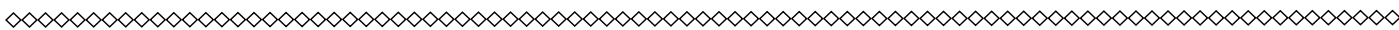




Pastor of the
International
Baptist Church
in Cologne Ger-
many.

Sermon Brief
Text: Titus 3:1-11
Title: God's Church: Rightly Focused
Lorin L. Cranford

Seeking to faith-
fully proclaim
the whole coun-
cil of God in
scripture!



INTRODUCTION

How do you stay focused? The older I have become the more challenging it has become for me to concentrate on one task and to stay with it until it's completed. In my university studies years ago, I learned how to develop intense focus on the task at hand and to completely shut out the world around me. But in my 'senior years' I have begun losing that ability. The tendency to "chase rabbits," that is, to be distracted from the main job before me, has increased. My long time dream of retirement has been somewhat centered on freedom to chase the many rabbits of personal interest that time did not permit me to do while actively serving as a professor. But already I'm discovering that distractions from primary responsibilities is a large problem for me. And that's not good!

A church can become distracted as well. Sometimes during periods of fussing and broken relationships inside the congregation, the church can begin chasing rabbits that have little real importance, or that cause it to lose sight of what God has called it to be and do. This can also be true of the pastor.

In Paul's continuing instruction to Titus in chapter three, verses one through eleven,¹ he calls upon Titus to get the Cretan believers rightly focused on the important things of serving God. And he also calls upon Titus to keep his pastoral leadership rightly focused. If both the church and its pastor stay focused on God's things, then the Lord can bless His church abundantly.

We have a lot that we can learn from these words.

BODY

I. People, live focused, vv. 1-7

In these first seven verses, Paul tells Titus to be reminding the Cretan believers to stay focused on a positive relationship with other people, and especially with folks who are outside the Christian church.

1. Remember to do certain things, vv. 1-2

In this first section, Paul tells Titus to put the Cretan believers in remembrance of seven duties largely to the outside world. The wording of the text points to these responsibilities having previously been taught to the churches on Crete, but Titus needed to keep these obligations continuously before the eyes of the Cretan believers to help them follow up.

These responsibilities focus on Christian responsibility to the surrounding world. This emphasis represents

NRSV. 1 Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, 2 to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show every courtesy to everyone. 3 For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, despicable, hating one another. 4 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. 6 This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

8 The saying is sure. I desire that you insist on these things, so that those who have come to believe in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works; these things are excellent and profitable to everyone. 9 But avoid stupid controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. 10 After a first and second admonition, have nothing more to do with anyone who causes divisions, 11 since you know that such a person is perverted and sinful, being self-condemned.

Greek NT. 3.1 Υπομίμησκε αὐτοὺς ἀρχαῖς ἐξουσίαις ὑποτάσσεσθαι, πειθαρχεῖν, πρὸς πᾶν ἔργον ἀγαθὸν ἐ-
τοίμους εἶναι, 3.2 μηδένα βλασφημεῖν, ἀμάχους εἶναι, ἐπεικεῖς, πάσαν ἐνδεικνυμένους πραύτητα πρὸς πάντας
ἀνθρώπους. 3.3 Ἦμεν γὰρ ποτε καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀνόητοι, ἀπειθεῖς, πλανώμενοι, δουλεύοντες ἐπιθυμίαις καὶ ἡδοναῖς
ποικίλαις, ἐν κακίᾳ καὶ φθόνῳ διάγοντες, στυγητοί, μισοῦντες ἀλλήλους. 3.4 ὅτε δὲ ἡ χρηστότης καὶ ἡ φιλανθρωπία
ἐπεφάνη τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν θεοῦ, 3.5 οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων τῶν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ ἃ ἐποιήσαμεν ἡμεῖς ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὸ αὐτοῦ ἔλεος
ἔσωσεν ἡμᾶς διὰ λουτροῦ παλιγγενεσίας καὶ ἀνακαινώσεως πνεύματος ἀγίου, 3.6 οὐδέποτε ἐφ' ἡμᾶς πλουσίως
διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν, 3.7 ἵνα δικαιοθέντες τῇ ἐκείνου χάριτι κληρονόμοι γεννηθῶμεν κατ' ἐλπίδα
ζωῆς αἰωνίου.

3.8 Πιστὸς ὁ λόγος· καὶ περὶ τούτων βούλομαι σε διαβεβαιούσθαι, ἵνα φροντίζωσιν καλῶν ἔργων προϊστασθαι
οἱ πεπιστευκότες θεῷ· ταῦτά ἐστιν καλὰ καὶ ὠφέλιμα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις. 3.9 μωρὰς δὲ ζητήσεις καὶ γενεαλογίας καὶ
ἔρεις καὶ μάχας νομικὰς περιῦστασο· εἰσὶν γὰρ ἀνοφελεῖς καὶ μάταιοι. 3.10 αἰρετικὸν ἄνθρωπον μετὰ μίαν καὶ
δευτέραν νουθεσίαν παραιτοῦ, 3.11 εἰδὼς ὅτι ἐξέστραπται ὁ τοιοῦτος καὶ ἀμαρτάνει ὡς αὐτοκατάκριτος.

the logical progression from the previous emphasis on responsibilities to one another inside the church in 2:2-14.

Such understanding is important. In a small religious group living in ways contrary to prevailing patterns in society at large, the tendency of the believers would easily be to pull inward and try to isolate themselves from the outside world, especially when that world is mostly hostile, as was the case on Crete. I'm discovering this is much too often the case among some of the small independent churches scattered over Cologne. With a ministry focused on one ethnic group with its own language and customs, the churches evidently seldom reach beyond this segment to identify with others and even less often do they seek to reach out to the surrounding German world. Our ministry at IBC Cologne is of such a nature that we cannot follow such a pattern. God has given us a global ministry and vision. We seek to reach all peoples living in the Bonn / Cologne region.

But Paul's emphasis here is upon Christian obligation to the non-Christian world in which the believers live. This is crucial for believers to realize: we have responsibilities to our pagan neighbors! And not just to share the Gospel with them, as important as that is!

Seven obligations are put on the table here by Paul for Titus to share with the Cretans. And ultimately with us today. These obligations are far ranging and cover both attitudes and actions. Let us note them.

To government leaders: "to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient" (*αὐτοῖς ἀρχαῖς ἐξουσίαις ὑποτάσσεσθαι, πειθαρχεῖν*). Paul begins with obligations to governmental authorities. Such emphasis is common in the New Testament. In Romans 13:1-10,² Paul spelled out these duties in much greater detail. In 1 Tim. 2:1-4,³ Paul admonished believers to pray regularly for governmental leaders, as well as for other people. Also Peter advocated similar principles in 1 Peter 2:13-17.⁴

Christians are under God's mandate to obey the laws of the land. To be sure, this responsibility is always overridden by the responsibility to "obey God rather than men" as set forth in Acts 5:29.⁵ But where the demands of human authority do not contradict the demands of God, we are responsible to obey human authority. Both Paul and Peter are very clear about this. It is very important that we do this. Failure to do so can have devastating consequences both to us, and to the witness to the Gospel.

Out of my first pastorate in Texas in the middle 1960s comes an illustration of just how important this can be. As a pastor in this small west Texas ranching I worked with the young people in the community and church to try to help them get through their teenage years successfully. One young man in the church went through an especially tough time with misbehavior, some of which almost led to legal charges against him. When I tried to talk to him about this, his response was simply, "Bro. Lorin, I don't see that anything I've done is so bad. My dad breaks the law all the time, and he's a leader in the church. So why are actions so bad?" "What do you mean?" I asked him. He then described how his father cheated on his income tax return every year. As a post man who delivered mail in the rural area outside the town, he regularly disconnected the speedometer cable of his car so that the warranty on his automobile would not expire so quickly. His son was very much aware of what dad was doing, and thus concluded that if dad could break the law and still be a leader in the church, then it was all right for him to disregard the law. What a horrible witness his father was giving to this son! It's not alright for us to disregard the laws of the land as believers. God holds us accountable to obey the laws of our country.

We must show proper respect to them (*ὑποτάσσεσθαι*) and we must obey what they say (*πειθαρχεῖν*), Paul

²NRSV: 1 Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; 4 for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. 6 For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, busy with this very thing.

7 Pay to all what is due them — taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due. 8 Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. 9 The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbor as yourself." 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

³NRSV: 1 First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. 3 This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

⁴NRSV: 13 For the Lord's sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, 14 or of governors, as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. 15 For it is God's will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish. 16 As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil. 17 Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

⁵NRSV: But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than any human authority."

declares. The leaders that Paul was alluding to in this letter written in the early 60s included Nero as emperor during a time of rampant corruption throughout the Roman government. The government leaders we have today, in spite of occasional corruption, are infinitely more honest and are held accountable for their conduct as governmental leaders in comparison. Thus our task is much easier than was the case for the Cretan believers.

This was probably more the case than we can imagine. The Cretans had a reputation in the ancient world for being lawless and rebellious people, especially against the Romans who controlled the island in the first Christian century. The Greek historian Polybius⁶ in his *Histories* made this statement about the Cretans a century before Paul wrote to Titus:⁷

[It was] impossible to find . . . personal conduct more treacherous or public policy more unjust than in Crete”

Titus most likely found a people less willing to comply with this obligation than would be the case today in most countries. But the Christian duty to government wasn't 'watered down' just because the Cretans were less willing to comply. Believers on the island were to live different from the world, and this responsibility would be one area definitely different than the prevailing attitude culturally and socially.

Thus, God's Word doesn't back off responsibility just because it may be more difficult to comply because of the situation we believers find ourselves in. At no time can we legitimately plead a loophole or excuse from compliance because of personal circumstance. The obligation holds true no matter what circumstance we find ourselves in at any given point in time.

To humanity in general: “to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show every courtesy to everyone” (*πρὸς πᾶν ἔργον ἀγαθὸν ἐτοιμοὺς εἶναι, μηδένα βλασφημεῖν, ἀμάχους εἶναι, ἐπιεικεῖς, πᾶσαν ἐνδεικνυμένους πραΰτητα πρὸς πάντας ἀνθρώπους*).

The second group of responsibilities (#s 3-7) apply universally to all people. They further underscore our responsibility to people around us outside the community of believers. Taken collectively these duties stress a positive attitude and approach to all people. We are not to be individuals with a “chip on our shoulder” who look for ways to “pick a fight” with people we work with, ride the tram with, shop with in the stores, play with in the parks etc. Instead, we are to be a pleasant people who reach out to others in a positive manner. When we become contentious individuals, we lose our witness and the Gospel loses credibility in the eyes of non-believers.

Let me challenge you to consider ways you can be positive toward other people this coming week. When the temptation comes to criticize, just say something good instead. When you feel like “ripping to shreds” another person, stop and consider how to edify that person. This is God's will for you. And one day you will have to give account of how you have reacted to other people around you.

2. Draw upon God's resources gained in conversion, vv. 3-7

In verses 3-7, Paul reaches back to the foundation spiritually for the admonitions in the first two verses. This pattern is particularly common in early Christian writings.⁸ We obey God's commands, not in our own strength or determination. To the contrary, obedience stems out of our conversion experience of God's grace and the resulting spiritual resources made available to us in that experience.

The significance of that experience can be seen dramatically by comparing the BC (before Christ) spiritual condition with the AD (after Christ) status before God. Conversion by definition means change -- dramatic change of lifestyle and of spiritual status before God. Patterns both of living and of relationship with God are emphasized in these passages. This stresses the nature of conversion as foundational. When we come to Christ, clearly our status before God changes. But just as importantly, the way we live changes as well. To be certain, these passages focus on adults who have lived a good part of their lives before becoming Christians. In our world, many were born to Christian parents and have “grown up in the church.” Thus their lifestyles will not in general have gone the same direction described in these passages. But their spiritual status before God prior to conversion is no different than the “pagans” Paul typically alludes to in these passages. Our lifestyle as a non-Christian plays no positive role in helping our status before God. Paul makes this very clear in

⁶Polybius (ca. 203–120 BC, Greek Πολύβιος) was a Greek historian of the Hellenistic Period noted for his book called *The Histories* covering in detail the period of 220–146 BC. He is also renowned for his ideas of political balance in the government, which was later used in Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws* and the drafting of the United States Constitution. [Source: Wikipedia]

⁷Polybius, *Hist.* 6.46.1–47.6, as quoted by William D. Mounce, vol. 46, *Word Biblical Commentary: Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 444.

⁸“This kind of text is relatively common in the letters of Paul. Sometimes the thrust is a recounting of Paul's own spiritual pilgrimage: Gal. 1:13-17; Phil 3:2-11; 1 Tim. 1:12-17 et al. But at other times the emphasis falls upon his readers: 1 Cor. 1:26-31; Eph. 2:1-10; 4:17-24; Col. 1:21-23; Titus 2:11-14; 3:3-7 et al.” (taken from the background Bible study on this passage).



these passages.

a. *Don't forget what you were before Christ, v. 3*

In the BC section Paul paints a depressing picture of the spiritual condition of a person outside Christ. It compares to some of the other BC sections of similar passages in Paul's writings:

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| <p>Titus 3:3 foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, despicable, hating one another.</p> | <p>1 Cor. 1:26 not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.</p> | <p>Eph. 2:1-3 1 You were dead through the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. 3 All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else.</p> |
| <p>Titus 2:11-12 11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, 12 training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions,</p> | <p>Col. 1:21 And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,</p> | <p>Eph. 4:17-20 17 Now this I affirm and insist on in the Lord: you must no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their minds. 18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart. 19 They have lost all sensitivity and have abandoned themselves to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. 20 That is not the way you learned Christ!</p> |

In these declarations, Paul underscores the spiritual depravity of those outside Christ. At the heart of the spiritual status aspect was death. To be outside Christ is to be spiritually dead! This is reality, although most of those in spiritual death have little or no comprehension of what is happening to them. The non-believers of the first Christian century didn't grasp this; neither to non-believers in our world.

Signals of this spiritual death, however, could be picked up through realizing the emptiness of life, the pointlessness of living, enslavement to physical passions and cravings, the loss of real control over one's existence and more. These consequences of spiritual death should call non-believers to searching for better, more satisfying answers to life.

For those of us who know Christ, and maybe at points stand a bit envious of the "fun lifestyle" that we observe in some non-believers, we need to remind ourselves of these truths about what life really is outside of Christ. Hollywood makes it appear glamorous and attractive; social workers in the ghettos of our world can testify that it doesn't work that way. Just listen a little to the TV bimbos who show up on television in sensuous dress and make their appeal. There's nothing there but hot air dressed up in sexy clothes.

As believers, we must never lose sight of where we were and who we were when Christ saved us from our sins, and from ourselves. We were delivered from pointlessness and given purpose and definition to our living as children of God.

b. *Realize what you gained in salvation, vv. 4-7*

In the AD section, Paul underscores to Titus the marvelous deliverance gained by believers in coming to Christ. This AD side of the parallel passages above adds even greater richness of insight.

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| <p>Titus 3:4-7 4 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. 6 This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.</p> | <p>1 Cor. 1:27-31 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, 29 so that no one might boast in the presence of God. 30 He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, 31 in order that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."</p> | <p>Eph. 2:4-10 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us 5 even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ —by grace you have been saved — 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God — 9 not the result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.</p> |
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| | | |
|---|--|---|
| <p>Titus 2:11-14 11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, 12 training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, <i>and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly,</i> 13 while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. 14 He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.</p> | <p>Col. 1:22-23 22 he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him — 23 provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven. I, Paul, became a servant of this gospel.</p> | <p>Eph. 4:21-24 21 For surely you have heard about him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus. 22 You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.</p> |
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Wow! What a blessing we have received from God! In the Titus 3:4-7 text one Greek sentence expresses all this idea. And the foundational declaration -- grammatically the main clause -- is “He saved us.” God delivered us from ourselves and from certain damnation in an eternal Hell.

This spiritual deliverance is linked to the appearance of “the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior.” The nature of the Greek text is such that this appearance refers to the coming of Christ as Savior, and especially highlights His death on the cross as the crowning expression of God’s goodness and loving kindness. God saved us -- Paul declares -- “not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy.” Our salvation had nothing to do with anything good or deserving inside us. It rests solely on the mercy of God. The channel of this saving action of God is “through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.” Although some wrongly see Christian baptism in the first of these designations, what Paul asserts is simply that rebirth produces a cleansing from sin and its guilt.⁹ This cleansing is in reality a renewal -- one produced by the Holy Spirit in the moment of salvation. Both the negative (cleansing) and the positive (renewal) aspects of salvation are linked together inseparably. New birth and the Holy Spirit play decisive roles in this. Saving is new birth cleansing of the believer; saving is Holy Spirit renewal of the believer. They are flip sides of the same spiritual coin. And this cleansing / renewing through the “pouring out” of the Spirit comes through Jesus Christ whose sacrifice on the cross brought God’s grace into our lives. And the coming of this divine grace sets us up as heirs of God. As those positioned to receive the gift of life eternal as our expectancy when we look to the future and to what lies beyond death.

Out of this unbelievable transformation coming in conversion we then are to live as Christians to the outside world. Our obligation to all people to be authentically Christian toward them stems from this marvelous work of divine grace in salvation. God help us then to live focused on the things that really matter in our relations with people outside the church.

II. Pastor, focus your leadership, vv. 8-11

In verses 8 through 11, Paul shifts gears a bit to speak directly to Titus about the contours of his own ministry to the Cretan believers. As a young minister of the Gospel, Titus also could easily face distractions, which could fragment and thus diminish the effectiveness of his help to the churches. Paul was concerned that Titus stay focused on the issues that really mattered.

Let me step aside a moment and carry on a conversation with Paul in trying to hear his words to me as pastor of this church. The apostle has something very important to say to me that I need to hear and not lose sight of. Just listen in, as we talk with one another. There’s some understanding that you might gain about my job assignment from God that could be helpful.

In assessing these verses, I think Paul is trying to tell me three things about the pattern of my ministry as pastor of this church.

1. *Lorin, concentrate on helping the people do good, v. 8*

Paul said to Titus and ultimately to me as pastor, “I desire that you insist on these things, so that those who have come to believe in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works; these things are excellent and profitable to everyone.” “Lorin, your job assignment is to focus on helping the church members devote themselves to doing good. By doing good,” I mean, “you are to lead the church to reach out to people in positive, spiritu-

⁹In the Greek phrase *λουτροῦ παλιγγενεσίας*, the rebirth (*παλιγγενεσίας*) stands as a subjective Genitive case function, parallel to the Holy Spirit (*πνεύματος ἁγίου*) in the next phrase *ἀνακαινώσεως πνεύματος ἁγίου*.

ally productive ways that lead folks to Christ and then to devoted service to the Lord.” The parameters of this Paul described in chapters two and three. My ministry is more than helping folks “get saved,” as important as that is. Disciplining converts is the heart of pastoral ministry. In the emerging discipleship from these converts is to be commitment to the patterns of relationships defined in chapters two and three of the letter to Titus. Distinctive relationships inside the community of faith are specified in 2:2-14, and are summarized in 2:1 and 2:15 as “spiritual health producing” teaching (*τῇ ὑγιαίνουσῃ διδασκαλίᾳ*). Then relationships to the outside world are defined in 3:1-2, and stand just as important as the former.

My fundamental assignment from God as your pastor is to do everything in my power to lead you as a church into a lifelong pattern of doing good as believers. That means “good deeds” as defined by God in scripture. And Titus chapters two and three sketch out many of these “good deeds” that are to be incorporated into the living of the church members. It touches on relationships with fellow believers inside the church. But it also impacts on how we related to the outside world as well. God will assess my ministry as your pastor when I stand before Him in final judgment on the basis of whether or not I helped you commit yourself to doing good.

I pledge to you today, and to God, that my commitment is to faithfully carry out this assignment. I passionately desire to help you become all that God wants you to be. I will seek to understand the teaching of scripture deeply and then try to pass on that understanding in the clearest way possible. You must decide whether you’re going to obey it or not. But as Titus 2:15 admonishes Titus, I will speak the words of scripture to you; I will encourage you to obedience through the words of scripture; I will on occasion rebuke you with the words of scripture. Everything is targeting helping you “do good” as God desires. All that I do will come out of my love for you as the church of the living God, the bride that Christ is preparing for the great wedding feast at the close of human history.

2. *Lorin, don't waste your time with distractions, v. 9*

“Lorin, in the church some folks are going to be preoccupied at times with things that don’t amount to a hill of beans. Don’t waste your time addressing these issues. Stay focused on what is really important.”

For Titus on Crete in the mid first century world these distractions included “[stupid controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law](#)” (*μωρὰς ζητήσεις καὶ γενεαλογίας καὶ ἔρεις καὶ μάχας νομικὰς*). Although the precise details of these things are not certain,¹⁰ the essential thrust of them is clear and compares to Paul’s instruction to Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:3-8:

3 I urge you, as I did when I was on my way to Macedonia, to remain in Ephesus so that you may instruct certain people not to teach any different doctrine, 4 and not to occupy themselves with **myths and endless genealogies** that promote speculations rather than the divine training that is known by faith. 5 But the aim of such instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith. 6 Some people have deviated from these and turned to meaningless talk, 7 desiring to be **teachers of the law**, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make assertions. 8 Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it legitimately.

The human tendency of some believers is to substitute personal opinion for clearly expressed scriptural teaching. Or else to super impose personal opinion down on to scripture as though this was what it says, when such just isn’t true. Typically doing this leads to argumentativeness and insistence that my ideas are the

¹⁰Myths are traditional stories of ancestors and origins; these are present in most cultures, and people regard them very highly. Here, however, myths is used in a negative way; it is not simply that the myths referred to are made-up tales and legends (TEV), but that these stories have been substituted for the true Christian message. It is possible to read the text in such a way as to identify the myths with the genealogies, which are in turn described as endless in the sense of “long” (TEV). What these genealogies consist of is not at all clear, since the letter itself offers no clues. Some of the possibilities suggested are as follows:

(1) These could refer to the lists of ancestors that were found in the various Gnostic movements at that time. Gnosticism taught that anything material was evil. This includes the physical universe, which was not created by the Supreme God but by demigods who come between the Supreme God and the physical universe. The genealogies would contain the lists of these semi-divine beings.

(2) These genealogies could refer to Jewish ancestral lists and other stories that became popular among Jews who were influenced by Greek culture. These stories would include not only ancestral origins but the meaning and interpretation of even minute details of the biblical record, such as numerals and the spelling of names.

(3) These genealogies could refer to legends and stories built around the Hebrew ancestors—stories that were handed down by tradition and were contained in popular Jewish writings at that time. An example of this kind of writing is the Book of Jubilees. All three are possible although, as already noted, it is difficult to be certain. What is certain is that these myths and genealogies have been introduced into the Christian community as a legitimate part of Christian doctrine.

With all this in mind it is probably better for translators to use some general term like TEV’s “long lists of ancestors” to translate genealogies. “Ancestors” may be variously translated as “forefathers,” “grandfathers in ancient times,” “big grandfathers,” and so on. In languages that do not have a word for “lists,” one may express this as “collections”; for example, “collections of the names of ancestors.” The phrase myths and endless genealogies may then be translated “made-up tales about long lists of ancestors.” [source: Daniel C. Arichea and Howard Hatton, *A Handbook on Paul’s Letters to Timothy and to Titus*, UBS handbook series; Helps for translators (New York: United Bible Societies, 1995), 16.]

only legitimate ones. Titus could easily get bogged down in an endless round of debate and argumentation with such folks in the churches. But he had much more important things to do than spend his time answering all these useless speculations. Paul recognized that such stuff was “unprofitable and worthless.”

Here is an important criteria for every preacher to follow: *spend your time on things that build up and edify; don't waste your time messing with things that don't edify.*

My commitment to you as pastor is to endeavor to follow this guideline that Paul laid down to Titus and all spiritual leaders. I will always seek to answer your questions. But there's not enough hours in the day to deal with unproductive issues and claims that some will make. Paul told Titus to “περιύστασο” these unprofitable issues. Literarily, Titus was to “step completely around” these things without touching them. That's my commitment to you as well.

3. *Lorin, avoid troublesome people, vv. 10-11*

Finally, and closely related to the preceding instruction, Paul demanded that Titus avoid dealings with the people promoting these divisive and unprofitable issues in the churches: “After a first and second admonition, have nothing more to do with anyone who causes divisions,...” (*αἰρετικὸν ἄνθρωπον μετὰ μίαν καὶ δευτέραν νοουθεσίαν παραιτοῦ,...*). When church members begin promoting their own agenda in the congregation and it leads to divisions and divisiveness in the church, God demands that the pastor warn such individuals to cease this activity. If after the second warning these individuals refuse so stop causing division by their useless teaching, then the pastor is to isolate them to the fringe of the life of the church where they can cause minimal damage. He is to ‘shun’ (*παραιτοῦ*) them by avoiding contact with them. In his similar instructions to Timothy at Ephesus (cf. 1 Tim. 1:4-21), Paul names two individuals guilty of such divisiveness, Hymenaeus and Alexander, and indicates that he had “turned [them] over to Satan, so that they may learn not to blaspheme.”¹¹

For any pastor who loves his people, this assignment is a tough one. But if the church is to remain spiritually healthy, it must be free of divisiveness and of people creating divisions in the church. Sternness is demanded by God in the treatment of such individuals. For them to continue causing problems will eventually kill the church. And God's church is too precious to allow anyone to destroy it.

My prayer is that no time will ever come in our church when such an approach becomes necessary. But I pledge to you, that if it does become necessary I will be faithful to God's leadership in taking the necessary corrective actions as your pastor.

CONCLUSION

My dear people, will you join me in a commitment to stay focused on the things of God, and not let distractions pull us away from doing God's will? My deep desire is to keep “first things first” in leading this church. Our witness to the outside world is critical. We need to become known as a congregation who loves people and loves God. And are passionately committed to walking in God's paths.

Help me move that direction. Our city desperately needs this marvelous salvation from God. God is depending on believers in His churches to become the witness pointing a lost city to Christ.

¹¹ **1 Tim. 1:18-20 (NRSV):** 18 I am giving you these instructions, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies made earlier about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, 19 having faith and a good conscience. By rejecting conscience, certain persons have suffered shipwreck in the faith; 20 among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have turned over to Satan, so that they may learn not to blaspheme.