

Warning: Two Strikes and You're Out

Remarkable Christianity, Part 6

Titus 3:10-11

I have read that nearly 1 in 4 Americans will be involved in a lawsuit of some sort during his lifetime.

And because our culture is literally inundated with litigation and lawsuits it is nearly impossible to buy anything without finding some kind of warning label attached to it.

And you can't help but wonder would people really not know this stuff? I mean, do we really need all these warnings?

I have read, for instance, the following warnings:

- On a Dura flame fireplace log the warning, "Caution: Risk of Fire."
- On a cardboard sun shield for cars and vans: "Do not drive your vehicle with sun shield in place."
- On a portable baby stroller: "Caution: Remove infant before folding for storage."ⁱ

The problem is, most people ignore warning signs – even if they are shining like a beam in their face.

One of the most neglected warning signs is the "check engine" light on the dash of your vehicle. According to a Harris Interactive survey I came across not too long ago, 1 out of 10 people are driving their vehicle right now with that light on. In fact, this survey revealed that "50% of those whose cars were showing signs of an impending breakdown indicated the light had been on for more than 3 months." So why didn't they listen to the warning? Those

adults surveyed said things like "My car seemed to be running just fine." Others said, "I didn't have time to have it checked." And still others admitted, "If I got it checked and they found something wrong with it, I wouldn't have had the money to fix it."ⁱⁱ

So I'll just ignore the warning sign.

I read this and had to admit my own guilt here – I'm driving my daughters used vehicle while she serves in Santiago, Chile and last week the 'check engine' came on and you know what my first thought was, "Everything seems to be fine; I don't have time to check it out; what if it's expensive to fix . . . and then I actually had this final thought before I ignored the light – maybe it will just turn off by itself." And two days later, it did . . . hallelujah.

Of course the car won't turn on either . . . no, that light really did just turn off and I guess I have a few more days to go.

The truth is life is filled with caution signals and warning signs.

I read recently where a woman was quoting a newspaper article to her husband – she didn't know their little girl was listening as she said to her husband, "According to this newspaper article, most automobile accidents occur within a fifteen mile radius of home." Their little girl immediately piped up and said, 'Mommy, then why don't we move?'

Let's find a safer place to live!

Tim Keller, a pastor in New York told how whenever he traveled anywhere with his

brother-in-law, his brother-in-law would refuse to wear a seatbelt. Keller would really get on to him about it, but nothing worked. Then one time, he flew into town and his brother-in-law picked him up by the curb at the airport and he had his seatbelt on. Keller writes, “I immediately asked him, “What happened? What changed your mind?” He said, “I went to visit a friend of mind in the hospital who had been in a car accident and he went through the windshield of his car. He had 300 stitches in his face and as I looked at my friend and the pain he was suffering I said to myself, “I need to wear a seatbelt.” Tim asked him, “But didn’t you already know that if you don’t wear your seatbelt you can go through the windshield if you have an accident?” His brother-in-law said, “Of course I knew that. When I went to the hospital to see my friend, I didn’t get any new information. [I just saw that information applied and at that moment,] the information got real in my own heart and began to affect the way I life.”ⁱⁱⁱ

The truth is, even if you follow all the directions and pay attention to all the warning lights, you still can’t guarantee the absence of accidents and trouble and pain.

But you can minimize the damage and be protected from even greater danger.

We have already learned from Paul’s letter to Titus that:

- remarkable Christianity has a unique attitude of humility toward authority – and that will certainly help keep us out of trouble (chapter 3 and verses 1 & 2);
- that remarkable Christians remembers the pit from which they were dug – they never quite get over their conversion, which keeps us from spiritual danger (verse 3);
- that remarkable Christians revel in the fact that they have been ambushed by the goodness and grace of God then attempt to do the same thing to others – protecting ourselves and others from potential harm (verses 4-8);

- that remarkable Christianity learns the art of refusal and what not to put on their tray in the cafeteria of the world that constantly serves up spiritual myths and speculations and unprofitable disputes.

And now, Paul tells Titus and these churches on the island of Crete the rather surprising news that remarkable, distinctive Christian communities of believers called churches, actually come with a warning label – and here’s the warning label: Two strikes and you’re out!

What in the world could Paul be referring to with this warning label?

Well, hold on to your baseball hat and take a look at *Titus chapter 3, where we left off with verse 10. Reject a factious man after a first and second warning; 11. Knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.*

Just as Paul has challenged us to develop the art of refusing unprofitable and fruitless and empty distractions in *verse 8*, he now tells us, within the context of a local church, to *reject a factious man after only two warnings.*

The word here for *reject – reject a factious man* – is from a word that literally means to have nothing to do with.^{iv}

To the Corinthians, Paul wrote that they were to remove from their midst the unrepentant man who was carrying on, in that particular case, of life of sexual immorality (*I Corinthians 5*).

In his letter to the believers in Rome, the Apostle Paul told the believers to *turn away from the one causing dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching they had learned. (Romans 16:17).*

In fact, he began that verse in Romans 16 by telling them, *‘I urge you brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions...’*

The word translated, “*keep your eye on*” is the verb skopein (σκοπεῖν) which means to mark and avoid.^v

The verb skopein gives us our word scope which we use in words like telescope or microscope.

In other words, carefully watch out for people who cause dissension in the flock – don't let them slip out of your sight.

Now here in Titus 3, Paul identifies a particular kind of person to watch out for; he uses the descriptive word “factious”. ***Reject a factious man.***

It's the Greek word *hairetikos* (αἰρετικός) which gives us our word *heretic*.

This is the only time this particular adjective appears in the New Testament although the noun form appears in 1 Corinthians 11 and Galatians 5 to refer to factions and divisions in the body.

While Paul could be warning Titus of theological heresies and heretical teachers hiding within the church community, most scholars understand Paul to be using the word in a broader sense to refer to someone who is divisive and disruptive.

One author writes, “This includes anyone in the church who is divisive and disruptive; the issues may be trivial, but arguing about them is not; and because the consequences of bickering and insubordination can be so destructive of unity among the [Flock], the apostle commands that this divisive man, or woman, as the case may be, should be rejected by the church if they do not respond to the warning.”^{vi}

If you combine Paul's warning label here in Titus with other similar passages of scripture, Paul is informing the church to remove from her midst this kind of individual.

And did you notice, Paul writes, ***Reject a factious man after a first and second warning.*** Two strikes and you're out!

Are you kidding?

That's tougher than any baseball umpire I've ever seen in action.

I know two men in our church who are, or have been, professional baseball umpires. That's got to be one of the toughest jobs on the planet.

Especially when they're calling pitches and they yell out, “Strike three – you're out!”

There's just nowhere to hide after that. I've asked these men in the past, what's it like

standing there at home plate with most of the world against you? It's not pretty.

Titus, you'd better get on your gear – make sure you're helmet's on; it's about to get ugly . . . there's a collision about to take place.

And by the way, you're not to give three strikes, but only two.

Let me show you why.

Paul describes this factious person with three descriptive words; notice ***verse 11*** – knowing that such a man is, first of all, ***perverted***.

This is the only time you find this word in the New Testament. You might think that he's referring to some kind of sexual perversion, but he's not.

The word he's using is a word that refers to a person whose mind is turned around or even, inside out.^{vii}

You could use the word, “slanted” . . . his mind, or his perspective is skewered, or slanted to one side – and it's to his side only.

Which is exactly what happens in so many divisive issues in the church, right?

Someone has the facts or the feelings or only one side of the issue and not the entire facts of both sides and since they don't know all the facts and all the issues, everything gets slanted – or skewered toward their opinion.

And they begin attempting to convince people that their opinion and their perspective is the only correct perspective and people begin taking sides.

And whenever slanted, skewered thinking people begin directing traffic, collisions begin taking place.

Paul goes on to say, “They're not only slanted, ***but they're sinning.***”

The word here for ***sinning*** means “to miss the mark”. In other words, they think they represent the truth, but they've actually wandered off the path – they are missing the mark.^{viii}

Thirdly, they are not only slanted and sinning but notice here in ***verse 11, they are self-condemned.***

Again, a rare word used here by Paul; but a word that says it all.

John Phillips paraphrased and expanded this word so you can understand the full impact of its meaning. Paul is writing, “this divisive, slanted, sinning person is self-condemned because he knows perfectly well that what he is doing is wrong.”^{ix}

That doesn’t mean he’ll admit it . . . but Paul says, “He knows it.”

He knows when he’s causing division – he knows when he’s gossiping – he knows when he’s slanting the story without having gotten all the facts; Paul writes, he knows what he’s doing and what he’s saying all along.

Gene Getz writes in his commentary, the problem with dealing with an individual like this and why they only get two strikes is because they happen to get emotional satisfaction from creating controversy in the church. In dealing with them, there is only one recourse, for Titus – radical surgery – they must be stopped.^x

But at least give them two warnings first.

Paul makes that clear here in *verse 10*. In fact, the word he uses for *warning* – give him a first and second warning – is a compound word which means, to put to the mind (νοθεσιαν) in the noun form.^{xi}

It’s the root word we’ve used to create the word nouthetic counseling.

So this isn’t some one sentence warning phone call or email with a cryptic – Okay, this is warning number 1 – Quit doing that divisive stuff – you know what I’m talking about.

And the, “Okay, this is warning #2 – stop it or else.”

No, this is more like an extended conversation where you “put to their mind”, you expose them to their error and the potential consequences according to the scriptures.

And that’s why you only need one more warning after the first one.

They got it the first time.

They knew what they were doing and they knew the damage they were creating and now they know you know but they’ve made up their mind they’d rather keep doing it than listen to you.

They are not going to quit. That’s because they actually love the fight. They enjoy the tantalizing controversy. They thrive on being the person in the know and the one who really has the story straight; they love the shock on people’s faces when they tell them what so-and-so did or said and their favorite expression of all is something like, “And you won’t believe what I found out.”

And the division begins creeping and crawling like poison ivy through the body and unsuspecting people walk right into it and infections begin to spread.

Another pastor of many years, Chuck Swindoll, wrote with the same kind of seasoned wisdom and advice as he commented on this text; he writes, “The battle-hardened apostle wanted to prepare his younger protégé, Titus, for the conflicts awaiting him on Crete. Effective spiritual leadership does everything with compassion but never at the expense of conviction. It never fails to confront when necessary. Just as a surgeon must cut out diseased tissue, so leaders in churches must confront those who would infect the body of Christ with discord and divide congregations into factions. If the [pastor/elder/shepherd] isn’t willing to love his congregation enough to risk misunderstanding and criticism, he should step aside and choose another, less hazardous occupation.”^{xii}

Well put.

That’s like saying, “If a baseball umpire can’t quite bring himself to call a batter out, he really outta take up another occupation.”

The warning light is on!

But I don’t have time to fix it; it’ll cost too much time and energy . . . maybe it will fix itself.

Paul makes it painfully clear here – remove him from your midst – *reject him*.

Which means, dear flock, as ironic as it sounds, Paul’s answer to dealing with a divisive person is to create division.

There must be a division in the church – but it is to be a division between the Flock and that

person who persists in their unrepentant divisive agenda.

He or she is no longer allowed access to the Body – literally – their platform and access to the congregation is taken away. The Flock is thus protected from his divisive spirit and slanted mindset.

Yes, there will be division – and it will be painful and hurtful and emotional and maybe even tearful – but the flock will divide this factious person away from themselves so that he or she can no longer continue their unrelenting undermining attempts to create division among the Flock.

And by the way, Paul’s command to reject him, along with other passages dealing with this subject make it clear that there will be no readmission until there is repentance – a changed mind.

What the church becomes is an outward demonstration of the loss of fellowship both on the physical level between church members, but on the spiritual level between that person and the Lord.

Fellowship has been broken . . . division has occurred. And we in the body pray that the breach will be restored not only between believers, but between this unrepentant believer and his Savior.

Now, if you put together the various passages on dealing with excluding unrepentant believers from the church you discover that action is taken on two different levels.

And by the way, the key word here is excluding unrepentant believers, right?

If we excluded all sinners from attending church, who would be here today?

Paul is talking about a sinning believer who is warned and then warned again for his divisive spirit; he’s counseled, he’s exhorted, he’s brought before leaders on more than one occasion and pled with to change his mind and stop his divisive and disobedient behavior, but he refuses.

At that point, decisive action is to take place on two levels.

a. The first level is the level of leadership

And their primary focus at this point is on being protective.

They are actually attempting to protect the sinning believer from himself.

Leadership becomes aware at some point that this individual is effectively living a dangerous life of distorted values and a twisted sense of self-importance – remember, Paul writes that their thinking is upside down.

And leadership knows that this person is going to do nothing more than systematically dismantle his life.

He’s going to pay a high price and the price tag could very well play out over the course of the rest of his life.

One Christian wrote, “My most painful experiences have been when I’ve had a problem and no one loved me enough to tell me about it.”^{xiii}

Well, leadership attempts to protect a brother or sister by exposing his sin and confronting his spirit.

This is really just one aspect of discipleship. Discipline and discipleship are from the same root word.

But when that fails, and the person effectively refuses to be disciplined, leadership then attempts to protect the flock.

You’ll notice in *Titus chapter 3* that there are no lengthy steps found in *Matthew 18* – where in Matthew’s Gospel you have witnesses and several steps of corroborating evidence and public warning, etc. etc.

Here in *Titus*, the divisive believer is warned twice and then dismissed from the assembly.

It’s quite possible that Paul was concerned that Titus and every other shepherd takes a quicker path simply because a divisive person is capable of influencing so many people in a short amount of time.

If Titus will be decisive, a tremendous amount of intrigue and further taking of sides will never make it to center stage.

Put it this way, Titus is told – and we are told the same today – to effectively put out the campfire before it turns into a forest fire.

Deal with this on the level of leadership.

How many of you have come from churches or know of churches where the leadership has simply refused to deal with sin.

And the entire Flock ends up suffering.

I remember serving part time as a music pastor while going through college and not long after taking the job, I found out one of the key soloists in the choir was having an adulterous affair with a man in town. She happened to be the daughter of one of the leading deacons in the church. When I went to the pastor to tell him about it, I'll never forget he kind of scrunched up his nose and wiped his forehead and said, "You know, we really can't be sure." I said, "Well, the entire choir is sure, shouldn't we get to the bottom of it?" Which he never did and that one woman literally impeded the effective forward movement of the church.

Dealing with sin involves the level of leadership.

b. Secondly, deal with this on the level of membership

In other words, the body gets involved.

While the primary focus of the leadership is protective, the primary focus of the body is proactive.

Paul told the congregation in *Colossians 3:15-16*, *Let peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. And let the word of Christ richly dwell within you as you teach and – note this – admonish one another.*

That word *admonish* literally means to correct one who is at fault.^{xiv}

And get this – this is the same root word used by Paul in Titus 3 for *warning* them.

Admonishing is the same thing as warning.

Paul is saying to the Colossian believers and certainly to the Cretan believers to literally be proactive; to be on the lookout; to be engaged in warning each other.

Why? Because in any flock there is a myriad of issues that can create disgruntlement and disagreement.

Paul effectively challenges the congregation – don't wait for the issue to go from the pasture where the flock is, to the attention of those who shepherd . . . don't wait . . . counsel and admonish one another now.

Let me share some practical experience in this regard that might surprise you; the membership of a church will most often know about a divisive issue or a divisive person before the leadership is even aware of the problem.

After 26 years of pastoring I can tell you first hand, that leaders most often find out about something only after the die is cast – after the division has taken root – after someone has chosen to leave – after a decision was misinterpreted or misunderstood – after the gossip has made the rounds – after the disagreement has reached the boiling point.

So according to Paul – and in the wisdom of God – proactivity occurs among the parishioners.

You're probably going to spot it before we do . . . you then offer prayer, balanced perspective, the benefit of the doubt, admonition, help, warning, encouragement to get to the bottom of things without divisiveness or disrespect.

The body literally holds each other accountable.

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement developed a series of questions that were posed to people who expressed a desire to join their churches.

Listen to these:

- Does any sin, inward or outward have dominion over you?
- Do you desire to be told of your faults?
- Do you desire to be told of all your faults – and that plain and clear?
- Do you desire that in doing this we should come as close as possible and search your heart to the bottom?

- Do you desire to be on this and all other occasions entirely open, without disguise, and without reserve?

Who would want to join that church? Only people willing to be warned and admonished and encouraged to be real and genuine and unified.

My younger brother, now about to begin his second round of intensive chemotherapy for an aggressive brain tumor, went to the hospital this week to have a feeding tube inserted. He's lost a lot of weight and strength – he, by the way is so grateful for so many of you praying – he called me last night and asked me what I was doing. I said, working on my sermon, of course, we talked for an hour – that's why my sermon is so short.

When he went into the hospital they put a wrist band on him that had the words printed on it – Fall Risk.

Fall risk. He was at risk of falling – the staff and others around him needed to be alert that he could fall at any time.

His wife Melinda later put a picture of that bracelet online and I couldn't help but agree that this was the perfect metaphor for every one of us.

We are at great risk of tripping, stumbling and falling.

Every one of us can become slanted in our perspective; distorted in our values; disobedient in our actions and sinful in our choices;

Creating division, hurting our testimony; hindering the joy of the flock, discrediting the testimony of the gospel and, most importantly, diminishing the awareness of our world to the gospel and glory of our Lord.

Listen church, Paul effectively writes here:

- be unified;
- although you are incredibly diversified;
- be in your doctrine centralized;
- and in your efforts be energized
- to see the gospel magnified;
- let your life be divinely authorized
- so that the truth through you will be synthesized;
- and keep your heart entirely mesmerized;
- by your great God, whom you wish to see glorified.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 10/21/2012 by Stephen Davey.

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viii John Phillips, Exploring The Pastoral Epistles (Kregel, 2004, p. 309

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