to bring about order and justice in society. So then I ask the question, where is the line? We have all seen an employer or maybe even a government official or a nation walk in ways that are completely contrary to the truth of God's Word. When does this obedience have a limit or does it?

I want to encourage you with this. If an authority figure in your life would ask you to do something that if you obeyed, you would be deliberately sinning. We are not required to be obedient in that moment. The truth of God's Word supersedes that request and we don't have to obey. You could imagine this if you were at work and your boss said, "Hey, I want you to do this unethical thing." You don't have to submit to that.

You can say, "Hey, I'm not comfortable with that. I'm not going to do it." Because the truth of God Word supersedes that authority in that moment. Imagine a German soldier in World War II was a committed follower of Jesus. You don't have to commit those atrocities. Even in the home, if a parent or a guardian were to ask a minor to do something that would clearly be sinful, they do not have to submit to authority in that moment.

But if you are not being required to deliberately sin, we are to obey. There will be many laws and expectations and rules and guidelines that are frustrating, inconvenient, and even burdensome to your life. But God calls us as believers to obey and to live out His goodness under that authority. And even in this obedience, you and I can be voices for change.

Christians should be involved with local and national government. Christians should be using legal means to bring about change. You could be a voice for change in your workplace, but we should be doing it in the Spirit of Christ and in the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Paul continues in verse two, "To slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone." Our speech as believers and our demeanor as believers should always reflect the fruit of the Spirit.

Paul commands us not to slander one another. So you may ask, what is slander exactly? To slander is to make a false or malicious statement about someone for the sake of damaging their reputation. Let me be very clear what Paul is not saying here. Paul is not teaching Titus that we are never to speak about someone else's flaws. In this very letter, Paul has instructed Titus that there is a time to rebuke someone and at times even publicly.

He's used words like rebuke them sharply. They must be silenced. Refute those. Rebuke with all authority. But these rebukes that are in the Spirit of Christ should be done for the edification of those around you with correct facts and details and in a spirit of self-control. Paul also says that we're to be peaceable, considerate, and gentle.

In essence, he's saying, "It's not fitting for the family of God to act in ways that are unnecessarily argumentative or harsh. Some things don't need to be said." And even if they do, it's not only what we say, but how we say it that matters. To help keep us from this argumentative spirit, Paul is going to pause and give us a little humility lesson and reminder.

We continue in verse 3, "At one time, we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived, and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. We all have a past. Can it get an amen?" Paul is encouraging us, "Remember who you were before Jesus changed your life." Let that be a reminder before you get unnecessarily critical and harsh to those around you.

But I know in a room like this, though there are many stories of dramatic transformation and Christ bringing us from dark ways into light, there are also those of you who are sitting here who say, "You know what? I grew up in a Christian home. I said yes to Jesus at a very young age. I've learned more what that means throughout my life and have never really had this awful wayward season. So how do I begin to think this way? First, I want to say, praise God.

What a testimony of His grace in your life that you would have that story. That's not a bad testimony. That's the best kind of testimony. And yet, we should remind our hearts that in light of a holy God, we are all desperate and helpless without Jesus Christ. Paul says in Romans 3:11, "There is no one righteous, not even one. There's no one who understands. There is no one who seeks God.

Remind your heart, I'm nothing without Jesus." Then Paul reminds us of the miracle of salvation beginning in verse four. He says, "But when the kindness and love of God, our Savior appeared, He saved us not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy." God in Christ Jesus showed us kindness and love. And that's the model for you and I as we treat one another.

Is there a kindness and love that is evident? Because Scripture says that God's kindness is what leads us to repentance. Even in the midst of Paul encouraging Titus to help this church realize that good works matter, Paul is reminding him again that the miracle of salvation is not something that you and I could ever earn. God has shown us mercy. He's withheld the judgment that you and I deserve.

It's by grace through faith that we are saved. Paul then explains the means by which we're saved. He says this, "He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us

generously through Jesus Christ, our Savior. So that, having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

Paul highlights this fact that the Holy Spirit is the one who washes and purifies us. First, this happens at the moment of your conversion to put your faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. The Holy Spirit cleanses you from sin and you receive the righteousness of Christ. In the church, we call this justification. You are righteous before God the Father at that moment.

But the Spirit is also the one who teaches and empowers us to die to our old sinful ways and passions of our flesh and to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. This is a lifelong journey in the Spirit called sanctification. Some have wrongly used this very passage to promote that baptism in water is what saves a person.

This is called baptismal regeneration is the belief of that. Now focus on this phrase that says, "He saved us through the washing of rebirth." But this is a misunderstanding of Paul's whole point here. It's a washing of the Holy Spirit, not the washing of physical water that saves us. Baptism in water is then this physical expression to those around us that I have been washed by the Holy Spirit.

The old me is dead and I am raised to new life in the Spirit. This is why we refer to people as a born-again Christian. We're saying there's new life in the Spirit in that person. Notice at the beginning of verse 6, the whom who has been poured out, that's the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the one who cleanses us. This is an act of the grace of Jesus Christ, our Savior.

It's because of this gracious gift that you and I also have the hope of eternal life with God forever. So now, in light of all of this, Paul highlighting our helplessness without Jesus Christ, his wonderful gift of new life in the Spirit, Paul then gives this instruction. Beginning in verse 8, "This is a trustworthy saying.

And I want you to stress these things so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good." These things are excellent and profitable for everyone. As followers of Jesus, we're to be carefully devoted to doing what is good. Anyone who tells you that Christianity is all just about the grace of God and it's not about doing right things. They're missing the whole council of Scripture here.

Now, when we read that God wants us to do good works, I want you to not feel discouraged and burdened instantly. I know as soon as I say that, there can be like this, ugh. Maybe you think back to a time, maybe even in a church where this was done wrong, where there was a legalism and a criticism and an abuse maybe even in a church setting that was done in the name of doing good things.

And so you hear that and you take a step back for a minute. I want to encourage you. Paul is not trying to burden us or discourage us with this. He says, "Doing what is right is beneficial." Imagine if everyone in this room were deeply devoted to being kind, being loving, being compassionate, and to doing what is right. We all win in that moment. Everybody is blessed when we commit ourselves to that.

Paul then, though, is going to finish this section with an instruction and a stern warning. It's as if he knows the human heart as soon as we talk about living out our lives in good works. He knows where that goes in our selfishness. He says this in verse nine, "But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law because these are unprofitable and useless." You see, there were divisive teachers in the Cretan church who were creating extra rules and always stirring the pot, demanding that these New Testament believers adhere to certain Old Testament laws.

And all of this was done not to edify the church, but they wanted to get financial gain from this. And they also wanted to have a place of status in the church. And all the while that these leaders were doing this, they were operating in a way that was not consistent with the fruit of the Spirit and the heart of Christ for the church. It was just incompatible what they were doing. And Paul is going to give very clear instructions. How should the church deal with this?

In verse 10, he says, "Warn a divisive person once, then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them. You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful. They are self-condemned." In essence, Paul is saying there is no place in the family of God for this kind of behavior.

So I asked the question, how do we discern then between a righteous rebuke and someone who's being divisive? The truth is that many godly people have been wrongly labeled divisive over 2,000-plus years of church history. And the truth is also that many divisive people have proclaimed to be godly over 2,000-plus years of church history.

So how do we discern between these two? I'd like to call this segment righteous rebuke or divisive diva. How do we know the difference? I've got four questions that we can answer to help us in this discernment. Number one, is the topic commanded in Scripture for New Testament believers? Is whatever is being presented explicitly in Scripture for the New Testament church?

Because some people will bring out strange Old Testament laws. You can't eat pork if you're a Christian. You can't cut your sideburns. They don't usually use that one. Some people will bring up matters of preference, things that are not explicitly in Scripture, but fits their desire, their preference, their history, and they'll say, "This is God's Word for the church." Let's be clear. The church should never bend on truth.

We should stand hard in the face of evil on the truth of God's Word. We will never compromise His Word. But on matters that are not clearly in His Word, we are all about compromising for the unity of this family. You've heard your pastor say over and over, "unity over preference." We're not saying water down the truth. We're saying, "I put my preferences aside for the sake of unity and the furthering of the gospel." And then we fight for truth together.

Number two, is it being presented in the fruit of the Spirit? Is the one bringing this rebuke doing so in an obvious manner that fits with the fruit of the Holy Spirit and for the edification of the church? Number three, is the presenter a person of sound doctrine and lifestyle?

When someone comes with a rebuke, can you look at their life and say, "Boy, this person has evidence of the Holy Spirit in their life, in their home, in their relationships." This person has evidence of clear understanding of Scripture because sometimes someone will come with a rebuke and you're like, "Whoa, they've got some crazy ideology on three other categories. We should pause." That should be a question for concern. And then number four, does it honor and use God's church authority structure?

So is the person bringing this rebuke using the biblical processes to voice this? And are they respecting the church leadership positions that God has put in place for that rebuke to happen? And if we can look at all four of these questions and resoundingly say yes, then the church should receive with gladness the rebuke of the Holy Spirit. This is God's love to us that He would correct us and steer us back and remind us of truth.

But if not, the church should resist this as this type of division, this type of bickering has no benefit to the body of Christ. Paul begins to conclude his letter to Titus then with some final remarks. "As soon as I send Artemis and Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis because I have decided to winter there." One thing that we see in this verse is that Titus Call to the Cretan churches was not a lifelong call.

Paul is saying, "I've got you there for a time, for a specific reason, and then I want you to continue on with me." And this highlights the truth that, yes, there are pastors and leaders whom God calls to say in one congregation or one location for all or most of their ministry days. And if this is at the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit, there is extreme benefit to the church in that pattern.

However, there are also pastors and leaders whom God may call to multiple positions and multiple locations throughout their ministry life and years. And this can also have benefit to the church if it is done at the

prompting of the Holy Spirit. God calls and God gifts people in different ways all for His good pleasure and purposes. And we should receive that with gladness.

Continuing in verse 13, we read, "Do everything you can to help Zenus the lawyer and Apollos on their way and see that they have everything they need. Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good in order to provide for urgent needs and not live unproductive lives." Paul is saying that another way that you and I live out this goodness of the gospel is by supporting others who are on mission with us.

This is why as a church, at Fairview Missionary, that if you give money to the church, there's a percentage of that that we give away to missionaries and organizations locally, regionally, globally. We are all about getting behind other people and ministries who are already doing the good work of helping people take their next step towards Jesus. Paul is saying that is part of walking in good works, too, is supporting those ministries.

And then he concludes in verse 15. He says, "Everyone with me sends you greetings. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all." Paul is concluding with some warm feelings, but I want you to also notice that final line, "Grace be with you all." Paul had opened this letter by saying, "Grace to you, Titus." But then Paul is making it clear, this word is not just for Titus.

This is for the whole family of believers, and it's for you and I 2,000 plus years later. You see, throughout this book of Titus, we've seen how the people of God are to live out the miracle of salvation by growing in faith and growing in truth and growing in obedience to that truth. There's to be an order and a goodness in the life of a believer.

There's to be an order and a goodness in the family of believers, which we call the local church. People should look at our lives, they should look at our church, and they should be drawn to honor and glorify God because of what they see. So this morning, I'd like to close by addressing four groups of people that may be here this morning. Group number one, maybe you're here this morning and you have said yes to Jesus as Lord and Savior, but you've never grown in your faith.

You had that salvation experience, "Yes, Jesus, I'm in, but you've never grown in your faith and in truth and in your obedience to that truth." I want to encourage you this morning that with the words of the apostle Paul that we just read, "Devote yourself to doing good." It's an act of faith in your life, and it's profitable for yourself and everyone around you when you devote yourself to doing what is good.

And it takes time. It takes a lifetime. There will be ups and downs and twists and turns, but devote yourself because it matters and it's worth it. Group number two, maybe you're here this morning and you know it's important to grow in your faith, but you have found yourself continually failing. Maybe it's that addiction that you just have not been able to kick.

Maybe it's that Bible reading time and prayer time that you're like, "I'm going to do it this week," and day two or day three, you fall off the map. You might have even asked yourself in a dark moment, "Lord, if faith is lived out by doing good, am I really saved?" I want to encourage you this morning. Real Christians don't get it right every time.

It's a journey with ups and downs, twists and turns, many failures and successes. But I want to encourage you also this morning to take a step of faith. And the step of faith that I'm referring to is the act of confession and repentance. Maybe your actions in that argument last night with your spouse or that tough parenting moment this week or that coworker that you blew up at, maybe those moments didn't show your faith in action.

They didn't show that you really trust and are confident as Jesus and Lord and Savior. But I want to encourage you, the act of confession and repentance always has the sweet aroma of faith to our Savior. Today's the day to get back in the game. Quit letting the enemy hold you down in shame and in discouragement. You are loved by God right where you're at.

Group number three, maybe you're here this morning and you've been living or operating in a spirit of criticism, conflict, and division, maybe even in this family of believers. And you've masked this destruction under the cloak of being more spiritual or holy than those around you. You've got the inside track. May I encourage you?

There is no place for that in the family of God. Yes, there is a time for righteous rebuke, but let it be done on matters of clear biblical teaching by people of sound beliefs and lifestyle in the fruit of the Holy Spirit as we do it and for the edification of the church body. Apart from that, let it not happen.

Finally, group number four. Maybe you are here this morning and you've never placed your faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. I want to encourage you that God loves you. He loves you so much, and He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross for your sin and for my sin. This is not something that we earn. You could never earn your way to God. It is a gift.

Scripture says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Jesus is offering you the free gift of salvation this morning. And you can receive that by placing your trust and confidence, your faith in Him as Lord and Savior. I want to encourage you if you feel the Lord prompting you that you want to take that step of faith today.

We would love to walk you through that and pray through that with you. We'll have members of our prayer team at the sides of the stage. Some of our pastoral staff will be available. We would love to help you know what it means to walk with Jesus, to be washed by the Spirit, and to be made new. You may want to come this morning, though, and pray, and it's not to receive salvation. Members of our prayer team are still here. Whatever you would like prayer for, we want to encourage you this morning.

And for all of us, as we grow in this faith and in our understanding of truth and our understanding of how to live that out, I want to encourage you, let's do it all for the glory and honor of Jesus Christ our Lord. Let Christ alone be magnified in this church. Would you pray with me? Lord, we thank You so much for Your Word. Holy Spirit, I pray that Your conviction would not end with this message, but that it would go forward.

Lord, for the one who may feel the prompting of Your Spirit to come and receive that gift of salvation, God, would you give them boldness and anoint them with the fire to take a step of faith? Lord, for Your people, as You teach us to grow in our understanding of truth and to grow in our obedience to truth, God, would you help us? And in all of this, Lord, we want to see Jesus Christ lifted up in the church.

None of this is for our own glory. None of this is just for our own gain, but it's that you would be honored and glorified. We love you. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.