

## **WE MUST STAND FOR TRUTH**

Titus 3: 9-11 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

On June 14<sup>th</sup>, I spoke to a pastor whose church is being ripped apart with foolish controversies, by a deep desire by two church members—a husband and wife who are trying to get total control of their church's future. This church is not in our EFFC fellowship. I have preached in this church once and I have seen folk saved. I prayed strongly for this pastor. In the middle of our conversation, God called me afresh in my spirit to address this matter pro-actively from His Word once more—to dust off the bases for the good of our church in the days ahead. One worship song you may have heard, speaks volumes of truth. The words are: "The greatest single cause of atheism in the world today, Is Christians who acknowledge Jesus with their lips, Then walk out the door and deny him by their lifestyle. That is what an unbelieving world simply finds unbelievable." Pastor Herbert Hand wisely said, "Disunity rears its ugly head when I'm consumed with what I think, with what I want, with what I like. When we become obsessed with winning "my battle": We end up losing the war. We end up not only hurting others, but ourselves as well." Beloved, if our message is observed by unbelievers to be biblical, godly unity, cooperation, and love for one another: They will find us believable. They will find us attractive. Ultimately, they will find Jesus in our midst. Jesus said in His high priestly prayer in John 17: 20, 21, "I do not ask for these only (speaking of His disciples) but also for those who will believe in me through their word (that's you and me) that they may all be one, just as you, Father are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be one in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me."

It's easy for any of us to get into foolish controversies that are silly and stupid. We can get in a huff and our anger and tears can bring a wash-out in our vision for our own road ahead. Ungodly anger can burn big bridges. Over the years, we can learn to put up walls. In our striving, we lose our way without God's landmarks and boundary markers. I'm reminded of the second verse of Martin Luther's great historic hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God." "Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing, Were not the right Man on our side, The Man of God's own choosing. Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He— Lord Sabaoth His name, from age to age the same, And He must win the battle."

How do we stand for truth and avoid striving after the wind? We must learn to cry out to God in our darkness. We must expect Him to answer with His Word which echoes in our darkness. Our conscience prods us closer to God and His truth. God has given us the Law as our schoolmaster to bring us to God. God's 10 commandments become our guard-rails, side rails, curbs, lane markers and delineator posts. God has many useful tools in His Word to keep us on the right road. These tools are God-given servants to drive us back to Christ. Yet, staying on

the road and obeying the traffic laws will not, in itself, get us where God wants us to go. God's gifts of mercy and love in Christ keep us moving in the right direction and He ultimately will take His obedient saints where He wants us to go. If we arrive at His destination of our standing for truth, we will have to avoid scores of landmines, falling rocks, and even many colorful, majestic pull-offs. At times, we may have to pull off the road and clean the windshields because of the bugs on the windshield. Many years ago in October, I was with my family traveling to Florida. We were in southern Georgia and northern Florida when we ran into many miles of a huge migration of insects called "love-bugs." They migrate in huge massive black clouds low to the ground, by the quadrillions. They hit our windshield like black tar. Soon, many travelers including us--we had to pull off the road more than once to clear them off. Our wipers could not do the job. Many times the enemy sends his clouds of division to keep us from standing for truth; to cause us to strive after foolishness. Would we not all love to have back times we have found ourselves striving about foolishness in our marriage or in God's church?

Looking back, was it a pride thing, a control thing, or a selfish thing? Do you remember Linus Van Pelt, the famous blanket-dragging philosopher of Peanut's fame? Linus declared to his sister Lucy, "I am going to help the world." Lucy pointed out to Linus how often he had difficult times with people. He exclaimed in response, "I love mankind; it's people I can't stand." It's like the poem, "To live up above with the saints that we love, O that will be glory, but to live down below with the saints that we know, well, that's a different story." It is my desire as your pastor to keep us in green pastures. What lessons in our text show us the divine way not to get sidetracked into foolish discussions on the road of life? In this text, I see three questions God challenges us with--so we will trim our lamps and give out more light and less black smudgy smoke. What are these three questions and answers to that God is leading us to ask and answer so we will be able to stand for truth and avoid striving for foolishness? (1) What should we avoid? – v. 9, (2) Whom should we reject? – v. 10, and (3) What should we know? – v. 11.

**WHAT SHOULD WE AVOID?** (I.) Notice the word avoid or shun which is a strong Greek word here. Titus 3: 9 declares, "But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless." This first warning is against foolish controversies. The word for avoid or shun is periistemi. It means don't stand around or near as a bystander, stay or keep away from, keep aloof, avoid or shun. In plain English vernacular, it means "avoid like the plague." Now what should we avoid or shun? The word is first of all—**controversies/questions.** The Greek word for controversies/questions is **zetesis.** The word means investigations, inquiries, searchings, and questionings. Does that mean we are not to ask any questions? No, notice the adjective before the word, questions—**foolish.** The Greek word for foolish is **moros.** It means

spiritually dull, stupid, absurd, silly, worthless, heedless, and not a vital question. A non-vital question is one where the answer is only about one of us proving we are right and trying to prove another person we are against is wrong. Such questions split thousands of churches. God wants us to stay out of bypath meadow and its foolish questions. These kinds of struggles and arguments are not only in church but in marriage. In his book “Revolutionary Love,” Bishop Festo Kivengere, of Uganda said, “My wife, Mera and I had a misunderstanding and I retreated into silence. A fog settled between us. Even though I said nothing, inside I was angry. Then I heard the voices of a group of boys coming to my house. Suddenly I remembered I was supposed to teach them a Bible study in a few minutes. I cried, "Lord, what shall I do? They're arriving and I have nothing to say to them. I'm in a mess. Help! Quietly the Lord said, "Don't try to give them a message. Just tell them who you are. It is time for them to find you in this mess. They will know you better." Bishop Festo didn't like it at all, but he repented of his un-forgiveness in front of the boys. Then in front of the boys, he asked Mera if she would forgive him. Not only did it heal Festo and Mera's relationship, but several of the boys were so impressed, they committed their lives to Jesus that very day.

There are many people who want to prove they are right, in power, and in control. They would rather argue foolish theological questions not clear in the Word rather than do “honey do jobs” that need done at home. Discussion that does not end in needed action being taken, is fruitless and largely wasted. We as Christians need to know following Jesus requires action and obedience to Christ--not trying to win arguments in our foolish discussions. The second warning on what to avoid is **genealogies**. In short, the word **genealogia** means tracing our roots back by generations. This related in Paul's day to Jewish men trying to trace their roots back to one of the biblical patriarchs. Saying they found the answer, these tales crept into the church. It wasn't God's design for His children.

The third warning on what to avoid is **dissensions or strife and disputes about the Law**. The Greek word for dissensions is **eris**. It means quarrels, expressions of enmity, taking matters into our own hands that are not under our authority, undermining our leadership, contentions, variances, debates, and rivalries. We are called to earnestly contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints—Jude 3. This contending for the faith is never about the joy of rivalry or for having robust debate. The issue is why. If there is something we cannot back down from that is a denial of the scriptures, we must earnestly contend—Jude 3 tells us and that Greek word is **epagonidzomai**. You can hear the word agony in it. It means to be a combatant in a battle for God's truth, to struggle for the right. Paul is calling us to avoid strife like the plague. He is telling us to avoid quarrels about the law. Let me explain. When our identity is rooted in our being a 5-point-Calvinist, or a

strong Arminian, a home-schooler, a public schooler, or a Baptist, a Methodist, a Free Churchman, a helper of the poor, an upholder of justice, a guardian of biblical doctrine, when our main identity is anything else but Christ alone, and proclaiming His Gospel to this lost and lonely world, we are missing the mark. These all may be good things. But will our secondary identities draw the lost to Christ?

**Paul says of all three of these—foolish questions, genealogies and dissensions and battles about the law—avoid them.** Why? “They are unprofitable and worthless. The Greek word for “unprofitable” is **anopheles**. It means not beneficial, serviceable—of no use, vain and worthless. The Greek word for worthless is **mataios**. It means that which becomes our idol, a focus we can’t shake, a hobby horse we ride to the death, a vanity, or communication devoid of truth, force, success or of no purpose. It is an aimless battle that does not have God’s glory as its concern. Such a battle stems from an unbridled tongue—both in public and private—with words empty of divinely imparted wisdom. It means without quality. Endless debates about Calvinism or Arminianism or political persuasion or which version of the Bible is best are all foolish controversies.

**WHOM SHOULD WE REJECT?** (II.) Verse 10 is strong—“As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him...” The New American Standard Version translates this, “Reject a factious man after a first and a second warning.” This Greek word for reject or have nothing more to do with is **paraiteomai**. The word means beg off from involvement with these people, decline offers to debate, avoid the bait of prolonged discussions, ask to be excused. What kind of people should we beg off from involvement with? The word here Paul uses is “a person who stirs up division” or a factious man. The Greek word gives away its meaning. It is **hairetikos**. It means **a man with a party spirit** seeking division rather than unity. *It is at the heart of heresy that a man seeks to divide himself from others in the body of Christ.* Jesus’ high priestly prayer was that we all might be one that the world might know that the Father sent the Son. John 17: 23 is the prayer—“I in them and You in Me, that they may become perfectly one in Us, so that the world may know that You sent Me and loved them even as You loved Me.” Perhaps no heresy is worse than a willingness for pride’s sake to divide God’s people.

Now beginning my 50<sup>th</sup> year of Gospel ministry, I have watched this happen in churches. Over the last 40 years, I have seen it happen even in our own church, when individuals have wanted control at whatever price—they didn’t care. Such people seem never to be happy without control. They seek to divide the body into their side and those against them. No heresy is worse. The Scripture says, “Beg off from them after a first and a second warning. The Greek word for warning is

strong. It is **nouthesia**. It means to admonish or put in mind with a mild rebuke. Then, if this person persists in trying to divide, decline involvement with them. Paul says in II Thessalonians 3: 14-15, “If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.” Realize one vital distinction. When a person stands on solid rock Bible truth, central Gospel truth, entreating people to come away from false doctrine, that is not a factious man or woman. That is a bold Martin Luther “Here I stand!” brother or sister. Such a person is not one trying to divide brothers. They are standing for unity in truth, not peace at any price. They stand for truth. But there must be a strong Biblical reason. It must be solidly founded on God’s truth. We must stand for truth without fear or favor of man. It will be lonely. But it is God’s place to stand when truth is compromised. The third and last question,

**WHAT SHOULD WE KNOW?** Verse 11 tells us what. “Knowing that such a person, such a factious man is warped or perverted and sinful, he is self-condemned.” God is telling us that a heretic or factious man we must know is dangerous to follow and is rarely cured for very long. He is warped and perverted. The Greek word for warped is **ekstrepho**. It means a person who is overturned or turned over, one who has turned away from the right course, unnatural, abnormal, misguided, distorted, improper in motives and purpose, destroyed in mind, ruined and bent on destroying others. Paul tells Titus we must know this person is sinful and is sinning. The Greek word for sinful or sinning is **hamartano**. It means missing the mark, having no share in the prize, trespassing, and offending. And most of all, God closes this section by telling us this person knows the shape they are in. God tells us they are self-condemned. They even know it and we must know it too. The Greek word is **autokatakritos**. This means such a person knows he is doing himself what he is condemning in others. **Kritos** means to condemn and **auto** is self. Such persons are unhappy—so saddened by their own rotten choices, but trapped in the addiction of condemning others for what they themselves do.

I call us all to obey God’s Word. I call us all humbly to strive to obey Ephesians 4: 3—“be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Never sacrifice the future of our God-given unity on the altar of foolish dissensions, divisions and seeking for control. Dr. R. A. Torrey wrapped up this Pauline message, saying, “Nothing goes further to help us understand the Bible than the purpose to obey it...Nothing clears our mind like obedience; nothing darkens our mind like disobedience. To obey a truth you see prepares you to see other truths. To disobey a truth you see, darkens your mind to all truths.” Beloved, I call us today--stand for truth, unity, and never stand around waiting to debate over silly foolishness. Warn those who strive to divide our unity. No heresy is worse. May we be a unified people for the glory of the Savior, I pray, Amen.