



TIME OF GRACE®

The Power of "And": Divide and Unite

Study Notes

Summary

What do you do with people? In a world where some people pull you away from God and others encourage you toward him, how do you determine which people to allow into your life? Paul's wisdom is as needed as ever, wisdom that focuses us to think of the best "And."

- **Titus 3:9-11:** ⁹ But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. ¹⁰ Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them. ¹¹ You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are self-condemned.
- Beware of _____.
- **Titus 3:12-15:** ¹² As soon as I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, because I have decided to winter there. ¹³ Do everything you can to help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way and see that they have everything they need. ¹⁴ Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order to provide for urgent needs and not live unproductive lives. ¹⁵ Everyone with me sends you greetings. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all.
- Do life with _____.
- **Titus 3:15:** Grace be with you all.

Points to Ponder

1. Read Romans 16:1-19. What strikes you about verses 1-16? How about verses 17-19? What connections do you see with today's message?
2. Agree/Disagree: Keeping your distance from certain people is unchristian.

3. On which issues are you most tempted to be “divisive” in the church? What could God do to help you be a greater source of unity and peace within the church? Pray about your answer right now.

Homework for Next Week

Read 1 Peter 1:3.

Time of Grace Ministry
The Power of “And”: Divide and Unite
Titus 3:9-15
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This isn't going to sound very Christian when I say it but it's the truth. There is a group of people who are not welcome at our church.

And if you consider yourself a church person or not so sure about church person, every Sunday kind of church person, zero experience in church kind of person, I think the church is going to burn down when I walk in kind of person, we want you to feel welcome. If you were raised Catholic, if you were raised Lutheran, if you were raised with just Christmas and Easter, if you were raised non-denominational or nothing at all, we want you to feel welcome. Ninety-nine point nine percent of people when they walk through our doors, our faces light up and we can't wait until they take a seat here because we want all kinds of people to feel welcome.

Except for those people. We might let those people in the doors but before the sermon even starts, we're going to warn them once, and we're going to talk to them a second time, and then they're not going to be welcome. In fact, our church is going to try to avoid them because ultimately, we want nothing to do with them.

And if all that doesn't sound very biblical, I actually got that from the Bible. Let me read to you these words from Titus 3:9. The apostle Paul wrote, "But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law because they are unprofitable and useless. Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them. You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are self-condemned."

You see? I wasn't making that up to get your attention. Paul says there are some people that need to be warned - not 10 times or four times or even three times - you warn them twice and then they're done. They shouldn't be welcome because they're warped and sinful; they're self-condemned. Which is an interesting thing to find in the Bible, isn't it? I mean, the guy who wrote these words was the same guy who wrote those words that you hear at every other Christian wedding about love; love is patient, love is kind and love is not easily angered. Same guy. So why would he say that? And if we want this ministry to be the kind of place where all kinds of people can invite all kinds of people, why would we repeat that? Why would he, Paul, be so agitated and irritated with some people who showed up at his friend Titus' church? Well, if you're listening carefully to those words, it's because Paul is talking about, "a divisive person."

You ever met a divisive person before? Divisive, in Paul's original Greek language, is a word that might sound a little bit familiar. The Greek word is *hairetikos*, which is where we get our English word heretic. A heretic is someone who literally walks into the room and divides it and in Paul's language, a heretic is someone who walks into a church and divides people. Instead of being a peacemaker who brings people together in love and unity and respect, they're a person

who, he says, quarrels and argues and blows everything up so the church ends up more divided than it was before. It's a person who decides to either add or subtract to the Bible and in the process they multiply the drama and they divide the church. And so Paul says if someone like that walks through the doors, you give them a second chance, and then you warn them and give them a third, but after that, they've got to go. In fact, let's write this down so we don't forget this rather shocking truth. Paul says to Christian churches: "Beware of the divisive."

Which kind of makes you wonder who's Paul thinking about? You know, one of the smartest things you should do whenever you read a Bible passage is to look for the context so you know that you interpret it in the right way. And that's what I did this week. I actually read through the entire book of Titus and I looked for the kind of people that Paul was thinking of that he's pointing out in this chapter and here's what I learned. Way back in chapter one, Paul warns his pastor friend, Titus, about the, "circumcision group;" a group of Jewish people who had come into the church and added to the plan of salvation saying, "You have to be circumcised." Then a few verses later, Paul brings up people who were infatuated with what he called "Jewish myths," whatever these rumors and myths were that were floating around, not only in the Gentile, but in the Jewish community. Then here in this section, Paul brings up a third interesting point; he talks about genealogies, which didn't really seem to matter to the Greeks of the ancient world but to the Jews who had traced their family tree back to Abraham? They were addicted to it. And then finally, he brings up these, "quarrels about the law," which is a reference to the law of Moses or the Jewish scriptures. So once and then twice and then a third and then a fourth time, Paul's thinking of people who we might say had the most experience in the church; the people who were arguing and dividing and quarreling and being heretics were the people who had actually spent the most time in the pews. Now that is a fascinating thought. If my understanding of the book of Titus is right, Paul is saying the one most likely to be the heretic is not the first-time guest at the church but the longtime member.

Now it's very true as human beings, we can argue and quarrel about anything; you don't have to wait until your hundredth church service to start a fight. But for some of you who've been around the church for a while, isn't that kind of true? If you've ever been at like a church congregational meeting over some important decision, who's the person most likely to stand up and start a fight? The brand new Christian in the room or the guy who's been a part of the church for 50 years? When things get heated out in the lobby or there's some fierce debate that's dividing the church, is it the person who's brand new to discovering Jesus or the woman who can't remember a time when she wasn't following Jesus? I think Paul's saying that religious rookies are rarely heretics but church veterans like me are very tempted to be.

Here's what I thought of when that thought dawned on me. When you first come to believe in Jesus - and some of you can remember exactly when that happened - when you first realize that God rescues people and gives them the gift of heaven not because they've been amazing people but because he's an amazing God, that he saves us and he forgives us and he opens the doors of heaven not because we've checked all these boxes and done all these good deeds, no, he does it because of his mercy and his grace. When you first realize that, you are so thankful for the person who told you. Like you went your whole life thinking God loves the good people and if you're better than average, he'll bring you to a better place but then you finally realize, no, it's a

gift and the pressure is off and I can have peace because Jesus did everything for me. When someone tells you that, you love them for it!

But then - then the years go by and you've been able to listen to that pastor who first told you about the gospel and then another pastor and then another pastor. And to grow in your faith, you started podcasting and watching church sermons on YouTube so you've heard this guy and that guy, these guys and those guys. You started in this church but then you went to school to that church and you moved over to that church and after a few years, do you know what happens? You can become a heretic. Instead of being grateful for someone that would just give you the gospel, you start to add rules and requirements. That a guy can't just tell you about Jesus, no, he has to tell you about Jesus and he has to connect at your communication level and he has to have the personality that you prefer and he has to be kind of approachable and humorous and he can't be too stodgy and he can't be too traditional and he has to be this or in your heart while he speaks, you're going to quarrel with him. And you're going to get in the car and you're going to argue with yourself whether hearing the Bible and about Jesus is even worth it.

And can I tell you what that is? That's warped. There are literally billions of people on this planet who've never heard the gospel and we're going to criticize some guy because he doesn't preach in our perfect style? That is warped. Or you first become a Christian and you start to sing songs, not just because they make you feel good, but because they express your faith in Jesus. But then what happens? The years go by and you learn more about those traditional hymns and the history of the liturgy or you come up with your worship playlist of your favorite contemporary songs and you walk into a church that is lifting up the name of God and if it's not your style and your beat and your favorite song, that's warped. And if we're going to get into worship wars and pick favorite pastors, God wants nothing to do with it. In fact, he says you need to be warned. People who add their traditions and opinions to the Bible create divisions and they are toxic to a Christian community that is supposed to be known for its love. So if you've been following Jesus for more than a year or two, take Paul's words to heart. Don't add, don't subtract, don't argue, don't quarrel, don't let your experience and maturity in the faith turn you into a heretic.

Because it did for me. In the first 20 years of my life, I got to experience two very, very different kinds of church. Until I was 13, I grew up at a very, very traditional church with a very, very traditional pastor and a very, very traditional service. And then when I was in middle school, we got a very, very different pastor who came with a very, very different style. And I was saved during the first style and I came to really like the second style. So I go to school to become a pastor and I get assigned to my very first church and that first church was a lot more like this than like this. So what I tried to do was that, which is okay. It's okay for churches to change; every church has to decide about sermon series or the church year, about hymns or contemporary songs; there's nothing wrong with that. But here's what was wrong: In the process, I became a little heretic. I can remember walking into worship planning meetings anxious and nervous even though everyone in the room shared my love for Jesus. Because we were about to duke it out and fight for what church would like it. I remember this big guy named Steve. One day, after this had been going on for about two years, he said, "Pastor Mike, I think right now about 10 percent of our church is over here with you and about 10 percent of the church is way over there

with them and about 80 percent of us don't care. Your job, Pastor, is to not make the 80 percent of us mad." I think Paul would like that.

Have you ever been so infatuated with a decision that you're just competing to be right and then in the process you throw out love and patience and kindness and all the things that God cares about? That's Paul's warning. No one wants to go to a church where people argue and whisper and pick sides. They want church to be different; different than politics, different than the divorce where you had to pick who you were going to follow. How good and how great it is when people live together in peace. And so Paul said, in love, if someone's being divisive, you've got to warn them once, you've got to warn them twice, and if they won't let go of trying to be right, have nothing to do with them. And here's why he said it. The last verses of the book of Titus may not seem like the most exciting Bible passages you've heard all year but I love these words. Here's what Paul says: "As soon as I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, because I've decided to winter there. Do everything you can to help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way and see that they have everything they need. Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what's good in order to provide for urgent needs and not live unproductive lives. Everyone with me sends you greetings. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all." It's the second thing I want you to note today. Paul said beware of the divisive and here's why: So you can do life with the disciples; so nothing divides the followers of Jesus, so there's no tension but just joy when you walk into the church.

There's this picture we put all over our church; many of you have seen this before. We call it our roots. And I want to tell you, for me as a Christian, that second root, what we call our group root, is insanely powerful. And so my question for you today is do you have a group? I don't know what temptation you face - to be anxious, to worry, to give up on marriage, to give into alcohol, to be jealous of him and to try to be like her - like I don't know what that is for you but my question is does someone know what that is for you? And do they pray for you? And do they encourage you? Do they forgive you when you fall? Because one of the best gifts that God ever gave to you as a Christian is to make other Christians. To put other people in your church and in your life who know exactly what it's like to struggle with the same thing day after day and who know what a beautiful and powerful and wonderful name the name of Jesus is, especially when we fall and fail. So who's your group?

I asked that question of Tom from church. Tom's a newer guy to our church family and he grew up with tons of gathering and tons of growing and recently this past year, he took that huge step of joining for the very first time a group. He admitted to me he was pretty nervous; he didn't really know the people who would be there. And when he sat down and looked around the room at all the other faces, he got even more nervous. But he came up with the courage to ask the group a question. He asked, "Did I just sign up for a women's group?" Apparently, none of the other guys were there on that first day so Tom thought there was some big mistake but thankfully, the other guys came in the weeks to come and people started to do life together and they read the Bible together and they asked questions about confusing passages together and they prayed for each other and they confessed sins to one another and they forgave each other in Jesus' name and friendships started to be formed and outings started to be planned. And Tom told me he's been to a lot of Bible studies in his life but never experienced something like that. And I say, "Amen!" And Paul would agree. So if you're the person like Tom and me and Paul

who has a group, this week I just want you to take a minute and thank God. Some church cultures don't talk about the real stuff so if you have Christians that you can talk about the real stuff with, thank God.

And if you don't have people like that just yet, maybe today, maybe this message, maybe God brought you here for this service to give you that nudge. That in this next season or next year in your spiritual life, you could sign up for a group like Tom did. Or maybe you have a Christian that you get along with and it's going to be a text after church so you can get together for coffee or for breakfast once a month. Maybe it's going to be inviting someone through the Bible app to read a devotional plan and in the comments you can be real and confess and ask questions and actually do the Christian life together. I don't want to add any rules and become some heretic in the church but I will say this: It's no addition to the Scriptures to want every Christian to do life together, especially because of this last passage.

Paul ends the book of Titus with five simple words: "Grace be with you all." Paul loved doing this in his letters. Often the very first thing he said, "Grace and peace," and the very last thing he said, "grace be with you all," were like this sandwich and everything else was squeezed into the middle. He wanted the people that he loved to start and end every day with grace. Remember what grace means? It's getting what you don't deserve. It's a gift that you don't expect. And in the Christian faith, grace is why we worship Jesus. That the powerful name of Jesus gives us love when we don't deserve or expect it; that his goodness comes running after us, even when we feel lost and too far gone. And Paul said to his friends and I say to all of you today - grace be not with some of you but with all of you. Whatever the struggle, whatever the sin, whatever you think puts too much distance between you and God, no, no, no, Jesus says grace be with you. Grace that cleanses every sin. Grace that makes you beautiful to God. Grace that makes your heavenly Father smile when he looks down from heaven at you. The grace that redeems you, the grace that saves you, the grace that makes you one of God's own people. The grace that chose you before the beginning of the time, the grace that converted you, and the grace that will sustain you until you see God face to face. Paul says grace be with all of you. And then he says amen.

And ladies and gentleman, that is the book of Titus. One little book, three short chapters, just 46 verses. You could read it in under three minutes. But before I say amen, I just want you to imagine if your life and if our ministry looked like that book. I mean, imagine if you walked into a church and there was a message that spoke directly to you and it was incredibly focused on God? And there were people like me to watch over your soul; to look out for you. And we weren't hypocrites and we weren't in there for the money; we really were blameless people with self-control who loved God and loved you. And imagine if we had the courage to tell you to stop it when you're drifting away from God and would have the love to tell you, "And God is here" when you think you're too far away. And we preach the old and young, to male and female, to pastors and all kinds of people exactly what you should do not just for your good but for his glory. And we never give you a to-do list without lots and lots of grace; grace that teaches you to live a godly life and make you eager to do what God says is good. And we wouldn't just stand up here and blab on with religious words you don't understand; we'd stop to tell you exactly what each of them means. And we'd kick out the heretics and we'd help you to do life together. Can you imagine a church like that? It's what Paul wanted for his friend Titus and it's what God

wants for us. And so today, we pray, God, let it happen here for our good and especially, for your glory.

Let's pray.

Oh Jesus, we'd love to be a church like that. For every one of us to have the kind of humility that would just let little stuff go, to not argue and quarrel or dig in our heels, but instead to love people who are here. God, in our world, everyone is searching for acceptance and community and belonging; we call it a friendship or a tribe or a family. It's what all of us crave and we can find it here if your spirit could stir our hearts. And so, I pray boldly today, God, that as we think about your grace, the love that you give day after day, moment after moment, that that would overflow out of our hearts and we could love everyone who walks through these doors. God, no matter what they look like, what language they speak, what their gender, their weight, their height, their personality, their background, their sins, or their struggles, help us to love them so well that what happens here is abnormal and it's magnetic and it's beautiful and it makes the teaching about Jesus attractive.

God, we know we live in a culture that loves to talk about solo spirituality; that feels they're being locked down in some organized religion. You know that there's a third way; something that's organized in beautiful community and structure that's incredibly healthy for your people and for our hearts. And so I pray that in this next season you would protect us. Protect us from all the temptations that have blown up a million churches in human history. Protect us from divisive people and give us courage to kick out the people that are toxic to our health and to our love. I pray this, God, because I want this church to be even better. I believe it's already great but you call us to greater things. So God, may this be done among us. We ask it all in the wonderful name of our Savior Jesus Christ, the one who gave us grace, and all God's people who agreed, they joined their voices and they said, "Amen."