

Protecting God's Grace

Titus 3:8-11

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, June 2, 2019

Turn with me to the book of Titus. That is the book we're in this morning. Turn with me to the book of Titus. This is our second to last sermon in the book of Titus. You can all say "Ohh" with me. Oh, that's sad. It's sad to come to an end of a book of the Bible, isn't it? If you're joining us for the first time this morning, we are coming to the end of a series we started back in January on the book of Titus, called the "How to Plant a Church" series because that's what this book is about. It was written to tell us how to plant a church, how to get it started and off the ground.

And we haven't said much about this in the series, but you can't really plant a church without evangelism, can you? You can't get it started and off the ground without sharing the Gospel with the lost. The two go hand in hand, because people don't get saved through osmosis. They don't get saved by getting struck by a bolt of lightning. They get saved as people tell the Gospel to them. It's as simple as that. They get saved because someone tells them the Good News and they believe it, and they join the church. I'll say more about the book of Titus in a moment. But John Paton was a missionary to the New Hebrides islands of the South Pacific in the 1800s, where he had amazing success. He planted several churches there. But it wasn't easy for him because when he first arrived, the island was full of cannibals. There were no Christians there. The island was full of people that like to eat each other. In fact, when he first got off the boat, shortly after his arrival there, his wife and child died. And the story goes that he had to lie on top of their graves to keep the cannibals from digging them up and eating them. And he survived that ordeal, Paton lived through that. And he began to plant churches on the island, church after church after church. He had amazing success. And someone asked him once, "Well, how did you do that? How in the world?" And he said, "Well, it was simply." He said, "I evangelized them. I told them they were sinners, they were lost and going to hell and they needed a Saviour, and Jesus came to be that for them, and they believed. And when they did that, we started a church. It's as simple as that." He said, "I came to the island to the sound of drums and I left to the sound of church bells." Amen? That's the goal of every missionary. That's the goal of church planting. You want to come to a place one way and you want to leave it another way. You want to come to Chilliwack to the sound of drums and leave to the sound of church bells. But you only do that through the work of evangelism.

I've told you before there are basically three ways to grow the church. There is transfer growth where people leave one church and go to another. They switch churches. There's biological growth where people are born into the church, they attend biologically as a child. And then there's conversion growth where people are converted and they start attending because they're born again. That's the kind of growth you want to see in a church. That's the way you want to see it planted - through conversion. But that's only done through sharing the Gospel with the lost.

Some research has been done on this and it has been estimated that 95% of Christians have never led someone to the Lord - 95%. And 61% never share their faith on a regular basis. One out of five never pray for the lost regularly. It never enters their mind. And when you hear that, it

makes you say, “No wonder the church isn't growing. I mean, no wonder the church in Canada's dying off,” because we're not sharing our faith.

And I might add that this is something that the New Testament knew nothing about. This lackadaisical form of Christianity where we never share Christ with anyone is something they had no experience of because they shared the Gospel with anybody. They even shared the Gospel in places where no one wanted to go, which is what you see in the book of Titus, coming back to the book that we're in this morning.

If you look in Titus 1:5, you see where they shared the Gospel in this book, where this ministry is taking place. Chapter 1:5 says, “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you.”

Now, we read that and don't think much about it. But someone in the first century would've read that and stopped for a moment at the word “Crete” because Crete was a rough place in the first century. They had a terrible reputation, so bad nobody would've thought of planting a church there.

I've told you before that Crete was an island located just off the coast of Greece in the Mediterranean Sea, and it was the meeting point of three continents: Europe, Africa, and Asia. So, it was an important place, a lot of traffic went through there. And with that traffic, came a lot of sin. Sailors are notorious for bringing their sins with them there. They have no accountability, they live however they want.

And one author said, because of this there were three evil Cs in the ancient world, Cilicians, Cappadocians, and Cretans, and Cretans were the worst. They were the bottom of the barrel. And you could add that they'd been that way for generations. It didn't just start with these people. This island was notorious for centuries for producing bad people. The Philistines came from there.

Some of you guys remember the Philistines in the Old Testament? My children love the story of Goliath. They think that's the coolest thing. This really big, tall guy got knocked down by a rock. Well, that's his people, the Philistines. Goliath might've come from this island. The Minoan civilization came from there. The Minoans who were so bad that the Greeks said that they should be wiped off the face of the earth. They were so wicked with their human sacrifices and things. And yet someone evangelized these people and planted a church on the island of Crete. And if you look in chapter 2:11, Paul tells you what did that. He tells you the doctrine that produced this kind of change.

In chapter 2:11, he writes, “For the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to all men.” Paul says that, “The grace of God has changed this island. That's what did it. It wasn't good works, it wasn't moral reformation. The Cretans could have had no chance of that. It was the grace of God that saved these people.” It says, “The grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to all men.” There's kind of a play on words there, because if this would have been read out loud to the church in Crete, and as it's read out loud, the speaker probably would have looked up and said, “‘All men’ means you guys. Even you can be saved, you Cretans.” And if it could happen there, it could happen anywhere.

I read those statistics to you earlier, and one reason we fail to evangelize as much as we should is because we think some people are too evil to be saved. Don't we? Let's just be honest. You guys believe that sometimes? You go around town and you say, "Boy, that guy, he just looks rough. He'll never listen to this." It's a waste of time we think. Paul says there's no such thing as a waste of time when it comes to evangelism, because the grace of God has appeared to all. Which is how he ties off the book of Titus.

I've told you before, the outline for the book of Titus is simple at the end of the day. It's about leadership and then living. That's the outline for this book. Chapter 1 talks about leadership, the kind of leaders you want in the church. And chapters 2 through 3 talk about living - the way you're supposed to live the Christian life.

And as he's talking about living in chapters 2 through 3, Paul does something interesting because he just bounces back and forth between life and doctrine. He gives you a little bit of doctrine, a little bit of truth, and then he tells you how to apply it, and that's just how he wraps up the book. And the doctrine he goes back to over and over again at the end of this letter is the grace of God. It's almost as if he couldn't get grace off his mind. The Cretans needed it so badly.

And toward the end of the book, he says this about it, if you would read down in verses 8 through 11. This is what Chris read to us earlier - chapter three verses 8 through 11 as he goes back and forth talking about grace. In chapter 2:11-15, he applies it to the government at the beginning of chapter 3. Then he goes back to grace again in versus chapter 3:3-7. We talked about that last week. And then he says this in verse 8. He says,

8 This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men. 9 But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. 10 Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, 11 knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.

As he's wrapping up this letter and drawing it to a close, Paul says, "Avoid foolish controversies," then he says, "Reject the factious man." And the idea is this: all of that will ultimately take you away from the grace of God. That's the idea here. That's why he puts it in here at the end. You should avoid a man like that, you should avoid controversies and genealogies and strife about the Law, because it will ultimately detract your mind from grace.

I don't have to tell you, you guys know this, there's a million things that will distract you from the Gospel in the Church today. Do you guys agree with that? There's a million things. You don't have to go to the world. You can just go to the church or go to your local Christian bookstore. What do you see? You see books on wealth, books on diet, books on weight loss. Christians should be the healthiest, wealthiest, skinniest people on the planet according to the local Christian bookstore. Or you see books on fiction or books on Amish romance or forgotten romance. Well you do, don't look at me like that. You guys know what I'm talking about - people with the hats on. Or you go to the local Christian conference circuit and what do you see there?

You see conferences on beauty, conferences on self-image, conferences on making you a better you, which have nothing to do with the grace of God.

You can go to the world and get all that stuff. They're so distracting. They take up all our time and energy. And Paul says, "There's a solution to that. You should avoid them. There's a way to deal with that in the church. You should put them away." Now, I'm not saying that some of those things aren't helpful - maybe they are. But the church should focus on grace, not that. The church as an institution should focus on salvation. So, we should do away with anything that distracts us from that. This is a serious part of this passage. This is a serious part of the book.

But Paul says, "You should do away with not only the books and the conferences that distract you from grace," but if you notice in verse 10, he says, "You should do away with the people who do it as well, if they're divisive about it." That's sobering. You should reject people who promote that stuff if they're factious and they make people take sides. And this is tough stuff. This is serious. But Paul says, "The grace of God is so important to the church, the Gospel is so essential to who we are, that we are to reject anyone or anything that distracts us from it. We're to reject anything that puts our mind on something else."

We live in a distracted world, don't we? Do you guys feel distracted? I mean, you go into a room and what's everybody doing? They got there their head on their phone. Or you go into a restaurant and it's the same thing. People are watching TV - there's just a billion distractions in this world. Paul says the church should put distractions away and focus on this, which is what we're going to talk about this morning.

So, if you're taking notes and Titus 3:8-11, Paul gives us three ways to protect the grace of God in the church. That's our passage for today. That's what this is about. Three ways to protect the grace of God in the church, which is a sobering way to end this book. We have one more sermon next week, but this is almost the end of it. Because as Paul is ending the book, as he's drawing it to a close, he says, "Titus, the church is in danger, the church is in trouble, because there are people who are trying to distract you from all this stuff I've told you." He says that in chapter 1:10. He says, "For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision." That's kind of how he begins the letter and he ends it on the same note. He says, "There are people that are trying to take your mind off of Christ and put it on something else, and you need to guard against that. You have to protect the church, and there's three ways to do that."

The first way is this, the first way to protect the church is to teach what is good and profitable. That's the first thing he says here. But the first way to protect the church is to teach what is good and profitable.

They say that the best way to keep someone from being distracted is to keep them busy. Paul says, "Titus, you need to keep the church busy with the truth. Keep them occupied with things that are good, things that are of some value." And he says it this way in verse 8. He says, "This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men."

Just to point out a few things here: when Paul says, “This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently,” he’s referring to all he has said so far in the book specifically to what he says in verse 4 through 7, if you want to look in that in chapter 3:4-7. He says,

4 But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, 5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.

And then he says in verse 8, “This is a trustworthy statement and concerning these things, I want you to speak confidently.” In other words, “Titus, I want you to teach you this. I want you to focus on this. Jesus Christ has appeared and saved us.” Verse 7 says, “We’re justified by His grace and made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” Focus on that. It’s amazing you read through the New Testament, one thing you notice that’s very interesting is over and over and over again, the authors preached the Gospel to the Church. Ain’t that interesting? To the church. We’re not just talking about to lost people, although, lost people need to hear it too. But these letters are written to churches and they’re constantly going back to these themes you see in verses 4 through 7, because we need to hear it over and over again. Verse 8 says, “So that those who have believed God, will be careful to engage in good deeds.” This is the reason you’re to do this. This is the reason you teach these things, so that your hearers will engage in good deeds.

The word “engage” there is an interesting word. It is *proistemi* in Greek, which literally means to stand in front of something. It referred to a shopkeeper who would stand in front of his store and sell his goods. He would just stand in front and kind of shout out whatever he had in the store. Paul says, “Christians should do that with their good deeds.” We should stand in front of the world and show what grace has done in our lives through our good works. One author said, “Christians are to be lights in the world. They should be in the forefront of good works, not dragging their feet while others take the lead.”

But the idea that Paul is saying here is that, “Titus, you should focus on these things in the church. You should focus on stuff that impacts people’s lives and leads to good deeds.” It’s profitable that way. It’s not just pie in the sky doctrine, it’s stuff that actually impacts your life down here. I heard the story of the guy who heard a sermon and he came home and his wife said, “How was the message?” And the husband said, “I don’t know what it was about.” Paul says, “You should not preach that way, Titus.”

I can’t tell you how many Christians I’ve known who don’t get this, because they love to talk about things that don’t impact their lives. Talk about things that don’t matter in the church endlessly. I put just a small list together - we can make a longer list. But a couple of things: they love to talk about the blood moons and the new world order, and the mark of the beast until they’re blue in the face, until they’ve run out of breath. There’s nothing wrong with talking about end times, but there’s a lot of mysteries there. And some people talk about that endlessly. Or they talk about the location of the Garden of Eden or the Nephilim in Genesis 6. If you don’t know what the Nephilim are, just look it up on Google. It’ll tell you all kinds of stuff about the Nephilim. They’re the sons of God in Genesis. They talk about stuff like that. Or the whirlwind

in the book of Ezekiel. And they talk about that until you're just almost sick of hearing about it. And the question is, what profit is there in that? How does it make you a better Christian? How does it make you a better husband? How does it help you share the Gospel with the lost? Now, those things can be profitable, but not if you sit around and argue about them all the time. Not if you sit around and talk about them endlessly. Some Christians love to do that.

Mark Twain used to tell the story of the time he put a cat and a dog in a cage as an experiment. And afterwards, he taught them how to get along. They did okay. So then he put a bird and a pig and a goat in there and it had the same effect. Eventually, they got along. So, he got really confident and he took it one step further and he put a Baptist, a Methodist and Presbyterian in the cage. And he said, "It wasn't long until everybody was dead. They fought." And he said, "Over things like this; things that don't have an impact in our lives." I read something about some church leaders in the fourth century that had a huge fight over the plant that covered Jonah in Jonah chapter 4. Some said it was an ivy, some said it was a gourd, and they just went to blows over that. This is such a problem today. I mean, just drive around Chilliwack, what do you see? You see churches fighting. Oftentimes, over stuff like this. Paul says, "You need to focus on things that are good and profitable for the church. You can focus on those things if they are good and profitable. But if they're not, you leave them alone. Things that impact people's lives. Those other things don't help you change your life if they're used the wrong way." John Macarthur says,

The basic task of the church is to teach sound doctrine. It's not to give one pastor's opinion, to recite tear jerking illustrations or to promote someone's favourite passage or doctrine. It's to tell people the truth and watch it change their lives. It's to tell them about the grace of God and watch it make a difference in them.

Which leads to the next point that Paul makes here. It leads to the next way to protect the grace of God. The first way is to teach what is good and profitable; to teach things that will build people up in the faith and help them engage in good deeds. Please understand me, I'm not saying those other things can't do that. But if they're taught in the wrong spirit, they can be very harmful to the church. Paul says, "Keep the church occupied with grace." Which leads to a second way to do this, a second way to protect the grace of God, and that is to avoid foolish controversies. Not only should you teach what is good and profitable, but second he says, "You should avoid foolish controversies. Avoid this stuff I just talked about." Paul says, "You don't argue about them, you avoid them. You don't fight over them, you stay away from them if they're not profitable."

I don't have to tell you guys this, some people argue about everything, don't they? Do you guys know what I'm talking about? They fight over the colour of the carpet, they fight over the style of the music. They fight over the flowers that get put in front of the pulpit, and the stand you put them on. Some people like a clear stand, some people want a black stand. Paul says, "You shouldn't fight and have foolish controversies." He says in verse 8,

8 This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men. 9 But avoid foolish controversies and

genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law, for they are unprofitable and worthless.

I can't say much about this for the sake of time, but if you notice, Paul starts off in verse 9 with the word "but" to form a contrast with what he said before. In other words, where Titus was to speak confidently of these things, where he was to teach confidently on the grace of God and His mercy and salvation and what Christ has done, he should also go in the opposite direction and avoid these things. The list in verses 4 through 7, that's to be at the forefront of the church's ministry. The list in verse 9 is to be the things you are to turn away from. Which is what the word "avoid" actually means. It means you turn your back on this type of stuff. Turn towards the first list, turn away from the second list.

And there are four things in this list, four things to avoid. And I might want to point out to you that none of these things have the definite article in Greek, which means they refer to general categories. These are general things. Paul doesn't have specific things in mind. They're just kind of broad reaching things.

And the first one is this: foolish controversies, or foolish quarrels if you had the King James Version. Paul starts off with that one because the Greek philosophers loved to sit around all day and quarrel about foolish things. They loved to sit around and ask, "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" You guys aren't philosophy students, okay. Or what came first, the chicken or the egg? And they would ask that kind of stuff and they would sit around and go, "Mm-hmm, that is so deep. That's so rich." Or they would ask, "Can God make a rock so big that He Himself cannot lift it?" And they would fight over that and argue about that. And Paul says, "That's foolish. That's stupid. Avoid that type of discussion."

He also mentions genealogies here, because the Jews loved to argue about that as well. They loved to argue about the genealogies of their ancestors. And they would say, "I came from the line of Abraham, I came from the line of David." Or they would say, "I came from the house of Moses and I came from the house with Aaron." And they would pull out these huge long charts. Paul says, "Look, you Cretans didn't come from any of that, so don't get caught up in that. That's useless to you guys," he says.

And one more thing in the list, he mentions "strife and disputes about the Law." Or some of your translations say "dissensions and quarrels" because the Jews also loved to quarrel about the Law. Things like (you guys have heard this stuff) how many times a man had to wash his hands before he ate. They would have huge fights about that. Or how many steps you could take on the Sabbath before it was considered work.

And Paul says, "You should avoid this because verse 9 says, 'They are unprofitable and worthless.'" There you see the word "profitable" again there or "unprofitable," which means useless. These things in verses 4 through 7 are profitable, they have value in the Christian life - the things in verse 9 do not. And that's really the point of all this. That's the issue at the end of the day. None of this stuff in verse 9 impacts your life for the glory of God. None of it helps you grow spiritually. So, don't focus on it. Don't make a big deal of it.

I was a philosophy student in college. The joke was you won't get a job as a philosophy student, but it will help you think deep thoughts as you're delivering pizza. Which is true, I delivered pizza in college. But I remember studying this kind of stuff. And I remember studying Plato's theory of the forms and arguing for hours about whether we were actually in the classroom or not. I'm not kidding. We had a whole class on that. We argued about whether we were having the argument. And it all sounded so wonderful. It all sounded so deep, and I remember leaving the classroom thinking, "What was that all about? What was the point?" Paul says, "You shouldn't talk about stuff like that in the church. Not at length anyway. You shouldn't dwell on things that have no point." Matthew Henry says, "Doctrines like this, genealogies, controversies, and strivings about the law are so far from building us up in the faith that they actually hinder us. They block the road to godliness because they soak up all our time and energy."

We can say it like this (this is important), it is much easier to talk about all this stuff in verse 9 than it is to live a godly life. Amen? It's so much easier to talk about controversies and genealogies and stuff about the law than it is to go out and witness to your neighbour. It's so much easier to sit around all day and go, "Oh, that's so deep" than it is to go home and love your wife and kids. I've known men and women in the Church that knew so much theology, they knew so much doctrine, they could quote whole sections of systematic theology to you, but they were living in sin. Paul says, "You need to get your priorities straight in the church. You need to focus on things that impact people's lives for eternity."

The story is told of the time Abraham Lincoln, the former president of the United States, heard a sermon. And he told his aide that the sermon was Biblical, well-conceived and brilliant. To which the aide said, "Well, you must have enjoyed it then Mr. President, you must've really liked it." To which Abraham Lincoln replied, "No, I didn't because he didn't ask us to do anything." Sermons should ask you to do something. They should have an impact on your lives, so should every doctrine that's taught in the church.

And that leads to one more point Paul gives us in this passage, one more way to protect God's grace. And just to review these other ones, the first one is Paul tells us to teach what is good and profitable. To stay busy with the truth, to stay busy with things that benefit our lives. Second, he says, "Avoid foolish controversies." You should avoid things that have no impact on you, and don't help your walk with God. Don't argue about things like what is the sound of one hand clapping or something silly like that. Which leads us to one more way to do this. And this one is the most serious one so far. It hits home. But one more way to protect the grace of God in the church is this...And this is where it gets personal, but Paul says, "You need to reject the factious man. Teach what is good and profitable, avoid foolish controversies," but lastly he says, "You need to reject the factious man. Not just the doctrine, but the man himself. You need to reject those who talk endlessly about things that don't matter, and they do it divisively." If you look in verses 9 through 11, he says,

9 But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. 10 Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, 11 knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.

The word “factious” here is the Greek word *atimos*, which means “factious” or “one who takes sides”. The English Standard Version has “one who stirs up division”, and that’s a good translation of this, because that’s the issue here. This man doesn’t just teach all of that stuff in verse 9, but he is divisive about it. He doesn’t just talk about controversies and genealogies and strife about the Law, but he makes people take sides. Everything is calm and good in the church. Everything is nice and peaceful, until he shows up, and he just stirs the pot. He says, “If you’re really a Christian, you will follow me. If you really know God, then you’re going to take my side on this.”

And the idea here, if you notice in verse 10 is that he won’t quit. You warn him once, he won’t quit. You warn him a second time, he won’t quit. He just keeps going, keeps pushing his agenda because he thinks he’s right. So verse 10 says (and this is a strong word), it says, “To reject him.” That’s a singular word, which means Titus was to take the lead in this. He was to start the rejection process. But this letter was written to everyone in the church. So, this involved everybody.

I might want to say a word about this. Sometimes, church discipline is a long process. Sometimes you follow Matthew 18 and passages like that, and you confront a man multiple times, with lots of time in between to see if repentance has occurred. You’re very patient, you’re very long suffering. You’re not in a rush, you’re not trying to get him out of the church. But there are other times when the process is quick. It’s very quick because of the threat to the church. And this is what you see here. You remember another passage like this, first Corinthians 5. You remember the man is sleeping with his father’s wife? Paul doesn’t tell you to go through a long process there. He says, “Throw him out of the church. The sin is so grievous, it’s so evil and hurtful to the church, you throw him out now.” This is kind of like that. Paul says, “If a man is factious and divisive, he gets three strikes and he’s out. Three chances, and that’s it.” Because verse 11 says, “He’s perverted and warped.”

As the word indicates, the word “perverted” means his mind is twisted. He won’t listen to you, he won’t hear you out. It says, “Self-condemned,” which means that he knows better than this. This is a guy who on some level knows he’s not supposed to be that combative, but he doesn’t care. So, Paul’s advice is to reject him. That word is stronger than the word for “avoid” earlier because it means to have nothing to do with him anymore, to get him out of the church. If he repents, he can come back. But until he repents, he can’t, because he will destroy everything.

We’ve all known churches that split and ruptured and broke apart simply because one guy had something he was thumping so hard and he got a following and it was over after that. The idea here is the thing he talks about may be trivial. The thing he’s pushing may be dumb, but the way he’s doing it is not. It is very dangerous. And let’s be honest, this is hard stuff. This is tough to think of throwing someone out like this. But you have to remember, this is the church. It’s not just any organization. This is the bride of Christ and Jesus prayed that we would be one. He prayed for our unity.

In John 17:21, the Lord prayed, “They may all be one; [all My disciples may be one] even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You...” That was Jesus’ last prayer before His arrest. That was what was on His mind as He went to the cross, that His disciples would be one. And we need to

honour that today. We need to take that seriously since our Lord did. Paul says in Ephesians 4:3, that we should be diligent to preserve the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace. That word “diligent” means that there should be something that we sweat over. There should be something that is high, high priority for us. One more passage here, Romans 16:17-18 takes this one step further. It says, “Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions.” “Keep your eye” means you’re watching them, keeping an eye on them. “Those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them.” He says, “For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Jesus Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.” But Paul says, “This is how important unity is to God. This is how dear it is to him. It’s enough to turn people away if they don’t repent. It’s enough to reject them from the church.”

John Calvin says, “Every person who by his overweening pride tries to break up the unity of the church is pronounced by Paul to be a heretic.” That’s actually what the word “factious” is in Greek. It’s the same word for “heretic”. He says in a word, “heresy and the unity of the church are things totally opposite to each other. Since the unity of the church is dear to God, it ought to be dear to us.” He says, “We ought to entertain the strongest abhorrence for division in any form.”

Which leads me to ask, do you have this today? Do you have a strong abhorrence for division? Do you have a strong distaste for this type of heresy? Let me say it this way, do you hate it when Christians fight? Let’s be honest, we see so much fighting among Christians around us that we often get to the point we don’t hate it anymore. It’s kind of funny to us. We kind of laugh at it. If that’s you this morning, I want to remind you of something, God doesn’t laugh when Christians fight. God doesn’t think it’s funny. He can’t stand it, and we shouldn’t be able to stand it either.

Fleshing this out a little bit, what are you willing to do about this in your own life? What are you willing to do to unify the church? Are you willing to change the things you talk about in the church? That’s a big one. We all need to grow in that. Are you willing to work on only discussing things that are good and profitable? Talking about grace and mercy, talking about Christ more than you talk about some of these other controversies and genealogies and things? Here’s another way to do this, if you have conflict with someone, will you go and make it right today? If you see division forming in the church, if you see yourself splitting apart from someone, will you humble yourself and talk to them about it and repent if you need to? That’s the best thing you could do for the church’s unity - is to make the change in your own heart first.

I’ve told you before about the bishop who said that he asked the Lord to help him change the world, but God didn’t answer. He was silent. So, he asked the Lord to help him change his town, and the Lord still didn’t answer. So, he made it smaller and he said, “Well, Lord, would You change my neighborhood and would You change my family? And would You change my wife and kids,” and he got no response. And finally, he asked the Lord, “Lord, would You change me?” The Lord did that. He answered that prayer.

And do you know what? This morning, He would answer that prayer for you as well. If you ask the Lord to change you in this area, He will. So, would you pray for that this morning? Would we all pray to grow in this? This is our prayer for our church. Amen? This is what we want. We

want to be unified as we move forward together, as we do some new things, exciting things this summer. We want to do it hand in hand and not separately. So, let's pray for the Lord's help in this, for His grace.

Father, we do pray for Your help, Lord. As we talk about being unified, as we take some of these commands seriously, take them to heart, Lord. I humbly pray that we would never have to reject the factious man, because we would never have one. But it may not be Your will for us. There may come a time when we have to do that. But Father, I pray that the most important thing for us would be the unity of the church, and Your grace that You've talked about so clearly in this passage. That we would focus on Christ and what He has done and not all this other stuff.

Lord, give us wisdom in this. Give us a little more love for one another. Help us to grow in all these things. Thank you for Christ who died that we may be unified. Thank you for the Lord who went to the cross so that we would be one, and we could be united around Him. We pray for that for our church this morning, Lord. Would You be glorified as we take this home and apply it to our lives. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.