The Last Word on Relationships
Titus 3:9-15
56-26

Open your Bible to Titus chapter 3. We come now to the final message in our study of this wonderful power-packed condensed epistle of Paul to his young son in the faith ministering on the island of Crete. And we're going to be looking at the final verses, verses 9 through 15, just some closing remarks by the Apostle Paul, having already given the full argument of the book itself. He has some final things to say. And listen as he speaks beginning in verse 9.

"But shun foolish controversies and genealogies and strifes and disputes about the law for they are unprofitable and worthless. Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning being self-condemned. When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, make every effort to come to me at Nicopolis for I have decided to spend the winter there. And diligently help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way so that nothing is lacking for them. And let our people also learn to engage in good deeds to make pressing needs that they may not be unfruitful. All who are with me greet you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all."

If I was the leader responsible for many church congregations as Paul was for there were many cities and many congregations on the island of Crete, if I was responsible to lead and guide and direct and equip a young man to oversee those young and fragile churches, if I was responsible to strengthen a church in the midst of a very violently pagan culture, if I had the responsibility to arm them against false teachers and ungodliness and confusion and evil authority, if I had the task of trying to lead them to purity and holiness and virtue and maturity, if it was my responsibility to make sure that they were insulated from the evil of the world around them while at the same time reaching that evil world with the gospel of Jesus Christ, if all of that was my task I think I would have written a longer letter. I might have written a book. I might have written many books. And it amazes me that with all of that as responsibility, the Apostle Paul has wrapped this whole thing up in three chapters, brief chapters at best.

He was so brief and yet he was so direct. And he focused on the needful matters. And again this demonstrates the mind of the Spirit of God who with an economy of words can say everything that needs to be said. As I told you at the very beginning when we started this study many many months ago, this is a...this is a condensed epistle and when you mix it with the water of exegesis it begins to expand and expand and expand and it's taken us months to go through this, to expose ourselves to the almost unending riches that are found here.

But if we were to sum up this whole epistle in just one statement we would probably have to select the statement in chapter 2 and verse 10 where the Apostle Paul says, "The purpose of believers living is to show all good faith so that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect." While directed particularly at Those who are bondslaves, it certainly captures in one statement the essence of responsibility for every believer within the church and that is that we are to

so live that the world can see that our God saves sinners. The supreme responsibility is to adorn the teaching of Scripture about God's saving power by demonstrating what saved lives look like. We are to live so that the Word of God is not dishonored. We are to live so that the critics of the Christian faith are silenced because they have nothing to say negatively about us. We are to live so that that teaching which says God saves sinners from their sin is made visibly verifiable by our lives.

So really this is an evangelistic letter, it is telling the church how to win the world and it wins the world around it by its own purity. And so the greatest teaching on evangelism is teaching on holiness and virtue and integrity and purity and honesty in Christian living. If the church is to effect the lost world but be unaffected by it, it pursues holiness which keeps it pure and which gives it its impact in terms of its testimony.

Now just boiling that concept down it basically comes down in this epistle to relationships...relationships. In chapter 1 you have the relationship that is necessary between the people and their God and that is going to be directed and led by the appropriate Christian leadership. The Apostle Paul says in chapter 1 that it is crucial to the life sustenance and testimony of the church that it have elders who are above reproach, one-woman men with believing children, not accused of dissipation or rebellion, overseers who are above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, quick tempered, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, men who hold fast the faithful Word in accordance with the teaching who are able both to exhort in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict. The point is godly virtuous men who set the example of how everyone in the church is to be related to God. That's the essence of it.

Chapter 1 is concerned about the relationship of the people in the church to the Lord of the church. And it demands godly leadership unlike much of the false teachers that surrounded the church who are described, as we shall see later in the second half of chapter 1. Chapter 1 then really focuses on the church's relationship to the Lord as modeled and exemplified in its leadership. Chapter 2 then talks about relationships among believers with each other. Chapter 3 talks about the relationship that believers have with the unregenerate society in which they live. Those three crucial areas of relationship between us and God, between us and us, and between us and them on the outside. All of that has been covered with the genius of the Holy Spirit in these three brief chapters. But now as we come to the final section which I just read to you, we have Paul's few closing comments. And really, you know what it is? It's the last word on relationships. If I could title the message, that's what I would title it...the last word on relationships. Paul is going to say his final comments with regard to the important relationships in the life of the church that lead to effective testimony.

Now I've learned a few things just by hanging around long enough to get old or older. I've learned some things by listening to people and kind of walking through life and being a part of the ups and downs of their life. And one of the things that I've learned in my years of many many conversations that the Lord has allowed me to be involved in is usually when you're having a conversation with someone and they come to you and approach you and have something to share with you that's really on their heart, they will filter through some important things but generally speaking the last thing is of greatest concern. So now you know if you come to have a conversation with me I'll be listening intently for the last thing you say. I have learned that much of what comes first is sort of setting you up for the kill which whatever is going to be comes last in the conversation. And it's not a bad ploy, I think it's one that we find even used often in Scripture by the writers of Scripture. Certainly Paul has done that. He frequently starts off with some ingratiating amenities and then comes to the main point.

If I may, I would like to suggest to you that you will learn to be a good listener when you learn that lesson because it will keep you tuned in to the end. Sometimes people take a long time getting to the end and maybe listening becomes more difficult as the conversation lengthens but it's important for you to hang in there because until they get to the end you probably haven't heard what's most important. Can we give Paul the benefit of the doubt here and assume that maybe something like that is working in his own heart as he closes out this letter? He has had some crucial things to say, some preeminent things to say, certainly some eternally important things to say but he really isn't done until he's done. And he has a few last words that he wants to leave, sort of the final very practical, very personal and very significant ending to this wonderful letter. The last word on relationships as Paul closes out his teaching to this church, these churches really on Crete who are going to have to live as God's children in the wicked and perverse world where they're to shine as lights holding forth the Word of life.

As he does give us the last word on relationships, he does it in four distinct categories. The last word on relationships with false leaders, with factious people, with fellow servants and with faithful friends. They're the four groups that I see identified in these final wonderful verses.

Let's hear his last word on false teachers. Verse 9, "But shun foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the law for they're unprofitable and worthless." Now the Cretan Christians had been over-exposed to a number of men who said they represented the Lord, they said they were His servants, called, ordained, set apart. They said they were the bearers of divine truth but they were liars. In fact, that conflict that they were having with false teachers was creating so much chaos and so much confusion that it generated the very reason for which Paul calls on Titus, chapter 1 verse 5, to appoint elders in every city. The church needs strong spiritual leadership. And in verse 9 he says they must be men who hold fast to the faithful Word in accordance with the teaching, the revealed content of divine truth and they're able to wield that truth both for exhortation and sound doctrine and refutation against those who contradict. Godly pastors, godly elders, godly leaders are needed as defenders and protectors of the purity of the doctrine of the church. If the church is going to have any witness in the world, it must maintain pure doctrine, pure doctrine being the foundation for pure living and so it is crucial that these false teachers be confronted and dealt with and the church be insulated from them.

You will notice in verse 10 that there is a rather lengthy discussion of them indicating that they were a formidable group. He says there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, specially those of the circumcision. Rebellious indeed, not willing to be under biblical or divine authority. Empty talkers, they are fluent know-nothings. They are deceivers leading others into error, particularly this group of them was identified with self-righteous Jewish legalism. They were probably another of the group known as the Judaizers with which Paul deals in Galatians chapter 2. They were going around espousing that righteousness was by means of circumcision and the law, along with another crazy and bizarre and mystical and allegorical things. And there were many of them, he says in verse 11. They must be silenced. They are upsetting whole families. They are teaching things they shouldn't teach for the sake of sorted gain.

He says further about them in verse 16, they profess to know God but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed. And since good deeds are the essence of evangelistic impact, since that's what demonstrates transformed lives, they can't possibly do that because their lives haven't been transformed at all. He is deeply concerned then that these

churches on the island of Crete are being assaulted by demon doctrine, espoused by seducing spirits, pumped out through these rebellious empty talkers and deceivers who are associated with some kind of legalistic ceremonial righteousness, rather than the truth of the gospel. They produce in the church the opposite of what is good and profitable for men, as chapter 3 verse 8 says, they produce what is evil and what is unprofitable.

Chapter 2 carries on the same kind of emphasis when in verse 1 Titus is told to speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine. And then at the end of the chapter in verse 15, to speak and exhort and reprove with all authority and let no one disregard him. The battle for truth rages in Crete and Titus must defend the church by building up godly leaders and silencing false teachers. That is part of his responsibility. And so we know the background there from chapter 1.

Now go back to chapter 3 verse 9, and here's the last word. The last word is a verb, it's a verb in the form of an imperative or a command, shun...shun. The sense here is as a continual practice. The verb literally means to treat someone with indifference, with contempt, to turn your back on them and go the other way actually, to turn oneself around for the purpose of avoiding someone or something. And the responsibility that we have to false teachers is to turn our back and walk away, shun them. That's the last word.

He categorizes them in four different categories giving us some components of their error. First of all, he talks about foolish controversies. The word for foolish is the word from which we get the English word moron, moronic debates, moronic arguments...shun them, turn your back and walk the other direction. These false teachers always want to attack the truth. They always want to attack the theology of the church. They always want to attack what is historically true and affirmed and traditional. With their controversial teaching and their novel insights, they want to attack this solidly based truth and lead poor victimized believers into confusion and into sin. This was so common in Paul's time, by the way, that he wrote almost the same kind of thing to Timothy about the same kind of false teaching. And if you read carefully through 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy, you will hear an echo of precisely of what you see here in Titus.

For example, 1 Timothy 6:4 talks about false teachers who have morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words which arise out of...out of which, I should say, arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth. This is nothing new. They would come in and with their novel personal supposedly scholastic erudite divinely received intuitively ascertained mystically-gained insights, they would attack the Word of God. What they were really doing was espousing demon doctrine. They were ignorant, says Paul, in that passage in 1 Timothy 6, they were untrained, they were ungodly. They spent senseless hours arguing and debating about their speculations as over against the truth of God with the purpose of stirring up questions which cannot be answered, confusion and ultimately defection from the faith. That kind of teaching, Paul says, eats like gangrene, it makes shipwreck of the faith. It is devastating. Shun it, that's the last word.

Once it is exposed for what it is and confronted for what it is, you give it no platform. You do not listen to it as if it were truth being taught by those who represent God, you turn your back and you walk away.

As I was thinking about that I was meditating on the thought...I wonder if God is keeping any kind of record of how many hours and how many years and how many life times of Christians have been lost

to real Kingdom purposes, to real redemptive activity, to real evangelism, discipleship and spiritual ministry while they debate fools and their lies, often calling it scholarship, academia when the souls of men go begging to hear the gospel? In 2 Timothy chapter 2 and verse 14, Paul giving much the same kind of direction to Timothy says, "Solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words which is useless and leads to the ruin of the hearers." In verse 16, "Avoid the worldly and empty chatter, it only leads to further ungodliness." In verse 14 it leads to ruin, in verse 16 it leads to ungodliness, in verse 17 it becomes gangrenous. And then down in verse 23, "Refuse foolish and ignorant speculation, they just produce quarrel." If you want quarrel and diseased gangrenous kind of error that produces ungodliness and the ruin of its hearers, then get in a debate with people espousing that which isn't true. And yet the church has wasted who knows how many countless lives in a debate with the folly of these kinds of speculations and useless meaningless controversies. Shun foolish controversies.

The second aspect of this false teaching that he identifies is under the term "genealogies." You say, "Does that mean we're not supposed to read certain parts of Genesis? Or we're not supposed to read the genealogy of our Lord in Matthew or in Luke?" No, of course it doesn't mean that. What it has to do with was wild allegorical interpretations of Old Testament lists of names instead of just taking them at historical face value, so-and-so beget so-and-so, so-and-so beget so-and-so, as giving us a historical line so that we can draw certain conclusions about God's redemptive unfolding purpose, instead of looking at those genealogies at their historic face and literal value, there were those who looked at those and read into them all kinds of bizarre, wild, crazy, allegorical and mystical interpretations. They're associated with legends and myths that go along with certain fables, somehow read into those names of ancestors. Much of the rabbinic Haggada consists of such rewritten folly. There's an ancient called The Book of Jubileeswhich has many of these Jewish allegories and genealogical speculations where instead of just recognizing the fact that is there, a man is named who beget a man or whatever, there is read into it some bizarre speculation. And all of a sudden that secret elevated mystical truth becomes the real truth and they can spin fables and legends and out of concoct a whole religion that is generated out of hell itself.

Iraneus tells how ancestral lines of Genesis could be worked into myths. The early church historian Eusebius said that when the Apostles passed away, and I quote, "The conspiracy of godless error took its rise through the deceit of false teachers who endeavored with brazen face to preach their knowledge falsely so-called in opposition to the preaching of the truth," end quote.

Once the guardians, the Apostles, were gone, this thing escalated. But it had been around a long, long time. Apparently in Crete some of the same kind of stuff that was in Ephesus where Timothy was when Paul wrote 1 and 2 Timothy had come to the fore and was attacking the church and needed to be addressed...fanciful, mystical interpretations that fit only in to the category of stupid controversy and genealogy.

Thirdly he mentions strife, eris, rivalry, contention. Again this is reminiscent of 1 Timothy 6, "If anyone advocates...verse 3...a different doctrine and doesn't agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing but has a morbid interest in disputes out of which arise envy and strife and abusive language and evil suspicion and constant friction." Just constant friction and trouble...contention, constantly battling around the truth, trying to be divisive, conceited, proud men who attack the historic truth of God's Word and try to stir up battles which eventually are designed to destroy the confidence, the security, the sense of faith and rest that the saints have in the truth of Scripture. He says shun all that

stuff.

And then he looks at it even in a more specific way in the fourth little category, disputes about the law...fightings literally about the law. You remember back in 1 Timothy chapter 1 that the Apostle Paul identifies some false teachers who wanted to be teachers of the law. They were involved in fruitless discussion, pointless argument. They wanted to be teachers of the law but they didn't understand either what they were saying or the matters about which they were making confident assertions. They were dogmatic about what they didn't know. Very common, apparently, in those times. They sought prominence as teachers. They sought by their novel subtleties and their distorted allegories and their legalism and their mystical interpretations to be exalted as those who had the elevated kind of knowledge, who had the inside scoop with God, from it they gained prestige, prominence, sexual favors even as well as money. They, however, were completely ignorant as the Scripture points out.

When you come across any of that stuff that attacks the Word of God, any of these foolish controversies, any of these mystical allegorical speculations, any of these things that are mere arguments and disputes about the things of God, he says shun it, turn your back and walk away. The same demons are behind it all. It is all demonic doctrine espoused by seducing spirits through hypocritical liars. He says turn your back and walk away. There is no virtue in staying around to hear what they have to say. It undermines, it ruins the faith, it eats like gangrene. It leads to ungodliness.

I don't know how many times that particular emphasis I have repeated from this pulpit through the years and warned young people as they choose a college and as they choose a seminary to go to that they make sure they are not in disobedience to this clear command of the Word of God. Because they'll go there and what will occur will be the very promised devastation. Don't descend to the level of their ignorance by bickering and arguing with them. Show the error, understand the error, go on to proclaim the truth...truth such as we studied last time in verses 4 through 7. Anybody who attacks that isn't worthy of being heard. Both the doctrinal errors and just the format of endless bickering is a waste of time and a waste of energy that distresses Paul.

I can remember having a conversation with one of the professors at the Master's Seminary who said to me, "I came here because I wanted to train men in the Word of God for ministry, not argue with people who taught error." The positive approach is what the Scripture calls for.

So, the last word then from Paul on false teachers is shun. Secondly, on factious people...what's the last word? Verses 10 and 11, "Reject a factious man after a first and second warning knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned." Now this certainly could refer to those who teach unsound doctrine because they would be factious, that is divisive. They would separate. They would be a problem in the church. They would be a sectarian influence. But really it's beyond that. It goes beyond those who would engage in some wrong doctrine, those who would split the church over a doctrinal issue, it doesn't confine itself to that, it's anybody who tends to divide, to fracture the fellowship, to tear the seamless robe, as it were, of the garment of the unity of the church. The church, as you well know, has always struggled against false doctrine and always struggled to maintain unity. It will always be assaulted by people propagating lies and it will always be assaulted by people who try to divide it.

Truth in unity is the stock and trade of the church's evangelism. Sound doctrine and love expressed is what is our message. What makes our sound doctrine believable is the integrity of our unity as

Jesus made so very clear in the time He spoke to His disciples in John 13 and said, "By this will all men know that you're My disciples if you have love one for another." So the church has not only always struggled against error, it has struggled against discord, division. You remember Paul wrote 1 Corinthians and the first several chapters clear into chapter 4 are all about trying to bring to that church the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. After all, there is one God, there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism...we, Jesus prayed, would be one and we are in essence. We've all been baptized in to one body through the agency of the Holy Spirit, have all been made to drink of the same Spirit, there is a spiritual unity but there needs to be a real and visible one as well. We are called sacrificially to love each other.

In that 1 Corinthian epistle, chapter 1, I think Paul sums it up in verses 10 and following, " I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that you all agree and there be no division among you but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. I have been informed, concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you. Has Christ been divided?"

It was that very desire for unity that prompted him to write to the Philippians, only conduct yourselves, chapter 1 verse 27, in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent I may hear of you that you are striving together, standing firm in one spirit for the faith of the gospel. The unity of the church, absolutely crucial.

And that is that to which Paul addresses his attention in this second category. There are some people in the life of the church who are factious. They disrupt. They bring discord. They're divisive. Any of us at any point could do that if we're in sin. The term here for a factious man is hairetikosfrom which eventually our English transliteration heretic came. The term heretic to us means an apostate, someone who teaches something other than sound doctrine, someone who rejects the truth. We usually think of it in a doctrinal sense. And by the second century hairetikoshad come to mean a heretic, or an apostate. But at this time those who study the Greek language tell us that the word really did not have that kind of connotation. It came from the Greek verb hairetomi(?) which simply means to choose, or to prefer...to take for oneself.

It could refer to the particular group that a person chose to belong to. It wouldn't necessarily have been a bad one. For example, it is used throughout the book of Acts and translated the sect of the Pharisees. It is even used in the book of Acts with reference to the sect called Christianity. It simply means a group, a choice. But we start to see its bad connotation, for example, in Galatians 5:20 where it is translated factions and it is shown as one of the expressions of the flesh, the unregenerate wicked fallen flesh.

Summing it up, it had the idea of someone who makes a resolute choice. It then started to mean someone whose choice is obstinate and against the truth. It is used here to mean one who had chosen an idea, one who had chosen a teaching, a doctrine, a viewpoint, a perspective, a course of behavior that was not acceptable to the church. It was not acceptable to the Word of God or it was not acceptable to the mind of the Spirit as revealed through the leadership. Literally, one who chooses for himself, he will not become a part of the consensus. He will not submit to the Word. He will not submit to the leadership. He will not become a part of that which is the mind of the Spirit revealed through the elders.

And later, as I said, by the second century it comes all the way to meaning a heretic and an apostate.

But here we have someone who has chosen some unbiblical, some unacceptable way and he's gathering adherents and he's causing strife and division and factions in the church and will not move in to the area where truth resides and the testimony of the Spirit leads.

Lenski, the commentator, writes, "This person chooses for himself what the church by choosing the Scripture must repudiate and disdain." So he stands against the truth and against the leadership of the church and against the will of the Spirit. He may be holding some novel interpretation, some novel myth, some genealogical extrapolation or mystical interpretation. He may be holding some ignorant interpretation of Scripture. He may be also holding some course of action, some personal whim, some personal preference about behavior or conduct or whatever. The issue is he's divisive.

What do we do? The verb says reject. Reject, that's the last word. Have nothing to do with them. Reject. Don't have anything to do with them. It's very much like Matthew 18:17, "Let him be to you as a pagan and an outcast." Cut him off from the fellowship. In 2 Thessalonians 3 verse 14, "If anyone doesn't obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that man, do not associate with him so that he may be put to shame. Do not regard him as an enemy but admonish him as a brother." You know he belongs in the family of God, you assume that, and he's in sin. Remember that he is a brother, don't treat him like an enemy but do not associate with him. Don't have fellowship, don't have a meal, don't make it easy for him to feel comfortable so that he may be shamed by being put away from the accepted fellowship.

And this is really church discipline. In fact, look at verse 10, it says, "You don't even do this unless you have had a first and second warning." You're following here the process of Matthew chapter 18. You go to him, he doesn't repent. You go with two or three, he doesn't repent. Now you tell the whole church and then you treat him as an outcast. Reject him after properly going several times to warn him. Why? Because it isn't that you want to put him out, you want him to repent. It's always true that church discipline is remedial, it is restorative, it is redemptive. And so you want to go to this individual before you have to turn him over to Satan that he might learn not to blaspheme. Before you have to turn him over to Satan such as 1 Corinthians 5 for the instruction of the flesh that the spirit may be saved, before you have to cut him off from fellowship, you want to be gentle. And Paul says in 2 Timothy 2:25 you want to be gentle, you want to instruct him with gentleness. Perhaps God will grant him repentance and he'll come to the knowledge of the truth on this issue and you will have gained your brother. So you go through a process of admonishing. The word warning here comes from the Greek verb <u>noutheteo</u>, we use that word "nouthetic" to speak about counseling. It is a gentle kind of warning telling someone you better change the direction because the end of your course is dangerous, tragic, chastening, judgment of God.

So you go through a warning process. You go graciously to this individual, realizing he is a brother, and you call him to repentance. In Romans chapter 16 verses 17 and 18 Paul says, "I urge you, brethren, to keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned and turn away from them for they're not truly slaves of the Lord Jesus Christ but of their own appetites. And by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting." Turn away from them. Where you find a factious divisive person who is propagating error on the one point or standing in the way of the unity of the church on some personal matter, turn your back, reject them, treat them like an outcast, don't fellowship with them, don't let them be a part so that they can be shamed and learn they can't do that.

Boy, it would sure change the complexion of the church today if the church would rise to that level,

wouldn't it? We've got people running loose espousing all kinds of bizarre mystical stuff, all kinds of unbiblical stuff and we have a tendency in the church in the name of unity which is just the opposite of true unity to not only allow them but to give them platform and honor them. And what he's saying here, this same verb, reject, is translated in 1 Timothy 4:7 "have nothing to do with....have nothing to do with." Often it's translated such as 1 Timothy 5:11, Hebrews 12, "Refuse." The last word on divisive people is refuse them.

You say, "Well we're trying to get unity. Does unity do that?" Yes, unity does that because unity demands that we are united around the truth of the Word of God and the mind of the Spirit. Doing this should be easy because of what we know, verse 11, "Knowing," that's oida, that word tends to mean...it becomes clear to everybody, it's observable..."knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning...being self-condemned." I mean, it would seem obvious to do that because it should be obvious to all of us that someone who has made his choice to stand pat and is divisive about some teaching or some matter of behavior or choice is perverted. We ought to put him away. We ought to keep him at arm's length. We ought to reject that individual because it should be apparent to everybody by observation that his character is revealed by his stubborn hard heart, he is perverted. That is a very strong usage of a strong term. It literally means turned inside out. It could be translated distorted, twisted. It is used in medical literature and translated dislocated.

Here is a dislocated distorted twisted perverted inside-out individual. He has the truth. He has been told the truth. He's been warned again and again. This isn't some pagan who never heard. This isn't some individual who doesn't know the truth and doesn't know what is desired and what the mind of the Spirit is. But he's a perverted individual and is sinning...he is sinning. That's willful sin in the present tense. He's guilty of continuing in a course of belief and teaching and attitude and action, contrary to the Word and the will of God. Put him out. Reject him. He is self-condemned. It ought to be apparent to everybody he's condemned himself by his error...katakrino, strong word meaning condemned. And this man is autokatakrino, self-condemned. He's passing judgment on his own perversion by the way he's acting.

There are people today who teach error, who live ungodly, who carry unholy attitudes who are self-willed, divisive both in local churches and in a wider sense of area of influence. And rather than being rejected, they're allowed to maintain their profile in the local church or in the greater assembly of the body of Christ, they're tolerated, they're often even respected and given a platform for their aberrations. The last word on false teachers is shun. The last word on factious people is reject.

Well now we come to a much nicer group as we come to a close. Just briefly look at this, the third group, fellow servants. We turn to the positive. Moving from the self-condemned who are to be rejected and the false teachers who are to be shunned, we come to those who bless our lives. And Paul by means of personal words here gives us some final helpful thoughts on relations with Christians. Verse 12, "When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, make every effort to come to me at Nicopolis for I've decided to spend the winter there. Diligently help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way so that nothing is lacking for them."

Now this appears to be directed at Titus. And it is Titus' responsibility to take care of fellow servants, Aretemas, Tychicus, Zenas, Apollos, Titus, really they're all in the service of the Lord. They're all sort of fellow servants working under the direct leadership of the wonderful Apostle Paul. He's the general who moves his troops around to satisfy the strategies that the Spirit has revealed to him for the spiritual battle. And so here Paul tells Titus particularly that he wants him to tend to the care of these

fellow servants. There's a certain camaraderie at that level that is wonderful, blessed.

So he says when...now we don't know when he did this. We know that he very likely did it because as we shall see, Titus did leave Crete and Paul wouldn't have left them without someone to be in charge. So he says when I send Artemas or Tychicus, we don't know when that was going to be, at the time he didn't know. And secondly, he didn't know who he was going to send. Artemas perhaps was available and Tychicus was available but some time I'm going to send one of those two guys.

We don't know anything about Aretemas, absolutely nothing at all. He is mentioned here and he must have been a formidable servant of the Lord to take on such a task as the task of setting things in order and making sure the leadership of the churches of Crete were what they should be...that formidable task wouldn't be given to a man with weak gifts or character, so he must have been a wonderful man. We don't know anything about him.

And then there was Tychicus, a man more familiar to us. He accompanied Paul on the missionary journey from Corinth to Asia Minor recorded there in Acts chapter 20. He was the man who delivered the Ephesian letter and the Colossian letter, probably at the same time. He is described in some very glowing terms in Colossians 4:7 as a beloved brother, a faithful servant and a fellow bondservant in the Lord. Paul so describes him. He is also mentioned at the end of Ephesians, chapter 6 verse 21. And 2 Timothy 4 indicates that he was sent to Ephesus to replace Timothy. So he was a formidable guy. He replaced Timothy and here it may be that he replaces even Titus...one of Paul's most devoted trusted fellow servants.

So he says, "When I send either Artemas or Tychicus to you, make every effort to come to me at Nicopolis." In other words, one of these men is going to come and take your place and I want you to come and be with me. I want to spend some time with you. Where is Nicopolis? Well, historian Zahn tells us there were probably nine cities named Nicopolis. It's from two words, polismeans city, nikefrom which we get Nike, we think of shoes and rockets, nikewas the word for victor or victory, conquer. And every time great generals won great battles, they wanted to memorialize their triumphs. And one of the ways they did this was to plant cities that were called Nicopolis, victory town. The victory town that he is referring to here, no doubt, is the one on the coast of Epiris(?) a commercial seaport, a Roman colony which by the way was founded by Octavian, later known as Augustus after his battle in 31 B.C. at Atrium when he defeated Marc Antony and Cleopatra.

And so Paul was going to go there for the winter and he wanted to send somebody to replace Titus so Titus could come and be with him. Paul wanted some more input with Titus, not only did he want fellowship but he knew his end was near, he only has one more letter to write, even though, by the way, he's still free or he couldn't have decided to go to Nicopolis on his own. He hasn't been taken prisoner yet. He knows that his life is fast ending and this young man Titus is crucial. He's somewhere in Macedonia, maybe in Philippi when he writes. Macedonia and Crete would be equal distance from where this city of Nicopolis is, it would be a good median meeting point. It's also a wonderful launching place to go into Dalmatia and Titus did go in to Dalmatia, 2 Timothy 4:10 says, which you will be interested to know is modern day Yugoslavia, now Croatia and Serbia in that part of the world.

So he said...Look, I'm going to send somebody. I want you to come. I want to spend some time with you. I'm going to be in Nicopolis to spend the winter there.

Then he says in verse 13, "Diligently help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way so that nothing is lacking for them." You're going to have two other gentlemen that are going to come your way...Zenas the lawyer. We don't know anything about him. In fact, we don't even know what kind of lawyer he was. And by that I don't mean was he a good one or a bad one, we assume he was a good one because he was serving the Lord, ministering alongside Paul. What we don't know is whether he was a Jewish law expert or a Roman litigator. Some people say he must have been a Roman litigator because he has a Roman name. Well a lot of people had Roman and Greek names who were Jews, including Paul. So that doesn't tell us anything, we just don't know. He, by the way, is the only Christian lawyer mentioned in Scripture...for what it's worth.

Apollos we do know about. Apollos who was apparently going to be with him was the eloquent Jewish preacher from Alexandra who was mighty in the Scriptures, it says in Acts 18. He was the man who knew only about the baptism of John the Baptist and he was a great preacher of the Old Testament. He came to Ephesus and Aquila and Priscilla, instructed him in the way. He later worked at Corinth. Was blessed by the Lord. He became a partner of Paul. He had a tremendous ministry in the Corinthian church.

So he says to him Zenas is coming, Apollos is coming on their way. On their way where? We don't know. They were on some missionary enterprise. Again Paul the general is moving his troops. And when they come, no doubt they had this letter for Titus. No doubt they are the bearers of this epistle, but he says to them, "When they come by you on their way, you make sure they're not lacking anything, meet their need." Whether it's spiritual, encouragement, whether it's material, whatever it might be, food, housing, you take care of them. They're on a mission activity.

What all of this says is, "You're part of a team. These guys are going there and you're coming here and you do this and we'll do this and this is the plan." And this is the whole concept of how fellow servants should function as a team. We can only wish that were more true than it is, right? That the leadership of the church would be more devoted to each other. We're talking about fellow servants. "Titus, you have a responsibility to me, the time is going to come when you leave there and come to me. Titus, you have a responsibility to these two men who are your fellow servants to make sure all their needs are met as they carry on to their destination for the cause of the Kingdom. I want you to diligently help them on their way." That word diligently means eagerly, earnestly, passionately. You're a part of a team, we're all inter-dependent, we need to be supportive and trusting and delegating. We all share. We move to assist each other, what's ever best for the cause. That's a very important thing in spiritual leadership.

Through the years I've watched young men rise up in this congregation and inevitably they'll come to me some day and say, "I feel God has called me to another place." And there's something in my heart that says I don't want you to go but something else says but we're a team and the commander-in-chief says you go and you go. And that's how the Kingdom works. And that's how the team is.

There are times when a pastor will call me on the phone and say, "Will you come and minister in my church, in my place." And I'm always pulled in my heart to do that because I want to help him on his way. I want to minister. I want to strengthen his hand. I want to encourage his people. I want to do whatever I can. And if I can go somewhere in the world and get a group of pastors together and have some influence in their life, that's a very important thing to me because I'm a part of a team of fellow servants who serve the King all over the world. And wherever that team needs me to participate and

to share, that's where I want to be.

There's a sense, and I think you know this, I certainly believe you do as a church, that while I serve a local congregation, I'm a part of something that is beyond just this local congregation, that God has put me on a team of fellow servants all across this world that are involved in the enterprise of the advancement of His Kingdom. And there are times when my role as a team player calls me to another place. And some other team player comes and perhaps stands in my place here. But that's how it is as fellow servants. We want to do everything we can to make sure that we diligently help each other on the way so that nothing is lacking for them. That's just crucial.

And what a privilege it is. Whenever I'm asked to go, particularly to help another pastor, another spiritual leader, my heart is pulled to that because I want to strengthen them in any way and every way I can.

The last word on false teachers, shun. The last word on factious people, reject. The last word on fellow servants, help...help, diligently help.

And then group four. The last word on faithful friends. Verse 14, "And let our people also learn to engage in good deeds, to meet pressing needs that they may not be unfruitful." Now we come right down to the congregation level. Titus, he says, tell everybody to help each other. Paul turns here to the people, the congregation, you need to learn to engage in good deeds. Now he's been saying that all through this letter...all through this letter. Verse 1 chapter 3, be ready for every good deed. Verse 8, be careful to engage in good deeds. Verse 12 of chapter 2, denying ungodliness and worldly desires, to live sensibly, righteously and godly in this present age. Why? Verse 14, because God is purifying for Himself a people for His own possessions zealous for good deeds. Tell the whole congregation to learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs.

What do you mean? To just love each other, urgent needs, life is full of them, isn't it? It's by our love that they know who we are, particularly in the flock of God in order that they may not be unfruitful. Why? Because an unfruitful life is not a good testimony to the saving power of God, is it? People need to be able to look and see the fruit so that their lives are blessed and witnesses of God's saving power and God's grace, so that their light so shines that men may see their good works and glorify their Father who is in heaven, Matthew 5:16. This is the heart of our witness. This is the heart of our life. The last word on relationships between all of you is that you learn to do good deeds to meet pressing needs. Pour your life in to each other so that you'll be full of fruit and the world will know you by that.

And then talks about the glue that holds it all together in verse 15. "All who are with me greet you. Greet those who love us faithfully, grace be with you all." He says everybody over here greets you, would you please greet those who love us faithfully?

That's really the essence of verse 14. People will engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs when they faithfully love each other. Paul says, "I've got a group of folks over here who love you, I know you've got a group of folks over there who love us faithfully." That's the essence of it.

The final word for faithful friends is love. Love that engages in good deeds to meet pressing needs.

You say, "I thought this was an evangelistic epistle." It is. It's an evangelistic epistle. My goodness, verse 11 of chapter 2, "The grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to all men." Chapter 3, "He saved us not on the basis of deeds which we have done..." and so forth. It's all about salvation. It's an evangelistic epistle.

But the key to evangelism is right relationships. That involves shunning false teachers, rejecting factious people. It involves helping fellow servants and loving faithful friends. You see, the whole thing in evangelism, the whole credibility issue is built on the character of our lives. And the only way to pull this off is his final conclusion, "Grace be with you all." Apart from God's grace it can't happen. By His grace it can.

Father, we know that when the church is marked by truth and unity and loyal leadership and caring love, people are going to believe that You save sinners because they don't know anything about that. They don't know about truth or unity or loyal service or sacrificial love, they don't know anything about it. It doesn't come from man. If they see it in us they'll know You've touched our lives. Thank You for all that You've taught us this morning and throughout this wonderful epistle and may, Lord, the things we've heard be pressed to our heart by the convicting of the Holy Spirit who gives us no rest until we faithfully willingly submit to live according to the truth we've heard. We live in the midst of a dying world, a pagan culture under the wrath of God. The task of reaching them is so massive and, Lord, we could become frustrated and intimidated and discouraged were it not for the fact that Your grace is with us to ennoble us to be what we need to be what we need to be. Help us to think purely and biblically and to stay committed to truth and unity, committed to all those who are loyal to You, pastors and leaders across this world, to strengthen one another at that level and as well to be marked by sacrificial love as a people so that people will know that God saves sinners, that Christ saves sinners. That's our prayer. And then when the opportunity comes to speak the truth, their hearts will be open to receive it. Use us in that very way, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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