

**Profitable & Unprofitable**  
**Titus 3:8-11**  
**ABC 3/14/21**

When Pontius Pilate interacted with Jesus before sending Him to His death, he ended their exchange by asking Jesus, **What is truth?** (Jn 18:38). That's still a great question; *What is truth?* Unfortunately, our culture has answered that question with the belief that *truth* is whatever you choose to believe it is. 58% of Americans agree that *identifying moral truth is up to each individual; there are no moral absolutes that apply to everyone, all the time.*<sup>1</sup> Knowing right or wrong is now a matter of personal experience. In other words, whatever is right for your life or works best for you is the only truth you can know.<sup>2</sup> Sadly, Christians aren't far behind, percentage wise, from the population as a whole. It's been written,

*In a society where ultimate truth is treated like a fairy tale, an outdated idea or even an insult to human intelligence, the motto of the day becomes, "WHATEVER!" Believe whatever you want. Do whatever seems best to you. Live for whatever brings you pleasure, as long as it doesn't hurt anyone. & of course, be tolerant. Don't try to tell anyone that their whatever is wrong. & then she asks, But where does that leave us?*<sup>3</sup>

It leaves us drifting as the Jews did during the times of the judges, where **everyone** does **what** is **right in his own eyes** (Judges 17:6). Isn't that where we've found ourselves today? There is no absolute truth. Everyone can believe their own truth. There's a tolerance for anything & everything except for exclusivist claims to know absolute truth. Much of the American church *is committed to a gospel so vague & spectral that false teaching is impossible. The only heresy is to say that there is such a thing as heresy.*<sup>4</sup> Ironically, when someone says, *There is no absolute truth*, they're making a statement they believe is absolute truth. Where do we find truth, absolute truth? We must go to where God reveals Himself to us. A few examples:

**You, LORD, will not withhold Your compassion from me; Your mercy & Your truth will continually watch over me** (Ps 40:11).

**Teach me Your way, LORD; I will walk in Your truth** (Ps 86:11).

**These are the things which you shall do: speak the truth to one another; judge with truth & judgment for peace at your gates** (Zech 8:16).

<sup>1</sup> George Barna, Cultural Research Center, *American Worldview Inventory 2020 Results*

<sup>2</sup> George Barna, *The End of Absolutes: America's New Moral Code*, 5/25/16, [www.barna.com/research/the-end-of-absolutes-americas-new-moral-code/](http://www.barna.com/research/the-end-of-absolutes-americas-new-moral-code/)

<sup>3</sup> Lindy Keffer, *Absolute Truth in a Relativistic World*, 4/1/19, [www.focusonthefamily.com/church/absolute-truth/](http://www.focusonthefamily.com/church/absolute-truth/)

<sup>4</sup> *New Yorker*, April 9, 2006

Jesus said, **If you continue in My word, then you are truly My disciples; & you will know the truth, & the truth will set you free** (Jn 8:31-32).

**I am the way, & the truth, & the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me** (Jn 14:6).

**When He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own, but whatever He hears, He will speak...** (Jn 16:13).

**Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth** (Jn 17:17).

The Bible affirms from cover to cover that God exists. He spoke the universe into existence. He's revealed Himself in the words of Scripture & in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ, who is God in human flesh. God is truly God whether you believe in Him or not & whether you like who He is or not. You can make up your own god however you want, but such a god isn't the true God who's revealed Himself in Scripture. You can make up a god who lets everyone into heaven, no matter what they believe, but that god isn't the God of the Bible. If you believe in this make-believe god, then you've rejected Jesus, who taught something very exclusive & narrow but absolutely true. That He is the only way to salvation. The Bible declares things that are absolutely true because God cannot lie (Titus 1:2), which brings us back to our study through Titus. In 3:8-11 Paul continues to teach Titus & us. But His words would be meaningless unless there is such a thing as knowable, absolute spiritual truth. Because the gospel is true, we all have the responsibility to declare it confidently, obey it in the doing of good deeds, & deal with those who subvert it. **3:1-11**

We'll come back to that, but in 1 Tim 3:15 Paul writes that the church is **the pillar & support of the truth**. The main spiritual truth in the Bible is that Jesus Christ is the only Savior for sinful mankind. He is eternal God in human flesh who gave Himself on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. God offers forgiveness, new life, & eternity with Him to every person who repents of his sin & puts his trust in Jesus alone. Christians individually, & the church corporately, are entrusted with preserving & proclaiming this message of truth, centered on the person & work of Jesus. Note 3 things:

**A. There is knowable, absolute truth in the spiritual realm.** If there are many ways to God, then Jesus came to this earth & died in vain. He could have stayed in heaven & said,

*The native spirit worshipers will find Me in their way. The Hindus have their millions of gods, & any one of them is just as good as another. The Buddhists are such peace-loving people, so they're*

*welcome in heaven in spite of their mixed up views of reincarnation. You've got to admire the zeal of those Muslims, even if they don't believe in Me! Even goddess earth people have a good streak in them, so we'll give them their own section of heaven!*

No! Why would Jesus have gone through the agony of the cross if there are many ways to God? Jesus not only claimed to be **the truth**, the only way to the Father, but He also talked about the Spirit of truth, whom the Father would send to guide His disciples into all truth (Jn 14:17, 26; 15:26; cf 1 Jn 2:18-27; 4:1-6). He said, **This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, & Jesus Christ whom You have sent** (Jn 17:3). Jesus clearly said spiritual truth is narrow, exclusive, but knowable & given to us in His Word. In speaking to Pilate Jesus summed up the reason why He came to earth saying, **For this I have been born, & for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice** (Jn 18:37).

**B. Truth matters** Our culture believes in the exclusivity of truth in the physical realm, but denies it in the spiritual realm. In the physical realm, it makes all the difference in the world whether you take cyanide or Tylenol to deal with your aches & pains. It doesn't matter how sincere you are in your belief that cyanide will help. Sincerity isn't the issue; truth is. Even if you think it's judgmental to criticize taking cyanide, it'll kill you if you swallow it. But Tylenol may actually help. Or you can say you don't believe in gravity, but if you test it, it'll kill you. You don't need a parachute to sky dive. You do need a parachute if you want to sky dive more than once. There is absolute truth. Unless Jesus was a liar or deceived, believing the truth about Him is the difference between life & death. Peter says of Jesus, **There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved** (Acts 4:12). Paul states, **For there is one God, & one mediator also between God & men, the man Christ Jesus** (1 Tim 2:5). John draws the line when he says, **& the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, & this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life** (1 Jn 5:11-12). In Paul's final 3 letters to his 2 helpers, Timothy & Titus, there's a strong emphasis on truth & sound doctrine. I'll let you go through 1 & 2 Tim on your own, but note these in Titus:

**1:1-2: Paul, a bond-servant of God & an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God & the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness, in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago.**

1:9: An elder must hold fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine & to refute those who contradict.

1:13-14: This testimony is true. For this reason reprove them severely so that they may be sound in the faith, not paying attention to Jewish myths & commandments of men who turn away from the truth.

2:1: But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine.

2:15: These things speak & exhort & reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you. Obviously, you can't **speak, exhort, & reprove** relative ideas with **all authority**. Scripture clearly affirms there is knowable, absolute truth in the spiritual realm. The only way to deny this is to deny the words of Scripture, of Jesus, & of the apostles.

**C. Truth must be lived, not debated.** God didn't give us His truth so egg-headed philosophers & theologians can sit around & speculate about their own ideas of God. God's truth is given to change our lives as we submit to it & obey it. As we've seen, this is a major thrust in Titus. Apparently there were many in Crete who loved to speculate & argue about theology (1:14; 3:9). But Paul said their **foolish controversies** were **unprofitable** because they didn't lead to godliness. If our theology doesn't promote the supremacy & lordship of Jesus & the need to submit every aspect of our lives to Him, it's pointless speculation. John Calvin has been described like this:

*Piety was the keynote of his character. He was a God-possessed soul. Theology was no concern to him as a study in itself; he devoted himself to it as a framework for the support of all that religion meant to him... Gratitude, love, & obedience are involved in this religious attitude which is the indispensable condition of a sound theology. Since we 'owe everything to God,' in Calvin's pages we are everywhere confronting God, not toying with ideas or balancing opinions about Him.<sup>5</sup>*

In other words, God's truth must be obeyed. Doctrine & beliefs must be lived out in our daily lives. Like the steady beating of a drum, Paul repeatedly challenges those in Crete to maintain sound doctrine & good works. Those who would cause compromise in either area must be confronted &, if unrepentant, avoided. Paul insists on Christians doing good works & tells us to avoid what's foolish.

**1. Profitable** Vs 8 is a summary of all that Paul's been teaching Titus about living the Christian life.

**This is a trustworthy statement** occurs 4 other times in 1 & 2 Tim & usually emphasizes the

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<sup>5</sup> A. Mitchell Hunter, cited by John McNeill, editor, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, by John Calvin, p iii

importance of the words Paul is about to share. Here, though, it looks back to what preceded it. Because of the importance of the truths Paul has written, they should be repeated. These are words of truth & we must teach them constantly. **These things** are the great doctrinal truths about our salvation (4-7) & how we should live because of them (1-3). In vss 4-7 nothing was said of our faith but Paul mentions it here. **Have believed** carries the thought of one who believed at a point in time (conversion) & continues to believe in the present. A true believer not only perseveres in the faith, but also in **good deeds**, which is the point of vss 1-3. Faithful believers remember their duty to submit to authority **to be ready for every good deed** as they remember their former condition as unbelievers. They know that, but for the grace of God, they'd still be lost & condemned. They remember the marvelous gift of salvation, which they've received because of God's kindness, love, mercy, washing of regeneration & renewing by the Holy Spirit, through His Son, all by God's sovereign grace. & they remember that the Lord has called them to be His witnesses before the lost & condemned world in which they now live. The reality of this new life is found only by those who dare to live it out.<sup>6</sup> The new birth, the **regeneration** (5) results in a new life. & the beauty of our new life declares to others that Christ can change them too!<sup>7</sup> & so Titus needed to consistently teach the good news of salvation by God's grace through Christ. At the same time, he needed to emphasize that **those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds**. Paul connects theological truth with Christian behavior described as **good deeds**. **Careful** means to give thought to & be intent on something. It implies we must give mental effort to the question of how God wants us to serve Him. It also takes a swipe at the false teachers on Crete who loved to speculate on worthless things that didn't lead to good deeds (9). Sound doctrine isn't for useless speculation it's for practical application. If you understand the doctrine of salvation by God's kindness, love, mercy, & grace, it will motivate you to take thought about how you can live a life of **good deeds**. **Engage in** means *to take the lead or to stand in front*. It's used of elders leading the church (1 Tim 5:17). The idea is that Christians give careful thought so they may excel

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<sup>6</sup> Philip Towner, [1-2 Timothy & Titus](#), vol. 14, Titus 3:8.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel L. Akin, [Living Doctrine: The Book of Titus](#), ed. Craig G. Bartholomew & David Beldman, pp 60-61

or *take the lead* in doing good works. The reason is that these things (the truths of the gospel & the **good deeds** of believers) are **good & profitable** for all people, believers & unbelievers alike. The genuine Christian life contradicts the claims of the false teachers, who ultimately denied God with their lifestyle which was completely without good deeds (1:16).<sup>8</sup> The believer's **good deeds** are a gracious benefit to others & not a self-centered effort of salvation by works. As the Cretan believers obeyed Paul's words, their considerate conduct (3:2) would be a blessing to the unbelieving Cretans around them, perhaps being the very thing God would use to bring them to Christ (1 Pt 3:1-2). What are these **good deeds**? They are genuine acts of virtue that are beneficial & are produced by a loving heart that's empowered by God's Holy Spirit. Among these **good deeds** are our prayers for the lost & loving acts which the lost may not even know about but which will work to their blessing & hopefully to their salvation. Our **good deeds** are often the platform that opens the door so we can tell people about the kindness & love of God, who sent His Son to be the Savior of all that believe in Him. Good works we can do are things such as sharing the gospel (Mt 28:18-20) & telling others of God's grace (1 Pt 2:9-10). Encouraging other Christians (Heb 3:12-13). Restoring weak brethren (Gal 6:1-2; Js 5:19-20). They can also be physical in nature. Jesus didn't limit His good works to spiritual things (Lk 7:22) nor did He expect His disciples to limit their good works to spiritual things only (Mt 10:7-8; 25:34-40). Just as some may be gifted to teach, so others are gifted to in areas of physical service (Rom 12:3-8). **Good deeds** are things done for others that are beneficial for them, physically & spiritually/.

What is the role of **good deeds** in the life of a Christian? Quickly & briefly: They aren't done to buy or earn our salvation (5). God saves us by His grace, not by our works (Eph 2:8-9; Titus 3:4-7). Yet we've been created in Christ Jesus to do good works (Eph 2:10; Titus 2:14). Why are we commanded to do good works? Many reasons, including that's what we've been created in Christ to do, they bring glory to God (Mt 5:16; 1 Pt 2:11-12), they can prepare unbelievers to be more receptive to the gospel (1 Pt 2:12; 3:1-2), they demonstrate the living nature of our faith (Js 2:14-17), they're necessary if we're to be like Jesus (Lk 6:46; Acts 10:38), & they're good & profitable

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<sup>8</sup> Philip Towner, [1-2 Timothy & Titus](#), vol. 14, Titus 3:8

to all men (Titus 3:8). Good works are *good* & should be a major focus of our lives as disciples of Jesus. This is the truth God gives us here. Paul tells Titus to avoid all types of conduct that were **unprofitable & worthless** (9). One way to ensure meaningful, fruitful Christian lives is for believers to shun fighting & dissension & to devote themselves to good works.

## **2. Unprofitable 9-11**

Paul describes divisive issues in terms that remind us of false teachers in the Cretan church (cf 1:10–16): **foolish controversies & genealogies & strife & disputes about the Law** (9). Whereas the doctrines & duties of grace are **good & profitable** (8), these matters are **unprofitable & worthless** (9). Because those who engage in such debates distract the church from its mission & purpose, **ruining whole households** (1:11), Paul tells Titus to **reject a divisive person** up to 2x & then to **reject** him. In this compressed way he reminds us of both the Biblical process & necessity of church discipline (Mt 18:15–17; 1 Tim 5:19-20). The goal isn't just the protection of the church from quarrel & ruin, but also to turn the divisive person from his error.<sup>9</sup> It's interesting that Paul doesn't say God condemns such a person. Rather, one who tries to justify himself by causing foolish controversies, debating genealogies, or by causing quarrels about the law cuts himself off from his only hope of justification & thus he is **self-condemned**. Paul's words require us to examine whether controversy & argument about secondary issues become primary concerns to us. If so, our priorities must be realigned. There is a difference between needing to divide & loving to divide. A divisive person loves to bicker. Don't be that person!

If there's no such thing as absolute spiritual truth, we have no basis for any kind of unity & no reason to disagree with each other about such things. If all ideas about God are equally valid, then Paul's words here make no sense. But, if there is a true gospel & a false *gospel* (Gal 1:6-9), then we need to apply Paul's teaching here. **9**

**But** emphasizes the contrast between correct theological teaching & its profitable results & false teaching & its unprofitable results. The similarities here with passages in 1 & 2 Tim (1:4, 6:4, 2 Tim 2:16, 23) all occur in the context of dealing with false teaching. Titus & the Christians on Crete

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<sup>9</sup> R. Kent Hughes & Bryan Chapell, [1 & 2 Timothy & Titus: To Guard the Deposit](#), pp 363–364

were to turn away from morally & spiritually destructive false teachers, who not only corrupted the churches but, by their lifestyles, were a hindrance to the credibility of the gospel.<sup>10</sup> Vs 9 is a bit of a challenge in its specifics, though not in its applications. **Foolish controversies, genealogies, strife, & disputes about the law** address the false teachers of chpt 1 who were adding works to the doctrine of salvation by grace through Jesus (10–11). Not only did they add to the gospel, they also enjoyed arguing about theology, particularly fanciful understandings of Jewish genealogies & matters related to the law of Moses. Paul is direct & to the point. Such arguments & controversies are **unprofitable & worthless**. The goal of these false teachers was to divide & stir up trouble & Paul has little patience with such individuals. Paul gives 4 things for Titus to avoid & then the reason why.

**A. Foolish Controversies** We can assume, since Paul doesn't address any theological heresy here, this was nonsensical foolishness which lacked any substance. It was empty chatter, a quibbling about nothing, arguing for arguments sake.

**B. Genealogies** Paul wasn't saying the **genealogies** found in Scripture are pointless. No, those **genealogies** were critical for determining the God-given lineage of the priesthood, kings, & the Messiah. Matthew's gospel opens with **the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham....** (Mt 1:1–17). Paul's warning to Titus was about the many bizarre interpretations of such **genealogies** that fascinated many Jews. Paul tells Timothy to instruct the Ephesian believers not to **pay attention to myths & endless genealogies**, because such things promote **useless speculations** rather than advancing God's work (1 Tim 1:4). Titus should take steps to avoid becoming enmeshed in debates about them.

**C. Strife** Titus was to avoid **strife**, which is also translated as *dissension, quarrels, discord, & rivalry*. Harmonious relations are a challenge in every relationship including within the church. Paul knows that through grace mutual respect can, & should, replace **strife**.

**D. Disputes about the Law** This is literally *scribal battles about the Law*. These false teachers interpreted the Law in ways that were out of the norm. Paul referred to this in Titus 1 (10, 14)

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<sup>10</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., [Titus](#), p 161

calling them **Jewish myths & commandments of men who turn away from the truth**. These silly fables, stories, & arguments & their results are **unprofitable & worthless** which stands as the exact opposite of genuine Christianity, which is **good & profitable** for everyone (8). In the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter Titus was told to **reprimand** false teachers **severely** (13), with the purpose of correcting & restoring them to sound doctrine. But here Titus was to **avoid** these discussions or debates. He was to have nothing to do with them if restoration failed (10). In vs 11 Paul says, **such a such a person has deviated from what is right and is sinning, being self-condemned**. Because sin destroys people & churches, to confront sin & remove from the church those who continue in sin is an act of love & obedience.

## 10

**Reject** is also translated **have nothing to do with** in 1 Tim 4:7. Commentators aren't agreed on what it means to **reject** these difficult people. Some say it means something less than excommunication. But Paul wouldn't allow such divisive, sinning men to remain in the fellowship, teaching & trying to recruit more people to their cause. In Rom 16:17-18, Paul writes something similar to this:

**Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions & hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, & turn away from them. For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; & by their smooth & flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.**

Paul wants the church to avoid these people & put them out of the church (Mt 18:15-17) & no longer have fellowship with the church. Of course, when a factious person is rejected by the church, some will accuse them of being unloving & unkind. But to preserve the doctrinal purity of the church, to keep sin from spreading, & to uphold the honor of the God of truth, we must reject unrepentant sinners from the church. But the aim is always restoration & reconciliation. While Paul stood squarely against false teaching (1:13; 2:15), his use of the term **factious** or **divisive** indicates the destructive nature of those promoting error among believers (1:11). Divisiveness is a sin problem. **Factious** comes from a word meaning self-chosen, thus, an opinionated person. He tries to defend his opinions from Scripture, but is motivated by pride. He tries to gain a following by forcing people to choose between his views & those of the church elders, thus creating factions. In Gal 5:20, Paul lists **factions** as a deed of the flesh, along with **idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, & dissensions**. Divisions within the church result in confused,

frustrated, angry, & hurt Christians. They become ineffective in ministering to one another & to a lost world in desperate need of the gospel of Jesus & the **good deeds** Christians are known for. Paul required loving confrontation but if this failed, Paul said **reject** them. Further efforts wouldn't be a good stewardship of time & energy & would give the offender an undeserved sense of importance.<sup>11</sup> But to deal properly with **divisive** people, we must determine if an issue is worth contending over or not. **Unprofitable & worthless** refer back to vs 8, where Paul told Titus to speak confidently about the truth of the gospel because **these things**, the gospel truths, **are good & profitable for people** (8). Paul's yardstick for whether a matter is worth debating is this: Does it relate to salvation, godliness, & good deeds? If it's just a matter of speculation that doesn't affect the core issues, then don't waste your time arguing about it. When Paul tells Titus to **avoid** these controversies, I understand him to mean that we mustn't get into public debates over speculative matters that don't center on the gospel or godly living. That's a waste of time. There's a time for opponents to be gently instructed (2 Tim 2:25), but there's also a time when those opponents are beyond dialogue & discussion (Titus 1:11; 3:10-11). If someone's promoting peripheral things divisively, he needs to be confronted & asked to stop with the goal to get them back to being focused on the gospel & godly living. Arguing theology, doctrine, or morality with those who distort or disregard God's Word is fruitless. When we become aware of a sinning brother or sister, Paul gives clear instructions that after confronting them, reject them. Note that the sin we confront is public, serious, & lacking repentance. We aren't called to be spiritual garbage inspectors or theological Peeping Toms. If at any point the evidence of genuine repentance comes forth, rejection stops, & the ministry of restoration begins.<sup>12</sup> Since divisiveness & trying to recruit people to join a faction are sins, those who persist in doing so must be put out of the church after a 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> warning. Why? **11**

Because the divisive person refused to change, Titus could *know* or *be sure* of 3 things concerning this person: 1<sup>st</sup>, he is **perverted** or has **deviated** from the truth. It describes someone who refuses

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<sup>11</sup> Hiebert, *Titus*, 448

<sup>12</sup> Daniel L. Akin, [Living Doctrine: The Book of Titus](#), ed. Craig G. Bartholomew & David Beldman, pp 65–66

to embrace what's true & morally sound. Such a person had rejected the sound teaching that Paul & Titus delivered to the churches. Literally, it means *he has been & remains off the track*. This shows their spiritual condition. 2<sup>nd</sup>, he is **sinning** which is the day-to-day consequences of deviating from what is right. & finally, because he willfully continues in his sin, he is **self-condemned** suggesting that having refused correction, the divisive person participates in his own condemnation & is without excuse.<sup>13</sup> They claim to know God but deny Him by their deeds (1:16), & therefore, are **self-condemned**.

It's far easier to debate theology or mysterious points of doctrine than **to do good deeds** such as: to love your wife as Christ loved the church; love your children & bring them up in the instruction of the Lord; being a good worker at your job; practicing the fruit of the Spirit on a daily basis, & being **careful to engage in good deeds** such as these. This isn't to say that theology is unimportant or irrelevant. Not at all; doctrine is vital. Properly understood, true doctrine leads to submission to God, humility, & holiness before God. Speculations about matters that don't lead to godliness & **good deeds** are unprofitable. We want to keep our focus on the truth of the gospel that changes lives. Yes, at times we must fight (1:9). But if we love the fight, we must question if we're following God's priorities. Do we want to devote our lives to quarreling, criticism, & argument or to engaging in **good deeds** which are **beneficial for** everyone?

The truth of God's Word is that He has saved us (3:5). We cannot add to what He has done. But because of what He has done for us we must **be careful to engage in good deeds** (3:8). God is the root of our salvation & our good works are the fruit of it. As we go from here today, be praying & asking what **good deeds** you can do today that will be **profitable** for those around you. Don't be **unprofitable** bickering about **foolish controversies**, but look to serve your God & your fellow man in practical & loving ways.

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<sup>13</sup> Thomas D. Lea & Hayne P. Griffin, [1, 2 Timothy, Titus](#), vol 34, p 328