

Foolish Arguments and Factious People

Titus 3:8-11

Titus 3:8-11 - *“This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.*

⁹ But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless. ¹⁰ Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, ¹¹ knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.”

Background Notes

The book of Titus is one of Paul’s “Pastoral Epistles.” It was written to Paul’s fellow-worker, Titus, who was serving the Lord on the Mediterranean island of Crete. Paul had visited Crete in his later missionary travels and left Titus there to help build up the churches on this island. *“For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you” (1:5).*

One of the purposes of this letter was to remind Titus of his responsibilities in establishing the Cretan churches. He was to appoint elders, who were necessary for spiritual leadership, and he was to refute and correct the false teachers. *“For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, ¹¹ whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain” (1:10-11).*

In addition, Titus was to instruct and exhort the different groups within the churches in their responsibilities for godly living (chapter 2). The older men, the older women, the younger men, the younger women, and the Christian slaves were all instructed in how to fulfill their responsibilities for living godly lives. Godly living was crucial for healthy church and family life, and as a witness to unbelievers on the island of Crete. And this certainly applies today as well.

At the beginning of chapter 3, Paul told Titus to remind the Cretan Christians to be subject to civil authorities. *“Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men.”* As Christians, we need this constant reminder, whether it’s in reference to paying taxes or obeying speed limits.

There is a wonderful explanation of the gospel in Titus 3:3-7: the good news of salvation in Christ. In fact, the trustworthy statement (*“faithful saying”*) at the beginning of verse 8 is probably a specific reference to the wonderful description of the gospel in verses 5-7: *“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through*

Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

What a great summary of the gospel! It’s called a “trustworthy saying” in verse 8 is because it was - **and is** - the basic content or common confession of our Christian faith. This is a faithful or trustworthy statement.

In verses 9-11 Paul returned to the problem of the false teachers and their disruptive teachings.

Doctrinal Points

1. Avoid trivial discussions, which are unprofitable.

Verse 9: “But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless.”

The word “foolish” does not refer to funny or amusing conversations. No. Paul was talking about discussions that are irrelevant and trivial – discussions that are not worthwhile.

The “genealogies” were the Old Testament and apocryphal genealogies that the false teachers (the Judaizers) liked to quibble about. They discussed worthless ideas in these genealogies, like arguing about the names of Adam and Eve’s children (those that are not given in the Bible). They argued and nit-picked about details of the Old Testament Laws. They added laws and rituals that are not given in the Bible. Our Lord specifically condemned this practice (Matthew 15 and Mark 7).

Paul told Titus to avoid such disputes and discussions because they were not important. They were trivial, unprofitable, useless, worthless, and a waste of time. Foolish discussions always produce more heat than light. Titus was not to get involved and waste his valuable time with these worthless discussions.

This instruction is still true for us today. We should avoid trivial discussions that are not worthwhile. Our time is valuable – we shouldn’t waste it on worthless things!

Every now and then I receive a letter from a Christian man who likes to nit-pick about some trivial matter in the Bible or the Christian faith. He never asks about a doctrine that’s worthwhile. All he wants to do is argue about a trivial point. What do I do with his letters? I either write him a very short note - or I disregard his letter altogether. I refuse to get involved in his useless nit-picking.

I must admit at times I'd like to get involved in some of these trivial discussions. I enjoy getting off on tangents and into some of these arguments! But I'd be disobeying the direct command of Scripture if I did that. We're to avoid trivial discussions that are not profitable and worthwhile.

Don't give status to unimportant topics by arguing about them. Our discussions should center on topics that are helpful for building up our faith. Avoid trivial discussions that are unprofitable.

2. Warn divisive people who promote friction.

Verse 10: *"Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition."*

Did you ever meet a "divisive" Christian? Divisive Christians are never happy. They are always mouthing off - complaining about an issue or criticizing some person. They constantly "hop on their favorite hobby horse" of criticism. They constantly "grind their axe," and they're not content until they get others involved. As a result they cause factions within the body of Christ.

What should we do with Christians like that in the local church? We are to warn them! People who promote friction among believers must be warned. The spiritual leaders in the church should let them know that they're warped in their thinking and their character, and they're sinning in their conduct. Verse 11: *"... such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned."*

The spiritual leaders or elders are to give such a person two warnings, with as much love as possible, and with the idea of reclaiming this wayward Christian. However, if believers who are causing division will not respond, they are to be rejected.

In this connection, 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 says, *"And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."* A person who sows dissension must be warned twice, but if that person will not respond to the warnings, he or she is to be put out of the fellowship of the local church until they change. In fact, by their conduct, they have already taken themselves out of fellowship. I think that is what *"being self-condemned"* means (v11). "Three strikes and you're out" might be the best way to remember Titus 3:10.

This is not a pleasant responsibility for the elders of a congregation, but it must be done. It's a command from the Lord Jesus (Matthew 18:17). Spiritual leaders have been lax in this area of discipline, and thus there are many factions and divisions within evangelical churches today. In fact, many churches have been destroyed and cease to exist because of this very problem. When spiritual leaders don't address this problem properly, divisive people will continue to sow dissension until the church is basically ruined. We must warn divisive people who promote friction.

Practical Application

1. Let's not "major on the minors"!

Titus was told to avoid the foolish, irrelevant, trivial disputes and discussions of the Judaizing false teachers. Certainly an application of this for us today would be: "Don't major on the minors"!

Some Christians spend too much time arguing about what they think are "the things that God approves." Which translation of the Bible does God like best? What genre of music, or musical instruments, does God approve? What is the divine length of time and schedule for Sunday services? Should grape juice or wine should be used for communion? The list goes on and on.

While we all may have our own preferences in these areas, let's be careful not to create a major argument about relatively minor matters – and thus cause division in the church fellowship. Remember Colossians 3:15-17!

2. Do you have a "good work" schedule?

This question is not about your job, or the hours and days off at your place of employment. This question is about your schedule of good works and Christian service! Do you have one?

In verse 8, Paul told Titus, *"These things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men."*

Notice – ***be careful to maintain good works!*** Good works don't "just happen" - even for the Christian. We must be "careful to maintain good works," and this usually means that we must plan them and schedule them.

If you only do Christian service when you're "emotionally moved" to serve, you'll never do much service or accomplish much good work for the Lord. It's valuable to schedule your "good work" - maybe even write the schedule out as a motivator.

Our students at Emmaus Bible College do a lot of Christian service - more than some of them will ever do after they graduate. Do you know why? It's because the good works and Christian service are programmed into their time schedule while they're at Emmaus. It's part of their Bible College program. They've **got** to do it!

And it works! Needs are met! The students are blessed, and others are blessed! But if Christian service was not scheduled into their week, most of it wouldn't happen.

I think you see the point of this application. Do you have a "good work" schedule?