

Facing The False Teachers

Titus 1:10-16

Pastor John Miller

In Titus 1:10-16, Paul said to Titus, "For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households..." or "families" "...teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain." So they are motivated by money. "One of them, a prophet of their own, said, 'Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.' This testimony is true." He's referring to what the prophet quoted. "Therefore rebuke them sharply..." this is what Titus is to do with the false teachers on Crete "...that they may be sound in the faith, not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth. To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled." That's a description of these false teachers. "They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work." They cannot do what is good or what glorifies God.

One of the problems in our culture today that we've bought hook, line and sinker is the philosophy of relativism. The dictionary definition of relativism is "the doctrine that knowledge, truth and morality exist in relation to culture and society or historical context and is not absolute." Relativism basically teaches that there is no truth. "Your truth is your truth; my truth is my truth." We should be tolerant and accept everybody's truth as equally valid. And we have completely bought into this philosophy that there is no truth. Now the definition of truth is "that which is consistent with reality." But we have abandoned all sense of reality.

Have you ever looked at the culture we live in now and thought, We've gone mad! We've completely lost our minds! That's what's called "a reprobate mind." It's used in our text for the false teachers; they're reprobate or they can't discern right from wrong. We wonder, Why are they doing this? It's because we are reprobate; we've rejected God and bought into this relativism.

If you talk to a young person today and ask them, "Do you believe there is absolute truth?" they'll say, "Absolutely not." They'll say, "I'm absolutely sure there is no truth." That's self-contradicting. They are absolutely sure there are no absolutes?!

What Jesus said, in John 14:6, was, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." The only way to get to heaven is through Jesus Christ. If you want to get to heaven, you can't go around the Cross. Jesus is "the Word [who] became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14), who died on the Cross, rose from the dead and He's the only one who can save.

There is only one, inspired, infallible Word of God, and that's the Bible, and Jesus is the way to heaven. We must stand absolutely on the truth that the Bible is the inerrant, infallible, inspired Word of God, and that Jesus Christ is the only way for mankind to be saved. And we preach

the Gospel without compromise.

In Acts 20, Paul is meeting with a group of pastors on the beach, which is my favorite thing to do. We call it “a board meeting.” But Paul wasn’t surfing; he was meeting with the pastors. He said, in verses 29-30, “After my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up...” they’ll come from inside the church “...speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.” So Paul warned the elders of Ephesus that there would be false teachers.

And in our text, Paul opens, in verse 10, with a “for,” which means “because.” He said, “For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision,” meaning Jews. He used the word “for” in verse 10, because in verses 5-9, Paul had told Titus to ordain elders in every city to which he had been appointed.

An elder is a pastor, bishop or overseer. So Titus was to anoint spiritual leaders to oversee the church. Verse 9 says that they were to be men who would be “holding fast the faithful word as he...” that is, “the pastor” “...has been taught, that he...” “the pastor” “...may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict,” who are the false teachers. This is the last verse in the qualifications for elders. The word “sound” is a medical term, which means “healthy” or “life giving.”

So there is no break between the qualifications for elders and the elders’ task of standing up and dealing with false teachers. It was because there were false teachers, verse 10, that Paul told Titus to “appoint elders in every city.” They were to be faithful men who would hold onto the Word of God and be able to confront the false teachers and deal with them.

False teachers do exist, so don’t buy into relativism. They are everywhere. In verse 10, Paul said, “For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers.” There aren’t just a few but “many.” There are a lot of false teachers out there on television and radio. If you go to a Christian bookstore, there is a lot of false teaching. We have not been standing on the truth of God’s Word. We need to be discerning and confronting the false teaching that is so prevalent in the church today and in the culture around us.

I want to give you a few things about false doctrine. It is like leaven. Number one, it enters the church secretly. False teachers don’t identify themselves as such. But they’ll say, “You’re gonna love what I say. It’s gonna make you feel good and happy, and I’ll smile as I preach. I’ll tell you how wonderful you are! We’re not going to talk about sin; sorry I even mentioned the word.”

So these false prophets or false teachers do exist today, and it would be foolish to reject that reality. All through the Old Testament there were false prophets. And all through the Gospels Jesus warned us of “false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves” (Matthew 7:15). They do exist but enter the church secretly.

Number two, false doctrine grows quickly like leaven. “A little leaven leavens the whole

lump” (Galatians 5:9).

Number three, they permeate completely.

And number four, false teaching must be dealt with decisively.

A lot of pastors don’t like to preach on this subject. A lot of pastors will not preach on this subject. But we are bound by the text. If I told you we were going to go through Titus but I skipped over verses, you would say, “Well, what about those verses?”

“We don’t like those verses.”

But we at Revival will deal with every verse in every chapter of this book and deal with what it says, what it means and how it applies.

So we need to realize that there are false teachers who enter the church secretly, their teaching grows quickly, permeates completely and thus must be dealt with decisively.

How do we deal with false teaching? Verse 9 says by faithful men who are “holding fast the faithful word as [they have] been taught, that [they] may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.”

In our text, Paul instructs Titus on how to face false teachers. There are three, main points about this. Number one, Paul explains who they were, in verses 10-12. “For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers.”

So the reason we need to have solid leaders in the church, these faithful men in verses 5-9, is because of these “insubordinate...idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped.” That phrase means they “need to be muzzled.” They “subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain. One of them, a prophet of their own, said, ‘Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.’”

In this first category, Paul explains, number one, who the false teachers are in the area of their identity, in verse 10. He says there are a lot of false teachers, and they are unruly and disorderly or “insubordinate” or rebellious. This contrasts with verse 9, which says the faithful pastor is “holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught” by the apostles. So the false teachers are “insubordinate,” unruly and disorderly.

Beware of teachers who will not put themselves under the authority of Scripture, God’s Word, and church leadership. Beware of teachers who are just doing their own thing and not in the context of a local church. They are not submitted to the authority of Scripture.

I am not the authority; God’s Word is the authority. And you’ll hear God speak when we read the Bible. Somebody said, “I want to hear God speak!” Then read the Bible out loud. When we

read the Bible, you're hearing the Word of God. When we read a text, we could then say, "Thus saith the Lord," because all Scripture is given by inspiration of God.

So reject teachers who are not submitted to the authority of Scripture. And the way they preach reflects their view of Scripture. I can listen to a guy preach the Bible and tell in just a couple of minutes what his view of the Bible is by the way he preaches God's Word.

Notice also that these false teachers are "idle talkers." I like this. It means that they are "mere talkers"; they have style but no substance. They have fancy words but they are empty, meaningless words. Sometimes I watch Christian television and watch false preachers. They say things that mean nothing.

It's like cotton candy. You pay money, put it in your mouth and it disappears. "Did I eat something?!" If I'm going to buy something to eat, I want something with substance, real meat!

You can't live on "spiritual cotton candy." I hear so much preaching like that.

When I was a bachelor over 47 years ago, someone made me a big, chocolate cake. I don't cook; it's even a project for me to get a bowl of cereal. So I thought that was great. I was alone, so it was all for me!

When I was a little boy, I actually stayed with an older bachelor, who had a cake. I got two pieces, so I said, "When I grow up, I'm going to be a bachelor so I can eat the whole cake!"

So I hadn't gotten married yet and I had this cake that was given to me. I ate that chocolate cake for breakfast, lunch and dinner for a whole week. By the end of the week, I was getting visions and dreams, but they weren't from God. They were from the chocolate cake. It's so dangerous.

A lot of Christians are living on chocolate cake or cotton candy—no substance. They ask their preacher, "What did you just say?" and the preacher says, "I don't know but wasn't it awesome?!" It's all style and no substance. We should look for substance over style. It's great if you can have both, but the substance, the Word, life-giving truth from God's Word, is what matters.

And notice, in verse 10, that the false teachers are also called "deceivers." Not only are their words vain or empty; they are self-deceived and lead others astray. In Matthew 15:14, Jesus said that "They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch." So if you're blind and your leader's blind, it leads you to "fall into a ditch."

And in verse 10, they specifically are "of the circumcision." Most of these false teachers were Jewish. What were they teaching? In this entire passage, Paul does not say. He tells us they were primarily Jewish. If they were officially Judaizers, we do not know. But most likely what they were teaching was some kind of Jewish legalism. They would have interpreted the Scriptures with a mystic, parabolic kind of interpretation. They were into man-made traditions.

It's the same today with those who preach grace plus works; they are legalists. They don't preach grace alone, by faith alone, through Christ alone for salvation. They preach you have to work your way to heaven, as well. The Bible says, "By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). So all praise, all glory to God, who saves us by His grace! They are grace-plus preachers: grace plus baptism, grace plus good works such as rites and rituals.

Or even by grace and a haircut. When I got saved in 1971, I had long hair and a big beard. There were Christians who were praying for me to get saved because of the way I looked. "God save John Miller!"

"How do you know he's not saved?"

"Just look at him!"

I thought it was weird; I looked more like Jesus than they did! What's the deal?! We sometimes size up Christians by their looks. "He can't be a Christian; look at his hair!" "She can't be a Christian; look at that skirt!" So we judge people by their outward appearance. What does God look at? The heart. That's what's important.

So the false teachers are all external and legalistic. For them, it's the gospel of grace plus works. And no doubt they added days and diets. "Can't worship on that day. Can't eat that."

An indication of what these Jewish, false teachers were teaching is found in verse 14: "Jewish fables and commandments of men," and they "turn from the truth."

Secondly, what about their influence when we define them, in verse 11? Their "mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain." When Paul says their "mouths must be stopped," he literally uses a phrase from the Greek, which means "muzzled." It must be silenced. How? Back in verse 9 it says by "holding fast the faithful word as he..." that is, "a faithful leader" "...has been taught." It means preaching and teaching sound doctrine. The best antidote to false doctrine in a church is sound, Biblical truth being preached and taught.

Why? Because verse 11 says they are subverting or upsetting "whole households." It could be because at this time, the church met in homes. So he's probably talking about home churches. And a lot of times today false teachers will pull people away from church into their homes. I'm not against home Bible studies, but they many times use their homes to indoctrinate people into false teachings. And the word used here for "households" is actually "families." So more likely Paul is saying here that the false teachers were ruining their families.

I believe that can happen. If you get involved in false doctrine, it can ruin your marriage. It can ruin your children, your family, your home. But good, sound doctrine will strengthen your marriage. It will bless your family, and the family will bless the church. The family and the church are not in competition; they are complementary. The family strengthens the church, and

the church strengthens the family. But this false teaching destroys marriages. I've seen marriages end in divorce because of false doctrine. And I've seen families destroyed because of false doctrine.

Verse 11 says that they are also "teaching things which they ought not" to teach. It just flat out shouldn't be taught.

And these false teachers are motivated by money, verse 11. They seek "dishonest gain." Back in Titus 1:7, when the leaders in the church were chosen, they were not to be "greedy for money." They weren't to be doing ministry for unrighteous gain. And in 1 Timothy 6:3-12, Paul told Timothy that false teachers were trying to promote an idea that godliness was a way to get rich. Does that sound familiar? Paul said, "From such withdraw yourself." Run from them. Rather he said, "Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare." They "pierced themselves through with many sorrows." They deny the faith. So spiritual leaders are not to be doing it for filthy gain.

Now thirdly, notice the character of the false teachers, verse 12. One of their own poets or prophets from Crete, Epimenides, who lived about 400 BC, Paul is quoting. He lived hundreds of years before Christ. He said about the Cretans that they "are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." They are liars and "evil beasts" means they are "lawless." They are liars and like wild animals. We see that in the streets of America today—brawling in the streets like wild animals. And they are called "lazy gluttons." Don't be a lazy glutton.

So these people are celebrities and not servants. They're not serving the Lord; they're serving themselves, their own appetites.

Now in verses 13-14, Paul moves from who the false teachers were to the second category, or what Titus should do as a result of these false teachers. He said, "This testimony is true," referring to the quote in verse 12. So these Cretans were "liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." What Titus was to do—and what pastors need to do—is "rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not giving heed to Jewish fables..." or "myths" "...and commandments of men who turn from the truth." A pastor who is worth his salt will do this.

I say "Amen!" to this. The best antidote to false teaching is sound, healthy teaching. So let's look at these verses. Verse 13 says, "Rebuke them sharply." How are they to be rebuked sharply? By the Word of God. In 2 Timothy 4:2-5, Paul tells Timothy, "Preach the word!" We don't use psychology, philosophy or relativism; just "Preach the Word!" And how are we to do that? Be ready "in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort..." with the Word "...with all longsuffering and teaching." Why? "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables." Then Paul told Timothy, "But you be watchful in all things, endure

afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” He was telling Timothy to stay in the battle.

Notice also why, in verse 13: “that they may be sound in the faith.” Paul’s purpose was not to just rebuke them but to restore them, to rescue them. He wanted Titus to restore them back to the faith.

And it’s “the faith.” Whenever you find “the faith,” it’s not talking about your subjective, individual faith in Christ or God; it’s talking about the body of truth that we believe as Christians. An example is the book of Jude. When Jude wrote about false teachers, he said, “Contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). If it’s new, it’s not true; if it’s true, it’s not new. So we are to deliver the faith. Stand on it. Don’t deviate from the faith. That’s how they should be rebuked sharply.

Verse 14 has two more reasons to rebuke the false teachers. First is “not giving heed to Jewish fables.” The Jews were famous for allegorizing and spiritualizing the Scriptures. They took stories and read into them things that weren’t intended to be in the Bible.

Not too long ago we had The DaVinci Code. Then we had secret codes in the Bible. People ask me, “Do you believe in secret codes in the Bible?”

“No; I believe in the clarity of Scripture.” When the New Testament was written, it was written in a specific kind of Greek. It’s called “koine Greek.” That was the language of the street, the common Greek spoken on the street. I’m all for modern translations that bring the Bible into our vocabulary, as long as they are accurate to the text. The Scriptures are clear.

So don’t read into the Bible things that aren’t there. We taught this to our pastors in the classes last week on how to interpret Scripture. When you read a passage, always approach it with a literal interpretation. Don’t immediately assume it is allegorical, parabolic or mythological. Genesis 1-11—actually the whole book of Genesis—is historical fact. There really was a first man named Adam and a first woman named Eve. There really was a garden of Eden. There really was a serpent who tempted them. They really did disobey God. They really did sin. There really was a guy named Noah. He really did build an actual boat. God did destroy the surface of the whole earth. Everything you read in the book of Genesis is historically true. I believe in the historicity of Scripture.

You ask, “Aren’t there other kinds of literature?” Yes, like poetry. So whenever you’re reading the Bible, ask yourself, “What’s the genre of the text? What kind of literature am I reading? History, poetry, prophecy, proverbial?” And you interpret Scripture in a literal sense. You don’t read it allegorically.

If I were reading a newspaper that said there was an accident between two autos that collided at the intersection of Menifee and Scott Road, would I ask, “What does it really mean?” One car was black, so that means sinners collided with saints? The other car was blue, and blue is the symbol for heaven. So you might say that really wasn’t an accident; just undercover stuff.

That's not how you approach the Bible. That would be reading into the text or what's called "eisegesis." It means putting into the text what is not in the text. Last week we told the pastors to never get out of a text what was never in the text. What you look for when you read your Bible is the original author's intent. It's called "authorial intent." When you preach the Bible, you preach authorial intent or what the original author intended.

Someone asked, "What does it mean?" It means what Paul originally meant it to mean. It's not what you think it means. You can't read into the text. So interpret the Bible literally in its historical, grammatical, theological context.

Then verse 14 says that preachers are also to avoid the "commandments of men who turn from the truth." This is legalism or man-made rules that aren't in the Bible. Be careful of the modern-day Pharisees or legalists.

Category number three is in verses 15-16. Here we find the evidence of the errors of the false teachers. "To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work." This so graphically describes the evidence that these people are false teachers! Their minds and consciences are "defiled."

In verse 15, it says they have a false view of purity. It is an external view of purity. If you "don't smoke, don't chew and don't hang out with those who do," that means you're spiritual. If you wear these clothes, do this and don't do that, you're spiritual.

Now what does Paul mean where he says, "To the pure all things are pure." And this is an example of misinterpreting Scripture, taking it out of context. I've had that verse quoted to me by married persons who are in an adulterous affair to mean that it's pure, because their hearts were pure.

Excuse me?! You think that you can commit adultery and it's pure, because your heart is pure?! No. I knew a young man who was struggling with pornography. He said, "Well, it's pure; my heart's pure." He actually said, "Pastor, if you think it's evil, something's wrong with you. Your heart's not pure." Wow!

Let's look at the context of Paul's statement. False teachers, who were "of the circumcision." They were teaching diets and days. "Don't eat this. Don't eat that. Do eat this." So it's talking about ceremonial purity; not moral purity. You can't make pure something that God calls sin just because you claim your heart is pure. The Bible says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9).

So if you're claiming to be pure because your heart is pure, and you're doing things that the Bible very clearly says are wrong, you can't quote this verse; it's out of context. Paul is talking about ceremonial purity—diet and days. That's Jewish legalism. That's so very important.

I've had people ask, "Can Christians dance?" My answer is, "Some can and some can't." The ones I see should not. Sit down and don't dance. It's embarrassing.

So we judge a person's purity based on what they do or don't do. Remember that Jesus said, "Not what goes in the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man" (Matthew 15:11). I quote that verse every time I go to In-N-Out, every time I eat a big double-double. If you think it's wrong, don't eat a hamburger. Don't eat meat. Don't eat pork. But God looks on the heart. What defiles a man is what comes from his heart. It's the heart that is the problem.

Peter was on his rooftop in Joppa waiting for lunch to be served. He probably was in a hammock on a warm day. What could be better? Then he had a vision of a big sheet coming down from heaven holding many ceremonially unclean animals that Jews were not to eat. But God said to Peter, "Rise, Peter, kill and eat." But Peter argued with the Lord. He said, "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean." Then a voice told Peter, "What God has cleansed you must not call common" (Acts 10:13-15).

The minute that happened, there was a knock on Peter's front door. There were Gentiles standing on his front porch. They came from a Roman centurion named Cornelius. They told Peter that God had spoken to their master that they should go to bring Peter to their master's house to tell them "all the things commanded you by God" (Acts 10:33). Peter thought, Wow! God is going to save the Gentiles. He was not to call unclean what God had called clean.

So the context here is that the false teachers have a false view of purity. In Philippians 3:5-9, Paul listed his spiritual pedigree and gives us his evaluation of it. He was "circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness, which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ." They were a pile of rubbish or dung to him. What was important to him was that he may be "found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ."

God looks on the heart, and what we need is regeneration, a new heart.

Now look at the problem they had, in verse 16. They had a false profession; they're hypocrites. "They profess to know God..." which means to know Him experientially, intimately and personally "...but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work." They are reprobate. So they had ritual without reality. They had creed without Christ.

How about you? Are you a hypocrite? Do you say you're a Christian but your life denies that? Do you say you believe in Jesus Christ but in your works, you deny Him?

Notice they denied God, number one; they were detestable, number two; and were disobedient, number three.

Were Paul's words here in our text loving? Yes, they were. They are the most loving thing you can ever do. In Galatians 1:8, Paul said, "Even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed." Anybody who preaches a gospel of grace plus works is anathema or cursed to the lowest hell. Paul's words were loving because, number one, these false teachers were perverting the Gospel; number two, they were dishonoring the Person and work of Christ; and number three, they were damning men's souls for eternity.

Let me give you three tests to apply to any system that is ever being taught. Number one, ask what the origin is. Is it revelation or tradition from men? Is it the divinely inspired Word of God or man-made tradition? Number two, what is its essence? Is it spiritual or all ritual? And number three, what are its results? Does it transform one's life into the image of Christ? Or is it just formal creeds and conduct? John Stott said, "True Christianity is divine in its origin, spiritual in its essence and moral in its effect."

I like what Paul said in Philippians 3:3. He said, "For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."