Pastor Richard Allen Farmer

The Crossroads Church

5587 Redan Road

Stone Mountain, GA 30088

770-469-9069

The Art of Avoidance

Text: Titus 3:9-11

One of the benefits of having old time religion, according to the song at least, is that it *makes me love everybody. Makes me love everybody. Makes me love everybody. It’s good enough for me.*

Maybe not EVERYBODY. We could probably all agree that some people are more difficult to love than other people. Also, some people are easier to avoid than other people.

Paul advises his spiritual son, Timothy, regarding social engagement.

“There are some types who are not good for you, Titus”.

Avoid these four types of communication:

* Foolish (*moros*[moron]) disputes-
* Genealogies
* Contentions
* Striving about the law

This idea of avoidance or turning away from foolish, divisive, argumentative people is a repeated idea in Paul’s writing to his spiritual sons.

1 Timothy 1:4

*...nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification.*

1 Timothy 6:3-5

*If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wrangling of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.*

2 Timothy 2:23

*But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife.*

Titus 1:10, 13-14

*For there are many insubordinates, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision...Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth.*

Why **avoid** these divisive, argumentative, foolish types? Isn’t spirited discussion healthy? Isn’t robust debate a hallmark of a mature friendship? In fact, wasn’t Titus *instructed* to take on these types, in 1:11 and 13? Isn’t Titus supposed to stop their mouths and rebuke them sharply?

Paul’s harsh answer to those unasked questions is,

Titus, ultimately, foolish disputes and genealogies and contentions and striving about the law are **unprofitable and useless!!!**

Paul suggests that after you admonish these types two times, you avoid them. (V. 10). We give the divisive, factious, contentious person an opportunity to be heard. If after a couple of times there is no repentant, teachable spirit exhibited, we are appropriate in rejecting and avoiding that person. That rejection is the last step in a multi-step process of trying to get the moron managed. Jesus laid out the model for us in Matthew 18:15-17. **The divisive person is to be warned, and possibly, avoided.**

At issue here is profitable versus unprofitable.

1 Timothy 4:8- Godliness is **profitable** for all things

2 Timothy 3:16- All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is **profitable** for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness...

2 Timothy 4:11- Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is **profitable** to me for ministry.

That divisive (*hairetikos*[heretical]), foolish, argumentative person is:

* Warped in character
* Keeps on sinning
* Has condemned himself/herself

Maturing followers of Jesus must learn to whom to attach themselves and whom to cut loose. Some people aren’t good for you. This is what Paul says to his spiritual son, Titus.

Some folks are not worthy of our time. They are not serious about growing in faith or becoming more and more like Jesus. They are interested in starting some mess and stirring up trouble and controversy. Not “good trouble” (John Lewis), either.

Paul closes the letter to the believers in Rome with these words in Romans 16:17-18,

*Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and* ***avoid them.*** *For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.*

**Illus.**

Do you remember Ross Perot? He was a billionaire Texas businessman who ran for President of the United States, as an independent, in 1992. He ran again in 1996 as the candidate for the Reform Party. In his campaign speeches he denounced the US Congress and said they were guilty of all talk and little action. In a speech at the National Press Club on March 18, 1992, Perot said:

*This city has become a town filled with sound bites, shell games, handlers, media stuntmen who posture, create images, talk, shoot off Roman candles, but don’t ever accomplish anything. We need deeds, not words, in this city.*

In one of his TV spots, Ross Perot said,

*It’s time to pick up a shovel and clean out the barn.*

That is what Paul tells Titus, in this short pastoral letter.

Approach those people who are doing nothing but muddying the work of the Church. Go to those contentious, factious, heretical, divisive, bullying people and clean out the barn. Get rid of the mess. Avoid getting sucked in.

It’s not profitable!

Amen