

Dumb Talk and Divisions

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 10 April 2016

Preacher: Paul Brennan

[0 : 00] Well, in a little while, Paul Brennan will be continuing his series in Paul's letter to Titus that he began in our evening services. So perhaps you turn with me to Titus chapter 3, page 998 in the Church Bibles.

And Paul will be focusing today on verses 9 to 11, but we'll read from verse 1 just to remind ourselves where we are.

So then Titus chapter 3, verse 1. Remind them, says Paul, that is Christians in Crete under his care, remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities.

To be obedient, to be ready for every good work. To speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle and to show perfect courtesy towards all people.

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.

[1 : 22] But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 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 by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

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.

Amen. This is God's word, and may it challenge us this morning. Well, please do turn back to Titus chapter 3, page 999 in the Church Bibles.

[2 : 59] Titus 3, we're looking at verses 9 to 11. Now, nobody likes a party pooper.

You know the sort of person I'm talking about. The one who's always turning the volume down on the music. Sending people home as soon as the clock strikes 8.35. I was a self-inflicted party pooper last night, happily watching the golf, enjoying the Masters.

And it hit 10 o'clock, and I thought, I've got to go to bed. It's an early start. So I was a self-inflicted party pooper. But no one likes a party pooper. And that's exactly what Paul appears to be here this morning in these verses.

His letter's been going so well, especially since the start of chapter 2. It's all positive stuff about how to live the good, godly life.

Living the good life in the household setting, chapter 2. And then in chapter 3, about living good, godly lives in the public arena. It's all about ordinary Christians adorning the gospel in their ordinary lives.

[4 : 18] We also have those two glorious gospel summaries in chapter 2 from verse 11, and then chapter 3 from verse 4. These passages set out the glorious gospel, which is the engine that drives our godliness.

Wonderful truths. Truths that pastors today are to insist upon. Just look on at verse 8 of chapter 3. The saying is trustworthy. And I want you, Titus, to insist on these things so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works.

It's all very positive. Challenging at times, but positive. It's been a great letter, Paul. But then you get to verse 9. You get this but.

It'd be quite nice, wouldn't it, to be able to cut these couple of verses out of the Bible? Well, take that bit out and also the second half of chapter 1. They're all rather unpleasant, nasty verses, just not very tolerant, Paul.

Why do you have to be such a party pooper, Paul? It's tempting to think that way, isn't it? Tempting to skip over these bits when preaching. But these verses are crucial. They were crucial for Titus to grasp.

[5 : 36] They were crucial for the church in Crete to get hold of. They're crucial for us as well. Why? Why are verses 9 to 11 so important? Well, because hearing Paul's instructions and following them is going to protect the church from two key threats.

Threats that, if left unchecked, would totally undermine the witness of the church and, in the end, pull it apart. Remember what Paul's key message to Titus is in the letter.

It's to encourage him to teach the truth that leads to godliness. Titus was to press home to the church that their response to the good news of the gospel was to live good and godly lives.

The truth that leads to godliness. They were two key things that he was to insist upon. Truth and witness. What was said, how they lived.

Lips and lives. Good news and good living. And the threats that Paul tackles in these verses are threats to those two key things.

[6 : 45] There's an attack on truth, verse 9, and an attack on witness, verse 10. Look again at verse 9. It's all to do with controversy, discussion, quarrels about the law.

It's theological discussion, but it's not really about the truth. In fact, it's a threat to the truth. It's a distraction from the truth. Look again at verse 10.

It's all about the sort of person who stirs up division and what to do about such a person. It's a person who's not living the good life. It's a person who's not adorning the gospel.

That sort of person represents an attack on the unity and the witness of the church. So we'll look at these couple of verses on the two points.

First, Paul instructs Titus and pastors today to avoid unprofitable distractions. And second, Paul instructs Titus and pastors today to warn people that stir up division.

[7 : 49] Paul is clear. He's authoritative. And far from being a party peeper, he's saying these things for the health and survival of the church.

They're pretty hard-hitting, straight-down-the-line verses. It's not going to be an uncomfortable 20 minutes coming up, but we must hear it. So verse 9 firstly, avoid unprofitable distraction.

Now verse 9 flows on, straight on, from the positive command in verse 8 to teach the truth and to insist on its implications. That is the sort of ministry that Titus is to focus on, teaching the truth, insisting on implications.

That's his focus. And he's not to be distracted from it. And distraction is exactly what these unprofitable theological controversies present.

We know well, if you've been here on Sunday evenings, you know well what sort of place Crete was. It was full of empty talkers, liars, evil beasts.

[8 : 55] We bumped into the Cretan false teacher in the second half of chapter 1. And it probably comes as no surprise that Paul tells Titus to avoid certain speech-related things.

There were plenty of people, perhaps, on the fringe of the church, in the society around, that enjoyed and dabbled in theological speculation. Titus may have been tempted to wade in, to get involved with the discussions, with the arguments.

But he's not to do it. He's to avoid it. Don't get distracted, Titus. But what was the nature of these theological discussions that were going on that he was to avoid?

Well, Paul mentions four things in particular. Firstly, it's foolish controversies. Look at verse 9. Avoid foolish controversies. These are just frivolous theological inquiries.

Whatever debate happens to erupt on the Christian blogs, suddenly that's the big issue. It's all you talk about. Anyone who listens to you for a moment will hear your take on the latest blog from whoever it is that's written it.

[10 : 08] Until next week, when the next foolish controversy erupts on social media. Perhaps it's a well-known pastor who's run into trouble. It's all over the news.

It's all you talk about. Looking into every little sordid detail. Foolish controversy. Unprofitable. Secondly, he mentions genealogies.

This is likely to be a Jewish type of interpretation. Based on Old Testament myths and speculation based on family trees. Man-made myths.

Avoid it. Thirdly, it's dissensions. Fourthly, quarrels about the law. These are sort of arguments and discord about the law, the Torah.

Going into the minutiae of this word and that. People getting tied up with small issues. Rather than focusing on the main thing. Rather than focusing on the great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who is the fulfillment of all that the Old Testament pointed to.

[11:10] These distractions, says Paul, are to be distinguished from genuine theological inquiry. Genuine inquiry into the truth is profitable.

It's good. But these things that he mentions in verse 9 are, according to Paul, unprofitable and worthless. Look at the end of verse 9. That's how he sees them. We, in our church lives, are to invest in that which is profitable.

And what is profitable is gospel truth. And the implications that flow from it in terms of how we are to live. That's profitable. But we're to avoid that which is unprofitable.

Foolish arguments. Quarrels. What is it that we, as a church, talk about? What do you talk about? Is it the particular bee in your bonnet? Trying to gather people around you. Persuade people to join your cause. You know the sort of thing. Yeah, you know, the Tron is a good church.

[12:16] Got good teaching. But you know what really annoys me about it? It's not taking this particular issue seriously enough. When was the last time we had a sermon on creationism?

Or healing ministries? Or premillennial dispensationalism? You don't know what that is. Speak to Rupert. I've got no idea. Why are we not promoting this conference?

Why don't we have this guy come to speak to us? Why don't we sing this particular song? Why isn't everyone reading this book? People will consciously or otherwise promote, gently push their own theological agenda.

Don't be distracted. It's Paul's message. It's dumb talk. If you're in a conversation that's going that way, people getting really caught up in a particular issue that's complete distraction.

If you find yourself in that sort of conversation, just gently kick it into the long grass. Explain why it's distracting. Explain why it's not worth getting involved with. It's foolish.

[13:23] It's a controversy. Don't be distracted. And pastors in particular are to focus on what matters and to avoid distraction, to keep the church laser focused on its core mission.

There's so much out there you could get involved with, isn't there? Endless stuff you could get sidetracked by. But the church leader particularly must focus on the key thing.

What do churches spend their time on? The profitable or the distraction? Think about the church business meeting. Is it spent on that which is worthless?

Foolish controversy? Or is the focus on gospel progress? On that which is profitable? What is it that occupies the pulpits? Is it theological speculation?

Or is it the truth as revealed in the Bible? Is it worthless or profitable? What does it achieve? Change lives? Or just more pointless arguments?

[14:30] Have nothing to do with these unprofitable theological speculations. That's Paul's instruction to Titus. And it's instruction to us. Don't be distracted.

Such things are just not worth engaging with. Church leaders and churches are to focus on that which is profitable and lasting.

To the truth that leads to godliness. And so we must learn to distinguish and discern the profitable from the unprofitable.

And then throw our energies into that which lasts, into that which is profitable. It's not always easy, is it, to discern what is worth getting stuck in with what isn't. So we must pray for discernment.

What is a core issue? What needs to be tackled? What can be ignored? So pray for your pastor. Pray that he would avoid distraction.

[15:29] That he would avoid peripheral battles and focus on the clear and sound instruction of the truth. That's our first point. Avoid unprofitable distraction.

Keep focused on the main thing. Secondly, look on to verse 10. Where Paul instructs Titus to warn people that stir up division.

Now the sort of person that Paul has in mind here is the sort of person who intentionally stirs up division in the church family. Now division is a serious issue in the church.

We've seen it already in the letter. Look back to chapter 1, verse 11. Titus was to silence false teachers. Verse 11. They must be silenced.

Since they're upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. Titus was to silence them because they were upsetting whole households.

[16:30] And to upset the household of God, to bring division to that which God has brought together, that is very serious indeed. Stirring up division is a particular hobby for many in the church these days.

As it was then. It's not a new thing. It's always been there. People just want to get their own way. To have things operate as they want them to operate.

We've all got that in us, haven't we? We always want things our way. But it's usually in the sort of areas in church life that you just wouldn't expect division to crop up in.

It's not often the big issues that division arises, but rather in the seemingly unimportant. Let me give you an example. A few months ago, I was at a training course with the PTC.

We had an Australian minister come to visit, and he was talking about this very issue, about division arising in unexpected places. And he gave an example.

[17:31] I think it was the choir or some individuals within it caused an absolute stushy about a change to the service times. I think it was a half hour change. It was going to move from a 10.30 to a 10 o'clock service.

And they were up in arms. They thought it was all about them. People were coming to hear them sing. And this was going to throw people off. It was a threat to them. A small thing like that, just changing the time of a service, gave certain people in that church an opportunity to stir up division. To want things their way. To stamp their feet. To throw their weight around. And that sort of thing is dangerous. That sort of thing causes division.

And Paul urges Titus to warn people that stir up division. Warn them with a view to restoring. Perhaps unaware of what they're really doing.

Unaware of the impact they're really having. Pastors are to warn them for two reasons. For their own sake. And also for the health of the church. But before we look at what Titus is to do.

[18:41] What church leaders now are to do. A word to would-be stirrers up out there. And we've all got it in us, haven't we? If you're the sort of person who likes to get their own way.

Particularly in church life. Don't do it. To insist on your way when others have made a decision. That will often cause division.

And in particular refusal to repent. When warned. Well that's very serious indeed. Just look at the language Paul uses.

For unrepentant division makers. Verse 11. Such a person. Is warped. Sinful. Self condemned. It's pretty tough stuff, isn't it? Perhaps. Perhaps you need to hear this warning today. Perhaps even this week you've got your sights set on an area of church life where you're going to make your mark.

[19:41] Whatever it may be. The flower arranging or the coffee rota. Whatever it might be. Don't do it. It causes division. It threatens the unity of the household of God. Now of course.

This doesn't mean that we can't contribute. We can't make suggestions. Or bring up a new idea. Of course not. But that is quite a different thing from stirring up division. There is a distinction.

Perhaps you want to take issue with a particular decision that's already been made by the church. Could be anything. From the trivial. The color of a carpet. Or maybe something more substantial.

The way a particularly difficult pastoral issue has been handled. Whatever it is. We are to trust our church leaders in the decisions that they make.

In the direction they take. They will have at their disposal a lot more information than you probably do. Perhaps you think you could have dealt with it better.

[20:45] The situation could have been handled differently. And possibly yes. Everyone is infallible. Everyone is fallible. Sorry. As you have just seen. Everyone is fallible.

I'm sure they could have done it better. I'm sure they could have done it better. But there should be a presumption of trust in our leaders. In those who make decisions. Paul takes the creation of division.

So we should think very carefully before throwing our weight around. And questioning. Challenging. Those who are leading us. Paul takes the creation of division very seriously indeed.

So then. What happens when somebody does cause division? What was Titus to do? What are church leaders today to do? Well, they are to warn.

Look again. Verse 10. As for a person who stirs up division. After warning him once. And then twice. Have nothing more to do with him. Now the word warning here.

[21 : 46] Has the sense of admonition. And that includes. Instructing. Correcting. Warning. It's all done with a view to restoring the offender.

Think of a father. Admonishing his son. Seeking to get him back on track. The church leader is to seek to win them back. With corrective teaching.

Instruction. To warn them about the impact their behavior is having. And he is to warn once. And then again. If the first warning has no impact.

And if that second warning is not heeded. If there's no repentance. No turning away from what they've done and said. Then the church leader is to have nothing more to do with them.

They're to be excluded. Excluded both to protect the unity of the church. But also to seek to bring them to repentance.

[22 : 44] When they see how serious it is. Now perhaps. What Paul's suggesting here seems a little harsh. You've got two chances. Then you're out.

But it's absolutely the right approach. Jesus himself advocates the same thing in Matthew chapter 18. Two public warnings. Followed by. Having nothing more to do with someone who is unrepentant.

Persistently. It could be very easy for a church leadership to be consumed. With individuals just like this. Who cause problems. Meeting after meeting after meeting.

Deciding what to do. There is a genuine desire to be wise. And gentle. And sensitive. To seek to win such a person back. But there is a danger that such a person just swallows up energy and time and people.

More and more energy from those in leadership is spent on this one person. A huge distraction from the key tasks. So Paul's approach here. Two strikes and you're out.

[23 : 48] Is good. And right. Because it gives an opportunity to repent. But it also keeps church leaders focused. On what they must focus on. Focused on the need of the wider flock.

Focusing on that which is profitable. And if such a person. Doesn't respond after two warnings. It's unlikely they'll respond after ten.

So we need to be praying. For our church leaders. That they would. Have courage. To tackle such things. It's not easy.

I don't know anyone that enjoys doing this sort of thing. Do pray for them. And stand by them. When they take a stand against those who cause division. So there we have.

Paul's two key instructions for church leaders. Have nothing to do with foolish talk that leads nowhere. Warn those who cause division. But there's also an implication for all of us here.

[24 : 55] It's not just for church leaders and what they're to do. You see there's a link between the two points. A link between foolish. Controversial talk. And division.

One leads to the other. You see dumb talk is more dangerous than you think. Dumb talk about anything you can think about in church life and doctrine. If left unchecked.

Will snowball. And cause division. Dumb talk about anything. Music. Preaching style.

About what appears in the notices. About what events we do. About the color of the walls. Dumb talk. Dumb talk. Dumb talk. Dumb talk. Foolish talk about anything.

That is designed to stir up a bit of division. That's dangerous. So the way that you talk. The things that you say.

[25 : 54] Can build up others. Or it can cause them to stumble. Doesn't take long for a few foolish words. To spread like wildfire. Before long.

Factions are formed. Division becomes inevitable. And there's massive fallout. Dumb talk. Is more dangerous than you think. So are you.

An instigator. Of such talk. Or do you encourage it. Or are you a buffer. Are you one who dampens down such talk.

So that it goes no further. Now it's not to say that we can't. Talk about things. If you've got questions or ideas. It's not to say that. It's not to say that. It's not to say that.

But if you've got a real problem. With something that's happening in church. Then the thing to do. Is to go and speak to the church leader. Take it to them. Don't be gossiping about it.

[26 : 54] And causing other people to stumble. Take it to those who are in leadership. But we can all be buffers. We can all dampen down such things. Can't we. Dumb talk is dangerous.

So do you see why it's so important. That church leaders heed these warnings. To heed what Paul is saying. These things that he's warning about. Threaten the witness of the church.

Remember Paul's big concern for the church. Then and today. Is that we would be committed to the truth. That leads to godliness. And commitment to the truth.

Means a commitment to teaching the truth. And to living out its implications. Good works. In home. In public. And a church that does that. That teaches the truth.

And lives out the implications. Will adorn the gospel. It will shine bright in the world. People will notice. And the things that Paul warns about here. Threaten that witness.

[27 : 52] Threaten that adorning of the gospel. So will you be one who commits to. Who talks about that which is profitable. Will you be one who builds up the church.

Or will you be one who. By the words you use. Slowly. Tear it down. Cause division. Will you. Commit to pray for church leaders. That they would follow. Paul's pattern here. That they'd be willing to avoid. That which is distracting. That they'd be willing to warn those. Who cause division. The witness of the church. Is at stake. It's a sobering message. Isn't it? But it's an important one. And we must heed it.

Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. For we ourselves were once foolish.

[28 : 56] Disobedient. Led astray. Slaves to various passions and pleasures. Passing our days in malice and envy. Hated by others and hating one another. But.

when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 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.

Lord, what a precious and beautiful thing your church is. The bride of Christ, the bride of Christ, bought with his own blood, bought to be zealous for good works, to adorn the gospel, how precious your church is.

Help us to heed these warnings, these sober warnings, which threaten that witness and unity of what you've brought together. Would we be ones who build the unity of the church that through our words we may build up and encourage?

Help us to be buffers who dampen down the sort of talk that might cause division. And would you strengthen our leaders that they might be strong to focus on that which is profitable and to keep us focused on that which is lasting so that you might be glorified and that the church might be built.

[30 : 38] We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.