

Like Peter Pan... many people have fears or reservations about the growing up. ... Fortunately... most of us get over it. But there's a bizarre... tragic exception known as geras-co-phobia... (or the fear of growing up.)

A recent article in *Case Reports in Psychiatry* describes a case about a 14-year-old boy who tried hard *not* to grow up. The two psychiatrist authors write:

*He does not eat much because according to his own research food contains nutrients needed for physical development; in addition, he adopted a stooped posture to hide his height and began to distort his voice, using lower volume and higher pitch than usual ... If people tell him that he is taller or older, he becomes extremely upset and cries. Due to the restriction in food intake, he has a weight loss of more than 12kg. He is currently in the 25th percentile. ...*

After treatment the two doctors reported that the boy had improved... but they also added... "[The patient] continues to express a fear of commitment and responsibilities that he feels will be required of him in adult life."

I am so glad that “geras-co-phobia” is not a common problem in American society that we hear a lot about. ... I wish that I could say that this was true about the church in America. Wouldn't you agree that there seems to be a fear of growing-up (or spiritual maturing)...? Some believers fear spiritual growth... because they know that it comes through challenge and hardship. They are unwilling to get involved in ministry because they know it will always bring faith-producing trials. They think that they already have enough difficulty and burdens in their life... and don't want to add any more – **even** when they KNOW God will use it to develop and complete them.

But there is an effective cure for “Spiritual Geras-co-phobia.” ... Is your first response (whenever a plea for ministry help is made) - an automatic “no

thanks!”? Do you run as fast as you can to get away from the possibility of Christian service... because you know that challenge and difficulty are inevitable...? - You may have “Spiritual Geras-co-phobia.”

If you do... please consider this. This life is not all there is. This life is preparing us for the next. Through temporary hardship we gain spiritual maturity and gain ETERNAL honor. ... Those who live more for the here and now... than they live for eternity... suffer “Spiritual Geras-co-phobia.”

Today’s passage that we come to in Titus... might not help anyone who currently suffers from Geras-co-phobia. (You see) we are about to be reminded (as we already have been in Timothy and in Titus) that everyone who is in Christian leadership will battle criticism... dissension... and power struggles. Those engaged in ministry (at all levels and in every respect) become targets of some of life’s most vicious... and personally offensive attacks.

Christians who have strayed from the truth and refuse to repent invariably find their way into churches... only to spread the disease of division and strife. ... Just as a surgeon must cut out diseased tissue... (we will see today)... so leaders in churches must confront those who would infect the body of Christ with discord and divide congregations into factions.

Today’s passage in Titus will teach us how to deal with problem people in the church who create dissention. Part of spiritual maturity calls for divisive people to be firmly addressed. (We will be told what immediate action must be taken.) But it is never easy. ... A secondary battle (often) ensues... and the divide becomes more pronounced... because churches have sufferers

of “Spiritual Geras-co-phobia” who simply want to look the other way... and ignore a divisive person... They hold the mistaken notion that THIS would keep peace in the church. They want us to ignore our clear Biblical instruction... in favor of us all being “men-pleasers.” Pleasing people instead of obeying Scripture feels easier - *but only in the **short** term*. The long-term suffering for the church is always devastating... when we chose “what feels easier” – over obeying Scripture.

Mature spiritual leadership does all things with compassion... but never at the expense of Biblical obedience. ... Mature spiritual leadership never fails to confront when necessary.

When I studied our passage for today... I realized that the verse I ended with last week plays a crucial role in our understanding the verse we start with today. (They are a UNIT together.) So... I am going to read Titus 3:8 and Titus 3:9 together.

### **Titus 3:8-9**

Paul keeps emphasizing good works in this letter to Titus. He mentioned them in verse one of this same chapter...

#### **Titus 3:1 (ESV)**

*<sup>1</sup> Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work,*

And he will repeat it once more in verse 14...

#### **Titus 3:14 (ESV)**

*<sup>14</sup> And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful.*

THREE TIMES (verses 1, 8, and 14) in this same chapter... Paul has emphasized their need to do good works. ... Well... the **Jewish Law** also emphasized doing good works... didn't it. Paul charges Titus to "insist" that God's people be devoted to good works (since they are good and profitable for everyone.) ... But in verse 9... Paul now draws a contrast. ... He says, "**But** - avoid foolish debates, genealogies, quarrels, and disputes about the law." ... In other words... insist on doing good works (these are still important)... **but** avoid arguing about all the other stuff. That is just foolish.

The false teaching in Crete apparently had Jewish roots and focused on two errors: spiritual pedigrees and quarrels and fights about obedience to Jewish laws — probably some useless speculations on the Old Testament rules and rituals... especially Jewish laws regarding what was clean and unclean. These teachers were causing controversies... arguments... and quarrels.

But where our focus needs to be is **not** the nature of Titus' particular controversies... but the fact that controversies are bred in the church... and they arise from divisive intentions. The point of verses 9–11 is not so much to identify and correct wrong doctrine... as it is to tell us that we must silence the divisive person... or the good works of the church will be hampered.

### **Titus 3:9-11**

Look how similar this is to Paul's warning in Romans.

#### **Romans 16:17 (ESV)**

*<sup>17</sup> I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have*

*been taught; avoid them.*

One of my favorite Bible commentators writes: “*Where there is light – there are bugs.*” ... (That’s true... isn’t it.) ... Bible truth (wherever it is taught) should expect that it will also attract unfavorable responses. ... Another commentator... (Warren Wiersbe) has written:

*“I have learned that professed Christians who like to argue about the Bible are usually covering up some sin in their lives, are very insecure, and are usually unhappy at work or at home.”*

So... they come into Bible-teaching churches... but spiritually mature leaders must learn to “avoid” or “stand aside” from such people. They will consume your time... drain our energy... and weaken the entire Church’s testimony. ... They think of themselves as the “Theological Elite... “Spiritual Know-it-alls”... But our passage says that what they offer is “WORTHLESS.”

This does not mean that the church leaders should refuse to study... discuss... and examine different interpretations of difficult Bible passages. Paul was warning against petty quarrels (not honest discussion that leads to wisdom.) ... As foolish arguments develop... they should rebuke the false teaching and turn the discussion back to a helpful and profitable direction. ... **[ P A U S E ]** ...

It was his first Sunday (visiting our church.) He was one of the first to meet me at the back door. He walked up to me and asked for a private meeting. There were others that I wanted to greet... so I asked him if he wouldn’t mind waiting. After most of the people had gone to their cars... we walked back into the sanctuary and sat down. His wife sat several rows behind us. It was as if she did not want to participate in what she knew would be

coming. A deacon of our church walked by... (back then... we didn't have elders yet) and I asked him to join us.

The visitor said that he liked my preaching... but the man (in no uncertain terms) told me how wrong our church is... because I don't preach from the King James Bible... and we did not sing the proper songs... (by which he meant hymns... and only the songs that were on his list of approved worship music.) I asked him where he got his list... and he told me the lady who led the choir in his former church in the Portland area made the comprehensive list of acceptable music that can be used in church.

I told him that I am not under the authority of this pastor lady... and asked him why he thinks King James version of the Bible is the only version to be preached from. He tried to explain to me that modern versions were translated by Devil worshippers. I asked him if he knew any of the translators personally. When he answered "no," I explained to him that two of my Hebrew professors in Seminary were primary translators – and they are NOT devil worshippers... but very Godly men."

This was a conversation with a person that Paul describes in our passage from Titus. Our conversation did not last very long. I stood up and told him that we simply will not adopt his convictions and this is probably NOT the church for him to join.

We didn't see him for a month or two... but he and his wife returned. They came back for a third visit. ... It appeared that they were seriously considering becoming a part of our church... so I decided that I should set up a visit with them in their home.

When I sat down with them in their home... I told him that we will not allow his authoritative song selection... Bible version choice... or any other matter to become an issue - or to be taught as the only means for Spirituality. AND THEY BOTH AGREED. They became regular attenders – and even members. For years they fellowshiped with us... served in leadership... AND IT WAS NEVER A PROBLEM. Paul's instruction to Titus worked. It was confront head-on! We didn't allow it. Swift action was taken. And we became ministry partners. (ONLY God could do that!)

Paul didn't intend his instructions to transform the church into a police state in which no dissenting opinions are tolerated. He wrote these instructions to protect the church from internal strife and corruption. At times we must fight ... But if we love the fight... we must question if we are following God's priorities. No pastor or body of elders should delight in the disciplinary action of any kind. All correction must be conducted in love... not condemnation.

However... delay in taking action... is always a lose-lose scenario... and must be avoided. We must move quickly in the initial stage when the sin is discovered. We may extend the "grace of patience" as we seek the repentance of the one who needs to be corrected. However, we must be clear, above board, and timely. Vigilance and steadfastness are required... all the while keeping Galatians 6:1–2 before our mind's eye: "*Brothers, if someone is caught in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual should restore such a person with a gentle spirit, watching out for yourselves so you also won't be tempted. Carry one another's burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.*"

It is essential that a church protects and values its doctrinal and moral integrity. Those who would cause compromise in either area must be confronted and (if unrepentant) avoided. ... To do so is ***loving***. Not to do so... is to mistake sentimentality for love.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote:

*“Nothing can be more cruel than that leniency which abandons others to sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than that severe reprimand which calls another Christian in one’s community back from the path of sin.”*

We proclaim through biblical discipline that love cares and confronts. It can be tender... but sometimes it also must be tough. What it cannot do is stand by and do nothing when one of the family is ensnared by sin. As the revivalist Charles Finney wrote:

*“If you see your neighbor sin, and you pass by and neglect to reprove him, it is as cruel as if you should see his house on fire, and pass by and not warn him.”*

Because Church discipline is brought up so often in the New Testament by Paul and by Jesus... I believe that it is a natural component of the fabric of what the church is and does. No. Church discipline is not the focal point of ministry. It is a painful – but essential aspect of any church that aims to be a healthy church.

As we conclude our study through Paul’s letter to Titus today – we are seeing two specific aspects for any church that aims to be healthy. #1. is how to handle a divisive person. Now we are ready for #2. – is to be devoted to doing good.

**Titus 3:12-15**

In the closing verses, Paul conveyed some personal information to Titus, and reminded him of the main theme of the letter: Insist that God's people "learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives."

Surrounding this... Paul reflects his own relational concerns and one thing strikes me... as he mentions his ministry partners. All ministry (including Paul's is very dependent on others. We rely on one another to complete whatever the work is that God has given us.

But beyond that... here is what I am very much amazed by: I am amazed the Lord chooses to involve people in His sacred work. God doesn't *have* to involve people. He could call in His host of angels to get the job done far more efficiently. He could bat an eyelash and everything He desires would become reality. Instead, He calls people to become instruments of His grace, and He equips the church to be the mouthpiece of the gospel. He invites the contributions of men and women who submit to His sovereignty and remain faithful to His calling. If He wants a message declared, He employs human lips. If He wants a truth written, He inspires a human mind and empowers human hands. If He wants grace to be modeled, He calls, saves, justifies, sanctifies, and transforms people to become His examples of loving mercy.

What role have you accepted in the Lord's great enterprise to redeem the world from sin and evil? What call of God have you answered by saying, "Here am I Lord, send me"? You have been called, you know.

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