

WHAT IF . . . ?

What If a Person Is an Unrepentant Troublemaker?

Romans 16:17; Titus 1:4–7; 3:3–11



LET'S BEGIN HERE

In his message, Chuck Swindoll said:

Every minister of the gospel must be “as wise as a serpent and as harmless as a dove.” We who are engaged in ministry must be both tough and tender. Not either/or but both/and. Both devoted and disciplined. Both compassionate and strong. Both understanding and discerning. Both gracious with people and impervious to destructive criticism.

This is a huge responsibility! Before we dismiss the charge to strike a “both/and” balance in dealing with unrepentant people as something relegated solely to pastors, we need to remember that *every one of us is a minister of the gospel*.

In this *Searching the Scriptures* study, let's delve deeper into the background of the book of Titus—the epistle containing the principles of balance as a minister of the gospel.



DIGGING DEEPER

Now would be a good time for you to look at the table of contents page of your study Bible. Do you see where Titus fits into the overall organization of the Bible? Titus is part of what we call the *Epistles*—a genre of literature in the New Testament written by apostles to provide believers guidance for daily living. Titus is a Pauline epistle, which simply means that Paul penned the letter to Titus.

Titus is one of the lesser-known epistles of the New Testament, so take some time to get to know the book. Locate a commentary on the book of Titus and spend some time reading the introductory material that orients you to the nature, context, and literary uniqueness of this letter. All of this will help you discover the meaning of the passage you are studying.

Quotable

You want a church that's healthy and encouraging and positive? It starts with you.

It started with me.

— Charles R. Swindoll



**Surveying the Shelves . . . Background on the Book of Titus**

Paul identified himself as the author of the letter to Titus, calling himself a “bond-servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ” (Titus 1:1 NASB). The origin of Paul’s relationship with Titus is shrouded in mystery, though we can gather that Titus may have been converted under the ministry of Paul, who called him “my true child in a common faith” (1:4 NASB).

Titus accompanied Paul on his third missionary journey, during which the apostle sent him to Corinth at least once (2 Corinthians 2:12–13; 7:5–7, 13–15; 8:6, 16–24). Paul clearly held Titus in a position of great respect as a friend and fellow worker for the gospel, praising Titus for his affection, his earnestness, and his bringing comfort to others.

Paul wrote his letter to Titus from Nicopolis in AD 63, after the apostle’s release from his Roman imprisonment. Upon leaving Timothy in Ephesus to minister there, Paul accompanied Titus to the island of Crete, where he intended Titus to lead and organize the island’s churches in their early years of existence. While the gospel had no doubt spread to Crete soon after Peter’s sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2:11), Paul and Titus likely evangelized on the island in the weeks before Paul commissioned Titus to a leadership position there.

Why Is Titus So Important?

Three summaries of the incarnation dot the pages of Titus, providing a framework within which the Christian can view the work of God in the world and in individual lives (Titus 1:1–4; 2:11–14; 3:4–7). All three passages involve the manifestation, or appearance, of God in Christ, rooting the Christian faith in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. When God the Son took on human flesh in the person of Jesus, He poured out His grace on all humanity, cleansing us from sin and purifying us for Himself.

What’s the Big Idea?

The doctrine of the incarnation in the letter to Titus grounds its message of producing right living through the careful attention to theological truth. The churches on Crete were just as susceptible to false teachers as any other church, so Paul directed Titus to establish a group of faithful elders to oversee the doctrinal purity and good conduct of the believers on Crete. Paul exhorted Titus to “speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1 NASB), a clear direction that this should be the young pastor’s primary role.

However, Paul also understood that when a body of believers embraces sound doctrine, the result is changed and purified lives that produce “good deeds” (mentioned in Titus 2:7, 14; 3:8, 14 NASB). God’s grace is the motivation for all good deeds. Paul gave instructions to Titus about the roles of specific groups of people—older men, older women, young women, young men, and slaves—as well as general instructions to all believers about their conduct. Right living was essential because Christ “gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed,” saving us “by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit” (2:14; 3:5 NASB).



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What are some personal applications that you take away from reading the background of Titus?

How Do I Apply This?

How seriously do you consider your beliefs about God in the overall scheme of your life? The book of Titus reminds us that our beliefs about God impact every decision we make. Sometimes it is difficult for believers today to see the point of getting all worked up about the person and nature of Christ or the doctrine of the Trinity. However, Paul made clear that a church that teaches and preaches sound doctrine will see results in the lives of its people. Not only will people be saved from their sins, but God's grace will also motivate them to live out that saving faith with renewed and purified lives.

Many churches today focus more on the form of their worship—music styles, lighting, and building designs—than they do on the content of the faith they mean to proclaim. And while the form of a church's worship is vital to reaching its community for Christ, without a firm base of sound doctrine, the church will lay its foundation in shifting and sinking sand. Make doctrine a priority in your own life, as well as encouraging it in your churches. Nothing is more significant than a solid foundation in Christ.

What Are “These Teachings”?

In his message, Chuck refers to Titus 3:8: “This is a trustworthy saying, and I want you to insist on **these teachings** so that all who trust in God will devote themselves to doing good. These teachings are good and beneficial for everyone” (emphasis added).

What are “these teachings?” The reader cannot definitively know unless he or she looks back to previous verses for context.

Chuck says, “You’ve heard me say it before, and I’ll repeat it. Every verse has a context. This is a classic example of a verse in the middle of a context.”

Which verses in Titus 3 specify what “teachings” Paul referred to?



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Chuck referred his listeners to Titus 3:4–7 to glean the context of “these teachings”:

“When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior. Because of his grace he declared us righteous and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life.”

Take a few moments to read “these teachings,” so you know them for yourself.

Why did God our Savior save us?

What did He do with our sins?

Through whom do we have new life?

Are believers right in Christ’s sight?



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What future occurrence can we be confident in?

Accurate teaching prevents counterfeit faith. Paul wrote this letter to Titus to thwart false teaching, namely the attempts of some troublemakers to constrain the grace of Jesus with hierarchy and legalism: “Do not get involved in foolish discussions about spiritual pedigrees or in quarrels and fights about obedience to Jewish laws” (Titus 3:9).



Chuck’s Application: A Helpful Guideline

Chuck concludes his message with an ancient guideline passed down within the Christian faith for centuries:

“In essentials . . . unity. In nonessentials . . . liberty. In all things . . . charity.”

Jot down your paraphrase of this guideline, noting how it relates to the background of Titus.

What are some of your takeaways from today’s study?



A FINAL PRAYER

Lord, help me to extend to others the grace You have given me. Through Your Spirit, help me to call others to repentance when necessary—and to joyfully restore the repentant. Lord, keep me from relishing the opportunity to correct a brother or sister in Christ. And may I be a source of support and encouragement to those in spiritual leadership. In Jesus’ name, amen.



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For the 2017 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by the Pastoral Ministries Department in collaboration with Mark Tobey, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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