



A Unity worth Working and Fighting for

Intro: One would be hard-pressed to find a group that claimed to be a Christian church that also denied that the Gospel of Christ is at least a significant focus of their group. However, Gospel unity is actually quite rare – even in churches across America. Groups may gather around this theme or that cause; they may celebrate something, but frequently the Gospel is vague or outright rejected. Even in churches in which the Gospel is a noticeable message, there may be little effort at fighting to maintain any real Gospel unity. Genuine Gospel unity is a prized thing indeed! It produces transformed lives, progressively shapes entire communities, and it is worth fighting for.

Passage: Titus 3:8-11

Background / Set-up

- The Gospel message is the beginning of the Christian life, it is the middle of the Christian journey, and it is what brings the Christian to final victory over death itself. Too often Christians think that the Gospel is merely the elementary teaching of the Faith, and they seek out some other knowledge that they believe will offer more practical help in this mortal life. Paul commands Titus to “insist” on Gospel unity. Paul demonstrates the importance of Gospel unity by commanding Titus to exclude anyone who is a real threat to it. While contemporary American Christians will likely find this passage difficult at best, it is probably most needed in our culture today, which prizes tolerance and inclusivism over truth and consistency.

Exposition of Major Ideas in the Passage

Outline:

- (1) Gospel Unity is the MAIN THING!**
- (2) Unity in the Gospel must result in “Good Works”**
- (3) Unity in the Gospel is worth Fighting for**

8 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. 9 But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. 10 As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, 11 knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.

1. Gospel Unity is the MAIN THING!

- *“The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things”* (v8)
 - “The saying” that is “trustworthy” – “these things” which Paul “wants” that Titus to “insist” on are what Paul has just said in the previous verses.
 - Titus 3:3-7 – “3 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. 4 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 5 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, 6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”
 - The Gospel itself is the focus of trustworthy doctrine, which is to be the constant focus of preaching/teaching ministry.
 - The Gospel is the central message of all that a local church is and does!

- Gospel-centrality is the hallmark of FBC Diana! We are nothing at all if we are not centered upon, focused upon, and relentlessly insistent upon the Gospel of Jesus Christ!
 - At the top of our webpage we, underneath the words “Gospel-centered” in big letters, we ask and answer the question “What is the Gospel?”
 - The beginning statement reads, “In short, the Gospel is the story of God’s plan to save sinners. Throughout human history, God has been actively involved in revealing Himself as both righteous Judge and gracious Savior.”
 - The Gospel is central... Here is the only unity that matters.

2. Unity in the Gospel must result in “Good Works”

- *“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” (v8)*
 - Gospel saturation will/must result in changed lives – FOR ALL WHO HAVE BELIEVED.
 - The distinguishing mark, that which causes a Christian to shine as a light in the darkness, is NOT:
 - A bumper-sticker slogan
 - A post affirming faith in Christ on Facebook
 - A “Jesus welcomes you to Diana” sign in your yard
 - A “Jesus loves you T-shirt”
 - Saying “merry Christmas” instead of “happy holidays” during the holiday season
 - *“These things are [NOT] excellent and profitable for people,”* they are only self-gratifying and empty.

- The distinguishing mark is a life “devoted” to “good works!”
 - To “devote” means to *constantly perform as the perfect example.*
 - “Good Works” are *winsome, attractively good, beautiful, the outward demonstration of good that is representative of the good within.*
 - These ARE:
 - A father who invests himself so much into his family that his wife and his children may say that no one has disciplined or loved them better than he...
 - A businessman or businesswoman who maintains such a high ethical standard and humble approach that he or she is admired among peers and clients...
 - A mother who diligently serves her husband and children to the extent that all are better than they ever could have been by themselves...
 - A teenager who approaches life with a focus on eternal glory and not momentary pleasure...
 - A single person who maintains sexual purity in order to honor Christ and others.
 - *“These things ARE excellent and profitable for [ALL] people”*
 - A life devoted to good works is infinitely more difficult than “pop-Christianity,” but that is why the Gospel must be central and real.
 - Martin Luther said, “We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone.”

3. Unity in the Gospel is worth Fighting for

- Gospel Unity is worth fighting against our own sinful inclinations

“9 But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless.” (v9)

 - This is exactly the kind of stuff that the “empty talking” false teachers in Crete were peddling (Titus 1:10-14)!
 - Notice also that these things are “unprofitable and worthless.” This is also a direct contrast with those things that are “excellent and profitable” in verse 8.
 - Some theological, ecclesiological, and philosophical issues will merely distract us from the main thing – the Gospel, but often these will also inspire the most fascination and emotion as well.
 - Eschatological details
 - Amillennial?
 - Postmillennial?
 - Premillennial?
 - Historical Premil, Modified Premil, Covenantal or Dispensational Premil?
 - Biblical/Theological minutia
 - Who were the nephilim?
 - Is it ever appropriate to call an Old Testament manifestation of God a “Christophany” or a “Theophany?”
 - Are you an infralapsarian or supralapsarian?
- Gospel Unity is worth fighting against those who seek to deny or distort

“10 As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, 11 knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.” (v10-11)

 - 1) First, we fight alongside one another.

“a person who stirs up division... [warn] him once and then twice...”

 - When there is someone off track, even stirring up division, a pastor/elder is to “warn” him or her – repeatedly...
 - The practice and sequence goes like this:

- First, warn him. Here, to “warn” is to *admonish* or to *warn through teaching*. The idea is to present this erroneous one with instruction as to why his error is in fact error and how he may replace wrong thinking or wrong living with its appropriate opposite. The picture is of a knowledgeable instructor coming alongside an errant student for the sake of kind admonition.
 - Second, warn him again. If the errant student refuses to head the instruction, then the wise pastor/elder is to take great pains to express patience and love. Time may elapse before the student is willing to see his error, or more evidence may be needed to convince him further. At any rate, the kind admonition is to be conveyed again.
- This is in perfect keeping with the rest of Scripture when it comes to life in the fellowship of a church family.
 - [Galatians 6:1](#) – “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness...”
 - [Psalm 141:5](#) – “Let a righteous man strike me--that is a kindness; let him rebuke me--that is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it...”
 - [James 5:19](#) – “My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back...”
 - [Matthew 18:15](#) – “If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over.”

2) Second, we fight against those who deny God/the Gospel by their works (Titus 1:16).

“have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned” (v10-11)

- [Hughes](#) – “It is interesting that Paul does not say God condemns such a person. Rather, one who tries to justify himself by besting others (causing foolish controversies), presuming on his background or family status (debating genealogies), or by wrangling holiness from legal strictures

(causing quarrels about the law) instead cuts himself off from his only hope of justification – grace. And thus he is ‘self-condemned.’”¹

- Anyone who refuses the repeated warnings of God through the loving engagement of pastors and other church family is providing self-condemnation that opposes his/her own profession of faith.
 - Fighting for genuine Gospel Unity is a top priority in the role of shepherding a congregation.
- Let’s just recap this single letter (Titus):
 - Elders/pastors are to “hold firm to the trustworthy word” and “sound doctrine” so that they will be able to “instruct” and “rebuke those who contradict it” (1:9).
 - Those who are unruly and deceptive in their teaching are to be “silenced” by elders/pastors (1:10-11).
 - Those who teach false truths and those who listen to them are to be “rebuked sharply” so that they may once again “be sound in the faith” (1:13).
 - Those who profess a faith in God, but live lives that match those of sinful pagans, are judged by Paul to be “detestable,” “disobedient,” and “unfit for any good work” (1:16).
 - Elders/pastors are to continually speak about *right doctrine* and *right living*, “exhorting” and “rebuking” with “all authority” (2:15)
 - Elders/pastors are to lovingly warn those who are off track, and eventually (if the errant person remains unwilling to heed the warning) to recommend that such a one be removed from fellowship (Titus 3:10).
- Let’s examine two other passages that deal directly with the concept of calling out those who are a threat to Gospel Unity.

¹ Hughes, 398

- 1 Corinthians 5:9-13 – “9 I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— 10 *not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.* 11 But now I **am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one...** 13b ‘Purge the evil person from among you’” (cf. Deut. 17:7, 24:7).
- Matthew 18:15-17 – “15 If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”

Gospel Unity is worth fighting for!

We cannot see people’s hearts, and there is no forehead tattoo that marks out one team or the other.

There are only two different jerseys in this game:

Unconverted Sinners: Those who are marked by verse 3 – “foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another”

Gospel-United Christians: Those who are marked by verse 8 – they “have believed in God” and they are “careful to devote themselves to good works”

Application

- What is God commanding us to BELIEVE here?
 - The Gospel is the most important thing to the individual Christians
 - The Gospel is the most important thing to the church family
 - The life we live evidences what we believe
 - God expects that Christians will fight together for Gospel unity
- What is God commanding us to DO here?
 - Seek to know and believe the Gospel more everyday
 - Seek to live lives that are marked by a devotion to good works
 - Live honestly and openly with one another in community together

My Prayers

- May God help us to know and believe the Gospel
- May God create in us a heart that is devoted to loving Him and others
- May God make us a genuinely united family of Gospel-centered people

Pastor Marc's Commentary

- Outline of the Letter:
 - Salutation (1:1-4) **doctrinal statement #1*
 - Organizing the Churches in Crete (1:5-16)
 - Order and Qualified Elders (1:5-6)
 - Qualifications of Elders/Overseers (1:7-9)
 - Dealing with False Teachers (1:10-14)
 - Stark Distinctions and True Intimacy with God (1:15-16)
 - Instructing Various Groups (2:1-14)
 - Instructions for Titus and Others A (2:1-6)
 - Instructions for Titus and Others B (2:7-10)
 - Theology for Life (2:11-14) **doctrinal statement #2*
 - Instructing on Doing What is Good (2:15-3:11)
 - Initial Charge (2:15-3:2)
 - Human Depravity and the Grace of God (3:3-7) **doctrinal statement #3*
 - **Final Charge (3:8-11)**
- Closing and Benediction (3:12-15)

8 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. 9 But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. 10 As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, 11 knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.

- *“The saying is trustworthy”* (v8)
 - Some commentators believe that the reference here to “saying” might indicate that what Paul has just said was also a familiar recitation of Christian doctrine at the time. It may very well be that the “trustworthy” saying was something that would be a recognizable creedal statement in the early church.
 - Some commentators believe that this affirmation is simply an Apostolic stamp upon what Paul has just said. “What I have said is true and trustworthy...” This kind of expression would provide an emphatic affirmation of that which preceded it.
 - Either way, we are wise to understand this short phrase as an emphatic affirmation of the “saying.”
- *“and I want you to insist on these things”* (v8)
 - The Apostle Paul now gives an authoritative edict for Titus to follow. This is no suggestion. Paul commands Titus, and all other pastor/elder/overseers who would follow in his footsteps, to “insist” on “these things”
 - *“insist”* – *diabebaiousthai* – assert emphatically and thoroughly
 - *“these things”* – referring to those things just mentioned previously (verses 3-7 and maybe even including verses 1-2)
 - At a minimum, the Apostle Paul is demanding that Titus remain focused and emphatic in his speaking – particularly focused on the content of the Gospel. Right doctrine is the most important focus of any pastor/elder, and the central doctrines of Christianity are those doctrines that are essential to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - Paul may also be demanding a focus on right practice or right living. If “these things” includes verse 1 and 2 of chapter 3, then the practical life application of verses 3-7 is also meant to be emphatically and

thoroughly asserted through the pastoral ministry. Whether it is necessarily included here or not, Right Doctrine will always result in Right Practice. This is exactly what the Apostle Paul argues as verse 8 continues...

- *“so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works”* (v8)
 - “so that” indicates a desired result or end purpose. The reason for emphatically and thoroughly asserting “these things,” which pertain to the Gospel of Christ (Right Doctrine), is “so that those who have believed” that message and the God who saves will “be careful to devote themselves” to “good works” (Right Practice).
 - Once again, we are reminded that “good works” always accompany genuine faith. Those who “have believed in God” will indeed “be careful to devote themselves to good works.”
 - Martin Luther said, “We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone.”
- *“These things are excellent and profitable for people”* (v8)
 - “These things” here may refer either to the same content of the previous “these things” (the content of biblical doctrine, particularly that of the Gospel) or it may refer to “good works.”
 - *“excellent”* – kala – beautiful, noble, outward sign of inward good
 - *“profitable”* – ōphelima – useful, beneficial
 - In light of the terms Paul uses to describe “these things” here it seems still possible that he may be referring to either of the two possible options listed above. However, since he also provides the recipients of “these things,” which are “excellent” and “profitable,” it seems to become clearer that the reference is to “good works.”
 - “People,” generally and without qualification, are those for whom “these things” are “excellent” and “profitable.” In this case, the Gospel is not believed by all people everywhere, but all people everywhere may benefit from the good works done by those who do believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - The saying might otherwise be stated, “All people benefit from the excellent and profitable

doing of good, which should always mark the lives of those who believe the Gospel.”

- “*But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law*” (v9)
 - These categories of avoidance are reminiscent of what Paul wrote about earlier in chapter 1, verses 10-16.
 - The individuals named there were insubordinate, empty talkers, deceivers, and factious religionists (v10). They were upsetting families by teaching dishonest things for dishonest gain (v11). They were also devoting themselves to myths and various man-centered commands (v14).
 - “*foolish controversies*” – *mōras zētēseis* – stupid and meaningless questions; meaningless speculations
 - These may be exemplified in our day in the form of speculative questions regarding theology or practice.
 - Specializing in eschatological study and focusing on particular Hebrew worship practices in order to reenact such things are two examples of “foolish controversies” in contemporary American Christianity.
 - “*genealogies*” – *genealogias* – the making of a pedigree
 - While this was a particular practice of those who were interested in finding some significant ancestry in redemptive history, the principle may still be imported to our day. Family heritage or some other significant emphasis on lineage can still demand attention in unhealthy ways.
 - “*dissensions*” – *ereis* – readiness to quarrel; a posture of loving the debate
 - This carries the idea of one who enjoys the debate. Anyone who hopes for controversy or seeks out a fight is to be avoided.
 - “*quarrels about the law*” – *machas nomikas* – fighting over the law or some aspect of it
 - Legalism is a recurring danger in the Church, and there is no shortage of teachers for this crippling position.
- “*for they are unprofitable and worthless*” (v9)
 - “*unprofitable*” – *anōpheleis* – useless
 - “*worthless*” – *mataioi* – aimless, purposeless, vain

- These are in direct contrast to the “these things” mentioned earlier. “These things” are “excellent” and “profitable,” but these other things, which merely distract from the main things, are “unprofitable” and “worthless.”
 - In the end, these vain speculations and distractions from the Gospel are utterly useless. They only serve to distract, and they give nothing in return to the one who gives himself and his time to them.
- “*As for a person who stirs up division*” (v10)
 - This is meant to describe one who persists in his error, and possibly even seeks to gain others to his cause.
 - As has been the focus of the entire letter, the division here can be over either or both Right Doctrine and Right Practice.
 - If a person deviates from Right Doctrine, and persists in his deviation, then he is stirring up division. So too, if a person deviates from Right Practice, and persists in his deviation, then he is stirring up division.
- “*after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him*” (v10)
 - The remedy follows the diagnosis.
 - First, warn him. Here, to “warn” is to *admonish* or to *warn through teaching*. The idea is to present this erroneous one with instruction as to why his error is in fact error and how he may replace wrong thinking or wrong living with its appropriate opposite. The picture is of a knowledgeable instructor coming alongside an errant student for the sake of kind admonition.
 - Second, warn him again. If the errant student refuses to heed the instruction, then the wise pastor/elder is to take great pains to express patience and love. Time may elapse before the student is willing to see his error, or more evidence may be needed to convince him further. At any rate, the kind admonition is to be conveyed again.
 - Third, have nothing more to do with him. If the errant student refuses yet again, then he ceases to remain in the category of ‘student.’ The erring person who persists in his error, even after a patient and loving admonition has been delivered to him on more than one occasion, cannot reasonably be understood as anything

other than an opponent to proper instruction. Such a one, by necessity, removes himself from the benefits of a student.

- This process is closely aligned with Jesus' teaching recorded in Matthew.
 - Matthew 18:15-17 – “15 If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”
- “*knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned*” (v11)
 - “*warped*” – *exestraptai* – corrupted, out of place
 - “*sinful*” – *hamartanei* – sinning, sinful
 - “*self-condemned*” – *autokatakritos* – self-condemned
 - Hughes – “It is interesting that Paul does not say God condemns such a person. Rather, one who tries to justify himself by besting others (causing foolish controversies), presuming on his background or family status (debating genealogies), or by wrangling holiness from legal strictures (causing quarrels about the law) instead cuts himself off from his only hope of justification – grace. And thus he is ‘self-condemned.’”²

² Hughes, 398

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