

Titus
Identifying and Confronting False Teachers
Lesson 4 Titus 1.10-16
092825

Introduction

- 1 Three weeks ago we began a study in the book of Titus. This letter was written by the Apostle Paul to Titus after he left Titus on the island of Crete to bring order to the fledgling church which had many problems, one of which was ungodly leadership.
- 2 So following the letter's greeting Paul gives Titus a list of the character qualifications in order to appoint new leaders in the churches known as elders or overseers. He then follows that in verse 9 with a job description for the elders, namely teaching sound doctrine and refuting those who oppose it.
- 3 And apparently there were "many" people on the island of Crete who were opposed to sound doctrine primarily due to the activity of false teachers.
 - a This was not an isolated case but very common in the first century church. You see that when you read through the NT letters.
 - b While there was great growth and expansion in the church there were also significant problems ... the most serious of which was the activity of false teachers.
- 4 And that's why Paul wastes no time getting to that issue in his letter to Titus. In verses 10-16 he instructs Titus how he was to deal with the false teachers and their false teachings. Let's read it.

For there are many rebellious people, full of meaningless talk and deception, especially those of the circumcision group. ¹¹ They must be silenced, because they are disrupting whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach—and that for the sake of dishonest gain. ¹² One of Crete's own prophets has said it: "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons." ¹³ This saying is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith ¹⁴ and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the merely human commands of those who reject the truth. ¹⁵ To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. ¹⁶ They claim to know God,

but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good (Titus 1:10–16).

False Teachers

- What they were like
- What kind of influence were they having
- What they were teaching
- What was to be done with them
- What about today?

[1] What they were like

For there are many rebellious people, full of meaningless talk and deception, especially those of the circumcision group (v10).

1 Rebellious

Literally this means “not under authority.” Verse 14 says these false teachers rejected the truth of God (v14) therefore were not under God’s authority and therefore not under the spiritual authority he delegated to Paul or Titus.

2 Wordy but Empty

full of meaningless talk (v10)

False teachers usually hide their deception in wordiness. They sound intriguing, impressive and convincing but when you truly analyzed what they were saying, it was empty and without eternal value. Worse than that they were ...

3 Deceptive

full of meaningless talk and deception (v10)

- a The most talked-about vice of Cretan culture was deception. Deception was palpable all over the island. And sadly, but not shockingly, deception had made its way into the community of Christ followers through some prominent leaders.
- b These leaders were not merely deceived in a particular point of doctrine but “full” of deception which underscores their culpability.
 - They were purposely leading God’s people away from the truth into false beliefs by remaining within the church, giving the impression they were following Christ and claiming to be honoring the Bible.
 - They were gifted communicators who were engaging and entertaining and who had a way of exploiting some hidden area of

discontentment in the lives of the Cretans. They knew just how to scratch the itching ears (2Tim 4:3).

- Ultimately their message made the Cretan believers feel good about themselves and subsequently these believers kept coming back for more even when the false teachers revealed their greed.

4 Greedy

... teaching things they ought not to teach—and that for the sake of dishonest gain (v11b).

- a It wasn't just their doctrine that was bad but their motive as well. They were certainly guilty of many evils but at the end of the day they were doing it for the money.
- b **Rebellious, empty, deceptive and greedy** ...sounds just like a Cretan which is Paul's conclusion in verse 12.

5 Cretan (v12)

One of Crete's own prophets has said it: "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons." ¹³ This saying is true (v12-13a).

- a It's not a pretty picture that the apostle paints. But the most disturbing detail of all is the word "many" in verse 10. There were 'many rebellious people.
- b It would have been bad enough if there had only been a few. But there were *many* of them and their influence was devastating the church.

[2] What kind of influence were they having

... they are disrupting whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach (v11).

1 There are two Greek words translated household.

- a The first word is *oikia* which refers specifically to a physical structure—a house or dwelling where a family lived.
- b The second word is *oikos* which encompasses not just the physical house and immediate family but extended family, servants and other families who joined together to form a socio-economic and religious unit in Greco-Roman culture.

2 As Christianity spread the *oikos* (households) were repurposed and became meeting places for the church to worship, fellowship, and be taught the Word of God.

3 It is these household churches that the false teachers were disrupting by teaching things they ***ought not to teach***. So what were they teaching?

[3] What they were teaching

1 Jesus plus something else.

- a Apparently the false teachers were ethnically Jewish, culturally Cretan and ethnically Gentile. In other words, Jews who had the morals of pagan Gentiles. We know they were Jewish because in verse 10 Paul refers to them as the “circumcision party.”
 - This term appears two other places in the NT (Acts 11:2/ Galatians 2:12), and in both cases it refers to Jewish believers in Jesus who insisted that before a Gentile could become a genuine Christian they had to adopt Judaism, keep Jewish law and be circumcised.
 - This was a big problem in the first century church. Almost the entirety of Paul’s letter to the Galatians is devoted to exposing and denouncing this heresy.
 - It remained such a problem throughout the church that a council was convened in Jerusalem to settle the matter.
 - 1 What was at stake was this: Are we saved by faith in Jesus alone or faith in Jesus plus keeping Jewish law.
 - 2 Today we refer to it as “**Jesus plus**” and it remains one of Satan’s best deceptions.
- b Sinful human beings have always had the propensity to add some other requirement on top of pure faith in Jesus. Most of the time it is because it seems appropriate or feels right.
 - To those who adhered to the false teachings of “circumcision party” it just felt right to add Jewishness to faith in Jesus.
 - After all, they postulated, “Jesus was a Jew who kept Jewish law. We have always kept these laws and practices from the time of our forefathers. So if Gentiles want to believe they should do the same.”
 - Summary. Before Gentiles could receive a Jewish Savior they had to first come under a Jewish morality (the Law of Moses) in order to clean up their lives.
- c Today Jesus plus Jewish law/circumcision is not the big problem as it was in the first century. But “Jesus plus” is still a huge problem. For example ...
 - **Jesus plus getting my life in order.** I feel like I can’t really officially come to Jesus or ask him for any help until I first fix this problem area in my life. I’ve got to get things in order first, then I can fully believe and be baptized.

- **Jesus plus sincerity.** I understand that it's not by good works that I come to Christ but rather through repentance and faith in the gospel. But I wonder if my repentance has been sincere enough to the point I wonder if I am truly saved. I need add some sincerity to my faith.
 - **Jesus plus good behavior.** I can't really feel secure in Jesus or approved/loved by God until I show sufficient progress in my growth in godly living. I have never felt I have had enough progress and therefore feel insecure in my salvation.
 - **Jesus plus feelings.** When I feel the Spirit moving and experience those close-to-God moments, I feel good about my status before him. But when I am "dry", I feel like I've done something to lose his favor.
 - **Jesus plus success.** I feel good about my faith when my family life, child raising, career path or some other aspect of my life is going well. If things are not going well I feel like I have done something wrong.
- e What is so bad about Jesus plus? Two things.
- **First, Jesus plus keeps people from the true gospel.**
 - 1 Ephesians 2:8 says, For it is by grace you have been saved not by works. Romans 11:6 adds that if you add works to God's saving grace then grace is no longer the grace because grace and works are mutually exclusive.
 - 2 And if works are added to the gospel of grace it is no longer the gospel but as Paul said in Galatians, another gospel. A counterfeit gospel that is very close to the real but at its core fundamentally a different gospel.
I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—⁷ which is really no gospel at all. (Gal 1:6–7a)
 - **Secondly, Jesus plus implies that Jesus sacrifice was not enough.**
 - 1 It is saying in order to be saved I need to add my goodness and obedience to his death and resurrection. It is the unpardonable sin because you cannot be saved by insisting you will add to what Jesus has done on the cross so as to contribute to your salvation.
 - 2 This is why the Reformers proclaimed the Five Solas; salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone, according to Scripture alone for the glory of God alone!

- f The false teachers on Crete were not only teaching Jesus plus Jewish law, they were teaching ...

2 Jesus plus Jewish myths.

Therefore rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith ¹⁴ and will pay no attention to Jewish myths (Titus 1:13b–14a).

- a Jewish myths were fictional stories or legends based on actual characters found in Jewish history and fictional characters found in Jewish folklore. Apparently these legends were presented as reality and then blended with Christianity to form a new version of Christianity.
- b This blending is still a problem today as we have seen it in the church over the last two decades.
- In an effort to accommodate culture many prominent leaders tried to combine the gospel with worldly philosophies so as to make Christianity more palatable to the unbelieving.
 - The same that has been happening in missionary work for years where a newly evangelized people group blends the gospel with their own tribal beliefs so that they can both believe in Jesus and yet keep their ancestral religion.
- b It's called syncretism which is from Greek word "sunkretismos." Ironically it is a word that originates from the island of Crete.
- Because it was a major port on the Mediterranean it was very cosmopolitan and a place where many of the world's religions and gods melded together in a sunkretismos which literally means the "Union of Cretans."
 - It turns out that Crete was the perfect place for false teaching to thrive and syncretism to abound and therefore the pure gospel needed to be retaught. Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.
- c False teachers on Crete were not only teaching Jesus plus Jewish law, Jesus plus Jewish myths but also ...

3 Jesus plus human commands.

Therefore rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith ¹⁴ and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the merely human commands ... (Titus 1:13b–14).

- a Human commands refers to any command that is put in the place of obedience to God's commands. This is exactly what Jesus condemned in the Pharisees when he said ...

You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: ⁸

"These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

⁹ They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules."

(Matt 15:7–9).

- These "human rules" centered around cleans laws and in particular clean laws about food and eating food.
- If you wanted to maintain a right relationship with God you could not eat certain foods and only eat acceptable foods after ceremonially washing your hands. To that Jesus said,

Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? ¹⁸ *But the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them.* ¹⁹ *For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.* ²⁰ *These are what defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them (Matt 15:17–20).*

- b So it seems that the false teachers had been requiring observance of Jewish clean laws which included the restriction of eating certain foods. Jesus plus human commands. But apparently they went beyond forbidding certain foods. When Paul addressed the same false teachers in 1 Timothy he said,

They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. ⁴ *For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, (1 Tim 4:3–4).*

- c This is exactly what Paul is referring to in verse 15 when he says, *To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure ... (Titus 1:15a).*

- "All things" refers to creation so verse 15 simply means that "the pure"—those who have experienced the cleansing of salvation—know that God has given them all of creation to enjoy (1 Tim 6:17).
- The "pure" know that "everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving.

- Thus, the pure do not regard the things forbidden by the false teachers as impure. In that sense, to the pure, all things are pure. *But to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure.*
 - In other words, there is nothing “pure” to the Jewish false teachers. Their minds are corrupted in the sense that they do not evaluate God’s creation correctly. They forbid marriage and certain foods as impure when in fact marriage and food are actually good gifts from God.
 - And the worst part of it all was that these human commands were being added to the gospel which made it another gospel which is no gospel at all ... a gospel that does not save. That’s why Paul said some of these teachers were corrupted and not believers.
- d Now why would these Cretan believers be so susceptible to the Jesus plus human commands/clean laws? Well it seemed like a reasonable course of action when you considered how corrupt and immoral Cretan society was.
- “Yes I know the gospel of grace teaches us to say no to ungodliness (2:12) but it takes too long to do that and will probably never work in a culture as corrupt as Crete.
 - So we need more than Jesus. We need Jesus plus human commands in order to bring about moral change on our island.”

[4] What was to be done with them

They must be silenced ... Therefore rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith (v11a, 13)

- 1 First **rebuke them**. The word translated “rebuke” here in verse 13 is translated “refute” in verse 9 and is one of the task’s assigned to the Elder/Pastor. The Elder is called to refute false teaching and rebuke those who spread false teaching. In other words he is to protect the flock.
- 2 Secondly Paul says to Titus **rebuke them sharply**. Why sharply? Two reasons.
 - a First, because the severity of the threat calls for a severe response. Christ shed his blood for their salvation and that salvation was being jeopardized. Jesus himself said it is no small thing to make a child of God stumble. So rebuke them sharply.
 - b Secondly because the Cretans were hard people so only a strong rebuke would work.

- In most cases Pastors are to try and gently restore people to sound doctrine (2 Tim 2:25-26).
 - In some cases that is not possible and the only way to shock someone out of their deception back into “sound faith” is with a sharp rebuke.
- 3 Thirdly Paul says ***rebuke them so they will be sound in the faith***. The goal was correction, restoration and salvation. And the motive was love.
- a But in spite of that pure motive sometimes people refuse to repent and continue to produce division as was the case with many in the Cretan church. Concerning that sad possibility Paul says in chapter 3, *Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them.* ¹¹ *You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are self-condemned (Titus 3:10–11).*
- b To some that seems so unloving but in reality it is just the opposite.
- The unloving thing is to do nothing and let false teachers go on spreading their harmful teaching.
 - The loving thing is to follow Paul’s directive and rebuke false teachers so that they will be sound in the faith and cease teaching error.

[5] What about today?

- 1 The first and most fundamental thing to know about false teaching/teachers is that we ought to expect them and be on the lookout for them because they have been present in every chapter of church history.
- a False teachers should not surprise us, since the Bible warns that we are in a spiritual battle and that Satan remains on the offensive against God and his people.
- b Throughout history whenever and wherever the gospel advanced, false teaching and teachers followed in its wake. Where there are teachers of truth, there will most certainly be teachers of error.
- c The most surprising thing about false teachers is that we continue to be surprised by them.
- 2 In the light of that we should take something away from this passage and that is that it is just as important to refute false doctrine as it is to teach sound doctrine.
- a Again we are not talking about someone who has a particular point of doctrine wrong but is open to correction.

- b We are talking about someone who resists orthodoxy, who resists the historical and widely held tenants of the Christian faith and refuses correction from their peers or tries to justify their false teaching through semantics.
 - c Usually this refuting or rebuking involves a national leader who is sound in doctrine correcting another leader, teacher, organization, movement that is not sound in doctrine. I don't have the national platform required to do that nor would I want it. But I am responsible for sound doctrine in this local church and I take that seriously.
 - d There are of course secondary issues in which it is possible to have a difference of opinion. But when it comes to the fundamentals of the faith as clearly revealed in the Bible there can be no compromise.
- 3 But what makes it so difficult today is that there is so much faulty teaching because it is so easy for someone to gain a platform and an audience.
- a Prior to the age of the internet everything was vetted to some degree before it was published or broadcast on TV or radio. Not so today.
 - b Certainly there are solid authors, teachers and apologists out there but the majority of youtubers, bloggers, social media personalities and authors on Amazon have not been vetted and many are lacking in sound doctrine to one degree or another.
 - c We were reminded of that again last week with the most recent prediction of the rapture by South African pastor/prophet Joshua Mhlakela.
 - He claimed to have received a vision that Jesus would return on September 23 or 24 coinciding with the Jewish holiday of Rosh Hashanah.
 - His prediction went viral on TikTok, where it fueled a trend known as “#RaptureTok” and prompted 1000's believers to sell their cars, quit school/jobs and leave notes explaining their disappearance.

So how can we avoid error and false teaching?

1 Stay humble (avoid over-confidence)

- a A number of years ago I was having lunch with some wonderful mature believers who while we were eating showed me a book that their church was going through together. They were so excited about it.

- b As soon as I laid eyes on it I knew it was really bad and I had to tell them. The author was a progressive Christian posing as a biblical Christian.
- He did not believe in the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures or substitutionary atonement of Jesus.
 - Furthermore he did not believe in the reality of the person of Satan or the existence of hell because everybody on the planet was no matter what they believed was going to heaven (universalism).
 - It's not that everything he believed was in error and some of the thing he wrote in the book were potentially helpful. But his foundation was not Christ and the fundamentals of his doctrine was not sound. He was a false teacher.
- c So I told them thinking that they would appreciate my concern and drop out of the study or at the very least ask for more information on the author so they could look into it. But I got just the opposite. They kind of dismissed me and said if there is error in the book they would certainly see it. It was pride.
- d Some time later God mercifully brought humility and clarity to them and they saw their error. But the was scatter and eventually closed ... and that too was probably God's mercy.

2 Examine the fruit

- a Jesus said to his disciples, *Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.* ¹⁶ *By their fruit you will recognize them (Matthew 7:15–16a).*
- b Is there humility or arrogance. Is there godliness or moral slackness? Do they make much Jesus or much of themselves? Are they givers or takers?
- c A teachers character and lifestyle is often the most telling indicator of their true motives and the nature of their teaching.

3 Test all teachings

- a The apostle John instructs believers to *test the spirits to see whether they are from God (1 Jn 4:1)* by measuring the teaching against the full counsel of scripture and the core tenets of the gospel.

- b In addition to testing beware of any “new revelation.” The book of Hebrews warns against being led astray by “diverse and strange teachings (Heb 13:9).
- c Remember, the gospel message is complete, nothing can be added to or taken away from scripture. Therefore we should be extremely cautious of anyone claiming to have a special, new, or personal revelation from God that goes beyond what is already written in the Word. Test all teaching. But to do that we need to really know God’s Word.

4 Study God's Word diligently

- a The most effective safeguard against false teaching is a deep and consistent study of scripture. When you know the truth it is easier to detect error.
- b Remember error is usually hidden in truth. Satan is a counterfeiter and a good counterfeit is very close to the genuine. On top of that Satan is ruthless looking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8). In John 10 Jesus said he is out to steal, kill and destroy your faith through deception.
- c So be like the Bereans who were praised by Luke because they not only *received the message with great eagerness (but also) examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true (Acts 17:11).*
- d Peter ends his second letter with a similar warning and encouragement.
Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position. ¹⁸ But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen (2 Peter 3:17–18).

Small Group Discussion Questions

- 1 Why do you think Paul was so concerned about false teachers in the early church? How is this still relevant today?
- 2 The sermon mentioned "Jesus plus" teachings. What are some modern examples of this you've encountered?
- 3 How can we balance being loving and accepting while also being discerning about false teaching?
- 4 What makes someone susceptible to false teaching? How can we guard ourselves and others?
- 5 The sermon suggests rebuking false teachers "sharply." How do we determine when gentle correction or sharp rebuke is appropriate?
- 6 In what ways has technology and social media impacted the spread of both sound doctrine and false teaching?
- 7 How can we cultivate humility while still standing firm for biblical truth?