

**Church Matters**  
**Studies in Paul's letter to Titus**  
**Titus 3:1-15**  
**The precious Gift of Unity**  
**December 11th 2022**  
**Preacher: Pastor Roy Summers**

**Harry and Megan**

Unity is a precious gift!

Many of you will be aware of the new Netflix series “Harry & Megan.” They have vowed to tell their side of the story. But one commentator this week suggested that apart from earning the ex-Royals lots of money, the only thing this series will accomplish is division: some people will side with the Royal family and others will side with Harry and Megan.

And the thing about strife and division is that it always brings unhappiness and distress, whether in a marriage, a family, a neighbourhood or a nation. By contrast, unity breeds joy and happiness—which is why some people look forward to their annual Christmas meal: they hope, they long, that perhaps for just one day of the year divided families will set aside their differences and enjoy the blessing of unity.

As Paul closes his letter to Titus, his parting message to them - and to us - is, “avoid division, be united.”

*“But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments about the law because they are unprofitable and useless. Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that have nothing to do with him. You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.”*

And that's God's message to us today. “Avoid division, be united.”

The last few verses of chapter 3 reveal some vital truths for all Christian leaders, let's trace them out briefly:

1. **Paul is a team player**— “*Everyone with me sends you greetings.*” (verse 15)  
Beware of people who are not collegial.
2. Paul **is a strategist**—it’s approaching winter, when travel by sea is hazardous, so he decides he’ll spend the winter in Nicopolis, “I have decided to winter there” (verse 12). It’s a good thing to make prayerful future plans!
3. **Paul can’t live without Christian friends.** He does not want to spend the winter on his own, but wants Titus to be with him, “*Do your best to come to me at Nicopolis.*” (verse 12). Do we think we can make it on our own? Well, we’re out of company with Paul, and out of sorts with Jesus who chose 12 apostle so that “*they might be with him.*” (Mark 3:14)
4. **Paul doesn’t lord it over his junior partner,** Titus, and expect him to do all the travelling: Nicopolis is half-way between Crete and Macedonia, which is where he is believed to be when writing Titus.
5. **Paul gives his workers a break.** He wants to give Titus a break from the very difficult task he has given him in Crete—we all need to rest!
6. **Paul chooses wisely!** He chooses Zenas the lawyer and Apollos to bring the letter to Titus! We don’t know much about Zenas, but the fact that he is a lawyer means he’d have a good clear head to sort out some of the false teaching going on in the churches of Crete. And his choice of Apollos is genius too—because Apollos knew his Bible very well, “he was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures” (Acts 18:24) and could easily refute the foolish Jewish myths which were plaguing the island’s churches. Zenas and Apollos were only travelling through the island, but my what a choice of postmen!
7. **Paul wants Gospel workers to be treated well,** verse 13, “Do everything you can to help Zenas and Apollos on their way and see that they have everything they need.” These guys have travelled all the way to Crete to deliver an important letter, treat them well, make sure they are not in need. That’s a message for every church—take care of your Gospel workers.
8. Paul **is spiritually careful**— although he wants Titus to take a break, he knows he cannot leave the churches on the island without supervision—not yet! They are too young in the faith! So he plans to replace Titus with Artemas or Tychicus, two more of Paul’s helpers. Young churches with young leaders need supervision until they become mature enough to lead. Young churches and young leaders must learn to walk before they are allowed to run.
9. Paul **loves to send spiritual greetings** —“Everyone with me sends you greetings. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all.” Grace be to you all!

## #1 Unity is a precious gift!

Unity is a precious gift from God, let's zoom out to Ephesians 4, "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep *the unity of the Spirit* through the bond of peace." See that phrase, "the unity of the Spirit"? Christian unity is not something we can create or drum up, says Paul, it's a gift from the Holy Spirit. We're called to maintain it, but we cannot create it. And notice too, that this divine unity is founded on the core doctrines we all hold in common.

"There is one body (only one true Church) and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." We hold these central Gospel truths in common! We may come from different backgrounds, we may not see eye to eye over secondary matters, but when it comes to the main things, everyone born again of the Spirit is—in point of fact- on the same page!

Unity is a precious gift from God! Which makes it a sinful travesty of the Gospel when Christians won't forgive one another, refuse to be reconciled to one another, and even slander one another. When they, what is it called today "Cancel culture" where you write someone out of your life? Surely it is sinful to write any fellow believer out of our lives, to close the door on reconciliation, rather than to leave it open.

In preparation for sermons about heaven next term I've been reading a number of books, and in one of them, I came across a Christian teacher who thinks this will happen in the first hour of heaven; "I believe we will have face to face meetings with everyone we've been in conflict with— and there will be truth telling, confession, honesty and repentance. No equivocation, no excuses, no pretending. Friendships repaired; relationships set right. We'll lock arms, slap backs, give hugs and shed tears of relief and joy" (p.113, *The Case for Heaven*). Well, I'm not sure about that, because it's not in the Bible, but I get where he's coming from. What we can be certain about is that believers, in this world, and the next, are de-facto, united to one another, for unity is something created by the Holy Spirit.

## #2 Unity must be protected

But now, and here we return to our text, Unity must be protected, in two ways writes Paul. First, Christians leaders like Titus must themselves avoid controversies, "But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law

because these are unprofitable and useless.." (verse 9)

Way back when I met a Christian who was often contentious and argumentative. And then one day I met her pastor... who was also contentious and argumentative too! I had found the source of her spiky nature! Like church leader, like church members! So this is a word for all church leaders present and future. Listen up! Don't argue about secondary matters! Don't argue about the future of Israel, don't argue over the second coming or the millennium; don't argue about the gifts of the Holy Spirit, don't argue about translations of the Bible; don't argue about conspiracy theories.

Some of us will remember when Chris Brauns came to our first church weekend way many years ago, he mentioned a church community that had fallen out over what kind of bread to use in communion!

Arguments like these do nothing to advance the Gospel, all they do is stir up dissension! The world is filled with contentious people, Twitter storms abound, but we're called to guard the unity of the Spirit by avoiding arguments.

One sister up north used to put it this way: walk softly in God's flock, there are fragile young lambs, and are hurting sheep, so walk gently in the fold.

Secondly, we guard the unity of the body by warning and if necessary shunning divisive people. "Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that have nothing to do with him. You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned." Yellow Card, Yellow Card, Red Card!

If someone goes around causing division, take these three steps: Yellow Card 1 — warn them. Why? Because they genuinely might not realise that what they are doing or saying is dividing the flock. We can all make mistakes! Yellow Card 2 —warn them again. Grace demands we are patient with one another. But if they continue to stir up division after two warning, then it's the red card.

Red Card—have nothing to do with them! It's a very remarkable instruction, but think about it, if everyone in a church ignored a divisive person, they'd soon get the message and either change their tune or pack their bags. Hopefully this is a rare thing. In the thirty years I have been a pastor I have had to obey this injunction only a few times. It's a very difficult command, which is why one of my former pastors called Titus

3:10, “the most disobeyed verse in the Bible!” It’s hard ignore someone, to pay no attention to them, to “send them to Coventry” as they say in Wolverhampton!

But to help us we must remember that the unity of the whole community is more important than the comfort of any one individual! And besides, Paul says, you can be sure that a continually divisive person is warped and sinful: he is self-condemned. You’re not shunning a delightful saint, you’re staying clear of a disobedient twisted individual.

### **#3 Unity bears wonderful fruit!**

“How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity. It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron’s beard, down upon the colour of his robes. It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life evermore.” Psalm 133. When God’s people live together in unity, it’s like the beautiful scented oil that high-priest Aaron was anointed with. So much that it flowed off his head, down his beard and onto his robe! And filled the whole room with sweet perfume! Unity is God’s perfume in a broken world!

And unity is like the dew that fell on mount Hermon, watering plants and bringing life to the desert! Unity is how God waters the garden of his kingdom.

And unity is where God is pleased to bestow his blessing—even the blessing of eternal life. Unity and love is what so often attracts people to Jesus Christ in the first place: “By this shall men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35)

May the Lord cause the truth of his word to sink deeply into our hearts and may the unity of the Spirit be seen among us, for the glory of God.