

3.06.2024

Titus – Making Things Right

Chapter 3 - (Vs. 8-11)

Believe it or not, we're coming to the end of Titus. What a great study it is too. Maybe as we come closer to the end, I can be more dogmatic about the purpose of this book. It is clear according to the book itself who the audience is; it's Titus. Titus is the audience. This is not written to a church or a group of people, it's written to Titus. The reason is that he has a responsibility to put things in order. In other words, God ordains authority, pastors, teachers, and apostles for a particular purpose. There are particular epistles that are designated specifically to the pastors. Titus, Philemon, 1 and 2 Timothy are called pastoral epistles. So, in a way, you're seeing kind of a job description of what a pastor is responsible for. In the context of Titus, you see the job description within the setting of chaos. What is a pastor to do when he's dealing with upset within the church and how does he bring things back into order? So, this letter is written for that purpose. It is to be understood that in this role of pastoral position, the main responsibility of any pastor is to make sure that any teaching is correct; that the doctrine is being adhered to and that people are abiding by that doctrine. There are times when the pastor doesn't seem to be even nice, but it's because he's protecting something more valuable than a person's feelings. He's protecting the integrity of the word of God. Once you let the integrity slip, then men begin to feel that they're above what Scripture says. Once that begins to happen, then the one who is offended is God, and that's the worst offense.

So, as we come to this, within the context, if you would go all the way back to Acts 20, you see Paul in many respects like 2 Timothy 4, passing over the baton to those that are leaders within the church. If you look with me in Acts 20, you see him doing this specifically with those that are the leaders in Ephesus. In the first part of this, as he begins to talk to those that are there, Paul begins to share that he has been faithful, and he hasn't held back any of the truth to them. He then passes over the baton, and I want you to pick up in verse 28.

“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”

This is the high calling.

(Acts 20:29) “I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;

(Acts 20:30) and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.

(Acts 20:31) Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.

(Acts 20:32) And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”

That’s a great text, isn’t it? In many respects, he gives a synopsis of what the leaders are supposed to do.

We come to Titus and there are specific directives that he gives Titus in this particular epistle. If you look at Titus 1:5, one of the passages that we continue to repeat is the summary or the focus of the book.

It reads this way, “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.”

It’s clear that he has a duty, an obligation, a directive that is given to him. “Set in order; appoint elders. This is your job.” He has to do this not according to friendship, money, positions; he can’t let and allow those things to come into the play. It has to be upon the character of the individual and the faithfulness of their walk. He has to adhere to this. He doesn’t have an option. It is God that has ordained this. He’s listening to one voice. That’s his responsibility.

As you come into verse 11, he states that there are certain men that have come in that must be silenced. Who do you think he’s talking to? Titus. What is he saying? “You’ve got to silence these people.” Why? Because they’re upsetting whole families. It is the responsibility of the pastor therefore to oftentimes come into particular realms where he sees that things are being threatened; he has to come in and silence things. In some cases, he’s going to almost have to be harsh. This is why Scripture will say, “Reprove, rebuke, exhort” (2 Timothy 4:2) in sound doctrine. “Exhort is the only word that would be “encourage.” The “reprove, rebuke” are very harsh words. Why? Well, not only is the word of God at stake, not only are the feelings of God at stake, but families are not going to get healed if wrong doctrine is being proclaimed, and people are upsetting them by that wrong doctrine; things are becoming divisive within the body. You have an obligation.

Obviously, there are going to be people that speak things that are inappropriate, but he now turns to Titus, and he says in Titus 2:1, “But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine.”

Pretty clear, isn't it? He has these directives, and you begin to realize that part of the directives is you want to put the right people in charge; you also want to maintain the order that God has ordained from the beginning, and that is "Older, teach the younger," "Men, teach the men," and "Women, teach the women." You want to adhere to these things. Of course, here again, we live in a world where people say, "What's the big deal?" Well, let's see. The big deal is God said it. So, that's what makes it a big deal. God knows that which will maintain the proper order. I've oftentimes said that people argue with the fact that "It's a woman pastor. What's the big issue with that?" Well, there's a number of problems with that, but let me just say one of the main ones. When she stands at the pulpit, her husband is in the audience, and she's telling her husband what to do. Now, there's going to be problems in that home. If there's not, there's something wrong with the husband. That's no different than "What's wrong with the children telling the parents what to do?" Well, there's a lot wrong with that. It brings a lot of problems and disorder.

If you look with me at Titus 2:15. Once again, who is he speaking to? Titus, right.

"These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you."

What's the authority? "Thus, sayeth the Lord." It's what God says. The authority necessarily doesn't come from the fact that this person is extremely intelligent in the things that he's saying or that he has a degree behind him. The authority comes from "If this is the word of God and what it says, then you need to do it." You need to be unapologetic about saying that.

As you come into Titus 3:1, he then tells them to, what? "Remind them.. "Remind them," what? "...to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed." Why would he say that? Because the whole problem with things being in disarray is nobody's following orders; things are out of order. One of the reasons why is because people aren't being subject to the authority that God has ordained. Is authority a big issue? It is with God. He ordains all authority. So, the passage is saying to remind them of these things, and Titus 3:1 is conveying that.

If you look with me in verse 8, we're going to be looking at verse 8-11 in particular. I don't know how far we're going to get into this. If you look with me in verse 8, he begins to tell him of course, what to tell the people. The emphasis of our message is the grace of Christ. There's no doubt about that, and this you cannot compromise. It's not the goodness of man, it's the gospel of Christ. He proclaims in verse 8, "This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak..."

What?

"...confidently..."

You know, it's been interesting to me through the years that everybody has their ideas of what a pastor should be. "The pastor should do this..." In some cases, I've talked with some people and there's this sense of "He should just be so congenial and so nice." I'm going, "Well, I'm not reading it." Now, it doesn't mean that we should be argumentative, but the pastor has to lead, and he has to lead confidently. He has to lead in a way that says, "This is what Scripture says." He cannot compromise that. He doesn't have the luxury. That's one of the things we've been reading in Galatians 1, "Do I seek to please men or God?" There's actually no other gospel. So, I'm not going to compromise on that. We see the world compromising on all kinds of things, but I can tell you this, if you compromise in one part then it just opens the door to so many things. I remember when the Methodist church first started compromising on the whole thing with women pastors. I said to myself, "This is not going to go well." And it hasn't. Now, you have homosexuals leading services and all kinds of things, and there is no sense of right and wrong. Why? Because you compromised on one thing, and you said, "That's not that important." God says it is important. A pastor has to be strong in these areas. You can't worry about people leaving. People are going to leave. Quite frankly, I'd rather them leave than stay and be divisive and hurt somebody that's actually wanting to grow and follow God. It's actually a far better thing, but there has to be somebody that guards that. As Paul puts it so aptly to Timothy, it's that the church is the pillar and support of this truth, and we need to support it.

As we come to verse 8, he's wanting him to speak confidently of these things. In verse 9, he puts it into the context of shunning foolish controversies, genealogies, strife, and disputes. "You mean there are arguments in church?" Absolutely, and over some of the most ridiculous things you could ever imagine. Through the years I've been in a lot of different settings in churches as a kid, all the way up to now. I'll tell you I've seen some strange arguments. I've seen some people get angry at really stupid stuff. I think one of the things that bother me the most is instead of caring about how God feels about things, you begin to see that man's always worried about his own feelings. I'm going, "Why are you worried about your feelings? Your feelings aren't important compared to His."

So, in verse 10, he even tells them to what?

"Reject a factious man after a first and second warning".

Who is giving the first and second warning? Well, it's not just anybody in the church. It's Titus, and he's the one that's been placed in this position. So, there are times according to this passage, that a pastor has to say, "That's one." Because you don't want this person continuing to be factious within the church.

These verses, Titus 3:8-11, that we're going to be looking at in particular, he begins to talk about some of the things and problems that come in. What I'd like to do, if I can, is bring in the

modern-day version of what is being said within the passage. Always, when you come to a particular text, you want to first focus on “What does it say?” Ultimately, you then go to “How does it apply?”

- What does it say?
- What does it mean by what it says?
- How does it apply?

So, you begin to go through that process.

We’re going to start with what he’s saying within the passage. As we begin to look at this passage, we’re going to be seeing some tradition that’s involved and issues that were coming up. The issues were very much of this time, but you’re going to find also that there’s nothing new under the sun. So, what might have been a kind of tradition at that point in time, well, we’re still dealing with some of the same issues. Just like how the churches were dealing with Gnosticism, we’re still dealing with Gnosticism today. It still infiltrates the church today.

So, if you look with me in Titus 3, we’re going to begin within the passage. We’re going to begin to see some of the things that are happening. Let me just reiterate what he’s fundamentally said up to this point. He’s basically said, “You want to tell the people to stop being disrespectful and not listening to authority. He says that the fact of the matter is “Look, we’ve all been there, but it’s time to stop.” The wonderful thing about the gospel and our faith is if you confess your sins, He is faithful and just to forgive you of your sins. He will cleanse you from all unrighteousness. It’s a brand-new day, but you’ve got to stop. So, if you’re in the middle of it, and you’re still causing problems, the church can’t sit back and go, “We’re trying to be nice here.” It doesn’t have that option.

In Matthew 8, when Jesus is talking about stumbling blocks, “It’s better that a millstone be hung around your neck.” He’s talking about that people are pursuing greed and their own selfish motives. That’s why the “millstone” because it’s a picture of business. His point is that when you pursue your business, and hurt somebody else, it would be better that you drowned. We don’t want your business to come in and mess up the relationship that this person has. Of course, Christ will say, “If you see a brother in sin, go talk to him, but you might have to bring in the whole body and ultimately the leadership within that.” Here again, there’s an interesting context in Matthew 18, we always have to be ready to forgive. So, at the moment that person wants to change, done.

I remember a number of years ago, we were starting off in the ministry and somebody had really wronged someone. I won’t go into the details. You know, you get upset about somebody doing something really bad and hurting people purposely. The person came and was broken, wanting to do the right thing, and I remember fighting the Lord with it. I was going, “I know

what I'm supposed to do, but I'm not ready to do it." I could just see the word of God, "You don't have the option. You have to forgive him." I wrestled with it. Ultimately, I did it. My point is that you can't hold onto it. So, if you're going to wrestle with it, you've got a night. Then the next morning, you're going to have to get it straight. In living that way, you begin to learn how to let go. The word "forgive" literally means to "let go;" the same word as divorce. So, it is interesting that people will let go of somebody for their own selfish motives, but they won't let go of their own anger to save the relationship. Scripture says to let it go. So, you have to, let it go. I would encourage you to just practice doing that right away because the more you do that, the more you're free and the more God begins to work on your behalf. I'm just so thankful that the moment we confess our sins to the Lord, He forgives us. Of course, you have the dialogue in Matthew 18 of Peter going, "How many times do I have to forgive?" but you have to be willing to do that. The passage is telling us that some things are worth taking stands on, and you have to be tough, but when there's forgiveness, you have to be willing to forgive at any time.

So, we come to this text, and he's saying, "You have to tell the people to stop doing what they're doing. This is not a part of our lives anymore. Look, the kindness of God and His love for mankind appeared and He saved us from these things. It wasn't on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but it was according to His mercy that He saved us." So, we now walk in that. He's telling them that we're walking in righteousness. It's just a strange phenomenon that I'm seeing when people are saying, "You as Christians need to forgive us." Wait a minute, you need to stop doing what you're doing. Now, I can't go around being mad at everybody. The anger of man doesn't accomplish anything. I can't let the sun go down on my anger, but this whole idea of the church looking the other way when the person continues to sin is inappropriate. It is the gospel that is so powerful that changes me to the point that I don't want to sin. If in fact this person is genuine, they don't want to sin anymore. Then, they are forgiven. So, his point is that the Lord saved us, and He poured out His love upon us richly through Jesus Christ. We've been justified by His grace according to the hope of eternal life. Then he turns and he says, "So, this is our faith."

I think I was talking to Sonny about this, you look at the book of Ephesians and a word that's interjected throughout is "mystery." There's a couple of reasons why the word "mystery" is put in the book of Ephesians. One is because there was a lot of mysticism in this particular city. We know that because when God gives Paul the power to work wondrous miracles, people were just touching the garments and being healed, the people started burning their witchcraft books. So, it was a tremendous bonfire that was there. We know that there was a lot of superstition and witchcraft which tells us that the people were looking for something mysterious. Paul writes and he says, "You want mystery? I'm going to show you a mystery. The mystery is that God loves you. That's a mystery." Interestingly enough, in Ephesians 5, he puts it in the context of husband and wife. I think one of the things that makes a relationship wonderful is that sense

of mystery that “Of all the people in the world, she loves me.” It's kind of a mystery. I remember thinking, “Why does she even look at me?” I guess what I'm saying is if there's a mystery in the relationship then there's a depth of relationship. So, Paul prays that the eyes of their heart would be enlightened; that they would see the depth of His love. He begins to convey this in a relational way. Scripture is telling us that these things are important.

The same church at Ephesus is where Timothy is pastor, and you see that in 1 Timothy 1. He leaves them in Ephesus, and he's writing to Timothy in the book of Timothy. One of the statements that he makes in chapter 3 is “Ok, we're the pillar and support of the truth; the church.” Then he states this, “Great is the mystery of godliness.” His point is that as he's going to be leading the church, Timothy needs to understand that though he takes stands and there has to be this sense of right and wrong within the body that he needs to protect, the only thing that will ultimately change people is the Gospel. It changes them from the inside out. You and I can't understand how that works. I've seen some of the worst people on the planet receive the Lord, and I'm going, “You couldn't be that much nicer.” It's like it's not the same person anymore, and you go, “That's got to be a mystery.” The gospel is the greatest mystery. It's the power of God that changes lives. So, he writes this for the purpose of directing us. I think that's one of the reasons why he starts off in Titus 3 saying, “You know the kindness of God? That's the power.” But it's the kindness of God. I just want to emphasize that. It's not the kindness of man. That doesn't mean that we need to be hostile, but it's the kindness of God and His love for us in sending His son for us that changes the heart. I could stand at the corner and give everybody a Big Mac every day, and it wouldn't make them any nicer. In fact, I've been in certain conditions where I've been with people in which we helped somebody, and they go, “Is that all you have? You don't have something bigger than a five?” The point is that people are fundamentally miserable because they're miserable people. So, there has to be a change from the inside out. I can show kindness, and I should when I have that opportunity, but it's not my kindness that's going to win them over. That's why the gospel should be shared. Here again, that's why Titus in chapter 3 is saying “This is a trustworthy statement.”

Now, after saying that, he then turns and he goes, “Ok, so, speak confidently about that and with that in mind, now you need to go take care of the riffraff.” So, what's the thing that we speak boldly about? Jesus saves. It's all His power and His grace. “Oh, Jesus saves. So, you don't have to take a stand?” No, no, no. “Avoid foolish controversies.” That's the very next verse. So, the trustworthy statement is “The power of God changes people.” In the meantime, you're going to have foolish controversies in the church, and you have to protect the flock as Acts talks about.

So, Titus 3:9 says, “But avoid foolish controversies...”

Once again, “foolish” is where we get the word “moron.” The word itself actually has the connotation of something absurd; so ridiculous. He’s talking about that people get upset and they argue and debate about absurd things. It’s not important things, and they get upset about these things and hold onto them; it becomes divisive. So, the point is that you need to turn away or “shun.” In some cases, that is to say, “you turn away from” and in other cases it’s “you turn them away.”

“... avoid foolish controversies and genealogies...”

Of course, genealogies are an interesting study. You know that they are very much into this today even though they brought the gentiles into it. Now, everybody’s sending in their DNA to find out who their great-great-great-great grandfather is. I think the thought is “If I find somebody in my family that’s really important then I begin to matter.” I can tell you firsthand that it doesn’t matter. I have a wonderful heritage. I certainly don’t feel bad about that, but I can tell you this, because I have a wonderful heritage, it doesn’t make me better. It makes me more accountable. So, you should really feel sorry for me because all you who had a bad heritage, wow do you have a lot of freedom, but me, nope. I step out a little bit, I get the hammer. I don’t quite see the big advantage that everybody has because I’m held more accountable. Here again, it doesn’t make the person more valuable, and it’s one of the great truths that we see in Scripture. The value of a person is not based on his heritage. Jesus is really clear, especially with those in John 8 that are saying, “We have Abraham as our father.” The fact that they said that tells me that they had no strong heritage. If they had a strong heritage, they would’ve said something like Paul, “I’m from the tribe of Benjamin.” Why the tribe of Benjamin is so important is that the tribe of Benjamin is almost directly connected with the priests. Of course we see this with Jeremiah. What tribe was Jeremiah from? Benjamin. The thought is that Jerusalem is all in Judah, right? No, part of it’s in the tribe of Benjamin. So, part of the temple is in the tribe of Benjamin. That’s why you have the priests coming in and Paul was going, “I’m of the tribe of Benjamin.” The advantage is that even today, if you go into synagogue, and you’re from a tribe that has high credentials, then you’re treated different. You get to sit in a better seat; you’re looked at in a better way. So, one of the reasons why people would search their genealogies is that they’re looking to be valued; looking to receive benefits and it has a sense of security to it. So, genealogies are man’s way of trying to find some sense of worth and recognition. If you look in Matthew 23, people were concerned about sitting in the seat of Moses.

(Titus 3:10) “But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law, for they are unprofitable and worthless.”

I was looking at a passage in the book of Timothy; it was dealing with women and talking about they are not to be gossips. Oftentimes, the word being used for “gossip” is almost a demonic

tearing down of people, but that word in the passage is actually the word “bubbles.” It’s a word picture that Scripture has given. It’s saying that your talking has no value; it’s just air. So, people are going around blowing bubbles all day long and they have no value; nothing good, sound, virtuous, or beneficial comes out of the words. I think one of the things you’re going to see in Titus 3 is “engage in good deeds; do something beneficial.”

It goes all the way back to Titus 3:1, “Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed.” “*Agathos*” is the word that he used which is dealing with things that are pleasant and admirable. Of course, argumentation isn’t very pleasant, and it certainly isn’t very admirable and honorable.

He then goes on and begins to say in verse 8, that they may be confident and careful to “engage in good deeds.” Here again, he uses a different word for “good” within this particular passage, but the emphasis is “beneficial.”

In Matthew 7, Scripture makes reference to “a good tree bears good fruit.” So, what does “good fruit” look like? Well, it’s not only honorable, but also virtuous and beneficial. It helps people; it builds up; it doesn’t tear down. So, if in fact somebody’s tearing down, that’s what we call “bad fruit” because it’s not productive. You’re not really adding anything of value to the conversation.

So, the passage talks about the fact that you need to be careful to engage in good deeds.

“These things are good...”

Here again, he emphasizes “valuable” and “virtuous.” It would be the best way to describe “*kalos*” within the text.

“... and profitable for men.”

That is to say that they actually yield profit to the things that are going on.

(Titus 3:9) “But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law...”

Now, let me just say this about the Law, we know that Jews have this oral law that they tie together. Of course, their thought is that the word of God needs to be surrounded and protected. Here again, this is the way they describe it. So, I’m not just making this up. So, it’s like they build these walls to protect the word of God. Of course, the more they feel that the word of God needs to be protected, the higher the walls go. There’s really no end to the building of the walls. It’s like Peter saying to Jesus, “I’m going to protect you.” Well, their idea is that they’re going to protect the Torah. They do this through the Talmud. Really, the Talmud and all of the writing that come together with that, and we’re going to talk about some of

them, weren't really pulled together until about 200 AD. So, after Christ. However, all of the oral traditions that are put together were enacted at the time of Christ. So, the fact that it wasn't necessarily in the form of an encyclopedia so to speak at that particular time does not mean they weren't using these things. Scripture really relates that they were using these things. They had these oral traditions. So, when we talk about these writings that now have been culminated into these things, it's clearly the way that they thought at that point in time.

After saying that, it's telling us that there's strife about the Law. Now, the Jews had what was called the Midrash. The Midrash comes from a Hebrew word in the Old Testament "*darash*" which makes reference to "inquiring" or "searching out." You see it in the book of Ezra where it says, "Ezra began to seek out the word of the Lord." So, "midrash" is that desire to seek out. It's the commentary that is for the purpose of investigation. Not unlike the commentaries that we have. What are the commentaries doing? Well, they're kind of searching out and they're inquiring, "What does it really say?" Sometimes, there's debate. You read one commentary, then another one says, "I don't agree with this guy." It was the same way back then. I don't want to get too technical, but I want you to see these things because I'm going to give you examples of them today. The Midrash was more in the realm of litigation and dealing with the Law. Basically, you investigate to in some way hang the guy.

I'll give you a couple of examples. Matthew 12 would be one that you see. You'll see this litigating work of lawyers conducting a discovery for their trials. In other words, think prosecuted attorney. "Can we bring up some legalities here to get this guy in court?"

(Matthew 12:1) "At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat."

(Matthew 12:2) "But when the Pharisees saw this, they said to Him, 'Look, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath.'"

Then, Jesus begins to pull out of the Law. He says, "Ok, I'm the defense attorney. So, let me tell you what the Law says about this," and He begins to defend them according to the Law. He uses David as the example within the passage. The point of the text is that they were using Law to trip up people, obviously, and to prosecute.

You see the same thing in Mark 3.

(Mark 3:1) "He entered again into a synagogue; and a man was there whose hand was withered."

(Mark 3:2) "They were watching Him to see if He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him."

(Mark 3:3) He said to the man with the withered hand, 'Get up and come forward!'

(Mark 3:4) And He said to them, 'Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to kill?'..."

That's an interesting question because they're wanting to convey that they're doing good by virtue of persecuting somebody.

So, interesting examples of what is called the Midrash, the Halakah. So, we're in the Midrash; in the Midrash, there's the focus on legal works which is "You did something unlawful." In Midrash, there's also something that is called the Aggadah which focuses on nonlegal issues; still a part of their law. The nonlegal issues are dealing with anything from business to medicine. They would wrangle about these things; they would argue and debate about them. They might argue about what the best kind of vitamins to take are. We wouldn't argue about that in church, would we? Something like, "Is it right to take yoga classes?" or things that are maybe even dealing with business. It is amazing to me how man will argue and debate about things, first of all, that is none of their business. What somebody else is doing, that's their business. Then, they'll neglect the weightier things when Scripture tells you "This is doctrine; this is truth." It's always been amazing to me how in churches, I'll see debates over minor issues that really don't matter. "Strain out a gnat and swallow a camel", right? (Matthew 23:24)

So, you have these things coming into play. On top of that, you have what called the Mishnah. In case you aren't already confused, we'll just add another one to it. The Mishnah is a collection of oral traditions. The best example I can give you of this is Mark 7.

If you look in Mark 7, the oral traditions were basically supplemental to the laws. So, you have a law which basically might talk about the purity of cleanliness according to the Law.

(Mark 7:1) "The Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered around Him when they had come from Jerusalem,

(Mark 7:2) and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed."

Now, Scripture says that there needs to be a cleanliness in this, but it doesn't go into the details. This is basically where the Mishnah comes into play, "We'll tell you exactly what that means." So, you have to wash your hands in a certain way.

In fact, if you look in the passage, it will go on to say, "(For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders..."

See, Scripture is separating this. This is not what Scripture said. This is their tradition; their oral law that they added to it.

(Mark 7:4) “and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.”

There’s a specific way that you have to wash something. You can’t just wash it. They have all these laws. Well, that’s fundamentally the Mishnah that comes in. Of course, as Jesus will deal with them in particular here in Mark 7, He says, “Ok, I have a problem with that. You disregard the laws of God for your traditions.”

His point is in verse 10, “Moses said, ‘HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER’, but you pronounce Corban over your stuff so that you don’t have to give to your mother and father.” (Verse 11)

He says, “This is where your traditions go against the law of God.” (Mark 7:13) This often would happen where they would elevate their traditions above what God says. We’ve seen that in churches throughout centuries. We’ve seen the emphasis of that.

Now, in case you’re not totally confused, there’s actually another volume called the Gemara. The Gemara is there to interpret the Mishnah. The best way I can put it is that you have volumes and volumes and volumes of literature. It’s one of the reasons why Ecclesiastes says the writing of books is endless and it’s going to weary you if you just sit and read them. So, the point of it is that men will litigate, he’ll delegate, he will academically smother anything and everything in such a way that it puts him in some sort of control. That’s what was happening.

One of the things that I’ve seen throughout the years in churches is how the church begins to elevate certain things that ultimately then smother the truth. It is that which seems to infiltrate. Let me just tell you, there’s some things that almost seem kind of innocuous. In fact, I’ll put it another way, they seem to be very wonderful things to do; yet how destructive they are in the church. It is the responsibility of the pastor not to allow those things to come in. One of my concerns is that oftentimes, pastors are very passive about these things. When they’re passive about allowing these things, it becomes divisive within the church.

I’ll just list a few of them for you. Here again, in the context that I was showing you, is it wrong to be clean? That’s a good thing, but how they went about it; how it began to take precedence over the heart. Then, the weightier things such as mercy and the kindness of God and righteousness; ultimately, the gospel itself takes a back seat to these kinds of things. I was in a church a number of years ago that was very much into missions. Missions, what a great thing to do. They actually formed a mission committee. I never could understand why we had to have a committee, but you have these committees. This was a missionary committee. It was interesting that through the metamorphosis of it, if a committee get more “airtime,” and they become seemingly more important, you then get people in committees that aren’t elders or

overseers. Character issues are not the thing, but what is the thing? Mission committee, and it began to take precedence over the church, and it began to run the church. I remember certain people they would lift up. Strangely enough, one guy was very good musically. He was able to play some of the grandest organs in all of Europe. He was a missionary to France. So, "Wow, you're not only a missionary; you're a missionary to France." That puts you up there, especially in the liberal scene. He had tremendous talent and ability in music. He could write scores and things like that. "We want him on, and we want to elevate this person." Well, they did, but he left his wife; he was a homosexual. I guess we'll call him "artistic." What happened there? There's only one easy way to respond to that, and that was they focused on the wrong thing. They made the position and what they were doing more important than anything else.

I hate to even give names of things, but I've seen this with Bible Study Fellowship with the women. There is a place called Bible Study Fellowship. They're women that have these Bible study fellowships. You say, "Pastor, why would you be against that?" First of all, they're not meeting as a church; they're meeting as a separate group. So, they have their separate group, and we're not talking about women's Bible study within the auspices of the church. We're talking about different women coming from different churches coming together and having a Bible study fellowship. Then, they become more loyal to the Bible study fellowship than they do to the church. See, this is where a church would step in and say, "You know what, you might know more of Scripture than your husband, but don't go home and tell him. You let him teach you." That's what a church would say, but not a Bible study fellowship. They're not interested in bringing the husband and wife together and honoring the Lord. They're interested in the academics of it. I'm talking about the innocuous things that come in. Is there anything wrong with the study of the Law? The litigation of the Law? Is there anything wrong with dealing with that particular kind of matter? No, there's nothing wrong with it except the way they dealt with it and the fact they took a front row seat in everything that was being done; it really wasn't overseen by the grace of God and the focus of the gospel. You see, the church keeps that focus and keeps everybody thinking right.

You can have churches get involved with building programs. I was in one church where they wanted to have a Christian school for the kids. I've seen this happen a number of times. I've actually had pastors come up and ask, "Do you think we should start a Christian school in our church?" They asked me for my opinion, and I said, "No." They said, "Why?" and I said, "Well, unless the school is overseen by the overseers, it's going to take on its own merit. Once that happens, the two are going to begin to fight for position." I've seen it. You wouldn't think a Christian school, you know. Yeah, but in a Christian school, what do you have? A committee. Who's in charge? Whoever's on the committee is in charge and they begin to make those kinds of decisions.

The church will open its doors to works such as AA. What's wrong with AA? As long as they put in Bible verses." I'll tell you what's wrong with AA. First of all, fundamentally, the work itself denies that Christ alone is the answer. That's the number one problem. The other problem that comes in is when people begin to fellowship because they're drunks or they have addictions. That's bizarre when you think about it. So, what's your fellowship in? Your addiction. That's not our fellowship. Our fellowship is in Christ. We don't care if this person is addicted, we don't care if this person's not. It's the coming together of the body of the family. It's like going into a neighborhood and saying, "Ok, how many of you people are really crazy?" So, you're going around and probably if you interview a hundred families, you might get ten people that are really crazy. Then you say, "Ok, you ten people come together and be a family." Why would you do that? You need some sane people in with the crazy people. They'll help them out a little bit. You begin to huddle people around an addiction, and it becomes very destructive. Here again, it makes the process the answer rather than the Savior, the Gospel.

We believe that "we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. (Titus 3:3)

(Titus 3:4) But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared,

(Titus 3:5) He saved us..."

What's the answer? It's the Gospel. He saved us.

If you have everybody deciding within a church, "I think you ought to be doing this or that," and you get off of "Thus sayeth the Lord" and the clear doctrine of what Scripture is telling you, you're going to find whole families being upset. People are wondering, "What is the truth?" A lot of confusion comes because the church allows these things.

Is there anything wrong with Christian comedy? No. There's nothing wrong with people telling jokes and laughing and having a good time. Do you want to put them on a pulpit? No because once the comedy takes center stage, doctrine takes backstage. After a while, it's all about the laugh rather than being about the truth. Is comedy a bad thing? No, it's not a bad thing, but it doesn't need to be in the church. The same thing is true with music. We're not here to entertain you. If in fact in any way you perceive that the church is a place for entertainment, you've just lost the focus of the church. We are a pillar and support of the truth. We're going to get you back into what's important. This is why he will begin to talk about "engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs" in verse 14. Why does he talk about that? Because everyone is talking about entertainment, and you're saying, "Is it really that important?" No. Then, let's focus on what we need to be doing. Once again, it doesn't mean that everybody in the church has to be walking around angry or upset about stuff, but it is about "What's important?" and

“What should we be doing?” The responsibility of the pastor is to maintain that. So, whatever is necessary to do that, he needs to make sure that this gospel is not compromised; the respect for God is not compromised. Above all else. This is one of the reasons why in this passage, he goes, “I want you to speak confidently about these things and you need to shun these arguments, controversies, and things that bring up strife.” The strangest things will bring strife. For instance, like whether or not we should have holistic classes in church; whether or not we should have a Bible study focused on addiction with people that are mentally deranged. You can’t in any way at any time allow any of those things to take center stage. If you keep the important thing important then the church will function very well. There will always be unity of Spirit. I have found as long as people have this one goal to exalt Christ, and Him above all else, we have no problems.

That’s one of the things that Paul is speaking of in Philippians 2, “If there’s anything at all...” If you’ll look with me in Philippians 1:27,

“Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ...”

A lot of the things that we pursue, is it really conduct befitting Christ?

“Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.”

It’s not complicated, is it? But Satan would come in and he would complicate. He would get the church to do and focus on anything else than what we’re supposed to be focused on. The responsibility of the pastor is to maintain that. He cannot allow these things to come in. Like I said, I’ve seen in many churches where the pastor acquiesces, he’s passive; doesn’t want to rock the boat or upset people. You can’t think that way. If in fact you give an inch, it will come in.

Closing Prayer:

Father, we give You thanks for Your lovingkindness to us. We give You thanks for these books, these pastoral epistles that remind us of what pastors should be doing and how they should be leading. Lord, raise within this body pastors that care for the flock enough to proclaim what is right. May they care for the flock enough to love You more than anything. We pray this in Your name. Amen.