

# TOUGH GRACE IN DIFFICULT PLACES A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF TITUS

## STUDY FOUR

### Dealing with the Difficult and Dangerous

*Titus 1:10–16*

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*To guide a flock, a leader must not only know the Word, but also have the courage to stand for the Word.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**I**N his commentary on Titus, Pastor Chuck Swindoll describes the challenge of facing off against false teachers in the church.

Defending the truth is for neither the fainthearted nor those who want to be liked above all else. No, only people of courage should take on such a difficult, thankless job. Talent and intelligence are fine qualities in a leader, but the essential quality must be courage. That's because the realm of truth is not a playground; it's a battleground.<sup>1</sup>

Enemies of truth prey on the unsuspecting and the naïve. They use silky speech often laced with Bible verses. They appear trustworthy but capture people with their lies.

As in Titus' day, godly church leaders today must confront false teachers with discerning eyes and courageous hearts. In this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we'll follow Paul as he leads us into the battle for truth.



#### PREPARE YOUR HEART

Has a teacher of lies captured the heart and mind of someone you love? Pray for wisdom from God's Spirit through His Word to discern what's true and to act with courage.



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## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

At the top of Paul’s to-do list for Titus was to recruit godly teachers who could help him stand against false teachers in the churches. These men were not to be chosen by popular vote—smooth-talkers can easily swing an election. Instead, Paul told Titus to base his selection of leaders on the qualifications spelled out in *Titus 1:5–9*.

Titus looked for men of integrity at home, in their personal life, and in the church. They must be men of good character and “strong belief in the trustworthy message” who are able to “encourage others with wholesome teaching and show those who oppose it where they are wrong” (Titus 1:9).

During Jesus’ earthly ministry, He warned that predators would come “disguised as harmless sheep but are really vicious wolves” (Matthew 7:15). Sure enough, a den of wolves had slipped into the churches in Crete. If the church was to survive, Titus needed discernment to expose the intruders and tough grace to deal with them firmly. In *Titus 1:10–16*, Paul briefed Titus on his mission to rid the churches of these difficult and potentially dangerous false teachers.



## Observation: The Wrongs False Teachers Commit

*Observation* involves looking closely at the verses to see every aspect of what the biblical writer was saying.<sup>2</sup> Lay a good foundation of observations before tackling interpretation. Carefully read each word and phrase as you take notes.

### False Teachers Say the Wrong Things—Titus 1:10–11

According to *Titus 1:10*, how extensive did Paul say the problem was? What were the prominent characteristics of the false teachers?

Paul identified them as “those who insist on circumcision for salvation” (Titus 1:10). These were Jews who told Gentile Christians that faith in Christ was insufficient. They were urged to follow Jewish laws, the Mosaic system, to be accepted by God. In *Philippians*, Paul didn’t mince words in his condemnation of these grace-killers, calling them “dogs” and “mutilators” (*Philippians 3:2*).

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What did Paul say to do to these grace-killers in [Titus 1:11](#)? Why was this necessary?

*False teachers' words are smooth and captivating. They have charisma, but they twist the truth and take it out of context. They are empty talkers. To the undiscerning, however, they sound good, even loving. In fact, they are leading people away from the truth. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

## False Teachers Have Wrong Motives—Titus 1:11–12

Paul peeled back the false teachers' impressive façade in the last line of [Titus 1:11](#). What was their real motive? How did Paul describe their character in [1:12](#)?

*The hidden motive of greed mixed with an absence of character is a disaster in the making. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

## False Teachers Do Wrong Deeds—Titus 1:13–16

“Just as you can identify a tree by its fruit,” Jesus taught, “so you can identify people by their actions” (Matthew 7:20). How did Paul identify the false teachers, according to [Titus 1:16](#)?

“A bad tree produces bad fruit,” Jesus said (Matthew 7:17). Paul rephrased Jesus' analogy: “Nothing is pure to those who are corrupt and unbelieving, because their minds and consciences are corrupted” (Titus 1:15). Everything they say is corrupt because they are corrupt.

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Redemption was possible, even for false teachers! But it would take an act of tough grace. What must Titus do, and how must they respond, according to [Titus 1:13–14](#)?

By God’s grace through Christ, a person’s corrupt heart can become pure. Then, good fruit will follow—as Paul wrote, “Everything is pure to those whose hearts are pure” (Titus 1:15). Before their words, motives, and deeds could be trusted, however, the false teachers must experience inner transformation.

*The Christian message always has restoration at its heart. The goal of discipline is to restore the one who has fallen—to help the person back on his or her feet.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



## Interpretation: How to Spot the Truth

In his commentary, *The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus*, John Stott draws from our passage three tests that act as truth meters to help us evaluate a person’s teaching.<sup>3</sup>

**The test of *origin*:** “Is its origin divine or human, revelation or tradition?”

The elders based their teaching on “the trustworthy message” that Paul and Titus had taught from the Scriptures, according to [Titus 1:9](#). Where were the false teachers getting their information, according to [1:14](#)?

Write a principle based on this test for evaluating whether a person is speaking truth.

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**The test of essence.** “Is its essence inward or outward, spiritual or ritual?”

What did the false teachers insist upon, according to *Titus 1:10*? In contrast, what was Paul’s emphasis in *1:15*?

Write a principle based on this test for evaluating whether a person is speaking truth.

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**The test of result.** “Is its result a transformed life or merely a formal creed?”

What negative effect were the false teachers having in *1:11*? If the wrongdoers repented in response to Titus’ confrontation, what would be the result, according to *1:13*?

Write a principle based on this test for evaluating whether a person is speaking truth.

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You can use these truth tests next time you wonder about a teacher. In summary, if the message is *divine* in origin (Bible-based), *spiritual* in essence (Christ-centered), and *transformational* in its result (life-changing), then the teacher is worth hearing.



## **Correlation: A Pervasive Problem**

Wherever Paul sowed the gospel, troublemakers crept in and planted weeds as soon as his back was turned. Purging the false teachers from the churches and weeding out their lies was a nonstop job. Read the following verses and write down Paul’s main points.

*Acts 20:29–31*: \_\_\_\_\_

*Romans 16:17–18*: \_\_\_\_\_

*Galatians 1:6–9*: \_\_\_\_\_

*1 Timothy 4:1–7*: \_\_\_\_\_

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What consistent themes do you gather from these verses about the nature of false teachers and how to respond to them?

*Remember this axiom: Wherever the truth is proclaimed, the truth is attacked. I tell young men training for ministry to cultivate a tender heart but a tough hide, because someday you'll have to deal with those who are difficult and sometimes dangerous. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## **Application: Three Responses God Honors**

Even if you're not a shepherd in your church, you still need to watch out for wolves. Here are three applications to carry as staffs for protection.

First, *commit to living in the real world*. Our world consistently confuses what is wrong as right. What falsehoods have you seen portrayed as truth? How can you guard yourself from falling for lies?

Second, *carry on a courageous strategy*. Paul's strategy was to reprove the false teachers with the goal of restoration. That took courage. What strategy may the Lord be giving you to fend off a wolf in your flock? Always start with prayer. Then what might be next?

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Third, *hold a high standard*. In our postmodern world, the voices of the immoral majority are loud and persuasive. It's difficult to stand against such a strong cultural tide, but with the Spirit's power and the support of other believers, it's possible. In what areas might you need to hold a higher standard?

You can step onto the battlefield with confidence when you're well-equipped. Attire your soul with the "belt of truth and the body armor of God's righteousness" (Ephesians 6:14). With the truth and righteousness of Christ, we *will* win the battle. No foe can stand against Him!



## A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, the powers of this world seek to silence the voice of truth and depose those who stand for what is right. May I not shrink back in fear but step forward in faith, knowing that the battle against Satan and the forces of darkness was won at the cross. Give me courage and help me stand strong in the power of Your Spirit. In Christ's name, amen.*

## ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014), 310.
2. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)"
3. John Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus: The Life of the Local Church*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 176.

For the 2024 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2006, 2024 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

