

“Are You a Help or a Hindrance to Your Congregation?”

Penetrating a Dark World

Various Scriptures

The Rev. Ted Wood

April 21, 2017

Ted: Don, would you lead us to the throne of grace with a piece of music? (*Music*)
Jesus Christ is risen today. Alleluia!

Participant: Amen.

Ted: Lord God, after the new birth and the word of God, the body of Christ, Your church, is our most precious gift. We pray that we may always, in our actions and in our attitudes, cause that church to be of great importance in our lives. Make us eager to serve her and to support her and encourage her. And we pray this in Your name. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Ted: What I try to do when I have a chance to talk or teach here at Brave Men is to take what Bruce has been teaching and look it over, and decide what in that strikes me. I don't try to follow up on Bruce. I don't try to teach a lesson in his place. I'm not capable of doing that.

So as I looked through the lessons from the beginning of the teaching on Titus, two things struck me. One is going to be very brief. And it has to do with a passage, and I think it's Titus 2:2, which talks about older men. And then I'm going to get on to the question, because so much of Titus 1 deals with the church and its organization and its leadership and its orderliness. I wanted to talk about challenges to us in living in the church and living with each other in the body of Christ.

You know, there are many reasons we admire Bruce. I'm always intrigued by why so many men would come out to hear him speak. And I just sat down and made a list of those reasons that we admire him and why we show up and find his teaching inspiring.

He's a successful businessman. He's a selfless boss. He's a college football star, or one level below a star. He's a Naval officer. He was wounded in action in Viet Nam. He was a pastor.

You know, he has an earned Ph.D. There are a lot of pastors who go around and say, "Dr. This." It's not earned; it's a given degree, it's an honorary degree.

I entered a Ph.D. program at Pitt and I stopped after the first class because I knew it would be a total disaster. I knew I couldn't do it. It was just too much work. So anybody who earns a Ph.D. I greatly admire. And he has an earned Ph.D., with studies at Oxford university.

He's the starter and supporter of many missions. He is a scholar, a faithful churchman, a faithful husband, a faithful father, and an invaluable mentor and voice for many of us.

But the quality that captures my attention is the extent and depth to which he has integrated his faith and his life as it mirrors Titus. "*Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love and in steadfastness.*" And I think Bruce exemplifies every one of these.

It's interesting. Sig, you mentioned the word *ambassador*. The Greek word for *older man* is *presbutes*. And it's different from the word for *elder*, as an elder in a church. It's a

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slightly different word, but it has the same origin. But it means an older man or an ambassador.

So I think Bruce is one of the *old men* of Titus. He’s sober-minded. And I’m going to just share with you the descriptions he gave for each one of these clauses in that verse.

He’s *sober-minded*. He said that this means “unaffected by their emotions.” That’s Bruce. *Dignified*. Bruce told us that meant “serious and solemn-minded, evoking the observation that that man is serious about his faith.”

Self-controlled. Bruce told us that meant “temperate, able to govern yourself; a person that is worthy of respect.” That sounds like Bruce to me. *Sound*, which comes from the Greek word for healthy or in good working order, free from debilitation. He’s sound and/or healthy in his faith. And the word *piste* in Greek is the word *faith*, meaning here, as one of the definitions, *divine persuasion* or *commitment*, a dedication.

Sound in love. *Agape* love is the word that is used there—divine love displayed by Jesus on the cross. And sound in *steadfastness*—one of my favorite words, *hupomeno*, which means *to remain under*; and it’s waiting under, enduring; patient waiting.

Those are all the qualities that Bruce has. And to me, of all the qualities I originally talked about—naval officer, Ph.D., great husband and father, those are some of his very greatest qualities. And I in my life will never hope to be one-tenth of the man that he is in those qualities. It embarrasses me to stand before you when I think that I have to follow him as the teacher.

But, you know, I’ve missed one quality. And Bruce would want for me to talk about this quality. I’ve missed one quality, and it really is his greatest quality. And do you know what that quality is? Bruce is in Christ.

Participant: Amen.

Ted: Of all the things I’ve mentioned, all his earthly achievements, all his character qualities, there is no greater quality than to be in Christ. That’s Bruce. And, by the grace of God, that’s each one of us.

Okay. I just felt that when I read that I just had to talk about Bruce. The second thing I want to talk about is an area that I’ve been struggling a lot with. And I was stimulated to think about it by going through Bruce’s teaching, especially in Titus the first chapter, where it talks about the life, leadership and orderliness in your congregation, and talking about whether I’m a help or a hindrance to my church. Am I a help or am I a hurt to my church?

How often do you think about that, as to what impact you have on your congregation? It comes out of my own struggles and the many times I have greatly hindered my own church. And it is a reoccurring theme in my life that I hurt or hinder my congregation.

So out of my own struggles I want to share some questions with you, and you can ask yourself these questions and perhaps we can discuss them. Of course, anything that I question is not allowed to be questioned after that. *(Laughter)*

Participant: That’s a hindrance.

Ted: That’s right. That would be a hindrance to me. *(Laughter)*

Participant: I have a question.

Ted: Yes?

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Participant: When you say that, are you talking as a parishioner or as the priest?

Ted: Both. It’s really various offices and callings. But the question is, whether you’re a lay person or an ordained person, are you really being a help or a hindrance, or even a hurt to your own congregation?

I think one of the first things that Bruce talked about in terms of your obligation to the church is just that *you’ve got to show up*. And you would think that would not be a big brainer. But it is. And I’ve shared with you in the past the statistics that I gathered from an excellent book by Dr. Richard Peace on conversion in the New Testament, where he describes how conversion is described in the New Testament versus how it’s often preached in today’s churches. But in that book Dr. Peace talks about the fact that a survey has shown that at major evangelistic events only five to fifteen per cent of those who come forward actually show up and are actually a part of a church a year later.

This is a serious problem. And so the question is this. Are you actually showing up? Paul writes in Romans 12:5, *“We, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of it.”* And in 1 Corinthians, *“You are the body of Christ, and individually members of it.”* And in Colossians, *“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body.”*

So the fact is, do we understand that when we show up in church, we’re actually showing up with Christ?

Participant: Amen.

Ted: And we don’t talk about that kind of thing. And actually, in my own life, it’s only been recently that I have started when I go on vacation and when I’m not in town. Usually, without exception, I’m in church when I’m in town. And I get points for that, right, God? Not! *(Laughter)* But when I’m away on vacation, and more recently, my wife and I for the last couple of years have started going to church when we’re on vacation.

We went out to Ohio a couple of weeks ago to look at some cabinets at an Amish cabinet shop. And there was a Mennonite church down the road. And there was a Martins Creek Mennonite Church.

So Diana, my wife, was very concerned. “Oh my gosh! What am I going to wear?” So I went on their site. And they are a very contemporary church with a band and everything to boot.

Men: Wow!

Ted: Oh yeah. And the pastor wears a golf shirt. But the thing I did was that I found on their site some photos of different activities at the church. One of the photos was a Mennonite history lesson they had done. And they dressed up—the players from the church, the members of the church—in old Mennonite costumes—the black jacket and the beard and the big hat. And so they kind of tweaked my wife. I never want to do that very much, but occasionally it’s delightful. *(Laughter)* You always pay for it, but at the time it feels great. *(Laughter)* Just like any sin.

But what I did was that I showed her. I said, “Diana, come over here. I’ve got a picture on their website of what goes on at the church.” *(Laughter)* So she came over and looked at that and got a horrified look on her face. And then she said, “Wait a second. That guy’s

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beard is moved out. I can tell that’s not a real beard.” *(Laughter)* And sure enough, I showed her the rest of the pictures. I got a good laugh out of it; she didn’t. *(Laughter)*

But nonetheless, we went to that church and we had a great time, and a lot of great serendipitous things kind of happened. So, you know, the first thing you’ve got to do is that you’ve got to quit making excuses not to show up in church. You’ve got to show up for church on Sunday. That’s all there is to it. That’s when we can be a help. If you don’t do it, you are saying, “I’d rather not be with Christ that Sunday.”

“Well, you know, brother, I can worship Christ and be with Him in the solitude of my room, or in the peacefulness of the golf course. I can be with Him there.”

And I said, “Well, He has told us that He appears in the body of Christ.”

The second thing is this. *What do you expect to be the outcome of your showing up?* I mean, what do you actually expect to happen when you show up?

Attending worship and congregational activities is primarily for my benefit, isn’t it? It’s what I’m going to get out of it. I get Bible knowledge and inspiration. You know how my batteries get charged? I had a hard week. I need my batteries recharged. I get good feelings. You know, I’ve got a lot of friends there, warm relationships. You know, I get a lot out of it.

I was talking to my son who is a Reformed Baptist pastor. I was talking to one of his parishioners who is a cabinet installer, and I was getting his advice. And my son is leaving for another location and the church is in a turmoil at this point as to what to do.

And I talked to this cabinet installer, who would consider himself a very serious Christian. And I said, “You know, Brian, you’ve got to stick with the church. You just can’t begin to hop around just because the church is going through this difficult time.”

And he said, “You know, Ted, I need to find a church where I’m comfortable.”

A church where I’m comfortable? Comfortable for you because it’s about you?”

I know the Bible talks about the God of all comfort. But I’m going to tell you something. God makes me uncomfortable all the time.

Participant: There you go.

Ted: I am agitated. I am disturbed. I am in turmoil all the time from my relationship with God. I’m like Jacob at the brook of Jabbok. I am wrestling with God all the time.

God forbid that we should get comfortable in our relationship with God or in the relationship with His people! *“If I say, ‘I will not mention Him or speak anymore in His name, there is in my heart, as it were, a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in.’”* God is agitating me. And I don’t expect my church to make me comfortable.

Participant: I’m reading the question there. In fact, I remember Bruce saying a while back about those people who show up expecting to receive a blessing. You should be there to give a blessing.

Ted: Right. That’s exactly right. I’m going to talk about this. The next point actually leads to that. Thank you.

From the spiritual gifts God has given you, what are you contributing to the congregational life? “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” “Well you know, Ted, I just don’t like to be in big groups. I don’t do well in a

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Bible study. I can't lead a Bible study. I don't like to ask for money.” There are all kinds of things we can tell God we don't like to do.

But you know, God has wired you in a certain way and given you a gift in a certain way so that you can contribute. There's a spiritual giftedness that you have that the church needs, whether you think it's important or not, because it's not you who gave it. God gave it. And He doesn't make mistakes when He gives the gifts of the Spirit.

Once again I think of my own wife, Diana. There couldn't have been two people who got married who were more opposite than we are. If you do the Myers/Briggs personality test, and you take her results and my results and put them on top of each other, we're at the extreme—not modestly different, but at the extreme difference. (*Laughter*) And by all reckonings we probably shouldn't have gotten married, but we did. By the grace of God we've been married thirty-five years and I think she's a great wife. She's just the right wife for me.

But you know, Diana hates to lead. She hates to be in the limelight. We have very few pictures of her because she will not get in a photograph, although she's a beautiful woman. And you know, about the most she will do publicly, in terms of the congregation, is that she will read a lesson. And she does a nice job. We read lessons in church. We read three lessons in our worship and she often reads one of them.

So looking at Diana, you would say, “My gosh, she's not giving very much to the church in terms of the gifts God has given her.” But you know, Diana is the champion Operation Christmas Child box maker. Diana must put together thirty to forty boxes every year.

Do you know what I'm talking about? Samaritan's Purse and the boxes that are sent overseas? She personally does that. She spends the whole year buying things for those boxes at garage sales and rummage sales. You know, you go into Target and there's a display with all the cheapest things they're trying to get rid of. She goes through those and finds the sales on items that she puts in those boxes. Our guest room has no room in it by October or November when the boxes are sent out.

I don't do that! I don't like to do that! I think it's kind of dumb, actually. I'm not wired to do that at all. But she is the champion! And somewhere, whether it's in Kenya or Croatia or Burma or someplace, there are kids who are receiving boxes because Diana, who can't stand to be in the limelight or lead a Bible study, is making boxes. I mean, what is your spiritual gift that God has given you that you need to start using for the church?

Next question. *How do you prepare?* How prepared are you for congregational gatherings and worship? How much time do you spend getting ready for Sunday morning?

Think about what Bruce does here every Friday. How many hours does he put into preparing for this? He says forty. To me, I tell you, I don't believe it. I don't know where someone would find forty hours to do it. But I recently heard twenty to thirty. I can believe that. It may be forty. Forgive me, Lord, for doubting.

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But that’s extraordinary, isn’t it? Do you know anybody else who puts that much time every week into producing a Bible study? He’s prepared because he’s preparing for the body of Christ. It’s not just preparing a Bible study. Sig?

Sig: How much time would you put into making a presentation on behalf of your company in order to make a good commission or a better whatever?

Ted: Right. Well you know, the commission, the promotion, those are real things. God is really not that real.

Sig: Oh, okay.

Ted: He’s more like an interest or a hobby, or something like that. Oh Ted, how can you say that! Well, we kind of act like that, don’t we?

Do you walk into church cold with no warmup? Are you warmed up for Sunday morning? Have you got your engines going? Or do you expect somebody else to warm you up? I’m going in cold. I have needs. The pastor’s going to do it. The greeter’s going to do it. The person who reads the lesson is going to do it.

You know, we have a great section of one of our prayers in the Book of Common Prayer that talks about the Scriptures that says that we’re to “*read, mark, learn and inwardly digest.*” And every one of us has got to get ready to go into church on Sunday morning. Now whether that means using a devotional book, having a devotional discipline,— Some people I know read what we call The Morning Office, which is the morning prayer service that would normally be said in church, but they read it and pray it. There are various ways of getting ready.

I spend time in prayer. I spend time reading Scripture. And I spend time journaling. That whole exercise takes me what? Thirty to forty minutes, I’m guessing. I came onto that practice gradually. I’m not bragging. It’s nothing to brag about. It’s something that God’s laid on my heart.

Do I enjoy doing it? Sometimes I don’t enjoy it at all. Is it sometimes something that is a duty and required and a drudgery? Yes, it is. But I’m ready. Whatever my attitude is when I enter that process, I’m ready at the other end. I’m warmed up.

And you know, I don’t know whether it’s one of God’s divine tricks or not. But every time I skip that devotion in the morning, something messy happens during the day and I say, “I sure wish I had been prepared for that.” And it’s kind of like God is saying, “Okay. You don’t think you need it? Let me show you what I can throw at you today.” And I’ll get out there and I’ll say, “Today is going to be an easy day at the office.” And I get there and all hell breaks loose. And I haven’t spent any time warming up. Yes, Don?

Don: Yes. I think of Exodus 19.

Ted: Yes.

Don: Where the Law was given at Sinai?

Ted: Okay.

Don: And all of the instructions that God gave His people to prepare. And I’m not necessarily saying that we as New Testament believers need to emulate that. But preparation is essential and I hear what you’re saying. If I don’t prepare for Sunday morning by spending time in the Word, reflecting on what is going to be taught that day,

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listening to appropriate music, etc., my worship experience, if you want to use that word, is not quality.

Ted: Yes, you’re right, Don. Thank you. Am I competing with somebody back there in terms of Don?

Participant: His phone is ringing.

Second Participant: He’s trying to turn it off.

Ted: Okay. Is he really? *(Laughter)* You know, they’ve got a toilet back there. Just drop it in there. *(Laughter)* That’ll stop it right away. *(Laughter)* And I think there’s some rice behind the counter. You can dry it out with a bag if you need to. *(Laughter)*

Transcriber’s Note: Someone helps the man turn his phone off.

Ted: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Clouser. Okay, being prepared. Let’s get back on track here. Be prepared. Do you prepare yourself?

Next thing. *Are you accountable or am I accountable to the congregation, and do you put yourself under congregational authority?* Are you part of a small group or are you guided by a spiritual mentor or director?

Lone Ranger Christians are especially susceptible to self-deception. And I will tell you that I am very weak in this area. I don’t have a spiritual mentor or director, and I don’t belong to a small group. I get too disgusted with the people in the small group. *(Laughter)* And that’s one of my following points. I mean I think I’m wasting my time being with those people in the small group because they’re doing nothing for me.

Bruce once quoted a Scottish Baptist from the nineteenth century, Andrew McLaren.

Transcriber’s Note: Ted speaks with a mock Scottish brogue.

Ted: Wouldn’t you like to be a Scotsman with that name, Andrew McLaren? *(Laughter)* And McLaren said, “*When the Spirit is in your heart*”,--and I wrote this quote down and I’ve had it for a year, and I’m just waiting for a chance to use it. Bruce told us, quoting McLaren, “*When the Spirit is in your heart and the Scripture is in your hand, you have all you need.*”

That is simply not true, because it takes no account of your need for the body of Christ. It’s more of this “Lone Ranger Christian.” All I need is Jesus and the Bible and I’m fine. Well I’m telling you something right now. If you’re like me, you will deceive yourself in that duo, because you’ll make God out to be the way you want Him to be, and you’ll read the Scripture the way you want to read it. And there will be nobody there to contradict it or hold a mirror up to your contradictions and hypocrisy. We need the Spirit in our hearts and the Scripture in our hands and to be embraced by the body of Christ, which reminds me what I am and Who’s I am.

Participant: Yes.

Ted: And it gives it to me more accurately than I can give to myself. Bishop?

Bishop Rodgers: The body of Christ needs your gifts, too.

Ted: Yes, that’s the point.

Bishop Rodgers: Your soul needs the body of Christ.

Ted: So you’re becoming a hindrance in both ways. Yes?

Participant: You know, Ted, the Lone Ranger did have Tonto.

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Ted: Yes, he did. *(Laughter)* And there’s that famous last scene in one of the episodes, Where they are surrounded by the Indians and native Americans and about to be done in. And the Lone Ranger is bewailing his fate, and he says, “What are we going to do?” And Tonto says, “What do you mean *we*, kemosabe?” *(Laughter)*

And at that point the Lone Ranger was not part of the body and Tonto was. *(Laughter)*

Participant: We ought to practice this more often. *(Laughter)*

Ted: Yes, straight man. *(Laughter)*

Next question. Here’s an important one. *“Are you making a stretch or a sacrificial investment in the success of the congregation?”* Time, treasure and talent—you know, this is the fundraising mantra. We need your time, treasure and talent.

Are you contributing time outside of Sunday morning worship? Or do you just show up Sundays and that’s it?

Are you contributing natural talents? I mean, this is different from the gifts of the Spirit. I mean I think I’m gifted in the area of nonprofit organization and guidance, and I give it to other organizations. What gifts and talents do you have?

You may be an excellent mechanic, somebody who can figure things out. When I look at a blueprint, it just remains on the page. In fact, I once did a cradle for my oldest daughter. I made a cradle out of curly maple. And that maple was so hard that it burned up one carbide tip blade after the other. The one I had was beautiful until I realized that I had taken the dovetails and reversed them on the corners. And I went to put it together and it didn’t fit, because when I looked at the plan, it didn’t become three-dimensional. I can’t do that.

But maybe you can do that. And those are the kinds of natural talents—not gifts of the Spirit, but natural talents—that you can bring to the body.

And are you contributing your treasure? It’s amazing how many people don’t tithe. And I know that’s not a rule. I understand that. We’re not going to get into that. But you know, that is a good place to start. Are you tithing?

Well, Ted, what do you mean? Before taxes or after taxes? *(Laughter)* If you have to ask that question, you’re already on your way to hell. *(Laughter)* The point being, if you’re not tithing, you’ve got to try to get there!

You know, I was a pastor back in the ‘70s for eight years. And I never tithed! And I didn’t start tithing until my first wife left me and I went into a divorce, and the Lord said, “Your life is an absolute mess.”

Participant: There you go.

Ted: “And there are lots of things we need to clean up. Why don’t we start with your giving first?”

“But Lord, I really don’t—I’ve lost a job. I don’t have any income.”

He said, “That’s okay. You’ve got money in the bank. Start tithing that.”

Participant: Wow!

Ted: And that’s what the Lord started. I’ve been tithing ever since 1981, and more. And I looked at one of my bosses when I worked for Ketchum Inc. And this fellow was a godly man. He was president of the company. Essentially he was hated by the others who

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were not believers. But he was a strong believer. And he talked about how he gave away 20%.

I said, “I can’t even begin to imagine that!” How would one give away twenty per cent of their income?

You know, I looked at my taxes this last tax season. I gave away 25%. And I didn’t even feel it!

Now once again, brothers, I’m not bragging. I didn’t get there because of any effort on my part. God moved me along. But I’m saying that if you’re not tithing yet, you need to do it because otherwise, you’re hindering and perhaps hurting the body of Christ. Tom?

Tom: Well, you know, the ten per cent is not a limit. It’s just history; it’s a good thing. But R. G. Laterno, the fellow who invented most of the great earth moving equipment that we have today, believed that the 10%/90% rule is very good.

Ted: Right.

Tom: He gave away 90% of his income to the church.

Ted: Right.

Tom: Yes, it’s a great rule. So give with a cheerful heart.

Ted: Yes, give with a cheerful heart, right. That’s my license plate. 2 Corinthians 9:7. 2 Corinthians 9:7. *“God loves a cheerful giver.”* Give with a cheerful heart.

Okay, the next item. *Are you prepared to spend time with parishioners and pastors—* fellow members who are irritating, petty, selfish, boring, and not up to your standard of Christian maturity? Are you prepared to spend time with them and fellowship with them and go to church with them, and be in small groups with these people?

An uncomfortable verse from 1 Corinthians is where Paul says that the weak are indispensable.

Participant: Yes. Amen.

Ted: Why are the weak indispensable? Why do you think Paul says that the weak in the church are indispensable? Why are the irritating and off-putting indispensable? Why do you think that is? Why do you think so? Yes?

Participant: Because the least among you is the greatest.

Ted: That’s right. What an odd thought! Wait a second. That’s just theoretically true. *(Laughter)* It’s really not true in real life. I mean, there’s only so much that you can put up with. And if that guy gives the same testimony about how he got saved and baptized with the Spirit thirty-five years ago, I’m going to scream because that’s driving me nuts!

I think this is my toughest one of all because I am, in my flesh, a very judgmental and critical person. And I am quick to point out those in the body that are really not up to standard.

Participant: Who’s standards?

Ted: My standards. It’s irrelevant whether I’ve fallen short of the standards. That’s irrelevant. It’s whether they’ve fallen short of the standards.

My oldest daughter is a great fan of the Dutch Catholic priest, writer and scholar Henry Nouen. Many of you know him. One of his earliest books was *The Wounded Healer*, which became very popular. I don’t agree with everything that Henry Nouen wrote. He’s now deceased. But let me tell you a little about this guy.

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He was a profound thinker. He was a very extensive author. He was a scholar. He was so good that he was hired by Harvard University to be a professor. He had reached the pinnacle of his own career. He could have gone any place. He could have been a church leader. He could have been a bishop in the Catholic Church. He had all kinds of opportunities.

But what did he commit himself to do? He was in Canada and he joined the L’Arche Daybreak Community. The L’Arche movement is a movement that believes that the best way to care for and love and serve folks with intellectual disabilities—Down’s syndrome and many others—is to actually live with them. Do not set up community homes or group homes and that kind of thing, but actually commit yourself to live with them.

And that’s what Nouen did. He gave up all of his other stuff, all of the glory that he had accumulated. And he became a nobody and lived in a home of people who had Down’s syndrome and even more severe disabilities.

One of his final books that he wrote was called *Adam*. Adam was a person in that community who was almost vegetative and quadriplegic. And Nouen said, “I learned so much from Adam. I’m going to write a book about him.” I’m not choking up, just drying up. (*Laughter*)

So if Nouen can leave all that’s humanly glorious and give his whole life over to be with a person he can’t even talk to, what am I complaining about? If Jesus can leave glory and come and live with me, and accept me as His child when I am petty, boring, self-centered, self-possessed, why am I having problems listening to that fellow tell the same testimony Sunday after Sunday?

If I were to be sent to hell, if God were to judge me and send me to hell, He would send me there for this reason, because I despise too many of the members of the body of Christ.

Participant: Yes. Amen.

Ted: And I say that to my shame. I don’t know how to get over those feelings, except that every morning I say, “Lord, I am guilty, guilty, guilty! Change me, change me, change me!”

Now here’s another one. I can’t believe I’m actually going to get to the end of this before it’s all over! And for this one you guys will probably report me to Bruce that I’ve said this. And I think that Don will probably have the most problem with it. *Will you allow yourself to put up with a certain amount of doctrinal leeway for the sake of the brethren?*

You know, there are things Bruce teaches that I think are not correct. There are things I teach that I know you don’t think are correct. And what we say is that, in the drive amongst those of us who are Reformed to be theologically correct, that this can be a hindrance and a hurt to the body, because it becomes more important to be doctrinally correct and perfect than it is to be sacrificial and loving to others. Yes, Don?

Don: When you study the unity of believers, through the Scriptures,--

Ted: Yes.

Don: You see something different from what we’ve been taught.

Ted: Thank you, thank you.

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Don: “By this shall all men know that you are My disciples because you’ve memorized the Thirty-nine Articles.”

Ted: Well, you know, that’s very close to the truth. *(Laughter)* But this—

Participant: It’s the Westminster Standards.

Ted: The Westminster Standards. Okay, well there we go. Am I going to tolerate Don’s position on Westminster?

I mean there are essentials. And it’s interesting that several months ago I was given a copy of a document. I’ve copied part of it here. And Norman Geisler, who is no small theologian and highly respected, he put out a booklet called *Essential Doctrine Made Easy*, which is almost kind of like a non-sequitur, an oxymoron. *(Laughter)* *Essential Doctrine Made Easy*.

And what he did is that he listed sixteen doctrines which you need to believe in order to be a true Christian. And you know what? I read through all those. And the person who handed me this document said, “Ted, what’s missing?”

And I looked through it and I said, “There’s no essential doctrine of the church.” It ends up being about me and Jesus again. I mean the Apostles’ Creed says, “I believe in the holy catholic church.” The Nicene Creed says, “We believe in one holy, catholic and apostolic church.” And yet in Geisler’s sixteen essentials the church does not appear!

Now I have to be able to tolerate Geisler’s mistake, I think, because I think he would find ones that are my mistakes as well. So are we willing to help the body, rather than to be a hindrance or a hurt? Are we willing to tolerate a certain amount of leeway as we share things?

I’ve talked to people in this group who I think have very strange doctrines of baptism. They think mine are very unbiblical. But can we tolerate each other for the sake of the body of Christ?

I know that’s a broad brush and that it involves a lot more scrutiny. But it’s just an initial thought.

And finally, *are you willing to be patient as the sovereign God works in you and in your congregation?* Are you willing to wait for a sovereign God to work out His purposes and will, His changing of you and making you and me a different person? You know, God is not done maturing your congregation and those irritating members, or your lack of tithing. God is not done maturing you or your congregation.

Remember, Bruce said this not too long ago. “Do you think that God is bigger than your boss?” *(Laughter)* I want to ask you this. Do you think God is bigger than your congregation?

I tried to come up with ten because that would have been like the Ten Commandments. *(Laughter)* But those are nine thoughts just to provoke us to think more deeply about what to me, after regeneration and the Word of God, is God’s most precious gift to us, and that is His body.

Participant: Ted, you talked mostly about the congregation. I wonder if you could try and say something about our relationship in the larger body.

Ted: Well I would. But first of all, that would get very heated at that point, because I have some stronger views about the bigger body versus the con—

“Are You a Help or a Hindrance to Your Congregation?”

Participant: For instance, we’re here this morning.

Ted: Yes, we are. Thank you. Go ahead.

Participant: It’s just that as part of the body, we’re here as Christians.

Ted: Right.

Participant: In a number of different congregations.

Ted: Right. You being here helps the body. There’s no question about it. I mean I’ve talked to fellows in this group who’ve been with Bruce for ten years and hear Bruce’s teaching, and they come out and they believe something completely opposite. Well, okay. That’s the part they didn’t get. But maybe they got another part that changed their lives or their families or their kids or the people of their churches. So being here helps the body. That’s why I come here, whether I feel like it or not. I come here for that reason. Yes?

Participant: Oswald Chambers in *My Utmost For His Highest* gives a corollary of what this means. For April 24 he writes that, according to Luke 10:20, that Jesus told the disciples not to rejoice at successful service. And yet this seems to be one thing in which most of us rejoice. We have a commercialized view. We count how many souls have been saved and sanctified. We thank God and then we think that everything is all right. *“Yet our work only begins where God’s grace has laid the foundation. Our work is not to save souls, but to disciple them. Salvation and sanctification are the work of God’s sovereign grace, and our work as His disciples is to disciple others’ lives until they are totally yielded to God.”*

Participant: Amen.

Ted: Any other thoughts this morning? Thanks, Tom. Yes?

Participant: There’s an old saying I just made up. *(Laughter)*

Ted: From an old guy.

Second Participant: Then it’s not old.

First Participant: I’m old.

Second Participant: Oh, okay.

First Participant: You can pick and choose your friends, but you’re stuck with your relatives.

Ted: Yeah.

Participant: I think that’s what we need to get used to in the church.

Ted: That’s exactly right. We can pick and choose our friends. But we cannot pick our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are stuck with us. And I don’t think the first thing to say is, “I think I’m going to try harder.” I’m going to start off by saying, “Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner. Change my heart about that person.” And there are some of whom I have been praying about that for years, and I’m not there yet. But I know that in time God will get me there. Bishop?

Bishop Rodgers: It might be helpful to say, “How can I serve that person?”

Ted: Right. That would be good. But sometimes I’m too irritated with them. *(Laughter)*

Bishop Rodgers: That’s a good way of getting over being irritated.

“Are You a Help or a Hindrance to Your Congregation?”

Ted: It is a way of getting over being irritated; that’s right. And sometimes, you know, when you’ve had your fight with your wife, sometimes you’ve just got to go in there and say, “Hi, honey.” You’ve got to do it even though you want to kill her!

Transcriber’s Note: Uttered through clenched teeth.

Ted: Okay. Anything else? Let us pray. Lord Jesus Christ, as You in Your perfect wisdom laid out for Yourself what would be Your family here on earth, we pray that we may treasure them, each one of them, as much as You treasure them, that our attitude towards our brothers and sisters may be Your attitude. And we pray that You will convert us and change us. And we pray this in Your name. Amen.

Men: Amen. (*Applause*)