

The Threats to the Good Church

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Preacher: Paul Brennan

[0 : 0 0] Well, a very good afternoon to you. Welcome to the Wednesday lunchtime Bible talk. My name is Paul Brennan, one of the ministers in training here at the church.

And it's good to be here, isn't it? To gather together, to hear God's word, confident that the truth leads to godliness, which in turn is our witness to the watching world.

So we turn now to God's word. We are near the end of our studies in Titus. So Titus chapter 3, and we're looking particularly at verses 9 to 11 this afternoon, but I'll pick it up from verse 8. So it's page 999 in the church Bibles, Titus chapter 3, and I'll pick it up at verse 8. The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things. That is what Paul has just been talking about in the previous verses. 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 the 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.

This is the word of the Lord. We'll be thinking about these words in just a moment, but before we do, let's come to our Heavenly Father and pray. Gracious Heavenly Father, you are the maker.

[1 : 5 8] you are the sustainer of all things. How powerful and majestic you are. You who created the stars, the planets, the galaxies, every man and woman who has walked this earth, you made it all.

And we stand in awe of all that you have made. We stand in awe that you, a holy God, would be mindful of sinful people like us. Thank you, Father, for all that you've done for us in your Son, Jesus Christ.

Thank you that you have caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning. Grant that we may hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them. That by patience and comfort of your Holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Thank you so much for all your blessings. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Nobody likes a party pooper.

You know the sort of person I'm talking about, the one who is always turning the volume down on the music, sending people home as soon as the clock strikes 9.30. The referee who makes a bad decision in the last minute of a crucial World Cup quarterfinal.

[3 : 5 0] No one likes a party pooper. And yet, that is exactly what Paul appears to be here in these verses this afternoon.

His letter has been going so well, especially since the start of chapter 2. It's all positive stuff about how to live the good life, the godly life, living the good life in the household setting, chapter 2, and in the public sphere, chapter 3.

We also have these two glorious gospel summaries in chapter 2 and chapter 3. These passages set out the gospel that is the engine of godliness.

Wonderful truths. Truths that pastors today are to insist upon. Chapter 3, verse 8. Pastors are to insist on these things so that you and I are careful to devote ourselves to good works.

It's all been very positive. Challenging at times, but positive. It's been a great letter. But then in verse 9 of chapter 3, you get a but.

[5 : 01] It would be quite nice, wouldn't it, to be able to cut these verses out of the letter, wouldn't it? These couple of verses here and the second half of chapter 1, just cut them out.

These verses, they're just a bit unpleasant and negative. Just not very tolerant, are they? Why do you have to be such a party pooper, Paul?

Now, it's tempting to think that way, isn't it? Tempting to skip over these bits when we're preaching. But these verses are crucial. They were crucial for Titus to grasp.

They were crucial for the church in Crete to grasp. And they're crucial for us to grasp as well. Why are they so crucial? Because hearing Paul's instructions and following them is going to protect the church from two key threats.

Threats that, if left unchecked and unchallenged, will totally undermine the witness of the church and, in the end, pull it apart. Remember, Paul's key message to Titus in the letter is to encourage him to teach the truth that leads to godliness.

[6 : 13] Titus was to press home to the church that their response to the good news of the gospel was to lead godly lives.

The truth that leads to godliness. Two key things. Truth and witness. The lives that go along with the truth.

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

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 truth. It's a distraction from the truth. Look again at verse 10.

[7 : 12] 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 is not living the good life. This sort of person represents an attack on the unity and the witness of the church.

So we'll look at these two verses under two points. First, Paul instructs Titus and passes today to avoid unprofitable distractions.

And our second point, Paul instructs Titus and passes today to warn people that stir up division. Distractions and division.

Paul is clear and authoritative here, isn't he? Far from being a party peeper, he is saying these things for the health and the survival of the church. So first then, verse 9, he says to Titus, avoid unprofitable distractions.

This follows on from the positive command in verse 8, where he is to teach the truth and to insist on its implications. That's the sort of ministry that Titus is to be involved with, to focus on.

[8 : 24] That's what he's to do and not to be distracted from it. And distraction is exactly what these unprofitable theological controversies in verse 9 are all about.

We know well by now, don't we, what Crete was like. It was full of empty talkers, liars, evil beasts. And we bumped into the Cretan false teachers in the second half of chapter 1.

And it probably comes as no surprise that Paul tells Titus to avoid certain things to do with speech and what people say. Because Crete was a place known for people who lied.

There were perhaps people on the fringes of the church, in the society around, in the church itself, who enjoyed and dabbled in theological speculation.

Titus, seeing that sort of thing going on, may have been tempted to wade in, to get involved with the arguments, to put them right. But he is, according to Paul, to avoid them altogether.

[9 : 30] Don't get distracted, Titus, is what he's saying. What was the exact nature of these theological speculations? Well, Paul mentions four things.

Just look down with me at verse 9 there. The first one is foolish controversies. It's just frivolous theological inquiries. Not really serious things, but just frivolous.

The second thing is genealogies. This was likely some sort of Jewish interpretation based on the Old Testament and myths. Speculations based on family trees.

Man-made myths. Thirdly, it's dissensions. And fourthly, quarrels about the law. Arguments and discord. And particularly to do with the law, the Old Testament.

The Torah, the first five books of our Old Testament. People were getting tied up with the minutiae of Old Testament law. Rather than about the main things.

[10 : 33] The great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. The fulfillment of all that the Old Testament promised. They're getting distracted by minutiae.

Not the main thing. These distractions, says Paul, are to be distinguished from genuine theological inquiry. Genuine inquiry into the truth is profitable for people.

End of verse 8. But the things in verse 9, according to Paul, are unprofitable. They're worthless. We in our church lives are to invest in that which is profitable.

And what is profitable is the gospel truth and the implications that flow from that in terms of how we are to live. We are to avoid that which is unprofitable.

Foolish arguments. Quarrels. And it is church leaders, pastors in particular, who are to focus on what matters and to avoid distraction.

[11 : 45] What do churches tend to spend their time on? Is it the profitable or the distraction? Think about the annual church business meeting.

Is it spent on that which is worthless? Foolish controversy. Distractions. 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 is it profitable? What does it achieve? Changed lives or just endless, pointless arguments? Have nothing to do with these unprofitable theological speculations as Paul's instruction to Titus and to us.

Such things are just not worth engaging in. Church leaders, churches are to focus and give energy to that which is profitable, which is lasting.

[12 : 49] To the truth that leads to godliness. We must learn to distinguish between that which is unprofitable and throw our energies into that which lasts.

Will you pray for your church leader? Your minister? Pray for him that he would avoid distraction. That he would avoid peripheral battles.

And focus on the clear and sound instruction of the truth. Because only that will lead to godliness and profitable living. There's our first point.

Avoid unprofitable distraction. Look on to verse 10. Where Paul instructs Titus to warn people that stir up division. That's our second point.

Warn people that stir up division. The sort of person that Paul has in mind here is the sort of person who intentionally stirs up division in the church family.

[13 : 50] 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.

Because they were upsetting whole households. And households is where the church met. False teachers were disrupting. Tearing apart household churches.

And to upset the household of God. To bring division to which God has brought together in Christ. Is a very serious matter indeed. And stirring up division.

Is a particular hobby for many in the church these days. As it was then. In Crete. People. Just want to get their own way. To have things operate as they think they should operate.

And it's usually in the sorts of areas of church life. That you really wouldn't expect division to come up. It's not often the big issues that things become problematic.

[14 : 56] But in the seemingly unimportant areas of church life. That division erupts. A few months back. I was at a training week with the pastor's training course.

Just next door. An Australian minister was speaking about this very issue. And he gave an example. And I think it was the choir in the church. Or some individuals within it.

They were causing an absolute stushy. In the church. Because. Of a change to the service times. A small thing like that. Changing the time of the service.

They thought that people were coming at a particular time. To hear them. To listen to them sing. And changing the service time. Is going to change all that.

Cause all sorts of problems. A small thing like changing the time of a service. Gave certain people the opportunity. To stir up all sorts of division and problems.

[15 : 53] To want things their way. And that sort of thing. Is dangerous. And that sort of thing. Causes division. Paul.

Urges Titus. To warn people. That stir up division. Church leaders today. Are to seek. To restore those sorts of people.

And warn them. Perhaps they're unaware. Of what they're really doing. But pastors are to warn them. For their own sake. And because the health of the church.

Is at stake. Now before we look at. What Titus is to do. What church leaders are to do now. A word. To would-be stir us up.

Out there. If you're the sort of person. Who likes to get their own way. Particularly in church life. Don't do it. Don't do it.

[16 : 51] To insist on your way. When those in leadership. Have made a decision. That will cause division. And in particular. A refusal to repent.

When warned. Is a serious matter indeed. Just look at the language. That Paul uses. For the unrepentant division makers. End of verse 10.

Sorry. Verse 11. Warped. Sinful. Self-condemned. Perhaps you need to hear this warning today.

Perhaps even this week. You've got your eyes set. On an area of church life. That you're going to make your mark on. You're going to put your stamp on it. Whatever it is. The flower arranging.

The choir. The church. Coffee rotor. Whatever it is. Don't do it. It causes division. It threatens the unity. Of the household of God.

[17 : 48] Now of course. This doesn't mean. That we can't make. Suggestions. We can't contribute. But that's quite a different thing. From stirring up division. So then.

What is Titus to do? You can see. That there are people. Stirring up division. What is. He to do. What are church leaders. Today to do. When there are those.

In the congregation. That stir up division. Again and again. Well they are to warn. Let me read it again. As for the 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. Sinful. And self-condemned.

Titus is to warn. And warning here. Has a sense of. Admonition. Instruction. Correction. Warning.

[18 : 46] All done with a view. To restoring the offender. Think of the father. Admonishing his son. Seeking to get him back on track.

That's the sense. In which Titus. Is to warn here. It's a spirit of admonition. The church leader. Is to seek. To warn these people.

To seek to. Win them back. With corrective teaching. And instruction. To warn them about the impact. That their behavior is having. He is to warn once. And then again.

If the first warning. Has no impact. And if the second warning. Is not heeded. If there's no repentance. Then the church leader. Is to have nothing more.

To do with them. They're to be excluded. Excluded. To protect. The unity of the church. And also.

[19 : 42] To bring that offender. To repentance. So that they might see. The seriousness. Of what they've been doing. Now perhaps. Seems a little harsh.

Doesn't it? It's a bit over the top. Isn't it? You've got two chances. Then you're out. But it's absolutely. The right approach. Jesus himself.

Advocates. In Matthew chapter 18. The same approach. Of two public warnings. Followed by having. Nothing more to do. With an unrepentant sinner. It could be very easy.

Couldn't it? For church leadership. To be consumed. With individuals. Like this. Who cause problems. Meeting. After meeting. After meeting. Trying to decide.

What to do. Trying to win them back. Time and time again. There's a right desire. To be wise. And sensitive. To seek. To win such a person back.

[20 : 37] But there is a danger. That such a person. Requires more. And more. And more. And more. Time and energy. From those in leadership. A huge distraction. From the key tasks.

To be wise. To be wise. So Paul's approach here. Is good. And right. Because it gives the opportunity. To repent. But it also keeps the church.

And the church leaders. Focused. On the needs of the flock. And on that which is profitable. If such a person. Doesn't respond after two warnings.

It's unlikely. They'll respond after ten. And it also needs to be said. That it is the job. Of the church leader.

To do the warning. It's down to him. To do the warning. Of such divisive people. So don't take it upon yourself. To be the church policeman. Going around. Ticking off people.

[21 : 33] Who you think are causing trouble. You're unlikely to be in possession. Of all the relevant information. Rather we are to pray. For our church leaders.

That they would. Have courage. To tackle these things. It's not an easy thing. Is it? And most church leaders.

Do not enjoy this sort of thing. So pray for them. That they would take a stand. When there are those. Who are threatening. The unity of the church. Left unchallenged.

Such people will tear it apart. So pray for them. That they would take a stand. And when they do take a stand. Stand by them. Don't lob grenades.

From the sidelines. Support them. They're doing the right thing. So there we have. Paul's two key instructions. For church leaders.

[22 : 30] One. Have nothing to do. With foolish talk. That leads nowhere. And two. Warn those. Who cause division. But a question arises.

Why? This all seems a bit harsh. Why must church leaders. Now heed these instructions. Why are we to pray for. And support our leaders.

In carrying these things out. Why? Well we're to do it. Because these things. These threats. To the church. They threaten the witness.

Of the church. Remember Paul's big concern. In the letter. For then. Then. And us now. Is that we would be committed. To the truth. That we would teach the truth.

That leads to godliness. God. And commitment to the truth. Means a commitment. To teaching the truth. And living it out. Living out the implications. A church committed to that.

[23 : 29] Will adorn the gospel. Will make it beautiful. Will shine bright. In the world. Those around. Will not help. But notice a church like that. And the things that Paul warns.

Against here. Threaten that witness. These things threaten. The adorning of the gospel. People that engage.

With foolish controversy. Have no interest. In the truth. Have nothing to do with them. People that stir up. Division. Have no love for the truth. And their lives.

Undermine the gospel. They must be warned. People that stir up. Division. Threaten the unity. And the witness. Of the church. They must be warned. Paul.

Had to give these instructions. So that the witness. Of the church. Remains unhindered. So that the church. Would devote itself. To good works.

[24 : 25] And so adorn the gospel. To the watching world. Will you be one. Who commits to. Talks about that.

Which is profitable. Will you be one. Who builds. Rather than destroys. Unity in the church. Will you.

Commit yourself. To pray for church leaders. That they would follow. Paul's pattern. Of avoiding. And warning. The witness of the church.

Is at stake. Let's pray. Father. We thank you. For. This short letter. Father. We thank you.

For the great. Gospel. Truths. It contains. Words of life. Words of our great. God and savior.

[25 : 22] You. But we thank you. For these words. Of warning. These words. That. Alert us.

To the. Threats. To the. True. Church. And the. Threats. To the true. Missionary. Witness. Of the church. Help us.

To heed. These. Tough words. So that we. Might shine. Bright for you. In this world. We ask this. For your sake. Amen.