

***THE FATHERS OF THE FOURTH  
ECUMENICAL COUNCIL  
Rightly Dividing the Lord's Commandments  
GOOD WORKS***

**Fathers of the 4<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Council  
July 16, 2017  
Revision E**

**GOSPEL: Matthew 5:14-19**  
**EPISTLE: Titus 3:8-15**

Today's Gospel and Epistle lessons speak of Bishops in the Church who are referred to as the salt of the earth and the light of the world. This feast day is celebrated on the Sunday falling between July 13th and July 19th and replaces the normally scheduled readings for that day (which will vary from year to year depending on the date for Pascha.)

In the West, today's Gospel is used either on the Fifth Sunday after Epiphany (February) or the 27th Sunday after Trinity (November.) Today's Epistle lesson is not used at all in the West.

**Gospel: Matthew 5:14-19 (Mark 9:49-50, Luke 14:34-35)**

In the Gospel lesson and verses preceding and following are a number of illustrations that have been applied to the Fathers of the Church first, and also to all of us. For example:

- Salt
- Light from a lamp on a lamp stand
- A city on a hill
- Preserving the Lord's Commandments
- Teaching men to adhere to the Lord's Commandments
- Rightly dividing the Lord's Commandments to apply to men's lives.

**Salt and Saltiness**

The first illustration is one of salt and saltiness. From Matthew's account, it is not clear whether Jesus is talking to His disciples or to the multitudes (compare Matthew 5:1.) From Mark's and Luke's accounts, He seems to be speaking primarily to His disciples (Mark 9:50, Luke 14:33-35.) And the connotation of salt in this context goes further than just the taste of food.

Salt in ancient times was valuable and was an important commodity in trade. Besides seasoning food, it was also used to keep food from spoiling without refrigeration. In all the sacrifices offered to the Lord, salt had to be present (Leviticus 2:13.) The significance of this was that nothing rotting or putrefying was to be offered to the Lord.

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The recipient of the animal sacrifices (after they were offered) and of the tithe, were the priests and Levities. They had no inheritance and owned no land like the other twelve tribes since the Lord was their inheritance (Numbers 18:20-24). The term used to describe the priests' and Levities' portion was called a "covenant of salt" (Numbers 18:19; 2 Chronicles 13:5.) In this aspect, salt took on the implication of unbending truthfulness and lack of corruption.

In our Gospel lesson, this has strong implications, especially as applied to the Fathers of the Church. Matthew 5:13 reads literally, "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt becomes foolish (or moronic), by what shall it be salted? It has no longer strength for anything but to be thrown out and be trampled underfoot by men." From the context as applied to Jesus' disciples (and their followers as the pillars of the Faith), this verse has strong things to say regarding the Fathers of the Church.

John Chrysostom (4th Century) commented on this exchange between the Lord and His disciples as follows:

"Think not then,' He says, 'that you are drawn on to ordinary conflicts, or that for some small matters you are to give account. You are the salt of the earth. When then? Did they restore the decayed? By no means; for neither is it possible to do any good to that which is already spoiled, by sprinkling it with salt. This therefore they did not. But rather, what things had been before restored, and committed to their charge, and freed from that ill savor, these they then salted, maintaining and preserving them in that freshness, which they had received of the Lord. For that men should be set free from the rottenness of their sins was the good work of Christ; but their not returning to it again any more was the object of these men's diligence and travail. See how by degrees He indicates their superiority to the very prophets? In that He says they are teachers, not of Palestine, but of the whole world?" (Homily xv on Matthew 5.)

If the Fathers of the Church (both in ancient times and in the present times) adhere to unbending truthfulness and are morally straight, the whole earth will tend in that direction also. If they don't, they're worse than useless. Salt that's thrown out can't be put where anything is growing (Luke 14:35) because it alters the pH of the soil (acid/alkali balance) and inhibits growth. (That's why crops can't be irrigated with sea water.) The only place to put it is on roads or paths where nothing is supposed to grow.

Chrysostom continues:

"Be not then impatient, as though my sayings were too burdensome. For while it is possible for others who have lost their savor to return by your means, you, if you should come to this, will with yourselves destroy others also. So that in proportion as the matters are great, which you have put into your hands, you need so much the greater diligence. For other men, though they fall never so often, may possibly obtain indulgence: but the teacher, should this happen to him, is deprived of all excuse, and will suffer the most extreme vengeance. Thus, lest at the words, 'when they shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of

evil against you,' they should be too timid to go forth: He tells them, 'unless you are prepared to combat with all this, you have been chosen in vain.' For it is not an evil report that you should fear, but lest you should prove partners in hypocrisy. For then, 'You will lose your savor, and be trodden under foot': but if you continue sharply to brace them up, and then are evil spoken of, rejoice; for this is the very use of salt, to sting the corrupt, and make them smart. And so their censure follows of course, in no way harming you, but rather testifying your firmness. But if through fear of it you give up the earnestness that becomes you, you will have to suffer much more grievously, being both evil spoken of, and despised by all. For this is the meaning of trodden under foot." (Ibid.)

### **The Light of the World**

The Gospel lesson continues on this theme to indicate that the salt of the earth is also the light of the world. One doesn't light a lamp (i.e. an oil burning lamp) and put it under a basket; one puts it on a lamp stand. In Revelation 1:11-20 the seven Churches in Asia to whom the Apostle John addressed chapters 2 and 3 are referred to as seven lamp stands. They were the light of that part of the world. Yet they each had something that they needed to repent of and correct. And if they didn't do so, John said that their lamp stand would be removed from its place (Revelation 2:5.) These are the things that the Fathers of the First Six Ecumenical Councils were very much involved with as were the fathers of the Church to date. Chrysostom pointed out that they were to be the light of the world; not of one nation, not of twenty states, but of the whole inhabited earth. (Ibid.)

A lamp set on a lamp stand, like a thriving Church in its own region of the world, is a city set on a hill (Matthew 5:14.) It's not easy to hide a thriving Church because people see their good works and glorify our Father in Heaven (Matthew 5:16.) Chrysostom wrote:

"Again, by these words He trains them to strictness of life, teaching them to be earnest in their endeavors, as set before the eyes of all men, and contending in the midst of the amphitheater of the world. 'For look not to this,' He saith, 'that we are now sitting here, that we are in a small portion of one corner. For you shall be as conspicuous to all as a city set on the ridge of a hill, as a candle in a house on the candlestick, giving light' ". (Ibid.)

### **Rightly Dividing the Lord's Commandments**

On the 2nd and 3rd Sundays after Pentecost we saw a pattern focusing on the basics of the Christian Faith. One common thread on those Sundays was the Lord's Commandment (called the Greatest Commandment) which was, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength and your neighbor as yourself". This was used as a creed in the 1st Century Synagogue worship, is fundamental to the Old Testament Law (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18) and on this simple commandment hang all the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 22:36-40). The Ten Commandments, today's Gospel lesson and the rest of Matthew 5 represent further detailing of the implications of the Greatest Commandment. As Matthew 5:17-18 states, the Greatest Commandment (and the Ten Commandments) has not been tossed overboard just

because we've received Grace and the Holy Spirit (compare Romans 6:15ff). Instead, it has been clarified.

All this aptly applies to the Fathers of the Church, since they are the ones that are charged with preserving, teaching and rightly dividing the Lord's Commandments. "Whoever adheres to these commandments and teaches them shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matthew 5:19).

John Chrysostom compared the Beatitudes of Matthew 5:3-12 with the rightly divided commandments of Matthew 5:17-48. These are listed side by side in Table I. The general theme is that the Beatitudes address the rewards for those who do right while the commandments address the punishments for those who neglect or set aside the Lord's commandments.

The Twelve Apostles and the Church Fathers have had to continue rightly dividing the Lord's commandments ever since. For example, at the Council of Jerusalem, they had to rightly divide the Word of God being revealed to the Gentiles. Obviously some changes were needed once Israel ceased to exist as a sovereign nation - which the Lord knew was coming. Also, once He, as the Lamb of God, was offered as the perfect sacrifice once for all, some changes in Mosaic Law rituals were needed also. The way this breaks down is thus: we do not quit offering sacrifices; it just takes different forms. For example, we offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is the fruit of our lips (Hebrews 13:15). And we present our own bodies as a living sacrifice similar to the whole burnt offering (Romans 12:1). The Epistle lesson for the 6th Sunday after Pentecost goes into this in more detail.

**TABLE I**  
**BEATITUDES VERSUS COMMANDMENTS**  
**(from Matthew 5)**

| BEATITUDE  | COMMANDMENT   |
|--|---|
| Blessed are poor in spirit (v.3); i.e., the humble                                       | Do not murder; do not be angry (vv.21,22)   |
| Blessed are the meek (v.5)   | Do not (arrogantly) call brother a fool (v.22)                                    |
| Blessed are those who hunger & thirst after righteousness (v.6)                          | Love enemies; do to others what you want them to do to you (vv.38-48)             |
| Blessed are the merciful (v.7), where "mercies" sometimes translated "alms" (Acts 24:17) | Do not lay up treasure on earth (6:19); one cannot serve God and mammon (6:24)    |
| Blessed are the pure in heart (v.8)  | Do not commit adultery; do not lust (vv.27-32)                                    |
| Blessed are the peacemakers (v.9)  | Be reconciled quickly, agree with your adversary (vv.23-26)                       |
| Blessed are the persecuted and reviled (vv.10,11). Blessed are those who mourn (v.4)     | Enter by the narrow gate; avoid the broad way that leads to destruction (7:13-14) |

In Matthew 5, the Lord gave examples on how the Mosaic Law should be "rightly divided"; these are summarized in Table II:



**TABLE II**  
**THE MOSAIC LAW - RIGHTLY DIVIDED**

| COMMANDMENT   | RIGHTLY DIVIDED   |
|---|---|
| Do not murder<br>(6th of 10 Commandments)                                       | Anger at or ridicule of one's brother or refusal to reconcile is equivalent to murder (Matthew 5:21-26) |
| Do not commit adultery<br>(7th of 10 Commandments)                              | Lust of the eyes and divorcing one's spouse is equivalent to adultery (Matthew 5:27-53)                 |
| Do not lie under oath<br>(9th of 10 Commandments)                               | Do not lie at all; oaths are irrelevant (Matthew 5:33-37; James 5:12)                                   |
| Just recompense for various evils<br>(eye for eye, etc.)                        | Do not resist an evil person but be generous to him (Matthew 5:38-42)                                   |
| Hate and maintain distance from treacherous arch-enemies that persecuted Israel | Love your enemies and bless those who curse you (Matthew 5:43-48)                                       |

Each of the above expansions or clarifications of the Law leads one in the direction of loving the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and strength and our neighbor as ourselves. Looking at each of these in more detail:

**Murder:** Most Christians today would agree that it's wrong to murder, to commit adultery and to lie under oath. Except for adultery, there's even civil penalties for doing so. But few Christians today understand that refusal to reconcile with one's brother is akin to murder. This is why the Fathers of the Church set up the Embrace of Peace before the Lord's Supper to guard against this.

**Adultery:** Similarly with adultery, which is so common place today. Many Christians today have great difficulty guarding their hearts against the lust broadcast by the media. To counter this, the Church Fathers encourage us to fast with the eyes as well as the stomach at the various Church fasts. [See Gospel lesson for the 3rd Sunday after Pentecost which speaks of the eye as the lamp of the body.]

**An Eye for an Eye:** The aspects of the Mosaic Law referred to in Matthew 5:38-48 applied largely to Israel as a nation, but came to be used in personal relations also. For example, the expression "eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth" referred to Old Testament justice and appears three times in the Pentateuch:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Innocent bystanders<br>Exodus 21:22-25        | If a pregnant woman was injured by two men fighting, the one who caused the injury was penalized according to her injury or her child's injury. |
| Injuring one's neighbor<br>Leviticus 24:19-30 | A man who maliciously injured his neighbor was penalized by the same wounds.  |
| False witnesses<br>Deuteronomy 19:16-21       | If a man falsely accused his neighbor of a crime, the penalty he sought for his neighbor was applied to the accuser.                            |

These are not necessarily bad laws, but they are impractical to enforce if Israel doesn't exist as a nation.

**Arch-Enemies:** Similarly with regard to the treacherous arch-enemies of Israel: Ammon and Moab (Deuteronomy 23:3-6). These two countries derived from Lot through incest with his two daughters (Genesis 19:30-38) and they had hired the Prophet Baalam to curse Israel in the wilderness. Not to be treated the same were Edom (descendants of Esau) because he was a brother and Egypt because Israel was an alien in his land (Deuteronomy 23:7-8). This also does not apply if Israel doesn't exist as a nation.

However, the Church has become the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16). Paul spoke about how he and those Apostles with him were always carrying about in their bodies the dying of Jesus (2 Corinthians 4:10). They were afflicted, persecuted, struck down, etc., such that their being delivered over to death worked life in the Church (2 Corinthians 4:9-12). Matthew 5:38-48 says the same thing, and this has especially applied to the Fathers of the Church over the last 2000 years. In the Orthodox lectionary, this subject is taken up during the year three times: at the Adoration of the Cross (3rd Sunday in Lent); on the 1st Sunday after Pentecost (i.e. the Sunday of All Saints), and at the Exaltation of the Cross (September). The theme all three times revolves around the Lord's Commandment to take up our cross and follow Him (Mark 8:34-9:1; 1 Corinthians 1:17-18).

## **GOOD WORKS**

**July 16, 2017**  
**Revision E**

### **Epistle: Titus 3:8-15**

This Epistle lesson is also used for the Sunday in mid October commemorating the Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council. However, this reading is not used at all in the Western lectionary.

### **Background: Titus, Bishop of Crete**

Paul wrote to Titus in about 64 AD shortly after his (Paul's) release from house-arrest in Rome. Acts 28 concludes with Paul under house-arrest in about 62 AD, so this letter post dates Acts. Following his release, Paul traveled a lot. One place he stopped was in Spain to visit the Churches started by James the son of Zebedee and others. Paul had wanted to visit Spain since 55 AD when he wrote Romans (Romans 15:28) and probably went there first after his release. After visiting Spain, Paul left Titus in Crete as Bishop (Titus 1:5-7) and Timothy in Ephesus as Bishop (1 Timothy 1:3) and was currently spending the winter in Nicopolis of Macedonia (Titus 3:12). Artemas, Tychicas, Zenas and Apollos (referred to in the Epistle lesson) are all members of the Seventy Lesser Apostles who had been sent out two by two by Jesus (Luke 10:1-24) and who had also worked with Paul. Titus and Timothy were also members of the Seventy.

As Bishop of Crete, Titus was one of the First Century Church Fathers and was encouraged by Paul to affirm constantly (v.8) that those who have believed should be careful to maintain good works (vv.8,14), to meet urgent needs. Titus ran into opposition, especially from Jews living on Crete (Titus 1:10-14). Thus, the good works Titus was overseeing would have the effect of "loving his enemies, blessing those who curse him and persecute him" (Matthew 5:44). But there is more involved than just this.

### **Good Works Benefit the Doer**

John Chrysostom pointed out that Paul seemed more concerned for Titus and his fellow bishops on Crete that they maintain good works than for the poor who would be the recipient of their kindnesses. If the poor were maintained by others, this would be of no benefit to them because they would remain unfruitful (Homily VI on Titus). To illustrate this, Chrysostom used four examples, summarized as follows:

**First:** Christ, who fed 5,000 men with five loaves and 4,000 with seven loaves, could He not have supported Himself and His disciples? But it was the women who followed Him and ministered to Him (Mark 15:41) who supported Him out of their possessions (Luke 8:3). This was to teach us from the beginning that He is concerned for those who do good.

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**Second:** Could not Paul, who supported others by his own hands, have maintained himself without assistance from others? Yet he received and requested aid during his house-arrest in Rome. His reason for it is stated: “Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account” (Philippians 4:10-17).

**Third:** At the beginning also, when men sold all their possessions and laid the money at the Apostles’ feet (Acts 4:37), the Apostles were more concerned for them than for those who received their alms. For if their concern had only been that the poor might by any means be relieved, they would not have judged so severely the sin of Ananias and Sapphira when they kept back (part of) their money (Acts 5:1-11).

**Fourth:** Paul charged the Corinthians not to give grudgingly or of necessity (2 Corinthians 9:7). Does this mean Paul is discouraging them from giving? No; he is addressing not the gift or the one who receives the gift but the benefit and the good it does to the giver. To be a cheerful giver takes faith. As John Chrysostom said, “...Many persons are afraid to give alms, saying, ‘Lest perchance I become poor; lest perchance I need aid from others’”. To give when one expects a return is an investment; even tax collectors do that! To give without expecting a return is being god-like. “If one is doing work of virtue, and yet all that is done is of necessity, it is shorn of its reward; with reason also Paul labors at this point.” (Homily XIX on 2 Corinthians 9).

The way this relates to Titus and the Bishops of Crete, Chrysostom explains, is that riches are an impediment. Therefore he commands them to be given to the poor, instructing the soul to be pitiful and merciful, to despise wealth and to flee from covetousness. According to Chrysostom, nothing is so strong and powerful to extinguish the fire of our sins as almsgiving. This is why Daniel counseled King Nebuchadnezzar to “break away from his sins by doing righteousness and from his iniquities by showing mercy to the poor” (Daniel 4:27). This is also why Christ said to the rich young ruler “sell all that you have and distribute to the poor...and come follow Me” (Luke 18:22).

Chrysostom continues that almsgiving is the mother of love, where love is the characteristic of Christianity and is greater than all miracles (1 Corinthians 13). Almsgiving is the medicine of our sins, the cleansing of the filth of our souls, the ladder fixed to heaven; it binds together the Body of Christ (Homily vi on Titus 3). In the early church where everyone sold what they had and laid the proceeds at the Apostles’ feet, “they were one heart and one soul” (Acts 4:32), “and grace was upon them all” (Acts 4:33).

## **What are Good Works?**

**Salvation by Grace:** In the verses preceding our Epistle lesson, Paul gives a brief summary of salvation by Grace. From Titus 3:4-7, Paul said that when the kindness and love of God appeared:

- He saved us according to His mercy
- Not by works of righteousness
- Through the washing of regeneration (i.e. *baptism*)

- And the renewing of the Holy Spirit (In the Orthodox church, this is known as *chrismation*)
- We are justified by His Grace
- And become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

This reading from Titus 3:4-7 is also used in the Eastern lectionary for Epiphany (or Theophany, q.v.) and is covered there in more detail. Today's Epistle lesson can be understood as the other side of the coin, much the same as James, the Lord's brother (and bishop of Jerusalem for 30 years) wrote that faith is perfected by works and faith without works is dead (James 2:22-26).

The faith-works issue became very clouded during the Protestant Reformation. The Roman Catholic Church, following the teachings of Augustine on "original sin", sold indulgences to remove the penalty of sin in Purgatory. In reaction to this emphasis on "works", an Augustinian monk named Martin Luther, proclaimed justification by faith alone. Luther had problems with the Epistle of James and referred to it as "a right strawy epistle" (a reference to 1 Corinthians 3:12), since James seemed to him to emphasize works over faith. Luther retained Augustine's concept of "original sin", however.

In Orthodoxy, "original sin" is a heretical concept. Man inherited Adam's mortality and corruption, and hence the passions and a propensity to sin. But Adam's sin in the Garden was his, not ours. Men can refuse to sin and thus live a holy life. "Original sin" says that men are born guilty. Because of the doctrine of "original sin", the Roman Catholic Church also had to add "the Immaculate Conception" of the Virgin Mary so that she could qualify in terms of personal holiness to give birth to the Son of God. Otherwise the Son of God would have been born with original sin. An Immaculate Conception is impossible to justify from historical documents (see Appendix B). The Orthodox view is that the Virgin Mary is a very good example of faith being perfected by works (James 2:22), that she received a great deal of grace (Luke 1:28), and that she achieved a considerable measure of holiness as a result.

**Good Works in Perspective:** Good works are mentioned throughout the Scriptures and have greater dimensions than many people think. For example, some statements regarding good works:

- Jesus' good works came from His Father (John 10:30-32; John 5:17)
- We are His workmanship, created for good works which God prepared beforehand (Ephesians 2:10)
- The first step toward good works: believe that the Father sent Jesus (John 6:27-29), which is where our works come from.
- All Scripture is given that the man of God may be equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
- We must work the works of the Father while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work (John 9:4).

**All Works Will be Rewarded:** All men will be judged on their works, not on their faith per se (Matthew 25:31-45; compare Matthew 7:20-23). As Paul said: "Glory, honor and peace to everyone who works what is good" (Romans 2:10). For more discussion on this, see the Sunday

of the Last Judgment (2 Sundays before Lent). For a related discussion on dead works, see the Epistle lesson for the 5th Sunday of Lent.

When the Lord returns, the dead will be judged according to the Book of Life (those saved by Grace) and according to the books that recorded their works (Revelation 20:12-13). By our deeds, we treasure up for ourselves either indignation, wrath, tribulation and anguish (Romans 2:8), or glory, honor, and immortality (Romans 2:7). In this regard, we are encouraged to bear one another's burdens and to examine our own works (Galatians 6:2-4). The central feature of our works is that we are to be holy as our Father in heaven is holy. Since we will be judged by our works, we conduct ourselves in the fear of God (1 Peter 1:15-17). Judgment of one's works was not limited to the New Testament. The Lord put man on notice way back that He searches the heart and rewards according to deeds (Jeremiah 17:9-10).

**Descriptions of Good Works:** Descriptions of good works in the Scriptures focus on doing the will of God, since that's what we were created for. Some good works mentioned specifically by Peter are abstaining from fleshly lusts (passions), having honorable conduct and submitting to every human ordinance. Doing good as such puts to silence the ignorance of foolish men (1 Peter 2:11-16).

Good works vary according to one's position in life where different people have different hurdles to overcome. For example, in Table I, good works are mentioned as characteristics for different people (Titus 2:1-10):

It is the Grace of God behind all this teaching us to deny ungodliness and worldly lust and to live self-controlled, righteously and godly. The purpose is that His own special people might be purified, zealous for good works (Titus 2:11-15). Finally he adds good works such as (Titus 3:1-2):

- speaking evil (Gk *blasphemes*) of no one
- being peaceable and gentle
- showing all humility to all men

For those who are wealthy, Paul exhorts them to avoid being stuck-up and setting their hope in their wealth, but instead to become rich in good works by being good at giving and by being generous (1 Timothy 6:17-18).

All the above examples of good works have to do more with a person's character than with his quotas. Much more emphasis is placed on righteous living than on save-the-world programs.

**TABLE III**  
**GOOD WORKS BY ONE’S POSITION IN LIFE**

|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| <b>older men:</b>   | be sober<br>be venerable or honorable<br>be self-controlled<br>be sound in: faith, love & patience  |
| <b>older women:</b> | be reverent (or conspicuously sacred)<br>not slanderers (Gk <i>diabolos</i> )<br>not heavy drinkers<br>make the young women self-controlled |
| <b>young men:</b>   | be self-controlled<br>in teaching: be incorruptible, venerable, having healthy faultless words<br>(i.e. cut out the trash talk)             |
| <b>young women:</b> | love their husbands and their children<br>be obedient to their husbands<br>be self-controlled<br>be chaste<br>be homeworkers                |
| <b>slaves:</b>      | be obedient to masters<br>don’t steal<br>be perfectly honest  |

**Matters for Titus to Avoid**

Titus had worked with Paul for about 25 years at this point. He’d seen this in action and it made sense - especially as applied to his fellow bishops on Crete. On the other hand, Paul encouraged Titus to avoid foolish questioning, genealogies, strife and Legal disputes (Titus 3:9). Paul is referring here to the Jewish opposition since genealogies (tracing their roots back to Abraham) were very important in determining who was a Jew and who wasn’t. Only a Jew with the proper genealogy could be a priest (descendant of Aaron) and records were kept in the Temple in Jerusalem to document this. This documentation was tapped by the Gospel writers Matthew and Luke to show Jesus was the Son of David (Matthew 1:1ff; Luke 3:23ff). With the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, these records were lost.

For the Lord, who looks on the heart, genealogies were not that important. Speaking to the Pharisees and Sadducees, John the Baptist declared that God could raise up children of Abraham from the stones along the river bank (Matthew 3:9). Speaking to the same group, the Lord said that they were neither children of Abraham nor children of God because they didn’t do what Abraham did or what God said (John 8:37-42).

The legal disputes Paul referred to were probably interpretations of the Mosaic Law and amplified by Jewish tradition. For example, Jesus had a dispute with the scribes and Pharisees over the washing of hands before eating bread (Matthew 15:1-20). Jewish tradition specified

washing one's hands before eating or one would be defiled. Jesus pointed out that it's what comes out of a man that defiles him, not what goes into his mouth (Matthew 15:11). The intent of the Mosaic Law was to direct the people toward holiness and to avoid contact with real uncleanness like idols and demons. (For more discussion on this, see Gospel and Epistle lessons for the 17th Sunday after Pentecost: Matthew 15:21-28; 2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1). By focusing on the minutiae of interpretation, the real intent of the Law could easily get overlooked and the Lord's Commandments would cease being rightly divided. Thus Paul's instructions for Titus were to avoid these things and concentrate on good works in order that the people might be really fruitful (Titus 3:14). Likewise, the Church Fathers encourage us the same way.