

## Foolish Controversy

### Discussion Guide for Titus 3:9-16

One of the unfortunate characteristics of the American church is that we have become known much more for our disagreements than for our unity. This is unfortunate on two levels:

1. We are not living up to Jesus' vision of unity (John 17:21) amongst the followers of Jesus
2. We are usually quite confused over what sorts of controversies are worth parting ways over and which ones should be left alone.

At Venture Church there are exactly five areas of doctrine on which our identity rests. We refuse to compromise our belief in the doctrines of:

- Scripture
- The Trinity
- Salvation by Grace through Faith
- Sanctification by Grace through Faith
- The Church

Our church will refuse to allow conversation and disagreements about any subject other than these to lead to divisions among people in the church. Even as we might explain our essential beliefs with people who may disagree, we always seek to do it lovingly and winsomely.

Sometimes churches divide over irreconcilable understandings of the essentials of faith. Unfortunately, most divisions in most churches take place over things that are outside of the scope of essential doctrine.

- Why are the five essential doctrines so important to our Church?
- Describe some church or family disagreements you have seen or heard about that had very little importance.
- How did those disagreements detract from people hearing the Gospel?

Paul goes on from talking about foolish controversy to warn about divisive people. This goes beyond simply what sorts of arguments Christians are allowed to have and talks about the kinds of people we should want to identify with.

Everyone knows someone whose middle name is D-R-A-M-A. If you don't know anyone like that, there is a good chance that you might be that person!

Paul warns Titus that these are toxic people for Christians to remain close with. He actually calls them "warped and sinful."

The problem with divisive people is that they, um, divide people.

They turn things that should be minor non-events and turn them into catastrophes that wreck families, friendships, and churches. These are the types of people who brawl over football games, quit speaking to friends after elections, and end relationships because of “Yanny vs. Laurel.”

- Talk about some of the characteristics of divisive people. (i.e. gossip, bullying, slander, lying, cliquish behavior, prejudice, etc.)
- How do you spot them?
- How do you create healthy space between you and divisive people?

Notice how Paul lays out a pattern that the church is to follow in disciplining divisive people.

The church is never called to condemn divisive people, because they are already “self-condemned.” On the contrary, we are called to love and rescue people from their divisiveness. This is why the church is to warn them twice, and only then have nothing more to do with them.

Even in having nothing to do with a divisive person, the hope is that they will understand the danger of their divisiveness, repent, and return to the church as forces for unity instead of division.

We need to remember that the grace of God naturally will cause us to open our hearts to people. We will love people in ways that we never thought possible before experiencing grace.

- As Paul gives final instructions in Titus 3:12-15, what emotions and commitments do you think he has made to the people he talk about?
- How does the Gospel deepen our own love for each other to a level we would never have thought possible before knowing Christ?