

Notes from Tim Gamston's am Sermon on Sunday 27/2/2022

Series in Titus – "Living Godly lives in a godless culture"

Part 12 – "Gospel grace in a cancel culture"

Scripture references from the ESV

Titus 2:11-3:11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, ¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, ¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. **3** Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, ² to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarrelling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. ³ 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. ⁴ But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour 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 Saviour, ⁷ so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. 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 word cancel has taken on a new meaning in today's culture. It now means to stop supporting someone because they have offended us by something they have said or done. The main targets seem to be celebrities who express an opinion that goes against popular culture, though it also happens among young people in their friendship groups.

J. K. Rowling is an example of cancel culture. When she made a comment implying that transgender women are not real women, she was turned on by many who had previously been her fans and was 'cancelled', losing their support.

In vv9-11 (above), it might appear that Paul is advocating cancel culture when he speaks about avoiding certain controversies, and therefore having nothing to do with the people involved. Yet these verses are actually about

Gospel grace in a cancel culture

Titus (and by implication all Christian leaders of churches) is given two commands by Paul.

1. Avoid false teaching and teachers (v9 above)

Paul tells Titus not to get involved in debates that will give people an opportunity to spread foolish lies. Instead, Titus must silence them (**Titus 1:10** see p4). The foolish controversies that Titus had to avoid are still relevant today. Rather than taking scripture at face value, the false teachers were using novel and speculative ideas and notions to interpret the Bible. We saw this in the 1980s when some Christians thought that they could find hidden messages in the Bible by working backwards through the text, rather than just reading it forwards as it is meant to be read.

There are plenty of current examples of similar foolishness.

Paul also tells Titus to avoid arguments about the law, almost certainly referring to the Old Testament law particularly around circumcision and food laws. That matter was settled by the apostles. (**Acts 15:** see p4), who spoke on behalf of Jesus and said that these laws were no longer binding on believers. John Mac Arthur writes:

‘For believers who recognise the authority of the apostles and of God’s word, disputes about the Law of Moses and its relationship to Christians were permanently settled at that time.’

Debates over things that are purely a matter of speculation and arguments over the place of Old Testament laws are ‘unprofitable and worthless’ (v9).

To fight over those things doesn’t do any lasting good

That type of debate and argument will not lead people to love and trust Jesus, to greater godliness or to unity in the church. Rather it will lead to division and disunity. The number of days we have to live on earth is determined by God, and none of us know how much time we have left, so let us not waste it discussing philosophy that is

based on human reason and imagination. We have a Gospel to proclaim and live out. That Gospel:

- Is written clearly in human language that is to be read forwards
- Is found in our Bibles and not in other speculative places
- Speaks about being put right with God through faith alone in Christ alone and not in keeping OT laws
- Is profitable because it leads a person to know God and to eternal life

Do not waste time on that which is foolish, speculative, unprofitable and worthless.

Instead,

give your time to the Gospel, which unites people both to God and to one another.

2. Rebuke and discipline divisive people (vv10-11 above)

Now Paul addresses the whole church fellowship and the need for church unity. He tells Titus (and by implication all elders of churches) how to deal with a divisive person. We need this message now, because our unity, which is highly prized in the church, is under threat.

As our mission statement says, we seek to be the people of God united around:

- a common Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ,
- a common message, the Gospel
- a common mission, that of reaching the world with the news that Jesus saves sinners.

A people **delighting in God, to the glory of God, for the good of all people**

Our unity is under threat. It always has been, because our enemy, the devil, wants to destroy churches, but it is particularly so now.

Our enemy is hell bent on destroying Broadstone Baptist Church

He will use divisive people to do this, which is why we need to be able to identify divisive people. This will be painful for each one of us, as it may expose our own heart.

Divisive people often come from outside the church. They have been in many churches but have never settled. In their previous church, they caused trouble and were either asked to leave, or they left and the church was glad to see

them go. They normally have pet doctrines, but do not have a healthy, strong hold on the doctrine of the church and church unity. The divisive person tries to get the leaders to change their views to agree with their own pet doctrine and when that fails, they try to undermine the leadership by persuading other members of the congregation to join with them in pushing their divisive views.

Sometimes these divisive people only come to light after they have been in the church for a while. The elders may have a sense of unease about them, but they come with a good recommendation from their previous church and seem theologically sound. It soon becomes clear that the person has come with their own agenda and when the elders get in their way, they begin to undermine the leaders in the eyes of those they have befriended in the church.

Relationships become damaged, people leave and the flock of God is scattered. Was this person a wolf in sheep's

clothing or a sheep acting like a wolf?

Sometimes divisive people show themselves when things begin to change in church. Change is inevitable, but they don't like the changes, and start to find others who also don't like the changes or are not sure if they ought to be liking the changes. Clandestine meetings and phone calls take place, resulting in ungodly gossip that undermines the leadership, and the unity of the church.

Not everyone who questions change is necessarily divisive. Sometimes people just want clarity and assurance that we are not going to drift in wrong directions. The examples above are to keep us on our guard.

This is a loving appeal to all of us to search our hearts and test our actions and motives.

We need to ask ourselves whether we are seeking to maintain the unity of the church in the bond of peace or are we, maybe inadvertently, stirring up division in the church and doing Satan's work for him? Ask yourself:

- Am I serving Christ by preferring the needs of others above my own wants?
Spend time praying through **Philippians 2:1-11** (see p4)

- Am I concerned for what I want or for what is good for the church overall?

Unrepentant divisive people are a distortion of what Christians are to be, and are not to be tolerated. Elders are to warn the divisive person (vv10-11 above). They must tell them to stop and the consequences if they don't. When necessary, a second warning must follow, and then the person is to be put under church discipline. That demonstrates how seriously divisiveness must be taken.

Unrepentant divisive people are **warped and sinful, self-condemned** (v11). They do not reflect the beauty of Christ as a person born again by the Spirit of God will do. However, Paul wants to see the divisive person brought to a place of change, not 'cancelled', as we can see from the fact that two warnings are issued.

We are all born with our mind, heart and will utterly corrupted by sin. We are utterly unable to change unless God changes our mind heart and will. Hence, we are alienated from God, and his righteous justice demands his hostility towards us for our sin. **God has every right to 'cancel' us.**

Instead, out of the overflow of his love, God moves toward us in the person of his son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to see us brought to repentance and restoration to himself. This comes at great cost, because on the cross

Jesus was cancelled in our place

He was made to be sin for us and he died our death, both physically and spiritually, so that the way is now open for us to come back to God and find our delight in him with mind, heart and will now constrained by his love. In this, we have a better model of dealing with sin and hurt than our culture does, enabling us to move towards one another so that we have true unity and are able to maintain it. If we are guilty of stirring up divisiveness in the last weeks or months, we can repent and find forgiveness, and then know the joy of this **Gospel grace in a cancel culture.**

If we don't apply **Titus 3:9-11**, then;

- 1) **We fail to protect the church.** The shepherd's role is to care for the sheep (the flock of God), and that means shooting the wolves – silencing false teachers, and warning the church against them.

- 2) **We fail to help believers come to repentance.** Some people will not listen when they are warned so nothing more can be done. However, others can be helped to come to repentance, and we should seek to do this. (**Galatians 6:1** see p4)
- 3) **We fail to witness to the world.** Disunity undermines the witness of the church. We are only an effective witness where we have unity in divine truth and true spiritual fellowship.

Jesus says to us (**John 13:35**):

All people will know that you are my disciples if you have love one for another

Titus 1:10 For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party

Acts 15: 5- 11 But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses."

⁶The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. ⁷And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. ⁸And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, ⁹and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. ¹⁰Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? ¹¹But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will."

Philippians 2:1-11 So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ²complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ^[a] ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ^[b] ⁷but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, ^[c] being born in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father

Galatians 6:1 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.