

## Avoid Foolish Disputes (Titus 3:8-15)

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### Background

1. Chapter 1: the needs of the fledgling church in Crete
  - Paul left Titus in Crete
  - Appointment of elders: their qualities
  - Job of the elders: hold fast to the scriptures, exhort and convict those who oppose
2. Chapters 2 and 3: instructions for the believing community, the church
  - Lives which exhibit a pattern of good works (Tit. 2:7)
  - Living so as to *adorn* the doctrine, or teaching of God (Tit. 2:10)
  - Last time: good works include obeying rulers and authorities (Tit. 3:1-2)

### Titus 3:8-15

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. But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless. Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned. When I send Artemas to you, or Tychicus, be diligent to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. Send Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their journey with haste, that they may lack nothing. And let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful. All who are with me greet you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all. Amen.<sup>1</sup>

### Three Primary Themes

1. The lives of believers are to exhibit good works
2. Unprofitable contention and strife are to be avoided
3. Christian fellowship is to be safeguarded from disruption

***First theme: The lives of believers should exhibit good works.***

1. **Believers are to be *careful to maintain* good works.**
  - “I want you to *Affirm constantly*” (v. 8)
  - “Be *careful* to maintain good works” (v. 8)

- “Maintain good works” (vv. 8, 14)

## 2. What are good works?

### A. Duty to the disadvantaged

God's concern for the disadvantaged and vulnerable is evident in Ezekiel [22:7](#), “In you [Jerusalem] they have made light of father and mother; in your midst they have oppressed the stranger; in you they have mistreated the fatherless and the widow.”

- Elderly (including father and mother)
- Stranger (foreigner, alien)
- Fatherless (orphans)
- Widows
- Poor “If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, Depart in peace, be warmed and filled, but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?” (James [2:15-16](#))

### B. Duty to family

#### I. Provide for family members when they are in need

“Honor widows who are really widows. But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God.” (1 Ti. [5:3-4](#))

### C. Duty to government and society

Includes obedience to civil authorities (Rom [13:1-7](#); Titus [3:1](#))

## 3. Motivation is love

*Favoring others over self.* Greek word for intense love is [ἀγάπη](#) [*agapē*]

## 4. The problem of 'sloppy agapē'

An aspect of 'works' which is often overlooked or deemed unimportant.

- The works we think about: big, visible deeds -- sometimes motivated by our desire to be recognized
- The works we tend to overlook: smaller, less visible, but often demonstrating our lack of love

### A. James - the book emphasizing the importance of works

- “But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No,' *lest you fall into judgment.*” (James 5:12)
- TRANSLATION Christians are to meet their commitments!

## B. How are we doing on our commitments?

### I. Social commitments

- Standing other people up
- Arriving perpetually late
- Inconsistently participating in Christian fellowship

### II. Family commitments

- Lacking commitment to our spouses: divorce is rampant
- Lacking commitment to our children:
  - Raising children in absentia
  - Entertaining or distracting children because it is easier than giving them our time or employing Biblical discipline

### III. Monetary commitments

- Frequently late on paying our bills
  - Not necessarily due to lack of money
    - Misdirected priorities
    - Unbiblical financial practices
- Unable to consistently hold down a job
  - Failure to consistently showing up to work on time
  - Working less than a full day
  - A poor investment for our boss
- Result: unable to meet urgent needs of others (e.g., the poor)

### IV. Abusing Grace

#### a. Grace

- Grace: another extends forbearance that we *don't* legitimately deserve
- Dependant upon the good will and volition of the party which has suffered wrong
- Not unconditionally extracted or assumed by the party doing the wrong: this is *presumption*, not *grace*

#### b. Extorting grace from nonbelievers

- Paying a bill late is akin to extracting an interest-free loan from the lender, often an unbeliever
- When unbelievers react appropriately to our “sloppy agapē,” we are quick to cry, “I’m being persecuted for the cause of Christ!”

## V. Faithful in little, faithful in much principle

- Parable of the Ten Minas, “And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.’” (Luke [19:17](#))
- God cares about the details - the little things matter: they are a tell-tale indicator of the depth of our Christian walk.

## 5. Good works are a witness to God

- Paul told Titus that our lives are to *adorn* God’s teaching (Tit. [2:10](#)): they should demonstrate the attractive benefits of God’s principles applied in real life.
- When our lives are like that of unbelievers, or even *worse*...
  - ... we are a false witness because we deny, by our actions, what we profess with our mouths
  - ... we malign God’s Word because we claim it as our guide for living
  - ... we give God Himself a bad name, similar to Israel’s failure to follow God (Ezekiel [36:22-23](#))

Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name's sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went. And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am the LORD," says the Lord GOD, "when I am hallowed in you before their eyes."

## Second theme: Unprofitable contention and strife are to be avoided

### 1. What are we to avoid?

- Foolish disputes (moronic - thoughts devoid of understanding)
- Genealogies (endless genealogies, 1Ti. [3:4](#))
- Strife and contention
- Quarrels or fights concerning the law of Moses
  - Commandments of men who turn from the truth (Tit. [1:4](#))
  - An emphasis upon *law* and *commandments*, these individuals are

peddling some form of legalism

- Jewish fables (Tit. 1:4), old wives' fables (1Ti. 4:7)

## 2. Why?

- They are *unprofitable and useless* (Tit. 3:9)
- Cause disputes rather than edification (1Ti. 3:4)
- They tear down, the very opposite of edification or building up, οἰκοδομῶ [*oikodomēō*] (1Cor. 14:26)

## **Third theme: Christian fellowship is to be safeguarded from disruption**

### 1. Characteristics of the divisive man

- Almost always zealous, but lacking in knowledge
- Teaching is out of balance and neglects important related passages
  - Tend to make sweeping conclusions based on isolated passages
  - Unable to discern primary teachings from secondary, less unimportant teachings
  - Stuck on bizarre interpretations
    - “divisive” is αἰρετικὸν [*airetikon*], from which we get the term *heretic* which came to denote the peculiar or unorthodox beliefs held by the divisive one
    - “... having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk, desiring to be teachers of the law, *understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm*” (1Ti. 1:6-7)
- Proudful
  - Questions often are insincere, not what they appear
    - Draw attention to themselves or to exhibit what they know to others
    - Undermine the authority of another who is productively teaching
    - Interfere with the edification of the sheep
  - Lack of respect for those God has placed in authority
    - Desiring to be teachers so see themselves in competition with existing teachers

### 2. Example of a disrupter

- Young man in our home group who asserted forcefully that the author of Hebrews is discussing a new *priesthood* where he is actually speaking about a new *covenant* (Heb. 7:22; 8; 9)
- A denial that the old covenant has passed away
- An attempt to place believers in a continuing position under the law
- An attempt to create a special priesthood, like the Aaronic, but ongoing in the NT (not the general priesthood of believers)
- Completely missing the primary NT message: the old [Mosaic] covenant has

passed away, believers are related to God through the new covenant

- Made no difference to him concerning any formal training I might have in the Scriptures or that I had studied the Scriptures for almost as many years as he had been alive

### 3. God's program of discipline

#### A. Initially, God's concern is for the correction and restoration of the errant individual

"... avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. *And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.*" (2 Ti [2:23–26](#))

- Elders are to be gentle, patient, and humble when attempting to apply correction
- The desire is for the disrupter to come to understand the error and repent
- Notice too: such a person Paul says has been taken captive by the devil to do his will. What is the devil's will?
  - To get us to play defense rather than offense.
  - To distract with questions and arguments which undermine our progress and dilute our effectiveness in ministering to those who truly are learning
  - The time-wasting power of endless questions (e.g., the child who always asks 'why?')

#### B. Ultimately, God's concern is for the safety of others in the fellowship

"... *their message will spread like cancer.* Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they *overthrow the faith of some.*" (2Ti. [2:17-18](#))

##### I. Separation for protection of His Sheep

- Jesus to Peter: "Do you love Me? . . . [then] feed my sheep . . . tend My Lambs ... feed my sheep" (John [21](#))
- God has established a point at which we favor protection of His sheep over restoration of the wayward individual
- Paul evidently understood American baseball: *Three strikes and you're out!*
  - "Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition

knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned”

- Warped: ἐξέστραπται [exestraptai], “departed from the patterns of correct behavior”
- “If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, *he is proud*, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. *From such withdraw yourself.*” (1 Ti 6:3–5)
- Assumes an authority structure is in place in order to reject the divisive one
- Hence the need for established elders to be present in every church (Tit. 1:5)

## Summary of Titus (if time)

1. Christian fellowship is to be ordered with an established authority structure of elders
  - Ideally, each church will have multiple elders (Tit. 1:5)
  - Elders are to be men, not women (Tit. 1:6 cf. 1Ti. 2:12)
  - Elders are to be persons of established Christian character (Tit. 1:6-9)
2. The job description of an elder
  - Hold fast the faithful word so as not to drift (Tit. 1:9)
  - Through sound teaching, to exhort and convict those who oppose (Tit. 1:9)
    - Hence, elders must know the Scriptures!
  - At times, the job will require confrontation
    - Mouths must be stopped (Tit. 1:11)
    - Divisive men must be rejected (Tit. 3:10)
    - Rebuke with all authority (Tit. 2:15)
3. Qualities of a sound church
  - A mix of ages, all interacting productively (Tit. 2:2-10)
  - Sound doctrine is taught which is producing sound living (Tit. 2:1)
  - Believers are exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit: sobriety, temperance, faith, love, patience, reverence, discretion, chastity
  - Believers are living in obedience to rulers and authorities (Tit. 3:1)
  - Believers are exhibiting a pattern of good works such that the teaching is adorned in the eyes of those outside (Tit. 2:10)
4. Anchored between advents in the present age
  - Looking back to the crucifixion of Jesus: reminding us of our separation to God from the present age (Tit. 2:11-12)

- Looking forward to the blessed hope, the any-moment return of Jesus: motivation for holy living in the present age (Tit. [2:13-14](#))
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Endnotes:

1. [NKJV, Tit. 3:8-15](#)
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Sources:

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**Links Mentioned Above**

[a](http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm) - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm>.