

TOUGH GRACE IN DIFFICULT PLACES A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF TITUS

STUDY NINE

The Tough Side of Ministry

Titus 3:8–11

Those who enter the ministry must cultivate two qualities at the same time: a tender heart and a tough hide.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

PASTOR Chuck Swindoll recalls a time early in his ministry when a man in the church bullied people to get his way and even threatened Chuck. Rather than deal with the man directly, the leaders tolerated the man’s angry outbursts and authoritarian spirit. Chuck reflects on the troubling experience:

I sigh as I look back and recall our passive, disobedient response to this kind of sin. He became a major reason that little church struggled to grow. Yet none of us had the courage to confront him and take bold action against his wrongdoing.¹

Difficult people have caused turmoil in churches since the beginning. John warned about Diotrephes who “loves to be first” (3 John 1:9 NASB). This domineering church boss undermined John’s authority and slammed the door on those John sent to help. Paul lamented over Alexander, an obstinate man who did Paul “much harm” and “fought against everything [Paul] said” (2 Timothy 4:14–15). Titus had to deal with troublemakers too. These self-appointed Bible experts picked verbal fights over nonessential issues and were dividing families and splitting churches.

There’s a tough side of ministry that young pastors often don’t anticipate. It involves confrontation—telling contentious people about the harm they are causing and setting restrictions on their behavior. It’s not a pleasant task, but it’s necessary for growing a healthy church.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Have you had to deal with a difficult person? If so, you may still bear the scars. In the space below, invite the Lord to minister to you and reveal His truth about standing up to bullies.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Paul authorized Titus to teach sound doctrine (Titus 3:8), which Paul stated in key sections of the letter (1:1–4; 2:11–15; 3:4–7). But that’s only one side of pastoral work. Paul also charged Titus to reprimand those who taught false doctrine so that, hopefully, they would repent and become “strong in their faith” (1:13). If they kept sowing discord, then further measures would be necessary, which Paul explained in 3:8–11.



Observation: Warnings and Consequences

Observation examines what the passage says, identifying figures of speech, comparison, cause-and-effect, and, particularly in this passage, *contrast*.²

What to Say—Titus 3:8

Paul put his apostolic stamp of approval on the doctrinal statement in *Titus 3:4–7* as “trustworthy” (Titus 3:8). Titus could teach it with confidence, which should bring what positive results, according to 3:8?

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What to Avoid—Titus 3:9

In contrast, how did Paul describe the teaching of the false teachers in *Titus 3:9*? What issues were they quibbling about that Titus should avoid? What were the results?

Whom to Reject—Titus 3:10–11

While these proud teachers arm-wrestled over the fine print of Jewish laws and whose ancestry was superior, they missed the point of the gospel—“love that comes from a pure heart, a clear conscience, and genuine faith” (1 Timothy 1:5). Instead of uniting believers, they were splitting them into factions.

These divisive people were poisoning the lifeblood of the church. To save the patient, what strong medicine did Paul prescribe in *Titus 3:10–11*?

Just as a surgeon must operate in order to cut out diseased tissue, so leaders in churches must confront those who would infect the body of Christ with discord and factions. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Divisive Troublemakers

Interpretation seeks to know the meaning of a passage primarily from its context. Paul told Titus to confront a “divisive” person (Titus 3:10). Paul used the Greek word, *hairetikos*—which appears only here in the New Testament and from which we get our word, “heretic.” Earlier in Titus, Paul called these same agitators “rebellious people, empty talkers, and deceivers” (1:10).

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Summarize Paul’s descriptions of the type of person pastors and church leaders must confront. What is the nature of a heretic? What do heretics do? How are their words and actions harmful?

Teaching based on sound doctrine is “good and beneficial” because it produces “good deeds” in the lives of those who listen (Titus 3:8 NASB). Divisive teaching, however, is “useless and a waste of time” (3:9). It produces no good fruit—only division, quarreling, and fighting (3:9). Previously, Paul stated that these divisive teachers “must be silenced” and that Titus must “reprimand them sternly” (1:11, 13). What specific disciplinary steps did Paul outline in *Titus 3:10*?

Why are these steps necessary for the sake of the one being disciplined and for the health of the church body?

What is the value of issuing two warnings?

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If the person continues his or her sinful behavior, what conclusion can we make, according to *Titus 3:11*? We don't judge them, however. What did Paul mean by "their own sins condemn them"?

We are to forthrightly declare salvation by grace alone, faith alone, and through Christ alone—alongside good works that demonstrate true salvation. Salvation and good works. Preach both. Live both. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: People Who Cause Divisions

Correlation enhances our understanding of one passage by consulting another. Read Paul's counsel in *Romans 16:17–18*, including its paraphrase in *The Message*. Write down how it adds to what Paul told Titus about divisive people regarding the following points:

Their nature: _____

The harm they cause: _____

Our response: _____

People who cause dissensions sow discord. They plant poisonous seeds of strife. They hinder a ministry from succeeding. They break down trust in a trustworthy leader. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Application: Steps to Follow

Is there someone in your world stirring up conflict? Perhaps the person is in your church, school, workplace, or even your family. Is this person turning people against each other or maybe undermining authority? Let's summarize what we've learned about responding to a divisive person with a few guidelines from our passage.

First, *set your feet on a foundation of sound doctrine*. Paul wrote *Titus 3:4–7* as a statement of faith for Titus to teach believers. Take a little time to memorize these verses as the content of your faith and the standard for truth against which all other teaching is measured.

Second, *sound teaching should lead to “doing good”* (Titus 3:8). Evaluate the outcome of the person's influence. Are the results beneficial? Is he or she drawing people together in unity or dividing them? Is he or she inspiring love or inciting criticism? Is the person pointing people to Christ or promoting his or her own status?

Third, *if a person is divisive, warn the person once, and if he or she keeps sinning, warn again*. By warning a person, we give room for the Holy Spirit to work. It's not our job to change the person. Only God can transform a person's heart.

Fourth, *after the second warning without change, lay down restrictions*. The person's own sins set the consequences into motion. The person might make excuses, hurl accusations, claim his or her rights, shift blame . . . but don't get sidetracked. Keep the focus on the main issues: the person's behavior and the harm caused by his or her actions.

How do these guidelines give you direction in your response to a difficult person? Write some notes on how you plan to respond and share these ideas with someone who can help you.

As you conclude your Bible study, bring to the Lord your concerns about this person. Ask for His wisdom and discernment. Invite the Lord to move in his or her life. Pray for the protection of those under his or her influence. Use the following space to write your prayer.

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A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for opening my eyes to the truth of the gospel through the kindness of Your mercy. You've laid out in Your Word the principles for living, and I treasure Your wisdom. Give me the insight and the grace I need to confront those who are causing harm to others and misusing the Scriptures. Help me in my walk with Your Son to always keep faithful to His way. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014), 350.
2. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)"

For the 2024 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2006, 2024 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

