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WHAT PROFITS AND WHAT DOESN'T (Titus 3:8-11)

There is no surprise that love is a main theme in Scripture. What is surprising is how far away our world has moved from a true understanding of a biblical definition of love. The more we emphasize a sentimental, emotional state, the further we roam from what true love is, as defined and modeled by the One who embodies love.

Church relationships should especially reflect real love, because "God is love." (1 John 4:8) C. S. Lewis put it well when he said, "Love is not affectionate feeling, but a steady wish for the loved person's ultimate good as far as it can be obtained."

In this study's passage, Paul writes these principles to Titus by contrasting what is profitable (wishing for a person's ultimate good) with what is unprofitable (or unloving.)

Titus 3:8-11 - The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people. But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.

REFLECT THE PROFITABLE

We have considered many times before in this series in Titus just why Paul repeatedly beats the "do good" drum. The residents of Crete, where Titus had been sent to minister, had a terrible reputation as a culture and were not known for good living. The Greek historian, Polybius, described them like this in the second century BC:

Cretans by their ingrained avarice are engaged in countless public and private seditions, murders and civil wars . . . Now, with few exceptions, you could find no habits prevailing in private life more steeped in treachery than those in Crete, and no public policy more inequitable.

So it would have been difficult to find a society more in need of people doing good works than on Crete. Paul instructs Titus to emphasize the good works brought about in the lives of those who believe in God. He calls these things profitable. They are the loving things to do. They often are the very works that set believers apart from the world around them.

But we also must remember the balance from a verse earlier in the chapter, as well as many other places in the Bible:

Titus 3:5 - he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.

*Ephesians 2:8, 9 - For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, **not a result of works**, so that no one may boast.*

*Romans 3:28 - For we hold that **one is justified by faith apart from works** of the law.*

*Romans 11:6 - But if it [salvation] is by grace, it is **no longer on the basis of works**; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.*

The balance to this is to realize that once a person believes and is being changed by the gospel of Christ, good works will be present, not as a means of salvation, but as evidence that salvation has taken place. An old Puritan pastor put it this way:

I would leave this with you: Be always doing or receiving good. Our Lord and Master went up and down in this world doing good; He is still doing good to body and soul; He was motivated by an untired power. Be still doing or receiving good. This will make your lives comfortable, your deaths happy, and your account glorious in the great day of our Lord!

- Thomas Brooks -

REJECT THE UNPROFITABLE

If seeking the best for each other is loving and profitable, the opposite attitudes and actions clearly do not build up. In fact, some of the most contentious battles have been within the church, where such disunity should never be experienced.

Three types of needless distractions are listed in these verses: foolish controversies (*moros* in Greek from which we get our word “moron”), genealogies (strained interpretations involving ancestry), and quarrels about the law (harsh applications of the law of Moses.)

Anything that produces an unprofitable quarrel is to be avoided, or turned away from. The first-century church must have had plenty of these issues, because Paul warned Timothy of the same thing:

*2 Timothy 2:23, 24 - Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And **the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil,***

Avoiding pointless arguments is not the same as avoiding all arguments. The Scriptures urge believers to exercise discernment as to what makes a necessary confrontation necessary and what makes a pointless confrontation pointless. We must choose our battles wisely.

Paul then gives a strong warning against the divisive person who would unlovingly cause disunity. Why? Because God takes disunity seriously.

*Proverbs 6:16-19 – There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him... [#7] **a man who stirs up dissention among brothers.***

The practical warning here is to warn the divisive person, then have nothing to do with him. And how do we know who is a person of division? Simply watch their lives. Division, tension, and conflict follow them and regularly result from their direct involvement. In another letter to Timothy, we see these attitudes pervaded the early church. He even called them out by name:

1 Timothy 1:19, 20 - holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

It is not our job to “produce” unity. Unity is “of the Spirit” (Ephesians 4:3). Unity is automatic when the Spirit is in control of everyone's lives. Our job is to “preserve” the unity of the Spirit – to do nothing to disrupt the unity He is producing... We must take care of our relationships and be quick to clean up our offenses. We must make right our wrongs so that the unity of the Spirit is not disrupted.

- Eddie Rasnake -

Paul describes this person as warped (*ekstrepho*, or turned inside out) and self-condemned. Their own actions condemn them. Disunity is serious in the church.

And so, we learn here not to waste our time with useless arguments, to pray for unity, and to be patient with divisive people yet ready to act if necessary.

BIBLE STUDY

Legislators and Staff (During Session)
Thursdays, 8:00 a.m.
Room 153, House Office Building