



TITUS

A HEALTHY CHURCH

IMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH

SERIES: A HEALTHY CHURCH

LESSON: A HEALTHY CHURCH TAKES UNITY SERIOUSLY

LESSON: TITUS 3:9-15

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Christians are designed to be equipped for good works and to spread the gospel message to others. This requires a unity of purpose towards achieving a common spiritual goal. And this is a serious spiritual matter! Any obstacles to accomplishing God's will for a church body should be avoided. Such obstacles include internal quarreling or wasting time on meaningless controversies.

INTRODUCTION

Motivation experts will often tell you that it is important to keep your eyes on an ultimate goal if you really want to achieve that goal. This means that you should not be sidetracked by less important activities or waste time on things that do not matter. With such a single-minded purpose, the goal is more likely to be achieved. And when other people are involved towards reaching a common goal, there needs to be a unity of purpose for everyone to work together efficiently in making progress towards that goal.

Unity in a church body does not mean that everyone must be the same. Actually, spiritual unity works in an opposite way. It turns out that we are all different from one another in unique ways, and we all have different gifts and talents. Paul recognized the many differences among the members of a church in Romans 12:4-5, "For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another." Then in Romans 12:6-8 and also 1 Corinthians 12:4-8, Paul identifies various different functions and spiritual gifts supplied by God's grace. This means that it is God who empowers different capabilities among His people so that when they work together, they can accomplish far more than what a single individual could accomplish alone. Therefore, unity in a church body takes on a divine authority and means working together to efficiently accomplish the same spiritual goals.

There is also the issue of Christians normally bonding together in a "koinonia" type of fellowship. Christians are designed to have a deeper relationship with one another beyond normal friendship. "Koinonia" is a Greek term for fellowship, but in the Bible it means a special bonding type of fellowship among Christians. It first shows up in the New Testament in Acts 2:42, "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." This identifies a fellowship that for us today includes studying the Bible, coming together in common situations such as sharing a meal together, and praying together. Paul also indicates that a special bonding occurs among Christians in Philippians 2:1-2, "So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation from the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind." Note that a relationship with Christ and the Holy Spirit leads to a relationship of unity with others by "being in full accord and of one mind." In a similar way, fellowship with God and walking in the light leads to fellowship with other Christians as stated in 1 John 1:5-7, "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin." These passages point to a special bonding relationship among Christians that flows from a fellowship with Christ and the Holy Spirit through to a meaningful relationship and fellowship with other Christians.

Such a special bonding fellowship is what should normally be expected among Christians in a church body. But there are times and situations in which differences of opinion can lead to a division in the church body. However, Paul noted in 1 Corinthians 12:25a that God has composed the body of the church "that there may be no division in the body". This can occur when various

obstacles to unity develop among Christians. Working together in unity and avoiding internal division within the church body is the main topic in this lesson's passage in Titus 3:9-15.

Text

Titus 3:9-15

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.

Final Instructions and Greetings

¹² When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. ¹³ Do your best to speed Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way; see that they lack nothing. ¹⁴ And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful.

¹⁵ All who are with me send greetings to you. Greet those who love us in the faith.

Summary or Explanation

The island of Crete was a rough place to begin a Christian ministry. It had several port harbors which attracted hardened sailors who had been at sea for a while and were looking for a good time. And the culture of the people on the island was inconsistent with Christian principles. Earlier, one of its poet/philosophers, Epimenides, described his own people in Titus 2:13, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." To meet this challenging situation, Paul advised Titus to begin a ministry on this island by appointing godly elders and overseers in every town of Crete. In this way, sound doctrine could be taught, and the Christian people could be instructed to do good works.

In verses 3:1-8 just before the key passages in this lesson, Paul identified the main goal for every Christian church. This primary goal is to further the Gospel Message. The Christians in Crete were to remember that they once followed a hateful and sinful lifestyle, but they were changed by the mercy and grace of

our Lord through accepting the Gospel Message of Jesus Christ and through the renewal of the Holy Spirit. Then good works would normally be expected to follow as a verification of their transformation to a loving Christian lifestyle. Note that Paul was very careful to indicate that the good works did not save the Christians. Verse 5 clearly states that Christians are not saved through “works done by us in righteousness”, but by the Lord “according to his own mercy” and the “renewal of the Holy Spirit.” As evidence of this change, Paul then instructed Titus to insist in verses 8-9, “those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.” However, there are also unprofitable and worthless things that are opposite to the “koinonia” type of fellowship among Christians and can cause discontent and division. All of this leads to the key verses in this lesson about behaviors that are a danger to maintaining unity within a church body in progressing towards a common spiritual goal.

Paul identifies four behaviors that are obstacles to unity in Titus 3:9, “But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless.” These are discussed below:

Foolish Controversies – There are some issues that will not affect the main spiritual goals of a church body one way or another. Extended arguments about trivial issues must be avoided. This includes such things as “What should be the color of the carpet in the sanctuary?”, “What style of songs should we sing during worship?”, and “Should the air conditioning be turned down for those who are too cold or turned up for those who are too hot?” There are also biblical issues that aren’t really important enough to argue about, such as “Will dogs go to heaven?”, “Do we all have a guardian angel watching out for us?”, and “Is it okay to read a public prayer or should we use formal or informal language to converse with the Lord?” At the same time, there are some doctrinal issues that are so important that they must be corrected. For example, doing good works will not save you because we are saved only by grace through faith. And there are no additional requirements such as circumcision or anything else to be saved. All of this means that trivial and foolish issues should be avoided, but key doctrinal issues should be corrected.

Genealogies – It is not certain what Paul meant by arguing about genealogies. However, we can speculate that there might have been disagreements that ancestors passed on good and bad personality qualities. Arguments could also have been made about whether ancestors continued to control current events even after they had died. Thus, analyzing genealogy might have been used in some way to argue about predicting the future. It is also possible

that there were arguments about who had the best ancestors or jealousy as to who came from the best Israelite tribe. In any event, arguments such as these about genealogies do not accomplish anything useful. In modern times, we realize that family background may have a short-term effect on each of us. However, we are all independent individuals and are personally responsible for our own actions. There are many examples of great people developing in spite of a poor family background. Unfortunately, there are also examples of truly evil people developing from excellent family backgrounds. The truth is that we are all individually responsible for our own sins. That is why each person must independently accept the gospel message to become a Christian. There is no benefit in terms of salvation from just being in a righteous family or having the right ancestors.

Dissensions – This is more of a generic term about arguing in general. The point is that it is not appropriate to be a difficult person when interacting with other Christians. Some people may be argumentative because they are very self-centered and always want to be right. Other difficult people may argue simply in an attempt to feel somewhat superior to others by putting them down in comparison. In any event, constant dissension in the church body is a negative behavior that should be avoided.

Quarrels about the Law – There were likely several Jews that wanted to follow the old covenant rituals. They may have argued that such behavior is also required of Christians who follow the new covenant. For example, they could have argued that the requirement of circumcision is necessary to become a Christian. Paul was adamant in countering that we are all saved by grace through faith, and circumcision is NOT a requirement for salvation. There are also less important issues pertaining to the Law that are often argued about today, such as “Should we honor the Sabbath on Saturday or on Sunday?” The truth is that we should be honoring God every day of the week in the first place rather than honoring only the Sabbath. As stated earlier, the bottom line is that trivial quarrels about the Law should be avoided while challenges to essential doctrinal issues should be corrected.

There are also occasionally people in the church that seem to disagree with anything and everything while they are at church. Maybe the chairs or pews are too uncomfortable, or the temperature is never right, or the sound system always seems to be not up to par. This type of grumpy person can be a source of division. If it disrupts the ordinary course of church functions, that kind of divisiveness needs to be dealt with kindly. Paul states in Titus 3:10-11 that a person who continues to stir up noticeable division in the church body should be warned once or twice to

discontinue that kind of behavior. Continuing to stir up significant division in the church body is a sin that needs to be corrected.

At the end of the letter to Titus, Paul provides some positive personal requests. He sends two friends to encourage Titus to meet Paul at Nicopolis during the winter. He also requests that Titus sends Zenas and Apollos off with everything they need, presumably on a mission trip. And finally, Paul hopes that the people in Crete will “learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful.” And finally, Paul ends the letter to Titus with the words “Grace be with you all.” As Christians we know that grace comes to us as a free gift from God. But in this context, the grace from God is expected to flow through Christians to others as well. When Paul says “Grace be with you all,” he means that the kindness, forgiveness, and love we receive from God should be reflected to others. We should do this even when they do not deserve it, just as we do not deserve grace from God as Christians.

Discussion Questions:

- Have you ever met someone who likes to argue about everything. Such a person often is passionate and even angered about issues that really don't matter one way or another. The main problem with such a difficult person is that it is difficult to get anything done if you are always arguing about meaningless issues. What do you think is the best way to deal with such a person?
- We all probably know of some churches that have split because of ridiculous arguments within a church. Can you think of any trivial or foolish issues that people have argued about in various churches? How should these issues be resolved?
- Sometimes there are divisive issues within a church body that seem to be above trivial and foolish controversies, but do not seem to rise to the level of important doctrinal issues. Often these divisive issues relate to some controversy about particular leaders within the church, and there could be serious differences of opinion. Given that there will likely be loyalties and discontent by different factions, how should such a controversy be handled?
- Decisions do have to be made within a church, and some of them are very important. What do you think is the best way to decide issues within the church body when there is more than one way to proceed?
- On a personal basis, how should Christians interact within the church body? Should you act happy even when you are not feeling well? Should you share your problems with others when you are having difficulties, or

should you act like nothing is wrong? What is the appropriate way to interact within the fellowship of the church body?

- If you clearly see inappropriate behavior within the church body, how should you respond? If you are made aware of your own inappropriate behavior, how should you respond?

Conclusions or Application

UNITY IN THE CHURCH BODY MEANS WORKING TOGETHER TOWARDS A COMMON GOAL IN A HARMONIOUS FASHION.

Harmonious behavior in the church body happens when we use our God given gifts and skills towards the common good, always with our eyes on achieving the things that God has placed before us. It is easier to work with others effectively when our main concern is to please the Lord.

Romans 8:28

²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

IN A HEALTHY CHURCH BODY, EACH MEMBER USES THEIR DIFFERENT GIFTS AND CAPABILITIES IN COORDINATION RATHER THAN COMPETITION.

Coordination happens when each member in the church body places the needs of others at a higher priority than their own needs. The idea is to work together towards a common goal and contribute according to the abilities God has given to us individually. We are not to compare our contribution with what others are doing, either to diminish or enhance what we are able to accomplish.

UNITY IN A CHURCH BODY DOES NOT MEAN WORKING TOGETHER DOING THE SAME THINGS. IT MEANS USING A VARIETY OF DIFFERENT GIFTS FUNCTIONING TOGETHER FOR THE COMMON GOOD.

There are different gifts and capabilities given to Christians by the Holy Spirit. Although we may have a tendency to value some higher than others, God has empowered each of them. For this reason, we should honor and respect each ability or service equally as a gift from God simply because it is from the Almighty God!

1 Corinthians 12:4-7

⁴Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ⁶and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. ⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

**CHURCH UNITY IS FURTHERED BY A THRIVING “KOINONIA”
FELLOWSHIP WITHIN THE CHURCH BODY.**

Built into every person is a need to feel significant, to find meaning in their life. Such significance and meaning can be found when Christians meet together in a special relationship, joined through the Holy Spirit. This can happen when Christians bond together and experience the joy of “koinonia” fellowship with other Christians within a local church group. That is important in terms of encouragement and building up the faith. However, this fellowship should also lead to other important goals for every Christian church, which are to further the Gospel Message and to do good works.