

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

02.15.2023 | Gospel Shaped Priorities | Titus 3:9-15 | Dr. Ben Day, Senior Pastor

If you have a Bible this morning, I want to invite you to turn with me to Titus chapter three.

This will be the last week that you hear me say that for all of 2026 so far. We've been going to the book of Titus as we've walked through this book over these seven weeks, but now we come to the end of our study and next week we're going to start a new sermon series that will take us through the Lent season. It'll be a study called Clean Heart, a look into the life of David, but it will be a focus on our sin and God's mercy. And so I hope that you'll join us as we continue on to study God's word together but this morning we come to the end of the book of Titus.

And we are reminded what we've been looking at throughout this letter and that is that we are to have lives shaped by the gospel. The good news of Jesus is to direct us and shape us and one of the things that we've considered is that this happens in our lives as individuals, but it happens in our church as a whole. That we are shaped by the gospel as we live in community, but also being shaped by the gospel shows up in the way that we act as a community. What we've seen over the last couple of weeks is how this good news of Jesus shapes our lives. A couple of weeks ago we looked specifically at the grace of God that is towards us and how the grace of God is at the root of a healthy Christian life.

Now last week we saw it kind of all put together that as God has done this work, this indicative work, this reality work in the gospel that he changes us so that we might follow the calls that he has called us to do. Specifically as we saw last week to do things that are good and profitable and excellent for all people. As we are seeking the good of all and we are gentle and kind to all. Now we come to the end of the letter. In some ways the end of the letter just seems like a conclusion. Paul will give some personal instructions to Titus in these verses. But along with just concluding the letter, I think Paul reiterates a couple of things. He wants Titus to know that as he is ending his instructions to Titus, that he wants to see Titus and this church continue to be shaped by the gospel. And so he tells them essentially, this is what the gospel shaped priorities of a church are. Here's what you need to avoid. Here's what you need to be focused on. But here's how you continue on as a community of faith that is shaped by the gospel.

So let's read Paul's final words to Titus here in Titus chapter three. Me looking at verses nine through 15. Paul tells Titus, but avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law. For they are unprofitable and worthless. As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him. Knowing that such a person is warped and sinful, he is self condemned. When I send Artemis or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. Do your best to speed Zenith the lawyer and Apollo's on their way. See that they lack nothing. And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works so as to help cases of urgent need and not be unfruitful. All who are with me send greetings to you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all.

You know, one of the keys to any organization being healthy is that the group of people, the organization can answer the questions, why do we exist? What's our goal in being together as a group? And how are we going to meet that goal? What are our priorities going to be according to why we exist? And one of the essential things is that you not only have to answer those questions as an organization, but you have to keep them before you quite often. I remember when I was young in ministry, kind of trying to learn how to do leadership, I was on a church staff and we read the book, The Advantage by Patrick Lencioni. It's just a helpful book, Lencioni is kind of a guru when it comes to leadership and organizational health and one of the things he says is you've got to answer those questions about why we exist, what our goals are. You've got to create that clarity and then he says you've got to over-communicate that clarity and then you've got to reinforce that clarity.

In other words, you've got to define or describe why you exist as an organization, but then you need to keep reminding yourselves why you exist. You need to keep communicating that and reinforcing that and it sounds like such simple advice, but it's so important and helpful because of how easy it is for an organization to drift off of its central mission. How easy it is for a group of people to become distracted for what they are supposed to do. As I was talking to the kids earlier, think about how easy it is for each one of us to be distracted. Children aren't the only ones guilty of getting distracted, right? I mean, as individuals, we get distracted. How many New Year's resolutions do we give up by mid-

February? How many times do we know that there are healthy habits that should be a part of our lives and yet we let them fall by the wayside as all sorts of unhealthy habits become parts of our lives? So often we know what we're supposed to do, but we don't remind ourselves, we don't continue on, we get distracted. If that can happen for an individual, think about amongst a group of people. When people get together and they all get distracted, then together as an organization, so often the group doesn't move together as a unit, but in different places, they begin to get distracted and divided.

This happens all the time in churches. You know, as a church, we exist to know God and to make him know. The local church exists to be disciples and to make disciples. The ways that we describe it or define it in our church, just as we often say in our mission statement, we exist to lead people to love and live for Jesus. So often we get distracted from this central truth as to why we exist. We start looking at individual ministries and programs and maybe things that are good, but they begin to consume our thoughts in our time. And then we move to maybe things that are even less important. Like we kind of start talking about what style of music we sing, what color the carpet is, how good the coffee is, if there's going to be a church picnic and where it's going to be held. Sometimes we lose sight of the fact that we exist for a reason and we can become distracted or divided. What we should be doing is we should be asking ourselves on a regular basis, am I leading people to love and live for Jesus? Is our church leading people to love and live for Jesus? Is all the things that we're doing as a church, the community groups and the discipleship groups and the children's ministry and youth ministry and events, are these things helping us accomplish our mission?

It's almost like Paul as he ends his letter to Titus. He says, listen, I know how easy it is to get distracted. I know how easy it is to lose focus on what you're supposed to do. And so he says, here's what I want to remind you of. Here's what I want you to remind the people of. Because there is one blessing of being part of a group or an organization. The difficulty I think is that we take our individual distractions and they get multiplied in a whole group. One of the good things is that we have each other to remind ourselves of what's most important. We have each other as a group to turn us back to what is our central mission? Why do we exist and together we continue in on this? So Paul tells Titus as you strengthen and establish this church on Crete, I want to remind you to keep your priorities in the right order. If you're going to be a gospel-shaped church, then you need to have gospel-shaped priorities. And he essentially says, this is what you need to avoid and this is what you need to be devoted to. This is what is likely to distract you and here's how you keep your focus. And so that's just how we're going to conclude our time in Titus's letter by just looking at these two things that Paul puts before Titus as a gospel-shaped priorities.

First, we know that we need to avoid being distracted and we need to avoid division. And so the first gospel-shaped priority is to protect from division. If you like to follow along in your notes, if you like to fill in blanks, that's our first one, really just two parts of looking at this text. The first one is that if we're going to be a church that is shaped by the gospel, if we're going to have gospel-shaped priorities, the first priority is to protect from division. I remember last week we started chapter 3 and the end of that section where we left off, Paul said that the people of God need to be devoted to good works, things that are profitable and excellent for all people. And immediately in verse 9, he makes the shift by saying, if that is what is profitable for people, here's what you need to know is unprofitable for the people of God. Here's what he says in verse 9, "But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless."

Now a few times throughout this letter, we've seen that there were false teachers in the church here on Crete. Paul had left Titus at Crete to establish and strengthen the church there on that island, probably different house churches around the island. And as Titus is there, Paul knows that there are these false teachers that have come in and begun to teach things that aren't true, that are contrary to the gospel. We saw some of the things about them in chapter 1. Chapter 1, we saw that there was a call to silence the teachers, to rebuke them sharply. Here the advice is a little bit different, but it's clear that it's probably the same group of people. This group of false teachers were basically what we would call "Judaizers." There were people that were saying, yes, if you're going to be a Christian, you have to believe in Jesus, but you also have to be Jewish as well. You have to act Jewish in order to be part of the people of God. And so they said things like, yes, believe in Jesus and his sacrifice for you, but also make sure you follow the Jewish law. Also, make sure you come from a certain heritage or a genealogy. Also, make sure that you pick up these Jewish cultural practices. They were called back in chapter 1, the circumcision party, because they were very focused on the Jewish practices.

Today, our false teachings may not look quite like that, but we often do add things on to Jesus. So often people will come and they'll say, well, yes, you need Jesus, but you also need to make sure you're doing this in order to be saved. Yes, you need Jesus, but Jesus plus your good works or your religious efforts or something else is what really makes you a Christian or make sure that you're forgiven. Paul says all these things are a distraction.

So back in chapter 1, he said you need to silence and rebuke these false teachers, but notice here, he doesn't begin by talking about the teachers themselves, but about the conversations and the discussions. And what does he say? He says the people of God need to avoid these conversations. They need to avoid these discussions. He calls them dissensions. He calls them quarrels about the law, foolish controversies, things about genealogies. What Paul is saying here is these are things that are not central to who the people of God are. These are things that distract from the gospel. These are things that pull away from the truth. This is why he calls them unprofitable and worthless. What he's saying is they serve no purpose for the people of God. These discussions, these debates, these considerations of all these different false teachings, not only do you need to silence the false teachers, but don't even as the people of God entertain such discussions or conversations, because all they are doing is distracting from what you are called to do and what you are called to believe as the people of God.

One of the things I think is really clear in Scripture is that when we take our eyes off of what unifies us, that is when we are likely to become divided. There's this clear call in the New Testament for the church, the people of God to be unified, to walk in unity as the people of God. And almost every time you see this call for unity amongst the church, there is this focus on what unifies us, on the fact that God has united us in the gospel. And to keep our focus on this, lest we not walk in this unity that God has created, lest we become divided. See, one of the great dangers of these discussions and these conversations that were happening there in the church in Crete, is that not only would they maybe introduce some false teachings, but they would begin to divide the people rather than unite the people of God. One of the clearest places that we I think kind of see this fleshed out, this call for unity and this focus on what unifies us is the beginning of Ephesians chapter 4.

Just hear Paul's words as he writes to the church in Ephesus and calls them to walk in unity. Ephesians 4, 1-6. Paul says, "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called. With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." She says, "Be eager to maintain this unity." And then notice what he says starting in verse 4. "There is one body and one spirit, just as you are called to one hope that belongs to your call. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all." Paul tells the church in Ephesus, "You have already been united by God in the gospel. In order to stay united, to walk in unity, keep your focus on this gospel message that unites you. The more you entertain these discussions of the false teachers, the more that you have conversations, maybe not even just amongst the false teachers, but even amongst yourselves, the more likely you are to get distracted from the truth of the gospel and to become divided because you've taken your eyes off of what unites you.

We need to hear this warning, church family. I'm not saying we can't ever have questions or discussions. There's gonna be new thoughts all the time that we need to consider and discuss. I'm not saying, well, okay, if it's not specifically the message of the gospel, then we can't talk about it. I'm not even saying if it's not specifically in the Bible, like cite me a Bible verse or I won't talk with you about it. I don't think that's the case. There's all sorts of things that we hear in the world. There's all sorts of new ideas that we're presented with that we wrestle with. The church should be a safe place to wrestle with these things. I don't think Paul is saying don't have these discussions at all. I think he is saying don't let these discussions consume you. Don't let them distract you from what's most important. Don't let them draw you away from the truth of God's word and the centrality of the gospel.

So yes, let's let's take questions and thoughts, but let's not hold them up to the Bible as if they're equal. Let's bring them under the authority of Scripture and test them. Let's have good fruitful discussions that help push us forward as followers of Christ and what it looks like to believe the gospel, but that's not allow conversations that distract us from the gospel from what we are to be focused on because it will eventually just divide us as the people of God and not allow us to carry out the mission that God has called us to. So God said, excuse me, Paul says you've got to protect from division in the church and one of the ways you do that is avoid this distracting talk or these distracting conversations. But then he does address the people that are bringing these things up. So you continue on in verse 10. Those people who keep

bringing in division. He says in verse 10 asked for a person who stirs up division after warning him once and then twice have nothing more to do with him. Knowing that such a person is warped and sinful. He is self-condemned.

Now at first glance, you just read verses 10 and 11. It can sound quite harsh. I think it's important that we consider what these instructions are and what it looks like to live them out as a church. What Paul is saying here is he's referring back to those false teachers that he has already addressed and just as he said before you need to rebuke them and silence them. Here is saying there's going to be people who not just maybe question things and maybe not even just believe things that are different than the gospel, but they are actively trying to spread them in the church. These are not just people who have questions who who raise a point of debate. These are people that have embraced the truth different than the truth of the gospel and not only have they embraced it, but they begin to teach it and share it with others. Therefore, they begin to cause division in the church because they're not focused on what unites us, but all these other false teachings.

Again, I just want to give a kind of a word of nuance. This is about people who are unrepentantly walking in sin and false teaching. This is not about people who who are struggling with a question or just curious or even struggling with a sinful issue in their lives. The church should be a safe place for sinners who want to come and to ask questions and to learn the truth. What Paul is describing here is someone who is walking unrepentantly in their sin and also seeking to spread it to others. He says this person is very dangerous. He writes to the church in Corinth that don't you know a little bit of leaven leavens the whole lump.

Another way you can think about is like one red sock in the load of clothes turns the whole group of laundry pink, right? Like one thing can affect many one person can affect many. Paul's not saying here we'll take every person who is has a different point of view or who has a question or is struggling in some way and kick them out the church. Sometimes people get nervous around these verses because churches have abused them in the past. Churches would say well if you're not on board with us or if you don't, you know go with our vision then then we just can't have you in our church at all. That's not what Paul's saying here. Paul has just told us to be courteous and gentle and kind to those who are around us. He has told us to to walk in love and and seek the good of others do things that are profitable and excellent for all people. But now he is saying for the people of God, you've got to be careful that you don't get distracted and divided as the people of God. You got to make sure that you're able to walk in unity and what God has called you to do and that will mean that will mean avoiding conversations that distract and divide also mean avoiding people that distract and divine.

But there are people who continually cause division the church who continue to teach truths that are contrary to the message of the gospel. We need to warn them. We need to talk with them. But eventually says they do not need to be part of your group because it will eventually move your group in a way that God does not want you to go. It will cause division in the church. You need to allow this person to consider their own sinfulness. What he says in verse 11 such a person is warped and sinful. He has self-condemned again. It sounds harsh, but we know from other places in the Bible is that the heart is that that person would be saved that a person who is caught in their sin and refuses to repent of their sin when removed from the body of Christ when when to some form of church discipline is carried out the hope would be that they would see their sinfulness. They would see the grace of God towards them and how they've refused it and they would come to trust in him.

Paul says if you're going to be a church that is shaped by the gospel, you've got to keep these gospel priorities. You've got to keep the gospel as a priority. And so one part of that is to protect from the division that is likely to come through conversations or people who divine but notice he doesn't just tell Titus what they are supposed to be against or what they're supposed to be avoiding sometimes is very easy as the church to just know what we are against or for people to know what we are against. We're known for standing against things or standing against certain people. The Paul doesn't end by saying well just avoid these conversations and these people. He ends in a different way. He has some personal instructions for Titus, but then he says I want you to be devoted to something something he's called us through to throughout this book be devoted to good works that meet the needs of others. So what are our churches that are shaped by the gospel priorities? One is that you would protect from division and two is that you would pursue fruitful ministry.

As a church if we're going to continue to be shaped by the gospel we need to protect from division avoid conversations and people that distract that divide that lead us away from who God has called us to be but we also need to be known for something. We need to be pursuing something. We need to pursue fruitful ministry. So Paul concludes his letter. He gives some personal instructions to Titus verse 12. He says when I send Artemis or Tychicus to you. Do your best to come to me at Nicopolis for I've decided to spend the winter there. Don't just love sometimes being reminded that this is both the Word of God, but it's also a letter from a father in the faith to a son in the faith. Like it's so amazing like so many other religions have religious books that they consider to be divinely inspired, but they seem to be so clearly kind of written in a formulaic way. We have what we believe to be the Word of God inspired by God breathed out by God, but he used real people to write these letters to to write these gospel accounts to record these historical truths for us. God inspired Paul to write this letter to Titus, but it is still a letter to Titus. So there's always just some personal instructions in there.

He says whenever I am able to send someone to you, maybe I'm going to send someone to help kind of relieve you there on the island of Crete where you've been working to strengthen and establish the church when I'm able to send someone there. I want you to come meet me in the copilis. I'm planning to spend the winter there and I'd like to see you. You know, this isn't a what we call a prescriptive text in which we should take it and and try to apply it to every area of our lives as if this is an instruction for us all like we shouldn't all try to make it to the copilis by winter so that we can spend time together there, but you can just sense like a little bit of the heart in that message, right? The Paul's writing this letter to Titus because he wants him to strengthen and establish the church. He wants him to be able to carry out the ministry well there in Crete, but he also still cares about him.

He still loves him. This letter was at the end of his relationship. He says I want you to be there to establish the church, but no, I've got plans to send someone else to kind of give you a relief from that work and that you might be able to see me again and be refreshed in my presence as we spend the winter together. He says that you can send these people back to me supply them with every need probably Zenas and Apollos were maybe the people that brought the letter to Titus on Crete. So he says send them back to me speedily give them out all the things that they need but then he closes by giving this more general instruction not just a personal word to Titus. He says in verse 14 and let our people learn to devote themselves to good works so as to help cases of urgent need and not be unfruitful.

Here's where we see that the second gospel shaped priority for a church a church is going to continue to be shaped by the gospel is going to be focused on avoiding things that divide protecting from division, but they're also a church that is shaped by the gospel is going to pursue something pursue fruitful ministry. He says our people the people of God should be devoted to good works. This is something that he has said throughout this letter. We saw it last week at the beginning of chapter 3. He already talked about the way that it happens amongst the people of God, but earlier in this chapter. He says this happens out in public with the people outside of the church be kind be gentle seek the public good be devoted to public work to good public works. And so he reminds them here one more time make sure the people of God are devoted to good works.

This is something significant for us to notice is often important for us to remember as we've seen even in this letter that we are not saved by our good works. Paul said that we are saved by the grace of God in just early in chapter 3. He said God's mercy came and it wasn't because of anything that we did to draw his mercy towards us, but yet simply by his mercy and grace. He has saved us. None of our good works contribute to our salvation at all. But yet as we've seen throughout this letter when the grace of God really gets a hold of us when the reality of the gospel really begins to shape our lives those indicative those truths we talked about last week really begin to work their way into our who we are how we see ourselves it begins to push us forward. To live out the things of God to be devoted to good works. So while we're not saved by our good works Church, we should be devoted to good works as a church body. We should be living this out. We should be doing things that are good for each other and for our community.

I would just encourage you think about this whenever you come to church. Sometimes I think in this day and age you can kind of be easy to come to church with a consumer mindset. Sometimes I'll meet people who maybe have moved to San Francisco a couple of months ago and they might say that they're church shopping. And if you've ever heard this term before and they don't ever mean it. I think like in a mean way, but what they mean is like I'm new to the area. I want to see what churches are here and which one might be a good fit for me. I think there's a God a lot of wisdom in that that

when we seek to become part of a church somewhere. We should really consider instead of healthy Church is it a church that is shaped by the gospel. But sometimes that consumeristic mindset of church shopping can take over. Sometimes people can show up to church thinking it exists to meet their needs. They start wondering what kind of programs and things do you have for me and for my kids? The things that you do really suit me and my interests. Well, what can you do for me? Well make no mistake. The church should exist for people. So we want to meet your needs. We want to care for you. But do you think there's something good about showing up not to church as a consumer, but as a contributor?

So this is a church that seems to be focused on the gospel. This is a church that seems to be shaped by the gospel. How can I be a part of what God is doing here? How is God calling me to serve? What good works is God calling me to within this church? How is this church equipping me to do good works outside of the walls of this church? This is I want to encourage you to be your focus that we would be a church that is devoted to good works. Individuals and a church body that is devoted to doing the things that are glorifying to God. And throughout this book, you know, we've talked about good works and I think they've been described in different ways in different parts of the book. But one of the ways I love that Paul describes it here is he says so as to help cases of urgent need.

When Paul has good works in mind, at least in part, he has the idea of meeting needs, specifically meeting needs that are urgent. And I would just say this is what I want our church to be focused on. We talk about being a gospel-shaped church, pursuing fruitful ministry. One of the main ways that we want to do that is by meeting urgent needs. One of the first places to do that is within our own body. We as a congregation, we as a church family, we need to meet one another's needs. Do you know someone in the church who is going through a loss, a season of grief, facing health challenges, lost a job? What needs do they have in their life right now? What can you do to meet that need? What good work is God calling you to to support that person?

By the way, I want to say I'm always so encouraged by the way our church does this so well. So many times in the life of our church, I see people have needs and maybe it's through our Deacons. Maybe it's through their community group. Maybe it's just through our whole church body. I see meal trains being set up. I see people going over to care for people, to give them rides, to help clean their house. I see urgent needs being met in so many different ways. Let us continue to be devoted to this church family. And this is why we encourage you to be in community. This is why we would say it's good for you to be in a community group, be in a discipleship group, so that people actually know what's going on in your life. You know what's going on in other people's lives. You can know the needs that are there and meet them. They can know yours and meet your needs. Says let's be devoted to good works that meet urgent needs, but let's not just do that within our church body. Let's also do that in our community.

We talked about this some last week. Paul says do things in the public sphere that are good for people. They're excellent, that are profitable for people. Let us do that together as a church family. So many times it's easier just to talk about the problems of our city, things that we see around us. What are we actually doing to meet the needs of people around us? I was in the newcomers class this morning with people who are just learning more about our church. We're able just to share about our church's history. One of the things I just love about our church's history is there's just been ways that I've been able to see our church seeking to be a part of our city, seeking to use the shared values that we have with our city to meet needs. And I want us to continue to do that. Well, whether it's through our Urban Ministry outreach, when we just see people who are unhoused right outside of our doors and just inviting them in for a meal and for fellowship for Bible study, whether it's more organized ways through local partners. I've told you before that we have this open space in the firehouse, an old firehouse just up the Waller Street from where our church building is right here. It's been on my heart for a while that we as a church would use that space well to meet people's needs. Praying that God would continue to give us vision and direction for that. Would you pray? Would you consider what needs are most urgent around me that I can meet in our church family, in our community, in our city, and let us be devoted to those things. Let us be active because this is bearing fruit.

He says to help cases of urgent need and not be unfruitful. I just so love the imagery that the Bible uses time and time again of the good works of the Christian life being like fruit. It's just so helpful to think about that because it shows us it's not the first thing or it's not something that we can just do on our own. But the good works that we are called to the good works that glorify God are produced by the Holy Spirit being at work in our lives. They are produced by the gospel of God really working its way down into our lives. The grace of God really getting a hold of us and when those things

happen when we abide in Christ as he is the vine and we are the branches fruit will come. It's not something that we can just strive to do in our own as if I could just stand before you and tell you all the needs of our congregation all the needs of our city and just make you feel guilty. So you have to go out and do more things. No, he says this is the way it should be as we've seen all throughout this letter. You should be so shaped by the good news of Jesus Christ.

The grace of God should be so at work in your life that should naturally produce fruit and that fruit should look like meeting urgent needs that fruit should look like caring for the people around you seeking the good of those in your church family and those in your community. You see how connected these two gospel shaped priorities are you hear that first one about protecting from division and you can just say oh, here's a pastor who just doesn't want people who disagree with him. You can hear about that about avoiding, you know, foolish conversations or putting out people who divide and you can just say oh, that's just harsh, but it's so connected because the people of God can never do the things that we are called to do unless we are continually focused on the gospel.

Only when we continue to be rooted in Christ and abiding in Christ only when we continue to be reminding ourselves of the grace of God being shaped by the gospel. Will we be able to produce fruit that is good for people and glorifying to God to see how connected these two are we have to protect from division so that we can pursue the fruitful ministry that God has for us. So church family as we in this book of Titus, I hope it won't just be another book that we walk through. Hope it won't just be something that we forget about, but I hope it'll be something that we continue to say how is the gospel shaping my life as an individual? How is the gospel shaping our church as a whole?

I pray that as we move forward, we would keep these gospel priorities in front of us as I mentioned earlier as much as it can be a problem that each one of us get distracted and we all get distracted in different ways and we kind of get divided. What can also be really helpful is together as a church body we bring each other back from distraction. We bring each other back from sinful ways of living from false teachings from anything that would divide and together we pursue fruitful ministry by caring for one another loving one another meeting the needs of the people around us. So church family, would you join me as we in the book of Titus and continue on in 2026 to commit to continue to be a gospel shaped church? Would we continue to protect from division as we walk in unity and would we be devoted to a gospel shaped life that pursues good works meet needs that are good for people that are glorifying to God?