Tough Grace in Difficult Places: A Study of the Book of Titus

A Little Letter of Enormous Importance

Selected Scriptures from Titus

The Heart of the Matter

Buried in the back of your New Testament, somewhere between the underlined pages of Romans and Hebrews, sits a little-known and even lesser-read book. But don't confuse *unknown* with *unimportant*. Paul's letter to Titus teaches us the vital balance of grace and godliness in three areas of our lives, which creates a winning combination that draws others to Jesus Christ.

Discovering the Way

1. Four Key Questions

To get a handle on the book as a whole, we need to find the answers to four basic questions.

2. Surveying the Big Picture

Titus found himself in the midst of a transient culture with fleeting values. Sounds a bit like today. How do we help people grow to become more like Christ in such a culture? Paul's answer is to blend grace with godly living into the flow of life.

Starting Your Journey

A balanced Christian life is demonstrated in three areas. First, grace and godliness make a church effective and stable. Second, grace and godliness keep a home sensible and sane. Third, grace and godliness cause the world to be curious and attracted.

Tools for Digging Deeper

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Tough Grace in Difficult Places: A Study of the Book of Titus

Two Men on a Mission, with Us

Titus 1:1–4

The Heart of the Matter

Paul and Titus ministered side-by-side until the apostle dispatched his young protégé for a difficult task in a difficult place. Knowing that Titus had nobody to bolster his faith when he felt low or to encourage him when he was criticized, Paul wrote a short but significant letter to fill that need. Though they were separated by many miles, both men shared the same cause. And though separated from Paul and Titus by two thousand years, we, too, are summoned to live out our identity in Christ and fulfill our personal calling to make disciples of Christ.

Discovering the Way

1. Paul, the Writer (Titus 1:1–3)

Paul introduced himself in the opening verses of this book, but we learn more than just his name. We learn his identity, his purpose, and his calling.

2. Titus, the Recipient (Titus 1:4)

As Titus unrolled this scroll and read the beloved name of Paul, he was reminded of their personal bond, their common faith, and a divine blessing.

Starting Your Journey

Though both Paul and Titus are dead, the ministry of Christ continues. As we carry on, we should remember these four questions. First, Paul's identity leads us to ask, "What is my identity?" Second, Paul's purpose begs us to ask, "What is my purpose?" Third, Paul's calling challenges us to ask, "What is my calling?" Fourth, Paul's relationship motivates us to ask, "With whom am I cultivating a relationship?"

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Looking for a Few Good Men

Titus 1:5–9

The Heart of the Matter

Few things are more important for a local church than having the right people in leadership. It's safe to say that most, if not all, of us have been in churches that lacked qualified leaders. And so we are not surprised that Paul addressed the subject of competent leadership immediately. It was of utmost importance that Titus selected the very best men to oversee the churches on Crete. But Paul's inspired list of qualifications was not only for Titus; it's still valid for us today.

Discovering the Way

1. The Main Reasons Why Titus Was Left (Titus 1:5)

Titus was left on the island of Crete to do a difficult job—to clean up a spiritual mess.

2. The "Blameless" Qualities Elders Must Possess (Titus 1:6–9)

The dirty job of cleaning up the churches couldn't be accomplished alone, so Paul instructed Titus to find a group of men who were blameless in their marriage and family, and in their character and conduct, to exhort and protect the churches.

Starting Your Journey

Qualified spiritual leaders possess at least three qualities. First, in the privacy of the home, they earn the right to be respected. Second, in their personal life, they model the reasons to be selected. And finally, in the public arena, they fill the role for others to be protected.

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Tough Grace in Difficult Places: A Study of the Book of Titus

Dealing with the Difficult and Dangerous

Titus 1:10–16

The Heart of the Matter

Living in the real world presents harsh realities we cannot escape and dare not ignore. The inexperienced and immature often think the "evil empire" is limited to the frightening underworld of terrorists and gangsters, rapists and molesters, thieves and murderers. But the truth is, there are enemies of righteousness—"wolves in sheep's clothing"—who are equally evil. Unless they are identified, refuted, and silenced, their evil influence will take a serious toll on the body of Christ. That is why spiritual leaders must be discerning, courageous, and honorable.

Discovering the Way

1. Three Ways Spiritual Leadership Emerges

In the privacy of the home, the spiritual leader earns the right to be respected. In the personal life, the spiritual leader models the reasons to be selected. In the public arena, the spiritual leader fills the role for others to be protected.

2. Three Wrongs False Teachers Commit (Titus 1:10–16)

Spiritual leaders are to love and nourish the flock, but they are also to protect and defend the flock. So keep a wary eye open for danger.

Starting Your Journey

How do you keep alert to the dangers of false teachers? First, commit to living in the real world. Second, carry on a courageous strategy. Third, hold the standard high.

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Tough Grace in Difficult Places: A Study of the Book of Titus

Older Men and Women: Listen Up!

Titus 2:1–4

The Heart of the Matter

Christians have been taught for years that the church is a family. Not a slick, efficient business full of professionals, not an entertaining theater for actors, and not an academic institution. The church is God's earthly family—brothers and sisters growing, laughing, playing, and suffering together. In this section, Paul is going to deliver some much needed "family counsel."

Discovering the Way

1. Categories of People Singled Out

People have always watched how God's people live their lives. Paul wanted, therefore, to put the churches on Crete on the alert to this fact.

2. Three Who Are Initially Identified (Titus 2:1–4)

In any church, there are three groups who come under the microscope: the pastor, older men, and older women.

Starting Your Journey

All of us are being watched, but especially those who are older. To ensure a good testimony, two points are important to remember. First, age mixed with maturity provides credibility that can't be ignored. Second, modeling and mentoring cultivate an integrity that won't be overlooked.

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Tough Grace in Difficult Places: A Study of the Book of Titus

Making Your Testimony Slam-Dunk Convincing

Titus 2:4–10

The Heart of the Matter

Christians are always searching for ways to share the gospel. But among the myriad approaches, there is one method that is not only effective, it's impossible to ignore or deliberately push aside. Interestingly, it appears in a section of Scripture rarely, if ever, used in seminars on evangelism. But the longer we examine this method, the more we'll realize that it holds the secret of convincing others that Jesus Christ has transformed our lives—and that He can do the same for them.

Discovering the Way

1. Reminder of the Context of Chapter 2

If people see you live an authentic Christian life, they will be open to hear spiritual things. Not surprisingly, Paul didn't send Titus a letter full of theories but a letter full of practical advice for Titus, for older men, and for older women.

2. Three Groups Whose Lives Are Being Watched (Titus 2:4–10)

As we learned in the last lesson and just reviewed, we're being watched—especially those who minister. But there are other groups under observation—those who are younger and those who are employed.

Starting Your Journey

Remember that you're being watched. So do a quick self-inspection: What does your testimony look like? If it's less than slam-dunk, then take this to heart: *The most effective presentation of the gospel begins with a Christlike life.*

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Tough Grace in Difficult Places: A Study of the Book of Titus

Tough Grace

Titus 2:11–15

The Heart of the Matter

There are few doctrinal truths more important, more valuable, and therefore more misrepresented than grace. Some abuse the doctrine of grace by indulging in their carnality. As Paul put it, they "continue in sin so that grace may increase" (Romans 6:1). Such abuse is never condoned, excused, or encouraged in the Scriptures. "May it never be!" (6:2) was Paul's passionate reaction to cheap grace. True grace—tough grace, as we shall see—sustains the high standard of obedience, which results in a life of self-control and godliness.

Discovering the Way

1. Grace and Salvation (Titus 2:11)

Paul began at the beginning of a grace relationship with God—the salvation of souls.

2. Grace and Sanctification (Titus 2:12)

Christians are free from the eternal penalty of sin but are still hounded by the temporal power of sin.

3. Grace and Glorification (Titus 2:13)

The first point, Grace and Salvation, looked back at what grace provided. The second point, Grace and Sanctification, looked at what grace teaches "in the present age." Glorification looks ahead at what grace perfects.

4. Grace and Redemption (Titus 2:14)

Redeeming grace provides wretches like us a hope for a blessed future.

Starting Your Journey

What's the big deal about grace? It's simple, really. *When we truly embrace grace, we won't casually abuse grace.*

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Tough Grace in Difficult Places: A Study of the Book of Titus

Living Before a Watching World

Titus 3:1–8

The Heart of the Matter

There is no more exacting ordeal for a Christian than living in the public eye. The public is looking, hoping to spot flaws. Once observed, they are quick to judge and criticize, and their memory of our failure is long lasting. Finding inconsistencies and irritabilities fuels their fire of unbelief. Non-Christians only live in the here-and-now and are unaware of another, better world. But if we are to help their unbelief turn into belief, we must prop open the eternal door. We can help them see beyond today with our good deeds.

Discovering the Way

1. Remembering Three Statements from the Scriptures

Our world is dark, desperate, and doubting. And that is why the Lord leaves us here and hasn't taken us to Heaven—so that we will be witnesses to His mercy, grace, and love.

2. Being Submissive Citizens and Good Neighbors (Titus 3:1–2)

The importance of a life well lived before a skeptical world was paramount in Paul's mind. Two good places for us to start are to be good citizens and good neighbors.

3. Humbling Reminders and Amazing Grace (Titus 3:3–7)

Being good citizens and neighbors is *what* we should be, but *why*?

4. Balancing Right Belief and Convincing Behavior (Titus 3:8)

Paul summed up his command with *how* to live in front of a watching world.

Starting Your Journey

Keep in mind these two reminders while living before a watching world. First, *it takes authenticity and integrity to win a hearing.* Second, *it's impossible to convince anyone of any truth you are not living.*

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The Tough Side of Ministry

Titus 3:8–11

The Heart of the Matter

Both hospitals and churches face a similar danger—the healthy may catch a disease that could kill them. Invariably, difficult people, Christians who have strayed from the truth and refuse to return, filter into our churches and spread the cancer of division and strife. Strong leaders must learn to endure it wisely. And 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.

Discovering the Way

1. A Realistic Fact

While all leaders tend to be targets of criticism, those engaged in ministry, at all levels, become recipients of some of the most vicious attacks.

2. A Brief Scriptural Survey

A look at Moses, David, Nehemiah, Job, John, and Paul, along with some principles, will illustrate the fact that leaders, and particularly godly leaders, are walking pin cushions of criticism.

3. A Wise Warning (Romans 16:17–18)

Whether they were on the island of Crete or in the metropolitan city of Rome, Paul expected troublemakers to arise, and he warned every leader in the church to put on a tough hide.

Starting Your Journey

No leader is immune from critics, and Titus provides a specific example of how to handle rabble-rousers by teaching us *what to speak* (Titus 3:8), *when to avoid* (3:9), and *whom to reject* (3:10–11).

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When Doing What's Hard Is Best

1 Timothy 5:20–21; Titus 3:10–11

The Heart of the Matter

God's work is sacred. So when a person engaged in ministry repeatedly defies God's high and holy standards, Paul's judgment and command are uncompromising: that individual is "perverted" and must be removed. The very reason God's work is holy is because He is holy. Those who minister will never do so without some failures, because they are not holy as He is. God's grace, however, is sufficient to forgive those frailties. But those who cover up a lifestyle of sin behind the facade of sacred ministry must be confronted and removed.

Discovering the Way

1. From Tabernacle to Temple to Hearts

In His infinite creativity, God has varied the method by which His sacred work has been performed, but His standard has never changed: He requires holiness from those who serve Him.

2. When a Leader Is Accused (1 Timothy 5:19–22)

At times in the life of a church, an accusation comes against one of its spiritual leaders. Paul instructed Timothy to act only on hard evidence accompanied by provable facts.

3. When a Leader Falls (Titus 3:10–11)

If a leader continues in his or her sin—continues to cover the stench of his or her sin under the perfume of sacredness—and causes factions in the church, what are you to do?

Starting Your Journey

Confronting ongoing sin in a leader should never be taken lightly. Begin the process with the facts in hand and the good of the ministry in view. And only discipline a leader in a spirit of love and after much prayer, with restoration as the goal.

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Covering All the Final Bases

Titus 3:12–15

The Heart of the Matter

When Paul closed his letters, he commonly mentioned various people and situations as if running through a mental checklist. People he hadn't mentioned before, he named. Situations he hadn't addressed, he covered. It's as if he were summing up those individuals he loved and those issues he considered most important, then wrapping them into one final bundle. That was exactly what Paul did in his letter to Titus. Here, in these concluding four verses, we read of what was close to the apostle's heart and should be close to ours: the difficulties of life are easier to bear with friends at our side and with an attitude of encouragement and grace.

Discovering the Way

1. Essential Truths to Keep in Balance

There are two essential truths we should keep in mind. First, God's sacred work usually occurs through people. Second, God's sacred work plan is unfolding, often in spite of people.

2. Final Priorities to Keep in Perspective (Titus 3:12–15)

Looking closely at Paul's relational heart reveals a few priorities that will help us face the difficulties of life.

Starting Your Journey

Life is hard to bear sometimes, but with friends it is bearable. This is particularly true if we extend grace to all by keeping some practical advice in mind. First, *don't let challenges drive you away. Stay close.* Second, *don't discount the value of the unknowns. Encourage someone.*

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