

Navigating Controversies

Titus 3:9-15

September 1st, 2019

Big idea: Avoid divisive topics and divisive people. Help faithful workers.

Intro

Gerry Breshears: Wise Christians know that the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing. They have a nose for significance and create a climate of unity around central issues while moderating and directing discussion over secondary issues. They see how seemingly insignificant matters may undercut the central points of the gospel, even though they may appear benign, cultured, or loving.

Mature churches understand Paul's admonition to "Avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless" (Titus 3:9) but also know to "Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him" (Titus 3:10).

To build healthy churches, Titus is told to focus on doctrine and duty, the gospel and its implications for living, truth and life.

Titus needed to appoint elders in every city who would be able to hold fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that they may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict namely the many rebellious men, empty talks and deceivers who are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gains (1:5, 9-11)

Titus 1:5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you,

Titus 1:9-11 holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. ¹⁰ For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, ¹¹ who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not *teach* for the sake of sordid gain.

Yet he will put some guard rails up for Titus at the end letter.

There are some controversies that should be avoided.

Yes, contend for the faith, hold to sound doctrine, silence those who are teaching destructive things, but there are some controversies to be avoided. They are needless.

There are some people who love to get caught up in those controversies. According to the verses we will look at today, *they* should be warned and then avoided as well.

But if doctrine matters and we are to care about sound doctrine, how do we know if something is worth arguing about or if it is a controversy that should be avoided? How do we know if we are "contending for the faith" or just being contentious?

1. Some **controversies** should be avoided. (3:9)
 - a. Notice it begins with a contrast (but).
 - i. **Titus 3:8** This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men.

- ii. Rather than engaging in good deeds in a way that is good and profitable, perhaps some were getting caught up in foolish controversies, etc.
 - iii. That would be unprofitable and worthless rather than good and profitable
 - b. “Avoid” here lit. means to “go around” or “keep aloof from”
 - i. Think about driving on a winding mountain road in Idaho with a sign that say “watch for rock” and you know there may be large rocks in the road to avoid/go around.
 - c. What we are to avoid is described in four ways:
 - i. Foolish controversies
 - ii. Genealogies
 - iii. Strife
 - iv. Disputes about the law
 - d. All are considered unprofitable and worthless.
 - e. Foolish controversies
 - i. **2 Timothy 2:23** But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels.
 - ii. It’s not ALL controversy that is to be avoided. Jesus waded directly in to controversy many times – controversy about the Sabbath, the source of His miracles, His authority, His identity. Paul was so controversial that he was often driven out of cities by people pelting him with rocks. He urged Timothy to fight the good fight of faith (1 tim 1:18-19, 6:12) and told Titus that false teachers must be silenced and rebuked (1:11,13)
 - 1. So then not all controversy is banned, but only foolish controversies. Speculations, in contrast with God’s revealed truth
 - 2. We must be concerned about the purity of the church and the unity of the church. Foolish controversies endanger the unity of the church. Refusing to ever engage in rigorous debate about any theological issue or refusing to ever draw a line in the sand and say ‘this is essential’ endangers the purity of the church.
 - iii. Levels of certainty and importance on theological issues
 - 1 Corinthians 15:3** For I delivered to you as of **first importance** what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,
 - 1. **Die** for
 - a. “Die for” are truths that are core to the gospel and God’s nature, to knowingly deny these is to place yourself outside the faith
 - 2. **Divide** for
 - a. “Divide for” are truths that are significant and would make it difficult to co-exist in the same church body
 - i. Denominations have typically arisen over these issues.

3. **Debate** for
 - a. “Debate for” are truths that we can have hearty debate within the same church body and unless someone tries to make it a first order issue, we can debate and disagree but happily still fellowship together
 4. **Decide** for
 - a. “Decide for” are truths that are practically opinions either because scripture says so little about them or they are relatively unimportant
 - i. It’s at this level that acceptance is a virtue and legalism is a real danger.
- iv. Seven considerations to determine in which category an issue belongs (From Erik Thoennes)
1. Biblical **clarity**
 2. Relevance to the character of **God**
 3. Relevance to the essence of the **gospel**
 4. Biblical **frequency** and significance (how often in scripture it is taught, and what weight scripture places upon it)
 5. Effect on other **doctrines**
 - a. For example, tweaking the doctrine of hell pulls on the holiness of God and the necessity of the cross.
 6. Consensus among **Christians** (past and present)
 - a. We take all these together, so just because something is in disagreement with the majority of Christians around you, doesn’t mean you are wrong. But you should at least consider why most other believers haven’t agreed with you. And you should be careful about pushing hard on it.
 7. Effect on **personal** and church life
- f. There were debates on genealogy
- i. **1 Timothy 1:3-4** As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, ⁴ nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than *furthering* the administration of God which is by faith.
 - ii. Not referring to the genealogies in the gospels or in the OT that are critical for showing the lineage of the Messiah. Problem is with fanciful or allegorical interpretations of them.
- g. Strife is listed as a deed of the flesh rather than a fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:20.
- h. Disputes about the law likely refers to a particular form of controversy that kept getting stirred up about whether Christians were still bound to follow the OT ceremonial laws related to food, circumcision, and holy days.
- i. That’s certainly not an unimportant topic. That is relevant to the gospel. It’s a first order issue.
 - ii. And yet Titus was warned to avoid these disputes. Why? Perhaps there are some disputes with people that are entrenched in unbiblical view that are unprofitable to get caught up in. Titus,

tasked with establishing healthy churches, appointing and training elders, and teaching the people, if he is not careful, could see all of his time consumed with argumentative people pushing a false gospel.

2. Some **people** should be avoided. (3:10-11)
 - a. “Reject” is actually a stronger word than avoid – it has the idea of refusing to listen to, or as several translations word it, “having nothing to do with.”
 - b. I would say most people struggle with that because we think of all the ways it could be abused, just like in the section in chapter 1 where Titus is told to silence certain rebellious men who are teaching things they ought not to teach.
 - i. We worry about a power hungry man or board silencing opposition over trivial things or “rejecting” someone on a minor point of doctrine.
 - ii. Such a man would not meet the qualifications of leadership given in chapter 1.
 - iii. **Titus 1:7-9b** not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, ⁸ but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, ⁹ holding fast the faithful word...
 - c. Look at the process here and the type of person described.
 - i. The person
 1. They are described as “factious” – someone who stirs up division and conflict.
 2. Some struggle with the idea of “rejecting” someone, and yet in the scenario described to *not act* is to allow this factious person to affect many people.
 3. Just recently read a quote that said “the ripple of a church split goes on for at least a decade beyond when the immediate crisis dissipates.”
 4. Definitely times that a church might need to split or people might need to leave a church. What this passage is describing is someone who seems to love to divide not someone who needs to divide over serious error. They may tend to distort words or assume the worst motives to fuel debate and conflict.
 - ii. The process
 1. He is to be warned. And warned again if it continues.
 2. It doesn’t give a script, but it might sound something like, “Hey brother, I don’t know if you realize but the way you’re going about this issue is stirring up more controversy than their needs to be. You need to take the issue to...Or, you need to be careful not to assume... or, this really is a lower order doctrine that your making a big deal out of...”
 - iii. It returns to the person because it says if they still don’t respond, it’s revealing somethings about themselves.
 1. They are “perverted,” which is a word we associate with some type of sexual deviancy, but it simply means warped, or turned aside.
 2. Their actions are sin, and it’s ongoing, and so they are condemning themselves, not that others are placing them under condemnation.

3. Some people should be helped. (3:12-15)
 - a. Another category of people come up at the end.
 - i. They are fellow gospel workers with Paul.
 - b. Some we know more about than others.
 - i. Tychicus comes up 5 times in the NT, and is described as a beloved brother, faithful servant, fellow bond servant in the Lord (Col. 4:7) and was sent to Ephesus in a similar way that he is now being sent to Crete.
 - ii. Apollos shows up throughout Acts and 1 Corinthians as someone “mighty in the scriptures” who was also teachable.
 - iii. Zenas and Artemas we know nothing else about.
 - c. They are to be helped, diligently helped
 - i. As a church, you have diligently helped many unique situations recently.
 1. Friends of the Ledfords that were adopting
 2. Aaron and Eliana’s family – 4 months rent, a house full of furniture, a vehicle
 3. Projects at people’s homes when they have been injured or limited in other ways
 - ii. Context here seems to be in support of missionaries, similar to 3 John 1:5-8
 1. **3 John 1:5-8** Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, and especially *when they are* strangers; ⁶ and they have testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. ⁷ For they went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. ⁸ Therefore we ought to support such men, so that we may be fellow workers with the truth.
 - a. Send them on their way
 - b. In a manner worthy of God
 - c. They went out for the sake of the Name – not adventure or travel
 - d. So we should support them to be fellow workers



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2 **Timothy 2:23** But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels.

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4. Decide for

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5. Effect on other doctrines
6. Consensus among Christians (past and present)
7. Effect on personal and church life

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