

## ***“The Believer’s Reaction”***

### **Penetrating a Dark World**

Titus 3:1-15

Dr. Bruce Bickel

April 28, 2017

**Bruce:** Good morning, men!

**Men:** Good morning!

**Bruce:** How are all of you today?

**Men:** Great.

**Bruce:** Well men, let’s turn in our Bibles, please, to the book of Titus. We’re in chapter 3. Don, do you want to take us into the presence of the Lord so we can just rejoice and know that He is God? *(Music)*

Merciful God, we thank You that You are all that we are not. When we are not forgiving, forgive us. Give us Your compassion. When we are not loving, give us Your mercy. Forgive us. When we are acrimonious and not kind, forgive us. Give us Your mercy. Father, trusting You is really about who has the resources of life. And we know that God alone is adequate. Help us to trust You and to be all that You want us to be by depending upon You to give us the resources of Your own life. Thank You, Lord, that we have this treasure in earthen vessels to show that the all-surpassing power comes from You and not from us. And may it be so for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

**Men:** Amen.

**Bruce:** Let’s open your Bibles, please, to the book of Titus, chapter 3. I’m going to pick it up in verse 1 and read it. We’re going to be looking today specifically at verses 8-11. But I want to read the first eleven verses to keep things in the right context. Titus chapter 3, beginning at verse 1, from the English Standard Version.

*“Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.*

*“But when the goodness and loving-kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior; so that being justified by His grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is trustworthy and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.*

*“But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful. He is self-condemned.”* This is the word of the Lord.

**Men:** Thanks be to God.

## ***“The Believer’s Reaction”***

**Bruce:** Amen and Amen. The last time we were together two weeks ago we talked about *the believer’s motivation*. In verses 1-2 we see *the believer’s obligation*. There are certain obligations that we have as members of the body of Christ, to be responsive and submissive to our authorities. There was a list of seven different virtues in verses 1 and 2, seven virtues that we have an obligation to fulfill because of God’s grace. That’s what I would call the believer’s obligation. Basically you can categorize that as concerning civil and social duties.

And then we looked at *the believer’s motivation* in verses 3-7. Forget not your past. Function in the present. And focus on the future.

Today we want to look at *the believer’s reaction*. Now the believer’s motivation, when we talked about those three words—gratitude, grace and glory—we ended up being motivated by understanding what we were, who we are and what we will be.

Basically Paul is reminding Titus about the motivation that we have with the understanding of our salvation. You don’t need anything more than to be motivated through good works to understanding your saving grace because of the Lord Jesus. It is our understanding and clarity of thought about our salvation that is our motivation. You don’t need anything more to be motivated. You don’t need somebody to come along and give you a pep talk. You just need to go back and remember this. Who was I? Who am I? And what will I be?—the total scope of our salvation. Men, what motivates us to our good works is the understanding and clarity of our salvation—who we were, who we are, and what we will be—those three words, *gratitude*, *grace* and *glory*. That’s what motivates us for good works.

And now Paul is going to tell Titus to do some things like this. He says, “Remind them of those things.” What is he reminding them of? Of the clarity of your salvation. Remind them of their salvation because when you understand the depth of your salvation with clarity and conviction, that is going to be the motivator for you to do good works.

So beginning at verse 8 Paul reminds Titus and says, “*The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who believe in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works.*”

Why the emphasis on good works? It’s because good works is the evidence of true saving faith. Good works is the evidence of your regeneration. Good works is the evidence of your renewal, of your sanctification. And so Paul tells Titus, “Titus, remind these people of their salvation, because that’s what’s going to motivate them to do good works.”

And so he begins to explore this in relationship to the context of the body of Christ. It’s about these things dealing with salvation that Paul wants Titus to teach, and to do it with conviction and to do it with confidence. And we need to talk about the same things.

Here is a summary of the same things that we need to be teaching with confidence and clarity of thought: the kindness of the Father and His love toward us. We need to teach and remind people of the kindness of the Father and His love toward mankind. We need to remind people of the work of the Holy Spirit in regenerating and renewing mankind—the work of regeneration and renewal, sanctification.

## *“The Believer’s Reaction”*

We need to remind people of the grace of Jesus Christ, considered as the effective cause of our justification. Christ is the effective cause of our justification. God declares us to be sinlessly perfect and perfectly obedient because of the accomplishments of the Person and work of Christ—not righteousness in our own strength, but an alien righteousness that’s imputed to us. God gives us a righteousness that was achieved by Christ. We need to understand and teach people that it is the effective cause of our justification. It’s the Person and work of Christ and His work at the cross.

And lastly, the purpose of all of this is that we might be righteous, that in our righteousness we would become *“heirs of the hope of eternal life.”* Now Paul says to Titus, “Titus, that’s what you want to remind people of.” Remind people of those things. Don’t get hung up on genealogies and dissensions. You want to remind people of the truth. Remind people of the truth because it’s profitable.

Other people are going to do all sorts of things. They’re going to speak with confidence about other things, frivolous things and frivolous matters about which they know nothing. Don’t get involved in that, Titus. And I would say, men, don’t get involved in those activities.

Look at 1 Timothy chapter 1 verse 7. *“Desiring to be teachers of the law without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.”* There are all kinds of people who are going to be talking about confidence in different things. But Paul tells Titus and reminds us that there are certain things you want to remind people of, and that is this. Remind them of their salvation, because when you understand your salvation, and you’re motivated by gratitude, you’re motivated by grace and you’re motivated by glory, that’s what’s going to produce good works in us. And one of the reasons for the emphasis on good works is that it’s the evidence of your salvation. It’s the proof of your salvation and your saving faith.

So Paul tells Titus to remind those people of that. And men, I do the same thing. I need to remind us of that. Stress these things. Stress these matters of which we have become firmly and rightly convinced because of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, the purpose being that those who have been brought to saving faith will produce good works as evidence of their saving faith.

And it’s really quite simple. Just remind people of their salvation. And when you do that, men, that is what’s going to motivate us for good works. So he tells us that we should concentrate on these things and these matters. These things are to be mentioned with great conviction and great clarity. And do it with confidence. Remind people of their salvation with confidence.

The reason he says that you do this is because they are excellent and they are profitable and beneficial. He tells us that they are beneficial to all people. You see, reminding people of these things, of the basics, is profitable and acceptable. And it’s good for all people.

Take a look at 1 Timothy chapter 4 verse 6.

**Participant:** Bruce, are you going to touch more deeply on verse 5 which says, *“Avoid foolish controversies”*, etc.?

## ***“The Believer’s Reaction”***

**Bruce:** That’s going to be the major part of what we’re going to do. This is all introduction, Ted. So that’s the major issue.

**Ted:** Thank you.

**Bruce:** Not only are these things excellent in themselves, but Paul tells Titus that they are also beneficial to all people. Take a look at 1 Timothy 4:6. *“If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus.”*

So what things is he putting before the brothers? He’s reminding them of the doctrines of grace in their salvation.

*“Being trained in the words of the faith, and the good doctrine that you have followed.”*

How about 2 Timothy 3:16? *“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.”* You see, even when you and I are reminding people of their salvation, we’re reminding them of the difference between what used to be death, darkness, sadness and fear. When we remind people of their salvation, we’re reminding them now that life is light, joy, peace and contentedness. That’s what we remind ourselves of when we talk about reminding people of their salvation.

Salvation is always designed to find practical expression in its faith, visible evidence. And that’s what good works do.

Now the word *good* is an interesting word that we need to take a look at. First, the word means *excellent* or *profitable*. This is a word typically used when dealing with moral issues and moral decisions that we make. It’s profitable; it’s good and useful. And the other Greek word is a word that means *beautiful*.

So when you combine these two things, when you’re reminding people of their salvation, you’re reminding them of two things: the beauty that is produced in good works because of God’s salvation motivating us. And it is profitable and excellent because it is the evidence by which we give testimony to our true saving faith.

Good works do not necessarily mean religious works in the church. It’s fine to do things in the church. We certainly ought to do that—sing in the choir, be an officer in the church, whatever the Lord leads you to do. But good works can also be done by dealing with an unsaved neighbor. Are you a good neighbor? Just be a good neighbor.

I have a friend who lives in St. Louis. He’s probably one of the best neighbors whom I’ve ever witnessed because of how he has taken care of people in his little complex. He’s a single man. But he’s picking people up and taking them to church and taking them to Panera’s. He goes and cuts their grass. He just says, “What can I do to be a good neighbor?” You see, that’s part of good works, the evidence of our true saving faith.

Babysitting to relieve a harassed young mother is just as significant a spiritual work as passing out a tract on a street corner. And the best way for the local church to witness with a testimony to the lost is through the sacrificial service of its members.

So the inference is this. Verses 1-2 give us seven virtues which we are obligated to put into our lives and practice. And the reason we do that is because of the seven vices in verses 3-7 that overcame us. And he’s reminding us of our salvation. Those seven virtues replace the seven vices in verses 3-7. And when you understand that contrast after

## *“The Believer’s Reaction”*

understanding your salvation, understanding your gratitude, your grace and your glory, that is what motivates you to good works.

And then he begins to warn us with the warning he gives us in verses 8-11. Now we wish that there were not problem people in the church. We wish that were not the case. But wherever there are people there are going to be problems. One of my preaching men has said this. “Bruce, you’re going to love the church, except for the people.” *(Laughter)* I love church work, except for people. We just wish it weren’t so, but it is the case.

And Paul warned Titus to avoid people who like to argue about unimportant things of the faith. Don’t get involved in that! Just walk away from it. Concerning controversial issues, he warns us that we’re not to involve ourselves in arguing over foolish and unanswerable questions. Most of those questions that people are going to ask are smoke screens because they have not dealt with the Person and work of Christ in their lives.

When I was in the Navy, on board ship, I was the Protestant lay leader. Junior officers always had extracurricular activity duties on board the ship. And the two things that nobody wanted to do were to be the athletic officer or the Protestant lay leader. When I went on board, I wanted to be the athletic officer and the Protestant lay leader. *(Laughter)*

So the skipper said, “Do it.” So I had services on board ship and organized a basketball team, and did some other things to keep the men occupied.

But then, as we used to have one embassy on board ship, the skipper of the ship would always let me give a prayer at night. Do you realize that for Navy regulations that one of the responsibilities of the CEO, the skipper of the ship, is to provide for the spiritual welfare of their men? Those are Navy regulations.

**Participant:** Amen.

**Bruce:** To provide for the spiritual welfare of the sailors.

**Participant:** Even today.

**Bruce:** Those are Navy regs. I’m not sure what’s going on today. But that’s what Navy regulations say, that the skipper of a ship is to provide for the spiritual welfare of his men. So I was the Protestant lay leader.

Some guys and the officers in the wardrobe began to come up to me and said, “Bruce, if your God is so great, can He make a rock that’s too big to pick up? *(Laughter)* Oh, what a great question! *(Laughter)* Or another one was this. “Can He make a square peg fit in a round hole?”

Now what are those? Such things are not even worth considering. You just avoid those things. Paul tells Titus, “Don’t get involved in that stuff! Those things are unprofitable!” The issue is that things like that are unprofitable. You don’t even engage in that.

What we’re about is that we’re teaching people about the loving-kindness of God the Father, reminding people of the message of salvation. That’s what we commit ourselves to with conviction. And we do that with confidence. But we don’t even get involved in these genealogies, other issues like that, these frivolous and unanswerable questions. We don’t even get involved in that. Paul warned Titus. And we need to do the same thing, men. We need to avoid those types of things. We need to avoid—Yes, Don?

**Don:** Yes, Bruce. Last week I thought Ted brought up something very profound about are we willing to give a little bit of leeway to doctrinal issues that we may not agree with.

## *“The Believer’s Reaction”*

And I’m just wondering where you draw the line. For the sake of unity, what do we avoid? I realize that you don’t answer “how to” questions, and you can’t be our Holy Spirit. But what do we avoid? What can we discuss that’s important? Where do we draw the line? I realize that’s not an easy question to answer.

**Bruce:** Well I won’t answer it. *(Laughter)*

**Don:** Yes. *(Laughter)* Thank you.

**Bruce:** Now that’s a very legitimate and good question. I can’t give you a list of things to avoid. I think that’s where you have to be trusting the Holy Spirit to know this. Certain things that we teach, which you just gave us, those things are profitable, the doctrines of salvation. Those are the things we communicate with conviction and compassion and with great confidence. Some of these other things that come along down the pike we have to be very discerning about. We have to know what the situation is with that person.

What I try to do when somebody tries to throw a thing like that to me is to say, “May I ask you another question?” I say, “What have you done with the Person and work of Christ?”

**Participant:** Amen.

**Bruce:** I change the subject. What do you do with the Person and work of Christ? That may or may not lead to a conversation. But if it does, then I begin to talk about the doctrines of salvation, the things that Paul told Titus to talk about.

So it’s very, very difficult to say, “Here’s a list of things you don’t talk about.” But all I’m trying to say is this. Don’t get involved in these genealogies, these needless things, these unanswerable questions of the faith, because you really don’t want to cast your pearls before swine. And so you just have to be very cautious. Yes, Ted?

**Ted:** Bruce, I’m curious. What do you think genealogies are about? I think I understand it from the first century perspective. But what’s the application today, besides not going and doing Mormon re-baptisms for the dead? I mean, how would that application be today when he talks about avoiding genealogies?

**Bruce:** Well I think it has to do with blood lines, when I say, “I’m of this family, I’m of that family. I’m of this tribe, I’m of that tribe. I’m of this ethnic group, I’m of that ethnic group.” And we get hung up on the ethnicity of groups, and things of that nature, all the genealogies. I think it’s a very, very broad subject. But I think it has to do with the blood lines of people. Yes, Bishop?

**Bishop Rodgers:** In Africa tribalism is a very big deal.

**Bruce:** Exactly.

**Bishop Rodgers:** And that might be quite directly appropriate to the African setting.

**Bruce:** That’s exactly right. I think it’s a broad subject. But men, we have to be very, very sensitive not to get involved in these types of things that are pointing us away from the real message of the gospel of Christ.

And so what I normally try to do in a situation like that is to say, “What have you done with the Person and work of Christ? Can you tell me who Christ is? Who is Jesus?”

That’s going to either turn off the conversation or open a door for the opportunity so we’ll begin to have a good discussion. Yes, Ted?

## ***“The Believer’s Reaction”***

**Ted:** This is a comment that was just made at our table: group or identity politics. It may not be tribalism, but it’s identity politics.

**Participant:** Pretty close.

**Ted:** Pretty close, being a part of a particular group. That becomes your greatest identity, rather than being in Christ.

**Bruce:** That’s exactly right. In the Scripture there were such groups as the Nazarenes. There were groups; there were sects. I think that all has to do with the genealogies, the association of some group that I’m involved in. So we just need to be careful about that.

Don, I did not answer your question well.

**Don:** No, no, no. It’s a hard question.

**Bruce:** It’s a hard question. I have to be very sensitive.

**Participant:** We shouldn’t fire a preacher who is a Patriots fan. *(Laughter)*

**Second Participant:** What are we doing that for?

**Bruce:** I would say to bring him to the Friday group. *(Laughter)*

**Participant:** Dr. Bruce?

**Bruce:** Yes, sir?

**Participant:** These questions, these paradoxes, are very old. But they tried to trip Jesus with similar constructs.

**Bruce:** Yes, they did.

**Participants:** And He asked them very wisely in their craftiness, saying, *“Why do you tempt Me?”* And the thing is, if Jesus answered yes, He would be wrong. If He answered no, He’d be wrong. So He cleverly and wisely turned it back to them and got them to consider the realities of the universe and an almighty God with whom they have to do. And when I’ve encountered these people, which I often do, and they try to trick me into that, I always say to them, “Okay. If I answer this and I satisfy you, will you give your life to Jesus Christ?” I’ve never had a person say, “If you can answer me satisfactorily, I will give my life to Christ.” They just shut up and they don’t want to talk anymore. *(Laughter)*

**Bruce:** Well that’s the same thing as saying, “Tell me about what you’ve done with the Person and work of Christ.” You’re either going to have a conversation or that’s going to turn it off.

**Participant:** Very good.

**Bruce:** And then you’ll know where to go, and then you can go from there. Yes, please?

**Participant:** Bruce, the verse that defines my life is Proverbs 19:25.

**Bruce:** Please.

**Participant:** That goes, *“Flog the mocker and the simple will learn prudence.”* That testifies to almost every fight in my life.

**Bruce:** Proverbs?

**Participant:** 19:25. *“Flog the mocker”*—meaning that you give him a smack—

**Bruce:** Okay. *(Laughter)*

**Participant:** And he’ll never forget you. He’ll never forget that moment. But you do it when your heart is convicted for God. I can’t explain that to my wife with the couple of

## *“The Believer’s Reaction”*

conflicts she’s seen me get into. And I said, “Don’t ever forget this.” And they’ll remember why the fight happened.

**Bruce:** Interesting. *(Laughter)* Yes, Bishop Rodgers?

**Bishop Rodgers:** The Articles of Religion state about predestination and election to life, that if somebody wants to dump that into the conversation partly to avoid dealing with the Person and work of Christ, there is a sense, when you’re sharing, of when you talk about that.

**Bruce:** That’s exactly right.

**Bishop Rodgers:** If it’s in the Bible, and it’s important to the Bible, then there will be a time for us to talk about it, but not necessarily as the first thing.

**Bruce:** That’s correct, that’s correct; a great sense of timing. Remember this. We cannot be somebody’s Holy Spirit.

**Participant:** Amen.

**Bruce:** We need to be sensitive to the movement of the Holy Spirit, but we cannot be Him for them. It’s a matter of timing.

What you and I are going to say will always be the same thing. It may be next week or it may be next month. We don’t change what we’re going to say. What changes is the receptivity of the hearer.

**Participant:** That’s right.

**Bruce:** The receptivity of the person. That’s what we need to be sensitive to—where they are, who they are, what’s going on, because what I’m going to say about the Person and work of Christ is not going to change. What’s going to change is their receptivity to hearing what I’m going to say about the Person and work of Christ. That’s where we need to have the sensitivity to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

In the meantime, we need to avoid those other things. And don’t be sidetracked.

Here’s another verse to help us to understand this, 1 Timothy 1, verses 3 and 4. *“As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain in Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, not to devote themselves to myths, or endless genealogies which promote speculations, rather than the stewardship of God which is by faith.”*

There’s the difference—speculations versus stewardship. You and I have a stewardship of the gospel of Christ. We need to be good stewards of it. We don’t want to get involved in speculations about what the gospel is. It’s a matter of our sensitivity to the receptivity of that person. Yes, Don?

**Don:** Yes. And a lot of times unbelievers will trip you up with questions. “Well, if there’s a God, why is there so much suffering in the world?”

**Bruce:** Sure.

**Don:** And until they are confronted with the Person and work of Christ, any answer you give is not going to satisfy them.

**Bruce:** Absolutely, Don. That’s exactly right. It’s something like this. Remember the book written years ago, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People?*

**Participant:** Yes.



## ***“The Believer’s Reaction”***

**Bruce:** The title should be changed around. *When Good Things Happen to Bad People. (Laughter)*

**Participant:** Right.

**Bruce:** You see, that’s the issue. That’s a smoke screen. Why is it, Bruce, that such bad things happen to such good people? Well, I’ve never met a good person, Biblically speaking.

So we have to be very sensitive. Men, the point is this. You and I are not going to change them. That’s what Paul is telling Titus. “Titus, remind them of these things!” He’s reminding them of their salvation. That’s what you and I will always talk about. That will never change. And we should never change the content of that, our salvation. But we need to be very sensitive. That’s why we need to shy from these and walk away. That’s how we need to deal with these issues.

Titus is to shun these Jewish legalisms, legends about the law and stipulations requiring the keeping of the law to accomplish salvation. He is to avoid these inquiries that produce wrangling and quarreling. When he sees them coming, Paul tells Titus to turn around and flee. Let him see these things for what they really are. They are unprofitable.

The contrast is this. Teach these things that are profitable and beautiful. Avoid those things that are unprofitable. Now if you’re going to have to avoid the things that are unprofitable, that means you’ll have to know the things that are what?

**Participant:** Profitable.

**Bruce:** Profitable. You have to know the things that are profitable. And he gave us a list of those in verses 3-7. It’s a reminder of our salvation, the Person and work of Christ. That is what is profitable. We need to avoid those things that are unprofitable and walk away from them.

There’s a sharp contrast between the useless nonsense and the very useful matters which Paul is teaching Titus to talk about in verses 3-7. The contrast between verses 3-7 versus these needless conversations produces quarreling.

Now what about contentious, controversial people? We need to discuss that for a moment because he warns us about that. First of all he warns us about heresy, doctrines that are against the Scripture. Now he talks about persistent and willful heretics, individual people. Not only do we need to avoid the issues, but sometimes we need to avoid dealing with the people in a different way.

There is another type of problem person we need to work with. We should deal with the heretic. Now Paul speaks about a heretical person. The word *heresy* originally simply meant *that which one chooses for himself as an opinion*. The first use of the word *heresy* meant an opinion that somebody chooses for himself.

It began to grow in depth and meaning over the years. It became a set of persons professing certain definite principles or opinions. Hence, it became a school of thought or a party, e.g., the party of the Sadducees in Acts 5 and the party of the Pharisees in Acts chapter 15.

Now in certain contexts this word began to develop in intensity, and it began to become more egregious, if you will. The term began to be used to become in more of an

## ***“The Believer’s Reaction”***

unfavorable sense. It became the word *faction*. It’s the word *faction*. We need to avoid people who are dealing with factions, in the sense that there were factions in Corinth as an example. “I’m of Paul,” “I’m of Apollos,” and so forth. We need to avoid those groups and situations.

Here, a factious person is a person who without justification creates division. A factious person is a person who without justification, for no reason at all, causes quarrels and divisions. We need to avoid those people and deal with them justly. The reason the Scripture tells us to avoid those things is because this is the work of the flesh.

Look at Galatians 5:20. “*Idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions and divisions.*” Where do they come from? They do not come from the Holy Spirit. They come from the evil one. That is the work of the flesh. We need to deal with those.

Now this word rendered *warped* in our Scripture, in the English Standard Version, means *distorted*. The person is very distorted. It’s a very descriptive word. It literally means that they’re not living and seeing straight. A person who is warped is not living and seeing straight. He is mentally and morally turned or twisted. It’s even worse than that. He’s actually living in sin.

Now that’s what we have to deal with. Such a person should be admonished at least twice, and if not repentant, then excommunicated. Now that’s what Paul is telling Titus. You’ve got to warn him twice.

Now there’s a reference here to Matthew chapter 18, which is church discipline. There are three keys to the kingdom. They are *the gospel, the sacraments* and *church discipline*. They are the gospel, the sacraments of Baptism and Communion, and church discipline. Matthew chapter 18.

**Transcriber’s Note:** Matthew 18:15-17, NKJV. “*Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.*”

**Bruce:** Now in Matthew 18 Jesus talks about three approaches. Paul in Titus only talks about two. I think the difference would be this. The first one by Jesus in Matthew 18 is a personal one. You go personally to that individual. Paul now deals with the two public ones. And what he says is that you need to warn these people twice—these people who are contentious, who are factious.

He basically says this. Have nothing to do with them. Brothers, that must be taken in the sense of *to reject them or to refuse them*.

Go to 2 Timothy 2:23. “*Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies. You know that they breed quarrels.*”

Now according to Pauline doctrine, discipline must always spring from a force of love. Whenever we go to somebody the first time to warn them, Paul says this. You see, the first time you warn somebody about being a heretic or being a contentious person, and they do not respond and they do not repent, you do what? You go a second time. And

## *“The Believer’s Reaction”*

the second time, if they do not repent, they are passing judgment upon themselves. They are saying that they are self-deceived. If they do not repent after the second warning, they are convicting themselves because they have become self-convicted. They’ve convicted themselves. We are not convicting them. By the fact that they are not repentant after the second warning, they are convicting themselves. They are self-convicted. We don’t convict them ourselves; they convict themselves. That’s what Paul is telling Titus. They convict themselves. They are self-convicted because they do not repent. And so we go to them twice.

But it must spring from love, from a desire to heal the individual person, never from a desire to get rid of the person or to get rid of the individual. Much patience must be shown as we get involved with warning people and dealing with people who are disrupting the flock. And even when their error is very grievous and dangerous, as in this present situation on Crete, every effort must be put forth to win the erring one back to the fold.

In the meantime, having been lovingly warned, if they refuse to repent, and they continue to do their evil work in the midst of the congregation, the church through its officers and by its means ordained in Scripture, all the membership, must redouble their efforts. And so you go back the second time and do the same thing. Paul tells Titus that there must be a second warning.

But if this remedy fails, the person must be excommunicated or expelled. Even this extreme measure has its purpose, and that is the reinstatement of the brother. You see, church discipline is not about punishment. It’s about restoration.

Look at Galatians 6.

**Bruce:** Those who are spiritual are to restore one another with graciousness and kindness. Church discipline is about restoration. It’s not about punishment. Church discipline is not something you do *to* a person. Church discipline is something that God works *in* a person, something that He works in a person by the flock coming and warning twice. The Holy Spirit begins to work in that person. So you’re not doing something to punish them. You’re doing something to restore them back for the glory of God, but also for the benefit of the congregation. Part of the benefit of this is that you do it for the congregation’s sake, so that you don’t have this infestation of a factious person causing dissensions. You’ve got to do it for the sake of the body. Carl, you had your hand up?

**Carl:** Bruce, I was going to ask you if you could speak to the divisiveness of what happens in churches, because what happens is that sometimes, when you start to give church discipline, the people take sides and they start fighting with one another. How do you address that?

**Bruce:** Well, would somebody read Galatians 6:1, please?

**Participant:** *“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.”*

**Bruce:** All right. Now right there, the key is this. You’ve got to watch out for yourself. You’ve got to examine your own life before you go to somebody else’s life.

**Participant:** That’s right.

## *“The Believer’s Reaction”*

**Bruce:** Now when I was a pastor, twice I had to exercise loving church discipline. And the first time I did it, Carl, I spent about three weeks teaching the flock how we had to respond and examine ourselves. Before we’re going to do anything with our erring brother, we have to examine ourselves. And so for the next three weeks we went through a series on self-examination. And there were some wonderful things that helped to purify the congregation before we went to another person, before we made the public effort to go back to this erring brother.

**Participant:** Amen.

**Bruce:** Some beautiful things happened in the life of the congregation before we did that, because Galatians 6 says this. Test yourself. Examine yourself. You’ve got to purify yourself before you can go and exercise church discipline.

Then we had to tell people how to do that. And so we had to teach them. If the erring brother comes to you and says, “Hey, I’d like to get together for lunch,” our response was something like this. Very graciously, I said, “I’d love to get together with you and we’ll talk about your repentance.”

“Well, that’s not what I want to talk about. I want to talk about the Steelers.”

“Well let me know when you’re ready to have lunch and we’ll talk. I’d love to get together with you, but we’ll talk about your repentance.”

Now I had to remind the church to say the same thing. Everybody had to say the same thing because if you don’t, you’re going to have factions. You’re going to have divisions.

**Participant:** That’s right.

**Bruce:** Somebody says, “That’s not loving.” I had to teach people how to be loving, and also how to be firm in this. And so we had 150 people where he came and said, “I’d like to have lunch with you.” And he heard the same thing. 150 people said the same thing. “I’d love to have lunch with you. Can we talk about your repentance?”

He didn’t want to do that until eighteen months later.

**Participant:** Wow!

**Bruce:** And he came back and said this. He came in to see me, and he was just very brokenhearted and repentant. He fell down on the floor and just wept. And he said, “The thing that got to me, Bruce, was the loss of the fellowship of the people. It wasn’t what you taught. It was the fact that I missed the fellowship of the people.”

You see, you have to get people on board with all of this together. And one of the other difficulties that occurs is that the person is likely to go to another church. So I went to all of the pastors of the churches in our area and just said, “I want you to know that we’re exercising loving church discipline with this brother.” I didn’t go into detail. But I basically said this. “Would you support us in this effort of restoring our brother? And when he comes to your church, would you send him back to us? Because if you don’t do that, you’re going to have pastors who will say, ‘Well, we’ll welcome him in,’ and somebody’s going to say, ‘That’s unloving.’”

This is loving church discipline and we had to cover all the bases. It took us about four weeks and we had to get all of that done before we could even go to see that erring brother and call for his repentance. So it’s not an easy task. But it’s one of the keys to the kingdom, men. Yes, Ted?

## ***“The Believer’s Reaction”***

**Ted:** How did that go with the pastors, in fact?

**Bruce:** That’s a good question. In fact, about 60% of them wouldn’t do it. 60% of them wouldn’t send them back to me. They said, “Bruce, That’s unloving. If they want to come to my church, I can’t exclude them from coming.”

I said, “We’re supporting the universal body of Christ. This is about the glory of the kingdom of God. We need your support because, if we don’t do this, people are just going to be church hoppers and get away with their sin.”

**Participant:** That’s right.

**Bruce:** “I’m not trying to convict somebody or punish somebody. I’m trying to restore him.

**Participant:** That’s right.

**Bruce:** “I’m trying to restore him and I need your help. This is a body issue. It’s not a single church issue. It’s a body issue, an issue of the body of Christ.”

There were a couple of pastors who said they would do that. And one of them called me on the phone and said, “You know, your brother came here and we sent him back to you.”

**Participant:** Wow!

**Bruce:** So I would say that about six out of ten said they would not, but the other four did. Yes, Ted?

**Ted:** Perhaps you were expecting unity in the body when none had been established.

**Bruce:** That’s correct.

**Participant:** So my question is, do preachers tend to gather with other preachers in the area to have lunches or gatherings with each other?

**Bruce:** Yeah, they do.

**Second Participant:** Generally.

**Bruce:** Generally they do. You have pastoral meetings and groups getting together. I’ve created one in one of the ten churches in our area, within about a twenty-mile radius. We started doing that. And one of the reasons I tried to do that was to plea for that help with me in church discipline. I said, “Men, this is such an important issue.”

Now do you notice this, the context of “*where two or three are gathered together, there I will be with you?*” What’s the context of that?

**Participant:** The use of church discipline.

**Bruce:** It’s church discipline! It’s not playing golf! (*Laughter*) Now that doesn’t mean that He’s not going to be with you in the golf league. That’s not what I’m saying. But it’s this. “It’s in the midst of church discipline that I’m going to be with you when you’re agreeing upon these things.” And I’m trying to get the pastors to agree with me on these things because it’s a body issue. It’s the issue of the unity with Christ. It’s not just a single church issue. Yes, Bill?

**Bill:** You brought up one thing. Consider this letter in our culture today and our churches today. To me this is the most radical letter in the whole Bible.

**Bruce:** It really is, because you look at those seven virtues and seven vices and the things he’s talking about, the stuff we talked about. How do we get along in our work ethic? A couple of weeks ago we talked about how we take these vices and get rid of the

## *“The Believer’s Reaction”*

vices and put the virtues into our work. It’s a very radical book. That’s why I wanted to teach it to us, because it’s so important for us to understand our civil obligations, to understand our motivation, and also to understand our reaction to problems in the church. It’s all for the glory of God. But it’s also for this, men. It’s for the sake of the body of Christ.

The reason is that Paul wrote to Titus and said, “Titus, you’ve got a lot of criminals on Crete. You’ve got a lot of rebellious soldiers on Crete. You’ve got a lot of slaves. You have a lot of problems. Here’s how you deal with those issues. Avoid those things that are contentious and quarrelsome. Don’t get hung up on those things that are unprofitable. Give yourself to that which is profitable. But when those things do happen, Titus, here’s how you handle it. You do it for the sake of the body of Christ, the glory of God, and for the sake of the congregation.” And it requires a lot of work and a great deal of effort. But you must do it for God’s glory.

So men, the three keys of the kingdom are these. Years ago, when I was candidating for a church, one of the men said, “I’ll never be involved in a church that exercises church discipline.”

**Participant:** Wow! Whoa!

**Bruce:** He was an elder of the church. Well I knew right away, that’s not for me. They don’t want me, not because I’m a church discipline guy, but because I’m saying that I understand what the three keys of the kingdom are. The three keys of the kingdom are the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, the proclamation of the gospel and church discipline. Those are the three keys. If you don’t have them, you’re only operating with two out of three keys. And one reason why the church is in such bad shape is because oftentimes we are exercising with two keys. There’s a third one with which we need to do that. Yes, please?

**Participant:** When I hear the words *tough love*, my answer is, is there any other kind?

**Bruce:** That’s exactly right. Is there any other kind?

Well men, what is it that motivates us? Paul told Titus to remind people of their salvation.

**Participant:** Amen.

**Bruce:** Remind the people of their salvation. There are certain obligations that you and I have because of our salvation. And those obligations are found in the virtues listed in verses 3-7, and to replace the vices that we see in verses 3-7 with the virtues that we see in verses 1 and 2. And how do we do that? We do that through the grace of God. Remember this. Our motivation is understanding our salvation. We need to teach that because it’s profitable and it’s beautiful and it’s beneficial. And we are to avoid those things that aren’t.

And when contentious people come along, the Scripture teaches us how we are to handle that. We do it from the spirit of love, a spirit of mercy, a spirit of compassion. It’s a spirit of restoration. It’s not punishment. Church discipline is not something we do *to* a person. Church discipline is something that God works in a person for His glory. And may it be so that we’ll have the courage to do that should the event occur.

**Participant:** Amen.

## ***“The Believer’s Reaction”***

**Bruce:** Let’s pray. Father, we’ve kind of been all over the place. That’s just who we are. We’ve got questions that we don’t know how to answer. That means that we’ve got to be dependent on You and Your resources. Trusting You is a matter of Who’s resources we have. And You alone have the resources to live a life. Who could live a life that has life or death consequences? Paul tells us that in 2 Corinthians 3. God alone is adequate. Our adequacy comes from Him. May we trust You for that, for Jesus’ sake. And all the Brave Men said, “Amen!” (*Applause*)